Ywǽn

Early
Late

Southern Sùng had its neighbor: since 1115 he north had been ruled by the Jīn or Tartar Dynasty (also called Jurchen, from the name of the ruling clan). Jīn lasted until 1234, when the Mongols conquered the north, and then, in 1279, the south as well. Their empire reached from Russia and Persia on the west to Korea on the east. Along the caravan routes of this unified Eurasia there flowed a trade in goods and ideas. Sojourners like Marco Polo were used by the Mongols as middle administrators. The new conquerors adopted the dynastic name Ywǽn.

Like the Jīn, the Ywǽn appreciated the value of the Chinese civil service, and approached many individuals with offers of high office. Out of principle, some refused. Others accepted, sometimes with a sense of inner shame. But in general, it is largely true that in Ywǽn times, the Chinese population were essentially aliens in their own culture; custodians of an increasingly obsolete imperial past.

Many found employment in the new world of the taverns, which quickly expanded their role to become theaters; opera was the great innovation of the time. The solo self-accompanied recitation form, which was native to all of Inner Asia, (the "Homer" texts, from Ionia, at the extreme west of Asia, are also examples), had already been adopted from the Tartars, and continued under Ywǽn (see the solo recitation of Jàu Lìng-jr̀, with its separate accompanist, p352). The next step, as with the Homeric parallel in its next, Aeschylean phase) was to stage the story, with only the main character being a singing role. This is the form of Ywǽn opera.

The language itself was changing. As already in Jyàng Kwéı (p340), open and closed versions of a syllable ("ma" versus "mak") counted as rhymes, reflecting sound changes which were transforming mediaeval Chinese into modern Chinese. We have followed this new procedure in rendering some poems in this chapter.

There is no sharp political division between Early and Late Ywǽn, as there is for Northern and Southern Sùng; there is rather a steady reversion to Chinese administrative forms, one landmark is the restoration of the exam system in 1325. As time passed, and Mongol control weakened, we see the poets increasingly acknowledging their own past, as something which might after all have a future.

Lǐ Tswèı-ngv́

The Plumtrees in the Courtyard
(1265)

Tswèı-ngv́ had had something of a classical education, and as a registered singing-girl still recited the Shr̄ and Shū, greatly resenting her at-disposal status. In 1265, after the Mongol conquest of the north (but just before that of the south), Lù Dzv́-jr̄ came as Governor-General to Yángjōu, and one day summoned her to entertain. She had no choice but to go. He bade her sing. She answered, "I did not study it when young." He was touched, and asked "What did you study?" She said "I read Shř Jì and Hàn Shū". He said "If you know how to read, you must be able to improvise a poem." He pointed to the plumtrees in the courtyard as her theme. Upon which Tswèı-ngv́ improvised this poem. Lù later released her from the official registry, and helped to set her up as a Dàuist nun.

Her poem describes, in the image of the plum, her preference for the snow, over the languorous and sensual warmth of later seasons.

Dazzling are the flowers of the plum,
Like one with skin of jade they overflow;
They willingly face up to icy cold –
To late-spring warmth they do not care to go

新刊関目張鼎智勘魔合羅

正末同旦上云

自家李得昌便是妻刘氏有个小孩兒嫡親三口兒在這河南府居住開着个絨線鋪有叔叔李伯英与叔伯弟兄李文鐸開着个生藥鋪對着門住如今我往南昌做買賣去渾家在意看家咱　旦云住　（賞花時）你叔嫂從来情性乖因此上將伊曾勸来休閑悩莫傷懷照管這家私里外好覷付小嬰孩（么）男子為人須掙揣如今向它鄉做買賣你則要淚盈腮多不到半載但得利便回来下

旦下　二外一折　末擔砌末上　云　從南昌兒賣回来這里姓家有十里田地早起天晴如今陟恁的好雨衣裳行里都濕了皿是死殺兩处（點絳唇）七月才初孟秋時序尤存暑着穿的這单布衣服怎遮懸麻兩（混江龍）連又不

表　二

Mv̀ng Hàn-chīng (c1300)

The Figurine

(c1310)

Even as they attempted to prosper, were encountering dangers of their own. This opera is about one such danger. It is a story of domestic intrigues: brother will poison brother; a heroic magistrate will assemble evidence to discover and punish the murderer. These courtroom-justice pieces had a great vogue under the Mongols. The magistrate in question, Jāng Dǐng, served in the Wǔ-chāng area in 1273. Wǔ-chāng was an operatic center; the audience could even buy little libretto books, with the sung parts (less easy to the common ear) printed in full, and the spoken dialogue, in easier colloquial, merely summarized. At left is the first page of that libretto. We will follow the story just that far.

The plot revolves around an image of the Indian mother-figure Muhurta, which plays a role in the Seventh Evening festival. It gives the opera its title.

And now we start reading our one page.

Prologue

(Enter male lead with female lead): I am Lǐ Dv́-chāng; this is my wife Miss Lyóu. We have a child, and we three live here in Hv́nán City, where we keep a thread shop. My uncle Lǐ Bwó-yīng and my cousin Lǐ Wv́n-dwó keep a drugstore across the street from us. Today I am going to Nán-chāng to trade. Wife, look well to our home.

(She speaks. Though the libretto does not specify, what she tells him is that his cousin has been paying improper attentions to her. He sings):

"While Enjoying Flowers"

753345

Yes,

The way your cousin feels toward you
has always been a thorn

And therefore,

Against that kind of thing I've had to warn
Don't give yourself to woe
Don't let your heart be torn

See that you

Keep the house and mind the store,

And

Try and take good care of our firstborn

"Reprise"

753345

Worldly struggle is the yoke
we men have always worn.

Today,

For far-off places I must leave my door.
Dry the stream of tears
That well from eyes forlorn

At the most,

It won't be half a year before.

Newly

Wealthy, I return one happy morn.

(He exits. Lady exits. Scene with two extras)

Scene 1

(Enter male lead, with a heavily loaded carrying pole over his shoulder. He speaks): I am coming back from trading in Nán-chāng, and am only ten leagues from home. It was fine weather when I got up this morning, but now it has turned dark and there is a heavy rain; my clothes are all soaked with walking through it, but there's no place I can stop and take shelter from it.

"Dotting Vermeil Lips"

44345

(The key of this piece immediately announces to latecomers that they are in the first act; The aria itself is the one which always begins the first act. Here is the protagonist making his stylized entrance. Our composer, the formally ingenious Mv̀ng Hàn-chīng, heightens the mood by having him, even in this preliminary section, already engaged with his enemy, the rain.

The seventh month, a pleasant day,
A bit of summer on the wane,
The autumn hours retain.

But dressed

As I am, in light array,
How shall I escape the pelting rain?

"Turbid River Dragon"

474455544

(And this is the traditional second entrance-aria, continuing the mood established in the first aria. Unfortunately, our one page of libretto ends here, and we will have to imagine the rest of the story).

Hwáng Gv̄ng (c1300)

River Village

Hwáng Gv̄ng was from Tyēn-táı, and lived for an extended period in that lower Yángdž region. He became prominent among the local poetry societies which, with the high culture in Mongol hands, functioned as a substitute for the capital literary scene of other times. His style is said to derive from late Táng, and we can see in this quatrain some of the listless astringency which links that period and his own. It uses the "half and half" line, its bleakness varying the wistfulness of Ywǽn Jv̌n's prototype (p240).

This is essentially a landscape poem: a visually expansive landscape in which the element of human presence is absent, and nature is seen only by nature.

As far away as eye can reach
  the river vista leads,
Chilly mists are spread abroad,
  the evening sun recedes;
Autumn colors at their height,
  but no one there to see –
Half belongs to flowering rushes,
  half to flowering reeds.

Dzv̄ng Rwèı (c1295)

"Glad That Spring Has Come"

$^{1}33^{1}33735$

The form of this piece is a variant of the popular 77735, with the two 7's split into two 3 +3 lines. On the content side, we have two lovers: she is wan from missing him, and he is gaunt with longing for her. The last line evokes a poignant, and by now a subversive, concept: the dz̀-yóu or "liberty" of p316.

Some will say that the use of this word as the culmination of Lǐ Yẁ's poem, and of this one, and its recurrence in arias across the whole operatic repertoire, is a case of prosodic convenience: dz̀-yóu is a handy-length phrase to rhyme on. Dz̀-yóu is indeed a handy-length phrase to rhyme on. To the poets, one suspects, who had little enough liberty, it was something more than a prosodic convenience.

It is he who speaks. Or maybe all who read the poem. Or maybe all of us.

By your
Fading-flower face
your robe displays its sheen,
From my
Dwindling span of waist
buckle and sash hang free.
When will this separated love
be over finally?
Together we would be –
Alas, that we are not at liberty!

"Four Bits of Jade"

Expressing Inmost Feelings
3377 333

Dzv̄ng Rwèı, a northerner, moved to the south, and lived most of his life in the scenic Hángjōu area, scorning office, studying painting, and winning many friends. He left a still-extant opera on a confusion between lovers at the First Night lantern festival. Though his song collection has not survived intact, a few preserved pieces sound a distinctive voice. This one is sardonic. Its subtitle evokes Rwǎn Jı̀ (p84): hiding discontent under an eccentric surface. The first lines parody the ambitions of officials; the rest advocate the hermit life as the true road to fame. Along with Táu Chyén, with his iconic symbol of the five willow trees (p109), there is here paired the Hàn hermit Yén Gwāng, who retired to fish in a stretch of river rapids (an opera, Seven League Rapids by Jāng Gwó-bīn, a Dàıdū theater manager, played as far away as Wǔ-chāng). The point is in the insouciant 333 conclusion: it is those who escape the world who are best remembered by the world.

A most precocious name,
A plan to aid the state –
Once they're buried in the earth
          it comes to much the same.
But some leap free of the crimson dust
          before it is too late:

Seven Leagues to fish,
Five Willows by the gate –
A myriad years of fame!

Chv́n Fú (1240-1303)

Evening Bell in the Misty Temple

Chv́n Fú, like Hwāng Gv̄ng, was from Tyēn-táɪ. His literary brilliance was early recognized, and he became a compiler in the Hàn-lɪ́n Academy. After other assignments including a mission to Annam, he worked with the Tyēn-táɪ Circuit Administration. All this is energetic enough. But his personal poetry implies a quiet personality; he has less sense of diminution than Hwáng Gv̄ng, and more peace.

The "Eight Scenes of the Syāu and Syāng," picturesque high spots in the region south of Dùng-tɪ́ng Lake, had become a theme for painters, and for poets and musicians. Chv́n Fú tried his hand. Of his "Returning Sail in a Distant Cove," a critic sniped that it left Wáng Wéɪ's reputation very much where it had been. Perhaps the most successful is this, the seventh of the original set, which draws on Táng and early Sùng models. Fú once visited Lɪ́n Bū's tomb on Orphan Mountain, and left a quatrain describing how the branches of the plum still reached craggily out, as in Bū's lifetime (p324). This piece can be read as a variant of Lɪ́n Bū's evening bell poem (p325). In Lɪ́n Bū, the bell is a catalyst, to pull the scene together in a meditationist way. Here the bell sound in couplet 2 reverberates in couplet 3, and in couplet 4 disappears, as birds find their places in the trees.

Then there is the moistened garment. The tears on a late Táng lady's red sleeve emphasized the red, suggested blood, and conveyed agitation (p313). Here, the pine dew on the monk's faded robe darkens its green, but conveying peace: blending it more completely into the darkening green of the mountains.

Hills so deep one cannot see the temple,
Vines so dense they screen bamboos from sight;
Suddenly I hear a single bell,
Clouds have filled the empty vales with white;
An aged monk returns from drawing water,
Pine dew splots his garment's green more bright –
The bell-sound fades, the temple gate is locked,
Birds are finding places for the night.

Báı Pǔ (1226-1306)

"Song of Spring"
777[3]35

Báı Pǔ, whose father had held office under Jīn, several times declined offers of employment under the Ywǽn. He made his name instead as a writer of operas His great masterpiece is the slow-moving but intensely lyrical "Rain on the Dryandra Trees," in whose final scene the Táng emperor Míng-hwáng, having survived the Ān Lù-shān rebellion but bereft of his beloved Yáng Gwèı-fēı, listens to the rain on the leaves of the trees in the palace garden, finding each more sad than the last, and the dryandra,, the quintessential rain-dripping tree (p291) saddest of all. Pǔ's concert arias, besides poetic disenchantment, also show a lively sense of erotic attraction. In this playful piece, the girl abandons the sad acceptance of the heroine in Lyǒu Yǔng's farewell poem (p333). Instead of parting, she dims the light and tempts him to play. It will delay his career, but as she says, what is that to her? If he passes the exams, he will pass out of her life.

The extra syllables that we have seen in Sùng verse are part of the new "aria" form; they were a way of adapting a text and its asides to a given melody. This is not a paper culture; it is a performance culture. Poetry is close to song.

Laughing, she lets her red sleeve snuff
the silver candle's light,
She will not let her brilliant man
read his books tonight:
She nestles close, and they embrace,
taking their delight.
Of course, the problem is
The exams he cannot try –
But should he pass them, what would be her plight!

Chīng Lóu Jí

A Party Incident (CLJ 3)

The Chīng-lóu Jí, or Tales of the Blue Towers (1364), contains anecdotes about the denizens, operatic and other, of the "Blue Tower" demimonde. This particular bit of banter from an early Ywǽn party turns on the conventions regarding the use of personal names. The non-Chinese Syēn'yẃ Shū (1257-1302) held important offices early in his life, and in later years retired to cultivate his passion for calligraphy. His style (the characters opposite are his personal name Bwó-jī) shows a lyrical blend of structure and line that puts him, as he hoped, and as critics recognized, at the level of the monumentally famous Wáng Syì-jr̄ (p85). Within the informal circle of his party guests, his personal name was proper usage, but the little minx of a singing-girl here presumes to use it also. Her comeback when challenged on this liberty (repeating it; underlining it by using an intimate pronoun for "you;" at once flattering and caricaturing his ambition) may have inspired a later heroine, the Syè Tyēn-syāng of Gwān Hàn-chīng (p356).

3

Tsáu Ngv́-syòu. A famous singing-girl of the capital; clever, quick, and with a gift for repartee: outstanding in both beauty and skill. One day Syēn'yẃ Bwó-jī gave a party. The guests were all prominent officials. Syēn'yẃ went to the inner rooms on some errand, and told Tsáu to see that everyone was served wine. When he returned, a guest said "Bwó-jī hasn't drunk." Tsáu also chimed in "Bwó-jī hasn't drunk." A guest laughed "You call him Bwó-jī, so you must be on the most intimate terms with him." Syēn'yẃ, pretending to be angry, said "You little demon; you dare to be so impertinent!" Tsáu said "All right, if I can't say Bwó-jī, I suppose I'll have to call you Wáng Syì-jr̄."

All the company laughed uproariously.

Gwān Hàn-chīng (c1220-c1330)

“Four Bits of Jade”

Separation

3377 333

Gwān Hàn-chīng, who had held office under the J̄ın, was the great master of early opera; not as poetic as Báı Pǔ, but vigorous, funny, enormously prolific, and high-minded enough when the occasion called for it.

This piece keeps close to its basic formula of 3’s and 7’s. Since 7-syllable lines end in 3-syllable segments, the whole design is thus based on recurring 3’s. The listener expects the rhythm to broaden at the end (as at the beginning: the 33 followed by 77). Instead, it stays at 3. In that context of expectation, the final 3’s have an air of constraint; of not quite reaching a goal, as in Dzv̄ng Rwèı (p413).

To this already expressive prosodic form, the words add detail: the tear stain on the sleeve, which gives the fabric a richer color (p340), the nudging of willow fronds (the usual accompaniment of partings, p201). As she takes her hand from her eyes, the graceful sleeve of her robe inadvertently scatters the flowers on the breeze; all ends with the distant landscape into which her lover has vanished.

Since I saw you go,
My heart is full of woe;
When this little splot of love
          will fade, I do not know -
By the rail, my sleeve brings down
          willow-blossom snow.
River’s winding flow,
Mountains in a row,
No trace of you they show.

"Half and Half"

777[1]37

Here is an almost-quatrain, of 7-syllable lines with a single interspersed 3. The "half and half" conceit has been popular since Táng (p269); here, it is an ambiguity in the lady's response. There may be a political note: the girl is giving mixed signals to her lover; Heaven, with barbarian emperors on Chinese thrones, is giving mixed signals to men.

Outside the window of azure gauze,
all is loneliness,
He kneels before her, eager for
an intimate caress;
She berates him angrily
for his faithlessness –
Even though
Her tone is pitiless,
Half is absolutely no,
half is maybe yes.

Gwān Hàn-chīng (c1230-c1320)

An Operatic Incident (Syè Tyēn-syāng, Scene 2)

$^{3}46445^{3}372^{1}8$ $4^{3}5^{3}65^{3}3728$

Now we are in the theater; people packed around us. On stage, the courtesan Syè Tyēn-syāng, the heroine, has parted from her lover Lyǒu Yǔng. He has written her a farewell verse, to the A Minor tune "Stilling Windblown Waves" (p363). The Governor (like Yèn Shū, p362) thinks that Lyǒu Yǔng should forget the girl and work on his career. The servant Jāng Chyēn has spied on the parting, and given the Governor a copy of Yǔng's farewell verse. The Governor sees the name taboo trap (p210; his own personal name includes the syllable Ti) that awaits her in Yǔng's verse. He craftily summons her.

Governor: Jāng Chyēn, bring in wine; I'll have a cup. And let's have Syè Tyēn-syāng sing us a song.

Girl (it is of course for him to choose the mood): What key?

Governor: A Minor.

Girl (professionally proud of her wide repertoire): What tune?

Governor: "Stilling Windblown Waves."

Girl (she knows a score of them, but of course, as the Governor expects, Yǔng's is special to her, and fresh in mind. She begins):

Since the spring has come / I sorrow at greens and sigh for reds,
My fragrant heart feels everything . . .

(The hearers hold their breath; she is about to fall into the trap. Jāng, a low fellow and thus on her side, gives her a warning cough. Seeing her peril, she improvises a different ending to the line):

. . . has lost its hue

(Everyone breathes in relief. She has dodged it!).

Governor (aside, impressed in spite of himself; he recites a throwaway couplet as the cheers die down): Percipient and resolute, that we call "genius." Upright and steady, that we call "talent." *(Quiet is restored; the audience can hear him. He recapitulates)*: This old man had her sing "Since the spring has come / I sorrow at greens and sigh for reds, My fragrant heart finds everything is vanity." Had she sung the "ty" of "vani**ty,**"she would have violated the taboo on pronouncing this official's personal name Ti; I could have sentenced her to forty strokes. But she heard Jāng Chyēn cough, and changed "vani**ty**" into "lost its **hue**." *(He sees another way)*: Aha! "-ty" is in the -i rhyme; "hue" is in the -u rhyme. *(He addresses her)*: All right, Syè Tyēn-syāng; I have a copy of the verse right here in front of me. If you miss a rhyme, or fault a tone, or scant a note, I'll sentence you to forty strokes. Go right ahead, sing it in the -u rhyme, and if you make a single mistake – Ha! Jāng Chyēn, prepare the heavy cudgel!

(The audience gasp. They know Yŭng's verse by heart; they know how intricately words and music combine in these verseforms. To improvise a prosodically perfect counterpart – in a different rhyme – impossible! The vulgar forget their bites of lunch, curious to see them stage-manage the fatal beating; the literary, for whom she symbolizes talent wasted in captivity, in short, themselves, listen intensely as the doomed heroine goes back to the beginning of Yŭng's verse):

Since the spring has come / I sorrow at greens and sigh for reds,
My fragrant heart feels everything has lost its hue:

(The task she had set herself, by her original substitution).

Past flowering boughs, the sun climbs high,
In trailing willows, orioles chirp,
'Neath broidered quilt I sleep the morning through.

(She might think of some -u word, but she doesn't just replace the word, she reshapes the whole line. In so doing, she makes Yŭng's verse her own, and avows her hope, and that of every frustrated person – everyone – in the audience. Doomed, but plucky. Applause).

The ointment dried away / the cloud-locks pushed askew:
Too weary, all the endless day, to wash and comb anew;
What to do?
I hate / how once the fickle one has gone, letters long are overdue.

(Halfway through: is it possible she is going to make it? Utter silence).

Had I known what would ensue,
I would then have kept / the figured saddle hidden far from view:

(Parting sorrow is socially acceptable, but now she will defy the Governor, Yèn Shū, the Mongols, with a vision of perfect literary happiness):

By the study window
I'd set in place the patterned paper, the ivory brush;
I'd make you learn the lesson to construe.

(Tremendous excitement: it is beautiful, and it is coming out):

Always near at hand / never a thought untrue:
My needlework I'd put aside, and watch you, just us two;

(A chastely sweet version of the line that had scandalized Yèn Shū)

I'd be with you –

(Zowie!! Never mind waiting for the last line; she has done it!! She faces the audience, and spontaneous applause begins to well up) –

And we'd not lose the years of youth
That fade away, so far and few.

(Uproar!!! Young love!!! Dreams of office!!! The crowd goes wild!!! Let's get out of here, before the cops come in and break it up).

Anonymous

"Heaven-Scoured Sands"
Autumn Thoughts
66646

This, if he had written it (most early anthologies give it as anonymous), would have been Mǎ Jr̀-ywǽn's most famous poem. Its pointillistic method, with its series of noun phrases, is celebrated. Its "ends of the sky" phrase turns up repeatedly. It portrays a sad traveler, in melancholy autumn, far from home. It is a hexameter quatrain, expanded by an extra 4-word line before the concluding 6. As with the expanded heptameter quatrain 77737, this produces a delayed cadence, dwelling a little longer on the mood set in the first three lines.

The prototype hexameter quatrain is by Gù Kwng (p198). This one repeats Kwàng's phrase "old road" – the old road, the ancient, and now the disused, Dàu. The landscape is autumnal to the point of desolation, with a brief hint of a human residence, and a goal for the lone traveler that is endlessly far away; a situation which Tsv́n Shv̄n (p190) would easily have recognized..

Withered vine, aged tree, twilight crows,
Someone's house, little bridge; streamlet flows,
Western wind, thin horse, ancient road;
Setting sun westward glows –
At the ends of the sky, a broken-hearted traveler goes.

Mǎ Jr̀-ywæ̌n (c1260-1325)

“Four Bits of Jade”

Sighing For The Age

3377 $^{3}3^{3}3^{3}3$

Mǎ Jr̀-ywæ̌n was a brilliant young man and aspiring official, who became instead a librettist and songwriter. This is a song to the tune «Four Bits of Jade». Like Dzv̄ng Rwèı’s example (p383) it is a criticism of the times. Like his, it tinkers with the ending. Where Rwèı imposed a satirical quality on the soft 333 cadence, Jr̀-ywæ̌n changes the cadence itself, adding before each 3 another 3, slowing the rhythm, giving a more stately quality. As with Dzv̄ng Rwèı, the farming and fishing of Táu Chyén and Yén Gwāng are hinted at in these broadened concluding lines. Whether the rural contentment they express is genuine, or something more subtle, the reader must judge.

White at both my temples,
Midyears slipped away,
What hopes have I, from scrabbling on,
some higher part to play?
I’ve seen the ups and downs to which
human life is heir.

To plant in the winds of spring:
Two plots of farming land,
To distance the crimson dusts:
A thousand rods of wave,
When all is said and done,
A leisure free from care.

Mǎ Jr̀-ywǣn (c1260-1325)

Longing For Her Lover

This is not an opera, but a set of song-forms, all in the same key and rhyme. A courtesan expresses, in that sustained way, her longing for an absent lover.

"Assembling Worthy Guests"

74444473355

Somewhere at the ends of earth
her lover takes his way,
The puppy barks in unfamiliar vein,
Every morn
Her lightly stepping socks grow wet
With moisture that on moss had lain,
In the eastern breeze
She does not lean beside the door,
Against the setting sun
She lingers on the stair in vain.
Scratch aside the rocks of earth,
plumb the ocean's gray –
He is still away
beyond the hills' array.
She's tired of tracing pale calligraphy,
Ashamed to see the crabtree bloom again

"Reprise"

Light of spring is easy bought
if you've the coin to pay
It's autumn scenes that bring the greatest pain.
She resembles now
Some rootless bit of tangled weed
That to flutter down
Into the dust does not disdain.
Supposing that it were
A kite that snapped its mooring-string,
No matter where it fell, someone
Would be called on to explain.
Now she sees how wretched is
the life that seemed so gay,
Just too much to bear:
what her load of grief does weigh.
A lonely lady reckoning the time,
A fortune-teller pocketing his gain.

“Gold Chrysanthemum Perfume”

$^{3}5^{3}533\ \ 55$

If this were an opera, this aria would mark the beginning of the plot development section. Notice the change of scene.

She is summoned now
To the Residence to entertain
How much longer as
A lowly courtesan must she remain?
Lost amid a land
Where doubt and worry reign.
Willow brows are lovely, to be sure,
But wait until you’re past the Painted Lane.

“Amid the Waves”

$337^{3}54^{3}5$

And this would mark the exit section. Cháng-ngv́ is the lady in the moon.

The ceaseless clepsydra
That nothing can delay,
The fulling-block no sooner still
than watchmen’s horns complain;
Lantern light she has,
But mourns the absence of the moonbeams’ ray,
Yet not too long has she to stay
Til Cháng-ngv́’s silhouette
Looms large upon the study windowpane.

“Coda”

$^{1}\ 4^{1}445533^{3}557$

Bái Pǔ’s “Rain on the Dryandra Leaves” ends with rain on different leaves; Mǎ Jr̀-ywǎ̃n’s “Autumn in the Hàn Palace” opera ends with calls of wild geese. This coda brings our sequence to a similar end.

She hears
The nighttime rain that does not care,
She sighs
As silken windows countlessly
Draw tight and slack in breezes’ play.
To her ear the cricket-chirpings rise;
Bamboos’ rustling sounds
Through evening breezes strain,
Brushing then against
Banana leaves, and causing them to sway
Where, she asks, is he who went away?
A frenzy comes into her heart
with the wind and rain.

Dù Dzūn-lǐ

"The Drunkard's Heaven"

A Beautiful Girl With a Mole on Her Cheek

5575 64³4

Nothing seems to be known about Dù Dzūn-lǐ. This clever song is sometimes assigned to famous Báı Pǔ, probably because of the common theme, Lady Yáng. We may confidently attribute it to Dù.

Beautiful Yáng Gwèı-fēı was killed by disgruntled troops at a roadside spot called Mǎ-wéı as the Táng Emperor fled from the rebellious army of An̄ Lù-shān, an event celebrated in a long poem by Bwó Jyw̄-yì. The poet here thinks back to the high point of her success, when her face was at the moment of being immortalized in song by Lǐ Bwó (p184) – who is then here blamed for marring it (notice the effect of the extrametrical line) with a careless splash of pine-soot ink.

The piece is an adroit compliment to an almost-lovely singing-girl.

As if the Lady Yáng again could speak,
Escaping from her Mǎ-wéı tragedy,
Who once within the Palace held
the inkstone graciously,
As poet for his theme did seek.
How could Lǐ Bwó behave himself so heartlessly
As drunkenly his brush to ply,
And splash a pine-soot splot,
There upon her peach-bloom cheek?

Yáu Swèı (1239-1314)

"Wind That Sheds the Plum"

$55^3 57^3 4$

(c1310)

Swèı was orphaned early, but through assiduous study attracted the notice of patrons, and held several posts; in 1295 he became a Reader in the Hàn-lín Academy, and in 1301 went out as Commissioner for Jyāng-dūng. In 1308 he was back in the capital as Master of Guests to the Heir Apparent; there followed several other posts. He retired due to illness in 1312 and died in 1314.

His style is considered to be austere but not harsh; to have some of the granitic quality of early Hàn, and the cragginess of Hán Yẁ. Here, he transforms the wordlessness of Dù Mù's quatrain (p291) into a different kind of pathos: an old man keeps from youth the deeper sorrows of the age. The national spirit had sunk low under the Mongols: too low to be mentioned openly.

Wine can turn your cheeks more ruddy still,
Gray can make your gray hair more like snow;
We sit before the cup,
And all our inmost feelings we unfold;
If Heaven too possessed a heart,
Heaven would grow old –
But keep it to ourselves:
The younger folk should not be told

Lú Jŕ (c1246-c1309)

"The Toad Palace"

Green Pearl

7444 ^{3}4^{3}4^{3}4 444

Like Yáu Swèı, with whom he is sometimes compared, Lú Jŕ was a precocious youth and had a public career of sorts, alternating local administrative posts with capital literary ones. Like Yáu Swèı, he shows in his poetry the emptiness at the core of even this considerable success. One trait of the culture since Sùng, which had become still more marked in Ywǽn, was antiquarianism: a self-definition in terms of what has already happened. Less and less, so to speak, is occurring in the present tense. But poetic technique can intensely animate the past.

This Green Pearl piece, almost a drama in miniature, begins with a luxurious scene at Golden Valley, and reflects on the impermanence of human happiness. With brutal suddenness, in an almost cinematic shift from a long to a short focus, it less evokes than conjures up the suicide of Green Pearl a thousand years ago. We see, and touch, her broken body at the foot of Shŕ Chúng's tower. The stanza ends with three lines which are not a rehashing of Dù Mù (p298), but an extension of Dù Mù which by its very lingering on the final point suggests a larger point: Golden Valley, and everything else that is beautiful, has long since vanished with the ever eastward-flowing waters (p90).

And so has the present: the identity of Then and Now (p294) is here complete.

In back apartment, deep and dim,
brocades the walls do grace;
Greens invite, and reds entice,
Urging spring to stay its pace:
A myriad strands of human love.
One thinks, how in this life
Happiness lasts but a space:
Precious mirror smashed –
Fragrance fades from the jadelike face,
Phoenix tower bare –
Her wine grows cold beside her place . . .

Golden Valley has left no trace.
All its glory has passed away,
The river waters eastward race.

Jāng Kv̌-jyǒu (1270-1348)

"River Immortal"

Again Visiting West Lake

77756554

(c1325)

Jāng Kv̌-jyǒu is considered by connoisseurs to be the master of the artsong. He enjoyed the friendship of Lú Jŕ (opposite). The sheer volume of his preserved work in this form is approached only by Táng Shŕ, whose career runs into Mìng. Kv̌-jyǒu's own career was one of little jobs in little places, which, as he duly notes, kept him hard at work, and hard at travel, for very little official credit.

Like Lú Jŕ, he has not a languid but an intense sense of the past, and draws from it, in the end not a sense of solace, but a sense of loss: the past really is past; it is, in some important way, not there any longer. Like Chv́n Fú, he has left poems about visiting Ĺın Bū's tomb (the gentle purity of Ĺın Bū was a powerful symbol for the Ywǽn poets); Ĺın Bū died three hundred years before. Kv̌-jyǒu refers (by his polite name Jì-jv̄n) to Hv̀ Jr̄-jāng (p187), Lǐ Bwó's friend and fellow drinker, some six hundred years earlier. Like Jyàng Kwéı (p404) and everyone who writes a plum poem, he thinks of Hv́ Sywv̀n (p156), eight hundred years ago. The Shr̄ phrase "auspicious guests" (p37) takes us back all of sixteen hundred years.

His friend has died, in c1309; other early friends are gone as well, He finds no solace for his loss in the dancer enticing him to poetry, and affects to see, on her red sleeves, the red dust of history already lying. The menace often implicit in the 4-syllable line is here emphasized by having only one such line in the poem, and by placing it last. Beginning with a 7-syllable line, the poem shrinks down, though more elemental 5's and 6's, to that final, shattering, 4-syllable line.

History is dead.

Laughter resounds at the gathering;
auspicious guests are none
Life is lively beside the Lake;
my thoughts are of Jì-jv̄n
The brilliancies beside the plum
to Hv́ Sywv̀n do not run;
Alas that spring should fail to keep its trust,
Who offers, for the soul of Bū, an orison?
The colored fan invites new lines of verse,
But of my former friends I see not one –
On both her sleeves lies crimson dust

Jāng Yǎng-hàu (1269-1329)

"Mountain Goat"

Túng Pass
447 3377 $^{1}3^{1}3$
(c1329)

Jāng's modest career alternated periods of retirement and official service; this piece was inspired by a famine in the area where Chín and Hàn had had their capitals, in whose administration he was then involved. Túng Pass was a major entry point into this mountain-ringed strategic area; Táng too had its capital here. The pass is full of melancholy associations for the literate traveler.

But this lament is not for the dynasties. It is for the common people who bore the hardships entailed by their coming and going. The angry way the landscape is described in the beginning of the poem summons the hills and streams themselves to bear witness against the dynasties.

The peaks are ranged in seeming rows,
The water with seeming anger flows,
Between the river and the hills
the Túng Pass highway goes;

The capital lies below,
My thoughts come stealing slow:
That Chín and Hàn marched past this place
the grieving traveler knows,
Of all the palaces tramped to dirt
no single trace now shows –

They rise:
The people suffer woes.
They fall:
The people suffer woes.

Chyáu Jí (1280-1345)

"Six Lines"

5544447^{2}7

The meaning of this tune name is obscure: stage argot, or even foreign vocabulary, may be involved. Chyáu Jí lived for forty years in Hángjōu, writing operas (of 11 known, 3 now survive) and leading the life of a comfortable but still disenfranchised literary person. This wry retrospective poem in eight lines attests the ultimate emptiness of his success. Instead of "breaking a cassia bough" by passing the palace exams (p251), as in normal times he might have hoped to do, he has instead had a hollow life, a self-caricaturing life.

On Dragon List my name has not appeared,
As Famous Worthy I am not revered:
A Sage of Wine from time to time,
Adept at Verses, there and here;
Top of the class in mist plumes drear,
Drunken Immortal of stream and mere,
By laughter and talk, my path to the top
of the Repartee Board I've cleared –
I've lingered here,
To pluck the wind and reach for the moon
for all of forty year.

Syén'yẃ Bì-rv́n (c1320)

"Universal Happiness"

Evening Bell in the Misty Temple

3344557 [3]4444

Bì-rv́n was the son of wealthy Syén''yẃ Shū (p393). He left his mark, not on history (hence his unknown dates of birth and death) but on music: he was the originator of what was later known as the Hǎı-yén singing style. Hǎı-yén is a little up the coast from Hángjōu, the center of later Ywǽn operatic activity. It was the home of Yáng Dž, one of whose operas was given at Wǔ-chāng, and of his son, who was a friend and musical colleague of Bì-rv́n's. Bì-rv́n did not soil himself with opera, but left a number of art-songs, which display great skill. There is a set on poets and heroes, a set on the "Four Treasures of the Studio" (cithern, chess, calligraphy, painting); a set of "Eight Views of Yēn,, and a set for the "Eight Scenes of the Syāu and Syāng Rivers." This sample of the last, the second as he has rearranged the order of the set, may be compared with Chv́n Fú's poem on p415. Its first stanza covers much of the ground of Fú's poem, not excluding the evening birds; the parallel about seeing off and returning (lines 5-6) is a happy inspiration. In stanza 2, the scene shifts to nighttime, and a spill of mist from the mountains, made white by the moonlight. The working monk who had vanished into the temple in Chv́n Fú's piece becomes a connoisseur, a kindred spirit to the poet.

Many of these poems make a point of ending with a series of 4-beat lines, sometimes with stark effect. Here, they offer instead a genial conclusion.

Trees the mountains cover,
Hills the temple screen,
The shade of vines lies dark and dim,
The shapes of clouds move raggedly;
A distant bell sees off the fading light,
The weary birds press homeward urgently,
A streak of mist from mountain heights,
of cold light all congealed:

I ask the foreign monk:

In moonlight, whither wanders he?
Is it dawn he looks to see?
On bamboo staff he stops to lean –
He strolls in search of poetry!

Gwàn Yẃn-shŕ (1286-1324)

"Red Embroidered Shoes"

$667^{3}3^{3}35$

Gwàn was of Uighur background. Following the career path of his father, he held the important rank of Daruqachi (from the Persian Daroqa, "Commander") under the Mongols. Then he studied Confucian tradition under Yáu Swèı̀ (p407) and gained fame as a calligrapher. In 1308 he became Explicator to the Mongol heir apparent, and later held a post as a Reader in the Imperial Academy. In his thirties, he retired to the scenic south and the enjoyment of poetry and friendship, tinged with Dàuist eccentricity. He reverses the standard Chinese hunger for office, and represents instead the barbarian fascination with Chinese high culture. It seems that he had little enough to complain of, but his studio name was "Sour." Here, he celebrates the sourness in the sweet: the anguish of limited human life.

Touching *softly*, leaning *fondly*, by the window of cloud we hide,
Snuggling *cozily*, hugging *warmly*, on the pillow of moon we lie;
Listening *to it*, counting *with it*, fearful *of it*, sorrowing *at it*,
as the fourth watch passes by.
Fourth watch passes by,
Love is not content;
Love is not content
As nighttime seems to fly -
If Heaven granted
Just one more hour, what would that throw awry?

Yáng Wéı-jv̄n (1296-1370)

The Residence of the Chv́n Emperors

Yáng Wéı-jv̄n was from Shàu-syīng in the commercially important lower Yángdž area, which in the middle 14th century became a counterpoise to the Mongol power exerted from their new capital Dàıdū in the northeast. He briefly held office under the Mongols, but was for most of his life a private citizen in the Yángdž region. Like Hwáng Gv̄ng (p414), he was involved with the local poetry societies which had then emerged as a literary counterweight to the capital circle. He has been traditionally esteemed for his work in the spirit of the loose Hàn lyric, but a modern reader may find more revealing these standard-form pieces.

In another poem on the same subject, a few pages away from this one in his collected works, Yáng notes that some aged trees in a certain temple were said to have been planted by the hand of one of the Chv́n emperors; he infers that the temple is itself the former residence of those emperors. In this piece, he meditates on the mutability of life which this fact suggests to him. In the second couplet of the poem he uses the same opposition of pond and tree as did Lǐ Shr̀-mín (p177) in revisiting a disused residence, but here it is the fancy rockery and not the water that is gone from the pond; and gnarled trunks, not flowers that the tree preserves from former times. In the third, climactic couplet, comes the transformed present. The alien script and language of Buddhism offends Yáng (the bell and wooden fish in the 6th line accompany some temple ritual), not so much as a loss of the past (Dù Mù had done this very well, p294), as of its replacement by something foreign. The national psyche, long abraded by a foreign presence, was wearing thin.

This home of the rulers of Chv́n, in the desolate city
Was once the palace of the Kings of Wú:
In winding pond, no rockery is left,
Of aged trees, gnarled trunks remain in view;
The hall of state is now a Buddhist shrine,
To bell and fish, white socks come shuffling through –
One does not know, a myriad ages hence,
What further rises and falls may bring it to.

Coming Together

With the national tradition chiefly enshrined in the past, and that past itself almost too painful to contemplate, one turns instead to the immediacies. In succession to the hussy of Jv̀ng (p18) and the courtesans of Jı̀n (p114), continuing an increasingly frank tradition of nudity (p140) and ardor (p311), we have a girl, beautiful in the first couplet with her eyebrow drawn to resemble a mountain, who in the second couplet finally goes all the way. The mere erotic intensity is palpable, but so, in the light of earlier pages, is the concentration of all other hopes and ambitions in this personal form. Here, in this poem from late in Yáng Wéı-jv̄n's life, a basic impulse (dż̀, "unknowingly, unaware") reaches its natural conclusion. The amatory is not, as it was in late Táng, a substitute for the public aspect of life. It is all of life, compressed into a single white-hot moment.

By eyebrow mountain dark and dim,
　　　　the guttering lampstand glows
Half her loosened cloud of hair
　　　　over the pillow flows
Her four limbs intertwined with his,
　　　　she draws a sudden breath –
Unaware, she's pulled to shreds
　　　　his glistening silken clothes.

Ní Dzàn (1301-1374)

Written on No Particular Occasion
On the Fifth day of the Sixth Month

Ní Dzàn, a major painter of this period, figures in the «Chīng-lóu Jí» as a wealthy eccentric, fanatical about his personal cleanliness, It is said of Dzàn that his poetry shows the same tight, dry, astringent quality as his influential paintings. Certainly the play of light in this poem, from moss to robe, and from a cloud to its reflection in the pool, is handsomely done. As for the conventional ending, with the little village and the immortals on cranes; it is simply that: a conventional ending. A piece of wishful thinking – the sort of ending one can only bring off in a painting. That is, or very nearly is, the whole point of painting.

Onto my robe, the moss begins
to climb with its verdant stain,
Fading light from the overcast
in the spring pool gleams again;
To this desolate village, all day long
no carriage and horse have come –
But now and then a wisp of cloud
accompanies a crane.

"Bamboo Branch Song"
For the West Lake

This quietly daring piece is one of eight (Yáng Wéı-jv̄n, who had suggested the idea, himself wrote nine) on the "Bamboo Branch" theme. "Bamboo Branch" is a folksong of non-Chinese, specifically Mán, origin (p276-277). This poem takes up the seepage of "Mán" elements into Chinese culture, such as the Mongolisms which are common in Ywǽn operas (like the word for "wine," darasun). The girl here, who has no such contamination, is compared in the title to the West Lake, which had long typified scenic beauty and refinement, and now, in its southern location, also suggests freedom from all these much resented foreign influences. It is the girl, representing the next generation, who will be free of them.

2

Beside the lake, there dwells a girl,
        fifteen or some such thing,
Raven silk to wrap her hair,
        a touch of powdering;
It bothers her that mom and dad
        mix Mán words in their speech –
And as alone the stove she tends,
        with fresher voice doth sing.

Yẃ Jí (1272-1348)

Staying Late
At Shàng-fāng Lodge
(1333)

Yẃ Jí has been called the best of the Ywǽn poets. He was a prodigy, able to read at age three. He had a capital career as a teacher of Confucianism and a compiler in the Palace. From a life of intensive literary work (his fluency was as notable as his precocity), he is said to have left behind at his death an enormous body of writings, comprising almost a myriad items. They are mostly occasional, even ephemeral: many exchanges with friends, countless inscriptions on paintings. In 1333, when Jí had retired from the capital to a remote village, conditions in the north were hard, and from that year onward, they got harder. Natural disasters and famines were followed by uprisings, and after that, by proto-dynastic rivalries. The most odious of these rivals would found the Míng dynasty in 1368.

Nothing on the horizon promised relief, personal or national. The national spirit is here symbolized by that quintessentially pure flower, the plum. To endure the hard years that lay ahead, and realize the hope expressed by Ní Dzàn (p437), the plum would indeed need to have a heart of iron.

4

Deep in the mountains, drifted snows
the very eaves enfold,
Alone beside the covered lamp
I sit as night grows old;
Did not the flowers of the plum
have iron in their hearts,
How could they possibly contrive
to weather so much cold?