



To the tune “Treading on the Sedges”—“Chrysanthemums by the railings wilt”

鵲踏枝 · 檻菊愁煙蘭泣露

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. 91.

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

URL | <https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/tune-%E2%80%9Cmagpie-treads-branch%E2%80%9Dchrysanthemums-railings-wilt>

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 song is written from the perspective of a woman reminiscing about her lover. This is one of the most famous examples of the *ci* genre, and one of the best-known works of Yan Shu. The song lyrics depict natural imagery which mirrors and amplifies the speaker's feelings of loneliness.



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鵲踏枝

To the tune "Magpie Treads the Branch"

檻菊愁煙蘭泣露。

Chrysanthemums by the railings wilt in the mist, the orchids weep dew.

羅幕輕寒，

Inside the silken bed canopy, it is slightly cold;

燕子雙飛去。

Swallows fly away in pairs.

明月不諳離恨苦。

The bright moon does not know the bitterness of parting;

5 斜光到曉穿朱戶。

5 Its slanting light penetrates my painted window until daybreak.

昨夜西風凋碧樹。

Last night, the west wind withered the emerald tree.

獨上高樓，

Alone, I ascended the high tower,

望盡天涯路。

to stare at the road that leads to the edge of the world.

欲寄彩箋兼尺素。

I want to send letters on colored paper and white silk,

10 山長水闊知何處。

10 The mountains are wide, the rivers broad, how do I know where you are?

Critical Notes

Translation

Line 2 The "silken bed canopy" refers to a silk curtain over a bed, mostly found in wealthy households.

Line 7 The high tower refers to an ancient Chinese military tower, which would typically have had many floors. Once such towers were no longer in use, they often became gathering places for poets.

Line 9 "Colored paper" refers to the luxurious paper typically used for poems and songs.