

Classic Poetry Series

Bai Juyi
- poems -

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Bai Juyi(772–846)

Bai Juyi (pinyin: Bái Juyì; Wade-Giles: Po Chü-i) was a Chinese poet of the Tang dynasty. Many of his poems concern his career or observations made as a government official, including as governor of three different provinces. Bai Juyi was also renowned in Japan. Burton Watson says of Bai Juyi: "he worked to develop a style that was simple and easy to understand, and posterity has requited his efforts by making him one of the most well-loved and widely read of all Chinese poets, both in his native land and in the other countries of the East that participate in the appreciation of Chinese culture. He also, thanks to the translations and biographical studies by Arthur Waley, one of the most accessible to English readers". Today the fame of Bai Juyi is worldwide.

Name variants

Names

Pinyin: Bǎi Juyì or Bái Juyì

Wade-Giles: Pǎi Chü-i or Pai Chü-i

Zì : 乐天

Hào : 香山居士

Zuìyín Xiansheng

Shì Wén (hence referred

to as Bái Wéngōng)

Bai Juyi often referred to himself in life as Letian, the older English transcription version being Lo-t'ien, meaning something like "happy-go-lucky". Later in life, he referred to himself as the Hermit of Xiangshan.

Life

Bai Juyi lived during the Middle Tang period. This was a period of rebuilding and recovery for the Tang Empire, following the An Shi Rebellion, and following the poetically flourishing era famous for Li Bo (701-762), Wang Wei (701-761), and Du Fu (712-770). Bai Juyi lived through the reign of eight or nine emperors,

being born in the Dali regnal era (766-779) of Emperor Daizong of Tang. He had a long and successful career both as a government official and a poet, although these two facets of his career seemed to have come in conflict with each other at certain points. Bai Juyi was also a devoted Chan Buddhist.

Birth and childhood

Bai Juyi was born in 772, in Taiyuan, Shanxi, which was then a few miles from location of the modern city. Although he was in Zhengyang, Henan for most of his childhood. His family was poor but scholarly, his father being an Assistant Department Magistrate of the second-class. At the age of ten he was sent away from his family to avoid a war that broke out in the north of China, and went to live with relatives in the area known as Jiangnan, more specifically Xuzhou.

Early career

Bai Juyi's official career was initially successful. He passed the jinshi examinations in 800. Bai Juyi may have taken up residence in the western capital city of Chang'an, in 801. Not long after this, Bai Juyi and formed a long friendship with a scholar Yuan Zhen. Bai Juyi's father died in 804, and the young Bai spent the traditional period of retirement mourning the death of his parent, which he did along the Wei River, near to the capital. 806 was the first full year of the reign of Emperor Xianzong of Tang. Also, 806 was the Bai Juyi was appointed to a minor post as a government official, at Zhouzhi, which was not far from the Chang'an (and also in Shaanxi province). He was made a member (scholar) of the Hanlin Academy, in 807, and Reminder of the Left from 807 until 815, except in 811 when his mother died. He spent the traditional three year mourning period again along the Wei River, and returned to court in the winter of 814, where he held the title of Assistant Secretary to the Prince's Tutor. It was not a high ranking position, but nevertheless one which he was soon to lose.

Exile

While serving as a minor palace official, 814, Bei Juyi managed to get himself in official trouble. He made a few enemies at court and with certain individuals in other positions. It was partly his written works which lead him into trouble. He wrote two long memorials, translated by Arthur Waley as "On Stopping the War", regarding what he considered to be an overly lengthy campaign against a minor group of Tatars; and he wrote a series of poems, in which he satirized the actions of greedy officials and highlighting the sufferings of the common folk.

At this time, one of the post-An Lushan warlords (jiedushi), Wu Yuanji in Henan,

had seized control of Zhangyi Circuit (centered in Zhumadian), an act for which he sought reconciliation with the imperial government, trying to get an imperial pardon as a necessary prerequisite. Despite the intercession of influential friends, Wu was denied, thus officially putting him in the position of rebellion. Still seeking a pardon, Wu turned to assassination, blaming the Prime Minister (another Wu, Wu Yuanheng) and other officials: the imperial court generally began by dawn, requiring the ministers to rise early in order to attend in a timely manner; and, on July 13, 815, before dawn, the Tang Prime Minister Wu Yuanheng was set to go to the palace for a meeting with Emperor Xianzong. As he left his house, arrows were fired at his retinue. His servants all fled, and the assassins seized Wu Yuanheng and his horse, and then decapitated him, taking his head with them. The assassins also attacked another official who favored the campaign against the rebellious warlords, Pei Du, but was unable to kill him. The people at the capital were shocked and there was turmoil, with officials refusing to leave their personal residences until after dawn.

In this context, Bai Juyi overstepped his minor position by memorializing the emperor. As Assistant Secretary to the Prince's Tutor, Bai's memorial was a breach of protocol — he should have waited for those of censorial authority to take the lead before offering his own criticism. This was not the only charge which his opponents used against him. His mother had died, apparently caused by falling into a well while looking at some flowers, and two poems written by Bai Juyi — the titles of which Waley translates as "In Praise of Flowers" and "The New Well" — were used against him as a sign of lack of Filial Piety, one of the Confucian ideals. The result was exile: Bai Juyi was demoted to the rank of Sub-Prefect and banished from the court and the capital city to Jiujiang, then known as Xun Yang on the southern shores of the Yangtze River in northwest Jiangxi Province, China. After three years he was sent as Governor of a remote place in Sichuan. At the time, the main travel route there was up the Yangzi River. This trip allowed Bai Juyi a few days to visit his friend Yuan Zhen, who was also in exile and with whom he explored the rock caves located at Yichang. Bai Juyi was delighted by the flowers and trees for which his new location was noted. In 819, he was recalled back to the capital, ending his exile.

Return to the capital and a new emperor

In 819, Bai Juyi was recalled to the capital and given the position of second-class Assistant Secretary. In 821, China got a new emperor, Muzong. After succeeding to the throne, Muzong spent his time feasting and heavily drinking, and neglecting his duties as emperor. Meanwhile, the temporarily subdued regional military governors (jiedushi) began to challenge the central Tang government, leading to the new de facto independence of three circuits north of the Yellow

River, which had been previously subdued by Emperor Xianzong. Furthermore, Muzong's administration was characterized by massive corruption. Again, Bai Juyi wrote a series of memorials in remonstrance.

As Governor of Hangzhou

Again, Bai Juyi was sent away from the court and the capital, but this time to the important position of the thriving town of Hangzhou, which was at the southern terminus of the Grand Canal and located in the scenic neighborhood of West Lake. Fortunately for their friendship, Yuan Zhen at the time was serving an assignment in nearby Ningbo, also in what is today Zhejiang, so the two could occasionally get together, at least until Bai Juyi's term as Governor expired.

As governor of Hangzhou Bai Juyi realised that the farmland nearby depended on the water of West Lake, but due to the negligence of previous governors, the old dike had collapsed, and the lake so dried out that the local farmers were suffering from severe drought. He ordered the construction of a stronger and taller dike, with a dam to control the flow of water, thus providing water for irrigation and so relieving the drought and improving the livelihood of the local people over the following years. Bai Juyi used his leisure time to enjoy the beauty of West Lake, visiting the lake almost every day. He ordered the construction of a causeway connecting Broken Bridge with Solitary Hill to allow walking on foot, instead of requiring the services of a boat. He then planted trees along the dike, making it a beautiful landmark. Afterwards, this causeway was named Bai Causeway, in Bai Juyi's honour.

Life Near Luoyang

In 824, Bai Juyi's commission as governor expired, and he received the nominal rank of Imperial Tutor, which provided more in the way of official salary than official duties, and he relocated his household to a suburb of the "eastern capital", Luoyang. At this time, Luoyang was known as the 'Eastern Capital' of the empire and was a major metropolis with a population of around one million, and a reputation as the "cultural capital", as opposed to the more politically-oriented capital of Chang'an.

Governor of Suzhou

In 825, and fifty-three years old, Bai Juyi was given the position of Governor (or Prefect) of Suzhou, on the lower reaches of the Yangtze River and on the shores of Taihu Lake. For the first two years he enjoyed himself with feasts and picnic outings, but after a couple of years he became ill, and he was forced into a

period of retirement.

Later Career

After his time as Prefect of Hangzhou (822-824) and then Suzhou (825-827), Bai Juyi returned to the capital. He then served in various official posts in the capital, and then again as prefect/governor, this time of Henan province, which was the province in which Luoyang was part of. It was in Henan that his first son was born, though only to die prematurely the next year; and, in 831 Yuan Zhen died. For the next thirteen years, Bai Juyi continued to hold various nominal posts, but actually lived in retirement.

Retirement

In 832, Bai Juyi repaired an unused part of the Xiangshan Monastery, at Longmen, about 7.5 miles south of Luoyang. Bai Juyi moved to this location, and began to refer to himself as the "Hermit of Xianshang". This area, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is famous for its tens of thousands of statues of Buddha and his disciples carved out of the rock. In 839, he experienced a paralytic attack, losing the use of his left leg, and became a bedridden invalid for several months. After his partial recovery, he spent his final years arranging his Collected Works, which he presented to the main monasteries of those localities in which he had spent time.

Death

In 846, Bai Juyi died, leaving instructions for a simple burial in a grave at the monastery, with a plain style funeral, and not to have a posthumous title conferred upon him. He has a tomb monument, in Longmen, situated on Xiangshan, across the Yi River from the Longmen cave temples in the vicinity of Luoyang, Henan. It is a circular mound of earth 4 meters high, 52 meters in circumference, and with a 2.80 meter high Monument inscribed "Bai Juyi".

Works

Bai Juyi has been known for his plain, direct, and easily comprehensible style of verse, as well as for his social and political criticism. Besides his surviving poems, several letters and essays are also extant.

History

One of the most prolific of the Tang poets, Bai Juyi wrote over 2,800 poems,

which he had copied and distributed to ensure their survival. They are notable for their relative accessibility: it is said that he would rewrite any part of a poem if one of his servants was unable to understand it. The accessibility of Bai Juyi's poems made them extremely popular in his lifetime, in both China and Japan, and they continue to be read in these countries today.

Famous Poems

Two of his most famous works are the long narrative poems *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, which tells the story of Yang Guifei, and *The Song of the Pipa Player*. Like Du Fu, he had a strong sense of social responsibility and is well known for his satirical poems, such as *The Elderly Charcoal Seller*.

Bai Juyi also wrote intensely romantic poems to fellow officials with whom he studied and traveled. These speak of sharing wine, sleeping together, and viewing the moon and mountains. One friend, Yu Shunzhi, sent Bai a bolt of cloth as a gift from a far-off posting, and Bai Juyi debated on how best to use the precious material:

*About to cut it to make a mattress,
pitying the breaking of the leaves;
about to cut it to make a bag,
pitying the dividing of the flowers.
It is better to sew it,
making a coverlet of joined delight;
I think of you as if I'm with you,
day or night.*

Technical Virtuosity

Bai Juyi was known for his interest in the old yuefu form of poetry, which was a typical form of Han poetry, namely folk ballad verses, collected or written by the Music Bureau. These were often a form of social protest. And, in fact, writing poetry to promote social progress was explicitly one of his objectives. He is also known for his well-written poems in the regulated verse style.

A Foresaken Garden

I enter the court
Through the middle gate—
And my sleeve is wet with tears.

The flowers still grow
In the courtyard,
Though two springs have fled
Since last their master came.

The windows, porch, and bamboo screen
Are just as they always were,
But at the entrance to the house
Someone is missing—
You!

Bai Juyi

A Lament For My Son, Ts'Ui

You were a pearl
In the palm of my hand,
My tiny baby boy.

Why is it that I,
A white-haired man of three-score years,
Am left behind,
And you, a child of three,
Must by Heaven's silent, stern decree,
Precede me
To that strange and far-off land
Of death?

My heart is wounded sorely,
But not with a blade of steel;
My old eyes are dimmed and dull,
But not with the dust of earth.

These arms
That held you closely to my breast
Are empty now,
And I mourn, as did Teng Yu of old,
My only son.

Bai Juyi

A Song Of The Palace.

Her tears are spent, but no dreams come.
She can hear the others singing through the night.
She has lost his love. Alone with her beauty,
She leans till dawn on her incense-pillow.

Bai Juyi

A Suggestion To My Friend, Liu.

There's a gleam of green in an old bottle,
There's a stir of red in the quiet stove,
There's a feeling of snow in the dusk outside --
What about a cup of wine inside?

Bai Juyi

A Visit To Qiantang Lake In Spring

Gushan temple north Jiating west
Water surface first flat cloud base low
Several places early orioles fight warm tree
Every house new swallows peck spring mud
Disordered flowers gradually almost confuse person eye
Light grass able hide horse hoof
Most love lake east go not enough
Green poplar shade in white sand causeway Gushan Temple is to the north,
Jiating pavilion west,
The water's surface now is calm, the bottom of the clouds low.
In several places, the first orioles are fighting in warm trees,
By every house new swallows peck at spring mud.
Disordered flowers have grown almost enough to confuse the eye,
Bright grass is able now to hide the hooves of horses.
I most love the east of the lake, I cannot come often enough
Within the shade of green poplars on White Sand Embankment.

Bai Juyi

After Collecting The Autumn Taxes

From my high castle I look at the town below
Where the natives of Pa cluster like a swarm of flies.
How can I govern these people and lead them aright?
I cannot even understand what they say.
But at least I am glad, now that the taxes are in,
To learn that in my province there is no discontent.
I fear its prosperity is not due to me
And was only caused by the year's abundant crops,
The papers that lie on my desk are simple and few;
My house by the moat is leisurely and still.
In the autumn rain the berries fall from the eaves;
At the evening bell the birds return to the wood.
A broken sunlight quavers over the southern porch
Where I lie on my couch abandoned of idleness.

Bai Juyi

After Lunch

After eating lunch, I feel so sleepy.
Waking later, I sip two bowls of tea,

then notice shadows aslant, the sun
already low in the southwest again.

Joyful people resent fleeting days.
Sad ones can't bear the slow yers.

It's those with no joy and no sorrow—
they trust whatever this life brings.

Bai Juyi

After Passing The Examination

For ten years I never left my books;
I went up ... and won unmerited praise.
My high place I do not much prize;
The joy of my parents will first make me proud.
Fellow students, six or seven men,
See me off as I leave the City gate.
My covered couch is ready to drive away;
Flutes and strings blend their parting tune.
Hopes achieved dull the pains of parting;
Fumes of wine shorten the long road ...
Shod with wings is the horse of him who rides
On a Spring day the road that leads to home.

Bai Juyi

An Invitation To Mr Liu

Green ant new unstrained beer
Red clay small fire stove
Evening come sky almost snow
Can drink one cup not?
Green lees of beer that's newly brewed,
A little stove of red clay burns.
As evening comes, the sky's about to snow,
Can you drink one cup with me?

Bai Juyi

At The End Of Spring

The flower of the pear-tree gathers and turns to fruit;
The swallows' eggs have hatched into young birds.
When the Seasons' changes thus confront the mind
What comfort can the Doctrine of Tao give?
It will teach me to watch the days and months fly
Without grieving that Youth slips away;
If the Fleeting World is but a long dream,
It does not matter whether one is young or old.
But ever since the day that my friend left my side
And has lived in exile in the City of Chiang-ling,
There is one wish I cannot quite destroy:
That from time to time we may chance to meet again.

Bai Juyi

Autumn Cold

here's my snowy crown
 time's tinted decrepitude
there's the frost in the courtyard
 autumn's glittery breath
now I'm sick and just watching my wife
 pick cure-alls
then I'm frozen waiting for the maid
 to comb my hair
without the body
 what use fame?
worldly things
 I've put aside
tranquilly
 I delve my heart
determined now
 to learn from Empty Boats!

Bai Juyi

Autumn Thoughts, Sent Far Away

We share all these disappointments of failing
autumn a thousand miles apart. This is where

autumn wind easily plunders courtyard trees,
but the sorrows of distance never scatter away.

Swallow shadows shake out homeward wings.
Orchid scents thin, drifting from old thickets.

These lovely seasons and fragrant years falling
lonely away— we share such emptiness here.

Bai Juyi

Drunk Again

Last year, when I lay sick,
I vowed
I'd never touch a drop again
As long as I should live.

But who could know
Last year
What this year's spring would bring ?

And here I am,
Coming home from old Liu's house
As drunk as I can be!

Bai Juyi

Eating Bamboo Shoots

My new province is a land of bamboo-groves:
Their shoots in spring fill the valleys and hills.
The mountain woodman cuts an armful of them
And brings them down to sell at the early market.
Things are cheap in proportion as they are common;
For two farthings, I buy a whole bundle.
I put the shoots in a great earthen pot
And heat them up along with boiling rice.
The purple nodules broken – like an old brocade;
The white skin opened – like new pearls.
Now every day I eat them recklessly;
For a long time I have not touched meat.
All the time I was living at Lo-yang
They could not give me enough to suit my taste,
Now I can have as many shoots as I please;
For each breath of the south-wind makes a new bamboo

Bai Juyi

Enjoying Pine And Bamboo

I treasure what front eaves face
and all that north windows frame.

Bamboo winds lavish out windows,
pine colors exquisite beyond eaves,

I gather it all into isolate mystery,
thoughts fading into their source.

Others may feel nothing in all this,
but it's perfectly open to me now:

such kindred natures need share
neither root nor form nor gesture.

Bai Juyi

Escorting Candidates To The Examination Hall

At dawn I rode to escort the Doctors of Art;
In the eastern quarter the sky was still grey.
I said to myself, 'You have started far too soon,'
But horses and coaches already thronged the road.
High and low the riders' torches bobbed;
Muffled or loud, the watchman's drum beat.
Riders, when I see you prick
To your early levee, pity fills my heart.
When the sun rises and the hot dust flies
And the creatures of earth resume their great strife,
You, with your striving, what shall you each seek?
Profit and fame, for that is all your care.
But I, you courtiers, rise from my bed at noon
And live idly in the city of Ch'ang-an.
Spring is deep and my term of office spent;
Day by day my thoughts go back to the hills.

Bai Juyi

Feelings On Watching The Moon

Time hard year famine life land empty
Brothers live abroad each east west
Fields gardens few fall shield spear after
Bone flesh flow apart road road on
Hang shadow separate like 10,000 li goose
Leave root apart rise 9 autumn dishevelled
Together look bright moon should fall tear
One night home heart 5 place alike The times are hard: a year of famine has
emptied the fields,
My brothers live abroad- scattered west and east.
Now fields and gardens are scarcely seen after the fighting,
Family members wander, scattered on the road.
Attached to shadows, like geese ten thousand li apart,
Or roots uplifted into September's autumn air.
We look together at the bright moon, and then the tears should fall,
This night, our wish for home can make five places one.

Bai Juyi

Fishing In The Wei River

In waters still as a burnished mirror's face,
In the depths of Wei, carp and grayling swim.
Idly I come with my bamboo fishing-rod
And hang my hook by the banks of Wei stream.
A gentle wind blows on my fishing-gear
Softly shaking my ten feet of line.
Though my body sits waiting for fish to come,
My heart has wandered to the Land of Nothingness.
Long ago a white-headed man
Also fished at the same river's side;
A hooker of men, not a hooker of fish,
At seventy years, he caught Wen Wang.
But I, when I come to cast my hook in the stream,
Have no thought either of fish or men.
Lacking the skill to capture either prey,
I can only bask in the autumn water's light.
When I tire of this, my fishing also stops;
I go to my home and drink my cup of wine.□

Bai Juyi

Flower No Flower

Flower no flower
mist no mist

arrives at midnight
and leaves at dawn

arrives like a spring dream – how many times
leaves like a morning cloud – nowhere to find

Bai Juyi

Going Alone To Spend A Night At The Hsien-Yu Temple

The crane from the shore standing at the top of the steps;
The moon on the pool seen at the open door;
Where these are, I made my lodging-place
And for two nights could not turn away.
I am glad I chanced on a place so lonely and still
With no companion to drag me early home.
Now that I have tasted the joy of being alone
I will never again come with a friend at my side.

Bai Juyi

Golden Bells

When I was almost forty

I had a daughter whose name was Golden Bells.

Now it is just a year since she was born;

She is learning to sit and cannot yet talk.

Ashamed—to find that I have not a sage's heart:

Henceforward I am tied to things outside myself:

My only reward—the pleasure I am getting now.

If I am spared the grief of her dying young,

Then I shall have the trouble of getting her married.

My plan for retiring and going back to the hills

Must now be postponed for fifteen years!

Bai Juyi

Grass

Part part plain on grass
One year one wither flourish
Prairie fire burn not destroy
Spring wind blow again life
Distant fragrance invade old path
Clear emerald meet ruined town
Again see off noble friend go
Crowded full parting feeling
The grass is spreading out across the plain,
Each year, it dies, then flourishes again.
It's burnt but not destroyed by prairie fires,
When spring winds blow they bring it back to life.
Afar, its scent invades the ancient road,
Its emerald green overruns the ruined town.
Again I see my noble friend depart,
I find I'm crowded full of parting's feelings.

Bai Juyi

Grasses

Boundless grasses over the plain
Come and go with every season;
Wildfire never quite consumes them --
They are tall once more in the spring wind.
Sweet they press on the old high- road
And reach the crumbling city-gate....
O Prince of Friends, you are gone again....
I hear them sighing after you.

Bai Juyi

Hearing The Early Oriole

When the sun rose I was still lying in bed;
An early oriole sang on the roof of my house.
For a moment I thought of the Royal Park at dawn
When the Birds of Spring greeted their Lord from his trees.
I remember the days when I served before the Throne
Pencil in hand, on duty at the Ch'eng-ming;
At the height of spring, when I paused an instant from work,
Morning and evening, was this the voice I heard?
Now in my exile the oriole sings again
In the dreary stillness of Hsün-yang town ...
The bird's note cannot really have changed;
All the difference lies in the listener's heart.
If he could but forget that he lives at the World's end,
The bird would sing as it sang in the Palace of old.

Bai Juyi

Illness And Idleness

Illness and idleness give me much leisure.
What do I do with my leisure, when it comes?
I cannot bring myself to discard inkstone and brush;
Now and then I make a new poem.
When the poem is made, it is slight and flavourless,
A thing of derision to almost every one.
Superior people will be pained by the flatness of the metre;
Common people will hate the plainness of the words.
I sing it to myself, then stop and think about it ...

The Prefects of Soochow and Peng-tse
Would perhaps have praised it, but they died long ago.
Who else would care to hear it?
No one today except Yuan Chen,
And he is banished to the City of Chiang-ling,
For three years an usher in the Penal Court.
Parted from me by three thousand leagues
He will never know even that the poem was made.

Bai Juyi

In Early Summer Lodging In A Temple To Enjoy The Moonlight

In early summer, with two or three more
That were seeking fame in the city of Ch'ang-an,
Whose low employ gave them less business
Than ever they had since first they left their homes
With these I wandered deep into the shrine of Tao,
For the joy we sought was promised in this place.
When we reached the gate, we sent our coaches back;
We entered the yard with only cap and stick.
Still and clear, the first weeks of May,
When trees are green and bushes soft and wet;
When the wind has stolen the shadows of new leaves
And birds linger on the last boughs that bloom.
Towards evening when the sky grew clearer yet
And the South-east was still clothed in red,
To the western cloister we carried our jar of wine;
While we waited for the moon, our cups moved slow.
Soon, how soon her golden ghost was born,
Swiftly, as though she had waited for us to come.
The beams of her light shone in every place,
On towers and halls dancing to and fro.
Till day broke we sat in her clear light
Laughing and singing, and yet never grew tired.
In Ch'ang-an, the place of profit and fame,
Such moods as this, how many men know?

Bai Juyi

Kept Waiting!

White billows and huge waves block the river crossing;
Wherever I go, danger and difficulty; whatever I do, failure.
Just as in my worldly career I wander and lose the road,
So when I come to the river crossing, I am stopped by contrary winds.
Of fishes and prawns sodden in the rain, the smell fills my nostrils;
With the stings of insects that come with the fog, my whole body is sore.
I am growing old, time flies, and my short span runs out,
While I sit in a boat at Chiu-k'ou, wasting ten days!

Bai Juyi

Lazy Man's Song

I have got patronage, but am too lazy to use it;
I have got land, but am too lazy to farm it.
My house leaks; I am too lazy to mend it.
My clothes are torn; I am too lazy to darn them.
I have got wine, but am too lazy to drink;
So it's just the same as if my cellar were empty.
I have got a harp, but am too lazy to play;
So it's just the same as if it had no strings.
My wife tells me there is no more bread in the house;
I want to bake, but am too lazy to grind.
My friends and relatives write me long letters;
I should like to read them, but they're such a bother
to open.
I have always been told that Chi Shu-yeh¹
Passed his whole life in absolute idleness.
But he played the harp and sometimes transmuted metals,
So even he was not so lazy as I

Bai Juyi

Lodging With The Old Man Of The Stream

Men's hearts love gold and jade;
Men's mouths covet wine and flesh.
Not so the old man of the stream;
He drinks from his gourd and asks nothing more.
South of the stream he cuts firewood and grass;
North of the stream he has built wall and roof.
Yearly he sows a single acre of land;
In spring he drives two yellow calves.
In these things he finds great repose;
Beyond these he has no wish or care.
By chance I meet him walking by the water-side;
He took me home and lodged me in his thatched hut.
When I parted from him, to seek market and Court,
This old man asked my rank and pay.
Doubting my tale, he laughed loud and long:
'Privy Councillors do not sleep in barns.'

Bai Juyi

Losing A Slave Girl

Around my garden the little wall is low;
In the bailiff's lodge the lists are seldom checked.
I am ashamed to think we were not always kind;
I regret your labours, that will never be repaid.
The caged bird owes no allegiance;
The wind-tossed flower does not cling to the tree.
Where tonight she lies none can give us news;
Nor any knows, save the bright watching moon.

Bai Juyi

Night On The West River

No moon
To light my way upon the stair,
Cold comfort
In the wine I drink alone.

Black clouds,
Rain,
The hurried flight of birds,
Water flowing grayly
In the dusk.

A rising storm,
Boats tugging at their mooring ropes.
Or s ails full-spread
To take advantage of the wind.

A moving point of fire
In the dark,
The distant lantern
Of a passing boat.

Bai Juyi

Night Snow

Startled at the cold stiffness of my pillow,
I see that the window is a sheet of pure white.
Deep in the night, the weight of snow increases
Until I hear bamboo snapping in the darkness.

Bai Juyi

On Being Stricken With Paralysis

Good friends,
Why waste your time in wailing
And in sympathy for me?

Surely, from time to time,
I shall be strong enough
To move about a bit.
As for travel,
On land there are carrying-chairs,
And on the water there are boats;
So, if I can but keep my courage,
What need have I of feet ?

Bai Juyi

On His Baldness

At dawn I sighed to see my hairs fall;
At dusk I sighed to see my hairs fall.
For I dreaded the time when the last lock should go ...
They are all gone and I do not mind at all!
I have done with that cumbrous washing and getting dry;
My tiresome comb for ever is laid aside.
Best of all, when the weather is hot and wet,
To have no top-knot weighing down on one's head!
I put aside my dusty conical cap;
And loose my collar-fringe.
In a silver jar I have stored a cold stream;
On my bald pate I trickle a ladle-full.
Like one baptized with the Water of Buddha's Law,
I sit and receive this cool, cleansing joy.
Now I know why the priest who seeks Repose
Frees his heart by first shaving his head.

Bai Juyi

On The Lake (1)

Mountain monks facing chess sit
Board on bamboo dark quiet
Shine bamboo no person see
Sometimes hear down chess piece sound
Two monks sit facing, playing chess on the mountain,
The bamboo shadow on the board is dark and clear.
Not a person sees the bamboo's shadow,
One sometimes hears the pieces being moved.

Bai Juyi

On The Lake (2)

Little child paddle small boat
Drift pick white lotus back
Not know hide trace
Duckweed one path open
A little child paddles a little boat,
Drifting about, and picking white lotuses.
He does not know how to hide his tracks,
And duckweed's opened up along his path.

Bai Juyi

Peach Blossom At Dalin Temple

Person between fourth month fragrant fragrant end
Mountain temple peach blossom begin bloom out
Great regret spring go not find trace
Not know change over this here come □
Across the world this June, the petals all have fallen,
But the mountain temple's peach blossom has just begun to bloom.
I regretted so much that spring had gone without a trace,
I didn't know that it had only moved up here.

Bai Juyi

Planting Bamboos

Unrewarded, my will to serve the State;
At my closed door autumn grasses grow.
What could I do to ease a rustic heart?
I planted bamboo, more than a hundred shoots.
When I see their beauty, as they grow by the stream-side,
I feel again as though I lived in the hills,
And many a time on public holidays
Round their railing I walk till night comes.
Do not say that their roots are still weak,
Do not say that their shade is still small;
Already I feel that both in garden and house
Day by day a fresher air moves.
But most I love, lying near the window-side,
to hear in their branches the sound of the autumn-wind.

Bai Juyi

Poems In Depression, At Wei Village

I hug my pillow and do not speak a word;
In my empty room no sound stirs.
Who knows that, all day a-bed,
I am not ill and am not even asleep?

II

Turned to jade are the boy's rosy cheeks;
To his sick temples the frost of winter clings....
Do not wonder that my body sinks to decay;
Though my limbs are old, my heart is older yet.

Bai Juyi

Rain

Since I lived a stranger in the City of Hsün-yang
Hour by hour bitter rain has poured.
On few days has the dark sky cleared;
In listless sleep I have spent much time.
The lake has widened till it almost joins the sky;
The clouds sink till they touch the water's face.
Beyond my hedge I hear the boatmen's talk;
At the street-end I hear the fisher's song.
Misty birds are lost in yellow air;
Windy sails kick the white waves.
In front of my gate the horse and carriage-way
In a single night has turned into a river-bed.

Bai Juyi

Rain At Night

North of Solitary Mountain Temple
and west of Chia Pavilion
the water's surface is flattened
by the wet feet of clouds.
Early warblers dart and flutter,
squabbling amid warm trees;
around someone's house new swallows
peck mud for their nests.
Wildflowers will soon flourish
enough to overwhelm one's eyes,
but now the shallow grass
barely submerges a horse's hooves.

I love the east lake most--
I don't come this way often enough;
in the shade of green willows
lies White Sand Embankment.

Bai Juyi

Rain On Autumn Night

Cold, cold this third night of autumn
Rain makes me sleepy
Alone, this old man is contented and idle
It's late when I extinguish the lamp and lie down
To sleep, listening to the beautiful sound of rain
Incense ashes still glowing in the burner
My only heat in this lodging
At daybreak, I will stay under the quilt to stay warm
And the steps will be covered by frosty red leaves

Bai Juyi

Reading Laozi

Speak person not know know person silent
This saying I hear from old gentleman
If Way old gentleman be know person
Reason what confident five thousand characters
Those who speak do not know, those who know are silent,
I heard this saying from the old gentleman.
If the old gentleman was one who knew the way,
Why did he feel able to write five thousand words?

Bai Juyi

Reading Laozi

Those who speak do not know, those who know are silent,
I heard this saying from the old gentleman.
If the old gentleman was one who knew the way,
Why did he feel able to write five thousand words?

Bai Juyi

Regret For Peony Flowers

Melancholy steps before red peonies

Evening come only be two branches remain

Bright morning wind start cope blow exhaust

Night regret decline red hold fire look□

I'm saddened by the peonies before the steps, so red,

As evening came I found that only two remained.

Once morning's winds have blown, they surely won't survive,

At night I gaze by lamplight, to cherish the fading red.

Bai Juyi

Regret For Red Peonies

A melancholy walk among red peonies;
When evening comes, only two flowers remain.
They will not survive the morning wind;
I regret their passing by the campfire's light.

Bai Juyi

Remembering Golden Bells

Ruined and ill—a man of two score;

Pretty and guileless—a girl of three.

Not a boy—but still better than nothing:

To soothe one's feeling—from time to time a kiss!

There came a day—they suddenly took her from me;

Her soul's shadow wandered I know not where.

And when I remember how just at the time she died

She lisped strange sounds, beginning to learn to talk,

Then I know that the ties of flesh and blood

Only bind us to a load of grief and sorrow.

At last, by thinking of the time before she was born,

By thought and reason I drove the pain away.

Since my heart forgot her, many days have passed

And three times winter has changed to spring.

This morning, for a little, the old grief came back,

Because, in the road, I met her foster-nurse

Bai Juyi

Remembering South Of The River

South river good
Landscape old once know well
Sunrise river flower red bear fire
Spring come river water green like lily
Can not remember river south□
South of the river is good,
Long ago, I knew the landscape well.
At sunrise, the river's flowers are red like fire,
In spring, the river's water's green as lilies.
How could I not remember south of the river?

Bai Juyi

Resignation

Don't think of the past;
It only awakens painful regrets.
Don't think of the future;
It paralyzes with uncertain longings.
Better by day to sit like a sack in your chair;
Better by night to lie like a stone in your bed.
When food comes-open your mouth.
When sleep comes-shut your eyes.

Bai Juyi

Returning Late On The Road From Pingquan On A Winter's Day

Mountain road hard travel sun become slant
Mist village frost tree about to perch crow
Night return not arrive should be unimportant
Warm drink three cups reach be come □
The mountain road is hard to travel, the sun now slanting down,
In a misty village, a crow lands on a frosted tree.
I'll not arrive before night falls, but that should not concern me,
Once I've drunk three warm cups, I'll feel as if at home.

Bai Juyi

Returning Late On The Road From Pingquan On A Winter's Day

The mountain road is hard to travel, the sun now slanting down,
In a misty village, a crow lands on a frosted tree.
I'll not arrive before night falls, but that should not concern me,
Once I've drunk three warm cups, I'll feel as if at home.

Bai Juyi

Sleeping On A Night Of Autumn Rain

Cold cold 3rd autumn night
Peaceful leisure one old man
Lie late lamp go out after
Sleep beautiful rain sound in
Ash long warm bottle fire
Fragrance increase warm quilt cover
Sawn clear cold not rise
Frost leaf full level red□
It's cold this night in autumn's third month,
Peacefully within, a lone old man.
He lies down late, the lamp already gone out,
And beautifully sleeps amid the sound of rain.
The ash inside the vessel still warm from the fire,
Its fragrance increases the warmth of quilt and covers.
When dawn comes, clear and cold, he does not rise,
The red frosted leaves cover the steps.

Bai Juyi

Sleeping On Horseback

We had rode long and were still far from the inn;
My eyes grew dim; for a moment I fell asleep.
Under my right arm the whip still dangled;
In my left hand the reins for an instant slackened.
Suddenly I woke and turned to question my groom:
'We have gone a hundred paces since you fell asleep.'
Body and spirit for a while had exchanged place;
Swift and slow had turned to their contraries.
For these few steps that my horse had carried me
Had taken in my dream countless aeons of time!
True indeed is that saying of Wise Men
'A hundred years are but a moment of sleep.'

Bai Juyi

Song Of Sunset On The River

A length setting sun spread water in
Half river emerald half river red
Love ninth month first three night
Dew like pearl moon like bow
A strip of water's spread in the setting sun,
Half the river's emerald, half is red.
I love the third night of the ninth month,
The dew is like pearl; the moon like a bow.

Bai Juyi

Song Of The Guitar.

In the tenth year of Yuanhe I was banished and demoted to be assistant official in Jiujiang. In the summer of the next year I was seeing a friend leave Penpu and heard in the midnight from a neighbouring boat a guitar played in the manner of the capital. Upon inquiry, I found that the player had formerly been a dancing-girl there and in her maturity had been married to a merchant. I invited her to my boat to have her play for us. She told me her story, heyday and then unhappiness. Since my departure from the capital I had not felt sad; but that night, after I left her, I began to realize my banishment. And I wrote this long poem -- six hundred and twelve characters.

I was bidding a guest farewell, at night on the Xunyang River,
Where maple-leaves and full-grown rushes rustled in the autumn.
I, the host, had dismounted, my guest had boarded his boat,
And we raised our cups and wished to drink-but, alas, there was no music.
For all we had drunk we felt no joy and were parting from each other,
When the river widened mysteriously toward the full moon --
We had heard a sudden sound, a guitar across the water.
Host forgot to turn back home, and guest to go his way.
We followed where the melody led and asked the player's name.
The sound broke off...then reluctantly she answered.
We moved our boat near hers, invited her to join us,
Summoned more wine and lanterns to recommence our banquet.
Yet we called and urged a thousand times before she started toward us,
Still hiding half her face from us behind her guitar.
...She turned the tuning-pegs and tested several strings;
We could feel what she was feeling, even before she played:
Each string a meditation, each note a deep thought,
As if she were telling us the ache of her whole life.
She knit her brows, flexed her fingers, then began her music,
Little by little letting her heart share everything with ours.
She brushed the strings, twisted them slow, swept them, plucked them --
First the air of The Rainbow Skirt, then The Six Little Ones.
The large strings hummed like rain,
The small strings whispered like a secret,
Hummed, whispered-and then were intermingled
Like a pouring of large and small pearls into a plate of jade.
We heard an oriole, liquid, hidden among flowers.
We heard a brook bitterly sob along a bank of sand...
By the checking of its cold touch, the very string seemed broken

As though it could not pass; and the notes, dying away
Into a depth of sorrow and concealment of lament,
Told even more in silence than they had told in sound....
A silver vase abruptly broke with a gush of water,
And out leapt armored horses and weapons that clashed and smote --
And, before she laid her pick down, she ended with one stroke,
And all four strings made one sound, as of rending silk
There was quiet in the east boat and quiet in the west,
And we saw the white autumnal moon enter the river's heart.
...When she had slowly placed the pick back among the strings,
She rose and smoothed her clothing and, formal, courteous,
Told us how she had spent her girlhood at the capital,
Living in her parents' house under the Mount of Toads,
And had mastered the guitar at the age of thirteen,
With her name recorded first in the class-roll of musicians,
Her art the admiration even of experts,
Her beauty the envy of all the leading dancers,
How noble youths of Wuling had lavishly competed
And numberless red rolls of silk been given for one song,
And silver combs with shell inlay been snapped by her rhythms,
And skirts the colour of blood been spoiled with stains of wine....
Season after season, joy had followed joy,
Autumn moons and spring winds had passed without her heeding,
Till first her brother left for the war, and then her aunt died,
And evenings went and evenings came, and her beauty faded --
With ever fewer chariots and horses at her door;
So that finally she gave herself as wife to a merchant
Who, prizing money first, careless how he left her,
Had gone, a month before, to Fuliang to buy tea.
And she had been tending an empty boat at the river's mouth,
No company but the bright moon and the cold water.
And sometimes in the deep of night she would dream of her triumphs
And be wakened from her dreams by the scalding of her tears.
Her very first guitar-note had started me sighing;
Now, having heard her story, I was sadder still.
"We are both unhappy -- to the sky's end.
We meet. We understand. What does acquaintance matter?
I came, a year ago, away from the capital
And am now a sick exile here in Jiujiang --
And so remote is Jiujiang that I have heard no music,
Neither string nor bamboo, for a whole year.
My quarters, near the River Town, are low and damp,

With bitter reeds and yellowed rushes all about the house.
And what is to be heard here, morning and evening? --
The bleeding cry of cuckoos, the whimpering of apes.
On flowery spring mornings and moonlit autumn nights
I have often taken wine up and drunk it all alone,
Of course there are the mountain songs and the village pipes,
But they are crude and-strident, and grate on my ears.
And tonight, when I heard you playing your guitar,
I felt as if my hearing were bright with fairy-music.
Do not leave us. Come, sit down. Play for us again.
And I will write a long song concerning a guitar."
...Moved by what I said, she stood there for a moment,
Then sat again to her strings-and they sounded even sadder,
Although the tunes were different from those she had played before....
The feasters, all listening, covered their faces.
But who of them all was crying the most?
This Jiujiang official. My blue sleeve was wet.

Bai Juyi

Song Of The Palace

Tears utmost gauze cloth dream not succeed
Night deep before palace press song sound
Red cheek not old favour first cut
Slant lean on smoke cover sit arrive brightness
Her handkerchief all soaked in tears, she cannot dream,
In deepest night before the palace voices sing.
Her rosy cheeks aren't old, but first love has been cut,
Leaning, wreathed in smoke, she sits until the dawn.

Bai Juyi

Song Of Unending Sorrow.

China's Emperor, craving beauty that might shake an empire,
Was on the throne for many years, searching, never finding,
Till a little child of the Yang clan, hardly even grown,
Bred in an inner chamber, with no one knowing her,
But with graces granted by heaven and not to be concealed,
At last one day was chosen for the imperial household.
If she but turned her head and smiled, there were cast a hundred spells,
And the powder and paint of the Six Palaces faded into nothing.
...It was early spring. They bathed her in the FlowerPure Pool,
Which warmed and smoothed the creamy-tinted crystal of her skin,
And, because of her languor, a maid was lifting her
When first the Emperor noticed her and chose her for his bride.
The cloud of her hair, petal of her cheek, gold ripples of her crown when she
moved,
Were sheltered on spring evenings by warm hibiscus curtains;
But nights of spring were short and the sun arose too soon,
And the Emperor, from that time forth, forsook his early hearings
And lavished all his time on her with feasts and revelry,
His mistress of the spring, his despot of the night.
There were other ladies in his court, three thousand of rare beauty,
But his favours to three thousand were centered in one body.
By the time she was dressed in her Golden Chamber, it would be almost evening;

And when tables were cleared in the Tower of Jade, she would loiter, slow with
wine.
Her sisters and her brothers all were given titles;
And, because she so illumined and glorified her clan,
She brought to every father, every mother through the empire,
Happiness when a girl was born rather than a boy.
...High rose Li Palace, entering blue clouds,
And far and wide the breezes carried magical notes
Of soft song and slow dance, of string and bamboo music.
The Emperor's eyes could never gaze on her enough-
Till war-drums, booming from Yuyang, shocked the whole earth
And broke the tunes of The Rainbow Skirt and the Feathered Coat.
The Forbidden City, the nine-tiered palace, loomed in the dust
From thousands of horses and chariots headed southwest.
The imperial flag opened the way, now moving and now pausing- -
But thirty miles from the capital, beyond the western gate,

The men of the army stopped, not one of them would stir
 Till under their horses' hoofs they might trample those moth-eyebrows....
 Flowery hairpins fell to the ground, no one picked them up,
 And a green and white jade hair-tassel and a yellowgold hair-bird.
 The Emperor could not save her, he could only cover his face.
 And later when he turned to look, the place of blood and tears
 Was hidden in a yellow dust blown by a cold wind.
 ... At the cleft of the Dagger-Tower Trail they crisscrossed through a cloud-line
 Under Omei Mountain. The last few came.
 Flags and banners lost their colour in the fading sunlight....
 But as waters of Shu are always green and its mountains always blue,
 So changeless was His Majesty's love and deeper than the days.
 He stared at the desolate moon from his temporary palace.
 He heard bell-notes in the evening rain, cutting at his breast.
 And when heaven and earth resumed their round and the dragon car faced
 home,
 The Emperor clung to the spot and would not turn away
 From the soil along the Mawei slope, under which was buried
 That memory, that anguish. Where was her jade-white face?
 Ruler and lords, when eyes would meet, wept upon their coats
 As they rode, with loose rein, slowly eastward, back to the capital.
 ...The pools, the gardens, the palace, all were just as before,
 The Lake Taiye hibiscus, the Weiyang Palace willows;
 But a petal was like her face and a willow-leaf her eyebrow --
 And what could he do but cry whenever he looked at them?
 ...Peach-trees and plum-trees blossomed, in the winds of spring;
 Lakka-foliage fell to the ground, after autumn rains;
 The Western and Southern Palaces were littered with late grasses,
 And the steps were mounded with red leaves that no one swept away.
 Her Pear-Garden Players became white-haired
 And the eunuchs thin-eyebrowed in her Court of Pepper Trees;
 Over the throne flew fire-flies, while he brooded in the twilight.
 He would lengthen the lamp-wick to its end and still could never sleep.
 Bell and drum would slowly toll the dragging night hours
 And the River of Stars grow sharp in the sky, just before dawn,
 And the porcelain mandarin-ducks on the roof grow thick with morning frost
 And his covers of kingfisher-blue feel lonelier and colder
 With the distance between life and death year after year;
 And yet no beloved spirit ever visited his dreams.
 ...At Lingqiong lived a Taoist priest who was a guest of heaven,
 Able to summon spirits by his concentrated mind.
 And people were so moved by the Emperor's constant brooding

That they besought the Taoist priest to see if he could find her.
He opened his way in space and clove the ether like lightning,
Up to heaven, under the earth, looking everywhere.
Above, he searched the Green Void, below, the Yellow Spring;
But he failed, in either place, to find the one he looked for.
And then he heard accounts of an enchanted isle at sea,
A part of the intangible and incorporeal world,
With pavilions and fine towers in the five-coloured air,
And of exquisite immortals moving to and fro,
And of one among them-whom they called The Ever True-
With a face of snow and flowers resembling hers he sought.
So he went to the West Hall's gate of gold and knocked at the jasper door
And asked a girl, called Morsel-of-Jade, to tell The Doubly- Perfect.
And the lady, at news of an envoy from the Emperor of China,
Was startled out of dreams in her nine-flowered, canopy.
She pushed aside her pillow, dressed, shook away sleep,
And opened the pearly shade and then the silver screen.
Her cloudy hair-dress hung on one side because of her great haste,
And her flower-cap was loose when she came along the terrace,
While a light wind filled her cloak and fluttered with her motion
As though she danced The Rainbow Skirt and the Feathered Coat.
And the tear-drops drifting down her sad white face
Were like a rain in spring on the blossom of the pear.
But love glowed deep within her eyes when she bade him thank her liege,
Whose form and voice had been strange to her ever since their parting --
Since happiness had ended at the Court of the Bright Sun,
And moons and dawns had become long in Fairy-Mountain Palace.
But when she turned her face and looked down toward the earth
And tried to see the capital, there were only fog and dust.
So she took out, with emotion, the pledges he had given
And, through his envoy, sent him back a shell box and gold hairpin,
But kept one branch of the hairpin and one side of the box,
Breaking the gold of the hairpin, breaking the shell of the box;
"Our souls belong together," she said, " like this gold and this shell --
Somewhere, sometime, on earth or in heaven, we shall surely
And she sent him, by his messenger, a sentence reminding him
Of vows which had been known only to their two hearts:
"On the seventh day of the Seventh-month, in the Palace of Long Life,
We told each other secretly in the quiet midnight world
That we wished to fly in heaven, two birds with the wings of one,
And to grow together on the earth, two branches of one tree."
Earth endures, heaven endures; some time both shall end,

While this unending sorrow goes on and on for ever.

Bai Juyi

Spring Sleep

Pillow low quilt warm body smooth and steady

Sunshine room door cloth not open

Still have young spring air taste

Often brief arrive sleep at come□

The pillow's low, the quilt is warm, the body smooth and peaceful,

Sun shines on the door of the room, the curtain not yet open.

Still the youthful taste of spring remains in the air,

Often it will come to you even in your sleep.

Bai Juyi

Spring Visit

Remnants of sun ribbon the river--
half and half, black river red.
Third night, ninth month lovely hour;
pearled dew, bent bow moon.

Bai Juyi

Staying At Bamboo

an evening sitting under
 the eaves of the pines
at night sleeping
 in Bamboo Lodge
the sky so clear you'd say
 it was drugs
meditation so deep, thought
 I'd gone home to the hills
 but Clever can't beat
 Stupid
 and Quick won't match
 Quiet
Untoiling-ness!
 (you just can't pave the Way)
that's it!
 the Gate of Mystery!

Bai Juyi

The Almond Blossoms Of Chao Village

For fifteen long years,
Times without number
I have come
To see the red almond-blossoms
Open in the spring.

Now I am growing old—
I am all of seventy-three,
And it is hard for my old legs
To come thus far.

I fear that this time
Is the last,
And I have come
To bid the red blossoms of the almond
A long farewell.

Bai Juyi

The Beginning Of Summer

At the rise of summer a hundred beasts and trees
Join in gladness that the season bids them thrive.
Stags and does frolic in the deep woods;
Snakes and insects are pleased by the rank grass.

Bai Juyi

The Bloom Is Not A Bloom

Bloom not bloom
mist not mist
Night half come
heaven bright go
Come like spring dream how long time?
Go like morning cloud not find place The bloom is not a bloom,
The mist not mist.
At midnight she comes,
And goes again at dawn.
She comes like a spring dream -
how long will she stay?
She goes like morning cloud, without a trace.

Bai Juyi

The Chrysanthemums In The Eastern Garden

The days of my youth left me long ago;
And now in their turn dwindle my years of prime.
With what thoughts of sadness and loneliness
I walk again in this cold, deserted place!
In the midst of the garden long I stand alone;
The sunshine, faint; the wind and dew chill.
The autumn lettuce is tangled and turned to seed;
The fair trees are blighted and withered away.
All that is left are a few chrysanthemum-flowers
That have newly opened beneath the wattled fence.
I had brought wine and meant to fill my cup,
When the sight of these made me stay my hand.
I remember, when I was young,
How easily my mood changed from sad to gay.
If I saw wine, no matter what season,
Before I drank it, my heart was already glad.
But now that age comes,
A moment of joy is harder and harder to get.
And always I fear that when I am quite old
The strongest liquor will leave me comfortless.
Therefore I ask you, late chrysanthemum-flower
At this sad season why do you bloom alone?
Though well I know that it was not for my sake,
Taught by you, for a while I will open my face.

Bai Juyi

The Cranes

The western wind has blown but a few days;
Yet the first leaf already flies from the bough.
On the drying paths I walk in my thin shoes;
In the first cold I have donned my quilted coat.
Through shallow ditches the floods are clearing away;
Through sparse bamboo trickles a slanting light.
In the early dusk, down an alley of green moss,
The garden-boy is leading the cranes home.

Bai Juyi

The Dragon Of The Black Pool

Deep the waters of the Black Pool, colored like ink;
They say a Holy Dragon lives there, whom men have never seen.
Beside the Pool they have built a shrine; the authorities
have established a ritual;
A dragon by itself remains a dragon, but men can make it a god.
Prosperity and disaster, rain and drought, plagues and pestilences—
By the village people were all regarded as the Sacred Dragon's doing.
They all made offerings of sucking-pig and poured libations of wine;
The morning prayers and evening gifts depended on a "medium's" advice.
When the dragon comes, ah!
The wind stirs and sighs
Paper money thrown, ah!
Silk umbrellas waved.
When the dragon goes, ah!
The wind also—still.
Incense-fire dies, ah !
The cups and vessels are cold.
Meats lie stacked on the rocks of the Pool's shore;
Wine flows on the grass in front of the shrine.
I do not know, of all those offerings, how much the Dragon eats;
But the mice of the woods and the foxes of the hills are continually drunk and
sated.
Why are the foxes so lucky?
What have the sucking-pigs done,
That year by year they should be killed, merely to glut the foxes?
That the foxes are robbing the Sacred Dragon and eating His sucking-pig,
Beneath the nine-fold depths of His pool, does He know or not?

Bai Juyi

The Dwarves Of Tao-Chou

In the land of Tao-chou
Many of the people are dwarfs;
The tallest of them never grow to more than three feet.
They were sold in the market as dwarf slaves and yearly sent to Court;
Described as "an offering of natural products from the land of Tao-chou."
A strange "offering of natural products "; I never heard of one yet
That parted men from those they loved, never to meet again!
Old men—weeping for their grandsons; mothers for their children!
One day—Yang Ch'ëng came to govern the land;
He refused to send up dwarf slaves in spite of incessant mandates.
He replied to the Emperor "Your servant finds in the Six Canonical Books
'In offering products, one must offer what is there, and not what isn't there'
On the waters and lands of Tao-chou, among all the things that live
I only find dwarfish people; no dwarfish slaves."
The Emperor's heart was deeply moved and he sealed and sent a scroll
"The yearly tribute of dwarfish slaves is henceforth annulled."

The people of Tao-chou,
Old ones and young ones, how great their joy!
Father with son and brother with brother henceforward kept together;
From that day for ever more they lived as free men.
The people of Tao-chou
Still enjoy this gift.
And even now when they speak of the Governor
Tears start to their eyes.
And lest their children and their children's children should forget the Governor's
name,
When boys are born the syllable "Yang" is often used in their forename.

Bai Juyi

The Grain Tribute

There came an officer knocking by night at my door
In a loud voice demanding grain-tribute.
My house-servants dared not wait till the morning,
But brought candles and set them on the barn-floor.
Passed through the sieve, clean-washed as pearls,
A whole cart-load, thirty bushels of grain.
But still they cry that it is not paid in full:
With whips and curses they goad my servants and boys.
Once, in error, I entered public life;
I am inwardly ashamed that my talents were not sufficient.
In succession I occupied four official posts;
For doing nothing—ten years' salary!
Often have I heard that saying of ancient men
That "good and ill follow in an endless chain."
And to-day it ought to set my heart at rest
To return to others the corn in my great barn.

Bai Juyi

The Grand Houses At Lo-Yang

By woods and water, whose houses are these
With high gates and wide-stretching lands?
From their blue gables gilded fishes hang;
By their red pillars carven coursers run.

Bai Juyi

The North Window: Bamboo And Rock

A magisterial rock windswept and pure
and a few bamboo so lavish and green:

facing me, they seem full of sincerity.
I gaze into them and can't get enough,

and there's more at the north window
and along the path beside West Pond:

wind sowing bamboo clarities aplenty,
rain gracing the subtle greens of moss.

My wife's still here, frail and old as me,
but no one else: the children are gone.

Leave the window open. If you close it,
who'll keep us company for the night?

Bai Juyi

The Old Man With The Broken Arm

At Hsin-fêng—an old man—four-score and eight;
The hair on his head and the hair of his eyebrows—white as the new snow.
Leaning on the shoulders of his great-grandchildren, he walks in front of the Inn;
With his left arm he leans on their shoulders; his right arm is broken.
I asked the old man how many years had passed since he broke his arm;
I also asked the cause of the injury, how and why it happened.
The old man said he was born and reared in the District of Hsin-fêng;
At the time of his birth—a wise reign; no wars or discords.
“Often I listened in the Pear-Tree Garden to the sound of flute and song;
Naught I knew of banner and lance; nothing of arrow or bow.
Then came the wars of T’ien-pao and the great levy of men;
Of three men in each house—one man was taken.
And those to whom the lot fell, where were they taken to?
Five months’ journey, a thousand miles—away to Yiin-nan.
We heard it said that in Yiin-nan there flows the Lu River;
As the flowers fall from the pepper-trees, poisonous vapors rise.
When the great army waded across, the water seethed like a cauldron;
When barely ten had entered the water, two or three were dead.
To the north of my village, to the south of my village the sound of weeping and
wailing,
Children parting from fathers and mothers; husbands parting from wives.
Everyone says that in expeditions against the Min tribes
Of a million men who are sent out, not one returns.

I, that am old, was then twenty-four;
My name and fore-name were written down in the rolls of the Board of War.
In the depth of the night not daring to let any one know
I secretly took a huge stone and dashed it against my arm.
For drawing the bow and waving the banner now wholly unfit;
I knew henceforward I should not be sent to fight in Yün-nan.
Bones broken and sinews wounded could not fail to hurt;
I was ready enough to bear pain, if only I got back home.
My arm—broken ever since; it was sixty years ago.
One limb, although destroyed—whole body safe!
But even now on winter nights when the wind and rain blow
From evening on till day’s dawn I cannot sleep for pain.
Not sleeping for pain
Is a small thing to bear,
Compared with the joy of being alive when all the rest are dead.

For otherwise, years ago, at the ford of Lu River
My body would have died and my soul hovered by the bones that no one
gathered.
A ghost, I'd have wandered in Yiin-nan, always looking for home.
Over the graves of ten thousand soldiers, mournfully hovering."
So the old man spoke,
And I bid you listen to his words.
Have you not heard
That the Prime Minister of K'ai-yüan, Sung K'ai-fu,
Did not reward frontier exploits, lest a spirit of aggression should prevail?
And have you not heard
That the Prime Minister of T'ien-Pao, Yang Kuo-chung
Desiring to win imperial favour, started a frontier war?
But long before he could win the war, people had lost their temper;
Ask the man with thy broken arm in the village of Hsin-fëng!

Bai Juyi

The Philosopher

“Those who speak know nothing;
Those who know are silent.”
These words, as I am told,
Were spoken by Lao Tzu.
If we are to believe that Lao Tzu
Was himself one who knew,
How comes it that he wrote a book
Of five thousand words?

Bai Juyi

The Poem On The Wall

My clumsy poem on the inn-wall none cared to see.
With bird-droppings and moss's growth the letters were blotched away.
There came a guest with heart so full, that though a page to the Throne,
He did not grudge with his broidered coat to wipe off the dust, and read.

Bai Juyi

The Red Cockatoo

Sent as a present from Annam
A red cockatoo.
Coloured like the peach-tree blossom,
Speaking with the speech of men.
And they did to it what is always done
To the learned and eloquent.
They took a cage with stout bars
And shut it up inside.

Bai Juyi

The Spring River

Heat and cold, dusk and dawn have crowded one upon the other;
Suddenly I find it is two years since I came to Chung-chou.
Through my closed doors I hear nothing but the morning and evening drum;
From my upper windows all I see is the ships that come and go.
In vain the orioles tempt me with their song to stray beneath the flowering trees;
In vain the grasses lure me by their colour to sit beside the pond.
There is one thing and one alone I never tire of watching-
The spring river as it trickles over the stones and babbles past the rocks.

Bai Juyi

Thinking Of The Past

In an idle hour I thought of former days;
And former friends seemed to be standing in the room.
And then I wondered 'Where are they now?'
Like fallen leaves they have tumbled to the Nether Springs.
Han Yu swallowed his sulphur pills,
Yet a single illness carried him straight to the grave.
Yüan Chen smelled autumn stone
But before he was old, his strength crumbled away.
Master Tu possessed the 'Secret of Health':
All day long he fasted from meat and spice.
The Lord Ts'ui, trusting a strong drug,
Through the whole winter wore his summer coat.
Yet some by illness and some by sudden death ...
All vanished ere their middle years were passed.

Only I, who have never dieted myself
Have thus protracted a tedious span of age,
I who in young days
Yielded lightly to every lust and greed;
Whose palate craved only for the richest meat
And knew nothing of bismuth or calomel.
When hunger came, I gulped steaming food;
When thirst came, I drank from the frozen stream.
With verse I served the spirits of my Five Guts;
With wine I watered the three Vital Spots.

Day by day joining the broken clod
I have lived till now almost sound and whole.
There is no gap in my two rows of teeth;
Limbs and body still serve me well.
Already I have opened the seventh book of years;
Yet I eat my fill and sleep quietly;
I drink, while I may, the wine that lies in my cup,
And all else commit to Heaven's care.

Bai Juyi

To My Brothers & Sisters Adrift In Troubled Times This Poem Of The Moon.

Since the disorders in Henan and the famine in Guannei, my brothers and sisters have been scattered. Looking at the moon, I express my thoughts in this poem, which I send to my eldest brother at Fuliang, my seventh brother at Yuqian, My fifteen brother at Wujiang and my younger brothers and sisters at Fuli and Xiagui.

My heritage lost through disorder and famine,
My brothers and sisters flung eastward and westward,
My fields and gardens wrecked by the war,
My own flesh and blood become scum of the street,
I moan to my shadow like a lone-wandering wildgoose,
I am torn from my root like a water-plant in autumn:
I gaze at the moon, and my tears run down
For hearts, in five places, all sick with one wish.

Bai Juyi

Visiting The Hsi-Lin Temple

I dismount from my horse at the Hsi-Lin Temple;
I hurry forward, speeding with light cane.
In the morning I work at a Government office-desk;
In the evening I become a dweller in the Sacred Hills.
In the second month to the north of K'uang-lu
The ice breaks and the snow begins to melt.
On the southern plantation the tea-plant trusts its sprouts;
Through the northern crevice the view of the spring ooze.

This year there is war in An-hui,
In every place soldiers are rushing to arms.
Men of learning have been summoned to the Council Board;
Men of action are marching to the battle-line.
Only I, who have no talents at all,
Am left in the mountains to play with the pebbles of the stream.

Bai Juyi

Watching The Reapers

Tillers of the soil have few idle months;
In the fifth month their toil is double-fold.
A south-wind visits the fields at night:
Suddenly the hill is covered with yellow corn.
Wives and daughters shoulder baskets of rice;
Youths and boys carry the flasks of wine.
Following after they bring a wage of meat
To the strong reapers toiling on the southern hill,
Whose feet are burned by the hot earth they tread,
Whose backs are scorched by flames of the shining sky.
Tired they toil, caring nothing for the heat,
Grudging the shortness of the long summer day.
A poor woman follows at the reapers' side
With an infant child carried close to her breast.
With her right hand she gleans the fallen grain;
On her left arm a broken basket hangs.
And I today ... by virtue of what right
Have I never once tended field or tree?
My government-pay is three hundred tons;
At the year's end I have still grain in hand.
Thinking of this, secretly I grew ashamed;
And all day the thought lingered in my head.

Bai Juyi

Winter Night

My house is poor; those that I love have left me;
My body is sick; I cannot join the feast.
There is not a living soul before my eyes
As I lie alone locked in my cottage room.
My broken lamp burns with a feeble flame;
My tattered curtains are crooked and do not meet.
'Tsek, tsek' on the door-step and window-sill
Again I hear the new snow fall.
As I grow older, gradually I sleep less;
I wake at midnight and sit up straight in bed.
If I had not learned the 'art of sitting and forgetting,'
How could I bear this utter loneliness?
Stiff and stark my body cleaves to the earth;
Unimpeded my soul yields to Change.
So has it been for four hateful years,
Through one thousand and three hundred nights!

Bai Juyi