Twenty Selected Lyrics
Translated by D. C. Lau

To the Tune of Niü kuan tsu

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The Seventeenth Day of the Fourth Month
Was the very day a year ago
When we said goodbye.
Holding back my tears, I feigned looking down
And in bashfulness I puckered my brows.

Little did I know that my soul was crippled
And dreams would be left to follow you in vain.
Apart from the moon on the edge of the sky
No one knows of this.

Wei Chuang (826-910)
To the Tune of *Sheng-ch'ao-tzu*

From the spring hills the mist was about to lift.
The sky was pale, the scattered stars were scanty.
The fading moon by her cheeks shone,
Parting tears at the break of dawn.

Much had been said
But love lingered on.
Turning round, she said yet once again,
' Remember my green silk skirt
And be kind to the sweet grass where you go.'

Niu Hsi-chi (died after 925)
Spring is half gone since we parted.
Wherever I turn the sight breaks my heart.
Below the steps plum blossoms fall confusedly like snow.
Brushing them off, I am covered all over again.

The migrant birds come but where is the sign of a message.
The road is too long for homeward dreams to be dreamed.
The grief of parting is just like grass in spring:
The farther you go, the more it seems to grow.

Li Yü (937-978)
To the Tune of T'a so hsing

On the narrow path a touch of red,
In the fields an expanse of green,
By the tall tower the trees show a darkish hue.
The spring wind has not the sense to restrain the willow catkins
Which rush wildly in a drizzle at the faces of passers by.

The green leaves enfold the oriole,
The red blinds shut out the swallow.
The incense from the burner chases the gossamer quietly around.
As I awake from a troubled dream, the wine wearing off,
There goes the slanting sun shining on the inner courtyard.

Yen Shu (991-1055)
To the Tune of *Lang t’ao sha*

Raising my cup, I plead with the east wind
To stay with us for yet a while longer.
East of Loyang, the willows drooping, the fields purple,
There is no spot but we visited, hand in hand,
Where flowers bloom in abundance.

Having met, we parted, only too soon.
What would have been will never be.
Flowers this year are redder than last.
What a pity, flowers next year will be finer still
But goodness knows who will share them with me.

Ou-yang Hsiu (1007-1072)
To the Tune of *Tieh lien hua*

Who says idle love has long been cast aside?  
Whenever spring comes round I am melancholy as ever.  
Day after day, overcome by wine among the flowers,  
I accept a youthful face haggard in the mirror.

Green grass by the river, willows on the bank,  
But why, I ask, is there new grief year after year?  
Alone I stand on the little bridge, the wind swelling my sleeves,  
After she is gone in the moonlight across the wood in the plain.

Ou-yang Hsiu
To the Tune of *Sheng-cha-tzu*

Last year on the Night of the Lanterns
The flower market was bright as day.
The moon climbed to the tip of the willow tree;
I awaited my love at the hour of dusk.

This year on the Night of the Lanterns
The moon and the flowers are as they were.
My love from last year is nowhere to be seen;
Tears drench the sleeves of my spring dress.

Ou-yang Hsiu
To the Tune of Ts'ai-sang tzu

The West Lake is lovely when the blossoms are gone,
The ground littered with fallen red,
Catkins flying in a drizzle,
All day the wind blows on the railings by the drooping willows.

Only after the merry-making when the revellers are gone
Does one feel the emptiness of spring.
I lower the blinds on the window:
A pair of swallows come back in the fine rain.

Ou-yang Hsiu
To the Tune of Che-ku t'ien

Embroidered sleeves never let my jade cup go dry.
Then was I willing to risk a face flushed with wine.
She danced till the moon sank below the Willow Tower
And stilled the breeze coming off the Peach Fan by her song.

Ever since we parted,
Thinking of our meeting,
How often has my soul shared with yours the same dream!
Tonight I keep holding the silver lamp to you
For fear even now our meeting is but a dream.

Yen Chi-tao (?1030-?)
To the Tune of Ts'ai-sang tzu

The time we met under the moon in the West Lodge
In stealth you powdered over your tears
And you sang only to frown after your song.
A pity I could not see you clearly across the incense!

After we parted, the threads of the willow outside
Have time and again renewed their fresh green,
While the weary traveller in the mundane dust
Can never forget the girl in the Lodge with the powdered tears.

Yen Chi-tao
To the Tune of *Lin-chiang hsien*

On the East Hill I sobered up only to get drunk again.
When I returned it must have been the third watch.
The servant boy was by then snoring like thunder.
He never answered however hard I knocked.
Leaning on my staff I listened to the sound of the river.

I constantly regret not being my own master.
When can I leave behind this life of care?
The night spent, the wind drops and the ripples subside.
I will go away on a small boat never to return,
Spending the rest of my days upon the seas.

Su Shih (1036-1101)
To the Tune of *Huan hsi sha*

Below the hill the short orchid shoots soak in the stream,
Amongst the pines the clean sandy path is unsullied,
To the sound of rain drizzling at dusk, the cuckoo cries.

Who says for man youth never comes a second time?
Even the stream by the door is able to make for the west.
Sing not with your white hair of the cock impatient for dawn.

*Su Shih*

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1. It used to be the belief in China that in its nature water always flows east.
Last year when I saw you off
Outside the city gates,
The fluttering snow was like willow catkins.
This year spring has drawn to a close
And willow catkins are like snow.
Still there is no sign of your return.

I roll up the blinds and ask the moon to share my wine
And the wind and dew come through the window gauze.
It’s as if the Moon Maiden, out of pity for the nesting birds,
Lights up clearly
The painted beam aslant.

Su Shih
蝶戀花
花褪殘紅青杏小
燕子飛時
綠水人家邊
枝上柳綿吹又少
天涯何處無芳草
牆裏秋千牆外道
牆外行人
牆裏佳人笑
咳啾不聞聲遙悄
多情卻被無情惱

To the Tune of T'ieh lien hua

Flowers slip off their faded red and green apricots
are small.
When the swallow takes to its wings
The green water round the homestead winds.
The catkins on the willow branches dwindle with
each gust of wind.
Where to the ends of the earth is there no sweet
grass?

Within the walls a swing, without a path;
Without the walls a wayfarer,
Within the laughter of a fair maid.
The laughter grows faint; the sound dies away.
One who cares is vexed by one who cares not.

Su Shih
The long night is deep like water.
The wind taut, the post station is firmly shut.
My dream cut short, a mouse peeps at the lamp.
The frost sends the morning chill through my padded quilt.
No more sleep,
No more sleep,
Outside the horses neigh and men are up and about.

Ch’iu Kuan (1047-1100)
To the Tune of Shao-nien yu

The knife shimmers like water,
The salt is whiter than snow.
The slender fingers cut the new orange.
The curtains of brocade freshly warmed,
The incense from the burner rises unbroken.

Facing each other, they sit playing the pipes.
In a low voice she asks,
‘Where are you putting up for the night?
The third watch has sounded on the city walls.
It’s slippery for the horse on the thick frost.
I’d rather you didn’t go.
The streets are all but deserted outside.’

Chou Pang-yen (1057-1121)
To the Tune of *Ju meng ling*

I often recall the pavilion by the stream at sunset.  
The thought of home never crossed my drunken mind.  
The mood spent, I turned my boat as night fell  
And strayed into the depth of the lotus blossoms.  
A scramble for the jetty,  
A scramble for the jetty,  
Startled a flock of water birds on the sand.

Li Ch'ing-chao (1084-?)
To the Tune of *Ju meng ling*

Last night the rain was fitful and the wind abrupt.
A good sleep has not cleared my drunken head.
Asking her who is rolling up the blinds,
I am told the begonias are undisturbed.
‘Don’t you see?
Don’t you see?
The green must have grown fat and the red gone thin.’

Li Ch'ing-chao

如夢令
昨夜雨疏風驟
濃睡不消殘酒
試問捲簾人
卻道海棠依舊
知否
知否
應是綠肥紅瘦
To the Tune of *Ch'ou nu erh*

In youth, not knowing what grief was about,
I loved to seek a melancholy spot,
And for a new song I would pretend to speak of grief.

And now, knowing what grief is all about,
On the point of speaking, I hold back,
And say, instead, What a fine autumn, so very cool.

Hsin Ch'i-chi (1140-1207)
To the Tune of Yü mei-jen

In youth I listened to the rain in houses of song,
The red candle casting a shadow on the bed curtains.

In my prime I listened to the rain in sojourning boats,
The river broad, the clouds low,
A stray bird wailing in the west wind.

And now, I listen to the rain in a monk’s hut,
My hair long since bespeckled.
Gaiety and sorrow, meetings and partings, all so unfeeling,
I leave the rain to drip on the steps till dawn.

Chiang Chieh (fl. 13th c.)