

The Song of Enduring Woe

By Po Chü-i (772-846)

Translated by John Turner

漢皇重色思傾國，
御宇多年求不得。
楊家有女初長成，
養在深閨人未識。
天生麗質難自棄，
一朝選在君王側。
回眸一笑百媚生，
六宮粉黛無顏色。
春寒賜浴華清池，
溫泉水滑洗凝脂。
侍兒扶起嬌無力，
始是新承恩澤時。
雲鬢花顏金步搖，
芙蓉帳暖度春宵。
春宵苦短日高起，
從此君王不早朝。
承歡侍宴無閒暇，
春從春遊夜專夜。
後宮佳麗三千人，
三千寵愛在一身。

A PRINCE OF HAN who worshipped loveliness
Sought through his palaces long years in vain
For one whose beauty should lay kingdoms low.
A maiden of the house of Yang there was,
Fresh come to womanhood, and in the shade
Of virgin cloisters reared, unknown to men.
Too fairly formed for loneliness, one day
She stood selected for the monarch's side.
Glancing, one single smile she gave, which shed
Such radiance that through the palace halls
Each painted, pencill'd dame seemed pale and wan.

In the chill springtime she received command
To bathe in Hua-ch'ing Pool: and when the streams
Of the warm fountain laved her waxen limbs,
And softly by attendant hands upborne
She rose all faint and fair—then first it was
She gained the king's deep love and preference.

With hair like clouds she moved, and flower-like hues,
And golden plumes that nodded as she went.
Amid her curtains' roseate warmth was spent
That springtime night—the springtime night went by,
Too sadly swift; and the day mounted high.
Nor from that time was early audience held.
In feasts and merry-making day by day—
In the springtime no springtime holiday
She missed; and in the night the night was hers.
Three thousand loveliest women thronged those halls:
Three thousand loves were spared for her alone.

金屋妝成嬌侍夜，
 玉樓宴罷醉和春。
 姊妹弟兄皆列土，
 可憐光彩生門戶。
 遂令天下父母心，
 不重生男重生女。
 驪宮高處入青雲，
 仙樂風飄處處聞。
 緩歌慢舞凝絲竹，
 盡日君王看不足。
 漁陽鞞鼓動地來，
 驚破霓裳羽衣曲。
 九重城闕煙塵生，
 千乘萬騎西南行。
 翠華搖搖行復止，
 西出都門百餘里。
 六軍不發無奈何，
 宛轉蛾眉馬前死。
 花鈿委地無人收，
 翠翹金雀玉搔頭。

Golden inhabitant of Golden Bower,
 Each eve, resplendently bedecked, she waited—
 The banquet in Jewelled Hall being done—
 Drowsy with springtime yearning as with wine.

Her sisters and her brothers all were dowered
 With royal fiefs: tender benevolence
 Must dignify the roof from whence she sprung.
 And so a day came when, throughout the length
 And breadth of all the realm, no parents wished
 To bear men-children but fair daughters only.

The heights of the Li Palace soar
 Amid the azure skies;
 And fairy strains, wind-blown, on every side
 Are heard—soft singing and luxurious dance
 Chiming with throb of strings and wood.
 And all day long the Emperor
 Gazes unweariedly.
 —But hark, from Yu Yang thundering
 A noise of drums and cavalry
 That shakes the earth and jars the melody
 of “Rainbow Robes and Coat of Gossamer”!

Round the Imperial City gates
 Are rising clouds of flame and dust.
 Ten thousand charioteers, ten thousand knights,
 Race to the South-west Border; in their midst,
 Where emerald streamers flashing float,
 The Emperor's chariot rolls.
 Eleven miles¹ west of the Capital
 They halt—the armies will no longer march.
 There is no choice: but wistful-eyed,
 The dainty-browed beloved one
 Before the horsemen dies.
 Her blosmy² diadem and comb of jade
 And bird-wing'd golden bodkins strew the ground
 Unheeded, and her plumes of feathery pearl.

君王掩面救不得，
 回看血淚相和流。
 黃埃散漫風蕭索，
 雲棧縈紆登劍閣。
 峨嵋山下少人行，
 旌旗無光日色薄。
 蜀江水碧蜀山青，
 聖主朝朝暮暮情。
 行宮見月傷心色，
 夜雨聞鈴腸斷聲。
 天旋地轉迴龍馭，
 到此躊躇不能去。
 馬嵬坡下泥土中，
 不見玉顏空死處。
 君臣相顧盡霑衣，
 東望都門信馬歸。
 歸來池苑皆依舊，
 太液芙蓉未央柳。
 芙蓉如面柳如眉，
 對此如何不淚垂。

And now the Emperor, who had veiled his face—
 Powerless to gaze on her he could not save—
 Looks back, blood mingled with his falling tears.
 Where yellow sands are scattered far and wild winds
 whistling blow,
 By cloudy foot-rails sinuous they mount the Sword-
 Range rim
 And pass below Mount Omi where seldom travellers go:
 And daily as they journey on, their standards' glint
 grows dim.

Fair are the rivers of Szechwan and green the Szechwan
 hills.
 Morn after morn the Lord of All, eve after eve, repines.
 In exiled palace sojourning he views
 The mournful colours of the moon,
 And in the night rain hearkens to
 The agonizing sound of tinkling bells.

Heaven and the earth's upheaval being quelled,
 Again returning to his native throne
 The Emperor sets forth. But at one spot
 His pace grows laggard, and he may not move.
 There in the dust below Mount Ma-wei's slopes
 He sees no trace of the earth's loveliest one,
 Only the dismal scene of death. In tears
 Sovereign and ministers at each other gaze;
 Then dully turn their horses towards the town.
 At home the lawns and lakes are as of old:
 The rosy lilies yet in T'ai-yi Pool,
 The willows in the gardens of Wei-yang.
 Ah, but the water-lilies are her face,
 The willow leaves are like her brows—he sees;
 And seeing so, how can he choose but weep!

¹This phrase might more accurately be rendered "eleven leagues".

²A deliberately archaic use of "blossomy".

春風桃李花開日，
 秋雨梧桐葉落時。
 西宮南內多秋草，
 落葉滿階紅不掃。
 梨園弟子白髮新，
 椒房阿監青娥老。
 夕殿螢飛思悄然，
 孤燈挑盡未成眠。
 遲遲鐘鼓初長夜，
 耿耿星河欲曙天。
 鴛鴦瓦冷霜華重，
 翡翠衾寒誰與共。
 悠悠生死別經年，
 魂魄不曾來入夢。
 臨邛道士鴻都客，
 能以精誠致魂魄。
 爲感君王輾轉思，
 遂教方士殷勤覓。
 排雲馭氣奔如電，
 升天入地求之遍。

And thus, when with the winds of spring the pear
 And plum trees spread their blossoms; and thus too,
 When the tall forest trees³ were bare, he mourned:
 While far and wide autumnal weeds grew rank,
 And fallen leaves ruddied the palace steps
 Unswept. His Orchard Bands of Players now
 Were white-haired all, and in the Crimson Chamber
 The dark brows of the grooms were striped with age.
 Nightly the fire-flies brought sad memories.
 His lonely lamp he trimmed and trimmed again,
 Sleepless; and slowly, slowly heard the drums
 Of each long watch, until the Galaxy
 With glittering lights should usher in the dawn.

Gold were the tiles above his palace roofs
 (Tiles that depicted faithful matched birds)
 Mantled with heavy hoar-frost flowers; and cold
 Those gaudy silken coverlets unshared.
 In life of death-lorn gloom, year after year,
 Even her ghost came to him not in dreams.

In Linch'iung lived a Taoist,
 One of the Hung Tu school,
 Who by his special alchemy had power
 To summon ghosts to flock to him at will.
 This Archimage was warranted,
 Through pity of the fretful king,
 To make a fearful quest.
 Driving the clouds and mounted on the winds
 Like lightning flash he sped.

³The Wu-t'ung or Phoenix tree. This tree, which is a favourite of Chinese poets, is more beautiful than the plane-tree, with tall noble stem and great dark leaves glaucous underneath, and a profusion of flowers whiter than hawthorn in springtime.

上窮碧落下黃泉，
兩處茫茫皆不見。
忽聞海上有仙山，
山在虛無縹緲間。
樓閣玲瓏五雲起，
其中綽約多仙子。
中有一人字太真，
雪膚花貌參差是。
金闕西廂叩玉扃，
轉教小玉報雙成。
聞道漢家天子使，
九華帳裏夢魂驚。
攬衣推枕起徘徊，
珠箔銀屏迤邐開。
雲鬢半偏新睡覺，
花冠不整下堂來。
風吹仙袂飄飄舉，
猶似霓裳羽衣舞。
玉容寂寞淚闌干，
梨花一枝春帶雨。
含情凝睇謝君王，
一別音容兩渺茫。

Sky-scaling and earth-probing, wide he searched
The bright empyrean and the Yellow Springs
That flow beneath the world: yet not a glimpse
On either side through endless space was seen.
At last he heard that a lone fairy isle
Far in mid-ocean lay—a single peak
Sheer in the height of the dim blue-green void;
Where glimmering towers in iridescent mist
Rose, while about in gentle numbers moved
Young fairies—one among them named “All-true”,
Of damask cheeks and skin like whitest snow.
—Passing the massy gates of gold he smote
The jewelled door that barred the western hall,
And bade the attendant elf go usher him
Into the presence of the Fairy Queen.
Who from her orient curtains hearing word
That one was come from the Han Emperor,
Startled from out of dreams, arose straightway.

Snatching a gown, her pillow thrust aside,
In haste, pell-mell, through screens of mother-o'-pearl
And silvery veils that opened as she passed;
With billowy hair untrimmed, still fresh from sleep,
And feathered diadem askew, she came:
And stood, her elfin sleeves wind-fanned, indeed
Like “Rainbow Robes and Coat of Gossamer”,
Her woeful countenance all streaked with tears,
—A sprig of blossom drenched with springtime dew.

Then curbing her deep feeling, with fixed stare
She made obeisance to the Emperor,
And said how, since their parting, much she grieved,
His voice and shape being no longer near;

昭陽殿裏恩愛絕，
 蓬萊宮中日月長。
 回頭下望人寰處，
 不見長安見塵霧。
 惟將舊物表深情，
 鈿合金釵寄將去。
 釵留一股合一扇，
 釵擘黃金合分鈿。
 但教心似金鈿堅，
 天上人間會相見。
 臨別殷勤重寄詞，
 詞中有誓兩心知。
 七月七日長生殿，
 夜半無人私語時。
 在天願作比翼鳥，
 在地願爲連理枝。
 天長地久有時盡，
 此恨綿綿無絕期。

And how those days of gracious tenderness
 Were ended all to soon; and in the Halls
 Of Fairyland the days and months seemed long.
 Turning her head she gazed below—to see
 No Royal City, but a haze of dust:
 Then sadly gave into his hands, as token
 Of truest love, two keepsakes: a small casket,
 Gaily enamelled, and a clasp of gold.
 “One golden prong I keep,” she said, “One half
 Of the enamelled casket. Look, the pin
 Is broken gold, the broken casket bronze.

Bid him his mind like gold and bronze be firm,
 And know that we shall meet again some time,
 Whether in the sky or in the world of men.”
 Then parting, she enjoined him earnestly
 To bear her message—and her message told
 Of a deep oath that they two only knew.
 —The seventh moon, upon the seventh day,
 Alone at midnight in the Immortal Hall,
 When none was near, in private talk they swore
 In heaven as birds that yoked together fly
 To fly, or else on earth to grow as trees
 That twine their branches from a single stem.

“The heavens abide and earth endures,” she said,
 “Yet heaven and earth some time shall have an end.
 But this our woe shall evermore endure.”

白居易長恨歌



A PORTRAIT OF YANG KUEI-FEI, by Tang Ying, renowned painter of the Ming dynasty. Reproduced from frontispiece of *The Palace of Eternal Youth*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1955.