Classic Poetry Series

Su Tung-po

- poems -

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Battle of Red Cliff

The Yangtze flows east
Washing away
A thousand ages of great men
West of the ramparts --
People say --
Are the fabled Red Cliffs of young Chou of the Three Kingdoms
Rebellious rocks pierce the sky
Frightening waves rip the bank
The backwash churns vast snowy swells --
River and mountains like a painting
how many heroes passed them, once ...

Think back to those years, Chou Yu --
Just married to the younger Chiao --
Brave, brilliant
With plumed fan, silk kerchief
Laughed and talked
While masts and oars vanished to flying ash and smoke!
I roam through ancient realms
Absurdly moved
Turn gray too soon --
A man's life passes like a dream --
Pour out a cup then, to the river, and the moon

Translation 2

The endless river eastward flows;
With its huge waves are gone all those
Gallant heroes of bygone years.
West of the ancient fortress years
Red Cliff where General Zhou Yu won his early fame
When the Three Kingdoms were in flame.
Jugged rocks tower in the air
And swashing waves beat on the air
Rolling up a thousand heaps of snow.
To match the hills and the river so fair,
How many heroes brave of yore
Made a great show!

Translation 3

The great river surges east,

Its waves have scoured away

Since time began all traces of heroic men.

The western side of the old fort

Was once, so people say,

Known as the Red Cliff of Zhou of the Three Kingdoms.

With piled-up rocks to stab the sky

And waves to shake them thunderously

Churning the frothy mass to mounds of snow,

It's like a masterpiece in paint.

Those ages hide how many a hero!

Think back to those old days;

that first year when Zhou Yu had just married the Young Qiao.

Then, what a hero he became!

With waving fan and silken cap

He talked and laughed at ease

While masts and oars were blotted out in smoke and flame!

My wits that stray to realms of old

Deserve the scorn of all who feel;

Years pass, and hair grows white so soon.

Though a man's life is like a dream,

One toast continues still -- the River and the Moon!

Su Tung-po

Pu suan tzu

A fragment moon hangs from the bare tung tree
The water clock runs out, all is still
Who sees the dim figure come and go alone
Misty, indistinct, the shadow of a lone wild goose?

Startled, she gets up, looks back
With longing no one sees
And will not settle on any of the cold branches
Along the chill and lonely beach

Su Tung-po

Remembrance

To what can our life on earth be likened?
To a flock of geese,
alighting on the snow.
Sometimes leaving a trace of their passage.

Su Tung-po

Shui lung yin

Like a flower, but not a flower
No one cares when it falls
And lies discarded at the roadside
But though
Unmoved, I think about
The tangle of wounded tendrils
Lovely eyes full of sleep
About to open,yet
Still in dreams, following the wind ten thousand miles
In search of love
Startled, time and again, by the oriole's cry

Do not pity the flower that flies off
Grieve for the western garden
Its fallen red already beyond mending --
Now, after morning rain
What's left?
A pond full of broken duckweed
If the three parts of spring
Two turn to dust
One to flowing water
Look --
These are not catkins
But drop after drop of parted lover's tears

Su Tung-po

Shui Tiao Ko Tou

Will a moon so bright ever arise again?
Drink a cupful of wine and ask of the sky.
I don't know where the palace gate of heaven is,
Or even the year in which tonight slips by.
I want to return riding the whirl-wind! But I
Feel afraid that this heaven of jasper and jade
Lets in the cold, its palaces rear so high.
I shall get up and dance with my own shadow.
From life endured among men how far a cry!

Round the red pavilion
Slanting through the lattices
Onto every wakeful eye,
Moon, why should you bear a grudge, O why
Insist in time of separation so th fill the sky?
Men know joy and sorow, parting and reunion;
The moon lacks lustre, brightly shines; is al, is less.
Perfection was never easily come by.
Though miles apart, could men but live for ever
Dreaming they shared this moonlight endlessly!

Su Tung-po