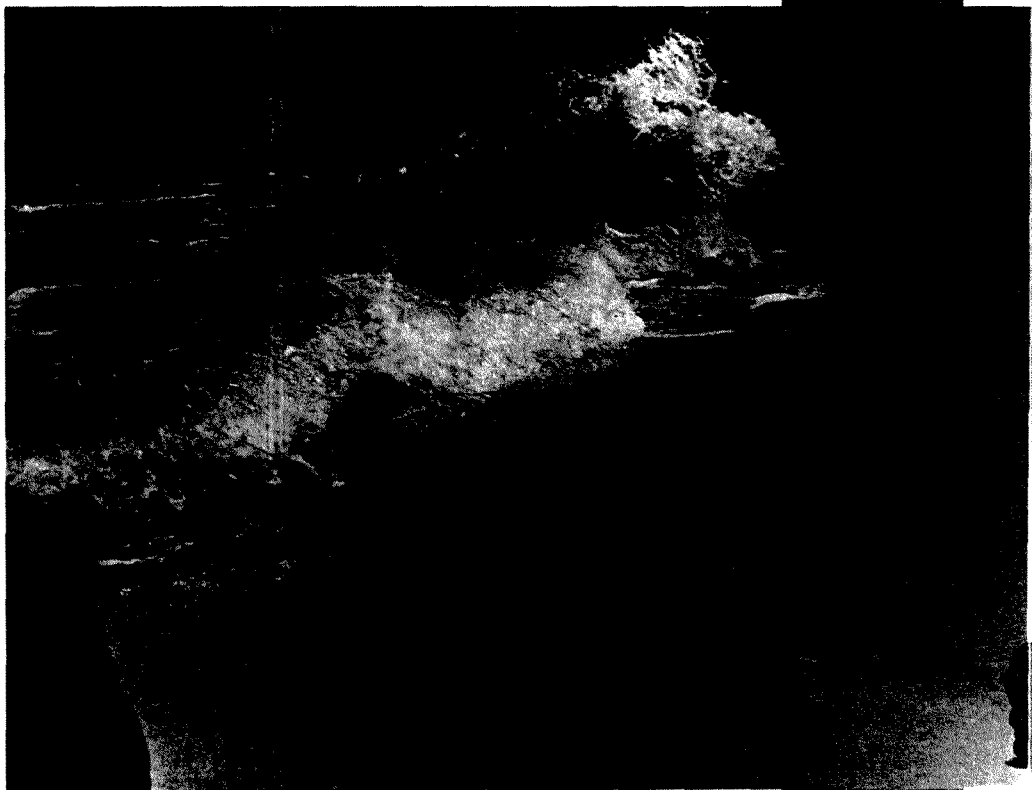


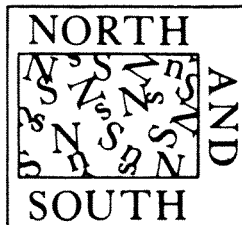
*What Country*

LISA RAPHALS



# What Country

LISA RAPHALS



Twickenham and Wakefield

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## EPITAPH

Elaine's Indian grandmother

lies in this field

recognize her  
by the flowers

in the lower left

black hunched figures, the snow

mountains

What country?  
tell me  
where

that Roman beauty  
Flora  
lies;

and Archipiada,  
where  
's her

first  
cousin, fair  
Thais,

and Echo  
who speaks  
in the cries

of sound  
over the  
river, then below,

such beauty more than human wise:  
where do they go,  
*les neiges d'antan?*

Where  
is that wise  
Heloise?

Peter  
Abelard became

a eunuch and  
at Saint Denis

a monk  
for love of same.

Similarly  
where's the queen  
who ordered them to throw

Buridan  
in a sack  
in the Seine:

Where do they go,  
*les neiges d'antan?*

Where's the siren-voices

lady, lily  
Blanche  
the queen,

Bertha Bigfoot,  
Beatrice,  
Alice,

Ermegarde, the dame  
of Maine,

and Joan  
the good Lorraine

the one the English  
burned  
at Rouen,

Sovereign Virgin, where are they:  
Where do they go,  
*les neiges d'antan?*

Prince  
don't ask again

this week or year.  
Know

you'll hear  
the same refrain:

Where do they go,  
*les neiges d'antan?*

— Villon



## CATS AND MICE

### *A Kitten*

sat there unmoved, a sphinx,  
viewed from the side  
beautiful, each muscle silent, still as marble.

It had no wings	small
really	instead of the head
of a woman, that	of a cat
and it sat	on a marble slab in a
lab.	

where the riddle of the brain  
was being removed for sectioning.

cut	cat	clock — the
right lateral		hypothalamus 12:03
right medial		hypothalamus 12:04
left posterior		pyreform lobe 12:04:30
left medial		hypothalamus 12:05
right posterior		pyre —

What about the left lateral hypothalamus?

Blood velvet nose	Procedure incomplete. bubbling <i>non in vivo</i>
that had been	a small perfection

## *Mice*

Once I had a mouse, it

lived in a cage  
on a row with nine  
in a stand with twenty-  
on a corridor with fifteen  
on each side

were three such aisles  
wire mesh), or  
on each corridor  
eight corridors

which was

with nine other mice  
other cages  
three other rows  
stands  
of the aisle. There

(separated in blocks by  
ninety stands total  
and twenty-  
in the room (there were three rooms)

several floors high  
with connecting galleries.

Mice were living in those rooms.

The mental energy of a mouse

is negligible. Once

I had to be there late at night

when they were all

awake. The rustle was terrifying.

## ICARUS

*he knowing less than drugged beasts*

Saline drifts through the tubes  
ruby in a vein  
sapphire in an artery

all night  
syringes, like fingers. right:  
adrenaline, antibiotic.  
left: narcotic  
bringer of blackness

double vision:  
adrenaline, morphine  
dark crows  
the dayshift

Release, he belongs  
to another her  
wedding set  
two weeks Tuesday

in his under world  
incubates  
pneumonia

slow and far  
from the medical lights  
the left lung  
the  
right

Oh it is godlike  
to sit self-possessed  
anywhere near you, your speech hearing,  
your laughter heedless, fire,  
desire

to me. My heart stumbles and  
flies. One glance, and my tongue  
is cancelled.

It melts. Fire fine-  
stitches me, all over.  
Eyes ... gone, ears ... bzzz ...

and a sweat / holds me cold, tremor  
seizes me. I am greener than grass.  
Just to see you, I  
all but die ...

— *Sappho*

## ASHES

My brother's ex-  
lover's ex-  
husband's ashes

(following  
cremation following  
death by murder in  
the Lower East Side)

stayed in  
my brother's closet  
a year and a half,

which became  
(he being in  
South America and I having  
her name)  
my fault.

His other  
ex-lover  
is threatening to vacuum.

Mine says  
return the urn, but first  
glaze it.  
Turn the ashes.

## ODYSSEUS AND PENELOPE

Agamemnon stewed at Aulis  
ten years' dull folly  
but Homer's Odysseus  
comes into his own,  
his wife and son  
into a sleek old age  
far from the waves' harsh break.

Fleecen couches  
late-waning firelight  
sea-knotted beggar and a queen  
converse in codes and dreams  
around the ears  
of her hostile maids.  
Circumspect

Penelope  
rises, having questioned the  
beggar, who has told her  
every lie. Now?  
Will long grief sway?  
Or feed and clothe an old  
man, and send him on his way?

## ORPHEUS

The Maenads got him and his music too.  
We found his smile hanging from a pine  
fingers there like amanita buds  
under the needleway, and stars.  
No branch could match the etch of his brow.  
his hair blacker than the sky,  
eyes deeper, reflecting no light.

We found his smile.  
Then the wind began,  
first with pre-dawn light, the curl-ends  
of his music  
waiting in the hemlocks  
in that place  
before day could intervene.

## UNE FLEUR DE MAL

The castle is old and wreck-  
rocked hard on the ocean.  
We clean our house,  
luring the rats  
by strewing the rocks with  
sweet carrion.

Too late,  
the rats have been absorbed to the marrow.  
A man leaps from the highest tower  
as the seas swallow.  
We run frantically  
from the rotten castle to the rotten sea.



AFTER BORGES

*Entre mi amor y yo han de levantarse  
trescientas noches como trescientas paredes  
y el mar sera una magia entre nosotros.*

Stars weave on a night  
warp, sea separations,  
and each strike of the clock weaves  
from an inexhaustible source  
of distance. Nor do different clocks change  
the stars' identities, and the same sun  
touches us both when touch is out. Three  
hundred nights' how naked presence,  
but absence is always one  
wave  
of no diminutions,  
one wall and one night.

## HIS LAST CAPTAIN

*for Victor*

He waited for his name where names could not  
as if some other man — hair by hair —  
had watched a moustache  
lose form, disappear

in a shaving basin. Now in the Odessa crowd,  
in with the wind, to flow  
softly in the new old civilian clothes,  
complete with forged papers,

death sentence heavy  
on the air. The Czar's arm is long or steps  
keep their own time no reverie  
can alter — the station door, the train, border

at last. Suddenly everything lurches. Overcast  
looks knit into one face — his last  
captain from the army, the very man, he guessed,  
who found the pamphlets hidden in the bunks

and denounced the traitor. Watching his arm  
rise, a salute no disguise could  
it was so smart, saw his death in the distance  
between them. Calm, dumb,

waiting, walking on, waiting for his name,  
it seemed the buttonhole of his lapel  
had caught the crook of someone else's thumb —  
and the man went on without a second look.

## A CHILD FOR MY LOVE

*for Sarah, Fred, and Mariah*

I gave my love an apple  
without any skin.  
I gave my love a leather pouch  
of the evening sun.  
I gave my love a new bone  
of erythropoeic marrow.  
I gave my love ungerminated seeds  
stolen from the furrow.  
I gave my love a pair of sleeves  
of green of all the summer leaves.  
I gave my love a little cat  
that cried and died and that was that.  
I gave my love a laundry line  
for drying flour,  
and a *perpetuum mobile* machine  
without power.  
I gave my love a leather boot  
that was not right for either foot.  
I gave my love a bed of oak  
we used until the bedsprings broke.

## A CATHARSIS OF GREY

Acheron      alley cat      birch grove grey  
bored baby      book dust      Chicago back porch grey  
centipede      centrefold      census taker grey  
dirty sheet      door factory      electrical tape grey  
elevator      enervator      *ex machina* grey  
factory      fragile      and failure grey  
gull-back and grey-away, goo of eternal youth  
hail, hallways and halcyon potential grey  
indigo-faded-into      juniper      and kangaroo grey  
lonely      laboratory      lay-away grey  
money, mould and map-of-Norway grey  
nearly      newly-sprayed      natty and old chemicals grey  
old grey orange grey order form grey  
peat moss pinwheel quartz ore grey  
rotor-rooter radar-used-by-bats grey  
slicks      slop      sludge      sewer  
water      test-tubes-from-*the Rats* grey  
torrent grey terror grey theory of holes and  
unburied moles      used clothes and unbelievable grey  
varied      vivid      wizard hat      wistful      warlike  
xylene      x-ray      xenon tetrafluoride grey  
your eyes      yellowing lies       $\sum_{zebra}$  grey

TO AN ALCHEMIST

*After HD*

Nor fear of death nor weeping leaf  
will cover you,  
or shelter or succour of time.  
Extract oils and platinum be over you,  
the gold, the tangent, and  
the sine.

My words unstrung —  
the old song — lover, you  
return as the tides but for this —  
the lees of your days massing over you,  
*without comfort, without kiss.*

如 夢 令

秦 觀

1

溜 皺 透 瘦  
紅 綠 寒 春 俱  
花 波 笙 梅 舊 楊  
啄 點 玉 小 依 綠  
嘴 尾 冷 徹 舊 與  
鶯 燕 指 吹 依 人

2

水 閉 被 起  
如 沈 燈 侵 人  
沉 亭 窺 寒 寐 嘶  
沉 驛 屬 曉 無 馬  
夜 緊 破 送 寐 外  
遙 風 夢 霜 無 門

RU MENG LING

Oriole bills  
    pluck  
        red bud lees.  
Swallow trails  
    dot  
        the green seas.

And numb hands,  
    the jade flute  
        so cold  
keens  
    “Little Plum”  
        spring flees.  
Always again  
    Always again  
As the willow  
    green fades, so,  
    people  
        grow thin.

— *Qin Guan*

Distantly, like  
    water, the  
        dusk deep night.  
Shut the inn  
    doors to the  
        edge hard wind.

By the lamp  
    a mouse moves  
        my dream shards.  
Dawn  
    in the covers  
        sends its frost.  
Sleepless again  
    Sleepless again  
On the street  
    horses  
        people  
            awake again.

— *Qin Guan*

如夢令

李清照

1

暮路處鷺  
日歸舟深鷗  
亭知回花渡灘  
溪不晚藕爭一  
記醉盡入渡起  
常沈興誤爭驚

2

驟酒舊瘦  
風殘人依紅  
疏消簾棠否肥  
雨不捲海知綠  
夜睡問道否是  
昨濃試卻知應



Always remember  
Flood Lodge  
dusk.  
Plumb drunk, I  
lost  
the road home.

Rapt  
all night, my  
home skiff  
strayed into  
lotus holds,  
deep ways.

How to get through  
How to get through  
Startled from the  
stands, a sandbar of  
egrets  
flies.

— *Li Qingzhao*

Spattering rain  
blast winds  
last night.  
Drowned in dregs,  
sunk in  
wine-deep sleep.

The maid,  
raising the blinds —  
ask her.  
“Plum —  
still in bloom?”  
“Still there.”

How could it be?  
How could it be?  
Now should the greens  
shine and the  
reds  
pine.

— *Li Qingzhao*

cormorant shadows

(sea-spray's white crash along the rock)

ululating black

## METAMORPHOSIS

*We had changed our throats  
and had the throats of birds.*

Squirrels the shadow of  
soot, moths with wings of ink,  
dead fish rise  
to meet us from the lake ...

Tadpoles have extra legs.  
Flowers are petalled wrong.  
The oil on our feathers is not right,  
even snow is the wrong colour.

a world too full of things  
to hold any reflection,  
how will salmon  
find the road upstream?

## FEZ

### *Medina*

Behind it, a spiral stair,  
winding us up the cool shaft,  
the dark wells of the Medina.  
Below it, noise of everything,  
flies, smells of dung, food, dye,  
the rainbow of the tanneries,  
segmented by vats and drying hides.

Before it, descent down slippery paths,  
jumping roof to roof,  
above the chasm of the town.  
Above it, the mosque,  
the mullah and the sun,  
in its sea, the  
indigo      vertigo.

### *Periphery*

I met him crowded on a bus  
near the desert at the city's edge.

He carried yellow melons,  
soft with a heavy load,  
and laughing copper hair.  
I never learned his name.  
All freckles, friends  
he shone.

*Festival*

The guest of honour  
duly hennaed and circumcised  
alternately sleeps and cries  
the night away.

Upstairs, we all  
danced; beating  
rhythms on  
everything.  
Downstairs, a  
solitary  
twirler — bills from a bosom  
already overflowing.

落花

李商隱

去飛陌暉掃歸盡依  
竟亂曲斜忍欲春沾  
客花連送未仍向是  
閣園差遞斷穿心得  
高小參迢腸眼芳所

## FALLING FLOWERS

Even you have quit my high pavilion;  
flowers astir in the garden below

scattering west, flown along the twisted dike  
escorting dusk, passed into distances.

In the faded light I reach for your return  
and still can't bear to sweep them away

fragrant mind following spring, to end  
here in a tear-drenched robe.

— *Li Shangyin*

軍 參 元 郡 譙 寄 遊 舊 憶

李 白

酒 樓

丘造笑侯客逆難惜枝思  
糟南哥王雲莫作所桂夢  
董橋賣輕青心不無攀愁  
陽津壁月豪君海意南北  
洛天白累賢與轉倒淮洛  
昔余金醉內中山情向留  
憶爲黃一海就迴傾我君



RECALLING OLD JOURNEYS:

*To Yuan Canjun, Chancellor of Qiao*

Think back —

Luoyang  
    that drinking-inn  
old “Wine-Barrel” Dong  
    had built me  
        south of Tianjin Bridge

Yellow gold, white jade  
    bought laughter and song,  
one everlasting month  
    forget kings and princes  
    — drunk!

’mid restless sages,  
    come from all directions  
        wanderers of the vivid clouds  
to meet you there  
    and none more welcome

Who thought it nothing  
    to turn peaks, churn seas,  
to incline together in open admiration  
    with open meanings  
        and no shadow of umbrage.

I went to Nanhuai,  
    “picking cassia”  
        going nowhere fast  
you stayed at Beiluo  
    dreaming backwards, thinking of it.

吹 玉 笙

城螢明聲地迎我樂鳴舉舞  
隨仙迴花風平相邀仙鳳輕起  
相訪水千松倒來人動鸞欲醉  
還迢曲入盡絡守真上似摧守  
別迢六初度金太之樓宛管太  
忍隨十溪壑鞍東陽霞然長中  
不相三一萬銀漢紫蒼嘈袖漢

Then —  
I couldn't bear it,  
back to meet  
to wander

We wandered far to  
Xiancheng  
that City of Spirits  
coiled in its  
thirty-six-fold river

Every stream giving onto  
a thousand flowers blazing,  
only then at the end  
of ten thousand valleys,  
each hollow full  
of sound,  
pines,  
wind.

Gold reins,  
gilt saddles,  
down the plain,  
the Taishou of Donghan  
came to greet us.

The Daemon of  
Ziyang,  
"Purple Light,"  
offered me his  
jade *sheng* flute to play

And back at high  
Canxia, began  
playing that immortal music,  
a brouhaha  
of brooding-phoenix calls

into the long  
sleeves of the  
Taishou of Zhonghan  
and up he rose, swaying and  
started to dance

身股霄朝遙巢橋虎虜行若深金案心  
我其九終水故渭豹戎太腸月黃玉歸  
覆枕凌不山尋度勇遏渡羊歲輕青無  
袍眠氣散關山家君州呼道涼義食飽  
錦橫意雨楚還歸嚴并相不北貴綺醉  
持醉筵離飛既亦家尹月輪來君杯我  
手我當星分余君君作五摧行感瓊使

who, with his own hands  
    covered me with his  
        brocade robe  
and I was drunk  
    and fell asleep with my head on his thigh.

And that  
    banquet's  
        thought and force, we reached ninth heaven  
Star-scattered, rain-driven  
    over by dawn.

Flown apart, riven  
    by Chu Pass  
        seas and vastnesses,  
I over the mountains, back to the old nest.  
You home, back by Wei Bridge.

Your father,  
    august and fierce,  
        a leopard and tiger,  
made governor of Bingzhou,  
    put down the barbarians.

In the fifth month  
    you sent for me,  
        across Taihang Mountain  
broke the wheels, trackless,  
    twisted like sheep guts

I reached Beiling,  
    already deep into the year,  
moved, most  
    by weight of kindness,  
        made light of yellow gold.

And there —  
    the jade winecups  
        pure jade tables  
drunk, wearing brocade,  
    no thought of return.

曲玉鳴綠過何日娥輝衣去飛  
四壁鼓草經雪斜翠月羅空雲  
城如簫莎恣似宜寫助舞入行  
向水水鱗妓花醉潭娟唱哥繞  
出流弄龍攜楊欲清嬋更吹自  
時祠舟波來若妝尺娥人風曲  
時晉浮微興其紅百翠美清哥

And sometimes, bending west,  
beyond the city walls,  
to the Jin shrine,  
ancestral waters flowing like  
green and white jade.

An idling boat,  
strumming the stream  
to flute and drum,  
etched ripples, dragon scales  
emerald water grass.

The impulse comes, lead out those girls  
giving in — the moment passes  
how do they do it,  
white poplar flowers  
so like snow?

Vermilioned, they *will* get drunk  
apt to the setting sun.  
a hundred feet of clear pool  
to mirror kingfisher grace

Kingfisher elegance  
reflected in young moonlight  
each beauty  
sings her gauze robe  
into dance.

Clear wind  
plays their songs  
away, into the void,  
curves of song  
twirling on their heels  
after passing clouds,

遊賦期去君群少紛 辭憶

再楊可歸遇離多紛 此相

難長不還一又知爭盡極絨遙

樂獻雲首頭北恨暮可可跪里

行因青白難之別春不不長千

時遊闕山橋臺余花亦亦兒君

此西北東渭渭問落言情呼寄



This moment of joy  
flies  
    hardly to be met again  
I journeyed west,  
    to offer my "Long Willow" verse

North Tower's  
    vivid clouds  
        undo hope;  
I returned to Dongshan  
    with white hair.

At the south head  
    of Wei Bridge  
        I met you one more time  
we parted again  
    north of Can Terrace.

You ask me about parting  
    how bitter? How much?  
At the end of spring  
    falling flowers  
        scatter and disperse

Words cannot reach the end of this  
    nor feelings fathom  
I call the boy to kneel  
    and close this poem

*and send you this a thousand miles, thinking.*

— Li Bai [Li Po]

Once more Eros  
unhinges my limbs  
and stings —

bicerebral  
untamable  
animal.

— *Sappho*

POISE

*for Phil*

Midsummer sunset  
clear from the street's end  
winter dusk, northwest.

It's all right  
the snow compass  
buried in the park.

The fifth direction  
(centre) still autrement, bow  
at rest, program slow

until the winds change  
to one work hold all over  
turning everything.

白鷺鷥

李白

水霜去旁  
秋墜未洲  
下如且沙  
鷺飛閑立  
白孤心猶

觀放白鷹

李白

高毛雪毫  
風錦片秋  
邊白一見  
月鷹飛里  
八胡孤百

劃鷹

杜甫

起殊兔胡  
霜作狡愁  
風畫思似  
練鷹身目  
素蒼竦側  
摘呼鳥燕  
堪可凡平  
光勢擊灑  
鏃櫻當血  
條軒何毛

## WHITE EGRET

white egret  
drops  
    to fall water  
flying alone  
    like  
    falling frost

mind so still  
still  
    I can't go  
standing alone  
    beside  
    the strand

— *Li Bai [Li Po]*

## LOOKING DOWN ON WHITE EAGLES

The August border winds  
    blow high  
Hu eagle feathers  
    white brocade

a mote of snow  
    flies alone  
see their autumn down  
    a hundred *li* away

— *Li Bai [Li Po]*

## PAINTED FALCON

winds rise, and frost from the pale silk  
grey falcon, uncanny work in paint  
strains its body longs for the crafty hare  
hooded eyes nomad's worried glance

metal tie-ring gleam from silk cord beckons the hand  
form in motion, poised on the rail to command  
When will it strike the common flock  
plumage and blood sprinkle the grassy plain?

— *Du Fu [Tu Fu]*

THREE POEMS FROM LINES BY ROBERT KELLY

A PENTIMENTO

*full of a special kind of dark called light*

circling in the pool

a special kind of dark called light  
and another clear, not dark or bright:  
full light and empty light

down where the rapid resolves, water falls

to foam of energy (blackwhite light) and bubbles  
reflect, absorb each other: whiteblack rocks, blackwhite falls  
ink leaves no trace on water.

SPEM IN ALIUM

*A congress of deception practices truth*

Voice by voice, the motet grows

eight five-part choirs shift imperceptible parts.  
Deduce who can, that *creator coeli et terrae*  
invoked in fortyfold counterpoint.

Russell to Bishop Berkeley, Hume and Kant:

against things-in-themselves  
induce phenomena, distinguish synthesis from cause,  
arguments and cases, bulwarks ground to a fault.

Hear and rejoice, sense and doubt

as voices interleave a single sound and note  
rising and falling, waves furl and calm  
to a deft design hidden from the ear of reason.

One tone, purer than light

*spem in alium nunquam habui*  
all my trust and hope  
only in thee.

## PEN AND HANDLE

flotsam on the surface

*perceive through your pen* he said  
the entry points, surface of the day.

Pass the handles, semaphores, the wrong road,  
no where here, how  
to know.

Follow the marks, reckon significs as  
clefts in rock, potential, invisible ink,  
dew on dead trees' leaves.

And learn to detect Han forgeries, lull the dozy brain  
of deep if useless memory (and useful particulars):  
*te deums, To Do* lists  
unwrite themselves, and do.

## BOOK

a book about the edges  
of language, *les ruses*  
*d'intelligence*, their curves

misses have it. The other words  
are shy, direct light  
stumbles them, threading

through, natural and relentless, around such obstacles  
are slow-moving if at all, and dull.  
body to stride, nothing out of season.

... words  
like certain cats that resist placement  
arrange themselves, and purr



*Adonis to the shades in Hades, asked what he missed most*

I leave

-best of all-

the light of the sun.

Then-

the shining stars and the face of the moon.

Then-

wet cucumbers,

apples

and pears.

— *Praxilla of Sicyon*

## NOTES

### RU MENG LING

Unlike Tang regulated verse forms, Song dynasty *ci* took its metres from songs, possibly of Central Asian origin. The music is lost, but each title identifies a distinctive metre. Like Elizabethan madrigals, *ci* could be read or sung. Most was written by men, ostensibly in the voices of the women who traditionally sang them. These four *ci* were written to the tune "Like a Dream".

Qin Guan (1049-1100). One of the great *ci* poets of the Northern Song, associated with the "Delicate Restraint" (*wan yue*) genre of *ci* poetry, his *ci* poems were considered superior to those of his friend, the great Tang poet Su Shi (also known as Su Dongpo), who was imprisoned in 1079 for offence against authority. Su tried to recommend the rather unsuccessful Qin Guan to the attentions of the great reformer Wang Anshi, but Wang's death prevented any action on the recommendation. Some fifteen years later (1094), Qin was accused of tampering with official records to help Su, and Qin was demoted and relieved of his official duties in the capital. Four years before his death, he was exiled to Chenzhou, where several more such transfers broke his spirit and his health.

Li Qingzhao (1084-1151), the greatest woman poet of China. Born into a literary family, her talents were recognized while she was still in her teens; and her early life and marriage were happy until the fall of the Northern Song (1127) and the subsequent death of her husband, the mayor of Nanjing. Her poetry combines an unaffected, natural style of language with rigorous observance of metrical rules.

### FALLING FLOWERS

Li Shangyin (813?-858) explored a complex and ambiguous emotional range previously untouched by Chinese poets. His poems are known for their tight structure, rich allusion, irony, portrayals of secret love and use of Taoist and Buddhist imagery.

### RECALLING OLD JOURNEYS

Opinion divides whether Li Bai [Li Po] (701-762) or Du Fu (see below) is the greatest of the Tang poets. Born somewhere in Central Asia, possibly of Turkic origin, Li Bai grew up in western China (modern Szechuan) and presented himself in the tradition of such "frontier" poets as Sima Xiangru.

He was summoned to a post at the Han Lin Academy by the emperor Xuan Zong in 742, and was expelled two years later. Thereafter he travelled widely, was implicated in a minor rebellion and arrested for treason during the An Lushan Rebellion. He was eventually released, and spent his last years wandering the Yangtze Valley, but never regained favour with the government.

#### POISE

Midsummer sunset: The geographical orientation of Montreal makes streets that run east- (northeast) west (-southwest) seem to run north-south.

Outrement: a neighbourhood in Montreal.

#### PAINTED FALCON

Du Fu [Tu Fu] (712-770) is variously esteemed for the technical precision of his verses, the realism of his representation of poverty and hardship during the An Lushan Rebellion, for his introspection, and for a surrealist richness of symbolism. He was a younger contemporary and devoted student and friend of Li Po.

#### ADONIS TO THE SHADES

The expression "Mad as Praxilla's Adonis" comes from this poem.



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