

李漁：詩選

Selected Poems

By Li Yu

Translated by Barbara Jiawei Li and Jiang Wei

Translators' Introduction

Li Yu (1611–1680), courtesy name Liweng 笠翁, enjoyed a literary reputation as a dramatist and a novelist in the late Ming and the early Qing periods. On top of that, he was also a prolific poet: based on contemporary statistics, one can access at least 1,300 poems of Li Yu, those in his dramas and novels excluded.¹ Compared to his other works, Li Yu's poems have been less noticed and translated into English, although they are crucial to understanding his idiosyncratic contributions to Chinese literature.

We have selected eight poems which we believe articulate Li Yu's literary aesthetics. In terms of textual features, Li Yu seldom revealed the voices present in the poems, a literary device that greatly diverges from most of his contemporaries, thereby marking his uniqueness. His writing style might be explained by his own words, 'Since people's hearts are as varied as their faces, why in writing must we all be the same?'² We hereby introduce Li Yu's poems to the reader in the hope that the poet's work will gain more exposure in the English-speaking world.³

* * *

¹ For Li Yu's view of poetry-writing, see Wei Chenlin 魏琛琳, "Yang gaoshan, fu liushui": Lun Li Yu shici zhong de shitu zhengzhi maodun guan' "仰高山, 俯流水"——論李漁詩詞中的仕途政治矛盾觀 [Li Yu's Poetry and His Paradoxical View on Officialdom], *Wenxue lunheng* 文學論衡 [Journal of Chinese Literary Studies], no. 35 (December 2019), pp. 53–65. The translators would like to express their sincere gratitude to Prof. Wei, who specializes in Ming and Qing literature, for explicating some of Li Yu's wordings and providing relevant reference materials.

² The Chinese original of this sentence runs 人心不同有如貌, 何必為文定求肖, from his poem 'Yiren zhiji xing zeng Tong Bimei shijun' 一人知己行贈佟碧枚使君 [My confidant, presented to Mr Tong Bimei].

³ The eight poems are selected from Li Yu, *Liweng Yijiayan* 笠翁一家言 [Liweng's own words], in *Liyu quanji* 李漁全集 [The complete works of Li Yu] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji, 1991), vol. 2.

Mooring at Caidian, Encountering a Sudden Rain at Night

A sudden rain came up at midnight,
Startling me awake—is the boat capsized?
I woke up, the bedding drenched,
As if great waves had washed by.
The lone boat, ragged and light,
As small as a raindrop bubble.
Seeking shelter yet finding none,
I crouched like a macaque.
I blamed myself again and again,
For my muddleheaded lack of foresight.
Misled by the sunny skies,
I hadn't worried about the gloomy rain.
How could I have known that when things have been settled for one,
Heaven would most certainly go against his mind?
I should have planned early for the unexpected;
How hard could it have been to mend a crack?
Even if a sable coat was used to cover it,
It would have been the sole thing that got wet.
It wouldn't have come to this, where water drenched everything
And even I lost my shelter.
Hence goes the *Book of Odes*,
Thatch the roof before the rain
And peel the bark from mulberry trees properly—
It brings benefits as do merits.
So admirable are the fishermen—
Never do they put away the raincoat on clear days.

泊蔡店夜逢驟雨

夜半逢驟雨 夢驚疑覆舟
醒來牀薦濕 無異波濤流
孤篷碎且薄 船小若點漚
欲避無可避 蹲伏如獼猴
自怨復自艾 昏愚乏先籌
祇以晴光誤 不為陰雨憂
詎知人事穩 天必左其謀
早為不然計 一隙何難修
縱以貂裘蔽 所濕惟貂裘
豈至盈艙物 連人喪其麻
所以風人詩 未雨先綢繆
桑土徹之當 其利同勳猷
服殺捕魚人 煙蓑晴不收



Impeded by the Wind When Travelling on the River

The wind often comes south-east in summer,
And always north-west in winter.
Feilian, the God of Wind, appointed by Heaven,
Divided time into different seasons.
Normalcy had now been abruptly disturbed,
As an easterly wind rose in winter.
Torturing the passers-by as before,
The heartless, fierce wind.
I drove my boat against tide and gust,
Beaten back like an egret that never flies against the wind.
From the south came I,
When summer began as spring faded away.
God of Wind, you disobey the rule of season,
Leaving me packed on the busy waters.
Unable to fathom the change of climate,
I took it as an act of kindness:
I came here for sightseeing,
But Heaven urged me to take a rest.
Over sixty years of age,
I resemble the sun already sinking toward the west.
Still, the setting sun knows to hide;
The elderly me, however, seeks not obscurity.
Along with the threat of lurking outlaws,
One's luck is quite difficult to tell.
If aided with the wind by Heaven,
They would be like resting tigers that have now grown wings.
Hence Heaven acted against my will—
I expected a smooth journey but met otherwise.
If only I could become a homing wild goose,
Free from the brigand's shot!

江行阻風

夏風多東南冬風每西北
上帝役飛簾以時分畛域
茲忽反其常東風起冬日
如故厄行人無情而有力
至使逆行舟退飛如六鷁
我昔自南來春徂夏始立
風伯亦違時故與來船密
此理殊不解解之以仁術
我意在遊覽天心勸休息
人年六十餘如日已西昃
日昃尚思藏人老不求匿
況多萑苻擾吉凶頗難測
天若助以風是生癡虎翼
所以違其心求通偏與塞
庶幾作歸鴻不為盜者弋

Ode to Moon-Viewing on Mid-Autumn

The Mid-Autumn moonlight unevenly spreads,
On the neighbouring house but not on mine.
With wine I go to my neighbour's to see the moon,
Only to find the moonlight shining upon my yard instead.
The moon comes and goes not to act aloof,
Simply because of the many clouds floating in the sky.
Few nights a year are like this one;
Why are they busy hiding the moon now here then there?
Floating clouds appear not only in the sky,
As things often go against one's will.
It doesn't matter whose house the moon will drop by tomorrow night;
Get dead drunk and do not decline the wine tonight.

中秋看月歌
中秋月色不平鋪
鄰家有月儂家無
攜酒鄰家借月看
月光又照儂家院
月來月去非離羣
祇因天際多浮雲
一年能得幾今夕
東蒙西翳何紛紛
浮雲不獨天邊有
人事違心常八九
明宵明月照誰家
酩酊莫辭今夜酒



Fisherman Viewing the Moon 月下漁夫圖 by the Ming-dynasty painter Ye Guang 葉廣. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Ode to Watching the Snow on a Boat in Zhenjiang

In the heavy winds sweeping across the wild, the snow grew dense,
 The flakes fluttering onto the lonely boat,⁴ rustling.
 The sumptuous pleasure boat, now with a pair of white wings,
 Looked like a crane hovering in the sky.
 Seated, I gazed upon the mantle of snow growing inch by inch,
 Mountains from near and far all vying to be coated in white,⁵
 Setting apart only the cold river, a green realm.
 On the freezing water, the old fisherman in a jade-coloured hat
 Pointed his rod at me, urging for poems.

鎮江舟中看雪歌

野曠風高雪易密
 灑向孤蓬聲淅淅
 青雀舫生白羽翼
 儼若凌空鶴一隻
 坐看盈尺復盈尺
 千山萬山相競白
 唯界寒江青一脈
 寒江釣叟玉為筮
 一竿相向催詩急

⁴ The translation here follows an earlier version, which has *peng* 篷 (boat) instead of *peng* 蓬 (reeds). See *Pingzhu Li Liweng yijia yan* 評註李笠翁一家言 [Li Liweng's own words, with commentaries and annotations] (Shanghai: Puyi shuju, 1928), 5.14a.

⁵ From this line on, the poem is interpreted in a way different from what is suggested by the punctuation in the Zhejiang guji version (p. 42).

I wished to keep silent then, yet I couldn't;
Scratching my head, I sang with vehemence, intoxicated.
For a single character, I breathed on the brush several times, the vapour
almost condensing,
But the frozen writing brush still refused to become wet.
Let me write down some short lines, just not perfunctory;
The spirit was high, yet the writing tools meagre.
How I wish to seek the aid of Wang Mojie, the great poet-painter,
And have him write on a bolt of fine silk.
It requires not a single drop of painting ink
To elaborate the boundless grandeur of the Yangtze river.

此時欲默默不得
搔首狂歌憑酒力
一字數呵氣欲滴
偏是凍毫未肯濕
聊書短句非塞責
吟興頗豐吟具嗇
恨不一倩王摩詰
寫入鵝溪絹一匹
圖中不用半點墨
妝盡長江千里色



Detail of *Deep Snow in Mountain Passes* 關山積雪圖(局部) by Wen Zhengming 文徵明 dated 1532.
Collection of the National Palace Museum.

Night Rain Outside a Guest-Room Window

I just extinguished the candle at the first watch;
Why is the colour of the night so dark?
The rain sounds like the songs of Chu,
And the wind also makes the tunes of Wu.
Sorrowless as I am, I suddenly shed tears,
Like a sprout with thorns growing in my heart.
As a rule, sideburns turn grey early
Mostly because of distressful long rains.

Material not available due to
copyright restrictions.

客窗夜雨
纔滅初更燭
胡為夜色深
雨如聽楚曲
風亦作吳音
忽灑無愁淚
如萌有棘心
從來霜鬢早
多半起愁霖

Gale and Shower 烈風驟雨圖
by Wan Yipeng 萬一鵬 dated 1981.
Hong Kong Museum of Art collection.

阻風泊沙渚四顧無人
惟蘆蒿伴宿而已

為避風濤惡
空江泊一舟
宿蘆人是雁
占雨話同鳩
癡夢猶行樂
豪飲故遣愁
不知前路險
爭戰幾時休

**Impeded by the Wind, I Anchored My Boat near an Islet.
I Looked Around, There Being no Company for the Night
but Reeds.**

To avoid the howling wind and treacherous water,
My boat moored on the empty river.
I huddled up in the reeds like a wild goose;
After divining the rain, I spoke to the doves.
Having myself indulged in crazy fantasies,
I binged on liquor to alleviate sorrow.
Not knowing what dangers lay ahead,
I wondered when the war would end.



Away from Hometown, with the Moon

The moon, the loving luna,
Shows me affection whenever I'm away from home.
Speak not that there exists no confidant,
An old friend awaits over the horizon.

Stopped by the Rain at Tongguan

How is land travel different from being in a boat?
One has no control over when to go or stop, his plans also exhausted.
Do not appreciate the green mountains while blaming the water,
For wheels too will be hindered by the adverse gale.

異鄉對月
多情是明月
異地必相親
莫道無知己
天邊有故人

潼關阻雨
陸行何異在舟中
行止難憑計亦窮
莫德青山徒怨水
車輪也阻石尤風