

妾薄命歎

Lament over My Poor Fate

Translated by Wilt L. Idema

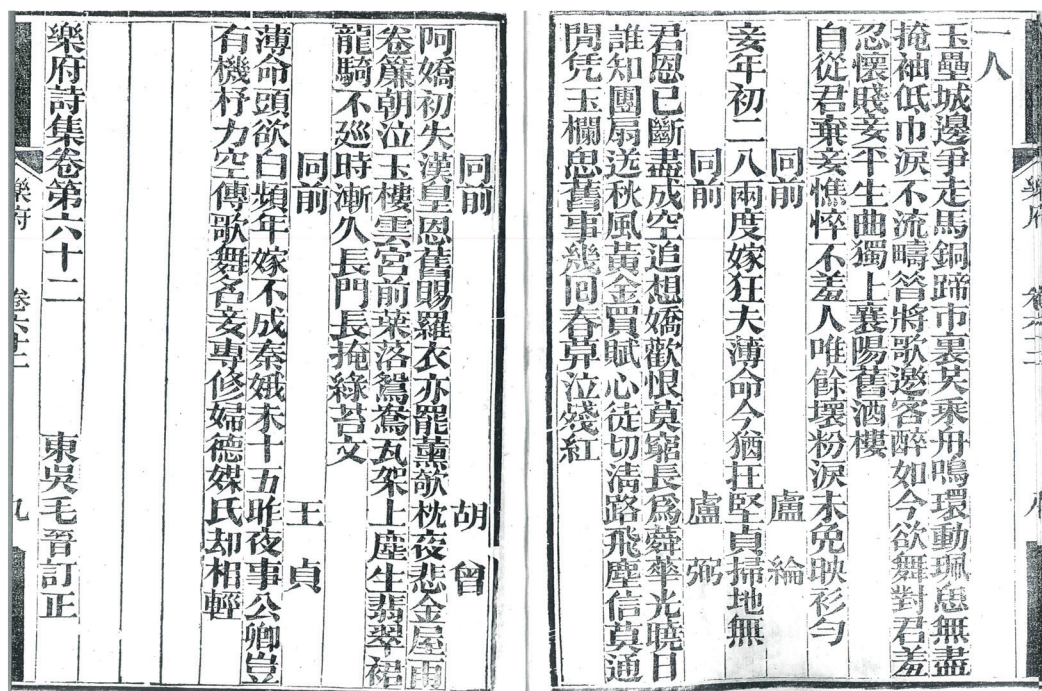
Introduction

‘Qie boming’ 妾薄命 [My poor fate] is first encountered as the title of a poem in the collection of Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232). There it is used as the title of two poems (both written in lines of six syllables) that describe the pleasures and festivities of inner court life. Cao Zhi’s modern editor Zhao Youwen 趙幼文 dates these two poems to 231 and reads them as criticisms of the luxurious lifestyle of Emperor Mingdi 明帝. In view of the contradiction between title and content ‘My Poor Fate’ here probably is used as an indication of the melody to which the poems should be performed. We re-encounter the title three centuries later in the collection of Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503–551). His poem (in lines of five syllables) is written in the voice of a beautiful woman who has been left by her patron and voices her fear that the passage of time will ravage her looks. Linked to this theme, this *yuefu* title remained popular throughout the Tang dynasty (617–906), and was taken up by poets as diverse as Li Baiyao 李百藥 (565–648) and Du Shenyan 杜審言 (c.645–c.708), Li Bai 李白 (701–762) and Meng Jiao 孟郊 (751–814), and Zhang Ji 張籍 (c.767–c.830) and Hu Zeng 胡曾 (c.840–?).¹ All of these poems focus on abandoned women, with the exception of a poem by Wang Zhen 王貞, whose protagonist complains she has never been able to find a partner because of her virtue:

Because of my poor fate my hair is turning grey;
After these many years I still remain unmarried.
That wench from Qin is not yet even fifteen
But last night served one of the highest lords.
She lacks the strength for loom and shuttle—
It’s just her idle fame for song and dance.
As I devote myself to wifely virtues
I am despised by all the go-betweens.²

¹ Poems entitled ‘My Poor Fate’ are of course only a minute fraction of the extensive body of male-authored poems on the topic of the abandoned woman. From an early date it has been suggested that such poetry should be read allegorically as an expression of loyalty towards the ruler on the part of the author.

² Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩, *Yuefu shi ji* 樂府詩集, SBBY 62:7a.



A page with Wang Zhen's 王貞 'Qie boming' 妾薄命, translated on the previous page

None of these short poems of the Tang and earlier collected in the twelfth century by Guo Maoqian in his *Yuefu shi ji* prepares us, however, for the over five hundred lines (2534 characters) of the long poem entitled 'Qie boming tan' 妾薄命歎 [Lament over my poor fate] included in one of the items of the *Guidong* 鬼董 [Historian of ghosts] and there ascribed to a certain madam Wang 王氏.

Historian of Ghosts is a collection of miracle tales from the early thirteenth century. All we know about its compiler is that he was surnamed Shen 沈 and that he had the status of a student in the National Academy. In the Ming and Qing dynasties the famous Yuan-dynasty playwright Guan Hanqing 關漢卿 (c.1220–c.1300) was occasionally credited with authorship of the collection, but that ascription is based on a hasty misreading of the partially preserved preface. Ming dynasty sources mention a Song dynasty printing of the text, but that edition has not been preserved. For many centuries the collection survived only in manuscript; it was printed only in the final years of the eighteenth century as part of the *Zhibuzuzhai congshu* 知不足齋叢書. Later the collection was also included in the nineteenth-century *Longwei mishu* 龍威秘書 and the early twentieth-century *Shuoku* 說庫.³ The text that is reproduced in the *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 is a photographic reproduction of the *Zhibuzuzhai congshu* edition.

³ Li Jianguo 李劍國, *Songdai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 宋代志怪傳奇敘錄 (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1997), 372–375.

The limited availability of the *Historian of Ghosts* during the Ming dynasty probably explains why ‘Lament over My Poor Fate’ was not included in any of the usually quite comprehensive anthologies of women’s poetry that were produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As these anthologies have often served as the sources of our modern anthologies of women’s poetry, ‘Lament for My Poor Fate’ is not found in any of those anthologies either. More recently, the poem was even neglected by the compilers of the 72-volume *Quan Song shi* 全宋詩 [Complete poems of the Song dynasty].⁴ A type-set and punctuated edition of the ‘Lament over My Poor Fate’ from *Historian of Ghosts* was eventually provided by Wu Zonghai 吳宗海.⁵ Wu does not specify his source, but his version would appear to be based on the text as found in the *Shuoku* edition of *Historian of Ghosts*. The translation presented here is based on the text as included in the *Zhibuzuzhai congshu* edition of *Historian of Ghosts* as included in *Xuxiu siku quanshu*.⁶

Historian of Ghosts provides the poem with a short introduction to explain its origin:

A girl of the Wang family in Julu was very beautiful in appearance, but her family was poor. A certain Mr Ling of the same prefecture married her as a concubine, but his wife was extremely jealous. Availing herself of the opportunity provided when Mr Ling had left the house, she ordered her female servants to tie Wang up and throw her into a ravine. Wang managed to free herself and fled to a different commandery, where she became a Daoist nun. She also wrote a ‘Lament Over My Poor Fate’ in more than a thousand words. One night she appeared to Mr Ling in a dream and told him what she had suffered, and also handed him this poem. When Mr Ling woke up, he found the poem by his bedside. When his wife died later on, Wang was able to come back again.

I had heard about this event, and was greatly intrigued by it, but I had never seen the poem. Recently a visitor showed it to me. ...

This is not a tale that inspires great confidence, even if those who would like to insist on the historical existence of woman Wang and her authorship would have no problem coming up with a rational explanation. For instance, a friend of the author in Ling’s household might have placed a copy of her poem next to the bedside of the guilt-ridden husband. The anecdote about the poem’s origin, however, does not completely fit the contents of ‘Lament for My Poor Fate’. A close reading of the poem itself suggests that

⁴ The poem is not discussed in Su Zhecong 蘇者聰, *Songdai nüxing wenxue* 宋代女性文學 (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 1997) either.

⁵ Wu Zhonghai, ‘“Quan Song shi” shishou zhi Songdai funü diyi changshi’ 《全宋詩》失收之宋代婦女第一長詩, *Jinggangshan shifanxueyuan xuebao* 井岡山師範學院學報, 24/4 (2003), 16–17.

⁶ *Guidong* 1:7a–13b. In *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*, ‘Zibu, Xiaoshuo jia lei’, mclxvi, 376–79.

the protagonist of the poem is not a discarded concubine but rather an abandoned first wife. The protagonist of the poem expresses the hope of being able ‘to offer grain’ at the ancestral sacrifices, which is typically the duty of the main wife, and she claims to have ‘shared [her husband’s] poverty’, which entitles the main wife to protection against divorce. In addition, the protagonist compares herself in her allusions (to Su Hui 蘇蕙 and Zhuang Jiang 莊薑) to first wives who had lost out to concubines. While female authorship cannot be excluded, the poem might as well, like all earlier poems entitled ‘My Poor Fate’, have been written by a man.⁷ Contrary to what one might expect, ‘My Poor Fate’ never became a popular title with women poets. The extensive McGill-Harvard-Yenching Library Ming Qing Women’s Literature database contains only one poem entitled ‘My Poor Fate!’⁸ The description of the husband’s home as a palatial establishment might suggest that the object of affection is the emperor rather than a local landlord, which would call for an allegorical reading. One also should note that the poem originally circulated independently from the anecdote, and that the poem contains no information that would allow it to be linked to a specific time or place, as it describes a typical situation in a cosmic context.

But whatever its authorship, ‘Lament over My Poor Fate’ as found in *Historian of Ghosts* is a very extraordinary poem indeed. Despite its length, it never loses its pace. It runs to more than five hundred lines, and is primarily written in lines of five syllables. Towards the end, one sees an occasional use of seven-syllable lines, and the final ten lines are all of seven syllables. Throughout the poem the same rhyme is maintained (支, 脂, 之) and as repetition of the same rhyme-word is avoided, one encounters some pretty uncommon rhyme words (for instance ‘daddy-long-legs’). As the original poem does not use change of rhyme to mark its paragraphs, the subdivisions in the translation (marked by a blank line) are owed to the translator. The poem cannot have been written much earlier than the late twelfth century as it refers to the fate of Yue Fei 岳飛 as a blatant miscarriage of justice.

‘Lament over My Poor Fate’ has been dubbed ‘the longest poem by a woman’ by the erudite comparatist Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 (1910–98), and may well be the longest poem of the Song dynasty *tout court*.⁹ As *shi* poems are overwhelmingly lyrical in

⁷ Zhang Hongsheng 張宏生, ‘Guiyuan: Xieshi haishi jituo—guanyu *Qieboming tan di jiedu*’ 閨怨：寫實還是寄托——關於妾薄命歎的解讀, in Zhang Peiheng 章培恆, ed., *Zhongguo zhongshi wenxue yanjiu lunji* 中國中世文學研究論集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006), 1582–1594, argues strongly in favour of a male author and an allegorical reading.

⁸ This poem was written by the late sixteenth-century poet Lu Qingzi 陸卿子 and is included in the *Mingyuan shi gui* 名媛詩歸.

⁹ Shu Zhan 舒展, ed., *Qian Zhongshu lunxue wenxuan* 錢鍾書論學文選 (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1990), v, 332. Qian Zhongshu mentions two longer poems by male authors, but both lived during the Qing dynasty. According to Wu Zonghai, ‘*Quan Song shi xiaozha*’ 全宋詩小札, *Wenxue yichan*, 1 (2001), 141, the longest poem by a male poet of the Song dynasty (Shao Yong’s 邵雍 *Guanqi dayin* 觀棋大吟 [Great chant on watching Go]) only has 340 lines.

nature, they are usually of modest length. Even the longer narrative *shi* poems of the first millennium that were studied by Dore Levy rarely count more than a few hundred lines. The same applies to the longer works of the prolific Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846). And while some Song dynasty poets produced thousands of poems, none of them established a reputation for long poems. Searching for an exemplar for a composition of this size, the author of ‘Lament over My Poor Fate’ evidently modelled his or her work on *Li Sao* 離騷 [Encountering sorrow]. This poem in eight-line stanzas, said to be the work of Qu Yuan 屈原 (also known as Qu Ping 屈平; fl. 300 BCE), runs to over 370 lines. According to his biography in Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (145?–90? BC) *Shi ji* 史記, Qu Yuan was an upright minister in the ancient state of Chu, who at first enjoyed the trust of the king. Later, however, the king was convinced by slander, and Qu Yuan was banished from court. Following travels through the still largely undeveloped area of northern Hunan, he is said in his final desperation to have drowned himself in the Miluo River. The annual dragon boat races are said to have been instituted in memory of the attempts to save Qu Yuan.

Encountering Sorrow is one of the foundational texts of the Chinese lyric tradition, as it established in Qu Yuan the figure of the poet as an honest official who is misunderstood and rejected by his lord, yet throughout his life hopes to regain his good graces and will stay loyal to his dying day. In some sections of the *Encountering Sorrow* Qu Yuan speaks directly to the king, protesting his sincerity and complaining of the slanderers who have the king’s ear. In a number of stanzas the poet stresses the purity of his person by portraying himself as decked out in all kinds of fragrant plants. The poem also contains a number of stanzas in which the poet presents himself as traveling through the cosmos, looking for ‘a matchmaker’ who will reunite him with his loved one, the Beautiful Person (*meiren* 美人). In yet other stanzas Qu Yuan presents himself as one of the king’s concubines, who has lost the king’s favour because of the vicious conniving of the king’s current favourites. In this way, *Encountering Sorrow* is one of the model texts in the Chinese tradition for the convention of male writers assuming a female persona.¹⁰ But it also does not come as a surprise that women poets who felt misjudged by their husbands, his family, or the world at large would identify with the character of Qu Yuan.¹¹

¹⁰ Maija Bell Samei, *Gendered Persona and Poetic Voice: The Abandoned Woman in Early Song Lyrics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 51–53.

¹¹ In the early sixteenth century a certain lady Wen 文 authored a collection entitled *Ni sao*, consisting of nine songs in the *sao*-meter. These songs are clearly modelled on the ‘Nine Songs’ and other sets of nine poems in the *Chu Ci* 楚辭 [Songs of the south], traditionally ascribed to Qu Yuan and his disciple Song Yu 宋玉. Even though *Ni sao* has been translated as *Imitations of the ‘Li Sao’*, the title might perhaps better be rendered as *Imitations in the Sao-Meter*. In the early nineteenth century Wu Zao 吳藻 (1799–1862) wrote a one-act play entitled *Qiaoying* 喬影 [The fake image] in which a thinly disguised alter-ego of the author is portrayed in male dress while reading *Encountering Sorrow*.

If we are willing to believe the short prose introduction to the ‘Lament over My Poor Fate’ we have to assume that by imitating *Encountering Sorrow* the concubine who has been literally thrown out of the house by the jealous wife compares her lasting fidelity to her husband to the undying loyalty of Qu Yuan to his king. She too dresses herself out in fragrant plants, and she too leaves on flights through the cosmos. But whereas Qu Yuan compared himself to an abandoned royal concubine only a number of times, the persona presented in the ‘Lament over My Poor Fate’ is consistently portrayed as female. The female first-person pronoun *qie* 妾 is used throughout the text, from its beginning to its end. And while Qu Yuan met a wide variety of characters in the course of his peregrinations, the universe of ‘Lament over My Poor Fate’ is thoroughly feminized. With the exception of her father and the ornamental Greybeards at the court of the Queen-Mother of the West, all other characters the first person protagonist of our poem encounters are female, culled from the rich pantheon of classical Chinese mythology.¹²

Setting out on her wanderings, our protagonist first comes across a temple dedicated to Concubine Ban 班婕妤, famous for her virtue and loyalty. She next (in a dream?) encounters Granny of Mt. Black Stallion (Lishan laomu 驪山老母) and asks her to tell her her fortune, in a scene which reminds one of Qu Yuan’s consultation of Ling Fen 靈氛 in *Encountering Sorrow*, with the difference that Qu Yuan consults Ling Fen at almost the very end of his peregrinations. Later, on her trip through the heavens, our protagonist is accompanied by a bevy of immortal maidens. She first calls on Hemp Lady (well known for her stylish long nails), and next is received in audience by the Queen-Mother of the West. On her further travels she meets with the Divine Consorts (the goddesses of the Xiang and the loyal wives of Shun), Guye, Weaving Maiden, and Chang’e, the goddess of the moon. The latter offers our protagonist her elixir of immortality, but she refuses to take it as long as she cannot share it with her lord and master. And whereas Qu Yuan concluded *Encountering Sorrow* with his decision to join Peng Xian, our protagonist decides to join the Feathered Maidens (Maonü 毛女) of the Qinling Mountains, which may explain why the introductory note to the poem claimed that she became a Daoist nun.

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¹² The similarities between *Encountering Sorrow* and ‘Lament over My Poor Fate’ were discussed in a number of papers presented at the 1991 national conference on Qu Yuan and Traditional Chinese Culture at Tianjin, but none of these papers would seem to have appeared in print. Zhou Jianzhong 周建忠, ‘Qu Yuan yu Zhongguo chuantong wenhua yanjiu niaokan’ 屈原與中國傳統文化研究鳥瞰, *Tianjin shehui kexue* 天津社會科學, 1 (1992), 76.

A GIRL OF THE WANG FAMILY in Julu¹³ was very beautiful in appearance, but her family was poor. A certain Mr Ling of the same prefecture married her as a concubine, but his wife was extremely jealous. Availing herself of the opportunity when Mr Ling had left the house, she ordered her female servants to tie Wang up and throw her into a ravine. Wang managed to free herself and fled to a different commandery, where she became a Daoist nun. She also wrote a 'Lament over My Poor Fate' in more than a thousand words. One night she appeared to Mr Ling in a dream and told him what she had suffered, and she also handed him this poem. When Mr Ling woke up, he found the poem by his bedside. When his wife died later on, Wang was able to come back again.

I had heard about this event, and was greatly intrigued by it, but I had never seen the poem. Recently a visitor showed it to me, and so I copy it out:

All alone I followed the smooth and level road,
As a chilling wind resounded in bare branches.
But the way was shaped like sheep intestine,
Curving and winding, with many a divergent path.

Mistakenly taking it to be the straight way,
I all of a sudden fell into the deepest thorns.
Dense trees hid and occluded the cold moon,
Its pure light piercing your handmaid's skin.

Wild crows continued to caw through the night,
While hidden owls laughed at my self-pity.
Male foxes too ran around me, howling,
And flying squirrels kept on in pursuit.

All alone I approached the den of tigers and wolves—
Of course I did not expect to be nurtured with love!
How could I not be filled with trepidation?
I relied on the protection by the blue sky above.

In my early years I learned to strum the zither,
And excelled in playing lyrics of Sunny Spring.¹⁴
When I grew up, I learned to blow the reed pipes:

¹³ The ancient county of Julu covered the area of the modern county of Pingxiang in southern Hebei.

¹⁴ Songs of Sunny Spring 陽春 refers to a superior kind of music the true value of which is only understood by a very small number.

As soon as I played them, two phoenixes danced!

In my middle years I met with domestic disaster,
Because everyone voiced their suspicions of me.
My lord and master did not inquire into the matter,
And chased me away to the river's winding bank.

When earlier I affected my reclusive manner,
I enjoyed his love and was very much admired.
Now suddenly he showed me a stern countenance,
Halfway on the road we have become separated.

His favourites delight in eating dishes of meat,
I alone willingly eat the bitter shepherd's purse.
His favourites all crave clothes of gauze and silk,
But I alone wear clothes of simple white yarn.

His favourites all love to have contacts outside,
I'm the only one to keep my door securely locked.
It's common nature to hate those who are different:
In precious jade they point out blemishes and flaws.

How could it be my lord and master is deluded?
My heart is transparent, without any deceptions.
He suffered them to manipulate poison by the cup,
And the danger increased with every moment.

He failed to understand hints and suggestions,¹⁵
But said that I competed in seductive beauty.
Discarded and rejected for three long years—
I have no way to show my innermost feelings.

I called out to Heaven, but Heaven remained silent,
I called out to Earth, but Earth didn't understand.
I called out to my father and to my mother:
'To what purpose did you give birth to me?'

Overcome by weakness I collapsed on the grass,
My parents called out to me, 'Dear little darling!'

¹⁵ For 'hints and suggestions' the text writes more literally 'feelings of the overturned cup'. Sima Rui 司馬睿, the later Emperor Yuan 元帝 of the Eastern Jin dynasty, used to be addicted to alcohol. When he was about to cross the Yangzi, one of his supporters admonished him against this vice, whereupon he emptied one last cup and placed it upside-down on the table to indicate he would never drink wine again.

Holding my hand they asked me how I was doing,
Both of them—their hair so white—awash in tears.

They urged me not to change my attitude, but
When I grasped their hands, they suddenly were gone.
The village rooster had already ended its song,
And at the edge of the forest early dawn rose.

The frozen frost on my skin was a full inch thick,
Turning and tossing I was both hungry and cold.
I didn't even have chaff or bran to still my hunger,
And I lacked even reeds to burn against the cold.

I shook my gown and rambled on at random,
Entered by chance a temple of Concubine Ban.¹⁶

鉅鹿有王氏女美容儀而家貧同郡凌生納為妾凌妻
極妬嘗俟凌出使婢縛王擲深谷中王偶脫而逸去入
他郡為女道士作妾薄命歎千餘言一夕見夢於凌語
所苦且以詩授凌凌覺而得其詩於禱前後凌妻死王
乃得復返予聞其事甚怪惜不見其詩客近有傳示予
者因錄之裴裴尋坦路淒風響枯枝路本羊腸形折轉
多他岐誤識為直道偶陷深蒺藜密林蔽寒月清光透
妾肌野鴉徹夜啼矇矓笑自悲雄狐繞妾號鼯鼠相追
隨獨近虎狼窟啖吐安可期妾心豈不懼仰賴穹蒼垂
少年學彈箏善鼓陽春詞長年學吹笙一吹雙鳳儀中
年催家禍眾口生嫌疑主君不及察逐妾江之碕昔嘗
致幽調酣歡頗見奇今忽厲顏色中道成睽離羣寵好
肉食妾獨甘苦薺羣寵好羅綺妾獨披素絲羣寵好外
交妾獨嚴門楣人情惡異已璫璫摘瑕玼主君豈不明
妾心洞無欺彼忍弄孟毒危機轉斯須不解覆盆情謂
我爭妍媸捐棄長三年剖心無所施呼天天不言呼地
地不知獨呼父與母何用生我為羸羸蓋草宿父母呼
孳孳攜手問苦樂白髮雙涕淚訓妾母改心掣手忽失

鬼董卷一
七知不足齋叢書

¹⁶ Concubine Ban was the virtuous and loyal concubine of the dissolute emperor Cheng 成帝 (r. 32–7 BCE). When he had discarded her in favour of an exotic dancer, she voiced her frustration in a rhapsody. Her name is also associated with an early *shi* poem in which a woman compares her fate to that of a round (‘doubled pleasure’ 合歡) fan that will be put away in fall when the summer heat has cooled—in the same ways he may be discarded by her lover once his love has cooled. See Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 77–82.

Also venerated were the virtuous women of yore,
Of different dynasties—equal in chaste fidelity.

In silent reverence I consulted the diving block,
[And asked whether I should perhaps] comply.¹⁷
An old nun then deduced the correct augury:
It behooved me to persist in chaste fidelity.

The divine gods would protect me in the end:
I should not slacken in maintaining my resolve.
I went outside and inspected my lonely shadow,
Confident in my rectitude I was without blame.

Its cold waves impressed themselves on my eyes:
All alone I walked on the banks of the clear Huai.
There I met with Granny of Mt. Black-Stallion,¹⁸
All around us, the two of us were all alone.

I prostrated myself and asked her for my fortune,
I asked her to consult the holy milfoil stalks.
White rushes were spread out on the sand,
As she opened the book to find good counsel:

The upper trigram was a hill, a mountain,
The lower trigram was a marsh, a lake.
The text of Fuxi names this 'Decrease',¹⁹
Hard and soft are defined by the times.

Praying to the Duke of Zhou and Confucius for divine guidance,
She showed me the explanations on how to control and restrain.²⁰
To the left she gave me a pair of jasper hairpins,
To the right she gave me a pair of carnelian fungi.

The dark brew poured from the gourd-like flask,

¹⁷ The first two characters of this line are missing in the original Chinese text, so the translation is tentative. The *Shuoku* edition of *Historian of Ghosts* has no lacuna here and writes *moyou* 默佑 for the two missing characters.

¹⁸ I.e. Lishan laomu, a fabled female immortal.

¹⁹ 'Decrease' is the name of the forty-first hexagram in the *Book of Changes* 易經, the 'Judgment' which reads: 'Decrease, combined with sincerity, / Brings about extreme good fortune / Without blame.' *The I ching: or Book of Changes*, trs. Richard Wilhelm/Cary F. Baynes, Bollingen Series (3rd edn, Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), 158.

²⁰ 'The Image' for 'Decrease' reads: 'At the foot of the mountain, the lake: The image of Decrease. / Thus the superior man controls his anger / And restrains his instincts'. Wilhelm/Baynes, 159.

And misty clouds filled the paired cups.
A first draught cleansed my dusty bones,
A second draught purified my old spleen.

I kowtowed, wanting to become her disciple,
But, moving slowly, I could not keep up with her.

My eyes explored the empty void to its limits,
My head bowed, I was stirred to distant travel.
And all of a sudden I had lost my bearings,
Heavy clouds moved in on me from all sides.

Drizzling and drizzling—the night mist arose,
Falling thick and fast—the snow only got worse,
Stumbling and falling, with no pity for myself,
I just went on and on, with no one to consult.

Far, far away the jade palace shone coldly,²¹
Each and every thought displayed on her brows.²²
Floating on and on between cover and carriage,²³
Sombre and desolate—what can be its support?

Filled by noble ardour I felt somewhat relieved,
Single-minded stillness must be my practice.
In the early morning I collected the *Polia Japonica*
And as dusk fell, I picked the *Gracilaria Vernucosa*.

Entering the stream, I grabbed *Angelica Sinensis*,
Ascending the mountain, picked *Magnolia Liliflora*,
With moist chrysanthemums as my girdle pendants,
And the hidden orchid as decoration for my sash.

With fragrant *Lysimachia* I tied up my high chignon,
And bound aromatic herbs to my light shoelaces.
I made myself a skirt of hibiscus flowers,
It fitted all around and also felt like feathers.

At the spring I once again cleansed my heart:
Completely transparent—free of dust or desire.

²¹ The 'jade palace' here refers to the moon.

²² I take this line to refer to Heng'e (Chang'e 嫦娥), the goddess of the moon, whose existence is marked by an eternal loneliness.

²³ 'Cover' refers to the dome of the sky, whereas 'carriage' refers to the earth.

I wanted to knock on my lord and master's gate
And, spitting blood, tell of my misfortune.

An elderly neighbour, pitying me for my fate—
Her cheeks streaked with tears because of me.
She urged me to be careful and circumspect,
So I would not cause myself shame to no avail.

'His favourites right now are most bewitching,
How could you oppose their whispered words?'
So I craned my neck to see the high pavilions:
Up to the dome of heaven a thousand floors!

Twelve balustrades all fashioned of jade,
Beams and rafters open to flying wings!
Thickly surrounded by a brilliant ether
The Patterned Magpies rose up in pairs.²⁴

I could look up to them, but could not approach,
So I composed myself, weeping my tears in vain.

之村雞已罷韻林杪流朝曦凝霜厚膚寸輒轉寒且飢
飢尙乏糠粃寒苦滅然其振衣恣所適偶入班姬祠配
享古烈婦異代同貞姿吞聲禱元琬 相委蛇老尼
推睽兆端貞諒所宜神明保終竟致志毋自衰出門顧
孤影棣棣何所訾寒波印宿眸獨步清淮涓偶逢驪山
姬左右兩相發長跽叩休咎爲我問靈著白茅藉沙上
展冊尋良規上卦乃山岳下卦乃澤陂義文命爲損剛
柔象爲時周孔祈神教示妾懲窒辭左贈雙瑤簪右贈
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宿脾稽首願爲徒冉冉不能追極目望空際俯首致遐
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浮覆載閒鬱鬱何能支慷慨復自寬靜一貴所持凌晨
拾杜若薄暮攀江蘿入溪攬薜芷陟山采辛夷滋菊以
充佩幽蘭以薦縞薰蕙紉高髻芳蓀結輕綦芙蓉製裳
裙周旋亦穢褻臨泉更洗心湛湛無塵私願登主君門
含血愬所懼鄰母憫我冤爲妾啼橫頤勸汝須重枉
自獲忸怩羣寵方治容寧堪衆嚙引領望危閣霄漢

²⁴ I take Patterned Magpies to be the name of a pair of towers of the palace.

If I could not even enter the walls of the palace,
How much less could I hope to offer up the grain?

If I could not even get to see his cap and gown,
How much less could I hope to hold the cups?
If I could not even hear the sound of his voice,
How much less could I hope to conceive a son?

I seemed to be wandering through open fields,
Where crested pheasants flew as cock and hen.

Crying for hunger—swarming crows and magpies,
Stampeding herds—the frantic roe and deer.
In the green mists the fireflies fled at night;
Now bright, then dark: so many ghosts and trolls!

My heart cannot be likened to a rock:
A rock may break, my heart cannot be split!
My heart cannot be likened to iron:
Iron corrodes, but my heart will not move.

My exhaled breath becomes a great rainbow,
The rainbow fades, but my heart is not cut.
My tears fall down and freeze as jasper blood,
When blood is gone, my heart is still the same.

My single heart is only one inch square, but
The universe provides its four dimensions.²⁵
Now suddenly the four dimensions stretched out,
As I, all alone, trod on dangerous ground.

All human beings share the same one hundred bones,
So why are suffering and happiness so diverse?
All other people full their gowns and skirts—
I hear the timely rules of scissors and of rulers.

All other people help in cooking meals—
As they clean the dishes, the golden spoons clatter.
All other people celebrate marriage festivities,
Teasing and joking, their joyful laughter resounds.

But I continuously embrace this deep sorrow,

²⁵ The 'four dimensions' may refer to the four virtues of ritual, righteousness, incorruptibility, and shame, or to the four intermediate directions.

My siblings are numerous but to no avail at all!
I deeply hid my palindrome-weaving skills,²⁶
To whom would I be able to voice my dire distress?

At midnight I sat up, and heaved a heavy sigh,
The cold dew drenched me through and through.
Loudly resounded the honking of a lonely goose,
In each and every note resenting its isolation.

As I listened it ripped apart my guts and innards,
Filled with vexation I became a true fool indeed—
To understand life, there're the wishes come true,
To understand decay, there's the green Idesia tree.²⁷

I knew the square, I did not know the round,
In vain this great clod accommodated me.
I hated myself, but did so to no profit at all,
I clawed my face—as if it were plowed by knives.

What was the use of this physical body?
I'd better discard it at some hidden crossway!
Clutching a stone I stood at the bank of an abyss,
But Pingyi pushed me back, filled with scorn!²⁸

I grasped a branch as I wanted to hang myself,
But the rope then broke, as if snapped by someone.
I grabbed a knife as I wished to cut my throat,
But the knife broke, so I again could only sigh.

Others seek to live but fail to succeed,
I sought to die but received no help!

Whoever called heaven and earth expansive?
They had no place to accommodate my body!
Whoever called the sun and moon so bright?
Coming and going they cannot illuminate deceit!

Not graced and enriched by His rain and dew—

²⁶ When Su Hui (fourth century) was rejected by her husband in favor of a concubine, she composed a palindrome expressing her abiding loyalty and wove it into a brocade. When her husband received this palindrome poem, he amended his ways. *The Red Brush*, 127–31.

²⁷ The Idesia Polycarpa is a deciduous tree; its yellow flowers open in early summer. The *Gaotang fu* 高唐賦 mentions 'paired Idesias'.

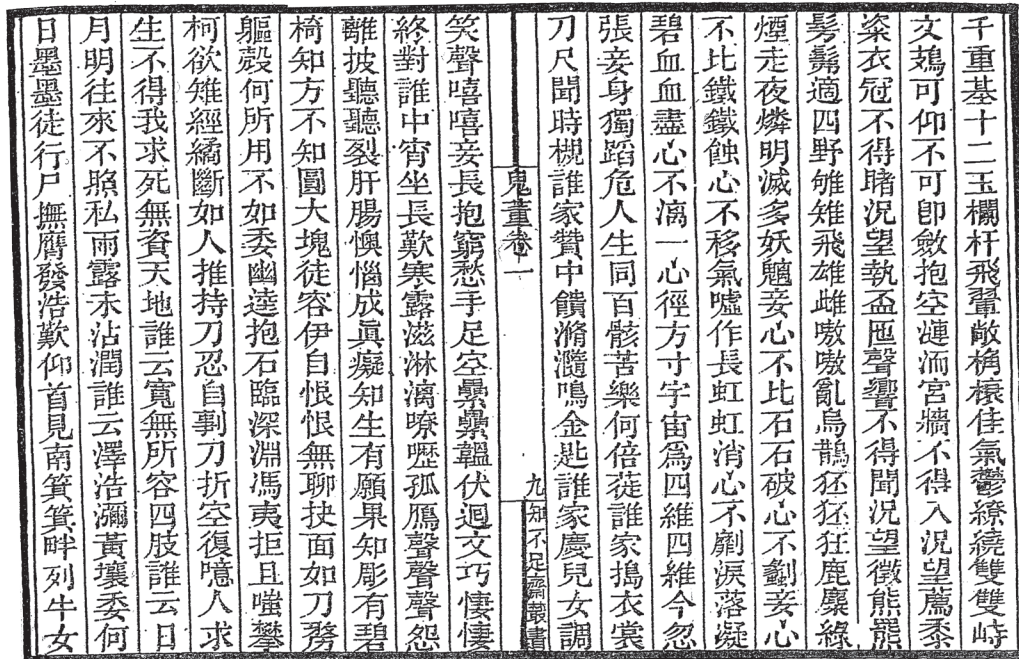
²⁸ Pingyi is the name of the god of the Yellow River.

Who calls their irrigation to be without limits?
To what sun is this yellow earth entrusted?
In ink-black darkness only walking corpses!

I beat my breast and heaved a heavy sigh,
When I looked up, I saw the Southern Sieve.
Next: Weaving Maiden and Buffalo Boy.²⁹

I gaze and gaze, but to what purpose?
Their silent grief is visible on high,
I here on earth was suffering in vain.
Bereft of sleep, watching the brilliant Toad,³⁰
I hummed and sang the song of my so sorry fate.

Each and every word spells self-incrimination,
Each and every line gives voice to self-abasement.
Each and every paragraph is tears of longing,



²⁹ Weaving Maiden 織女 and Buffalo Boy 牛郎 are the name of two stars, on opposite sides of the Silver River (the Milky Way). These two stars are husband and wife, but are only allowed to meet once a year.

³⁰ The moon is inhabited by a toad.

Honest and upright are my vows to the gods.

The conclusion clarifies my total dedication,
My model in life is the Chaste Maiden.³¹
Sitting straight up, I waited for the bright dawn
To spread white paper on the even steps.

I stretched my slender oh-so-slender arm,
And stabbed it for blood, suppressing any cry.
Holding my brush, I wrote the words in blood,
In style and manner imitating Concubine Fan:³²

The bond of marriage makes for norms and rules:
A state and dynasty depend on it for peace and order.
My letter cannot be compared to *Long Gate Rhapsody*—
That from first word to last was begging for intimacy.³³

Holding the poem, I knelt down and read it to Heaven,
And all the gods and ghosts were moved to sighs.
Once I had read it, I rolled it up into a scroll,
But to whom could I present my diligent devotion?

Facing upwards I ascended the peak of Mt. Heng,³⁴
Looking down, I stood on the bank of the Xiang.
But no carp arrived to take my letter, and
The migrating geese forsook me too.³⁵

Acting rashly, I now had no carrier—
But then I saw a pair of yellow orioles.
Singing their song they produced a fine sound,
But their short wings were of no avail.

³¹ The Chaste Maiden (*Chunü* 處女) most likely refers to ‘Chunü yin’ 處女吟 [The lament of the chaste maiden], which is included in *Yuefu shiji*. This zither song is said to have been composed by a chaste maiden from the state of Lu upon seeing a ‘chaste-maiden tree’. The songs gives expression to a determination to persists in loyalty, even unto death.

³² Concubine Fan 樊姬 was a concubine of King Zhuang of Chu 楚莊王 (r. 613–591 BCE). Her loyal advice, substantiated by her lack of jealousy, steered the king away from selfish courtiers. *The Red Brush*, 58–59.

³³ When Empress Chen (Ajiao 陳阿嬌), the childhood sweetheart of Emperor Wu (r. 140–87 BCE), had lost his favour and had been moved to Long Gate Palace, she paid the poet Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 to write ‘Changmen fu’ 長門賦 [Rhapsody of Long Gate Palace] in order to regain the emperor’s love by a detailed description of her constant fidelity. *The Red Brush*, 76.

³⁴ Mt. Heng, located in Hunan province, is the holy mountain of the south.

³⁵ Various ancient stories tell of letters that reach their destination in the stomachs of carps or tied to the legs of migrating geese.

Straightening my lapels, I chanted and hummed again,
And allowed heaven's wind to blow my words about.
Then the hundred critters all fled because of me,
And the many flowers all wilted on my account.

Flowers that fall may bloom again in spring,
But humans, once old, will not flower again.
Clutching my knees I finally dozed off, and
In my dream entered into my lord and master's curtains.

His features were still the same as before,
He slowly played his fingers through his beard.
I knelt and rose and told my story, all tears;
Through his questions he showed his concern.

My lord and master suddenly saw the light,
Taking me by the hand he insisted on my company.
As I modestly turned aside, I suddenly woke up,
And as before found myself in this spot.

My form and shadow bemoaned each other,
Bewildered and muddled like a crouching owl.
My souls and spirits were hollowed out,
My bones stood out as if I were a withered tree.

Turning in circles I practiced my old moves,
But my calves felt as thin as a daddy-long-legs.
So I went back and laid myself down to rest—
My ravaged body felt like a bag of bones.

And silently I suddenly came to the realization:
None in this world reach the age of a hundred,
Our five organs abhor the hundred afflictions,
And a wounded heart cannot be cured.

Combing and bathing, I made myself presentable,
And in every season I whetted myself.

In spring I wore forget-your-worries in my lapels
And I carried the most lushly growing herbs.
Mixing the dripping dew with potent yeast
I brewed in that way a quite special ale.

Mixing it with the water of the River Love,
Dripping it through a tender-bamboo sieve
I stored it in a chalice of a shared old age,

Green ants were floating on the surface.³⁶

I sent it with a message to my master
But he dismissed it as a village brew.

Throughout the night I took a major risk
And gathered rushes from the rippling streams.
I made of them a fan of doubled pleasure,³⁷
So excellent its price could not be valued.

I sent it with a message to my master
But he discarded it—'twas used to fan the stove.

In early fall I walked on steepest rocks;
One of those rocks contained a lucky jade.
I had it ground into two interlocking rings,
Their brilliant glow put glass and glaze to shame.

I sent it with this message to my master:
'This hinders tarrying on foreign travels.'

On winter days I warped the 'never-breaking' yarn

望望亦何其天上懸幽恨人閒徒自癡不寐對明蟾吟
噉薄命詩字字皆自咎句句皆自卑篇篇相思淚耿耿
矢神祇結束明依歸處女乃吾師危坐候大昕素楮鋪
平塹織織出玉臂刺血忍號謫擗管書血字體勢追樊
姬大義關綱常國家根平治不比長門賦首尾所歡怡
持展跪天讀神鬼皆於戲讀罷卷作封殷勤孰為貽仰
登衡岳峯俯臨湘水涯尺鯉竟不至賓鴻亦我詒買買
無所託願見雙黃鵬嚶嚶留好音翼短無所裨斂衽復
吟哦天風為我吹百蟲為我奔羣芳為我萎花落春復
華老無回腕抱膝一假寐夢入主君帷宛爾素昔容
申申弄長髯拜起泣且訴問對良孜孜主君頓然悟引
手強攜提遜避忽振覺依然身在茲形影自相弔情慳
如蹲鴟枵然魄與魂骨立如枯榴盤盤習故武兩腓如
柔綺施歸復偃臥殘骸如囊皮默默忽回想人壽無百
暮五內忌百感傷衷不可醫梳洗整容態亦自時礪砥
春頰忘憂花百草時歲蕤滴露揉麴醞釀成珍醃和
以愛河水漉以慈竹簾貯以借老航泛泛浮綠蟻奇言
獻主君斥之為村醜長夜不自愛摘蒲出瀾漪結為合

³⁶ 'Green ants' refers to the foam on Chinese rice wine (which is actually not a wine but a kind of beer).

³⁷ See note 16 above.

And set to work on coloured ...³⁸

I seamed it with 'in coldest winter' thread³⁹

And fashioned so a sash of 'hearts united'.

I sent it with this message to my master:
'Maybe you'll use it as a chin-strap or a hatband.'

Without a look my gifts were all discarded,
So even less the hope that he might take me back!
I had no means at all to penetrate his heart,
Whatever I might do spelled only danger.

How could I sit and wait to be dispatched?

So let me wildly ramble through the cosmos!

The Younger Maiden made a dashing driver,⁴⁰

The Mystic Maiden raised the triple banner;⁴¹

The ... Maiden grasped the cloud-parasol,⁴²
The Flowery Maiden held the flag of rosy dawn.

Jade-Player handled the long whip,⁴³ and

Blue Maiden gracefully held the pennants.⁴⁴

The White Tiger served as horse on the right,

The Dark Dragon served as horse on the left.⁴⁵

Racing in front, the Vermillion Bird soared,

In behind we were followed by Snake-and-Turtle.⁴⁶

³⁸ The last two characters of this line are missing in the original Chinese text. A later hand has written in the two characters *yingwei* 纓綉, but this is an obvious mistake as these two characters are used a few lines down as the final characters. The *Shuoku* edition of *Historian of Ghosts* follows the third character *hua* 華 by the two characters *shan ji* 山畿, but the resulting line doesn't make sense to me.

³⁹ 'In coldest winter' refers to the bamboo and the pine tree, which remain green even in the coldest month of winter, and serve as a symbol of loyalty in adversity.

⁴⁰ The Younger Maiden is the name of a Chinese asterism, and thus of an astral deity.

⁴¹ The Mystic Maiden is a goddess who is known as a teacher of both the martial and the sexual arts.

⁴² One character is missing from this line. The *Shuoku* edition inserts *yu* 玉 (jade). Jade Maiden is a common reference to an immortal maiden. One could object to this emendation in that later in the text 'Jade Maiden' is used to refer to the Weaving Maiden.

⁴³ Jade-Player was the daughter of an ancient duke of Qin, who eventually became an immortal.

⁴⁴ The Blue Maiden is the goddess of snow and frost.

⁴⁵ The White Tiger is the animal of the West, the Dark (or Green) Dragon is the animal of the East.

⁴⁶ The Vermillion Bird is a symbol of the South, while the intertwined snake and tortoise symbolize the North.

Divine banners were waved on both sides,
And how we rushed forward once we set off!
Driving eastward, we arrived in Yingzhou,⁴⁷
Where immortal beauties were playing Go.

Among them was Hemp Lady of ancient times,⁴⁸
Who asked me to take a seat next to her, but
Before even a single game of Go was finished,
The handle of the woodcutter's axe had rotted away.⁴⁹

We turned from there and raced towards the west:
I halted my carriage on the crags of Mt. Kunlun.⁵⁰
I thereupon ascended the Langfeng Garden, and
On Jasper Terrace met with a crowd of Greybeards.⁵¹

The Queen-Mother of the West headed the feast,
She welcomed me warmly and comforted me.
Following that, she called for Dong Shuangcheng⁵²
And told her to bring her favourite instrument.

Opposite her, I played the seven-stringed zither,
And its plaintive notes stirred up cold winds.
The Queen-Mother could not bear to listen,
And, awash in tears, gave me a couple of pears.⁵³

I thanked her and turned my carriage around,
Towards the Vermillion Hill, so far and high!⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Yingzhou is the name of one of the three floating islands in the Eastern Ocean. Each of these floating islands is a land of delight, inhabited by immortals.

⁴⁸ The Hemp Lady is a goddess with the appearance of a beautiful girl of about eighteen years, with exceptionally long nails.

⁴⁹ A well-known legend recounts the adventure of a woodcutter: in the course of his work in the mountains he comes across a group of immortals who are playing a game of go. He watches them and is caught up in the game, but when he looks back at his axe after a moment, the handle has rotted away and centuries have passed.

⁵⁰ Mt. Kunlun at the western margin of the world is the domicile of the Queen-Mother of the West, who rules all female immortals.

⁵¹ The Greybeards here would seem to refer to the assorted immortals feasting at the court of the Queen-Mother of the West.

⁵² Dong Shuangcheng is one of the attendants of the Queen-Mother of the West.

⁵³ The pears are 'mixed pears' (*jiaoli* 交梨) which symbolize the union of yin and yang. But as the word pear has the same pronunciation as the word for separation (*li* 離) the gift may also symbolize the end of a relationship.

⁵⁴ The Vermillion Hill is located in the extreme South.

The Divine Consorts reside in its southern house,⁵⁵
Surprised, they asked me why it took me so long.

From their sleeves they produced an ancient book,
They told me it was the *Inscription for Cao E*.⁵⁶
It started by praising her unswerving virtue,
And ended by praising her impeccable life.

I consulted the text and replied to their advice,
Then flew in my carriage to the Mystic Pond.⁵⁷
In this northern corner the weather is severe,
So Guye's skin felt just like frozen lard.⁵⁸

She was so kind to show me some paintings:
Exactly like the peaks of the Qin mountains!
But on the northern slopes, I recalled, of Mt. Qin,
A couple of cranes had built their nest in vain.

I wiped away my tears—where now to go?
I straightway arrived at the Silver River's bank.⁵⁹
The Jade Maiden was busy throwing her shuttle,⁶⁰
Moving her arms regularly, she never grew tired.

She did not speak of her grief over the separation,
But last night's tears were still frozen on her cheeks.
She looked at me and stopped throwing the shuttle,
Pointing at her heart, she vowed an unwavering love.

Bowing twice, I received her carnelian flowers,
And crossed once more the white Silver's ripples.
The plaque read: Metropolis of Spreading Cold,⁶¹
Palace buildings stretched out one after another.

Jian'a stepped to the beat of iron clappers,

⁵⁵ The Divine Consorts are the goddesses of the Xiang. They had been the wives of the mythic emperor Shun 舜. Following his death, they had drowned themselves in the river.

⁵⁶ The filial maiden Cao E is said to have lived during the Eastern Han. She committed suicide by jumping into the river in which her father had drowned.

⁵⁷ The Mystic Pond refers to the extreme North.

⁵⁸ The immortal Guye is mentioned in the *Zhuangzi* 庄子. There her/his skin is said to be like snow or frost.

⁵⁹ Silver River is one of the many names of the River of Heaven (the Milky Way).

⁶⁰ Jade Maiden here refers to the Weaving Maiden.

⁶¹ The realm of Spreading Cold refers to the moon.

And Wangshu smiled a most winning smile.⁶²
The tune of *Feather Gown and Rainbow Skirt*
Was once again danced in drunken abandon.⁶³

Heng'e pitied me because of my sincerity⁶⁴
And gave me the medicine of immortality.
Oh fragrant so fragrant—just one little tid-bit,
When I tasted it once, it was sweet as syrup.

But how could I dare ask for such a long life
With no means of offering it to my lord and master?
At the height of joy I discarded sight and smell,
As I remembered our harmony as ocarina and flute.

歡扇奇奇價不賞寄言獻主君拋擲供晨炊初秋履峻
石石中含瑞琦藝成雙連環光爛羞琉璃寄言獻主君
遙途阻逶迤冬經不斷縷端緒華 緯以歲寒線製
成同心襦寄言獻主君願言充纓綬棄棄不復視況望
收窮羸達心竟無由進退惟險陔安能坐待斃四海聊
猶夷須女整麗馭元女揚參旗 女擎雲蓋華女執霞
麾弄玉秉長策青女妙執綬白虎服右驂左驂乃蒼螭
前驅奮丹鳥後擁蛇與龜靈幡雙招搖發軔何躑躅駕
言適東瀛仙姝對奕碁中有古麻姑挾我坐以嬉一枰
鬼畫卷上
未勝負已爛樵斧柯迴輪急西向息駕崑崙嶂 登闕
風苑瑤臺皓參差上坐西王母溫慰亦熙熙願呼董雙
成命取素所司七弦妾對拊哀音動寒颺王母不忍聽
泣餽雙交梨謝歸轉風駕丹上遐且巘靈妃署南宇驚
問來何遲衷出古書冊云是曹娥碑始稱節不變終稱
行無虧檢卷對清誨飛駕臨元池北隅苦風色姑射膚
凝脂攜我展畫翫宛似秦山崖卻憶秦山陰雙鶴虛茅
茨收淚何所往直到銀河坻玉女正擲梭鼓臂不知疲
離恨雖不言宿淚雙凝頤願妾停機杼指心盟不移再

⁶² Jian'a and Wangshu are both mentioned as charioteers of the moon. Jian'a is said to be a beautiful woman.

⁶³ Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756) was said to have learned the tune of *Feather Gown and Rainbow Skirt* during a visit to the moon.

⁶⁴ Heng'e (Chang'e) is the goddess of the moon. When her husband Hou Yi 后羿 had received the medicine of immortality as a reward for shooting down nine of the ten suns that had appeared simultaneously in the sky, Heng'e drank all of it, and so now lives a life of eternal loneliness in her freezing moon palace.

Catching the wind, I quickly turned my carriage around,
And once again returned to my old village fences.
The neighbouring women all welcomed me back,
My wide travels truly had been a great blessing.

They admired my fine and beautiful appearance,
By divine wisdom I now lacked my earlier ugliness.
When I heard this I congratulated myself, and I
Straightened my gown to present what I received.

When I came to the gate, the gate was not opened,
They refused me entrance in an overbearing voice.
The dogs were barking at me in all ferocity,
From behind the gate, His favourites spied on me.

So frail and tender—the willow before the gate,
Oh green so green—the moss atop the wall.
Bending and waving—the bamboo by the road,
Oh bright, so bright—the mallow on the fence.

Brilliantly coloured—the couple of mandarin ducks
Had great fun in the deep rushes on the pond.
In couples together they were filled with love.
But there's no love for me, who shared your poverty.

Loudly I cried and I would like to leave for ever,
But in the end this love of mine kept me tied down.
The fickle dove occupies the sparrow's nest,
And flatfish dive under the water chestnuts.

When one rises, the other can only sink,
The way of the world is messed-up and mistaken.
Since ancient times wives have had a poor fate,
So how could I dare refuse this string of adversities?

My lord and master is enlightened and wise—
Distinguish between Sheng and Zi when scooping water.⁶⁵
The taste of your handmaid is out of the ordinary,
But my lord and master must inquire for himself!

May my lord and master's mind
Make minute distinctions in weighing the matter,
May my lord and master's body

⁶⁵ The Sheng and the Zi are rivers in Shandong province.

Be strong and at ease, and extend its blessings;
May my lord and master's family
Strengthen its moral bonds with all relatives.

If only my lord and master's clothes and quilt are warm,
I will be pleased despite the cold I suffer.
If only my lord and master is satiated and drunk,
My own hunger will taste like stewed beef.

I swear to divine Heaven that this is my heart—
Its awe-inspiring light displays its great power.

The Thunder watches over those loyal and filial,⁶⁶
Those who are good eventually will be protected.
If I have ever swerved from loyalty and filial piety,
May dragons torch what remains of my corpse!

My feelings always have been clearly discriminating,
And through wondrous use I have achieved harmony.
The one thing I have always been ashamed of
Is to be cunning and conniving like vixen and coyotes.

To be long-tongued, like the crafty cuckoo,
And to beg for one's food, like the cormorant—
Who could have known that today's people
Like such behaviour as much as swallows?

Those who beg and smile are considered virtuous,
But a Lady Yu is chased and whipped and beaten!⁶⁷
When a Xi Shi serves one on cushion and mat,⁶⁸
A Gong Jiang will be banished to the Three Steeps.⁶⁹

In the world of men this is the normal situation,
Steadfast chastity will only bring you blame.
But the divine gods hover three feet above us, and
As they will hear this complaint, I feel at ease.

⁶⁶ The Thunder is believed to kill those who are disloyal and unfilial.

⁶⁷ Lady Yu was the consort of Xiang Yu 項羽. When the latter realized he was beaten by the troops of Liu Bang, he said farewell to his horse and Lady Yu, who thereupon, according at least to the later tradition in fiction and drama, committed suicide out of loyalty.

⁶⁸ Xi Shi was a beautiful girl who was trained in all the arts of seduction at the court of king Goujian 勾踐 of Yue, who thereupon presented her to the king of Wu 吳王. The king of Wu fell in love with her and neglected his duties, and so allowed Yue to attack and destroy his country.

⁶⁹ Gong Jiang was the wife of the crown prince Gong Bo 共伯 of the ancient state of Wei. When her husband died at an early age, she steadfastly refused to remarry. The Three Steeps are mythic mountains at the western margin of the world.

I have learned that Yin Jifu, that noble general,
 Suspicious because of bees, killed his own son.⁷⁰
 Throwing down her shuttle, fleeing across a wall—
 Of course Zeng's mother deeply loved her son!⁷¹

Ping of Chu was banished to the margin of marshes,⁷²
 And his appearance became then as black as ink,

拜領瓊華復度白銀漪題曰廣寒都宮殿相連潋纖阿
 步鐵板望舒笑喔咻羽衣霓裳曲再奏舞傲娥憐
 妾誠賜我不死劑苾苾一刀圭試嘗甘如飴無路獻主
 君長生敢自斲樂極罷觀聽憶我填與篋乘風忽返蕩
 復履舊園籬鄰母共相勞周游諒多禧顏色羨美好靈
 慧失前崑間之頗自慶整衣獻所齋到門門不開拒我
 聲訑訑衆犬吠狷狷羣寵隔門闕依依門外柳青青牆
 上苔搖搖路傍竹灼灼籬邊葵采采雙鴛鴦池塘戲深
 蕨相對皆有情無情獨屢屢長號欲奮去此情終繫縻
 鬼畫卷一
 士知不足齋藏書
 薄鳩安鵲巢雁魚潛鳧茈彼升此顧沈物理亦繆紕古
 來妾薄命顛連妾敢辭主君明且哲酌水分滙溜妾味
 誠不凡主君當自諗但願主君心權衡析毫釐但願主
 君身康寧延福禔但願主君家內外敦倫彝主君衣衾
 溫妾寒亦自懷主君常醉飽妾餒如噬臍此心質神天
 威光赫赫祁雷霆司忠孝善人終見毗忠孝妾有違龍
 火尸壇遺妾情早鑿亮妙運成和比唯妾素所恥巧媚
 如狐狸長舌如鸚鵡哺啜如鷓鴣不意今之人愛此如
 鷓鴣徵舒以為賢虞姬逐鞭笞西施侍枕席共妾流三

⁷⁰ Yin Jifu is best known as the leading general at the court of King Xuan 宣王 of the Zhou dynasty. At the instigation of his second wife, according to legend, he wrongfully killed his own son Boqi 伯奇 (whereupon the soul of Boqi turned into the shrike). The bees, however, derive from another legend of an unjustly murdered son. A young concubine of the elderly Duke Xian 獻公 of the ancient state of Jin, who wanted to see her own son appointed as crown prince, accused the crown prince Shensheng 申生 of attempted rape to the duke. When the duke refused to believe her accusation, she told him to secretly observe Shensheng's behaviour. The next morning she went into a garden with honey in her hair, and when this attracted butterflies and bees, she asked Shensheng to chase the bees away. When Shensheng obeyed her command, the duke, who observed him from a distance, interpreted his behaviour as inappropriate and had him killed.

⁷¹ Zeng's mother is the mother of Zeng Shen 曾參, a disciple of Confucius who was renowned for his filial piety. When Zeng Shen was living in Fei with his mother, a man with the same name had committed a murder. When Zeng Shen's mother was told her son had committed a murder, she did not believe the rumour, and continued weaving as before. But when she heard the same story a third time, she started to give the rumour credence, and fled, afraid she might be implicated in the court case.

⁷² Ping of Chu is one of the many names of Qu Yuan.

But when finally he drowned himself in the Miluo,
His white purity was carried off by the current.

And in more recent times Yue Fei and his family
Were killed to a man by the executioner's axe.⁷³

If this even happens in the case of father and son and lord and vassal,
Of course the life of a lowly handmaid like me weighs less than a grain!

I've also learned that when the two younger brothers fanned rumours,
The Duke of Zhou had to flee to the eastern borders.⁷⁴

When the three Tian brothers suffered an internal rift,
The numinous thorn bush suddenly started to wither.⁷⁵

Zhang and Chen swore to be friends until death,
But one day the one destroyed the other by the Zhi.⁷⁶

Wang Dao was deeply attached to Zhou Yi, and
Having betrayed him he caressed his bloody bones.⁷⁷

If such things often happen between brothers and between friends,
Of course the body of this lowly handmaid is less than a fly or an ant.
Since ancient times the five norms do not protect one against slander,
But all this heart can do is stick strictly to fairness and impartiality.

I have also heard that even a pattern of brocade
Will attract the fierce evil of vicious slander, and
So Zhuang Jiang, without caring about herself,
Sent Dai Gui off with a sad and plaintive song.⁷⁸

⁷³ General Yue Fei (1103–1141) was recalled to court when he was about to reconquer Northern China and free the captive emperors Huizong and Qinzong. Once he had arrived in the capital he was murdered because of false accusations.

⁷⁴ The Duke of Zhou 周公 served as regent during the minority of King Cheng 成王, but at one stage he was accused of having designs on the throne for himself.

⁷⁵ When the brothers once again made common cause, the thorn bush miraculously revived.

⁷⁶ Zhang Er 張耳 (?–202 BC) and Chen Yu 陳余 (?–204 BC) lived in the final decades of the third century BCE. They had sworn friendship in their youth, but ended up on different sides in the wars following the collapse of the Qin dynasty.

⁷⁷ Wang Dao 王導 (276–339) served the Eastern Jin in various high court functions. He held a very high opinion of Zhou Yi 周顛 (269–322), but failed to intervene to save his life during the rebellion of Wang Dun in 322, and Wang was overcome by grief when he later learned that Zhou Yi had intervened to save his own life.

⁷⁸ Zhuang Jiang was the wife of duke Zhuang 莊 of Wei. She was childless herself, but raised the duke's son by his concubine Dai Gui as her own. This boy was established as crown prince, and succeeded his father as Duke Huan, but was killed by another of the duke's sons by yet another concubine. Dai Gui then had to leave the court and returned to her native country, and Zhuang Jiang sent her off with a poem, which is included in the *Shijing*—a number of poems in the *Shijing* are traditionally related to this series of events.

I do not dare expound all the feelings I cherish,
May you, my lord and master, make a full inquiry!
And if one day you will understand my heart, I will
Twine myself around you like a vine, even in death.

The Great Ultimate symbolizes the Mystic Furnace,
And yin and yang work their numinous hammers.
Silently they forge both human beings and animals,
Who each, in great profusion, finds its partner.

As our initial endowment is rich in good and bad,
Those who love slander must indeed be very pleased.
Suddenly I remembered the Zhongnan Mountains,
Its peaks rise high, devoid of the Nine Doubts.⁷⁹

On its tops grow many strange divine herbs,
The Feathered Maidens frolic there in groups.⁸⁰
They fled from the world three thousand years ago,
So now their long locks float on the wind.

I would like to follow them and join their roaming,
But my insignificant feelings still tie me down.
Yet two magpies suddenly flew around me and cried,
And a lucky spider hung down from my sleeve.

My right ear heard a heavenly bell, and a
Harmonious fragrance caressed my cheeks.
When stirring the fire, the fire laughed often,
Tortoise and dreams all spelled lasting luck.⁸¹

I hope you will have understood my feelings,
I do not stand tiptoe waiting for doting love.
Facing the gate, awash in tears, I wish to thank my lord and master,
The single scroll of the *Yellow Courtyard* will be my hoe and spade.⁸²

⁷⁹ The Nine Doubts are mountains in southernmost Hunan, where the mythic emperor Shun was buried.

⁸⁰ The Feathered Maidens were court ladies during the reign of the First Emperor. When the Qin dynasty collapsed, they fled to Mt. Hua, where they later became immortals. The earliest sources only mention a single *maonü* 毛女 and state that at the age of 170 years her body was fully covered in hair, but the later tradition made the *maonü* plural and estheticized their appearance.

⁸¹ Ancient Chinese predicted the future by reading the cracks in carapaces of turtles caused by heating pre-bored holes.

⁸² The *Book of the Yellow Courtyard* 黃庭經 is one of the earliest texts on Daoist mediation techniques associated with internal alchemy.

Eating flowers and wearing leaves I'll join the Feathered Maidens,
And the numinous draught will never be exhausted in glazed cups.
Riding the winds I'll follow my companions in their free wandering,
To Mt. Luofu, to Mt. Kuanglu, and from there back to Mt. Emei!

When a human being meets with misfortune, she should be content—
Who has ever been able to damage in the slightest strong purity?
Freely floating and whistling long, I move on and then on and on,
Pure springs and white pebbles will house me, of that I'm sure!

嵬世路此常態端貞宜取疵神明三尺臨聽懇應詭
會問尹吉甫疑蜂殺其兒投杼踰危牆曾母豈不慈
楚平放澤畔容色成黑黧汨羅終自沈潔白隨流漸近世
岳將軍一家遭斧鉞父子君臣尙如此賤妾之命如銖
錙又聞二叔煽流言周公避東陸三田生內睽靈荆且
自移張陳列頸交一旦身摧泚王導痛伯仁負之撫骸
骹兄弟朋友多若是賤妾之軀如蟬蛻五倫自古不除
讒此心但保無傾欹再聞貝錦章嫉讒投豺狗莊姜不
自惜悲歌送戴嬀有懷不敢盡主君須細窺一朝明妾
心萬死纏葛纆太極象元爐陰陽運神鍾默鍛人與物
雜然各相麗初稟足脩短讒人當自忤怙憶終南山秀
拔無九疑上多靈異草毛女羣相僖辟世三千年長髮
飄鬢鬢願追與之遊微情尙羈羈雙鵲忽遠鳴願袂垂
蟾蜍右耳聞天鐘和薰囑兩煩撥火火屢笑龜夢協休
禱情曲幸剖白寵愛非所歧望門泣謝主君義黃庭一
卷爲鑑鑑茹英披葉伴毛女靈漿不竭玻瓈紙馭風逐
侶恣遊遊羅浮匡廬返峨嵋人遭逆境須自得豎白從
來誰磷緇飄然長嘯去復去清泉白石容乎而

鬼董卷一

自知不足齋微書