

葉嘉瑩：大晏詞的欣賞

An Appreciation of the *Tz'u* of Yen Shu

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THE JUDGMENT OF A WORK of literature is to some extent a subjective matter, much as an individual's enjoyment of food depends on his own palate and experience; tastes notoriously differ, and there is no need to insist that everyone share one's own preferences. But, like the old peasant who recommended the flavor of fresh celery and the warmth of the spring sun on the back to the Emperor, I will pass on my honest opinion about the value of Yen Shu 晏殊's songs.

Among song writers at the beginning of the Northern Sung, Yen Shu (991-1055), his son Yen Chi-tao 晏幾道, and Ou-yang Hsiu 歐陽修 are commonly mentioned together. Most readers consider Yen Chi-tao the best of the three, fewer would choose Ou-yang Hsiu, while Yen Shu has the fewest admirers. There are two reasons why Yen Shu's songs are not easily appreciated: first, his style is smooth and unruffled: there is no strong emotion, no striking language—neither colors to dazzle nor vigor to impress. His songs are like the title under which they are collected, "Pearls and Jade" *Chu yü tz'u* 珠玉詞, smooth and polished as jade and pearls; they may be pure and refined and crystalline, but in the eyes of most readers they are not so splendid or interesting as a multi-colored piece of jasper.

Another impediment to the appreciation of Yen Shu's songs is the fact that he was highly successful in his public career. Many people feel that great poetry can only be written by a poet who has experienced hardship and poverty, and Yen Shu fails to fulfill their expectations. In Wan Min-hao's book on the *tz'u* of Yen Shu and Yen Chi-tao, Yen Shu's songs are dismissed as the groans of a rich man who has nothing wrong with him.¹ Mr. Wan's study is a thorough one, and while he is unstinting in his praise of the son, he finds little to appreciate in the father. As Chiang Jo-liu 蔣弱六 once remarked in another context,² to be overlooked by someone who is not looking for you is nothing to complain of, but to be rejected after careful scrutiny is truly distressing. Mr. Wan's remark makes me sigh at Yen Shu's misfortune in being so fortunate.

¹Wan Min-hao 宛敏彌, *Erh Yen chi ch'i tz'u* 二晏及其詞 (Shanghai: 1934, Commercial Press), p. 166.

of Tü Fu's poems 遊何將軍山林十首, *Tu-shi ching-ch'üan* 杜詩鏡銓 (Taiwan: 1970, Hsin-tien Shu-chü) 2.8a.

²Chiang Jo-liu 蔣弱六, commenting on the third

To appreciate Yen Shu's songs one must first of all recognize that he is an intellectual poet, a rational poet. It is not necessarily true that "Poetry is incompatible with success in life"³ or that "Talent and luck do not go together,"⁴ but a man's character does have something to do with shaping his career, and we can divide poets into two large groups, those who were successful in their extra-poetic lives and those who failed. In terms of temperament, among the successful will be found the rational, intellectual poets, while the failures will include the poets of pure feeling. Wang Kuo-wei 王國維 said of Li Yü 李煜, "He was a poet who never lost his child-heart. That he was born in the seclusion of the palace and raised by women was a handicap to him as the ruler of a state, but it was his great advantage as a poet. . . . The subjective poet needs no wide experience of the world. The less his experience, the more genuine his own nature."⁵ This is certainly true of the poet of pure feeling. The emotions of such a poet are like the unimpeded flow of water. He reacts emotionally to circumstances, unreflecting, without control or afterthought, uncritically. Of such poets it is not enough to say that they never lost their child-heart, in the world of practical affairs they simply remain children. Li Yü is an excellent example, and "kingdom ruined, family finished" is the classic end of this kind of poet. "Heaven takes a hundred disasters to make one poet"—for poets like this the disasters that are his lot and the pure feeling of his poetry are but two sides of the same coin.

It is otherwise with the intellectual poet. His emotions are more like a placid pool than flowing water; the wind may raise thousands of ripples; cast a stone in and it will sink in a little whirlpool, but nothing will make it lose its essential stillness, its limpid beauty. The intellectual poet is always reflecting on his experience, trying to understand it, or examining his own feelings and keeping them under control. He has developed an adult's standards of behavior while preserving a poet's sensitivity. Yen Shu is representative of this kind of poet.

When the Emperor Jen-tsung 仁宗 (1023-1063) came to the throne as a child of thirteen the government was left in the hands of his adoptive mother, the Empress Chang-hsien. The Minister Ting Wei and the Commissioner of Military Affairs Ts'ao Li-yung both wanted exclusive access to the Empress to present their memorials. The situation called for tact and a thorough grasp of the intricacies of court politics. When no one ventured to decide the matter, Yen Shu proposed that the Empress listen to all memorials from behind a screen, so that no one would get to see her individually.⁶

On another occasion he had to deal with a military crisis. The Hsi Hsia under the leadership of Yuan Hao 元昊 (Li Hsiang-hsiao) were making incursions along the Shensi border. Yen Shu requested that the generals be allowed to operate without interference by the Palace Commissars and that tactics not be prescribed from the

³Tu Fu, 天末懷李白, (*Tu Fu yin-te* 杜甫引得, v. 2) 20/25.

話 (Hongkong: 1961, Commercial Press, 蕙風詞話及人間詞話合刊本) p. 197-198.

⁴Li Shang-yin 李商隱, 有感, *Li I-shan shih chi* 李義山詩集 (*Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an* ed.) 6.18b.

⁶*Sung shih* (Taiwan: Yi-wen Yin-shu-kuan reprint of Wu-ying-tien ed.) 70.1b-2a.

⁵Wang Kuo-wei 王國維, *Jen-chien tz'u-hua* 人間詞

court, so they would be free to respond to the movements of the enemy. He proposed that bowmen be conscripted and trained, that palace luxuries be curtailed to aid those defending the borders, and that other government agencies apply directly to the treasury for all their income.⁷

These proposals show Yen Shu to have had a clear, incisive mind and a good grasp of the situation. The measures he proposed were those of a statesman and a general—certainly he was not just a ladies' man, nor was he a child with no experience of the world. Yet his songs show a real poetic talent. Practical accomplishments did not keep him from writing good poetry, nor was the value of his poetry diminished by the fact that he was successful and well-off.

Some may object to the label "intellectual" or "rational" for a poet, since poetry is supposed to rouse feeling, and feeling is diametrically opposed to intellect. This may be true if you think of intellect as the rationally calculating part of the mind, when it stands as the antithesis of feeling. But this is not a poet's rationality. For the poet, reason serves only as a restraint exercised over feeling, a controlling force that both refines and enhances feeling. It is not a matter of ratiocination, but of education and experience of life. Far from being antithetical to feeling, it is in fact steeped in feeling; the two are perfectly compatible, indistinguishable even as they arise simultaneously in the heart. Poetry may well be an emotional creation, but a poet may be a rational, intellectual writer.

YEN SHU'S SONGS, as the product of an intellectual poet, have several characteristic features. The first is feeling that holds a thought. It is a mixture of two perfectly blended elements. There is no lack of poems and songs by other writers which convey an idea; what makes Yen Shu's different is that theirs give the impression of being done deliberately, where in his songs it seems to be quite unconscious. If you take a cup of water from the sea, it is all salty without your intervention; or you can make a cup of salt water by adding salt to water. In Yen Shu's songs the reader is not confronted with an Idea, something the poet holds up for his consideration and approval. For instance, the lines in his famous song to the tune *Huan hsi sha* 浣溪沙 (Sands of the Washing Stream) (No. 17, p. 90)⁸

<i>Hills and rivers fill the eyes: vain to think of what is far away.</i>	滿目山河空念遠
<i>When flowers fall in wind and rain we grieve the more for spring—</i>	落花風雨更傷春
<i>Best love the one that's here right now.</i>	不如憐取眼前人

On the surface these lines are an emotional response to the passing of spring in a place far from home, with no intellectual content whatever, and it seems certain that Yen Shu was not consciously trying to express a thought. But the reader gets something in addition to the feeling, a stimulus or an invitation to a thought. In the

⁷*Ibid.*

Chung-hua Shu-chü). The No. refers to the number in sequence of any author's *tz'u* in that collection, followed by a page reference.

⁸All references to Sung *tz'u* are to T'ang Kuei-chang 唐圭璋, *Ch'üan Sung tz'u* 全宋詞 (Peking:

first line, besides the emotion roused by "vain to think of what is far away," the words lead the reader to reflect on the things in life that lie out of reach which we long for in vain. The second line stirs feelings of regret at the passing of spring and at the same time invites us to think of all loveliness irrevocably gone. And the last line makes us think not only of "the one that's here right now," but of the precious fleeting moment we should cling to. Yen Shu uses the same line in another song to the tune *Mu-lan-hua* 木蘭花 (Magnolia Flower) (No. 56, p. 95)

Best love the one that's here right now 不如憐取眼前人
*And not ask too much of your soul in dreams.*⁹ 免使勞魂兼役夢

We can take this repeated line "the one that's here right now" (*yen ch'ien jen*, 眼前人 "the person before your eyes") as representing Yen Shu's awareness of the necessity of facing reality.

Associations and inferences of this sort demand no profound reflection. The reader is aware of the implication at the same time he is moved by the emotional content of the poem. As suggested earlier, this intellectual content derives from Yen Shu's experience of life, it is not produced deliberately by reflective thought; it originates in the feelings and is not something tacked on. It follows that this intellectual content can appropriately only be felt and savored, it does not really lend itself to analysis and elucidation. My sort of exegesis is open to the objection that it is forced and trumped up, but Yen Shu's *tz'u* undeniably do suggest reflections about the human condition. Wang Kuo-wei, for instance,¹⁰ remarked that the poet showed weariness of life in the lines, from the song *Ch'üeh t'a chih* 鵲踏枝 (Magpie Treads the Branch) (No. 23, p. 91)

Last night the west wind withered the green trees. 昨夜西風凋碧樹
Alone I climb the high stairs 獨上高樓
And gaze down the world's-end road. 望盡天涯路

Of the same passage he said elsewhere,¹¹ "This is the first experience of one who has done great things, who is greatly learned." I shall not stop to elucidate Wang Kuo-wei's comment here,¹² having quoted it only to show that I am not the first to find an element of philosophy in Yen Shu's *tz'u*. That his songs owe their characteristic depth and significance to this factor is apparent when we compare them with those written by his son Yen Chi-tao, who surpasses him certainly in the qualities praised by Huang T'ing-chien 黃庭堅:¹³ "refined strength of phrasing" that "agitates the heart," as in the lines

⁹In a dream one's soul is supposed to make journeys to a distance to see another person; such dream trips are considered dangerous or fatiguing. For example, see Tu Fu's "Dreaming of Li Po," *Tu Fu yin-te* 2.

¹⁰*Jen-chien tz'u-hua* p. 202.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 203.

¹²The author has discussed Wang Kuo-wei's *tz'u* criticism in her 談詩歌的欣賞與人間詞話的三種境界 *Chia-ling t'an tz'u* 迦陵談詞. (Taiwan: 1970, Ch'un-wen-hsieh Ch'u-pan-she) p. 1-11.

¹³Huang T'ing-chien 黃庭堅, Preface to *Hsiao-shan tz'u* 小山詞 (Taiwan: 1962, Shih-chieh Shu-chü), p. 1.

*The moon of that night is there still
Which once shone on the Bright Cloud going home.*

To the tune *Lin-chiang hsien* 臨江仙
(Immortal by the River), No. 7, p. 222

當時明月在
曾照彩雲歸

*Tonight I keep shining the silver lamp on her
Fearful lest this encounter might be a dream.*

To the tune *Che-ku t'ien* 鷓鴣天
(Partridge in the Sky), No. 24, p. 225

今宵剩把銀缸照
猶恐相逢是夢中

*We danced the moon down from the peak of the
willow house
And sang the air to the end under the peach
blossom fan.*

(Ibid.)

舞低楊葉樓心月
歌盡桃花扇影風

But the son's verse is both narrower and shallower, lacking the intellectual component found in Yen Shu. For Yen Chi-tao's songs are preoccupied with "song, wine, and dalliance," "grief and joy, then and now;" they present only one aspect of human life, and appeal only to the reader's feelings. It is because Yen Shu's songs involve the reader's whole philosophy of life that they go beyond the limits of a given situation and suggest the entire human predicament.

Wan Min-hao argued that Yen Chi-tao had a better command of diction than Yen Shu, quoting these lines in support of his view, first by Yen Shu,

*I remember the red candle in Orchid Hall
The heart was long, the flame short
Shedding tears for someone.*

To the tune *Han t'ing ch'iu* 撼庭秋
(Moved by Autumn in the Courtyard), No. 48, p. 94

念蘭堂紅燭
心長焰短
向人垂淚

and by Yen Chi-tao,

The crimson candle joins me in idle tears

To the tune *P'o-chen tzu* 破陣子
(Break the Ranks), No. 173, p. 246

絳蠟等閒陪淚

*The red candle is sorry but has nothing to suggest
And through the cold night drips futile tears for
me.*

To the tune *Tieh lien hua* 蝶戀花
(Butterfly Loves Flowers), No. 15, p. 224

紅燭自憐無好計
夜寒空替人垂淚

He claims that the word *hsiang* (in 向人 "for someone") is less effective than *p'ei* (in 陪淚, lit., "accompanies my tears"), and especially is weaker than *t'i* (in 替人 "for

me"). That is all very well, as far as these two words are concerned, but it overlooks the fact that in Yen Chi-tao's poems what sheds tears is nothing more than a candle, while the figurative language of Yen Shu's "The heart was long, the flame short" leads the reader by a process of association from the burning candle to human life where "the heart is ready for more, but the strength is lacking." Yen Shu may have had no intention of rousing such an association, yet it is his peculiar characteristic to make such reverberations accessible to his reader. So we may grant Yen Chi-tao the greater emotional content, while insisting that Yen Shu is a more profound and a more intellectual poet.

Precisely here lies the difference between the poet of feeling and the poet of intellect. The one responds passively to life, registering experience as pure feeling; the other does not simply experience reality, he contributes a ray of understanding to his experience. The response of the former suffers from its narrowness, where the latter has the advantage of breadth. Where the response is purely emotional, the poetry conveys emotion but lacks thought, making for superficiality, while the one who can illuminate his subject will include thought with his feelings, and the result is greater depth. Consider these lines by Yen Shu:

*The flowers will fall for all you can do
And the swallows that look familiar return.*

To the tune *Huan hsi sha* 浣溪沙
(Sands of the Washing Stream), No. 9, p. 89

無可奈何花落去
似曾相識燕歸來

*The flowers don't give out
The willow lasts forever—
They should be just like my feelings.*

To the tune *Hsi ch'ien ying* 喜遷鶯
(The Oriole Flies for Joy), No. 45, p. 94

花不盡
柳無窮
應與我情同

In both passages the observation of seasonal change is not just the occasion for an emotional response. The poet perceives a pattern, a contrast or a repetition, that gives a rational basis for the emotion. Or the following, which suggests rational control of the feelings;

*Don't share these carnelian blossoms casually,
Keep them for the one you love.*

To the tune *Shao-nien yu* 少年游
(Youthful Diversions), No. 49, p. 94

莫將瓊萼等閒分
留贈意中人

It is this combination of feeling and idea which is Yen Shu's trademark, and it must be recognized for a true appreciation of his poetry. If you fail to see it, you will find no treasure in his "Pearls and Jade".

THE NEXT SPECIAL quality of his poetry is a certain quiet elegance of tone, the sort of thing the provincials admired in Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju 司馬相如's demeanor, an aristocratic bearing. It is something that seldom finds expression in Chinese poetry,

chiefly no doubt because few poets lived the life of refined luxury that Yen Shu enjoyed, and men who did live such a life lacked his talent for poetry. Yen Shu lived under the peaceful reigns of Chen-tsung 眞宗 (998-1022) and Jen-tsung. The chronicle of his promotions, from the time he passed his examinations as a child prodigy of fourteen and received the post of Collator in the Chancellery until he became Prime Minister thirty years later, is recorded in his biography and does not need to be reviewed here. His poetic talent is attested by the sensitivity and insight of his songs. He portrays a girl's psychology:

*You might suspect she had a nice spring dream
last night,
But it was winning the flower competition this
morning
That spread the smile on her cheeks.*

疑怪昨宵春夢好
元是今朝鬪草贏
笑從雙臉生

To the tune *P'o-chen tzu* 破陣子
(Break the Ranks), No. 135, p. 108

On the yellow hollyhock:

*The autumn scene is late under the phoenix tree
leaves—
The rare plant transformed into golden cups.*

高梧葉下秋光晚
珍叢化出黃金盞

To the tune *P'u-sa man* 菩薩蠻
(Bodhisattva Barbarian), No. 117, p. 105

*You can pick a blossom for a golden winecup
When you wish me a long long life,
Or I can hold it up as a Taoist nun's cap
And try it on you to see how pretty you look.*

摘承金盞酒
勸我千長壽
擎作女眞冠
試伊嬌面看

To the tune *P'u-sa man* 菩薩蠻
(Bodhisattva Barbarian), No. 116, p. 105

There is a fresh vision in these lines which conveys something of the poet's delight in the flower (and the occasion), a sensitive perception effectively translated into verse.

He has an ear and an eye for nature and can write as though it were capable of human feeling:

*From the Lung-t'ou the water voices gurgle
Behind the leaves soon the orioles will be chatter-
ing.*

壠頭嗚咽水聲繁
葉下間關鶯語近

To the tune *Mu-lan-hua* 木蘭花
(Magnolia Flower), No. 64, p. 96

*The spring breeze has not learned to keep the
willow fluff
From pelting the pedestrians in the face.*

春風不解禁楊花
濛濛亂撲行人面

To the tune *T'a so hsing* 踏莎行
(Treading the Sedge), No. 82, p. 99

Anyone with such sensitivity and insight is a poet, whether a failure or success in everyday life, though his experience of life will naturally affect the tone and style of his poetry. Yen Shu enjoyed a successful career, and there are no themes of banishment and frustrated ambition in his songs. If you are committed to the belief that to be a poet one must first be a failure, you will be disappointed at not finding such themes in his poetry, but their absence does not diminish his poetic endowments. The quiet elegance characteristic of his poetry is precisely a product of his experience and of his temperament. It is best illustrated by one of his songs to the tune *Ch'ing-p'ing yüeh* 清平樂 (Ch'ing-p'ing Music) (No. 32, p. 92):

*The autumn wind stirs
And one by one the leaves fall from the phoenix
tree.
It's easy to get drunk on the green wine
And nap soundly by the little window.*

金風細細
葉葉梧桐墜
綠酒初嘗人易醉
一枕小窗濃睡

*Blue myrtle and rose of Sharon both are faded
The setting sun shines on the railing
The pair of swallows are ready to leave.
It was a bit chill last night inside the silver screen.*

紫薇朱槿花殘
斜陽却照闌干
雙燕欲歸時節
銀屏昨夜微寒

We look in vain here for the usual stereotypes of Chinese poetry—sorrow in parting or grief at separation, lament on growing old or complaint about poverty,—nor is there the effect peculiar to Yen Shu of an idea conveyed through feeling. All we have is a poet's subtle aesthetic perceptions. In poetry of this sort we should not seek either emotion or idea, but only attempt to savor the unadulterated poetic impulse. As Chuang Tzu 莊子 put it, "Great is the usefulness of the useless!" Fair warning to readers who are determined to find emotion and idea in poetry, this is no place to look. It is like a vintage wine: you do not drink it to quench your thirst. The excellence of a poem like this is the aesthetic experience itself, unmixed with any of the more substantial ingredients of other poetry.

THE THIRD CHARACTERISTIC OF Yen Shu's songs could be described as an embracing perspective. Lu Chi 陸機 said of the poet,¹⁴ "He sighs at the passing of the seasons, and is pensive as he regards the complexity of Nature." Everyman to some degree feels the approach of old age when he is made aware of the flight of time, of the evanescence of happiness, of the decline of human affairs, and the poet is more responsive than everyman. The poet also puts his feelings into verse. Where Wan

¹⁴Lu Chi, *Wen fu* 文賦, *Wen hsüan* 文選 (Taiwan: Yi-wen Yin-shu-kuan), 17.1b.

Min-hao dismissed Yen Shu's poems of feeling as "moaning when he was not sick," I would understand them differently. What moves one emotionally need not be some great human tragedy; even the natural sequence of flourishing and decay will suffice to make one feel the sadness of impermanence. And in human terms, the threat of transience makes no distinction between the rich and the poor, the successful and the failures. Likewise the intensity of the poet's reaction to that threat has nothing to do with his station in life, but depends on his sensitivity. Yen Shu's response can be every bit as intense as that of a poet who did not enjoy his privileged position in society. Poets may react similarly, but the tone of their reaction will vary. If you compare Yen Shu's songs with those of Feng Yen-szu 馮延巳 and Ou-yang Hsiu, the two poets most nearly like him in style, the difference is apparent. Feng Yen-szu responds to grief with stoical resolution. Ou-yang Hsiu is exuberant and refuses to be depressed by it, and Yen Shu brings a broad view that puts the unhappiness in perspective.

Let us take a look at a few songs by Yen Shu.

To the tune *Ts'ai-sang tzu* 采桑子 (Picking Mulberry Leaves), (No. 41, p. 93)

<i>All the spring is good for is to make us old.</i>	時光只解催人老
<i>I don't think I'm so very sensitive,</i>	不信多情
<i>But still I always grieve at the parting place</i>	長恨離亭
<i>When tears fall on the spring gown and wine has</i>	滴淚春衫酒易醒
<i>no effect.</i>	

<i>Last night the west wind was sharp in the phoenix</i>	梧桐昨夜西風急
<i>tree,</i>	淡月隴明
<i>The pale moon shone clear.</i>	好夢頻驚
<i>I kept waking up from a dream of her:</i>	何處高樓雁一聲
<i>Above a tall building somewhere, the call of a wild</i>	
<i>goose.</i>	

To the tune *Yeh chin men* 謁金門 (Visiting the Golden Gate), (No. 1, p. 87)

<i>Autumn dew falls</i>	秋露墜
<i>Dripping out the red tears of the southern orchid.</i>	滴盡楚蘭紅淚
<i>Past affairs, the old joys—</i>	往事舊歡何限意
<i>All like a dream.</i>	思量如夢寐

<i>One's face has aged since last year</i>	人貌老于前歲
<i>But breeze and moonlight are just as they were.</i>	風月宛然無異
<i>A guest at the table, cinnamon wine in the glass</i>	座有嘉賓樽有桂
<i>We must not fail to get drunk tonight.</i>	莫辭終夕醉

To the tune *P'o-chen tzu* 破陣子 (Break the Ranks), (No. 5, p. 88)

*On the lake the west wind and slanting sun
The lotus have dropped all their pink petals.
Tiny pearl-buds in the bed of golden chrysan-
themum.
The sea swallow leaves its nest on light wings—
Every year, the same feelings.*

湖上西風斜日
荷花落盡紅英
金菊滿叢珠顆細
海燕辭巢翅羽輕
年年歲歲情

*A cup of the new wine,
A few stanzas of a wild song to listen to.
If we don't get drunk together on this bottle,
Whatever shall we do about time like water
Slipping off into the distance without stopping?*

美酒一杯新熟
高歌數闕堪聽
不向尊前同一醉
可奈光陰似水聲
迢迢去未停

Some of these lines (“All the spring is good for is to make us old”, “When tears fall on the spring gown and wine has no effect”, “Past affairs, the old joys,—/All like a dream”) express feeling. Others invoke something high and far-off (“Above a tall building somewhere, the call of a wild goose”) or invite to uninhibited abandonment (“A guest at the table, cinamon wine in the glass,/We must not fail to get drunk tonight”). On the other hand, there are lines that show acute sensitivity to the transience of things:

*On the lake the west wind and slanting sun
The lotus have dropped all their pink petals.*

*Whatever shall we do about time like water
Slipping off into the distance without stopping?*

But the sadness is tempered by “A cup of the new wine,/A few stanzas of a wild song to listen to.” From these lines we can see that though he was sensitive to the fact of impermanence, he had the courage to face reality and the perspective to accept it.

Feng Yen-szu's attitude toward suffering was simply to bear it with fortitude.

*For long she leans on the rail, but he does not
appear.
With a bit of silk she wipes her tears, and keeps
on thinking.*

一晌凭闌人不見
鮫綃掩淚思量遍

To the tune *Ch'üen t'a chih* 鶻踏枝
(Magpie on the Branch), No. 1, p. 234¹⁵

*Watching the flowers every day, I drink too much;
It's all the same to me the mirrored face is thin.*

舊日花前常病酒
敢辭鏡裏朱顏瘦

(same tune), No. 2, p. 234

¹⁵References for Feng Yen-szu are to Lin Ta-ch'un (hsüeh ku-chi, 1956).
林大椿, *T'ang Wu-tai tz'u* 唐五代詞 (Peking: Wen-

Ou-yang Hsiu's unconcern in the face of painful reality is only playful high spirits:

*After all your drinking and scheming you've got
spring back—* 尊前百計得春歸
莫爲傷春歌黛蹙

Don't knit your brows now lamenting spring.

To the tune *Yü lou-ch'un* 玉樓春
(Spring in the House of Jade), No. 86, p. 134

*Watch until all of Loyang's blossoms fall,
Then you can easily bid spring farewell.* 直須看盡洛城花
始共春風容易別

(same tune, No. 75, p. 132)

We can see how Yen Shu finds in his broad perspective a way of coping; it is a perfect demonstration of the character and self-discipline of an intellectual poet. There are no shrill cries in his songs, no despair. Emotion in the *Chu-yü tz'u* is only a delicate shading on the smooth surface of the pearls and jade, a nuance of color that adds to the viewer's appreciation and enjoyment, a special beauty that is part of Yen Shu's poetry.

THE FOURTH CHARACTERISTIC OF Yen Shu's songs involves something generally appreciated by his readers, his ability to describe luxury without being vulgar and to write about love affairs without seeming either coarse or frivolous. Critics have frequently remarked on these qualities. For example, Wu Ch'u-hou 吳處厚 (late 11th century) wrote,¹⁶

Although His Excellency Yen Yuan-hsien (Yen Shu) came from the country, he was a natural aristocrat in letters. On reading the lines in Li Ch'ing-sun 李慶孫's "Song of the Rich Man"

*Fine bound songbooks written in letters of gold
Trees and flowers named on plaques of jade,*

he commented, "This is the beggar's view, someone with no firsthand knowledge of upper class life. When I write on such subjects, I never directly mention gold or jade, brocade or embroidery. I just speak of their effects. For instance,

*On the path by the pavilion the willow flowers are past,
Between the curtains the swallows fly.*¹⁷

*In the pear blossom park the spreading moonlight
Across the willow-fluff pond the flowing wind*¹⁸

¹⁶Wu Ch'u-hou 吳處厚, *Ch'ing-hsiang tsa-chi* 青箱雜記 (*Pai hai* 稗海, Taiwan: 1968, Hsin-huan Shu-chü photoreprint of Chen-lu-t'ang 振鸞堂 ed.) 5.1b-2a. in *Yen Yuan-hsien i-wen* 晏元獻遺文 (v. 17 of *Sung erh-shih chia chi* 宋二十家集)

¹⁸*Ibid.* 7b "Untitled Poem" 無題.

¹⁷This couplet is not in any of the poems collected

Do you think such scenes exist for the poor?"

Chang Shun-min 張舜民 (late 11th century) tells the following anecdote:¹⁹

When Liu San-pien (Liu Yung 柳永) had offended the Emperor Jen-tsung by one of his songs, the Ministry of Civil Appointments would not give him a promotion. Dissatisfied, San-pien went to the office to complain. Minister Yen said, "Sir, you write songs?" San-pien said, "Like your Excellency, I too write songs." The Minister said, "I may write songs, but I never wrote such a line as 'Languidly holding her needlework she nestles close to him'." Whereupon Liu withdrew.

These anecdotes show Yen Shu's dislike of both vulgarity and impropriety. These he avoided by describing the spirit, not external appearance.

Generally speaking, there are two ways of reacting to experience, one simply registers the perceptions of the senses and is content with external appearances, the other, reacting through the mind, penetrates through superficial appearances to the underlying essentials of a situation. If someone enters a rich man's house and simply records what his senses tell him, then it will be the gold and jade, the brocade and embroidery that he sets down. But if he reacts through his mind, then what he perceives will be the aura of wealth, and this will have to be conveyed more indirectly. In the matter of sensuality, two people going hand in hand can be reported in terms of their physical contact, or, to the other kind of perception, the feeling of closeness is what matters. Of course, the feeling of affluence and luxury in the first case comes initially from the visible objects of luxury and in the second it is the evidence of physical contact that lets one conceive the intimacy between the couple. But for the one who perceives essences, the evidence of the senses is unimportant except as intermediary. Like Chuang Tzu, when you catch the fish you can forget the net, and when you have the idea you can forget the words. Once you have grasped the essence of a situation, you are no longer aware of the evidence provided by the senses; it is a spontaneous process, not something deliberately contrived. Yen Shu avoided the words "gold" and "jade," not as a matter of policy, as the anecdote would seem to suggest, but because his reaction was of the mind and led him to the essentials underlying appearance.

Here are some examples of how he presented a setting of luxury in his songs:

<i>A swallow passes by the double curtains of the little hall,</i>	小閣重簾有燕過
<i>Late pink petals fall on the courtyard grass;</i>	晚花紅片落庭莎
<i>Reflection of a curving bannister in the cool water.</i>	曲欄干影入涼波
To the tune <i>Huan hsi sha</i> 浣溪沙	
(Sands of the Washing Stream), No. 12, p. 88	

<i>Green leaves hide the orioles</i>	翠葉藏鶯
<i>Red curtains keep out the swallows</i>	朱簾隔燕

¹⁹Chang Shun-min 張舜民, *Hua-man lu* 畫墁錄 (vol. 2 of *Pai-hai*) 1.30b.

*Incense from the burner slowly pursues twisting
gossamer.* 爐香靜逐遊絲轉

To the tune *T'a so hsing* 踏莎行
(Treading on the Sedge), No. 82, p. 99

*The red curtain half lowered, incense burned out.
A second-month east wind brings an urgent
message to the willow.* 朱簾半下香銷印
二月東風催柳信
琵琶旁半且尋思

Beside her lute, lost in thought— 鸚鵡前頭休借問

Don't ask in front of the parrot.

To the tune *Mu-lan-hua* 木蘭花
(Magnolia Flower), No. 60, p. 96

In all of these passages Yen Shu manages to suggest a setting of luxury without flaunting the appurtenances of wealth. "You know this is not someone living in a three-family village," as Ch'ao Pu-chih 晁補之 put it.²⁰

*Right now I would like to be
A thousand-foot strand of gossamer
To hold fast the Moving Cloud.* 此時拚作
千尺游絲
惹住朝雲

To the tune *Su chung-ch'ing* 訴衷情
(Telling How I feel), No. 66, p. 97

*Green liquor in the cup, and someone she loves
Always together beneath the flowers, in the moon-
light.* 樽中綠醕意中人
花朝月下長相見

To the tune *T'a so hsing* 踏莎行
(Treading the Sedge), No. 81, p. 96

*So much love beyond telling
Is written into the words of the song—
This feeling a thousand thousand times.* 多少襟懷言不盡
寫向蠻牋曲調中
此情千萬重

To the tune *P'o-chen tzu* 破陣子
(Breaks the Ranks), No. 3, p. 88

It is lines like these which create the feeling of sensuality without the impropriety of Liu Yung's "languidly holding her needlework she nestles close to him" or "She wants to draw the fragrant curtain and talk of love." This is because the feelings Yen Shu evokes are those of real love, not simply erotic dalliance. Obviously his verse is never indecent, and although his worldly position and circumstances undoubtedly played some part in determining his standards of taste, his natural delicacy and refinement kept him from writing vulgar or obscene verse. Wan Min-hao was surely less than generous in asserting that he was only inhibited by what others might say.

²⁰Ch'ao Pu-chih 晁補之, quoted in Wu Ts'eng *ts'ung-pien* 詞話叢編, vol. 1) 16.1a.
吳曾, *Neng-kai-chai man lu* 能改齋漫錄 (*Tz'u hua*

In Yen Shu's "Pearls and Jade" are a certain number of congratulatory songs which provide good material for readers who are looking for something to criticize. It is a kind of verse which easily becomes empty and fatuous. As a minister of state, Yen Shu naturally had to write poems to order on social occasions, and these are certainly not among his best poems. However, compared with the congratulatory songs written by his contemporaries, Yen Shu's have some redeeming features. As in his other songs, he does not descend to the obvious; he manages to introduce some subtlety, and conveys a feeling rather than just presenting the subject's excellencies for our admiration. He offers his congratulations soberly and with restraint, most often against a background of natural description, about which he retains his poet's sensitivity. The result is congratulatory poetry that is refined and graceful, but which still manages to be fresh and original. For example, to the tune *Tiéh lien hua* 蝶戀花 (Butterfly Loves Flowers) (No. 107, p. 103)

<i>Purple chrysanthemums begin to bloom when Rose of Sharon declines.</i>	紫菊初生朱槿墜 月好風清
<i>The moon is nice, the breeze fresh.</i>	漸有中秋意
<i>Gradually the feel of full autumn—</i>	更漏乍長天似水
<i>The nightwatches grow longer, the sky is like water.</i>	銀屏展盡遙山翠 繡幕卷波香引穗
<i>The silver screen is spread to show the green of far- off hills.</i>	急管繁絃 共愛人間瑞
<i>The embroidered curtain rolled in waves, the incense ash grows,</i>	滿酌玉盃繁舞袂 南春祝壽千千歲
<i>Quick pipes, massed strings.</i>	
<i>Everyone loves this old man.</i>	
<i>Fill the jade cups full, whirl dancing sleeves.</i>	
<i>The southern spring congratulates his long, long life.</i>	

Or one celebrating the Emperor, to the tune *Fu ni-shang* 拂霓裳 (Brushing the Rainbow Robe) (No. 114, p. 105)

<i>We smile to see the autumn sky</i>	笑秋天
<i>Evening lotus with round strung dew-pearls,</i>	晚荷花綴露珠圓
<i>The breeze, the sun are nice.</i>	風日好
<i>Several rows of new geese stuck onto the cold mist cloud.</i>	數行新雁貼寒烟 銀簧調脆管
<i>On silver reeds blow crisp woodwind notes,</i>	瓊柱撥清絃
<i>On jasper frets pluck clear strings.</i>	捧觥船
<i>We offer a flowing bowl,</i>	一聲聲齊唱太平年
<i>With one voice sing of this age of peace.</i>	

Neither of these songs is particularly profound or subtle, but they are not wholly without merit in rousing a response in the reader. When one thinks how many happy occasions in a lifetime need celebrating, one can hardly disparage all such songs as

vulgar or common.

ONE FINAL POINT I WOULD LIKE to make. There is one song in the "Pearls and Jade" that stands out as being in a different style from the others. It is to the tune *Shan t'ing liu* 山亭柳 (Mountain Pavilion Willow) and carries the subtitle "To a Singer 贈歌者" (No. 123, p. 106):

<i>She hails from Ch'in in the west</i>	家住西秦
<i>And takes her chances with the skills she has.</i>	賭博藝隨身
<i>In the entertainment world</i>	花柳上
<i>She ranked with the best.</i>	鬪尖新
<i>Sometimes she equaled Nien-nu's virtuosity</i>	偶學念奴聲調
<i>And on occasion could stop the marching clouds.</i>	有時高遏行雲
<i>Her reward—any amount of Shu brocade;</i>	蜀錦纏頭無數
<i>Her efforts were not wasted.</i>	不負辛勤
<i>For some years now she's worked the capital road</i>	數年來往咸京道
<i>Wearing out her soul for heeltaps and poor fare.</i>	殘盃冷炙謾消魂
<i>To whom can she confide</i>	衷腸事
<i>Her heart's pain?</i>	託何人
<i>If a real connoisseur would choose her</i>	若有知音見採
<i>She would willingly sing the Spring Song to the</i>	不辭徧唱陽春
<i>end.</i>	一曲當筵落淚
<i>A song at the banquet, and her tears fall</i>	重掩羅巾
<i>She keeps wiping her eyes on a silken kerchief.</i>	

In all his other songs Yen Shu's style is smooth and placid, but this one throughout is written with strong feeling. None of his songs has a subtitle, except this one, which is carefully labeled "To a Singer." It is interesting that one song should be exceptional in two different ways, and some explanation seems called for. First we need to amplify a bit what has already been said about Yen Shu's disposition and his career. The quiet elegance and the balanced perspective that appear in his songs show clearly the rationality which he cultivated: everything tranquil and under control. But his biographer mentions another side of his character: "He was forceful and incisive, and in his assignments as prefectural governor the officers and people were somewhat fearful of his temper and impatience."²¹ Ou-yang Hsiu uses the same terms "forceful and incisive" *kang chien* 剛簡 to characterize him,²² and the Ssu-k'u 四庫 editors²³ echo it with "Yen Shu was endowed with a forceful and rugged disposition, but his written style was particularly graceful and lovely." To keep a forceful and rugged disposition in check, Yen Shu certainly must have exercised self-control, and the "graceful and lovely" language of his songs is the result of a forceful

²¹ *Sung shih* 6.3b.

p. 74.

²² Ou-yang Hsiu 歐陽修, *Ou-yang Wen-chung-kung chi* 歐陽文忠公集. (Kuo-hsueh chi-pen ts'ung-shu ed.)

²³ *Sus-k'u tsung-mu t'i-yao* (Liao-hai Shu-she ed.) 113.1a.

nature showing through the rational control, conflicting elements held in balance, a complex amalgam. Consequently they can be limpid without being monotonous, smooth without being insipid.

Let me suggest an analogy: White sunlight contains the seven colors of the spectrum, and when it passes through a prism, the colors appear. The complexity of Yen Shu's character likewise was revealed only under special circumstances. When he was involved in difficulties, he could be provoked to the point where the forceful, rugged component of his nature appeared. His biography tells a story²⁴ about the time he was Assistant Court Commissar of Military Affairs. He had memorialized against making Chang Ch'i 張耆 Commissar, against the wishes of the Empress Dowager. He was ordered to follow her to the palace. His servant was late in bringing his ivory tablet of office, and Yen Shu struck the servant with the tablet, breaking his teeth. Another anecdote²⁵ tells how Chang Hsien 張先, a fellow poet-official, insisted on discussing business in Yen Shu's home. Yen Shu would not respond to his remarks and finally flushed and said in his southern accent, "I got you an appointment because you could write 'There's nothing so strong as love',²⁶ but now you come here to talk business."

Once we have recognized these elements of forcefulness and irritability in Yen Shu's character, we can see that there is nothing to be surprised at in the passionate complaint of the "Mountain Pavilion Willow" song. Although the subtitle specifically says, "For a Singer," Cheng Ch'ien suggested that with it Yen Shu is "Borrowing a winecup from someone else to drown his own sorrows."²⁷ He also comments, "Since the song mentions 'Ch'in in the west' and the 'capital at Hsien,' it should date from the time he was in charge of the Yung-hsing District, when he was over sixty and had long been out of the court and found it hard not to be depressed." This is very perceptive. From the time Yen Shu was recommended as a child prodigy at age fourteen and was appointed Collator by Shen-tsung until he was dismissed as minister when he was fifty-four, his career was as successful as one could wish. But during the nearly ten years after his dismissal until his death in 1055 he was given provincial assignments, of which the one in Yung-hsing was the farthest away from the court. The reason for his dismissal, according to the *Sung History*²⁸ was an accusation that he failed to mention in the grave inscription he was ordered to write for the Imperial Concubine Li the fact that she was the real mother of the Emperor Jen-tsung. Further, that he had used conscripts to repair a building for his personal profit. But, in the words of the *Sung History*, "Since the Empress Dowager Chang-hsien was ruling, Shu did not dare state the truth (that she was not the Emperor's real mother), and it was one of the perquisites of a Minister to make use of conscript labor for private purposes. Contemporaries felt that Shu was not at fault."

Having been dismissed for offences for which he was not to blame and then to be left in exile for such a long time were frustrations which prompted him to reveal the forceful, irritable side of his character in a song. But this song has another

²⁴*Sung shih* 6.3b, 6.2a.

Clump of Flowers," No. 22, p. 61.

²⁵*Hua-man lu* 1.33a-b.

²⁷Cheng Ch'ien 鄭燾, *Tz'u hsüan* 詞選, p. 24.

²⁶A line from Chang Hsien's song to the tune "A

²⁸*Sung shih* 6.3a.

peculiarity already noted: it is "For a Singer." If, as seems likely, the song expresses his own feelings during his later years of exile, why did he "borrow someone else's winecup to drown his own sorrows" and give the song this subtitle? It seems to me that this can be accounted for as another sign of Yen Shu's rational self-control. Wang Kuo-wei quoted Nietzsche, "The literature I love is all written in blood."²⁹ Some authors, having written in their own fresh blood, want to show you the still dripping wound. Others prefer to keep the wound out of sight and make up a story to account for the painful event. This is the characteristic method of the intellectual poet. He prefers to maintain a distance from his emotion, and that is why Yen Shu chose to write "For a Singer," separating himself from his feelings by attributing them to someone else; so that he could write without inhibition.

At the same time, I do not believe that this subtitle is a convention, something concocted for the purpose; there must have been a singer. The singer's situation elicited a response in the poet, and his long-harbored feelings were released by it.

This sort of encounter is not something that can be arranged, and so it is not easy to find in Yen Shu's songs another that is comparably unrestrained in expression, for such a perfect occasion may never have happened again. And since he was not one to flaunt his wounds without such a disguise, the fact that this uncharacteristic poem is unique in his collection is further confirmation that he was indeed an intellectual poet.

In conclusion I would like to imitate Wang Kuo-wei by quoting a *tz'u* poet's own verse as a critical evaluation of his poetry. Yen Shu's songs have a touch of melancholy under the placid surface, the sharp clarity of the autumn sun along with the spring sun's mild warmth; this and the freshness and appropriateness of his images make one think of his lines:

<i>In the frost, under the moon</i>	霜前月下
<i>The slanting pinks, pale petals</i>	斜紅淡蕊
<i>Fresh and charming enough to bring back spring.</i>	明媚欲回春
To the tune <i>Shao nien yu</i> 少年游	
(Youthful Pleasures), No. 50, p. 94	

²⁹Jen-chien *tz'u-hua*, p. 198.