

馬致遠：青衫淚

Tears on the Blue Gown

By Ma Chih-yuan (fl. 1251)

Translated by Shiao-ling Yu

ACT I

(Enter PO LO-T' IEN in the role of ch'ung-mo,¹ CHIA LANG-HSIEN and MENG HAO-JAN in the role of wai.²)

PO LO-T' IEN (recites):

Banquets and feasts gradually lose their taste,

Wine and music only tie you down.

The guests merrily congregate and the servants are happy;

But I am beginning to realize—

My official position only serves the interests of others.

I am surnamed Po. My given name is Chü-i and my courtesy name, Lo-t'ien. At present, I hold the office of Undersecretary (*Shih-lang*) in the Ministry of Civil Office.³ These two gentlemen, one is Chia Lang-hsien, the other Meng Hao-jan, both compilers in the Hanlin Academy.⁴ Now Emperor Hsien-tsung has ascended the throne of our great T'ang Dynasty. During this spring time, the third month of the year, I feel weary and tired, cooped up in my office, and I am

about to take an incognito walk around town. Having changed my dress, I'll just pass myself as a scholar in white.⁵ I heard people say that Madam P'ei of the Music Academy⁶ has a daughter called Hsing-nu, who is a famous singing girl in the Capital, very clever and particularly good at playing the lute (*p'i-p'a*). The three of us are going to pay her a visit.

CHIA LANG-HSIEN: Let's go. (Recites):

Happy to leave the official world behind us,

Carrying our wine pots, we are going to enjoy some beautiful scenes.

MENG HAO-JAN (recites):

Taking advantage of the holidays,

To visit a courtesan's house.

(Enter lao-tan⁷ as PU-ERH⁸ [the PROCURESS].)

PROCURESS: This old person's surname is Li, I am the wife of P'ei Wu [P'ei the Fifth] of the Music Academy. My husband had already died; I have only a daughter named Hsing-nu. She is

who did not hold an academic degree or were not currently serving in the government were referred to as "white gowns".

⁶The Music Academy 教坊司 was a government institution for the training of musicians and songstresses, first established during the T'ang Dynasty and abolished during the Ch'ing Dynasty.

⁷老旦: Old female role.

⁸卜兒: In Yuan drama, old women are called 卜兒. The Procuress in this play is referred to by this name.

This translation is made from the play 江州司馬青衫淚雜劇 collected in 元曲選 (Selected Yuan Play), 1616, edited by Tsang Mao-hsün 臧懋循 of the Ming dynasty. The translator wishes to thank Prof. Grace Wan of the University of Kansas for reading the manuscript and making valuable suggestions.

¹冲末, ²外: supporting male roles. ³吏部侍郎. ⁴翰林院編修.

⁵In olden times, scholars who had not passed the civil examination wore white gowns. From this practice, those

blessed with unsurpassing beauty and talents. Playing the instruments, singing, poetry, calligraphy and mathematics, she excels in them all. Since early childhood she was a pupil of Master Ts'ao,⁹ and learned to play the lute. Attracted by her name, officials and patrons flock to our house. But my child is spoiled; on the one hand she likes ease and comfort, on the other hand she is a little choosy about whom she sees. At this hour, she is not up yet. I am afraid we may have visitors soon. Time to get up, my child.

(Enter cheng-tan¹⁰ as HSING-NU, leading MEI-HSIANG, the maid.)

HSING-NU: I am P'ei Hsing-nu and am a public courtesan belonging to the Music Academy. Even though I have learned to play a few pieces on the lute, but those who are "public properties" do not have a day of rest. This profession of mine is lowly indeed. So early in the morning my mother is calling me; I have to get up. But it is still early. (Sings):

[Hsien-lü, Tien Chiang-ch'un]

Before the morning begins to dawn,
Tavern banners hang from our house
of song.

I open the door with a squeaky sound,
To send away the old guests and to
welcome the new.

[Hun-chiang lung]

I do this with great reluctance,
It being the only good way for a
future.

Think of half of my life spent in the
world of flowers and moon,
And who knows how many saloons
and stages I've been to.

My clapping board is like its mistress
who is being summoned day after
day,

The fallen leaf is like myself who has
to answer the calls of officials.

This old mother of mine. (Sings):

She would give her life for piles of
silver,

⁹Refers to Ts'ao Kang 曹剛, a noted musician of the Chen-yuan period (785-805).

¹⁰正旦: Leading female role.

¹¹纏頭紅錦: Money and gifts given to a courtesan.

Bury herself in a heap of coins,
And dangle her daughter for sale like
a mat.

When can I exchange the gift of red
brocade¹¹

For a pair of bramble hairpins?¹²

(Sees her mother.) May you be blessed, mother.
You called me to tell me something?

PROCURESS: There is nothing I want to tell you
except that in a household like ours, we should
get up early, make our hair shine and face glow,
make ourselves look pretty. If some dashing
customer comes, make a few coppers from him
to support the family. You only care about
sleeping, who is going to give you any money?

HSING-NU (sings):

[Yu hu-hu]

When my mother is not sodden in
wine,

She often wears her topknot aslant.

She is full of cunning tricks to the very
tip of her nose,

Though her temples are as white as
frost and snow.

I thought when women past their
middle years,

Their good looks fade.

Who'd know this scrawny tigress

Never loses her ambition in catching
men!

She wears me out till I look like a
ghost,

She grills me till I am just a bag of
bones.

Enduring such sufferings, I do not dare
complain my mother is cruel,

Only blame my own fate for my mis-
fortunes.

PROCURESS: What are you jabbering about? Hurry
and do your makeup. Maybe guests will soon
arrive.

HSING-NU (sings):

[T'ien-hsia lo]

I have nothing to do but to lean against

¹²Hairpins made of bramble or thorn (荆釵) represent poor women's simple and unadorned way of dressing. Here Hsing-nu is saying that she'd rather be a poor man's wife than a bejeweled courtesan.

the door,
 Holding my cheek in my hand.
 Think of the other slaves,
 They get to rest from time to time;
 Yet when my turn comes—
 I inherited the courtesan's trade.
 Who cares if peach and plum bloom
 and fade,
 Or wind blows and rain sifts down.
 Don't ask whether my youth will come
 again.

(Enter PO LO-T' IEN with CHIA and MENG.)

PO LO-T' IEN: We have walked for quite a while.
 People say this is Madam P'ei's house. I'll give a
 cough to warn her before we go in.

PROCURESS: Who is out there? (Coming out.) Ah,
 it's three honorable *chin-shih*¹³. Please come in.

PO LO-T' IEN, CHIA and MENG: We salute you,
 Madam.

PROCURESS: Hsing-nu child, come and meet the
 three honorable *chin-shih*. Someone set up the
 table and bring out some wine, quick!

HSING-NU (peeking): That's strange. How come
 mother orders wine for three scholars? (Sings):

[*Tsui fu kuei*]

Goodness knows how many teas she
 has served in her lifetime,

But the wine set is still the same old
 one.

My mother can no longer eat meat or
 fish,

Yet she craves for them just the same.
 Satiated with her usual fare,

She is looking for fresh vegetables to
 change her diet.¹⁴

How can she tolerate these stingy poor
 scholars?

I understand now. (Sings):

It must be his rhinoceros hide belt that
 has caught her eye!

HSING-NU (coming out and greeting the guests):
 May you be blessed, gentlemen.

PO LO-T' IEN, CHIA and MENG: Our salutations,
 Miss P'ei.

HSING-NU (sings):

[*Hou-t'ing hua*]

This is flower and willow lane,
 Not the residences of princes and
 prime ministers.

Hurriedly I put on a welcoming smile:
 "What auspicious wind has brought
 you three scholars our way?"

PO LO-T' IEN: We've long heard of your name, we
 come especially to pay you a visit.

HSING-NU (sings):

These talented scholars,
 They even returned my courtesies.
 How can I help but feel respect in my
 heart?

May I ask your honorable names?

PO LO-T' IEN: I am *Shih-lang* Po Chü-i, these two
 gentlemen are Scholars (*hsüeh-shih*) Chia Lang-
 hsien and Meng Hao-jan. During this springtime,
 we do not have much to do in our offices, so
 we changed our clothes and took a leisurely
 walk around town. We have long admired your
 talent and beauty, and come all the way here
 to see you.

HSING-NU: I don't deserve this honor. But if you
 gentlemen do not think I am unworthy, shall
 we have a little wine?

PO LO-T' IEN: That sounds good, but we shouldn't
 trouble you.

(HSING-NU serves the wine.)

CHIA LANG-HSIEN: Today we are happy to have
 made Miss P'ei's acquaintance, let's drink a few
 more cups.

MENG HAO-JAN: I haven't finished the poems
 people asked me to write. I'd better not drink
 too much lest I get drunk.

HSING-NU (sings):

[*Chin chan-erh*]

One laughingly banishes his worries,
 The other pedantically shows off his
 poetic talents.

Don't insist on leaving,
 Seeker of plum blossoms in the snow
 at the Pa-ling Bridge,¹⁵

is now taking a fancy in poor scholars.

¹⁵“滿陵橋路雪尋梅客” refers to Meng Hao-jan. Ma
 Chih-yuan has another play, now lost, entitled *Meng Hao-
 jan Seeking Plum Blossoms in the Snow*.

¹³ 進士: Holders of the highest degree in the old civil
 examination system.

¹⁴ The meaning of these six lines (four in the original)
 is not quite clear to me. Maybe Hsing-nu is saying that her
 mother is tired of her usual run of the mill customers, and

Even Tzu-yu turned back from his trip
because of freezing cold.¹⁶

In my place,
Wine is being warmed in golden goblet,
Delicate fragrance envelopes beautiful
cheeks.

Isn't it better than to trudge in deep
snow in yonder village,

To look for a sprig of plum that has
bloomed last night?

CHIA and MENG (*feigning drunkenness*): We are
drunk, let's go home.

PO LO-T' IEN: Let's stay a little longer, what's the
hurry?

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Hou-t'ing hua*]

You mean to catch the sea-tortoise by
its cheeks,¹⁷

Never dreamed of becoming the like of
Liu Ling.¹⁸

My ugly face may be as frightening as
that of a ghost,

But your capacity for wine is as vast
as the ocean.

CHIA and MENG: We are already drunk. We'd better
not exceed our limits, let's not drink anymore.

HSING-NU (*sings*):

Please relax and enjoy yourselves.

If everyone abstains like you,

Where do we find the prince of
drunkenness?

PROCURESS: The two Scholars are drunk, but
Shih-lang can stay a little longer.

CHIA and MENG: *Shih-lang* Lo-t'ien, let's go home
now, we can come back tomorrow.

PO LO-T' IEN: We've troubled them for a whole
day, how can we just leave like this?

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Chin chan-erh*]

I did not leave Mt. T'ien-tai with the
stream,¹⁹

Why did you trot your horse to the
Chang Terrace?²⁰

PO LO-T' IEN: We've bothered you all day.

HSING-NU (*sings*):

I was waiting for the honored guest to
pay a night visit to the House of
Ch'in,²¹

Who'd know the rascals would stir up
trouble in the streets of Lo-yang?

It's too bad that we have wasted our
wine,

And have some hungry devils invade
our house.

Even though I've entertained these two
poor scholars,

I must count this as a disaster for us.

CHIA and MENG: Let's go. No need to blabber
anymore.

PROCURESS: *Shih-lang* wants to stay for the night;
but these two pressure him to leave. How
annoying!

PO LO-T' IEN: I truly wish to stay; but these two
are drunk and I cannot let them go home by
themselves. Let me take them home, tomorrow
I'll come alone. But you have served us tea and
wine and entertained us all day, allow me to
repay you.

HSING-NU: Please don't mention it, *Shih-lang*.
(*Sings*):

[*Chuan sha*]

We have a little money,

And not much debt,

I don't mind this money-losing busi-
ness for the time being.

But if it's up to my old lady manager,

¹⁶Tzu-yu is the courtesy name of Wang Hui-chih 王徽之 of the Chin Dynasty. One beautiful snowy night, Tzu-yu suddenly got the urge to visit his friend Tai K'uei 戴逵 who lived in another city. After traveling by boat for most of the night and finally arriving at Tai's place, Tzu-yu, just as suddenly, turned back without seeing his friend, saying, "I came on the spur of the moment, and I go back on the spur of the moment; there is no need to see Tai." This kind of impulsive behavior was greatly admired by the eccentric scholars of the time. Here Ma Chih-yuan gives this story a twist by saying that even Tzu-yu would turn back because he couldn't bear the cold.

¹⁷Euphemism for succeeding in civil examinations.

¹⁸劉伶: An eccentric scholar and famous wine lover of the Chin Dynasty.

¹⁹The stream by whose banks two Taoist hermits Liu Ch'en 劉晨 and Juan Chao 阮肇 met two fairies while the former were gathering herbs in Mt. T'ien-tai.

²⁰Euphemism for courtesan's house.

²¹Another euphemism for courtesan's house.

She won't care about your delicate feelings.
 Ah, you handsome scholar,
 Not that I've chosen you,
 You may feel ashamed to dismount
 from your horse in front of our house.

My mother's nature is hard to change,
 I hope you won't take any offense.
 Please remember, *Shih-lang*, (*sings*):
 When you come again,
 Don't bring anyone else!
 (*Exeunt.*)

THE WEDGE

(*Enter WAI as T'ANG HSIEN-TSUNG, leading EUNUCHS.*)

T'ANG HSIEN-TSUNG (*recites*):

The way to efficient government is to instill discipline,
 All the corrupt practices are to be swept clean.

Even though my dynasty holds poetry in high esteem,

I particularly loath frivolous writing!

I am Emperor Hsien-tsung of the T'ang Dynasty. I have inherited the empire from my ancestors and ascended the throne. Since the Rebellion of An and Shih,²² provincial commanders have grown very powerful. By adopting P'ei Tu's²³ strategy, I've succeeded in having their powers gradually curtailed. But many of my civilian officials are given to vanity, competing with one another in poetry writing and wine drinking, and not devoting their energies to official duties. Among them, Po Chü-i, Liu Yü-hsi and Liu Tsung-yuan especially like to compose poetry, and as a result, neglected their official responsibilities. If I let such behavior go uncensured, the morale of officials will certainly deteriorate. Eunuchs, give my order to the

Central Secretariat²⁴ to demote Po Chü-i to be Prefectural Assistant [Ssu-ma]²⁵ of Chiangchou; Liu Tsung-yuan, Prefectural Assistant of Liu-chou; Liu Yü-hsi, Prefectural Assistant of Po-chou. Do as I command.

EUNUCHS: Yes, Your Majesty.

(*Enter PO LO-T'IENT.*)

PO LO-T'IENT: I am Po Lo-t'ien and I love poetry and wine; therefore, I am nicknamed Mr. Drunken Poet. The present Emperor, anxious to run a good government and not given to frivolity, has exiled me to Chiangchou. I am to leave for my new post soon. I don't worry about other things; only I've been keeping company with P'ei Hsing-nu lately, and this will mean a long separation between us. I must have a word with her so I can leave in peace.

(*Enter HSING-NU, leading MEI-HSIANG.*)

HSING-NU (*recites*):

The good things in this world do not last long—

Rainbows disperse easily,

Crystals are not strong.

I am P'ei Hsing-nu. Since I went with *Shih-lang* Po, mornings and evenings, it's been almost half a year. Master Po has been doting on me, and I

²²The rebellion of An Lu-shan 安祿山 and Shih Szu-ming 史思明, from 755 to 763, which greatly weakened the T'ang Dynasty.

²³裴度: A capable and influential minister of the late T'ang period. For some thirty years, P'ei held many important positions, including that of prime minister 同平章事. During his tenure of office, he was responsible for

crushing several rebellions and re-establishing the royal succession line when Emperor Chin-tsung 敬宗 was assassinated by an eunuch.

²⁴中書省

²⁵司馬

have pledged myself to him. Recently I hear people say that *Shih-lang* Po is being exiled to Chiangchou and is to leave anytime now. Heaven, who'd have dreamt of this dreadful separation. Mei-hsiang, prepare some wine and dishes, when *Shih-lang* comes, I want to drink a parting toast with him.

MEI-HSIANG: Yes, Madam.

(*PO LO-T'IEN enters.*)

PO LO-T'IEN: I've come to the door of Hsing-nu's house. Since no one is around, I'll go in. (*Sees HSING-NU.*) Greetings, Sister.

HSING-NU: May you be blessed, Master.

PO LO-T'IEN: Sister, I had hoped we would be together always. Who'd expect we have to part.

HSING-NU: My unworthy self has been fortunate enough to have served my lord. I vow to entrust my whole life to you. Now you're going on a long journey. How distressing!

PO LO-T'IEN: My exile will last a year at most, maybe only half a year. When I come back, we'll be together again.

HSING-NU: But right now I cannot set my mind at

ease. Mei-hsiang, bring the wine, I want to toast the Master. (*She pours wine.*) (*Sings.*)

[*Hsien-lü, Tuan cheng hao*]

I wish to bid you good-bye,
Having no way to make you stay.
I am afraid after you leave,
I'll only dream about you but receive
no letter from you.

A pot of wine is consumed,
As dusk settles on green hills.
I wipe with my green sleeves, pearl-like
tears.

Taking the setting sun with you,
You trudge on your long journey.

My heart is saddened,
My longing lingers.

Go if you must,
But leave your heart here.

Master, after you leave, I will not receive any
guests; only to wait for your speedy return.

PO LO-T'IEN: Sister, keep your promise. I'll never
be unfaithful to you. I have to go now.

(*HSING-NU exit with him.*)

ACT II

(*Enter the PROCURESS.*)

PROCURESS: Since *Shih-lang* Po left, Hsing-nu has stopped putting on her makeup, stopped receiving guests; all day long, she just sits in her room. For a "singing" family like ours, what do we depend on to live? Yesterday, Little Chang from the tea house came over to tell me that Mr. Liu I-lang, a tea-merchant from Fu-liang, wishes to have a drink with my daughter. But she would not agree to it under any circumstance. He said he is coming over today. When he comes, I'll think of something.

(*Enter ch'ou²⁶ as LITTLE CHANG, leading ching²⁷ as LIU I-LANG.*)

LIU I-LANG (*recites*):

They all say the people from Chianghsi

Are not romantic lovers.

But I'm certainly romantic,

The most dashing one in all Chianghsi.

I am Liu I-lang, a native of Fu-liang. I've brought three thousand *yin*²⁸ of fine tea to the Capital to sell. I heard people say that Mother P'ei of the Music Academy has a daughter called Hsing-nu. Yesterday I asked Brother Chang to convey my wishes to see her; the old lady asked me to come over today. We've walked for a while and come to her house. Brother Chang, let's go in.

(*LITTLE CHANG sees the PROCURESS.*)

LITTLE CHANG: Madam, Mr. Liu is here.

PROCURESS: Please come in.

(*LIU greets the PROCURESS.*)

²⁶ 丑: A clownish role.

²⁷ 淨: A villain role.

²⁸ 引: A unit of weight during the Yuan Dynasty. A "short" yin is roughly equivalent to 80 lbs, a "long" yin, 120 lbs.

LIU I-LANG: My salutations, Madam.

PROCURESS: Greetings, honorable guest.

LIU I-LANG: I've long heard of your daughter's name. I have three thousand *yin* of fine tea, and I would like very much to be her customer (*tzu-ti*).²⁹

PROCURESS: Because of *Shih-lang* Po, my daughter refuses to receive any guests. I'll call her out now and make her wait on you. If she still refuses, you can write a forged letter saying that *Shih-lang* Po has died, then she will be willing.

LITTLE CHANG: Excellent idea! Madam, you call Sister out, and I'll go write the letter. Let's not waste any time. (*Exit.*)

PROCURESS: Hsing-nu child, we have a visitor. Come quickly.

(*Enter HSING-NU.*)

HSING-NU: I'm P'ei Hsing-nu. Since *Shih-lang* Po left, no matter how much that old woman schemed to deceive me, I refused to receive any visitors. Recently a tea-merchant, Liu I-lang, wants to keep company with me. Naturally I would have none of it. But the old woman has been won over by his money. What am I to do about this situation? I'm really worried. (*Sings*):

[*Cheng-kung, Tuan cheng hao*]

My life is miserable,

My person, humble.

I drag on—

While good people die by the tens of thousands.

Of all the separated lovers in the world,

None can match the parting sorrow of mine.

Shih-lang, because you're gone, whom can I depend on? (*Sings*):

[*Kun Hsiu-ch'iu*]

How can you do this to me, Master Po,

To cast aside a helpless woman?

But doesn't he deserve some sympathy too?

He did not purposely disobey the Emperor's commands.

²⁹ 子弟: In Yuan parlance, patrons of brothels are called *tzu-ti*.

³⁰ 拿着三千引茶, 來與大姐婿脚". I do not know

People say that *Shih-lang* Po indulged in drinking and verse-making and neglected his official duties. There were others like him before. (*Sings*):

Just think of Li Po of Chang-an,

Who lay sodden in wine;

[Yet he enjoyed honors galore]—

The imperial consort held his ink slab,

He often rode his horse in front of the phoenix tower.

But *Shih-lang* Po had to be exiled to Chiangchou,

Three thousand miles away!

Who cares about the two hundred years of literary tradition of the Ministry!

Is this how to invite scholars and to recruit the virtuous?

(*Sees the PROCURESS.*) Mother, what are you calling me for?

PROCURESS: Since *Shih-lang* Po left, we have not had a word from him. We have no firewood, no rice, how are we going to live? Now this Mr. Liu from Fu-liang, he is handsome, he is willing to spend money. Why don't you keep him and earn some money to support the family?

HSING-NU: Mother, I've promised *Shih-lang* Po that I'll not receive anyone else.

PROCURESS: You don't listen to what I tell you, so I'll let Mr. Liu talk to you himself.

(*LIU greeting HSING-NU.*)

LIU I-LANG: I salute you, Sister. I have long been attracted by your name, and now I've brought three thousand *yin* of tea for you.³⁰ I'll give you fifty taels of white silver as my gift for our first meeting.

HSING-NU: Get out of my way! How mixed up can you get? I am *Shih-lang* Po's wife, don't bother me.

PROCURESS: You don't want to keep company with Mr. Liu, what a dainty Mme. Po! Now where is that luckless *Shih-lang* Po?

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*T'ang hsiu-ts'ai*]

Whether this marriage will become true or not, it's up to Heaven;

what "婿脚" means. When a man marries a widow, he is said to be her "接脚婿" or "接脚". If "婿脚" means the same as "接脚", then Liu I-lang is proposing to Hsing-nu.

But don't you throw bricks whenever
you see rabbits running by,³¹
Knowing full well the procuresses of
the world all love money.

Ah, Mr. Liu! (*Sings*):

Even if you're a noble prince,
Like Prince P'ing-yuan of Chao,³²
I have to send you away.

LIU I-LANG: Your house has love for sale. I've
come as a customer. Instead of asking me to
stay, how come you're throwing me out?

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Kun hsiu-ch'iu*]

This is my advice to you:
Don't hang around here—
Around dancing girls' skirts and singing
girls' fans,
These two romantic articles will cost
you fortunes no end.

Mr. Liu, if you're wise,
You'd better turn back,
To keep your whole family intact.

Don't take this boobytrap of ours
For the Peach Blossom Fountain!³³
I am afraid—

You'll be a lonely traveler in a lonely
inn,

Having lost both sides;
You'll have no place to turn,
Your boat having sunk,
And you'll suffer in vain.

LIU I-LANG: I've come to your house seeking
pleasure, cut out that idle talk, Sister. Let's
have a drink. (*Urges her to drink.*)

HSING-NU: Take it away! I don't want to drink.

PROCURESS (*angrily*): You tramp! Here is a good
customer who delivers himself at our door.
Why don't you go along? You're throwing
money away. I'm going to beat you to death,
you slave!

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Tai ku-t'ou*]

Gazing at this tiresome fellow in front
of my eyes,

I have not dodged your blows on my
face.

You grabbed him as a good prize,
But he is as dull as a stupid donkey.
He urges me to drink wine,
I have no choice but to swallow ex-
crement as if it's cake.

I should know to beat me is to love
me,

To scold me is to have pity on me.
Oh, mother!

Please do not torture me so!

PROCURESS: This little tramp does not listen to
me. All she thinks about is her *Shih-lang* Po.
But is he thinking about you? However, no
matter what she thinks; Mr. Liu, you just give
me a lot of money, I'll have her marry you.

LIU I-LANG: Whatever amount Madam wants, I
can afford it.

HSING-NU: Do you know where my heart is? You
keep on pestering me? (*Sings*):

[*T'ang hsiu-ts'ai*]

These days, whenever I close my eyes,
I dream he is in my arms—

My poor darling Lo-t'ien of Chiang-
chou.

PROCURESS: You don't strike the bell in front of
you, instead, you want to smelt the copper.
Lo-t'ien, where is your Lo-t'ien?

LIU I-LANG: I am too bad looking, let's be
husband and wife for a while. What's so bad
about that?

HSING-NU (*sings*):

Who asked you to seek pipes and
strings in a courtesan's house

Mr. Liu. (*Sings*):

Please do not mind my drunken words,
I want to make myself clear before
hand.

Heavens! How can I keep company with some-
one like him. (*Sings*):

[*Kun Hsiu-ch'iu*]

I used to entrust my longings in fancy
note papers,

³¹Meaning taking unfair advantages.

³²趙平原: A famous prince of the State of Chao during the period of Warring States. He was noted for his hospitality and had many protégés with various talents.

³³Peach Blossom Fountain is where Liu Ch'en and Juan Chao met two fairies and lived with them. See also Footnote 19.

Join my sorrows to broken strings,
Carefree was I in the courtyard of
Hsieh.³⁴

Now all of a sudden I have to sleep
with a pig and dog!

LIU I-LANG: Sister, those big shots in the government are all my friends and relatives. I have a lot of gold and silver; besides, I am handsome. If you don't want to keep company with me, what kind of person you want to keep company with?

HSING-NU (*sings*):

That fellow pulls out his big fists,
Spends big money,
Pays no attention to my repeated
advices.

How can I fend off this idiot's incessant harassments?

Think of the gentle spring breeze that
blows on the peaks of Mt. Meng,³⁵
And the moon that just becomes full
over the Yangtze River.³⁶

It is Heaven that made things turn out
so.

(*Enter CH'OU made up as the letter-bearer.*)

MESSENGER: I am a messenger from Chiangchou. My master, Ssu-ma Po, accidentally took ill while in office. He wrote a letter and asked me to deliver it to P'ei Hsing-nu of the Music Academy. My master soon died after writing the letter. Here I am to carry out my mission. I traveled for half a month before I arrived at the Capital. People tell me this is her house. I think I'll go in. (*Sees the PROCURESS.*) I salute you, Madam.

PROCURESS: Brother, where are you from?

MESSENGER: I am from Chiangchou, my master, Ssu-ma Po sent me here to deliver a letter.

PROCURESS: How is your master?

MESSENGER: After Master gave me the letter, he died.

PROCURESS: Who says that? Let me see the letter.

(*MESSENGER presents the letter.*)

PROCURESS: My child, you read it.

(*HSING-NU takes the letter and reads.*):

From Po Chü-i, the Ssu-ma of Chiangchou to Miss P'ei: I caused you much trouble when we were together. Since we parted, I've been thinking and dreaming about you, and my longing for you never left me for a moment. I had hoped that I'll return to the north soon to fulfill our old pledge. Never did I expect that I would fall ill. Medications have not been able to make me recover; my death is imminent. I am sending this special messenger to inform you of this. Please do not think too much about the dead; find yourself a good husband and make plans for the future. I cannot help weeping as I write this letter. I hope you will understand.

HSING-NU (*grieving*): Oh, this is really killing me! How am I going to live?

PROCURESS: My child, now that *Shih-lang* Po is dead, your hope of becoming Mme. Po is busted. There is no more to be said. Now you go and marry Mr. Liu.

LIU I-LANG: Oh my, I really got it made this time.

MESSENGER: I'm leaving.

HSING-NU: Leave after you have something to eat.

MESSENGER: Please don't bother.

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*T'ao-t'ao ling*]

During the past few days,
I ascended the western tower to look
for my beloved thirty times.
His letter I am keeping in vain;
His face I'll never see again.
The flight of wild geese brings me out
to the courtyard,
Standing there for hours on end.
The neighing of horses causes me to
strain my eyes
Through the willow wands.
Oh, my lord!
Are you really dead?
Are you really dead?
From now on the more I think about
you,

³⁴Hsieh refers to the very prominent Hsieh family of the Chin Dynasty; it is a synonym for influential families. Sometimes, "Wang and Hsieh" (王謝) are used together.

³⁵蒙山: There are several Mt. Mengs; this one probably refers to the Mt. Meng in Szuchuan Province, which

is noted for the fine tea (蒙頂茶) produced there.

³⁶The meaning of this line and the preceding one is not clear to me. It could mean that Hsing-nu foresees her marriage to the tea-merchant and her passing her days on a river boat.

The more I wish your ghost would appear.

LIU I-LANG: Madam, since you've approved of our marriage, I'm presenting you five hundred taels of silver as betrothal gift. I am very anxious to go home and I would like to ask the young lady to come aboard right now.

PROCURESS: I've already given you my word, there is no reneging. I'll send my daughter to go with you.

HSING-NU: Alas, alas, alas! Since I have to marry Mr. Liu, allow me to offer a cup of wine and to burn a string of paper money to *Shih-lang's* spirit.

LIU I-LANG: This is all right.

HSING-NU (*burning the paper money and pouring wine*): *Shih-lang*, you were a man when alive, after death you'll be a God. (*Weeps.*) But you have really made me suffer! (*Sings*):

[*T'ang hsiu-ts'ai*]

Oh my *Shih-lang*!

You used to come and go in the royal palaces,

You should have lived and died in the imperial Capital,

Then a fine grave by the Golden Water River would have been your resting place.

Mr. Liu. (*Sings*):

Please leave me alone for a while,
He³⁷ had always been a little shy.

[*Kun hsiu-ch'iu*]

Your writing is superior to that Chia Lang-hsien,

Your poetry surpasses that of Meng Hao-jan,

Yet you could not serve the Emperor in his royal halls.

Who'd thought you were to die young like Yen Hui.³⁸

Now plop, the vase has fallen into the

³⁷ Meaning Po Chü-i.

³⁸ 顏回: Confucius's favorite disciple who lived in poverty and died young.

³⁹ Ma Chih-yuan makes clever reference to a *yueh-fu* poem by Po Chü-i, entitled "Pulling a Silver Vase from the Well" (井底引銀瓶) which tells the story of a girl who eloped with her lover and for this reason was despised by her in-laws.

well,³⁹

Snap, the zither strings broke.

How can I make your dead spirit come alive?

If you have the magic power to reveal yourself under the stars and the moon,

This meager sum of paper money

Will buy you a cup of wine in the other world.

I can't stop my tears from streaming down.

(*A whirlwind blows up the paper money.*)

Look at this gust of whirlwind. It must be *Shih-lang* who has come. (*Pantomimes grieving.*)

(*Sings*):

[*Tsui T'ai-ping*]

I burn a string of paper money,

I want to tell you a few heart-felt words.

The husband is the wife's heaven—

I can't help from crying.

How can you desert me, a helpless young woman?

I see swirling, spinning whirlwinds roll by one after another,

I am so frightened my hands and feet nervously shake and tremble.

A naughty spirit circles around me,

Oh, my handsome scholar!

LIU I-LANG: Sister, you've offered your sacrifice, expressed your affection for your dead husband.

Now please come aboard.

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*I-sha*]

Ah, Hsing-nu!

Why didn't you cut off your amble hair by the light of the lamp,

And let your devotion burn like incense under the moon?⁴⁰

I have cut off my love,

⁴⁰ 滿梳紺髮挑燈剪，一炷心香對月燃。" I am not sure what these two lines mean. Since the character "紺", other than its meaning of "reddish dark color", is usually associated with Buddhist monastery such as "紺園", "紺字", "紺殿", maybe Hsingnu is blaming herself for not having become a nun. The "oil lamps and Buddhist scriptures" in the next song seem to reinforce this interpretation.

Severed my attachment,
 But how can I forget his parting
 words?
 Till death I shall remain true.
 Now the crane has returned to the city
 gate,⁴¹
 The person grew old in Changsha,⁴²
 And the sea turned into mulberry
 field.
 There is nothing else I care about,
 Only to face river banks overgrown
 with red smartweeds and rivers
 lined with green willows.

LIU I-LANG: Sister, let's get going. If you keep on
 wailing like this, when is it ever going to end?

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Erh-sha*]
 From now on, I'll have to listen to:
 Dogs barking at night, my sleep inter-
 rupted;
 Cicadas droning at dusk, my heart torn
 to pieces.
 I'll pass through vast expanses of blue
 waves,
 Watch pairs of descending egrets,
 Face an endless stretch of green
 mountains,
 And listen to monkeys crying from the
 banks.
 I'll be saddened by:
 Wild geese flying in formation in late
 autumn,
 Mosquitos buzzing all summer long,
 Mist emanating from reed flowers in
 spring.
 I'll not see the oil lamps and Buddhist
 scriptures,

⁴¹ According to *Sou shen hou-chi* 搜神後記, Ting Ling-wei 丁令威 of the Han Dynasty, after achieving immortality on Mt. Ling-hsu 靈虛山, transformed himself into a crane and returned to his home town. Perched on the pillars (華表柱) of the city gate, the crane identified itself as Ting's metamorphosis, then flew away.

⁴² This reference is to Chia I 賈誼 of the Han Dynasty, who was exiled to Changsha and died there. Here Hsing-nu is obviously drawing a parallel between the exile of Po Chü-i with that of Chia who lost imperial favor because of his outspokenness.

⁴³ Full moon symbolizes happy family reunion.

Only to find sorrowful slumber amidst
 lights on fishing boats.

PROCURESS: Mr. Liu has been waiting long, you
 better go now.

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*San-sha*]

Actually this dandy has no right to my
 hand,

But the old lady is biased in favor of
 this man.

Who'd expect:

Besides the Ssu-ma's grave,
 Colored clouds disperse and vanish;
 While over the tea-merchant's boat,
 A full moon shines?⁴³

Oh, mother!

You're already an old woman—
 Your black skirt trails on the ground,
 You carry a cane taller than your head,
 Your topknot is upward swept—
 Yet you dealt me this unkind blow,
 And made me suffer the endless Tou
 O's sorrow.⁴⁴

Mother, I am your own blood and flesh, and I
 have earned money for you all my life. Now
 just for a few coppers, you sold me to a place
 thousands of miles away. How cruel you are!
 (*Sings*):

[*Ssu-sha*]

Who'd expect that when she is by a
 grindstone,

She wishes it to turn like a windmill.

When she dreams about locust flowers,
 She wants yellow jackets to wear.⁴⁵

I've wasted thirty years of my life,
 Being this woman's daughter.

Made use of for ten years,

⁴⁴ Tou O 賣娥 was a young widow who spurned the marriage proposal of a worthless punk. The rejected suitor then falsely accused her of murder and she was executed for her alleged crime. Her tragic story is the subject of a famous Yuan play, *Tou O yuan* (Tou O's Sorrow) by Kuan Han-ch'ing.

⁴⁵ Locust flowers are used as yellow dye, hence, the yellow jackets. Hsing-nu seems to be describing her mother's greediness with the first four lines (two in the original) of this song.

As Mother Chao's golden lily.⁴⁶
 I've entertained guests in the front
 parlor,
 Received visitors in the back chamber,
 Only I never rode in carriages!
 Such a huge poverty pit and brimstone
 Hell,
 I have to fill it with my very self.
 Well, well, well. Mother, I cannot look after
 you any more. I am going.

LIU I-LANG: Madam, I am leaving. I am much
 obliged for your favors, next year I'll bring you
 some fine tea to drink.

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Wei-sha*]

Just as I'm ending my singing career
 with a strain from the Golden
 Thread Song,⁴⁷
 Suddenly I would hear the mid-night
 bell from a passenger boat.
 I am anguished beyond description,
 My cruel mother only wants money!
 You don't care whether your means is
 right or wrong,
 But can you distinguish the wise from
 the dumb?
 The man I love my mother shows not

the slightest concern,
 The money my mother loves I have
 only scorn.
 Today my future is settled.
 The day when you are summoned to
 the underworld,
 May you be burned in Hell's fire,
 Fried in boiling cauldron,
 Pounded to pieces by mortar and
 pestle,
 Then ground to fine powder by the
 ox-headed demon.
 I'll swear at you to the mountain pass-
 es and river fords,
 I'll curse you to the end of the earth.
 People say a courtesan's fate is pre-
 destined,
 But we all know it's poverty that holds
 me in its clutches.

Oh, mother! (*Sings*):

Had you married me off to Hsün-yang
 a year or two earlier,
 My beloved would not have been
 exiled to Chiangchou four thousand
 miles away.

(*Exeunt.*)

ACT III

(*Enter PO LO-T' IEN leading ATTENDANTS.*)

PO LO-T' IEN: I am Po Lo-t'ien. Since I was de-
 moted to the rank of prefectural assistant and
 came to Chiangchou, a year has passed. Yester-
 day, the post house informed me that my old
 friend Yuan Wei-chih, because of his official
 duties in Chiangnan, is to pass through here.
 I've instructed my attendants to prepare wine
 and food to await his arrival.

(*Enter wai as YUAN WEI-CHIH.*)

YUAN WEI-CHIH: My surname is Yuan, given name
 Chen and courtesy name Wei-chih. At present,
 I serve as a government inspector. By the grace
 of the Emperor, I was sent here to learn about
 the conditions of the people. As I am passing
 through Chiangchou, I recall my good friend
 Po Lo-t'ien is the Prefectural Assistant here.
 Therefore, I've come ashore to pay him a call.
 Now I'm at the yamen gate. Attendants, please
 announce to your master that an old friend

⁴⁶"Golden lily" here probably means something or
 someone precious. The procuress so regards Hsing-nu
 because the latter is her "money tree".

⁴⁷金縷: A song made famous by another T'ang

courtesan, Tu Ch'iu-niang 杜秋娘. It says in part, "Please
 do not grudge your golden thread gown, but be careful
 not to waste your youthful years."

Yuan Chen has come to see him.

ATTENDANTS (*announcing*): His Excellency Mr. Yuan is here.

PO LO-T' IEN: Please show him in.

ATTENDANTS: Please come in.

(YUAN and PO greet each other.)

PO LO-T' IEN: Wei-chih, what auspicious wind has blown you here? Your honorable presence in my humble domain brings me boundless joy.

YUAN WEI-CHIH: Lo-t'ien, you've stayed long in this river town and you must feel very lonely. I've often thought about you, but tied down by official duties, I was unable to come to see you. Now I have this lucky opportunity to come your way, seeing you again makes me very happy indeed.

PO LO-T' IEN: Attendants, bring the wine. Wei-chih, please stay for a while.

YUAN WEI-CHIH: No need to stay here. My luggage is all on the boat, and I was just hoping to discuss some literary matters with you. How about moving the feast to the boat and you accompanying me for a distance?

PO LO-T' IEN: I was thinking about that too. Let's go now. Attendants, bring the wine and dishes. (*Exeunt.*)

(LIU I-LANG enters.)

LIU I-LANG: I am Liu I-lang. Since I married P'ei Hsing-nu, half a year has passed. Every day my friends ask me to attend drinking parties, not a day goes by without my receiving invitations. Today again, Mr. Wang has invited me. Sister, please watch the house, I'm going out to have a drink. (*Exit.*)

(Enter HSING-NU, leading MEI-HSIANG.)

HSING-NU: I am P'ei Hsing-nu. Because I refused to receive guests, the greedy and cruel procuress sold me to the tea-merchant Liu I-lang as his wife. I've followed him here on his tea-boat. I learned that this place is none other than Chiangchou. That fellow has gone out to drink, leaving me on the boat. Seeing this river scene

reminds me of my old love Lo-t'ien, I cannot help feeling sad. (*Sings*):

[*Shuang-tiao, Hsin-shui ling*]

Against a wide sky and setting sun,
darkling river meanders,
Mountains of Ch'u, like folds of green,
lean on the clear firmament.

The cosmos above and below, enclosed
in an ice-jar,

Trees tall and short, woven into cloud
brocade.

Who has asked Wang Wei
To paint sorrow into this landscape?

[*Chu-ma t'ing*]

The tavern streamer by the green
mountain

Beckons the tea-merchant to drink to
his fill.

The fishing rock that blocks my long-
ing view,

Is my companion in solitude.

This river is no ordinary river. (*Sings*):

It is the Wu-ling Stream⁴⁸ where
flowers line its banks;

It is the bridge over River Lan where
romantic liaisons are made.⁴⁹

Yet in the vast sky, wild geese seldom
come by,

Is it because Hengyang⁵⁰ has been
moved to the north of Chiangchou?

It's getting late. That fellow went to his drink-
ing party, who knows when he will come home.
Mei-hsiang, prepare my bed, I am going to bed
by myself. (*Sings*):

[*Pu-pu chiao*]

When this silk coverlet was first made,
I fully intended to marry a romantic
mate.

Little did I foresee my lousy fate—
To cuddle this icy-cold quilt alone
night after night.

Such loneliness is hard to describe.

⁴⁸In T'ao Ch'ien 陶潛's celebrated "An Account of the Peach Blossom Fountain", a fisherman from Wu-ling 武陵 found a utopian land at this fountain. But I think Ma Chih-yuan had in mind another Peach Blossom Fountain, that of T'ien-tai Mountain where Liu Ch'en and Juan Chao met two fairies. See footnotes 19 and 33.

⁴⁹An allusion to P'ei Hang 裴航's (of T'ang Dynasty)

encounter with the lady Immortal Yun-yin 雲英 by the Lan River Bridge 藍橋驛 and their subsequent marriage.

⁵⁰According to legend, wild geese, in their southward migration in the autumn, do not fly beyond the Wild-Geese-Return-Peak 回雁峯 in Hengyang; when they reach this mountain, they turn back.

How can you be called the mandarin-duck⁵¹ coverlet?

I meant to sleep a little, but how can I fall asleep? Mei-hsiang, bring me the lute, I want to play something to express my sorrow while looking at the moon. (*Holds the lute.*) (*Sings*):

[*Chiao cheng-p'a*]

It's all your fault, lute!

You have brought me very little joy but loads of sorrow.

It's you who caused this merchant's wife to come to the south of the river,

It's also you who accompanied Chao-chun⁵² to the northern frontier.

Your sandalwood body and carvings of golden beast

Make me feel sadder still.

When will my beloved come back to me?

Your four strings have kept us apart, I'd rather listen to flute-playing in a clear night.

(*She plays the lute.*)

(*Enter PO LO-T' IEN with YUAN WEI-CHIH.*)

PO LO-T' IEN: We've now come to this boat. A moonlit river and a vast expanse of water spread before us; this autumn night scene is truly enchanting. Wei-chih, let's drink slowly. (*Listens.*)

YUAN WEI-CHIH: Where is this lute music coming from?

ATTENDANTS: It's from that boat opposite us. Someone in there is playing the lute.

PO LO-T' IEN: Attendants, row our boat closer.

(*They pantomime moving the boat.*)

PO LO-T' IEN: This is no uncultured tune; it sounds like Hsing-nu's playing.

YUAN WEI-CHIH: Attendant, you go and ask her to come over to play something for us. I see no

harm in that.

(*ATTENDANT comes to see HSING-NU.*)

ATTENDANT: Mistress, there are two gentlemen on that boat, who would like to see you.

HSING-NU: I'll be right over. (*Recognizes PO LO-T' IEN.*) (*Sings*):

[*Yen-erh lo*]

I thought it's Chung Tzu-ch'i listening to the zither-playing,⁵³

I mistook him for Chang Chün-jui⁵⁴ going to a tryst in the moonlight.

It's not Fan Li⁵⁵ returning to his lake either,

But Po Chü-i in banishment.

(*HSING-NU looks frightened and avoids PO.*)

PO LO-T' IEN: Hsing-nu, why are you avoiding me?

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Hsiao chiang-chün*]

The moonlight happens to be as bright as day,

I know he is a ghost even though he doesn't say.

Oh, my master!

Whatever you want to do, I'll agree,

But please don't keep coming toward me!

PO LO-T' IEN: Hsing-nu, what do you mean by this? You're moving farther and farther away.

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Ch'en tsui tung-feng*]

I observe the style of his dress,

I examine the manner of his speech.

You'd better stay where you are,

I have the living person's breath.

Stay away from me,

So we may have a good talk.

(*She throws money into the water.*)

PO LO-T' IEN: Why are you throwing money?

HSING-NU (*sings*):

Why do I drop yellow money into the

who could understand Po Ya's fine zither playing.

⁵¹Mandarin ducks are a symbol of marital bliss.

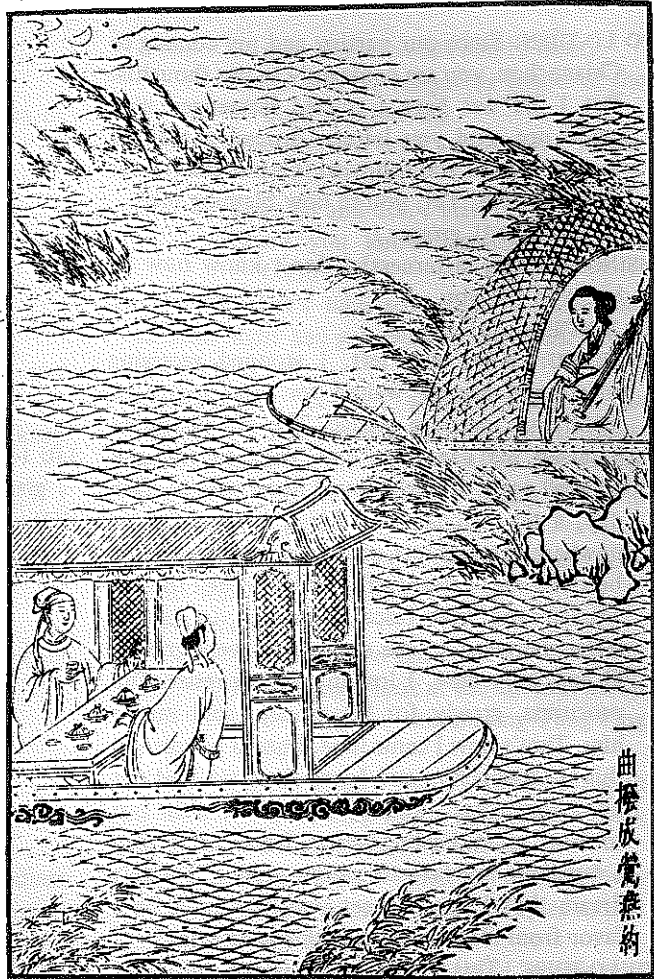
⁵²昭君: The beautiful Chinese court lady sent to marry a Tartan chieftain during the Han Dynasty. Chao-chun carried her lute with her to her exile. Ma Chih-yuan's most famous play, *Autumn in the Han Palace* is based on her story.

⁵³Chung Tzu-ch'i 鍾子期 was an outstanding musician during the Spring and Autumn Period, the only person

⁵⁴張君瑞: The hero in the celebrated Yuan play, *Romance of the Western Chamber*.

⁵⁵范蠡 was the able minister who helped his king, Kou-chien of Yueh 越王勾踐, to restore their conquered nation and to turn the tables on their conqueror, the state of Wu 吳. After this brilliant victory, Fan resigned his post and sailed off on the Lake Tai.

PO LO-T' IEN: "This is no uncultured tune; it sounds like Hsing-nu's playing." The illustrations used in this translation are taken from a Ming edition reprinted in the *Ku-pen hsi-chü ts'ung-k'an* 古本戲曲叢刊, Peking, 1958.



water?

So we may be reunited after my death.

PO LO-T' IEN: Hsing-nu, come forward.

(HSING-NU tries to recognize him again.)

PO LO-T' IEN: How did you come here?

HSING-NU: Looks like he may be still alive. (Sighs.)

Master, you've played a fine trick on me and made me fall into this state. Now you pretend that you know nothing about it. (Sings):

[*Po pu tuan*]

The yellow-leek eaters⁵⁶ are all bad

⁵⁶Meaning poor scholars.

⁵⁷This allusion is to the T'ang *ch'uan-ch'i* story, 離魂記, in which a girl, when her marriage was blocked by her parents, fell ill and her soul followed her lover on his journey home. After living together for five years and the birth of two children, husband and wife came to visit the girl's Parents. During which time, the girl's soul finally

guys:

With a letter written thousands of miles away,

They make girls suffer innumerable pains;

With a cup of wine, a lovelorn maiden's soul separated from her body;⁵⁷

With a three-foot long zither, Wen-chün was seduced to elopement.⁵⁸

Scholars like these,

They certainly deserve banishment!

reunited with her body which had been lying in bed during all these years. The Yuan playwright, Cheng Kuang-tsu, wrote a play based on this story.

⁵⁸卓文君 was the beautiful young widow who eloped with Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju 司馬相如 after listening to a number he played on the zither, "Phoenix Seeking Its Mate".

PO LO-T' IEN: Since our parting and my coming to Chiangchou, you are constantly in my thoughts. But I did not have a trusted messenger, so I could not send you letters. Instead of waiting for my return, you followed this merchant boat to come here. Yet, you're now blaming me!

(HSING-NU grieves.)

HSING-NU: Oh, bitterness! I don't know how to begin to tell you.

PO LO-T' IEN: Tell me.

HSING-NU: After you left, I stopped receiving guests and eagerly waited for your return to fulfill our marriage pledge. The old procuress harassed me day after day, tried to trap me with all sorts of tricks; but I never gave in. One day, a tea-merchant Liu I-lang appeared from nowhere; he had lots of money and wanted to befriend me. I steadfastly refused. Then the old woman and that rascal conspired to have a letter delivered to me saying you were gravely ill and soon died. I lost my will to resist. The procuress, greedy for his money, sold me to him. That's how I came here. I heard people say this is Chiangchou and I was about to find out news about you. Today, that fellow went out to drink again. Feeling listless, I decided to play a tune on my lute to amuse myself. I didn't dream that I would meet you; this must be a favor from Heaven. Who is this gentleman?

PO LO-T' IEN: This is my good friend Inspector Yuan Wei-chih. (He starts to grieve.)

YUAN WEI-CHIH: Lo-t'ien, no need to feel distressed. This fellow forged a spurious letter, falsely reported other people's death, and swindled another man's concubine. He has committed enough criminal offenses for us to prosecute him at our leisure.

PO LO-T' IEN: Just now I composed a poem, "The Lute Song". It is right here. Take a look, Sister.

(HSING-NU takes it and reads.)

[See Note on p. 154 and a full translation of Po's long poem *P'i-p'a hsing*, pp. 155-159.]

HSING-NU: Master, how talented you are!

(MEI-HSIANG hurriedly enters.)

MEI-HSIANG: Mistress, the Master is back!

HSING-NU (sings):

[*Kua ta ku*]

The sorrows of separation,
Hsiao-yü⁵⁹ was about to tell it all,
But love birds are again frightened to
fly separate ways.

I'd better avoid a confrontation,
For the time being.

My makeup soaked by tears,
My heart full of sadness.

Quickly I bestir my dainty feet,
Hurriedly I straighten my silk garment.

(PO and YUAN step aside.)

(LIU enters, drunk.)

LIU I-LANG: Sister, where are you? I am drunk,
give me a hand!

HSING-NU (sings):

[*Ku Mei-chiu*]

I thought the tea from Mt. Meng com-
mands a good price,
And on the tea-boat he was conducting
business.

Every day he gets dead drunk by the
river banks,

Never gives up a little of his booze.

You've ruined me, rascal!

[*T'ai-p'ing ling*]

I often envy water birds and mandarin
ducks that love to sleep,

I can only watch evening clouds roam
with the lone duck.

LIU I-LANG: Sister, come over and help me to bed.

HSING-NU (sings):

I can't bear to hear his gruff and rough
voice,

Yet he keeps bothering me for this and
for that.

To hug, to hold,

Do whatever you want,

Just don't act more drunk than you
are.

LIU I-LANG: You're my wife, how come you don't
wait on me? I am drunk!

HSING-NU (sings):

[*Ch'uan po cho*]

Behave yourself!

Don't throw temper tantrums in front

⁵⁹Probably refers to Huo Hsiao-yü 霍小玉, another famous courtesan in a T'ang tale, who was deserted by

her poet-lover and died of lovesickness. Here Hsing-nu is comparing herself to Hsiao-yü.

of me.
 He drinks till his head spins,
 And saliva runs down the corners of
 his mouth.
 I can't stand such revolting sight.
 It must be my fate
 That I should live with a man like this!
 [Ch'i ti-hsiung]
 From morning till evening,
 I have no idea where he is.
 How can we be called husband and
 wife?
 Lonely and helpless, I can hardly keep
 my sanity,
 Sad and depressed, to whom can I
 unburden my feelings?
 Day after day, you reek with liquor
 fumes!

(LIU falls asleep.)

HSING-NU: This fellow is asleep. I'd better go over
 to Master Po's boat right now.

[Mei-hua chiu]

I am getting ready to leave—
 Putting together my jewelry,
 Packing my bags.
 Don't hesitate,
 Though I'm troubled by endless
 worries.

(PO LO-T' IEN enters.)

PO LO-T' IEN: Sister, you called. What is it?

HSING-NU: That fellow is asleep, let me go with
 you. (Sings):

By good fortune we've met tonight,
 Master, what else are you waiting for?
 You and I should be together always.
 That fellow is now sound asleep,
 You take the silver coins,
 I carry the tea.
 In case he should wake up quickly,
 It will be too late.

[Shou Chiang-nan]

He will have only the moonlight to

take home on his empty boat,
 Songs will no longer be heard at the
 third night watch.
 This painted boat will be my "watch-
 husband rock".⁶⁰
 Let's go and don't tarry,
 Don't you know Hsi-shih⁶¹ married
 Ch'ih-i?⁶²

PO LO-T' IEN: Let's take advantage of this quiet
 autumn night and get away in our boat. Where
 can he find us?

YUAN WEI-CHIH: Lo-t'ien, when I return to the
 Capital, I'll memorialize the Emperor to trans-
 fer you back to the Capital. After this matter
 is settled, you can definitely marry Hsing-nu
 officially.

PO LO-T' IEN: Wei-chih, if this becomes true, both
 of us will be very grateful to you.

HSING-NU (sings):

[Shui hsien tzu]

I'll no longer look at the autumn moon
 flooding the shimmering Tung-t'ing
 Lake;

I'll no longer watch crows crying in
 the fishing village against the setting
 sun;

I'll no longer listen to evening bells
 from mist shrouded temples arouse
 the river gulls;

I'll no longer be saddened by the sight
 of wild geese descending on sandy
 banks;

I'll no longer fear snow storms blinding
 river and sky;

I'll no longer cherish the view of
 verdant mountains wrapped in haze;

I'll no longer feel rushed by night rain
 on the Rivers Hsiao and Hsiang;

I'll no longer look for returning sails
 from distant shores.

PO LO-T' IEN: Who'd expect we would meet again
 today and have our long-cherished wishes ful-

⁶⁰ 望夫石: An allusion to the wife who watched her
 husband leave on a journey from a mountain top; she
 stood there for so long that she finally turned into a rock.

⁶¹ 西施: A famous beauty during the Spring and
 Autumn Period, who was offered to King Fu-ch'a of Wu
 吳王夫差 by King Kou-chien of Yueh (see Footnote 55),
 as a bait to distract the former from state business. The

plan worked, Wu was annihilated by Yueh. Legend had it
 that Hsi-shih then married the Yueh minister Fan Li who
 first discovered her when she was a wood-cutter's
 daughter.

⁶² 鷓夷 refers to Fan Li (see Footnote 55). After Fan
 retired from government, he changed his name and called
 himself "鷓夷子皮", literally "the leather bag".

filled? This must be a favor from Heaven.

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*T'ai-ch'ing ko*]

Were it not for the west wind that fills
the sails,

How could Hsieh An bring out his girl
from Tungshan?⁶³

We did not make this trip to taste the
minced bass,⁶⁴

It's our happy union that we fulfilled
without anyone knowing.

That fellow must be still asleep with
his clothes on,

Snoring up a thunder in darkness.

By the time he is awakened by wind
blowing from willowy banks,

We'll have passed the painted bridge.

[*Erh-sha*]

Our parting sorrows may be as wet as
tea,

Our homeward longing flows swifter
than river stream.

Thank Heaven we are leaving Chiang-
chou,

And this fishermen's country of mist
and wave.

When he hears the spring thunder,

And the tea spouts tender leaves,⁶⁵

Let him chase us to the Five Peaks, the

Three Hsiangs and the River Chien,

He'll be wasting his longing thoughts
for ninety thousand miles!

PO LO-T' IEN: Let's start our boat.

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Yüan-yang sha*]

Had the tea-merchant of Fu-Liang not
been dead drunk,

Chiangchou Ssu-ma's tears would have
flowed in vain.

Speechlessly you hung your head,

Bitterly you wept.

Truly, love's blood leaves many stains,

Your blue gown is drenched with tears.

Were it not for the lute song that
brought us together,

Our rolling tears would have filled half
of the Hsün-yang River!

(*Exeunt.*)

LIU I-LANG (*wakes up and enters hurriedly*): I was
drunk and fell asleep. After I wake up, I can't
find Sister. Where can she go? Maybe she fell
into the river. But why are the trunks and
chests wide open; she must have run away.
Officials, catch her! Catch her!

(*Enter tsa-tang*⁶⁶ *made up as the local*
OFFICIAL.)

OFFICIAL: Who is on this boat? What are you
hollering about in the middle of the night?

LIU I-LANG: It's about my newly married wife. I
don't know where she has run away to. There
must be some rascal who kidnapped her. Please
catch him for me.

OFFICIAL: Bah! Nonsense! It's such a brightly
moonlit river and all is quiet; not a single boat
passes by. Yours is the only boat moored here;
where could she run off to? Most probably you
murdered her and then pretend to look for her.
I'll take you to the yamen to face the officials.

(OFFICIAL *puts manacles on* LIU.)

LIU I-LANG (*recites*):

I, Liu I-lang, did nothing improper,

My little wife must have fallen into the
water.

OFFICIAL (*recites*):

Something is fishy definitely,

I'll take you to the yamen

and let them flog your buttocks sound-
ly.

(*Exeunt.*)

Sungchiang 松江, is considered a delicacy.

⁶³Hsieh An 謝安 (320-380) was a noted statesman of the Chin Dynasty, who repulsed northern invaders in a major battle. Before he achieved prominence in government, he used to live in retirement in Tungshan (in modern Chekiang Province) and indulged in such pleasures as drinking and feasting in the company of song girls.

⁶⁴Bass 鱸魚, especially the kind that is produced in

⁶⁵The new shoot of tea looks like a pointed spear, and the young leaves on either side resemble tiny flags, hence, together they are called "flag-and spear" 旗槍.

⁶⁶雜當: A minor role.

ACT IV

(Enter YUAN WEI-CHIH.)

YUAN WEI-CHIH: I am Yuan Wei-chih. After I returned from my inspection tour of Chiangnan, I reported to His Majesty that Po Chü-i was banished without committing any offense. Thanks to the Sage Generosity, Po has been called back to the Capital and reinstated in his former office. After expressing his gratitude for imperial favor, Po reported Liu's plot to cheat him of his concubine by falsely reporting his death. The Sage One has permitted Hsing-nu to return to her lawful husband. Today, an edict was issued saying that His Majesty is to try this case personally. I'd better inform Lo-t'ien about it. (Exit.)

(Enter EMPEROR HSIEN-TSUNG, leading EUNUCHS.)

EMPEROR: I am Emperor Hsien-tsung of the T'ang Dynasty. Yesterday, Inspector Yuan Chen memorialized that Po Chü-i was exiled to remote regions with no apparent reason. I also admire Po's talents and had him recalled to the Capital and restored his rank of *Shih-lang*. Po also reported that his concubine P'ei Hsing-nu was formerly a public entertainer, and after he left for his post, a tea-merchant Liu I-lang falsely informed her of his death and tricked her into becoming Liu's wife. Sometime ago, Po accidentally ran into P'ei and snatched her back. According to precedent, she should be returned to her former husband. Eunuchs, summon Po Chü-i to my presence.

EUNUCHS: Yes, Your Majesty. Where is Po Chü-i?
(Enter PO LO-T'IENT.)

PO LO-T'IENT: I am Po Chü-i. Previously I was exiled to the river country. Thanks to my friend Wei-chih's recommendation, I was able to come back to the Capital and regain my former position. I took this opportunity to report Hsing-nu's story to the Emperor and His Majesty has generously permitted her to go

back to her former husband. Now they are calling me in the audience hall, I must go over and see. (Salutes the EMPEROR.) *Shih-lang* Po Chü-i has come back to the Capital by your order and now salutes Your Majesty.

EMPEROR: You must have endured many hardships while in Chiangchou. By what you reported to me about P'ei Hsing-nu's being cheated; according to established practices, she should be returned to her former husband. However, some circumstances in this case are not yet clear, I must summon P'ei Hsing-nu to come here to explain them thoroughly.

EUNUCHS: Yes, Your Majesty. Where is P'ei Hsing-nu? The Emperor is calling for you.

(HSING-NU enters in official headdress and robe.)

HSING-NU: Who'd dream this would happen to me today. I am of humble origin; yet I have the good fortune to be presented to the Emperor. This is truly no small honor. (Sings):

[*Chung-lü, Fen-tieh-erh*]

Autumn moon and spring flowers,
They all belong to the *Shih-lang's*
house.

The day when I achieve fortune and
honor,

It will be like looking for the rarest
stars.⁶⁷

Now I am pardoned,

And came home to marry again.

Today the Emperor summons me to
court,

Whether this means good fortune or
bad,

Only Heaven knows for sure.

I've come before the court. Oh, I'm so scared.
(Sings):

[*Tsui chun-feng*]

This is not like complying with cus-
tomers' wishes,

⁶⁷The stars Ch'en 辰 and Kou 勾.

Or granting my beau's heart's desires.
 I see two rows of warriors holding
 lances,
 This is certainly no child's play,
 No child's play.
 Whether he wants me to be equal to
 Fan Su,
 Or to be under Hsiao-man's⁶⁸ control,
 The imperial wishes I have no way to
 know.

EUNUCHS: P'ei Hsing-nu is here to be presented to
 His Majesty.

(HSING-NU does obeisance to the EMPEROR.)

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Yin hsien-k'e*]

I don't know the rules of ceremony,
 A woman am I.
 How to greet an emperor properly,
 Is truly beyond my knowledge.
 I can only hurriedly lower my head,
 Hastily fall on my knees.
 Your Majesty, please take me into
 your magnanimity,
 And listen to me recount my sad story.

EMPEROR: Is that woman P'ei Hsing-nu?

HSING-NU: Your servant is P'ei Hsing-nu.

EMPEROR: Tell me the whole story with all its
 details. Don't hide anything.

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Shih-liu hua*]

I've spent my years in the pleasure
 house,
 But who enjoys a life such as this?
 My mother guards the door and watch-
 es who comes to call.
 The day I met him—
 He was out on a holiday stroll.
 The old procuress was just waiting to
 squeeze him for money,
 First she provided four bottles of wine
 and ten cakes of fragrant tea.
 One of them was a sly one,
 Who wanted to look for plum blossoms
 in a big snow storm.
 [Tou An-chun]
 One wanted to compose poetry,
 The other to drink to his heart's

content.

They talked about the past and the
 present,
 And all manner of scholarly matters.
 The third, smooth as a ball,
 Struck up a relationship with me.
 As long as carriages and horses line our
 street,
 Money will roll into our house.

I used to belong to the Music Academy, had
 been apprenticed under musician Ts'ao and
 learned to play the lute. One day, *Shih-lang* Po,
 on his day off, came with Meng Hao-jan and
 Chia Lang-hsien to our house to have a drink.
 I waited on *Shih-lang* Po, that's how I got to
 know him.

EMPEROR: If that's so, how did the later develop-
 ments come about?

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Shang hsiao-lou*]

My white-haired mother,
 Of advanced age was she.
 When she saw they wear rhinoceros
 hide belts,
 Dress in white gowns
 And black gauze hats,⁶⁹
 She used all the tricks at her command,
 Hoping to extort money once the
 merry-making came to an end;
 But the old procuress was sadly dis-
 appointed.

[*Yao p'ien*]

From that day on,
 My mother was mad at me,
 And me, I loved him.
 Loved his many talents—
 His swiftness at verse-making,
 Quickness in composition,
 Aptness in word games.
 But no matter how hard he tried,
 My mother was not pleased.
 Furthermore, she couldn't resist the
 high price offered by the tea-
 merchant.

Since I met *Shih-lang* Po, my mother intended
 to squeeze some money out of him knowing
 that he was an official. But he didn't have much

⁶⁸Fan Su 樊素 and Hsiao-man 小蠻 were both Po
 Chü-i's concubines.

⁶⁹Hats worn by noblemen or high officials.



HSING-NU: "From that day on,
my mother was mad at me, and
me, I loved him."

money, so she was full of complaints. I, on the other hand, admired *Shih-lang's* fine character and brilliant mind, pledged myself to him; only I couldn't make the procuress consent. To make things worse, this tea-merchant appeared from nowhere.

EMPEROR: What about this tea-merchant?

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Hung Shao-yueh*]

That fellow traded in purple grasses
and red flowers,
Sweet and fragrant teas.
The ugly toad danced in the spring
breeze,
His headdress was of blue gauze.

I can't stand his unrefined voice
And his dull appearance.

A boat bobbing in the water was his
home.

He sounds no different from a croak-
ing frog,

And acts like a country bumpkin.

This tea-merchant is a native of Chianghsi. He brought along three thousand *yins* of tea and wanted me to sleep with him. Because of *Shih-lang*, I steadfastly refused him. (*Sings*):

[*Hung hsiu-hsieh*]

He had several hundred crates of famed
Yueh-hsia,⁷⁰

Two or three boatloads of jade chips

⁷⁰ 月映: Probably the name of a brand of tea.

and golden sprouts.⁷¹
 He also prepared a lie as big as the sky—
 In order to make Lü-chu leave her master,⁷²
 He falsely reported that Chia I had died in Changsha.⁷³
 Doesn't that letter forger deserve ten thousand deaths?

The old procuress conspired with the tea-merchant to send a spurious letter saying that *Shih-lang* had died. This left me with no succor, she then forced me to marry the tea-merchant.
 EMPEROR: After seeing the letter, what did you decide to do?

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Hsi chun lai*]
 Since they told me—
 Ssu-ma Po had died in Chiangchou,
 I, like a homeless swallow,
 Flew into ordinary people's household.⁷⁴
 My money-hungry mother,
 Harassed me many times a day,
 Until I gave in to her way.
 From then on,
 Watching the hunch-backed willow and the fishing boat
 Became my lot.

The procuress without even giving me a chance to protest, married me off to the tea-merchant. I couldn't argue successfully with her, so I went with him.
 EMPEROR: Since you were married to the tea-merchant, how did you get to go with Mr. Po later?

⁷¹Jade chips and golden sprouts (玉屑金芽) also refer to tea.

⁷²Lü-chu 綠珠 was a beautiful singing girl in the household of Shih Ch'ung 石崇, a very wealthy official in the Chin Dynasty. When a powerful official, Sun Hsiu 孫秀, demanded Lü-chu's hand, she committed suicide by jumping off a building rather than submitting to Sun. An enraged Sun had Shih Ch'ung executed on trumped up charges.

⁷³賈誼: See Footnote 42.

⁷⁴This line is derived from Liu Yü-hsi 劉禹錫's poem,

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*P'u-t'ien lo*]

As a stranger I came to Hsün-yang,
 Where could I mourn his departed soul?
 Fading clouds hung over the river ferry.
 Thinking about the past, in vain I grieved.
 In the middle of the night, sighing in front of the lamp,
 I would entrust my tears and sorrows to my lute.
 Cold waves rippling,
 My heart filled with longing,
 The moon shone on reed flowers.

EMPEROR: Aha, you played the lute. Did Po Chü-i hear it from somewhere and find you? Tell me more about it.

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*K'uai huo shan*]

I was prepared to watch the moon from my orchid boat,
 To see fishing-torches reflecting with reeds.
 Then, like the adventurous Chang Ch'ien⁷⁵ who sailed down from Heaven in a raft,
 He suddenly appeared before my eyes.
 Then I knew he didn't go to the Yellow Spring.⁷⁶

That night the tea merchant was not in. I was playing the lute in the moonlight, suddenly I saw two gentlemen on another boat. When I looked closely, I recognized one of them was *Shih-lang* Po. That's how I knew he did not die,

"The swallows from the halls of Wang and Hsieh of old, have now flown into ordinary people's household." See also Footnote 34 for "Wang and Hsieh".

⁷⁵張騫: The intrepid Chinese envoy who journeyed to Central Asia during the reign of Emperor Wu (140-87 B.C.) of the Han Dynasty. En route, he was captured by the Hsiung-nu tribe 匈奴 in the north and detained for over ten years before he was able to escape. Chang's exploits enabled China to establish diplomatic and commercial relations with the Central Asian states.

⁷⁶黃泉: The underworld.

then I followed him to come here. (*Sings*):

[*Pao lao-erh*]

My scholar would even be the choice
of demons and monster,
Everyone of them wild with passion.
By the time I left the misty village of
four or five houses,
My tears had soaked his blue gown and
my silk handkerchief.
After I met my old friend,
I no longer dreaded Hsün-yang's damp
low land;
Today the Emperor summons me,
I do not mind the long journey to
Chang-an.

EMPEROR: Hsing-nu, can you recognize which one
among my civil and military officials is Po Chü-
i?

(*HSING-NU tries to identify PO.*)

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Chiao-shen*]

They all look alike—
Holding ivory tablet and wearing black
gauze hat.
Oh, I feel so dazzled,
So dazzled.
Stealing glances and groping my way,
I'll try to find him among the as-
sembled officials.

(*She sees the three.*) This is Scholar Chia; this
is Scholar Meng; this is *Shih-lang* Po. (*Sings*):

[*T'i yin-teng*]

How have you been, my old cus-
tomers?
You look surprised, my new bride-
groom.
The scholars of the Hanlin Academy
are all speechless,
But this *Shih-lang* Po is my man for
better or for worse.
I'll look again,
He is indeed my man.
But why is he playing the deaf-mute?

EMPEROR: Hsing-nu, you look closely. Are you
sure he is your man?

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Man ch'ing-ts'ai*]

How dare he deny it before your
majesty?
The day he came to my house,

Springtime was in his heart,
And he wanted to stay for the night.
I thought he was a poetry-spouting,
wine-drinking profligate,
Didn't expect he also knows affairs of
the state.

EMPEROR: You people all kneel down and listen
to me pass judgement.

(*They all kneel down.*)

EMPEROR (*recites*):

Since time immemorial,
Those who wish to regulate people's
morals and conducts,
Must start with the relationship between
husband and wife.
We only have to look to the poem
"Osprey",
Which opens the *Book of Poetry*,
The intention of the poet is made quite
clear.

P'ei Hsing-nu was born into the courtesan's trade,
Yet she knows moral principle and is
steadfast in what she does.
When she met her future husband to
whom she entrusted her well being,
She intended to leave the world of
pleasure and sin.
The old procuress was greedy and cruel,
And forced her to marry the tea-
merchant.

Hsing-nu's determination never wavered

—
She awaited her betrothed to come home.
The procuress hatched a treacherous plot

—
A spurious letter falsely reporting Ssu-ma
Po's death.

Thereby she was made a merchant's wife,
And a sail boat took her to Hsün-yang.
While seeing off a friend by the river
bank,

Po Chü-i chanced to hear her lute song,
And they had a sorrowful reunion.

Separation between lovers
Induced a sad number on the lute
And a thousand trickling tears.

The exiled was also easily moved,
They wept till tears drenched their
clothes.

To follow one's former husband is clearly
 recognized by law,
 Even though she eloped with him,
 There is nothing wrong at all.
 Today the case has been brought before
 the imperial palace,
 I'll let you two unite in happy marriage.
 Po Chü-i will be installed in his former
 office,
 And Madam P'ei is to share his honors.
 The old procuress will get sixty strokes,
 Liu I-lang exiled to a distant place.
 This reward and punishment
 Come not from my personal preference;
 I did so only to uphold justice.

Let my pronouncement be posted and
 carried out,
 So my subjects will know to obey their
 emperor's decrees.
 (*The multitude expresses thanks to the*
 EMPEROR.)

HSING-NU (*sings*):

[*Sui sha*]
 I've just returned from ten thousand
 miles away,
 Sorrow has already tinted my temples
 with gray.
 I'll put away my youthful heart,
 Never again to pluck flowers in the
 spring breeze.

Po Chü-i's "Lute Song"

Many works of the Yuan drama are based on famous stories in history and classical literature. The foregoing play could be described in Hollywood parlance as "inspired by" or "adapted from" the celebrated T'ang poem *P'i-p'a hsing* 琵琶行 by Po Chü-i. As with modern-day screenwriting, the adaptation is replete with fanciful plot and character inventions, comedy relief, and anachronisms—all for the sake of a heightened entertainment value. Never mind that the demoted and exiled official and the melancholy *p'i-p'a* girl are total strangers in a chance encounter; a happy "reunion", and even happier ending, is what the public wanted.

Ma Chih-yuan, himself a scholar and no mean poet (See *Renditions* No. 3) would know that historically Po Chü-i's good friend Yuan Chen 元稹 did not visit him in Chiangchou and that the other well-known T'ang poet Meng Hao-*jan* 孟浩然 was not even a contemporary. It may be that he was so fond of Po's poem that he crafted a dramatic framework just to give it greater popular circulation.

P'i-p'a hsing carries a Preface which summarizes in Po's own prose the bare facts behind the long narrative poem. We reproduce it here in John Coleman's translation before presenting his English version of the main work.

The Chinese *p'i-p'a*, often rendered as *lute*, is a musical instrument resembling the guitar, having a long fretted neck and four or six strings. The word *hsing* in the title denotes a type of old-style poetry, or song.
