



To the tune "Treading on the Sedges"—"On the narrow path"

踏莎行 · 小徑紅稀

Text Information

Author | Yan Shu

Language | Chinese

Period | 11th Century

Genre | Song lyric (ci)

Source | Tang, Guizhang 唐圭璋 (ed.). *Quan Song Ci* 全宋詞. Vol 1. Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1965. 99.

Collection | Love Songs of the Medieval World: Lyrics from Europe and Asia

URL | <https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/tune-%E2%80%9Ctreading-sedges-narrow-path>

Translation by Qian Jia. Introduction and notes by Nina Du and Runqi Zhang.

Introduction to the Text

Yan Shu, a powerful statesman in the early Northern Song court, had a long and successful career both as an official and as a poet. Among his many literary achievements (which include poetry, song lyrics and prose) his *ci* compositions are best known. His lyrics are elegant in their choice of words, controlled in the emotions they express, and not as playful as the *ci* of other well-known poets. They often capture feelings of solitude and sorrow, creating a melancholic mood, but the poet is rarely explicit about what triggers the worry or sadness.

This piece is mostly focused on the description of spring scenery and the speaker's sadness at the end of the spring. It can be read as an attempt to convey the beauty of nature as well as a metaphor for the transience of happiness.



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小徑紅稀，
芳郊綠徧。
高臺樹色陰陰見。
春風不解禁楊花，
5 濛濛亂撲行人面。

On the narrow path, red flowers are few now,
While the fragrant countryside is green throughout.
The color of the trees upon the high terrace appears dark and shady.
The spring breeze does not know to prevent the willow catkins
5 from pelting the faces of passersby in a drizzle of fluff.

翠葉藏鶯，
珠簾隔燕。
爐香靜逐遊絲轉。
一場愁夢酒醒時，
10 斜陽卻照深深院。

The verdant leaves hide the orioles;
The pearl curtain keeps the swallows out.
The incense burner quietly chases the winding smoke.
After a sorrowful dream, as I sober up,
10 The slanting sun shines into the deep courtyard.

Critical Notes

Translation

Line 7 The "pearl curtain" refers to a curtain made of strung pearls.

Line 7 "Swallows" here refers to the girls behind the curtain.