

# Lyrics by Ho Chu

Translated by Stuart Sargent

橫塘路 青玉案  
凌波不過橫塘路。但目送。芳塵去。  
錦瑟華年誰與度。  
月臺花榭。瑣窗朱戶。只有春知處。  
碧雲冉冉蘅皋暮。彩筆新題斷腸句。  
試問閒愁都幾許。  
一川煙草。滿城風絮。梅子黃時雨。

## HENG-T'ANG ROAD<sup>1</sup>

—to the Tune of "Green Jade Serving Stand"

Gracefully floating—not over Heng-t'ang Road;  
I only gaze after her, as the fragrant dust goes.  
Youth counted on a zither's strings—with whom  
will it be spent?

A moonlit bridge, flower-planted court,  
Latticed window, vermilion door—  
A place that only spring would know.

Flying clouds trail over; night comes to the spike-  
nard marshes.

The many-colored brush inscribes anew heart-  
breaking lines.

If you ask, how much dreary sorrow can there  
be—

One flat expanse of misty grass,  
A whole city of wind-blown floss,<sup>2</sup>  
The rain that falls when plums are turning yellow.

<sup>1</sup>Heng-t'ang Road: Transverse Dike Road. Ho Chu had a small villa near Transverse Dike Bridge, outside Soochow.

<sup>2</sup>Referring to willow catkins blowing aimlessly in the wind.

HOPING FOR A LETTER  
—to the Tune of "Beating White Silk"

The frontier sponce is far  
And post houses few.  
I'll send along a travelling coat to line his coat of  
iron.  
It's not so bad, every night, to see him just in  
dream—  
I only hope, at New Year's, his letter will come  
home.

望書歸 擣練子  
邊候遠。  
置郵稀。  
附與征衣襯鐵衣。  
連夜不妨頻夢見。  
過年惟望得書歸。

砧面瑩。 杵聲齊 擣練子  
杵聲齊。  
擣就征衣淚墨題。  
寄到玉關應萬里。  
戍人猶在玉關西。

BEATERS' SOUNDS MAKE CHORUS  
—to the Tune of "Beating White Silk"

Fulling-stone faces gleam,  
Beaters' sounds make chorus.  
Pound out his travelling clothes, with tear-drop ink  
address.  
Send them to the Pass of Jade,<sup>3</sup> ten thousand *li*  
away;  
Beyond the Pass of Jade his garrison tarries in the  
west.

<sup>3</sup> *Yü-kuan* 玉關, in the western part of Tun-huang country in Kansu Province, was anciently a strategic point on the trade route to Central Asia.

斜月下。  
 北風前。  
 萬杵千砧擣欲穿。  
 不爲擣衣勤不睡。  
 破除今夜夜如年。

夜如年  
 擣練子

*NIGHT SO LIKE A YEAR*  
*—to the Tune of "Beating White Silk"*

Under the slanting moon,  
 Against the northern wind,  
 Ten thousand beaters, a thousand stones, well nigh  
 pounded through.  
 Not for pounding clothes does one toil without  
 sleep—  
 But to batter away this night, this night so like a  
 year.

*POUNDING CLOTHES BY NIGHT*  
*—to the Tune of "Beating White Silk"*

Gather up the brodered words,<sup>4</sup>  
 Put down the love-bird frame.<sup>5</sup>  
 Brush clean the fulling block<sup>6</sup> on rack, pound his  
 clothes by night.  
 Is that youth upon his horse in good health still?  
 Past melon time,<sup>7</sup> I only see the geese in southward  
 flight.

<sup>4</sup> Brodered words: The wife of Tou T'ao 寶滔 (Chin 晉 Dynasty) embroidered a poem in which the characters were written in a grid pattern and could be read top to bottom, bottom to top, or in a spiral, each way still producing a poem in the proper meter. She sent this poem to her husband, who had been transferred to a distant post, to express her longing.

<sup>5</sup> Some kind of embroidery device used to make colorful stitch-work, including most likely a mandarin duck design.

<sup>6</sup> A flat stone on which newly-sewn clothing was pounded to flatten the seams.

<sup>7</sup> An allusion to the *Tso-chuan*, eighth year of Duke Chuang: "The Marquis of Ch'i sent Lien Ch'eng and Kuan Chih-fu to garrison Kuei-ch'iu. They went out at the melon season, and he said, 'When the melons are in season again, I will relieve you.'" In the same way the speaker's husband in our poem fails to return at "melon season," i.e., the expected date.

收錦字。  
 下鴛機。  
 淨拂牀砧夜擣衣。  
 馬上少年今健否。  
 過瓜時見雁南歸。

夜擣衣  
 擣練子

HALF-DEAD T'UNG TREE  
—to the Tune of "Partridge Sky"

Once more I pass the Westgate,<sup>8</sup> but nothing is the same.

We came together; why can't we both return?  
The t'ung tree is half dead, after the clear frost;  
Head white, the love-duck<sup>9</sup> flies on alone.

Grass on the plain:  
Dew begins to dry.

Our old roost, your new tomb: the two keep me by.

On the empty bed I lie and listen to rain on the south window.

Who will trim the lamp now, and mend my clothes at night?

<sup>8</sup>The Westgate: Ch'ang-men 閩門, the northwest gate of Wuh sien (Soochow) in Kiangsu.

<sup>9</sup>Love ducks, i.e. Mandarin ducks, are the symbol of conjugal togetherness.

半死桐 亦名鷓鴣天  
重過閩門萬事非。同來何事不同歸。  
梧桐半死清霜後。頭白鴛鴦失伴飛。  
原上草。露初晞。  
舊棲新壠兩依依。  
空牀臥聽南窗雨。誰復挑燈夜補衣。

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*Ho Chu (1063-1120) was first a military officer, then a civil servant before he retired to the city of Soochow in the closing years of the Northern Sung dynasty. He was reputed to be both a brilliant prosateur and versifier. As a writer of tz'u poetry, he was highly acclaimed for his description of scenery and coining of poetic vocabulary at once elegant and forceful. Less discussed by critics is the scope of his themes, which often went beyond conventional melancholia to cover the wider span of communal life. The four short poems printed here, written to the tune of "Beating White Silk", have a theme that is common in T'ang poetry but rare in the works of Sung poets.*

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賀鑄詞六首