



To the tune "Sands of the Washing Stream"—"A single new song, a single cup of wine"

浣溪沙 · 一曲新詞酒一杯

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. 89.

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

URL | <http://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/tune-sands-washing-stream-single-new-song-single-cup-wine>

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 *ci* is regarded as Yan Shu's masterpiece, because it conveys deep sentiments using few words. The first two lines of the second stanza are particularly admired for their parallelism and neat contrast. The song expresses feelings of sorrow and regret at the passage of spring. As in many of Yan Shu's songs, there is no way to determine if the person being described is male or female. This is unusual and must be deliberate. It imparts to his songs a certain universality. The person before us could be anyone.



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曲新詞酒一杯。
去年天氣舊亭臺。
夕陽西下幾時回。

A single new song, a single cup of wine
On the old terrace in last year's weather.
The setting sun has gone west, when will it return?

無可奈何花落去。
5 似曾相識燕歸來。
小園香徑獨徘徊。

There's no help for it, the blossoms fall and disappear;
5 I seem to recognize them, the swallows come back again.
On the fragrant path of the little garden, I linger alone.