

Ancient Chinese poems in Scots and English

Anonymous (7th century BC)

CORONACH

*Ai, whit haes becum o us?
Yon mukkil ashets o veivers
It wes, 'Fill an fesh mair!'
The-day, even whan we hae meat,
the'r naething ti spare.
Ochone an ochone!
We haena growne as we breirdit.*

*Ai, whit haes befawn us?
Fower plates at ilka dounsittin;
whyles as monie helpins.
The-day, evin whan we hae meat,
the'r never aneuch.
Ochone, ochanee!
We haena growne as we breirdit.*

LAMENT

*Oh what has become of us?
Those great plates of food
when nothing was lacking!
Today, even when we have food,
there is nothing to spare
Heaven help us!
We have not grown as we started.*

*Oh what has befallen us?
Four plates at every sitting;
Sometimes as many helpings
Today, even when we have anything
There is never enough
Alas, alas!
We have not grown as we started*

THE MUKKIL CHARIOT

*Dinna forder the mukkil chairiot!
Ye wul onie mak yeirsell stourie.
Dinna think on the dule o the warld!
Ye wul onlie mak yeirsell waesum.*

*Dinna forder the mukkil chairiot!
Ye'l never can see for the stour.
Dinna think on the dule o the warld.
or ye'l never win free frae wanhowp!*

*Dinna forder the mukkil chairiot!
Ye'l onlie be smoored wi the stour.
Dinna think on the dule o the warld!
Ye wul onlie be trauchilt wi care.*

THE BIG CHARIOT

*Do not follow the big chariot!
You will only cover yourself with dust
Never think of the world's sorrow!
You will only make yourself sad.*

*Do not follow the big chariot!
You will never see for the dust.
Do not think on the grief of the world
or you'll never be free of sorrow.*

*Do not follow the big chariot!
You will only be smothered with dust.
Never think of the world's sorrow
You will only be burdened with care*

WEIDAE'S YAMMER

*Simmer days, wunter nichts--
Year eftir year o thaim maun pass
or Ah gang til him whaur he bydes.
Wunter nichts, Simmer days--
Year eftir year o thaim maun gae it,
or Ah gang til his hame.*

WIDOW'S LAMENT

*Summer days, winter nights--
year after year must pass
Till I go to him where he dwells.
Winter nights, Summer days--
Year after year of them must pass
Till I go to his home.*

Anonymous (2nd century BC)

FECHTIN OOTBY THE KEEP

*Thay focht south o the breistwark
 Thay dee'd north o the waws.
 Thay fell on the muir athout beirial.
 Thair flesh becam meat for the crows.
 In the lochan the rashes war mirklyke ,
 as the rydars focht an war slauchtert.
 Nou thair horses reinge about nickerin.
 Bi the brig the war shuirlie a houss
 Wes it north, wes it south?
 The hairst it wes never ingethert.*

*Ah think o ye, leal sojers.
 Ye serred yeir Prince in vain.
 The-mornin ye gaed oot ti battle
 an at nicht, ye never cam hame.*

FIGHTING SOUTH OF THE CASTLE

*They fought south of the castle,
 They died north of the wall,
 They died on the moors and were not buried
 Their flesh was the food of crows
 The rushes were dark in the lochan
 The riders fought and were slain:
 Their horses wander neighing.
 By the bridge there was a house?
 Was it south, was it north?
 The harvest was never gathered.*

*I think of you faithful soldiers.
 Your service shall not be forgotten.
 For in morning you went out to battle
 And at night you did not return.*

Hsi-chün (2nd Century BC)

THE SAIR WEIRD

*Ma fowl haes mairrit me on
 a caird at the warld's end;
 sent me awa til a ferr kintrie,
 til the dottilt keing o the Wu-sun.
 A tent nou serrs me for ma houss
 wi mattit felt for sillie waws.
 Raw flesh is aw ma meat
 an cuddie's milk ma drink.
 Aye greinin for ma ain kintrie,
 wi a waesum hert inby---
 Ai, Ah wush Ah wes a yallae stork
 for ti' flie the haill road hame!*

LAMENT

*My people have married me
 in a far corner o Earth;
 Sent me away to a strange land,
 To the king of the Wu-sun,
 A tent is my house,
 Offelt are my walls;
 Raw flesh my food
 With mare's milk to drink,
 Always thinking of my own country,
 My heart sad within
 Would I were a yellow stork
 And could fly to my old home!*

Wu-ti (157-87 BC) Sixth Emperor of the Han Dynasty

TINT LUIV

*The soun o hir silk skirt haes gaen.
 On the merbil plainstanes
 the stour doungethers
 Hir tuim chaumer is cauld an lown.
 The fawn leafs is haepit agin the doors.
 Greinin for that lousum leddie,
 hou can Ah bring ma sair hert ti rest?*

LOST LOVE

*The sound of her silk skirt has ceased
 On the marble pavement
 Dust accumulates
 Her empty room is cold and still.
 Fallen leaves are piled against the doors
 Longing for that lovely lady
 How can I bring my aching hert to rest?*

Anonymous (1st century BC)

THE TUIM BED

*Green, green, the wattirsyde gress!
Thick, thick, the sauchs i the gairden!
Waesum, waesum, the leddie i the touer!
Whyte, whyte, sittin bi the winnok!
Bonnie, bonnie, hir reid-pouther face!
Smaw, smaw, hir dentie haund!
Aince she wes a daunce-houss quyne,
but nou she is a gangril's wyfe
The gangril gaed an never cam back,
an nou the leddie's aw hir lane.
Ai, a tuim bed is ill ti thole!*

*Green, green, the river bank grass!
Thick, thick, the garden willows.
Sad, sad, the lady in the tower.
White, white, sitting by the window.
Fair, fair, her red-powdered face!
Small, small her pale hand.
Once she was a dancing girl
But now she is a vagrant's wife.
the vagrant left, but did not return.
It is hard to be alone
And keep an empty bed.*

Anonymous (200 BC – 200 AD)

HAME

*At fifteen Ah jyned the airmie.
At twantie-five Ah cam hame at lest.
As Ah gaed inti the clachan,
Ah met an auld caird an speired:
“Wha bydes in oor houss nou?”
Says he: “Look you doun the street!
Thare yeir auld hame doun thare!”
Pynes an cypresses growe lyke weeds.
Mappies leeve in the dug's kennel.
Dous nest in the brukken ruif.
Wyld gress cuivers the courtyaird.
Daunerin creepers hap the wal.
Ah gether millet an mak a pudden
an pick sum maws ti mak a pikkil soup,
but the'r naebodie for ti share thaim.
Whan Ah'm feinisht wi ma meat,
Ah staun ma lane bi the brukken yett
an dicht the tears frae ma een.*

HOME

*At fifteen I enlisted
At twenty-five I finally returned.
As I entered my village
I met an old man and asked him,
“Who lives in our house now?”
“If you look down the street,
There is your old home!”
Pines and cypresses grow like weeds.
Rabbits live in the dog's house.
Pigeons nest in the broken tiles.
Wild grass covers the courtyard.
Wandering vines cover the wall.
I gather wild millet and make a pudding
And pull some mallows for soup.
But there is nobodie to share them.
When soup and pudding are done,
I stand by the broken gate,
And wipe the tears from my eyes.*

Chu Wen-chun (First Century)

SANG O THE SNAW-WHYTE HEIDS

*Oor luiv wes saikless
as the snaw on the bens;
whyte as a muin
atwein the clouds---
Nou Ah hear tell
yeir thochts is doubil;
that's hou Ah hae cum,
ti brek it aff.
The-day we'l drink
a tass o wyne.
The-morn we'l twyne
asyde the Canal:
dauner aboot
asyde the Canal,
whaur the brainches sinder
East an Wast.
Ochone an ochone,
syne again, ochone!
Sae maun a lass
greit whan she's wad,
gin she finndsna a man
o singil hert
that winna leave hir
or hir hair is whyte.*

SONG OF SNOW WHITE HEADS

*Our love was pure
As the snow on the mountains;
White as a moon,
Between the clouds---
The're telling me
Your thoughts are double.
That's why I've come
To break it off.
Today we'll drink
A cup of wine.
Tomorrow we'll part
Beside the Canal,
Wander about
Beside the Canal,
Where its branches
Divide East and West.
Alas and alas,
And again alas!
So must a girl
Cry when she's married,
If she finds no man
Of single heart,
Who will not leave her
Till her hair is white.*

Wei Wen-ti (188-227)

ON THE DAITH O HIS FAITHER

*Ah glance up at his drapes an bed:
Ah look doun at his table heid an mat.
Thir things is thare juist lyke afore,
but the man they belanged til isna thare.
His speirit haes taen flicht bedein
an left me ferr awa ahint, masell.
Wha sal Ah look til – on wha depend?
Ma tears rins doun athouten end.*

*Ah'm aw ma lane an desolate,
dreidin the days o oor lang twynin.
Ma sair hert's ayebydin stound
nae ither sowl can ever ken.
The'r a thing ye often hear fowk say:
“It's the dule that shuirlie maks us auld.”
Ochone, ochone, for ma whyte hairs!
Thay hae cum ti me ower suin.*

ON THE DEATHOF HIS FATHER

*I look up and see his curtains and bed:
I look down and see his table and mat.
The things are there just as before.
But the man who owned them is gone.
His spirit has suddenly taken flight
And left me far away behind.
Whom shall I look to and rely?
My tears run down, an endless stream.*

*Alone now, I am desolate
Dreading the days of our long parting.
My grieving heart's lasting pain
No one else can understand.
There is a saying one often hears:
“It is sorrow that makes us grow old.
Alas, alas for my white hairs!
They have come to me too soon.”*

Yüan Chi (210-263)

EFTIRSTANG

*Whan a hauflin Ah fairlie lairnt ti fence--
Ah wes better at it nor Camsheuch Castel.*
Ma speirit rade heich as the rowin clouds,
an ma nameliheid wes kent aw ower.
Ah taen ma sword til the desert sands
an wattirt ma naig at the Ferr Bens.
Ma flags an culors flauchtert abuin
an nocht wes heard but the dirl o ma drums.*

* * * *

*But war an its traivels haes made me waesum
an a fell feim nou bleizes inby me:
it's thinkin o hou Ah hae gaen throu ma days
at gars this unco rue ryve at ma hert.*

REMORSE

*When young I learnt to fence
And was better than Crooked Castle.
My spirit was high as the clouds
And my fame was worldwide.
I took my sword to the desert sand
I watered my horse at the far hills.
My banners flapped in the wind.
And nought was heard but my drums.*

*War's travels have made me sad,
And a great rage now burns in me:
It's thinking how I have spent my life
That makes this anger tear my heart.*

*A famous general

Fu Hsuan (3rd Century)

A DOUCE WUND

*A douce wund fans the lown nicht:
A bricht muin leims on the hie touer.
Ah hear a whusper sumwhaur,
but naeb'die aunsirs whan A caw.
Syne the kitchen loun brings ben a bowle o lentils:
The'r wyne anaw, but Ah dinna fill ma gless.
Content wi puirtith is Fortuin's first blissin;
Walth an Honor is the byde-ins o Mishanter.
Tho gowd an jowels is socht bi aw the warld,
ti me thay kyth nae mair nor weeds or caff*

A SOFT WIND

*A soft wind fans the calm night
A bright moon shines on the hight tower.
I hear a whisper somewhere,
But nobody answers when I call.
Then the kitchen man brings in a dish of lentils.
There's wine, but I do not fill my cup.
Content with poverty is Fortune's fairest gift:
Wealth and Honor are the handmaids of Disaster
Though gold and jewels are sought by all the world,
To me they seem no more than weeds or chaff.*

Ch'eng-kung Sui (3rd Century)

MA PAIRTIE

*Ah sent oot invytes
for a hantil guests.
Ah brocht thegither
aw ma cronies.
Loud yammerins,
fill an flesh mair,
wi rowth o meat!
A byordnar splore;
hekkin in even on,
wi wyne galore.
Craks on philosophie
an airtilik haivers;
aw tungs lowsent,
in clishmaclaivers;
skellochin lauchin
amang freins forgethert;
herts made lichtsum
for a wee, winnin free.*

MY GUESTS

*I sent invitations
To many guests.
To bring together
All my friends.
Loud talk
Lots of drink
And plenty food.
A splendid affair.
Constant consumption.
Endless wine.
Chats on philosophy.
Arty nonsense.
Tongues loosened
In idle chatter
Shrill laughter
Among old friends:
Hearts refreshed
For a while, winning free.*

Lu Yun (4th Century)

THE WUND IN THE GLEN

*Leevin in retirement ayont the Warld,
quaetlie enjoyin aesumness,
Ah pul the raip o ma door the tichter,
an binnd steivelie this crackit jaur
that serrs me as a winnok bole.
Ma speirit is in kilter wi the Spring
an at the Faw the'r Autumn in ma hert.
This gait, in follaein cosmic chynge,
Ma cot-houss haes becum ma Universe.*

THE WIND IN THE VALLEY

*Living in retirement beyond the world
Quietly enjoying my isolation,
I pull the rope of my door more tight,
And stuff in securely this cracked jar
That serves me as a window space.
My spirit is in tune with the Spring
And now there's Autumn in my heart.
This way, following cosmic change,
My cottage has become my Universe*

T'ao Ch'ien (372-427)

BACK END

*Snell an coorse the year draws til its end.
In ma cotton goun Ah luik for sunlicht on the porch.
In the south pleasance aw the leafs is gaen.
In the norlin gairden foustit bous liggs haepit.
Ah tak ma tass an drink it, doun til the dregs.
Ah luik til the kitchen, but nae reik ryses.
Poems an buiks is stekk't asyde ma chair:
but the licht is gaun an Ah'l no hae tyme ti read thaim.*

THE FALL

*Cold and harsh the year draws to its end:
In my cotton gown I search for sunlight in the porch.
In the south orchard all the leaves have gone:
In the north garden, rotten branches lie
I take my cup and drink it to the dregs:
I look to the kitchen but no smoke rises.
Poems and books are stacked beside my chair;
But the light is gone and I'll not have time to read them.*

SPRING BREIRD

*Swippert the years, ayont myndin.
Solemn the lown o this braw mornin.
Ah wul cleid masell in Spring claes
an veisit the braes o the Eastern ben.
Bi the hill burn a haar hings,
swithers a wee, syne skails awa.
Cums a wund blawin frae the South,
at skiffs the riggs o the new corn.*

NEW CORN

*Swiftly the years, beyond memory.
Solemn the calm of this fine morning.
I will dress myself in Spring clothes
And visit the slopes of the east hill
By the hill stream a mist hangs,
Delays a little, then disperses.
Then a wind blows from the South
That brushes the field of new corn.*

Pao Chao (5th Century)

THE SCHOLAR SOJER

*Nou late on i the day Ah list wi the lave for the War.
We mairch aw day for fullie twae month.
Sklimmin the breistwark, Ah fecht
wi outlin clans Ah never kent war thare afore.
Thrawin aff ma sash, Ah cleid masell
in an unco teuch rhinoceros coat:
rowin up ma kilt, Ah shouther a steive blek bou.
The cheil on ma richt skraichs oot an founders,
a fell slain in his wame, an pitmirk haps his een.
Even at the verra stert, ma smeddum fails.
“Mither! Whit wul becum o me afore it's ower?”*

THE BOY SOLDIER

*Now late on in the day I enlist with the rest for the War.
We march all day for fully two months.
Climbing the barricade, I fight
With alien tribes I never knew existed before.
Throwing off my sash, I clothe myself
In an extra tough rhinoceros coat:
Rolling up my skirt, I shoulder a stiff black bow.
The lad on my right screams out and falls,
An arrow in his stomach, and darkness in his eyes.
Even at the start my courage fails.
“Mother! What will become of me before it’s over?”*

Wu-ti (464-549)

FOWK DERNS THAIR LUIV

*Wha says this is whit Ah want,
ti be sindert aye sae ferr frae ye?
Ma goun hauds yit the whuff o lavender ye sent.
Aboot ma waist Ah weir a doubil sash:
Ah dream it binnds us baith wi ae hert-knot.
Did ye no ken that fowk can dern thair luiv:
A flouer that kyths ower praiciuss for ti pou?*

HIDDEN LOVE

*Who says this is what I want,
Separated so far from you?
My gown still holds a trace of lavender you sent
Around my waist I wear a double sash:
I dream it binds us both with one heart-knot
Did you not know that people hide their love,
Like a flower that seems too precious to be pulled.*

Tsang Chih (6th Century)

AULD KIMMER’S SANG

*Ah wes brocht up anaith the Stane Castel:
ma winnok opent forenen the mukkil touer.
Inby war aw the braw yung callants
waved aye ti me as thay gaed oot an in.*

OLD WOMAN'S SONG

*I was raised below the Stone Castle
My window faced the great tower.
Inside were all the breave young men
Who waved to me going in and out.*

Wang Seng-ju (6th Century)

TEARS

*Heich ower the ben the muin skowe steers;
the lantern lichts departs.
Deid springs is steirin in ma hert,
an nou the'r tears ...
The stound that maks ma dule mair deep
is that ye kenna whan Ah greit.*

TEARS

*High o'er the hill the moon barque steers.
The lantern lights depart
Dead springs are stirring in my heart,
And now there are tears...
But that which makes my grief more deep
Is that you know not when I weep.*

Wang Chi (ca. 700)

TELL ME NOU

*'Tell me nou, whit mair micht a man want
nor ti sit his lane, bebbin his tass o wyne?'
Ah soud lyke ti hae veisitors for ti crak on philosophie,
an no hae the tax-man cum getherin siller;
ma thrie sons mairrit inti guid faimlies;
ma five dochters mairrit on wycelyke men.
Syne Ah coud jundie throu a blyth hunder year,
an at the hinner end, want nae Heivin.*

TELL ME NOW

*"Tell me now, what more might a man want
But to sit alone, sipping his cup of wine?"
I should like to have visitors to discuss philosophy,
And not have the tax-man to collecting taxes:
My three sons married into good families
And my five daughters wedded to reliable husbands.
Then I could jog throu a happy hundred years
And at the end, need no Paradise.*

Kao-shih (ca.700)

AUTUMN DAYS

*The mantil o Autumn liggs lourd
ower wuid an ben an cleuch.
It's the Faw, the tyme o decay,
an the deid leafs howderin flicht;
an the mantil o Autumn haps wae
on the gangril's saul the-nicht.*

THE FALL

*The mantle of Autumn lies heavy
Over wood and hill and ravine
It's Autumn, the time of decay,
And the dead leaves wandering flight
And the mantle of Autumn lies heavy
On the wanderers soul to-night*

Wang Wei (701-761)

IN THE HIELAND FOREST

*Deep ben amang the bens
whaur naebodie ever cumns,
onlie aince in a lang whyle
ye hear the soun o a ferr vyce.
The laich leims o the sun
jouk throu the mirk forest an glent
aince mair on the shaidaed moss*

DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS

*Deep in the mountain forests
Where nobody ever comes
Only once in long while
You hear the sound of a far voice.
The low rays of the sun
Dodge through the dark trees
And glint again on the shaded moss.*

Li Po (701-762)

A WAESUM WUMMAN

*Up the merbil steps she walks on dew
an daidils thare, as nicht cumns on,
or hir stockin-soles ir droukit.*

A FORLORN WOMAN

*Up the marble steps she walks on dew
And lingers there, as night comes on,
Till her stocking-soles are drenched.*

*She waits in vain, gaes in at lest,
syne pairts the kirstal-beadit curtain
an goaves at the glisterin muin.*

*She waits in vain, retires at last,
Parts the crystal-beaded curtain,
And gazes at the glistening moon.*

CLEARIN AT DAWIN

*The riggs is cauld, the smirr haes liftit;
the culors o Spring splairge in ilka airt;
wi lowpin fish the blue puil is rowth;
wi liltin maivises the green bous stint.*

*The flouers o the field haes daibilt thair poutheret chowks;
the gress on the bens is bent sklef at mids;
bi the bamboo wattir the lest nirl o cloud
is blawn bi the wund an slaelie skails awa.*

CLEARING AT DAWN

*The fields are cold, the mist has lifted.
The colors of Spring burgeon on every side;
With leaping fish the blue pool is full,
With song thrushes the green bows bend.*

*The flowers of the field have dappilt their powdered cheeks;
The grass on the hills is bent in two;
By the bamboo water the last wisp of cloud
Is blown by the wind an dissolves slowly away*

GREININ

*Sae bricht a leim at ma bed-fuit---
Coud the hae been a freist
areddies? Hystin masell ti luik,
Ah see that it is nou muinlicht.
Bouin ma heid, Ah dream
that Ah im hame.*

LONGING

*So bright a gleam at my bed foot--
Could there have been a frost
Already? Hoisting myself to look,
I see that it is now midnight.
Bowing my head, I dream
That I am home.*

DISHAUNTIT SELL

*Ah sat bebbin an never taen tent o the gloamin.
Ah sat tipplin an Ah never kent 'twes the forenicht,
or the fawin petals filled the faulds o ma goun.
Drukken Ah rase an made for the muinlicht wattir:
the burds war gaen --- no monie fowk aboot!*

DISENCHANTED

*I sat drinking and nevir noticed the dusk fall.
I sat tippling and I nevir knew it was evening,
Till the falling petals filled the folds of my gown.
Drunk I rose and made for the moonlight water:
The birds were gone --- few folk about!*

MA FREIN

*Ma frein is ludgin up in the Aistern hills
fair browdent on the bewtie o the straths an bens.
In the green Spring days, he liggs i the tuim wuids;
doverin aye whan the sun sheins hie abuin.
A pine-tree wund kisses his sleeves an coat.
A chuck-stane burn synds his ears an hert.
Ah fairlie envy ye, that ferr frae sturt an clash,
ir stelled heich on a bouster o whyte cloud.*

MY FRIEND

*My friend is living in the Eastern hills
Enchanted with the beauty of the mountains.
In the green Spring days, he lies in the empty woods;
Dozing when the sun shines high above.
A pine-tree wind kisses his sleeves and coat.
A pebbled stream cleanses his ears and heart.
I really envy you, that far from noise and strife,
Are settled high on a bolster of white cloud.*

SAUCHT

*An ye war ti speir at me, lyke,
whitfor Ah byde amang the green bens,
Ah sal lauch quaetlyke ti masell.
Ma saul is lown. The peach-blossom
follaes the rinnin wattir aye,
an the'r anither heivin an yird sumwhaur
ayont the warld o men.*

PEACE

*If you were to ask me
Why I live among the green hills,
I shall laugh quietly to myself.
My soul is calm. The peach blossoms
follow the running water always,
And there's another heaven and earth
Somewhere, beyond the world of men.*

SIMMER DAY

*Up here ma lane amang the bens,
doucelie Ah steir a whyte feather fan.
Wi an open serk, Ah sit in a green wuid.
Ah lowse ma bonnet an hank it on a ledgin stane;
a souch frae the pine-tree strinkils ma bare heid.*

SUMMER DAY

*Up here alone among the hills,
Softly I waft a white feather fan.
With an open shirt, I sit in a green wood.
I loosen my bonnet an hang it on a jutting stone;
A breeze from the pine-tree brushes my bare head.*

Tu Fu (712-770)

KINTRIE COTHOUSS

*A cottar's houss asyde
the clear wattir; the rustic yett
gies on til a forleiten loan.
The weeds growes ower the pant wal.
Ah slounge in ma auld claes.
The sauch's brainches swey.
Flouerin trees perfume the air.
The sun gaes doune aince mair
ahint a clekkin droukit cormorants,
dryin thair blek weings alang the pier.*

COUNTRY COTTAGE

*A peasant's house beside
The clear water; the rustic gate
Opens on a deserted road
The weeds grow over the public well.
I lounge in my old clothes.
The willow's branches sway.
Flowering trees perfume the air.
The sun goes down once more
Behind a group of wet cormorants,
Drying their black wings along the pier.*

THE SPRING AINCE MAIR

*Brukken the muin o Mairch,
April lamps on.
Hou monie ither Springs
im Ah ti walcum?*

*Wul Ah see monie mair
Springs turn til Simmer?
But nou Ah'l no forgae
wyne douce as hinnie.*

*Nae guid ti think on things
Ah canna reckon:
afore lyfe's dregs ir drained
aye the'r sum glesses.*

SPRING AGAIN

*The moon of March is broken
April strides on
How many other Springs
Will I welcome?*

*Will I see many more
Springs turn to Summer/
But now I'll not forgo
Wine sweet as honey.*

*No good to think on things
I cannot reckon:
Before life's dregs are drained
Always some glasses.*

SPRING RAIN

*A guidlyke rain kens its saison.
It kyths at the oncum o Spring.
It snuves throu the nicht on the breeze,
Seilentlie droukin awthing;
a mirk nicht, clouds blek as the causie,
juist ae licht on a boat leimin;
the mornin, fair droukit wi wattir,
the flouers hing thair lourd heids*

SPRING RAIN

*A good rain knows its season.
It comes at the onset of Spring.
It steals through the night on a breeze,
Silently drenching everything;
A dark night, clouds black as the road
Just one light on a boat gleaming;
In the morning, drenched with water,
The flowers hang their heavy heads.*

TRAIVLIN NORLINS

*The houlets skraich in the yallaein
mulberrie busses. Field myce skelter
reddin thair holes for the wunter.
At nicht, we cross an auld battilgrund.
The muinlicht leims cauld on whyte banes.*

TRAVELLING NORTH

*The owls screech in the yellowing
Mulberry bushes. Field mice scurry
Tidying their holes for winter
At night, we cross an old battleground.
Moonlight gleams cold on white bones.*

VEISITORS

*Ah've suffered frae asthma for
a guid whyle back. Ah finnd easement
here in this biggin bi the wattirsyde.
It is lown in here. Nae crouds
fash me. Ah'm brichter in masell.
an mair restit lyke. Ah im blyth here.
Whan a bodie caws in at ma theikit hut,
ma son brings ben ma strae hat
an oot Ah gae an gether me
a gowpenfu fresh vegetables.
Ah ken it's no mukkil ti offer,
but it is gien in freinship.*

VISITORS

*Ah've suffered from asthma for
a good long whyle. I find easement
Here in this cottage by the waterside.
It is peaceful here. No crowds
Disturb me. I'm brighter in myself
And more rested. I am content here
When anybody calls at my thatcht hut
My son brings in my straw hat
And out I go and gather myself
Some fresh vegetables.
I know it is't much to offer,
But it is given in friendship.*

WAUKRIF NICHT IN CAMP

*In the drakkin damp,
Ah mak ti sleep ablo the bamboo
canes, anaith the fekfu cauld
muinlicht in the wilderness.
The smirr dwynes til a fyne flim.
Yin bi yin the sterns skinkil oot,
or anelie the fyreflies is left.
Burds wheipil ower the wattir.
The war rages til its fell ootcum.
It's uissless for ti vex masell,
waukrif the lang nicht throu.*

RESTLESS NIGHT IN CAMP

*On the damp ground
I try to sleep below the bamboo
Canes, beneath the bitter cold
Moonlight in the wilderness.
The dew thins to a fine mist.
One by one the stars twinkle out,
Till only the fireflies are left.
Birds call across the water
The war rages to its outcome.
It is useless for me to vex myself
Sleepless the whole night through.*

Po Chü-i (772-846)

ANITHER DAY

*Ma man waukens me: “Maister, the day’s weill on!
Up oot yeir bed! Here bowle an kaim!
Wunter cums an the air is yit snell.
Yeir Guidsell durstna gang ootby the-day!”*

*Whan Ah byde at hame, naebodie veisits me.
Whit wul Ah dae wi the lang slouth oors?
Settlin ma chair naith a waek sun’s leims,
Ah hae mulled up wyne an taen up ma poems.*

ANOTHER DAY

*My servant wakens me: “Master, the day’s well on!
It’s time to rise! Here is your bowl and comb!
Winter is near and the air is cold.
Your Honor should not go out today!”*

*When I stay home, nobody comes to see me.
What will I do to fill the long lazy hours?
Settling my chair below a weak sun’s rays,
I have mulled up wine and taken up my poems.*

AULD AGE

*We ir growin auld thegither, you an me;
we maun ask oorsells, ‘Whitlyke is eild?’
The bleirie ee is steik’t or nicht faws,
the fekless heid is aye unkaimed at nuin.
Stelled bi a stick, whyles a wee turn ootby;
or aw day sittin inby wi steikit doors.
Ah daurna glisk i the keikin gless;
Ah canna read smaw-prentit buiks.
Deeper an deeper Ah loue the auld freins;
thir days Ah’ve littil troke wi yungir men.
But ae thing juist: the pleisir o idle blether
is gleg as evir, whan you an Ah forgether.*

OLD AGE

*We are growing old together, you and I?
We must ask ourselves, ‘What is old age lyke?
The watery eyes are shut before night fall,
The unkempt head is still uncombed at noon..
Steadied by stick, sometimes a turn outside;
Or all day sitting inside closed doors.
I dare not glance at the looking glass;
I cannot read small-printed books.
Deeper and deeper I love the old friends;
These days I’ve little time for younger men.
But just one thing: the pleasure of idle chatter
Is lively as ever, when you and I get together.*

LAO TZU

*‘Thaim that speaks kens naething.
Thaim that kens bydes lown.’
Thir wurds, Ah hear tell,
war spoken bi Lao-tzu.
Gin we ir ti credit that Lao-tzu
wes himself ane that kent,
hou cumis it he wrate a buik
o five thousan wurds?*

LAO TZU

*‘Those that speak know nothing
Those that know remain silent.’
These words, I believe,
Were spoken by Lao-tzu.
If we believe that Lao tzu
Was himself somebody that knew,
How did he come to write a book
Offive thousand words?*

LOSSIN A SLAVE-QUYNE

*Aroun ma howf the littil waw is laich.
At the vennel yett hir loss wes leitit late.
Ah think shame ti mynd at whyles we warna kynd;
Ah'm vext anent yeir tyauvin that wul nevir
be repeyed. The cagit burd is no behauden.
The wund-blawn flouers claunchtsna the tree.*

* * * *

*Whaur the-nicht she liggs the'r nane can gie us wurd;
naebodie kens, but thon bricht ower-watchin muin.*

LOSING A SLAVE-GIRL

*Around my home the little wall is low.
At the lane gate her loss was noted late.
I'm shamed to think sometimes we were unkind;
And sorry that your hard work will never
Be repayed. The caged bird is not indebted.
The wind-blown blossoms cling not to the tree.*

* * * *

*Where tonight she lies nobody can tell;
Nobody knows, but that bright over-watching moon.*

THE REID COCKATOO

*Sent as a present frae Annam---
a reid cockatoo;
hued lik the peach-tree blossom,
yammerin awa the words o men,
an thay did til it whit aye is duin
til the wyce an glib-gabbit.
Thay taen a cage wi mukkil bars
an shut it up inby.*

THE RED COCKATOO

*Sent as a gift from Annam---
A red cockatoo;
hued like the peach-tree blossom,
Speaking away in the words of men,
And they did to it what is always done
To the wise and talkative.
They brought a cage with great bars
And shut it up inside.*

UP ABUIN THE TOUN

*Sklimmin up heich, Ah begin ti see the smawness
o Man's Kinrik.
Glowerin hyne awa, Ah begin ti see the vainitie
o the fleshlie warld.
Ah turn ma heid an breishil hame---back til
the Court an Mercat,
a singil rice aiker fawin---intil
the Mukkil Bern.*

UP ABOVE THE TOWN

*Climbing up above, I begin to see the pettyness
of Man's Kingdom.
Looking far away, I begin to see the vanity
of the fleshly world.
I turn my head an hurry home---back to
the Court and Market,
A single rice grain falling---into
the great Barn.*

WUNTER NICHT

*Ma houss is puir an thaim Ah loue haes left me.
Ma corp is seik --- Ah canna jyne the feast.
The'r no a leevin sowl forenent ma een
as Ah ligg ma lane lock't in ma cot-houss chaumer.
Ma brukken cruisie burns wi a dwaiblie lowe.
Ma tattert drapes hings squint an dinna meet.
'Puff' on the front dure-step an wundae sill,
aye an again Ah hear the new snaw faw.
Day in, day oot, the aulder Ah growe Ah sleep the less.
Ah wauken the midnicht oor an sit up strecht in bed.
Gin Ah haedna lairnt the airt o meditation,
hou coud Ah beir this yondmaist lanesumness?
Steive an sterke ma bodie hauds the yird;
unhinnert nou ma sowl devauls til entropie.
Sae haes it been for fower dreich year:
a thousan an thrie hunder nicht!*

WINTER NIGHT

*My house is poor an those 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 chamber.
My broken lamp burns with a feeble glow.
My tattert curtains hang squint and do not meet.
'Puff' on the front door step and window sill,
Over and over again I hear the new snow fall.
Day in, day out, the older I grow, I sleep the less.
I awake at the midnight hour and sit up straight in bed.
If I had not learned the art of meditation,
How could I bear this utter loneliness?
Stiff and stark my body holds the ground;
Unhindert now my soul dissolves to entropie.
Thus it has been for fower desolate years:
A thousand and three hundred nights.*

LEST POEM

*Thay hae putten ma bed asyde the unpentit screen.
Thay hae steired ma stove forenenent the blue curtain.
Ah listen til ma grandbairns haetin up ma pikkil kail.
Wi a gleg pincil Ah aunser the poems o ma freins,
Ah graip in ma poutches for siller for medicine,
an whan Ah'm duin wi aw this lik fouterin,
Ah ligg back on ma cod an dover aff,
wi ma gizz turnt til the South.*

LAST POEM

*They have put my bed beside the unpainted screen.
They have moved my stove before the blue curtain.
I listen ti my grandchildren heating up my broth.
With a deft pencil I answer the poems of my friends.
I grope in my pockets for money for medicine,
And when I'm through with all this trifling,
I lie back on my bolster and doze off,
With my face turned to the South.*

Ts'ao Sung (ca. 830-910)

PLAINT AGIN GENERALS

*The hills an wattirs o the Lawland kintrie
ye hae made yeir battil grund.
Hou dae ye think the fowk that bydes thare
wul gether hey an kinnlin?
Dinna you lat me hear ye haiverin thegither
anent teitils an honors,
for a singil general's namelikeid
is biggit on ten thousan corps.*

COMPLAINT AGAINST GENERALS

*The hills and rivers of the Lowland country
You have made your battle ground
How do you think the people that live there
Will gather hay and firewood?
Do not let me hear you speaking together
About titles and honors,
For a single general's celebrity
Is founded on ten thousand corpses.*

Li Hou-chu, Emperor of Southern Tang Dynasty
(deposed in 975)

BOUNLESS PYNE

*Ma dreamin saul lest nicht
wes keing aince mair.
As in days bygaen,
Ah daunert throu
the Pailace o Delicht,
an in ma dreams,
doun gressie gairden gaits
ma chairiot snuived,
smoother nor a simmer stream.
The war muinlicht,
the trees war breirdin blossom
an a lown wund saftent the nicht air,
for it wes Spring.*

BOUNLESS PAIN

*My dreaming soul last night
Was king once more.
As in bygone times,
I strolled through
The Palace of Delight,
And in my dreams,
Down grassy garden paths
My chariot glided,
Smoother than a summer stream.
There was sunlight,
The trees were forming blossom
And a gentle breeze softened the night air
For it was Spring*

Su Tung-p'o (1036-1101)

HOGMANAY

*The year slips in til anither end
lyke a serpent crawlin in a field.
Ye hae nae suiner sichtit it
or it haes santit awa foraye.
It haes gaen an its fash is gaen wi it.
Ye haed better no grup it bi the tail!
Whitfor soud ye try, whan it wad dae ye nae guid.
The bairns ir waukrif; thay canna sleep.
Thay sit up aw nicht lauchin an yatterin.
The cocks dinna craw ti hansil the dawin.
The watch dinna dird thair drums the-nicht.
Awbody bydes up whyle the lamps burn doun,
an gaes oot ti watch the sterns dwyne awa.
Ah div howp neist year wul be better nor lest.
But Ah daursay it wul juist be
the same auld mistaks an mishanters.
Mebbe Ah wul be better fordilt
bi Hogmanay neist year. Ah soud!
Here Ah im, yung an yauld—
lichtsum, an fou o smedдум.*

HOGMANAY

*The year slips in to another end
Like a serpent crawling in a field.
You have no sooner sighted it
Than it has disappeared forever.
It has gone and its trouble has gone with it.
You had better not grip it by the tail!
Why should you try, when it would do you no good.
The children are restless; they cannot sleep.
They sit up all night laughing and chattering.
The cocks do not crow to welcome the dawn.
The watch do not beat their drums tonight.
Everyone stays up whyle the lamps burn down,
And goes out to watch the stars fade away.
I do hope next year will be better than last,
But I daresay it will just be
The same old mistakes and mishaps.
Perhaps I will have done better
By Hogmanay next year. I should have!
Here I am, young and healthy:
Cheerful and full of drive.*

ON THE BIRTH O HIS SON

*Whan a bairn is born
the faimlie forordnar
wad lyke it ti be
smertlyke an clivver.
But wi be-in owre smert,
Ah hae connacht ma haill lyfe.
Sae Ah div howp this wean
wul growe up ti be
donnert an stuipit.
An syne Ah daursay
he wul shuirlie croun
a blythsum career
as a Caabinet Meinister.*

ON THE BIRTH OF HIS SON

*When a baby is born
The family usually
Would like it to be
Smart and clever.
But by being too smart,
I have spoiled my whole life.
So I do hope this child
Will grow up to be
Backward and stupid,
And then I dare say
He will ssurely crown
A happy career
As a Cabinet Minister*

Chu Hsi (1130-1200)

THOCHT BI THE LOCHAN

*The gless o the lochan leims
an skimmers cannilie in the saur.
The splendor o the lift abuin
an the whyteness o the clouds
happin the taps o the bens
ir reflekit back on thairsells.
Ah speir at the lochan:
“Whaur can Ah finnd
oniething ither as clear an pure?”
“Anelie at the springheid
o the wattir o lyfe.”*

THOUGHT BY THE LAKE

*The glass of the lake gleams
And shimmers gently in the breeze.
The splendor of the sky above
And the whiteness of the clouds
Covering the tops of the bens
Are reflected back on themselves.
I ask of the lake: “Where can I find
Anything else as clear and pure?”
“Only at the source of the water of life.”*

Feng Meng-lung (ca.1590-1646)

LUIV POEM

*Nou dinna you set sail the-day!
The wund is getherin an the wather isna guid.
Ferr better cum back ti ma houss wi me.
Gin the'r oniething ye wad lyke, juist tell me!
Gin ye'r cauld, ma bodie is warm.
Lat us be blyth thegither this ae nicht.
The-morn, Ah daursay, the wund wul hae lowdent,
syne ye can gae, an A'l no fash aboot ye.*

LOVE POEM

*Now don't you set sail today!
The wind is gathering and the weather is not good.
Far better come back to my house with me.
If there is anything you would like, just tell me!
If you are cold, my body is warm.
Let us be happy together this one night.
Tomorrow, I imagine, the wind will have fallen,
Then you can go, and I'll not worry about you.*