

Ancient Oriental Autumnal Poetry

Chinese Poetry

Autumn is a well-known motif in Chinese literature. Many Chinese literati in ancient times write about their melancholy feelings in late autumn, hence the season is often associated with a sombre, introspective mood.

Wang Wei (701-761 CE)

“A Song Of An Autumn Night”

Under the crescent moon a light autumn dew
Has chilled the robe she will not change —
And she touches a silver lute all night,
Afraid to go back to her empty room.

“Three Songs For Lady Pan”

Fireflies flash on mica screens.
No echo in Golden Halls.
Seen through gauze the autumn night
Where the lonely light shines.

Autumn grass on Palace yards.
The Emperor no longer cares to see.
How much pain in clear music.
They go past. The Golden Ones.

Court-ladies' blinds are closed.
Courtyards empty. All are gone.
Now they are part of spring gardens,
Flowered voices in the sun.
White silk new sliced
Pure as fallen snow,
Cut for a round fan
Bright as the full moon,
Goes always by his side,
Like the tender wind.
But when autumn comes
When cold chills fire,
It will be cast aside.
Love's flame will end.

Du Fu (712-770)

“Autumn Thoughts”

Jade frost bites the maple trees
and Wu Mountain and Wu Gorge breathe out dark fear

as river waves rise up to the sky
and dark wind-clouds touch ground by a frontier fortress.

The chrysanthemums have twice bloomed tears of other days,
When I moor my lonely boat my heart longs for my old garden.
The need for winter clothes hurries scissors and bamboo rulers.

White Emperor City looms over the rushed sound of clothes
beaten at dusk.

Li Ching Chao (1084 -1151)

“Autumn Love”

Search. Search. Seek. Seek.
Cold. Cold. Clear. Clear.
Sorrow. Sorrow. Pain. Pain.
Hot flashes. Sudden chills.
Stabbing pains. Slow agonies.
I can find no peace.
I drink two cups, then three bowls,
Of clear wine until I can't
Stand up against a gust of wind.
Wild geese fly over head.
They wrench my heart.
They were our friends in the old days.
Gold chrysanthemums litter
The ground, pile up, faded, dead.
This season I could not bear
To pick them. All alone,
Motionless at my window,
I watch the gathering shadows.
Fine rain sifts through the wu-t'ung trees,
And drips, drop by drop, through the dusk.
What can I ever do now?
How can I drive off this word — Hopelessness.

Kunai-kyō (Lady Kunaikyo, 1185-1204)

“Autumn Poem”

It's not that I'm now
lost in thought,
but dusk in autumn
makes me ponder
on matters of the heart.

(12th c. poem reflects on the mood of sad reflection that the end of an
autumn day brings on.)

Ma Zhiyuan (? -1321)

“Autumn Thoughts”

Over old trees wreathed with withered vines fly evening
crows;
Under a small bridge near a cottage a stream flows;
On an ancient road in the westerly wind a lean horse goes.
Westward declines the sun;
Faraway wanderer is the heartbroken one.

Yi Lei

“Nature Aria” (2018)

Autumn wind chases in
From all directions
And a thousand chaste leaves
Give way.

Scatter in me the seeds
Of a thousand saplings.
Let grow a grassy heaven.
On my brow: a sun.
This bliss is yours, Living
World, and alone it endures.
Music at midnight.
Young wine.
Lovers hand in hand
By daylight, moonlight.
Living World, hold me
In your mouth,

Slip on your frivolous shoes
And dance with me. My soul
Is the wild vine
Who alone has grasped it,
Who has seen through the awful plot,
Who will arrive in time to vanquish
The river already heavy with blossoms,
The moon spilling light onto packs
Of men. What is sadder than witless
Wolves, wind without borders,

Nationless birds, small gifts
Laden with love's intentions?

Fistfuls of rain fall hard, fill
My heart with mud. An old wind
May still come chasing in.
Resurrection fire. And me here
Laughing like a cloud in trousers,
Entreating the earth to bury me.

Japanese Poetry

Ono no Komachi (female poet 825-900)

“The Autumn Wind”

The autumn wind (In his ennui he blew cold)
Across the rice ears, (On our love)
So sad;
Empty of grain (My heart desolate)
Are they left.

Ki No Tsurayuki (872-945)

“The Autumn Mountains”

The Autumn mountains

Weave Autumn leaves
For offerings, so
Even I, living here,
Feel the urge to travel

“Alone for you Autumn”

Alone for you Autumn
Has not come,
Maidenflowers,
So why do you colour
So swiftly, then fade?

Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902)

“Oh Autumn”

Oh, autumn
in the boundless world!
its traces

Vietnamese Poetry

Ho Xuan Huong (female poet, 1772-1822)

“Autumn Landscape”

Drop by drop rain slaps the banana leaves.
Praise whoever sketched this desolate scene:

the lush, dark canopies of the gnarled trees,
the long river, sliding smooth and white.

I lift my wine flask, drunk with rivers and hills.
My backpack, breathing moonlight, sags with poems.

Look, and love everyone.
Whoever sees this landscape is stunned.