The Yuan and Ming Dynasties

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THE YUAN AND MING DYNASTIES: PERIOD INTRODUCTION

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Over the centuries, North China had passed through long periods of war, devastation, and conquest by non-Chinese peoples, but the Mongol conquest of the North in 1234 was in many ways unique, chiefly in the indifference of the Mongols to the benefits of Chinese civilization—except as those benefits served the Mongol war machine. Legend has it that Genghiz Khan considered turning his newly conquered territory into a large pastureland for Mongol ponies, and judging from the history of his conquests, he probably had the will, the means, and the ruthlessness to effect such a decision. He was dissuaded, the story goes, on being shown that the Chinese tax system would prove to be a more profitable use of the land. The Mongol conquest of North China was, like early Mongol conquests everywhere, of stunning ferocity, depopulating entire regions. But for the Confucian intellectuals who had ruled China and wrote its history, such mere physical violence was hardly a greater affront than the change in their own status in the new Mongol hierarchy of professions—close to the bottom of a list graded by usefulness. Slightly better than beggars and inferior to artisans and Buddhist monks, the Chinese intellectuals who had comfortably served the Jurchen Jin Dynasty saw what had seemed an immutable social order turned upside down. When, in a milder mood, the Mongols conquered the Southern Song some forty years later, an ethnic hierarchy placed the Mongols on top, followed by foreigners from the Mongol conquests in the West, then Northern Chinese, followed by "Southerners" at the very bottom.

Despite the profound cultural affront, in South China the Mongols and their foreign henchmen (such as Marco Polo) were a mere irritant. The Mongols, in their new Chinese guise as the Yuan Dynasty, recognized that the region was a profitable enterprise, so they disrupted neither commerce nor patterns of landholding. Despite heartfelt regrets about the end of the Song, carefully buried in elaborate metaphors, the old Southern Song elite essentially remained in place and continued Southern urban culture largely unchanged.

The Mongols' Chinese capital at Da-du (modern Beijing) was, however, a truly cosmopolitan city and very different from the Chinese cities of the South. Chinese elite culture was represented there, yet at the same time a truly popular urban culture flourished with unprecedented confidence and vitality. The vernacular songs of Da-du delighted in boasting, caustic satire, buffoonery, and direct eroticism, all treated in the lively argot of the city. Voices that had been rigorously excluded from the decorum of elite literature here found expression, and these voices gained much of their energy precisely because they violated such rules of decorum. This was a counterculture, and we have indications that such a counterculture already existed in the Song, though its texts were rarely preserved; from the Yuan, however, printed songbooks have been preserved, attesting not only to the existence of such a literature but that it had become a commodity that could be sold in print to a literate readership.

Closely related to vernacular songs were the "variety plays," *za-ju*, each of whose four acts was built around a song suite interspersed with dialogue. The top-

ics of these plays were largely shared with storytelling: stories from history, particularly the Three Kingdoms; romances elaborated from Tang and Song classical tales; stories of Wu Song and his righteous bandits from the end of the Northern Song; and court cases, in which a mystery is resolved by a wise magistrate. The variety plays were associated with Da-du; the Southern cities had their own local drama, differing from variety plays in music and structure. In contrast to the variety play's four acts, the Southern plays were long, sprawling affairs with many acts and many singers.

The earliest Southern plays, dating from the Yuan, were preserved in manuscript. Variety plays, however, like the songbooks, were first printed in the Yuan. From the Yuan also comes the earliest printed edition of vernacular stories. Both storytelling and drama predated the Yuan, but the Yuan stands out as a moment when vernacular literature entered print culture and became available in the privacy of one's home as well as in the street.

Although it left its mark on the Chinese cultural imagination, Mongol rule of all China lasted less than a century. By the second quarter of the fourteenth century, regional rebellions were already breaking out everywhere in response to the ineptitude and corruption of the Yuan government. A scheme to issue paper money, for example, led to runaway inflation and economic disaster. In 1356, Zhu Yuan-zhang, at the head of a regional army, conquered the old Southern Dynasties capital of Jin-ling and used it as a base to defeat other warlords and the Yuan armies sent against him. In 1368, the last Yuan emperor abandoned Da-du and fled back to Mongolia. In the same year a new dynasty, the Ming, was proclaimed, with its capital at Jin-ling, now renamed Nanjing. In a subsequent reign at the turn of the fifteenth century, the primary capital was moved to Da-du, which was renamed Beijing.

Zhu Yuan-zhang, the founder of the Ming, was not an attractive ruler: he was autocratic, bloodthirsty, and narrow-minded. His son Zhu Di, who usurped the succession, was a match for his father. He executed not only the individuals who opposed his usurpation but their families and associates. It is said that in response to Fang Xiao-ru's opposition to his taking the throne, Zhu Di put to death almost a thousand people—all Fang's extended family members, friends, and neighbors. In contrast to the relatively tolerant emperors of the Tang and Song, who expressed displeasure by sending offending officials into exile, the Ming represented a new style of imperial rule and a degree of intimidation that changed forever the relation between the emperor and officialdom.

Despite some disastrous wars with the Mongols in the frontier region and the depredations of Japanese pirates along the coast, the Ming was, by and large, a period of peace and unprecedented prosperity. Particular acts of imperial tyranny, and later of the tyranny of the imperial eunuchs, had relatively little impact on the cultural, social, and economic history of the dynasty.

One sign of the confidence of the new dynasty was a series of six imperially sponsored voyages undertaken between 1405 and 1422, commanded by the eunuch Zheng He. These voyages took him to Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and ultimately down to Zanzibar on the east coast of Africa. The voyages were carried out on an immense scale: the first included almost 28,000 men, and 62 large and 255 smaller ships. The largest of these ships measured 440 feet in length and were

186 feet wide, many times bigger than the largest ships in the subsequent European age of discovery. Despite encounters with pirates and battles with local rulers, the voyages of Zheng He were a combination of trading expeditions and diplomatic missions. Ultimately it was the sheer magnitude of these expeditions and the enormous costs they incurred that led to their end. Unlike the later European voyages, they were not profitable on such a scale. Moreover, the European powers' control of their newly established colonies took a very different turn in the Chinese case, where the spread of traders and colonists throughout Southeast Asia was a private undertaking that carried the émigrés away from the control of the Chinese polity.

Education spread rapidly in the Ming, with the "Four Books"—Zhu Xi's compact selection of the essence of the Confucian Classics—as the imperially sanctioned core of the curriculum. The unprecedented number of aspirants to public office, all of whom knew the "Four Books" by heart, required an examination system that could exclude the majority. Out of the older requirement for the composition of formal prose developed a new kind of examination essay called the "eight-legged essay," *ba-gu wen,* requiring a highly formalized argument in eight balanced parts, developing some Neo-Confucian theme. It was a form that invited error and awkwardness, thus offering some common criteria for grading. The genre, however, tested skills that were of no practical use for the bureaucracy, either in matters of statecraft or in the documentary eloquence essential to the smooth functioning of the bureaucracy.

Classical poetry and "old style" prose continued to be written, but contemporary critics felt strongly that these forms had become weak and awkward in comparison to the Tang and earlier periods. Toward the end of the fifteenth century a new movement arose among intellectuals, seeking the renewed vitality of classical literature by the strict imitation of earlier writers. Several generations of these intellectuals are grouped together as the "Archaists." The Archaists believed that each of the major genres of classical literature had achieved a degree of formal perfection at a certain historical moment, and that the compositions of that brief period of flourishing should set the immutable norms for all subsequent writers. Prose was supposed to have reached its moment of perfection in the Qin and Han; poetry in the "old style" reached perfection in the Eastern Han and Wei; and regulated poetry reached perfection in the High Tang. If the aspiring writer confined himself to these formal models, he would be able to infuse them with his own spirit and concerns.

The Archaists' own literary works were uninspiring in the realization of their agenda for literary reform. Their open advocacy of imitation produced a strong countermovement in the last part of the sixteenth century, and an enduring hostility that remains enshrined in Chinese textbooks on the history of literature. Despite being almost universally reviled in later times, their more subtle influence was enormous. In a society that had developed an immense appetite for the forms of elite culture, they offered a version of literary composition that could be taught. Their anthologies, pedagogic in intent, had a wide circulation; and the poems and prose pieces that they selected as exemplary models have remained part of the literary canon to the present day.

The Ming also saw the large, amorphous cycles of popular storytelling emerge as novels. Although such novels are conventionally assigned authors, the authors

named are historically very suspect. These novels are essentially anonymous, the commercial compilation of story cycles that had evolved over centuries. In many cases, they appeared in numerous and very different editions during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and modern editions simply choose the version they believe to be the "best," on grounds of priority, amplitude, or aesthetic integrity.

The old storytelling cycle treating the breakup of the Han emerged as *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms (San-guo zhi yan-yi),* traditionally attributed to one Luo Guan-zhong, the earliest edition of which is dated to 1522, followed by many subsequent editions. Many scholars believe that this was originally a Yuan work. The second of these novels is *Water Margin (Shui-hu zhuan),* attributed to one Shi Nai-an; its earliest extant edition also comes from the early sixteenth century, and it too was reprinted in many differing commercial editions. This tells of a group of righteous bandits at the end of the Northern Song. The third novel is *The Journey to the West* (or *Monkey; Xi-you ji),* attributed to Wu Cheng-en, the earliest extant edition dating to 1592. This tells the story of the Tang monk Xuan-zang (also called Tripitaka) and his journey to India to fetch Buddhist scriptures, aided by three supernatural disciples, the most important of whom was the ever resourceful "Monkey" (Sun Wu-kong). Branching off from *Water Margin* came the first original novelistic composition: this was *The Golden Lotus (Jin Ping Mei),* probably completed in the late sixteenth century and first published in 1617. Linked tangentially to one of the major figures in *Water Margin,* it treats the sexual escapades of a powerful member of a local elite, Xi-men Qing, his excesses, and ultimate demise.

The Ming also saw the increasing popularity of the long Southern drama, spurred on by the vogue for *The Lute (Pi-pa ji),* by Gao Ming (1305–ca. 1370), a melodramatic work about a poor but loyal wife who goes in search of her politically successful husband, who has been compelled to remarry. Southern drama had numerous regional styles, and among these a form known as *Kun-qu* emerged dominant in the sixteenth century. The immense popularity of these plays contributed to their transformation into a literary drama for reading as well as performance.

Ming culture became perhaps more memorable in the stylish individualism of its last sixty years than in all the two preceding centuries of the dynasty. Many scholars believe that the foundation of late Ming individualism can be traced back to the influential Neo-Confucian philosopher Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529). Wang Yang-ming's thought is too complex to permit easy characterization, but perhaps its best-known and most influential aspect was the claim that moral categories exist within the mind alone and do not depend on study and the outer forms of Confucianism. Wang Yang-ming's focus on individual self-cultivation gave some support to the remarkable turn against social norms that occurred toward the end of the sixteenth century. The eccentric philosopher Li Zhi (1527–1602) entitled his works *Fen-shu, Books to Be Burned;* in them, he offered a sharp critique of conventional moral judgments. His most influential essay, "On the Child Mind," argues that everything genuine follows from an immediacy that is inherently corrupted by learning and society; the argument is framed in a passionate defense of vernacular literature.

Li Zhi was greatly admired by the three Yuan brothers, the most famous of whom was Yuan Hong-dao (1568–1610). Yuan Hong-dao advocated a poetry of complete spontaneity, by which a person could give free expression to whatever was natural

within him. Yuan Hong-dao even wrote a preface for his brother's poetry which declared that his brother's formal errors and stylistic lapses were more valuable than the passages in his works that were beautiful in a conventional sense: ordinary grace was a function of norms, while lapses came from the individual alone.

Yuan Hong-dao also singled out the crude popular songs of the villages as being the most perfect of the dynasty's literature. This led to a vogue in collecting popular song, most notably by Feng Meng-long (1574–1646). Feng published two collections of such songs, the most famous of which, the "Mountain Songs" *(Shan-ge),* was composed in Wu dialect. The frankness of their eroticism was felt to be an expression of "natural" feeling. Feng Meng-long was widely involved in editing and publishing vernacular literature, of which three collections of vernacular stories are best known.

The age was fascinated with *qing,* a term that ranges from the more delicate "sentiment" to "passion." *Qing* was often paired with the motif of "dream," bridging the world of the senses and that of the mind; dream sometimes cast a haze of illusion around the experience of *qing* and sometimes became the means by which it could be realized in the world. Both *qing* and dream were strongly associated with the plays of Tang Xian-zu (1550–1617). Tang's *Peony Pavilion (Mu-dan ting)* was the most popular literary work of his day, and its celebration of love gave it a near-cult status. In *Peony Pavilion,* a young woman falls in love in a dream, then dies of longing, only to return to life when her dream lover appears in the flesh and takes up lodging near her grave.

The cult of *Peony Pavilion* was shared as much by women as by men. Literacy among elite women made great advances in the Ming. The number of female writers increased, and these writers looked back to the meager survivals in earlier literature to establish a tradition of women's literature. The heroines of the day were the great courtesans of Nanjing; poets and connoisseurs, they participated fully in the artistic life of the city and received the adulation of literati throughout the empire.

The fortunes of the Ming were, however, coming to an end. Famine and widespread corruption weakened the fabric of the state, and in the 1630s there were a number of uprisings that the government had difficulty controlling. Beyond the Great Wall in the Northeast, a non-Chinese people—the Manchus—had formed a highly disciplined state and military machine, and had gained the allegiance of the large population of Chinese frontiersmen living in the region. In 1644, the most powerful of the Chinese rebel armies, commanded by Li Zi-cheng, entered Beijing, and the Ming emperor committed suicide. The story goes that one of Li Zi-cheng's generals took the beautiful Yuan-yuan, promised as a concubine to Wu San-gui, the Ming general holding the fortifications in the Northeast against the armies of the Manchus. In rage, Wu San-gui opened the passes and invited in the Manchus, who quickly defeated Li Zi-cheng before turning to slowly conquer the rest of the country. They proclaimed their new dynasty the Qing.

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Yuan Vernacular Song

In 1127, the Song Dynasty lost the North to the non-Chinese Jin Dynasty, a division that intensified the cultural gap between North and South China that had been growing over centuries. The Mongols, who replaced the Jin Dynasty in the North, established Da-du (modern Beijing) as their Chinese capital in 1264, and a few years later proclaimed themselves as a new dynasty, the Yuan. During the Yuan, Da-du developed a flourishing urban culture, one that seems to have prided itself on its vigor and roughness in contrast to Southern refinement, which its inhabitants often saw as effete. The former tunes of song lyrics from the Northern Song capital of Kai-feng were carried south and became an ossified literary form in the Southern Song. Some of those same Northern Song melodies and new ones went farther north and reappeared in Yuan Da-du transformed. These Yuan popular song lyrics are characterized by new themes, a new tone, and a striking use of Northern vernacular Chinese.

Since the same melodies were used in the aria suites of Yuan variety plays, the vernacular lyrics were called "independent songs" *(san-qu)*. Some of these songs appear as single short lyrics; others appear in sets to the same tune, making variations on a single theme; still others occur in suites of different melodies, working together just like the song suites that formed the core of an act in a Yuan variety play. These song suites could be long lyrics, but many were narrative or dramatic monologues.

Guan Han-qing, who flourished in the last part of the thirteenth century and into the fourteenth, was both a dramatist and a lyricist of vernacular song; he was also the greatest master of the rough city slang of Da-du. He also obviously loved Da-du's urban culture. His most famous song suite, on the theme of "not giving in to old age," assumes the voice of an old rake celebrating life in the entertainment quarters of the city—drinking, gambling, and above all enjoying its courtesans, the "flowers" and "willows" described below. Such a suite should not be taken as a "realistic" portrait of Guan Han-qing or of anyone else, but as representing a new set of values in song, an anti-hero who is admired not for the qualities he claims to possess, but for the way in which he boldly claims those qualities of which society disapproves. He portrays himself as defiant, canny, and a survivor. The conventional values at which he snubs his nose are not simply proper Confucian social mores; he also mocks the conventional values of the pleasure quarters and its love affairs. Guan Han-qing is not the Song lyricist who stands with hesitant longing before the house of the beloved: he tells us at the outset that he has enjoyed them all.

QYSQ 172-174

Guan Han-qing (late 13th–early 14 century), to "A Spray of Flowers" (Not Giving In to Old Age)

I've plucked every bud hanging over the wall,
and picked every roadside branch of the willow.
The flowers I plucked had the softest red petals,
the willows I picked were the tenderest green.
A rogue and a lover, I'll rely
on my picking and plucking dexterity
'til flowers are ruined and willows wrecked.
I've picked and plucked half the years of my life,
a generation entirely spent
    lying with willows, sleeping with flowers.

to "Liang-zhou"

I'm champion rake of all the world,
the cosmic chieftain of rogues.
May those rosy cheeks never change,
    let them stay as they are forever.
For among the flowers I spend my time,
I forget my cares in wine;
I can:
    swirl the tealeaves,
    shoot craps,
    play checkers,
    do a shell game.
And I know whatever there is to know
    about music in every key—
nothing sad ever touches me.
I go with girls with silver harps
    on terraces of silver,
    who play upon their silver harps,
    and smiling, lean on silver screens.
I go with jade white goddesses
    and take them by their jade white hands,
    then shoulder to jade white shoulder,
    we go upstairs in mansions of jade.
I go with girls with pins of gold
    who sing their songs of golden threads,
    who raise their golden drinking cups
    and golden flagons brimming full.
You think I'm too old!
Forget it!
I'm the best known lover anywhere,
    I'm center stage,
I'm smooth,

sharp, too!
I'm commander in chief
of the brocade legions
and garrisons of flowers.
And I've played every district and province.

to Ge-wei

You boys are baby bunnies
from sandy little rabbitholes
on grassy hills,
caught in the hunt
for the very first time;
I'm an ol' pheasant cock plumed with gray;
I've been caged,
I've been snared,
a tried and true stud
who's run the course.
I've been through ambushes, pot-shots,
dummy spears,
and I never came out second-best.
So what if they say:
"A man is finished at middle age"—
you think I'm going to let
the years just slip away?

Coda

I'm a tough old bronze bean
that can still go *boing,*
steamed but not softened,
stewed but not mush,
whacked but not flattened,
baked but not popped.
Who let you boys worm your way in-
to the brocade noose
of a thousand coils
that you can't chop off
and you can't cut down
and you can't wriggle out
and you can't untie?
The moon of Liang's park is what I enjoy,
Kaifeng wine is what I drink,
Luo-yang's flowers are what I like,
Zhang-tai's willows are what I pick.
Me, I can:
recite poems,
write ancient script,

play all stringed instruments—
woodwinds too;
and I can:
sing "The Partridge,"
dance "Dangling Hands,"
I can hunt
play soccer,
play chess,
shoot craps.
You can
knock out my teeth,
scrunch up my mouth,
lame my legs,
break both my hands;
but Heaven bestowed on me this gift
for vice in each assorted kind,
so still I'll never quit.
Not till Yama the King of Hell
himself gives me the call,
and demons come and nab me,
my three souls sink to Earth below,
my seven spirits float away
into the murky dark,
then, Heaven, that's the time
I'll walk the lanes of misty flowers
no more.

Although we find the practice earlier, in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing it became common for writers and anyone with cultural pretensions to take pseudonyms. Since writers often gave names to the libraries or "studios" where they worked, one of the most popular kinds of pseudonyms was the "studio name." Zhong Si-cheng, the fourteenth-century connoisseur of theater and vernacular song, named his studio for what he felt was his most outstanding trait.

1371-73

Zhong Si-cheng (14th century), from a song sequence to "A Spray of Flowers" (A Word About Ugly Studio)

I. to "A Spray of Flowers"

Born to dwell between Earth and Sky,
endowed with humors of Dark and Light,
and given a man-child's body, I
was sure to make my way in the world.
Whatever I did would have gone all right,
and each particular suited me.

But comments provoked one point of contention:
friends old and new,
    no matter who,
snicker when they catch sight of me.

II. to "Liang-zhou"

Because my looks don't meet wide commendation,
my inner merits can't appear as they please;
half a life's writing brings no compensation—
for nothing my breast holds rich tapestries,
and my lips drip pearls of poetry.
I can't help this ashen complexion,
the missing teeth, the double jowls,
added to which are eyes like slits,
    the narrow brow,
a too short space 'twixt nose and lips,
and scraggly wisps of thinning hair.
If only I could have gotten
    Chen Ping's pure and jadelike glow,
    He Yan's handsome, gallant features;
if only I could have gotten
    Pan Yue's splendid looks and figure.
And I know
the real reason why!
I'm sick of facing my mirror each morning,
and furious at Mom and Dad
    for not having tried their very best!
Should the day ever come when a royal decree
    summons the homely to serve the state,
I guarantee
    I'll top the list.

III. to Ge-wei

There are times
at those idle moments as evening draws nigh
    at the back door I stand
with a winged black hat of gauze on hair
    piled sky-high,
and jet black boots sticking out from my gown
    that brushes the ground—
then all of a sudden I start to laugh.
I look like what?—
a modern-day
    queller of demons, Zhong Kui,
        who could not frighten a ghost away.

IV. to "Sheep-Herding Pass"

If the hat is askew,
    friends can blame you;
but a face unappealing
    is nobody's failing;
it's true,
    as they say,
        men honor appearance,
and a dignity of face
    invites a certain deference.
I think about this lying in bed
and rage rises in my heart:
I've lived these thirty years in vain,
nine thousand times it's been on my mind—
just like knots in lumber
    you can't plane smooth,
a congenital illness
    no remedy can soothe.

V. to "Congratulating the Groom"

Whatever can run in this world can't fly,
no matter how much goes your way,
no matter how gifted and clever you be—
in quiet times I understand
    the meaning of this for me,
and secretly comfort myself this way.
I have no urge to see the frontier
    or by a pool to stroll:
the fish in the pool would dive in fear,
and frontier geese would fly off in alarm,
and if I went to park and grove
    even the commonest birds would flee.
They'll paint me no portrait while I live,
and dead, they'll write no poems for me.

. . .

IX. Coda

I'll always recall one night in the rain
    when the lamp had just gone out,
the autumn wind blew over my bed,
    and I was still far off in dream.
There I met someone,
he asked me join him,

and he said that I
was meant rise high.
"Having been a Confucian scholar,
you were to hold office as well;
a man who could take it easy,
with a fine eye for detail too.
But there was a certain moment
when best-laid plans went awry;
and since your body was formed thus,
regret can remedy naught.
I can only bring it about that you
receive an ample salary,
have many children and grandchildren,
a good marriage,
plenty of property,
a well-stocked granary,
good fortune added,
and great longevity.
I came here on purpose
just to let you know.
Soon I'm going to leave you,
and beg your forgiveness."
At last he heaved a few sighs
in a moment of remorse.
On waking I remembered him,
remembered who he was—
he was that very demon
    who shaped me in the womb back then
        and made me:
            unhandsome.

Vernacular song lyrics started out in the songs of the entertainment quarters, and many of the extant *san-qu* treat the world of romance and the courtesans. Sometimes bawdy, sometimes comic, sometimes merely coy, such lyrics are light and often delightful pieces.

1048

Xu Zai-si (14th century), to "Dead Drunk in the East Wind" *(Chen-zui dong-feng)*

My sweetheart and I had long been apart,
I didn't know when we'd meet again.
Then all of a sudden I saw him today
passing right in front of my door.
I was going to shout,
    then worried that people around would stare.

So I sang out
    right then and there
        the popular "River Melody,"
to let him know by the voice it was me.

Although the qualities of such songs often evaporate on reflection (and usually in translation), many depend on the surprising pleasure of vernacular usage, especially when a conventional languidly "poetic" situation is suddenly naturalized, both in language and sentiment.

203

Bo Pu (1226–after 1306), to "Victory Music" *(De sheng yue)*

I walk here all alone,
I've walked a trail into the ground,
and back and forth a thousand times
    I've walked in vain.
Won't you hurry up and let me know.
Come on,
    don't make me hang around till dawn!

Many of the Northern vernacular songs were sentimental love songs, churned out for the commerce of the entertainment quarters; others were song settings of commonplace poetic material. There was also a wit and irony that was relatively rare in classical poetry and the older song lyric.

575

Qiao Ji (d. 1345), to *Lü-yao-bian,* Of Myself

I didn't graduate in the top ten,
I'm not in "The Lives of Famous Men."
Now and then I'm Sage of Beer,
I find zen of poetry everywhere.
A cloud and mist valedictorian,
the drunken immortal of lakes and the river.
In conversation, witty and clever—
    my own kind of Royal Historian.
After forty years I still endure,
of life's finer pleasures,
    connoisseur.

In the early 1260s, a butterfly of remarkable size was sighted in Da-du. This was the stuff of vernacular song. Not only did it call to mind the conventional association of the butterfly as the gallant young rake tasting "flowers" (courtesans), but the memory of Zhuang Zhou's famous "butterfly dream" was irresistible (see p. 122).

Wang He-qing (late 13th century), to "Heaven Drunk" *(Zui-zhong Tian),* Big Butterfly

It came crashing out of Zhuang Zhou's dream,
its two mighty pinions mounted east wind.
Three hundred famous gardens
    were every one picked clean—
who would ever have thought
    it was such a man about town?
It terrorized the honeybees
    chasing blossoms' scent,
and when it gently flapped its wings,
it fanned a gale of flowersellers
    east across the bridge.

Vernacular song did not, like most classical poetry and the older song lyric, avoid the body and physical love. Sometimes it was merely titillating, sometimes obscene, and often comic, as in Wang He-qing's literally "reversed" version of spending the night in bed with his girlfriend.

to "Helped Home Drunk" *(Zui fu gui)*

My lips were squeezed against her
    glossy coils of hair,
her back lay pressed against my breast—
hardly what they call
    "sweet cheeks nuzzled everywhere."
I had to heave my plaintive sighs
    into the nape of her neck.
I never saw her face all night,
my view:
    her ivory comb's backside.

Lan Chu-fang (14th century?), to "Four Pieces of Jade" *(Si-kuai yu),* Passion

I am utterly bumbling,[1]
she is as homely as can be;
but no matter how bumbling and homely
    we've fallen deep in love.
Because she's homely, her heart is true,
which makes a bumbling fellow like me
    care for her all the more.

[1] In the context of Yuan urban culture, "bumbling," literally, "rustic," could perhaps best be translated by the American slang term "nerd."

Such a homely lover
and such a bumbling mate
make a match found only in Heaven.

One of the favorite songs was *Yi-ban-er,* literally, "A Half." Lyrics to this song usually concluded with the lines: "half one thing, half another." Although apparently trivial, the significance of this song's popularity lies in its interest in conditions that were intermediate or made up of contradictions; especially when applied to human feeling, it marked, like Yuan irony, a growing interest in the complexity of human behavior and feeling.

Guan Han-qing, to "A Half" *(Yi-ban-er)*

Cloudy coils of hair and hazy tresses,
    blacker than piled crows,
with a rustling of crimson satin
    a golden lotus foot shows.
No common flower over the wall
    is quite so pleasing:
you tell off your good-for-nothing lover
and half of you is furious,
    and half of you is teasing.

Xu Zai-si, to "Moon Palace" *(Chan-gong qu),* Spring Passion

I had never felt longing all my life,
no sooner do I feel it now
than longing brings me injury.
My body, like a cloud adrift;
the heart, like willow catkins flying,
my force, like spider's floss
    drifting in air.
Only a thread of incense smoke remains
    still here,
And I, wondering where
    my high-class lover has gone.
Precisely when
    did the symptoms first appear?—
when the lamp had half dimmed its light
and the moon had grown
    half bright.

Although vernacular song had its beginnings in urban entertainment quarters, literary men soon used it to evoke idyllic rural scenes.

Zhang Ke-jiu (ca. 1280–after 1348), to "Someone Leaning on the Balustrade" *(Ping-lan ren)*, By the Lake

Far-off waters, sunlit skies
  bright with colored wisps of cloud
    sinking away.
Ancient shore, a fishing village
  where fishing rafts are spread.
The azure curtains of a tavern keeper's home.
A painted bridge where willow catkins blow.

Guan Yun-shi (1286–1324), to "Clear River" *(Qing-jiang yin)*

I gave up what little status I had
  and went away—
    it makes the heart feel good!
Beyond white clouds laughter's heard.
And if a few true friends and I
drink ourselves sick, who cares at all!
Our drunken sleeves go dancing
and we loathe
  a universe that seems too small.

Vernacular song took over and "translated" into its own idiom many of the standard themes and types of classical poetry and earlier literary song. The following is a standard occasion, writing a poem on a famous ancient site; in this case, Tong Pass, which guarded the approach to Chang-an.

Zhang Yang-hao (1270–1329), to "Sheep on the Hillside" *(Shan-po yang)*, Thoughts on the Past at Tong Pass

Here peaks and ridges seem to mass,
waves of the river seem enraged,
into river and hills and out again
  goes the road through Tong Pass.
I gaze toward the Western Capital,
it gives pause to thought.
This spot
  that Qin and Han marched past
    breaks the heart,
towers and chambered galleries
  turned to dirt all.
The common folk suffered
  when kingdoms rose;

the common folk suffered
  when kingdoms fell.

The Yuan Dynasty began in brutality and ended with a sense of corruption and ineptitude that went beyond even the infamously failed last reigns of earlier dynasties. Classical poetry may have directed barbed ironies against those in power, but the unsubtle sarcasm of the following anonymous vernacular song was almost unique. The "River Project" was a massive public works enterprise of 1351 to build a transport canal to Da-du. The introduction of paper money caused runaway inflation and combined with other factors to wreck the economy.

Anon., to "Drunk in an Age of Peace" *(Zui tai-ping)*

Glorious is our Mighty Yuan!—
all power is held by vile men.
The River Project and paper cash
  were root cause of our doom,
driving millions to insurrection.
Laws that govern slacken,
laws that punish, stern,
the common folk burn
  in rage:
men eat men,
cash buys cash,
things never before seen.
Thieves hold public office,
officials turn to thieves,
good men are confused with fools,
a sad state indeed.

Ma Zhi-yuan (1260–1325)

Writers of lyrics for vernacular song rarely show the kind of salient personalities that we find in classical poetry and even in Song literary song lyric. Rather than individuality, their preferences appear in the range of themes and styles that vernacular song offered. These lyricists often assumed the voices of conventional roles, not unlike the roles provided in drama. Guan Han-qing may be distinctive for his love of city slang and the culture of the demimonde, a love witnessed in both his plays and in his lyrics. Ma Zhi-yuan appears from his plays and songs as someone with rather more "literary" preferences, though little more of his life is known than of Guan Han-qing's.

One particularly popular form of *san-qu* was the short lyric describing a scene, perhaps related to the poetic vignettes of rural life found in the Southern Song and contemporary Yuan quatrains on paintings. The most famous short song lyric of the

Yuan is just such a simple description. It is often praised in traditional critical terms for its handling of stasis *(jing)* and motion *(dong)*.

to "Heaven Pure Sand" *(Tian jing sha)*, Autumn Thoughts

Withered vines, old trees, twilight crows.
Small bridge, flowing water, people's homes.
Ancient road, the west wind, gaunt horse.
The evening sun sinks westward.
A man, broken-hearted, on a far horizon.

to "Shou-yang Melody" *(Shou-yang qu)*, Clearing Haze at a Market in the Hills

Past the village filled with flowers,
west of the thatched tavern.
Wisps of cloud brighten in late afternoon,
  the rain stops, the heavens clear.
Hills all around
  within the fading light
    of the sun hanging low in the sky.
To this brocade screen
  is added another swathe of azure green.

to "Shou-yang Melody" *(Shou-yang qu)*, A Sail Returns to the Distant Shore

The evening sun goes down,
tavern streamers calm.
Two or three boats have still
  not yet touched the shore.
Waters smell sweet from fallen blooms,
  a thatched cottage late in day.
Beside the broken bridge,
  each fishseller goes his way.

to "Shou-yang Melody" *(Shou-yang qu)*, Evening Bells in a Misty Temple

Chilly mist hangs thin,
the ancient temple pure.
Nearing dusk the sounds grow still
  from people praying to Buddha.
Borne with the western wind, a bell
  late in the day
    rung three or four times.

It will not let the aging monk remain
  deep in his meditation.

to "Shou-yang Melody" *(Shou-yang qu)*, Evening Sunshine in a Fishing Village

The rapping of mallets ends,[2]
in twilight sunbeams flash.
By a levee with green willows
  come sounds of fishermen's songs.
At several homes, from scrapwood gates,
  hang idle nets drying in sun.
All are snatched up within
  this picture of catching fish.

to "Shou-yang Melody" *(Shou-yang qu)*, Autumn Moonlight on Lake Dong-ting

Clouds veil the moon,
breeze plays the chimes:
two different kinds
of enhancement for my gloom.
I trim the silver lamp wick
  to write what's in the heart,
then give a long moan—
the sound
  blows out the flame.

The following suite of seven songs, one of Ma Zhi-yuan's most famous, begins with the call to seize pleasure while you can, and ends with the praise of the simple life.

A Suite on Autumn Thoughts

I. to "A Boat Going by Night" (Ye xing chuan)

The time passed in life's century,
  a dream of a butterfly.
Looking back, all
  that happened brings a sigh.
Spring comes today,
tomorrow flowers fall.
Hurry to offer another toast—
  night ends,
    the lamplight burns away.

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[2]The mallets are used to frighten the fish into the nets.

II. to "Tall Trees Far Away" (Qiao-mu yao)

I imagine Qin's palaces,
the towers of the Han,
all have turned to meadows now
where sheep and cattle graze.
How else would woodsmen and fishermen
have their tales to tell?
Although great stone inscriptions lie
broken on their grassy tombs,
I can't make out the serpentine words.

III. to "Celebrating the Xuan-he Reign" (Qing Xuan-he)

They have come to fox tracks and rabbitholes,
so many proud and daring men.
The Three Kingdoms then,
a tripod's legs however strong,
cracked midway.
Was it Jin?
Was it Wei?

IV. to "The Wind That Brings Down Plum Blossoms" (Luo-mei-feng)

If Heaven makes you rich—
be not too intemperate.
Yet
fine days, fair nights last not long.
Then, rich man, let us say
your heart is stingy, hard as steel—
how could you just throw away
pleasures of moonlight and breeze
in your brocade hall?

V. to "Wind Enters Pines" (Feng ru song)

Before my eyes the crimson sun
sinks again to the west,
fast as a wagon rolls downhill.
Just look in your mirror tomorrow at dawn,
a further increase of snow white hair.
You'll get in bed and say farewell
forever to shoes left on the floor.
Mock not the dove's incompetence
because it borrows another's nest.
I bumble along and always play the fool.

VI. to "Keep Stirring Things Up" (Bo-bu-duan)

Fame and profit are done,
should's and shouldn't's are gone.

The world's red dust can never lure
me out my door.
Green trees are the perfect cover
for roof's corner,
and green hills fit the broken ledge
in my garden wall.
And so much more!—
my thatched cottage and bamboo hedge.

VII. to "Feast at the Pavilion of Parting" (Li-ting yan sha)

The crickets' chirping stops, I wake
comfortable and snug;
but when the rooster crows come cares
in thousands never ceasing.
When will it be through?
I view
ants parade in packed maneuvers,
chaotic swarms of bees that brew
honey, and the furious din
of horseflies seeking blood.
The Green Meadow Hall of Lord Pei Du,
Magistrate Tao at White Lotus Club.[3]
These things I love when autumn comes:
to pick chrysanthemums mixed with dew,
to split purple crabs with frost within,
to burn red leaves to warm my wine.
I think in our lives the cups will pass
a limited number of rounds,
and how many times in all
comes the autumn festival?
I charge my servant to keep in mind:
if Kong Rong comes seeking me,[4]
tell him he'll find
me utterly drunk by the eastern hedge.

[3]Pei Du, one of the great ministers of the early ninth century, eventually retired to his estate called Green Meadow Hall, where he held famous parties for literary men. Magistrate Tao is Tao Qian, who, according to one erroneous legend, was associated with the monk Hui-yuan's famous "White Lotus Club."

[4]Kong Rong, an intellectual and literary man of the Three Kingdoms period, was supposed to have said that he had no worries as long as he had ample guests and the winecups were never empty.