

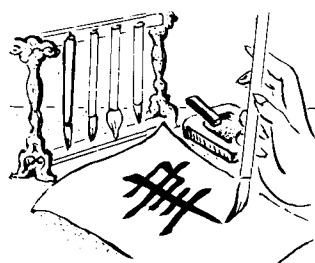
HAVING ACKNOWLEDGED all that, is everything in the garden really so rosy as LaPalombara claims? Here, sceptical Italians surely provide a more reliable guide. Governmental instability is a serious matter, even if the cast remains much the same, and the country has developed techniques to mitigate some of its inevitable consequences. Two examples illustrate the price the country is paying for the games its politicians love to play. One is the mass of public debt which has been accumulated over the years, now amounting to over 11% of the country's GDP—an enormous burden which, as the unhappy experience of the recent Gorla government has shown, has now become a major political as well as financial problem. Another, though less dramatic, is the impact instability has had on Italy's role within the European Community. Membership of the Community is one of the Republic's major commitments, sustained by genuine conviction and enthusiasm. But its wobbly governments have rarely been able to make much of a showing in its councils. Apart from De Gasperi in its early days and Craxi more recently, the Italian contribution has depended more on indi-

vidual ministers and determined individuals outside the government—like Altiero Spinelli who fathered the Draft Treaty for European Union in the European Parliament—than sustained government initiatives.

It is also difficult to share LaPalombara's view that endemic public antipathy towards the country's political élites and leaders reinforces, rather than undermines, democratic structures and practices. *Spettacolo* is all very well, but all too often it makes a very poor show. Unlike the *Brigate Rosse*, the professional politicians have not yet bothered to learn how to exploit the new mass media. Their television performances in last year's general election, for instance, were quite appalling. Many of them paid for personal ads on the television: those I saw, sandwiched between plugs for more attractive products, go a long way to explain the success at the polls of a well-known strip-tease artiste. And the discussion programme in which LaPalombara himself took part was no better: a row of talking faces, droning on at inordinate length. Both on and off the screen, the Italians are right to want a better performance from their political élites.

The Perfect Gentleman

Poets of the Sung Dynasty—By JULIE LANDAU



A STAGGERING AMOUNT OF poetry was written in the Sung Dynasty (960-1279). Most of it has survived, retaining its freshness and appeal, even in English translation. In the tradition of much Chinese poetry that preceded it, it is striking for its vivid imagery, and intensely

personal tone. The images are precise, concrete; the emotion understated or simply evoked.

Visual images from poetry were so compelling that they found their way into not only Chinese painting, but Japanese and Korean as well. Those untranslatable into another medium—Yang Wan-li's "The sour after-taste of plums attacks my teeth", for instance—linger in the mind, echo in the literature.

Imagery, tied to a specific moment, a particular place, a season, a time of day, the experience of a particular person, appeared in the very earliest Chinese poetry. For the Sung Dynasty poets, one of the most important models was the 4th-century nature poet, T'ao Ch'ien, who, from the details of his life constructed a combination of landscape and self-portrait.

*I planted peas under South Mountain
Weeds flourish but the peas are scant
Mornings I rise to deal with the wilderness*

*The moon hangs from my hoe when I return
Long grass and shrubs narrow the path
Evening mists soak through my clothes
But never mind about wet clothes—
If things work out. . . .*

"Returning to the Farm to Live", No. 3

Half photograph album, half diary, both the particular and the autobiographical elements are unmistakable.

But there was only one T'ao Ch'ien and there were hundreds of Sung poets, each ardently trying to express himself. Almost to a man, they were civil servants, as poets had always been in China. To put it more romantically, China was for thousands of years governed by the poets. In imperial China, the fusion of intellectual and political leadership was not only traditional, it was institutionalised through the examination system, a practice already ancient in the 10th century.

Entry into government was through exams, centred on the Confucian classics and emphasising literary ability, particularly poetry. In the Sung dynasty, the exams were open to any man who could afford the decades of preparation. A candidate would have known by heart thousands of poems, and would have been able to express himself with ease in all forms. As a result, there was a vast army of intellectuals whose primary concern was the paternalistic administration of a highly centralised empire: not philosophers, as Plato would have had them (though some were that too), but poets.

What is special about the Sung official is the degree of his commitment to his own cultivation. Confucius had said that culture begins with poetry, so the Sung gentleman wrote poetry. He wrote poetry all the time: to criticise the government, to satirise his enemies, to communicate with friends, to commemorate occasions, to pass the time, to express his feelings. There were writing games, writing parties, writing contests. Usually, T'ang Dynasty (618-907) poetry was the model; Sung rivals it in quality and overwhelms it in quantity.

Though his passion to express himself began with poetry, it was by no means all the Sung gentleman did to this end. He painted, did calligraphy, played a musical instrument, designed a garden, collected, compiled, invented. In painting, the amateur—if indeed the scholar was an amateur—completely displaced the academician. There was an absolute shift in value from the realistic representation of nature espoused by the academy, to a lyrical one of meaning beyond the images favoured by the scholar. Refinement didn't matter: what counted was vigour and spontaneity.

IN HIS ZEAL to evoke or express in painting and calligraphy, the Sung gentleman might apply ink with strips of paper, elm pods, or rushes. The same sort of impulse in poetry led him to take up a song form from the singing house, erotic in content, disreputable in origin, and to mould it into what became the most important lyric form in Chinese: *tz'u*. These lines are from an early Sung *tz'u* by a prime minister, Yen Shu:

*The water in the pond was green, the wind a little warm
When first I saw her
To the ring of the melody's opening bars
She came dancing, waist spinning red confusion*

Quite possibly the poem was dashed off in the singing house itself in a moment of enthusiasm for a particular singer.

Among the hundreds of thousands of poems preserved from the Sung, the proportion of *tz'u* is the smallest; it only became popular, and respectable enough to sign and collect, fairly late. Rooted in the times, much of it was written in the vernacular. It acquired rules as time went on, but, for a while at least, it was much freer than earlier forms, a perfect vehicle for self-expression.

In terms of intellectual ferment, rediscovery of classical models, and humanism, one is tempted to compare this period of Chinese history to the Renaissance in Europe. The classical models, however, were Chinese, and the humanism Confucian. Officials considered themselves personally responsible for the welfare of the people, and each vehemently advocated—or opposed—something: land reform, tax reform, education reform, reform of the examination system, of interpretation of the classics, of prose style, social reform, economic reform. Nothing escaped improvement: there was foreign trade; there were printed books; paper money; and a means to grow a second rice crop. Academies flourished; dictionaries, histories, anthologies, and encyclopaedias were compiled. Documents were preserved, antiquities collected, annotated bibliographies made. There was a wealth of public services and entertainment, and there were countless advances in science and technology.

Despite its brilliance, Sung as an empire was a disaster. It was not strong, not large, not expansionist. The dynasty was plagued by wars, humiliated by treaties and tribute, and as a result kept close to bankruptcy. Responsible for both the brilliance and the disasters were the civil and military administrators: the poets. They sought, with almost equal intensity, both the public good and the private voice.

THE LIVES OF three of these poets—Su Shih, Li Ch'ing-chao, and Hsin Ch'i-chi—span the significant years of the dynasty. Their work marks some of the high points in development of the lyric, but also raises questions as to whether the personal tone was achieved despite the fact that most of the poets came from the same homogeneous background, or because of it.

Nothing particularly differentiates Su Shih from many other Northern Sung officials, except that with Su, everything was more so: talent, versatility, output, as well as hardship, frustration, and bad luck. His grandfather had been illiterate. His father, a failed scholar—meaning he had failed the examinations, a perfectly respectable position—was a prominent literary figure. Su Shih studied for, and passed the examinations with his brother. All three Sus were leaders in the movement to reform the prose style, and are among “the eight prose masters of T'ang and Sung”.

The radical economic and social reform programme of a political rival, Wang An-shih (it dominated Chinese politics

Time Sanctified

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for more than a generation, and was later to be blamed for every ill that befell China since that time) was adopted shortly after the brothers entered the government. It left them almost permanently out of power: within two years, Wang had swept all opposition out of court. His reforms would seem radical even today, but Su Shih objected more strongly to the repressive measures needed to enforce them than to the reforms themselves.

Immoderate in whom he compared to “chirping cicadas” and “croaking frogs”, Su Shih was sometimes imprisoned and often exiled, posted to malarial regions where he faced endless difficulties and near-starvation. Whatever the circumstances, he could take pleasure in some small aspect of nature or of life—a sudden shower, a plum blossom, a cup of tea:

*White bubbles, the floating flowers of noon tea,
Luxuriant fresh shoots and sprouts in a spring dish
All this to savour, what pure delight!*

A man of immense good humour and astonishing resilience, he was also a celebrated drinker, in the tradition of great Chinese poets. “Last night at Tung P’o I was drunk, sober, and drunk again—” begins one poem. “I gaily drink until dawn”, he writes to his brother on Moon Festival, “and write this, completely drunk, thinking of you.” In the poem he compares their separations and reunions to the waxing and waning of the moon; and he concludes: “We share this loveliness, even a thousand miles apart.” As separation became more permanent, their exchange of poems on this festival grows increasingly melancholy:

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*Life on this night is not often good
Next year's moon, from where will we see it?*

Of a career that lasted forty years, only eight were spent in positions of power and prestige in the capital. The rest, at best, involved one far-flung post after another; and at worst, prison under sentence of death. Three years were the maximum any official was allowed in one post; Su tended to be moved more frequently.

A SERIES OF five short poems, written when he was Governor of Hsu Men, paints scenes along the road while he is on a ceremonial pilgrimage to give thanks for rain. One scene:

*Hemp leaves piled layer on bright layer—
Which house cooks cocoons? The whole village is fragrant
Soft-voiced girls chat over fences as they reel silk*

*Old men with sticks look about, bleary drunk
With green-wheat buns in their hungry stomachs
They wonder when the bean leaf will be ripe*

Su essentially wrote about what he did and what he saw, what he thought, what he felt; his poems trace his life from day to day. One of the most famous records a dream about his dead wife.

*Ten years living and dead have drawn apart
I do nothing to remember
But I cannot forget
Your lonely grave a thousand miles away
There is nowhere I can talk of my sorrow
Even if we met, how would you know me
My face full of dust
My hair like snow*

*In the dark of night, a dream: suddenly, I am home
You by the window
Doing your hair
I look at you and cannot speak
Your face is streaked by endless tears
Year after year must they break my heart
These moonlit nights
That low pine grave?*

There were other dreams (“when one wakes, pleasure fades, regret lingers”), reflections on literature and history, impressions on viewing a painting; and always the hope, even in old age, that he could fulfil his potential as a statesman.

*When will the emperor send Feng T'ang
So I can stretch my bow into a full moon
Gaze north
And shoot the sky wolf?*

Although his troubles were directly attributable to his opposition to Wang's policies, the two men remained friends and exchanged poems throughout their lives.

During his lifetime Su was recognised as a poet, painter, and calligrapher of the top rank. Much of his work, however, was destroyed shortly after his death owing to the resurgence of Wang's party (Wang himself was dead). Su was post-

humously stripped of his rank, all stone tablets bearing his calligraphy were ordered to be destroyed, and his literary works were banned—there was a heavy fine for possession of his books. This only increased his popularity; inability to recite his poems was distinctly *déclassé*. A decade later, his rank was posthumously restored, with the Emperor himself collecting Su's manuscripts, paintings, and calligraphy.

IT WAS NOT UNCOMMON at that time to date poems, or to state the occasion on which one was written. Su introduced long, elaborate prose prefaces. For the most part, these are completely autobiographical, recreating the moment of inspiration, the setting from which the poem should be viewed. Sometimes they quite overpower the poem. Here is a 55 character preface to a short poem:

"I was travelling along the Ch'i River in Huangchou on a spring night. Passing a wine shop, I stopped to drink; drunk, I followed the moon to a bridge spanning a small brook. There, I unsaddled the horse and, with my arm for a pillow, lay down to rest a little. When I awoke, it was already dawn, mountains crowding each other, the flowing river clanging against the bridge. Feeling, strangely, that I had left the human world, I wrote this on a piling. . . ."

Prefaces encourage a common tendency to assume that the poem is autobiographical and to interpret it according to what is known of the poet's life, or to elaborate the life with what is said in the poem. Pressure to do this stems from the in-

trinsic ambiguity of the poems. However precise the images, however clear the underlying emotion, what is actually being said may not be clear at all.

The Chinese language has built-in ambiguities. There is virtually no syntax. It has no tense, no number, no case. Verbs are often omitted. Certain adjectives can function as verbs. Pronouns are rarely used; in poetry, virtually never. There is no Aristotelian commitment to a single point of view; there are no unities of time and place.

Punctuation is a modern phenomenon, unknown in the old texts, where poems are printed not line by line, but run-on, stanza by stanza. In the more classical forms, however, lines are of a specified length, end-stopped, with strict rules of parallel structure which help to decipher the meaning. *Tz'u* are simply words fitted to music.

The music came first; the transliterated "title" identifies the tune to which the words were written. Some 800 tunes were used again and again, but eventually the music was lost. Each title became a strict form, reconstructed from earlier *tz'u*, based on line length, tones (Chinese is a tonal language), and rhyme. In Su's time, the music still existed, and could be modified slightly to fit the words. In any case, *tz'u*—compared with earlier forms—was relatively free. Long lines were mixed with short; enjambement was allowed; there was no parallelism. These elements made it refreshing to the poets, but now increase the difficulty of puzzling out what is being said.

A three-character line, with characters for "this", "spring", and "come", has dozens of possible meanings.

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spring comes/is coming/has come

since spring came

when spring comes/came

if spring comes/were to come/had come

These meanings, of course, assume that spring is the subject. It may not be. There is no way of knowing whether the poet is talking about a change in the weather or about somebody's visit. The line may have an implied pronoun (*any* pronoun) as the subject; it means some version of:

He came in spring (or this spring)

If I had come in spring

When they came in spring

Since you came in spring

Were she to come in spring

Tense and pronoun can vary in each example.

Enjambement from the preceding or to the following line would create other possibilities. Sometimes the context helps; but often it merely compounds alternatives rather than resolving the ambiguities. Since borrowing lines, images, and conceits, far from being considered plagiarism, was thought elegant and erudite—quotation marks are not used—the whole line, or several lines, might have been quoted or paraphrased from some other poem. This would add a whole new spectrum of meanings—provided, of course, that the source was extant, and that one recognised it.

Little wonder that would-be exegetes rush to the life of the poet in an attempt to make sense of the poems. As the poems are so personal, and the reason for writing them was self-expression, it may even be justified. Unfortunately, across a millenium, lives too can be ambiguous. Traditional Chinese criticism goes back and forth from the life to the work in perfect circularity, using the life as a context for the work, and filling in details of the life from the work, until it all “fits”, with a liberal dose of the prejudices and expectations of the interpreter thrown in.

THE CONSEQUENCES of such circular reasoning are particularly unfortunate when applied to the work of Li Ch'ing-chao (1084-1155). Li was, in many ways, “the perfect Sung gentleman”: highly respected as a poet, accomplished in music, painting and calligraphy, a collector of rare books and antiquities, the author of various prose works—among those extant are a manual on the game of *Go*, and one of the earliest works of criticism of *tz'u* poetry. Hardly the portrait of a person whose “only vocation” was love, as Hu Pin Ch'ing, one biographer, suggests. For him and many others, the fact that Li was a woman tells her whole story. He credits her with “unveiling the quivering feminine soul”; his translations quiver along with the soul he creates for her. Is the quiver in the poems?

Compare two poems about parting, one by Li, the other by Liu Yung, a minor official who spent most of his life “linger-

ing along the lovely path to the red tower” and whose main vocation really was love. Both poems are written in the first person, in the persona of a woman, and though Li's is probably autobiographical, it is clear from Liu's, which is earlier, that she was working in a tradition. The first poem, “Parting”, is by Li Ch'ing-chao, the second by Liu Yung (fl. 1034).

*Incense cools in the gold lion
My quilt is tossed into a red sea
I get up, carelessly do my hair
Let make-up gather dust in its case
The sun's already to the curtain hook
I dread it—parting and the pain of it
How many things I wanted to say—and didn't
Now I'll grow thin again
Not from wine
Not from autumn melancholy*

*No! No!
Don't go this time
I'll sing Yang Kuan ten thousand times
To keep you
When you went as far as Wu Ling
Mist enclosed my tower here in Ch'in
And only the river passed
Take pity on me—always watching, waiting
Eyes fixed on a far place
Doomed now again to measure, day by day, a new length
of sorrow
“Feng Huang T'ai Shang Yi Ch'ui Hsiao”*

*Spring came
Cruel green and vexing red
Who cares? Not I!
When the sun rises above the blossoms
And orioles weave through the willows
I'm still asleep
Warm glow fading
Bright hair limp
All day I drag about, uncombed
So what?
Hateful the casual lover who just leaves and sends no word,
no letter*

*I knew it would be like this
Now I'm sorry that from the start
I didn't lock up your fancy saddle
And by the study window
Give you fine paper and an ivory brush
Make you recite and do your work
And follow you all day
Not let you go!
I'd fool with thread and needle, sit by you
And you by me—
Not throw my youth away!
“T'ing Feng P'o”*

For nine centuries scholars have argued that Li could not have remarried after the death of her husband. Her love poems are very moving; and the thought that they were perhaps not addressed to her husband, or that she did not

remain faithful to him after his death, has perhaps seemed culturally and aesthetically offensive. A woman of good family could not have done such a thing. Records of her re-marriage must, it is concluded, have been fabricated by male poets jealous of her reputation.

SO MUCH ATTENTION has been focused on that question that a far more interesting one remains unexplained: how did she manage to move freely in male society? She was educated, respected, and published (although most of her work has not survived) in a time when women of her class—she was the daughter of a high official, and the daughter-in-law of an even higher one—hobbled about on bound feet, were kept illiterate, lived lives of boredom and intrigue within the inner chambers, longing for absent or errant husbands, and were prey to an ever-present mother-in-law.

Li and her husband, on the other hand, were celebrated antiquarians, collectors of rare books, scrolls, and bronzes—they collaborated on a book on ancient bronze inscriptions. They had no children. As Li is almost the only known woman writer in China before the 18th century, one could argue that however much she loved her husband—and there is ample evidence that she did—she did not feel that love was her only vocation. She wrote about what she thought and felt, what she did and saw, just as the other poets of the time did—although, admittedly, her experience was somewhat different.

Her poems suggest that she was a rather truculent intellec-

tual, with a love of words akin to Gertude Stein's. She is famous for a poem that has fourteen reduplicatives in the first three lines. In a poem about spring turbulence, she writes:

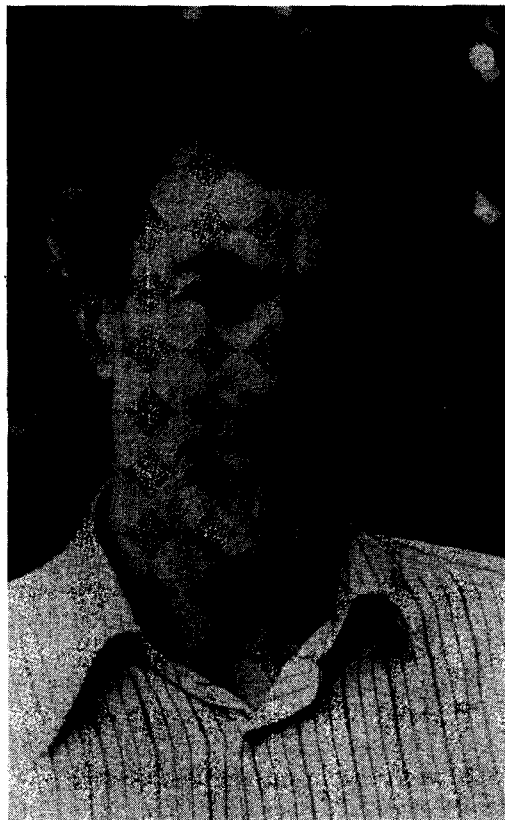
*The poem of impossible rhymes is finished
Head clearing as after wine
I taste a special sort of idleness*

Rhythm and sound are important. Both repetition and refrain are used to great effect, as can be seen in the following poem written to the tune *T'ien Tzu Ts'ai Sang Tzu*:

*Already the banana palm we planted by the window
Shades the whole yard
Shades the whole yard
Leaf by leaf, cluster by cluster
Spreading, furling—overwrought*

*The echo of the third-watch rain in the afflicted heart
Clear drop by drop
Cold drop by drop
Resonates—anguish—separation
I can't get used to it!*

WHEN LI WAS in her mid-forties in 1126, the Sung capital fell to the Chin Tartars. The following year the emperor was captured. As the Chin advanced, there began a series of flights to one place after another, always just too late. Part of their collection was burned by the invaders, some lost, some sold. At one time in her perigri-



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nations, she and her husband still had some 20,000 books. Eventually, those too were lost.

Meanwhile, the court fled south. With what was left of China, the Southern Sung Dynasty was established under a new emperor who, understandably, had little interest in ransoming the old. In the midst of this turmoil, Li's husband died. At the same time, her father was disgraced, and she herself had some political difficulties. Within a period of about two years, her entire life had collapsed. Several of the poems about the death of her husband survive; "Wu Ling Ch'un" is probably the most famous:

*The wind has dropped leaving the earth fragrant with fallen
flowers
I know it's late, but what's the use of doing my hair?
Things go on, all but you! Everything is finished
And all I had to say has turned to tears
Along the Suan, I hear, it's still spring—
If only I could take the skiff there!
But I'm afraid—that light boat in the Suan—
How could it carry so much sorrow?*

Li definitely spent some years in Hangchou, the new capital. There, in a poem about the Lantern Festival, she reminisces:

*In Chung-chou in the good days
There was no end of time behind girls' doors
To mark the date
We dressed our hair with feathers,
Twisted gold, white silk and willow sprays
Competing in our finery
Now, all is faded, faded
Hair dishevelled, temples grey
Now going out at night
Is not so good as hiding under the bamboo shade
Listening to others laugh and talk*

After that, little is known of her, except for that much disputed story of a marriage to a rogue followed by a divorce.

WITH THE EMPEROR a prisoner and the old capital taken, the Chin were in control of north China; the Chinese, under the new emperor, in a new capital, held the south. Though forced to pay tribute to a foreign power, and much reduced in size, the dynasty thrived, as "Southern Sung", for another 150 years. Viewed by many as a period of unprecedented peace, prosperity, and high cultural achievement, it appeared to others as one of intense humiliation. Hsin Ch'i-chi (1140-1207), the most famous of the Southern Sung *tz'u* poets, was among the latter.

Hsin advocated military action to regain the north. No one listened to him. Traditionally, there were two acceptable ways of dealing with giving advice to a ruler which is not heeded—both with long precedents in Chinese history. Su Shih's continued opposition to policy, with a total disregard for his personal welfare or advancement, is the more Confucian; the other—retirement—more Taoist. Hsin did both.

After twenty stormy years in official posts, he withdrew: ". . . to dream about the time of my youth spent in the saddle, and be immersed in the poetry and classics of the ancients."¹ Most of his 600 extant *tz'u* date from these last years.

*If in Chang-an old friends ask for me
Say sorrow is congealed with wine in my intestines still
I see only to the horizon, where geese fall from autumn skies
And when I'm drunk, sometimes I vainly play the ch'in*

Hsin Ch'i-chi's feelings about his retirement ranged from the melancholy to the defiant:

*The shoes I've worn out in a lifetime!
I scoff at the world's work—what a waste for thirty-nine years
Always the official, the wanderer*

It could also be cynical:

*Tired of office, I want to drift on the river
Plant a thousand orange-trees with my own hand
If you two seek fame in the south-east
Make ten thousand books of poems your career
Take my advice
Don't try to shoot the Nan San tiger
Just look for money and a marquise*

Though still immensely personal and expressive, in the two centuries since *tz'u* had first been taken up by scholars it had come increasingly into the mainstream of Chinese poetic genres. The influence of the singing house had disappeared: music had ceased to be important, and much of it had already been lost. Instead there were rules, and an ever-increasing use of allusion.

One must remember that the literate in China had been, for millennia, an homogeneous group. They studied the same classics, memorised the same poems, and led very similar lives. Identifying with an official of the 3rd century B.C., for example, Liu Yung wrote in the 10th.

*I feel Sung Yu's despair
When, reaching the river,
He saw the ranges to be crossed*

Chinese poetry resonates through centuries with this sort of shared feeling and experience. Allusions were therefore rarely obscure. They evoked a well-known story, which in turn served to turn a simple image into a multi-faceted one.

A CLOSER LOOK at an allusion—to seaweed and *lu* fish—which Hsin Ch'i-chi used frequently may make clear how this works. It is explained in the following lines from a poem of Hsin's about building a house for his retirement:

*Intent on cloud and mountain
My whole life
I scoffed at officials
Who stayed in office until the end—
Weary of purpose, one should retire,
Seek repose in time—*

¹ Irving Y. Lo, *Hsin Ch'i-chi* (Twayne Publishers, 1971), p. 33.

No, not simply for the taste of seaweed and lu fish:
 When autumn settles along the river
 See how the geese evade the bow-strings?
 Returning boats avoid the backwash?

The allusion, which by Hsin's time had already been popular for centuries and had acquired the patina of previous usage is to Chang Han (Chang Chi Yin), an official of the 3rd century. In a 5th-century work, "A New Account of the Tales of the World", Chang is singled out as the only worthy minister who left office at the peak of his power, and avoided the terrible reverses of fortune experienced by the others. Only Chang Han "felt the autumn wind and turned toward home",² and lived to enjoy the delicacies of his native region: *lu* fish and seaweed. The story can be alluded to by mentioning Chang Han, or through synecdoche, by naming any of the elements in the story: the autumn wind, *lu* fish, seaweed. Here, from another of Hsin's poems is a more subtle use of the same allusion:

Old age comes, feeling and taste go
 We drink at parting

² Translated by Richard Mather, *A New Account of the Tales of the World* (University of Minnesota Press, 1976), p. 78.

And fear the flowing years,
 Count the autumn festivals
 When the full moon
 Did not shine on our reunion!
 The river doesn't care—
 Nor the West wind—
 They only speed your boat away. . . .
 Late autumn seaweed—*lu* fish along the river
 Deep in the night, the lamps of children, fishing

In yet another use of the same story, Hsin expresses some ambivalence about retiring:

Don't say *lu* fish are ready to be minced
 Even if the west wind blows,
 Would Chang Chi Yin go home,
 Seek land, and build his house?

IT IS CONVENTIONAL in poems of retirement to write of one's surroundings. Hsin wrote of the place he built for himself in particularly moving detail.

At East Mountain, I'll remodel the thatched hut
 So all the large windows facing the water open

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'Mr Ford's prose is richly-coloured, gleaming with freshly-cut images' *Bernard Levin, Sunday Times*

£3.95 Published 16 June

His recent book *Rock Springs* is published by Collins Harvill in hardback

*I'll fish from a skiff
But first, I should plant willows
Build fences to protect bamboo*

or

*The east bank has little green, too little shade
I should plant more willows over there*

He wrote in fun about losing his teeth, using the Taoist paradox of the soft overcoming the hard; he poked fun at Buddhist abstinence; at the feigned sorrow of young poets; at himself. He wrote about love and wine, and, increasingly, about old age: "What is a man to do when white hair mocks him?" Many poems are casual—the introduction gives you the sense of a chance encounter with a friend. The following lines, for instance, are from a poem prefaced: "Returning from O Lakes sick, I got up to write this."

*Flushed lotus flop, like drunks, one on the other
White birds bring no word, I resign myself to melancholy*

*Over books, I sigh and sigh
Nothing to do but nothing
A hill, a valley . . . scenery enough. . . .
How weak I've grown
Lately, I can't even climb the stairs*

The complete Sung *tz'u* have been collected. They number some 20,000 lyrics by over 1,300 poets. The appeal of what they wrote, whether about the trivial or the cosmic, about "fresh shoots and sprouts of a spring dish" or death and parting, lies in the intensely personal expression of someone whose life lay elsewhere—soldier, statesman, emperor, monk, philosopher, historian, reformer. The marvels of the capital and the court of the great Khan described by Marco Polo were what remained of the Sung culture after one of their inventions—gunpowder—had been successfully used against them, and all China came for the first time under foreign rule.

THE SUNG GENTLEMAN refused to serve the Mongols. He went into retirement to write and paint and rue the loss of China. The loss of a kingdom was not new. Li Yü, last king of the Southern T'ang, had lost all to the rising Sung centuries before. He wrote:

*Lush wisteria embracing sculptured jade—
What use had we for the arts of war?*

These lines the Sung gentleman may well have contemplated, paraphrased, or written on a painting when all was lost.

In Memory of a Gardener

(For Rachel)

Sbolci, Giulio; via di Montebene, Settignano;
Occupation gardener; passion the land he worked.
Has left that stony soil for God knows where.

You served a scrap of land and its *signora*;
Took care of her tenants much as your patience tended
Lemons and roses grown for your *signora*.
You reminded us once, when our holiday selves
Had been growing for years in your care, and we had forgotten,
That one of us, when she came to stay that first time,
Had drooped in long despair in the hot abroadness:
"Era piccina piccina. Eh, mi ricordo!
Piangeva piangeva piangeva, due tre giorni."

Dear Giulio, our belated candle burned
Under an English virtuoso's triumph
Of Gothic vaulting fit for Paradise,
While flower and blossom filled the City squares
At noontime on a day of air as blue
And clean as Tuscan air,
Not the eternal *nebbia* you imagined.

Perhaps—God knows—with whatever it is that rises
From candles burned in churches,
The wallflower scent has risen
To tell you we remember you with love.

Julian Brown (1923-1987)