

Classic Poetry Series

Yuan Zhen
- poems -

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Yuan Zhen()

An Elegy 1

O youngest, best-loved daughter of Xie,
Who unluckily married this penniless scholar,
You patched my clothes from your own wicker basket,
And I coaxed off your hairpins of gold, to buy wine with;
For dinner we had to pick wild herbs
And to use dry locust-leaves for our kindling.
...Today they are paying me a hundred thousand
And all that I can bring to you is a temple sacrifice.

Yuan Zhen

An Elegy 2

We joked, long ago, about one of us dying,
But suddenly, before my eyes, you are gone.
Almost all your clothes have been given away;
Your needlework is sealed, I dare not look at it....
I continue your bounty to our men and our maids
Sometimes, in a dream, I bring you gifts.
...This is a sorrow that all mankind must know
But not as those know it who have been poor together.

Yuan Zhen

An Elegy 3

I sit here alone, mourning for us both.
How many years do I lack now of my threescore and ten?
There have been better men than I to whom heaven denied a son,
There was a poet better than I whose dead wife could not hear him.
What have I to hope for in the darkness of our tomb?
You and I had little faith in a meeting after death-
Yet my open eyes can see all night
That lifelong trouble of your brow.

Yuan Zhen

Chrysanthemum Flowers

Autumn clusters surround my house just like Tao Yuanming's.
I walk full circle round the fence as the sun slowly tilts.
It's not that I love chrysanthemums more than other flowers,
but that no others will blossom after these blooms wither.

Yuan Zhen

Late Spring

Calm day through the thin curtain, swallows talking fast.
Pairs of fighting sparrows kick up dust on the steps.
Wind at dusk, a brushwood gate swings shut.
Flowers dropp their last petals. No one notices.

Yuan Zhen

Missing Her After Separation

A mountain spring randomly flows over the steps:
a small house among thousands of peach flowers.
Before getting up, I leaf through a Daoist book
and watch her combing her hair under the crystal curtain.

Yuan Zhen

Petals Falling In The River

At sunset the Jialing River flows east
and thousands of pear petals chase the river wind.
What twists my stomach as I watch the river flowers?
Half have fallen in the river, half drift on the air.

Yuan Zhen

Poem Written For Bai Juyi Who Often Dreams Of Me

Thousand of mountains and waters part us. No letters come.
I know you care for me, since you dream of me
but I'm so sick these days my delirious soul
just dreams of random people, won't show me you.

Yuan Zhen

The Pitcher

I dreamt I climbed to a high, high plain;
And on the plain I found a deep well.
My throat was dry with climbing and I longed to drink,
And my eyes were eager to look into the cool shaft.
I walked round it; I looked right down;
I saw my image mirrored on the face of the pool.
An earthen pitcher was sinking into the black depths;
There was no rope to pull it to the well-head.
I was strangely troubled lest the pitcher should be lost,
And started wildly running to look for help.
From village to village I scoured that high plain;
The men were gone: the dogs leapt at my throat.
I came back and walked weeping round the well;
Faster and faster the blinding tears flowed-
Till my own sobbing suddenly woke me up;
My room was silent, no one in the house stirred;
The flame of my candle flickered with a green smoke;
The tears I had shed glittered in the candle-light.
A bell sounded; I knew it was the midnight chime;
I sat up in bed and tried to arrange my thoughts:
The plain in my dream was the graveyard at Ch'ang-an,
Those hundred acres of untilled land.
The soil heavy and the mounds heaped high;
And the dead below them laid in deep troughs.
Deep are the troughs, yet sometimes dead men
Find their way to the world above the grave.
And tonight my love who died long ago
Came into my dream as the pitcher sunk in the well.
That was why the tears suddenly streamed from my eyes,
Streamed from my eyes and fell on the collar of my dress.

Yuan Zhen

Two Poems Written In An Inn By The Jialing River

In an inn by the Jialing, my traveler's bed feels empty.
The water flows noisily all night.
I gaze at trees on the mountain past the south wall,
and see wild flowers teasing me in soft moonlight.

Branches blooming outside press on the low wall.
The bright moon lights up half my bed.
No one understands how I feel at this moment.
In the western chamber all night I sleep alone.

Yuan Zhen