

ĐẶNG TRẦN CÔN
ĐOÀN THỊ ĐIỂM

Lament
Of the
Soldier's
Wife

Translated by
REWI ALLEY



THẾ GIỚI PUBLISHERS
HANOI - 1998

LAMENT OF THE SOLDIER'S WIFE



WORLD PUBLICATIONS
Hawaii - 1958

LAMENT OF THE SOLDIER'S WIFE

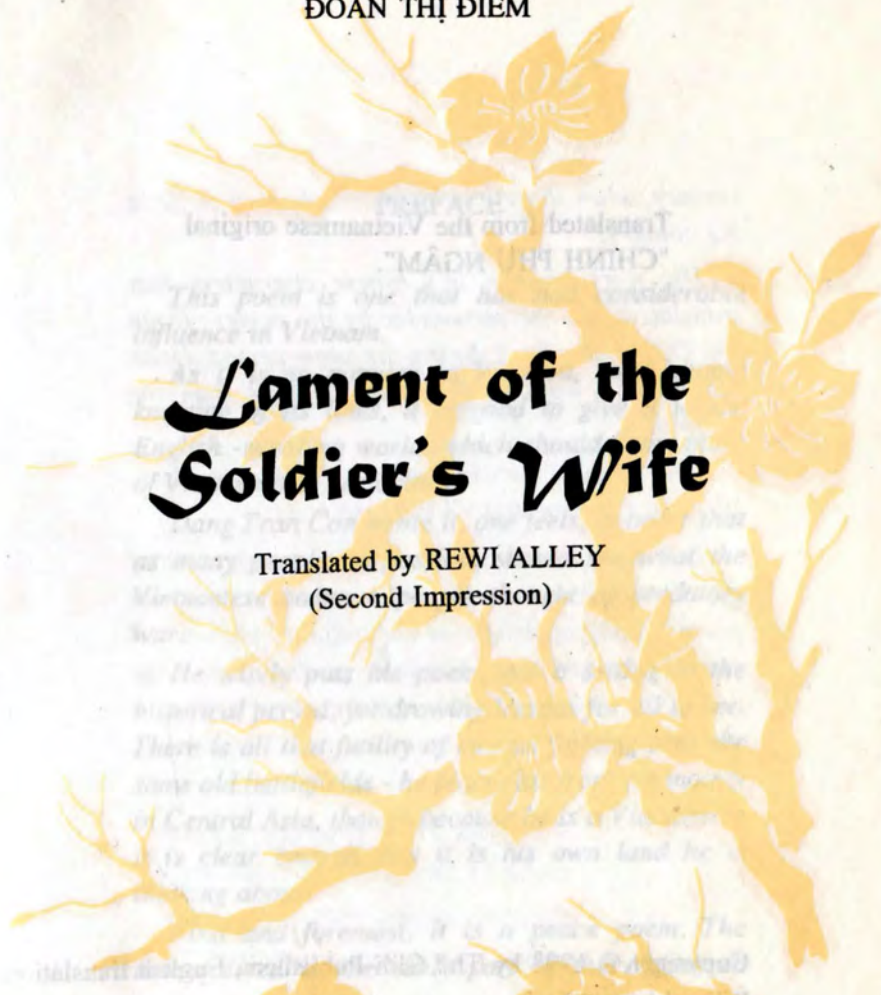


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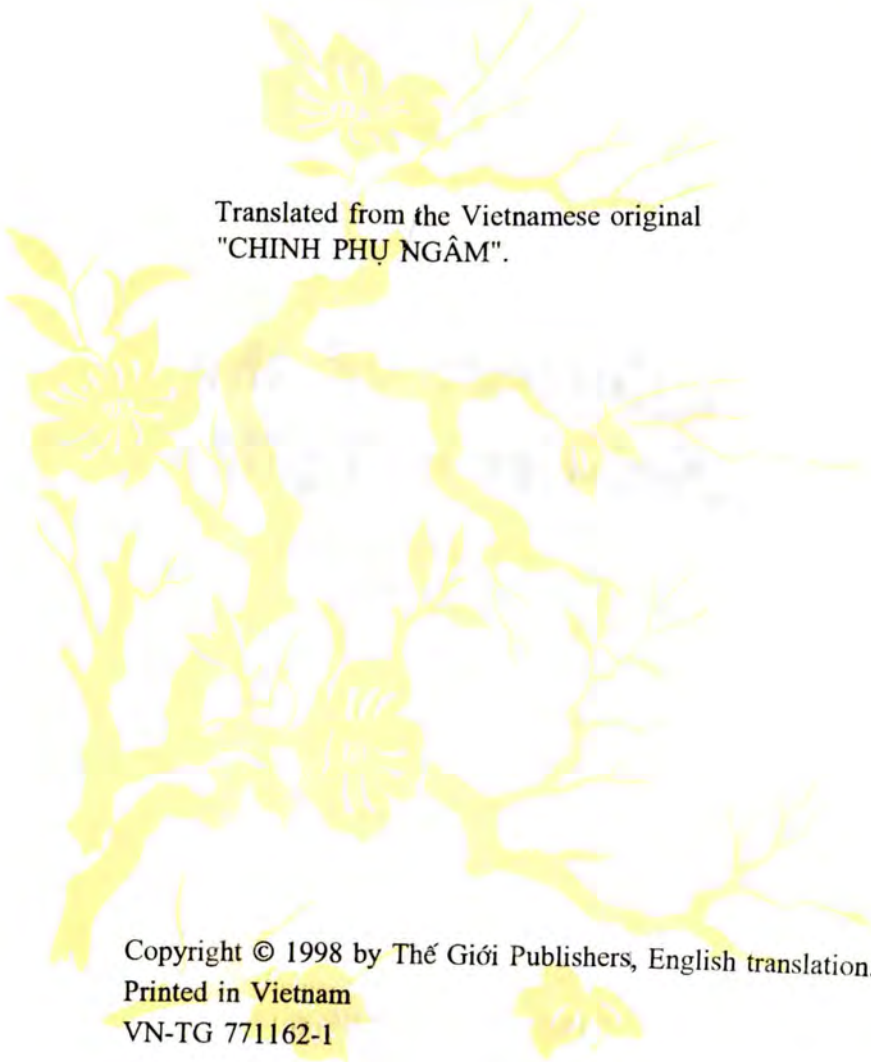
Translated from the Vietnamese original
"MÀNG THỊ ĐIỂM"
This poem is one that has had a significant
influence in Vietnam.

Lament of the Soldier's Wife

Translated by REWI ALLEY
(Second Impression)



THE GIỚI PUBLISHERS
Hanoi - 1998

A large, stylized yellow floral illustration on the left page, featuring a gnarled branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds. The illustration is rendered in a simple, graphic style with yellow outlines and some internal shading.

Translated from the Vietnamese original
"CHINH PHỤ NGÂM".

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A large, stylized yellow floral illustration on the right page, mirroring the design on the left page. It features a gnarled branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, rendered in a simple, graphic style with yellow outlines and some internal shading.

PREFACE

This poem is one that has had considerable influence in Vietnam.

As it is so popular in Vietnam, most people knowing of its lines, it is good to give it to the English-speaking world, which should know more of Vietnam and her culture.

Dang Tran Con wrote it, one feels, in order that as many people as possible should see what the Vietnamese common people thought of predatory war.

He wisely puts his poem into a setting in the historical period, yet drawing lessons for all to see. There is all that futility of eternal fighting over the same old battlefields - he places his frontiers mainly in Central Asia, though because he is a Vietnamese it is clear enough that it is his own land he is thinking about.

First and foremost, it is a peace poem. The author lived in the early part of the eighteenth

century, when there was considerable civil strife in his country.

His work written in Chinese characters was translated into the vernacular by the poetess Đoàn Thị Điểm, who lived during the same period. Đoàn Thị Điểm's work is far more popular than the original.

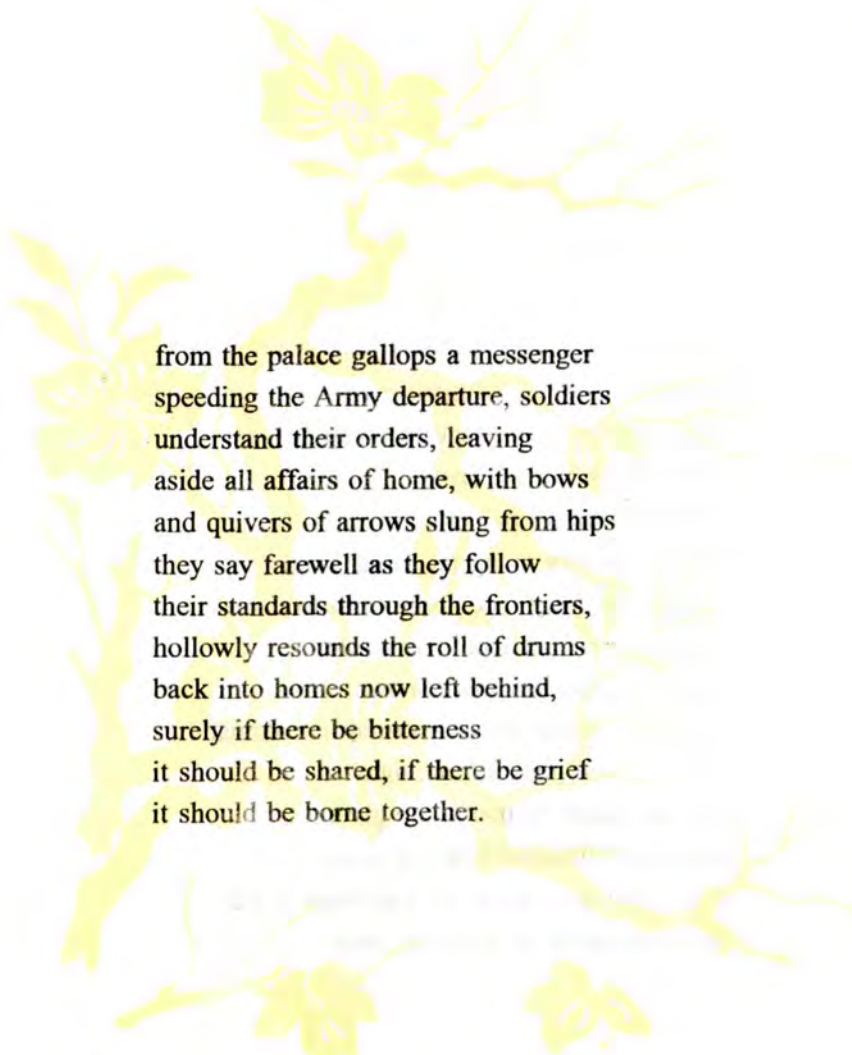
The English translation has been made from both the Chinese and Vietnamese texts.

It is not possible to reproduce the musical lilt of the Vietnamese language which makes the great poem a thing of delight to the ordinary person. All one can do is to give its meaning so that its message will go on still further through the world and move the hearts of men by its passion.

REWI ALLEY

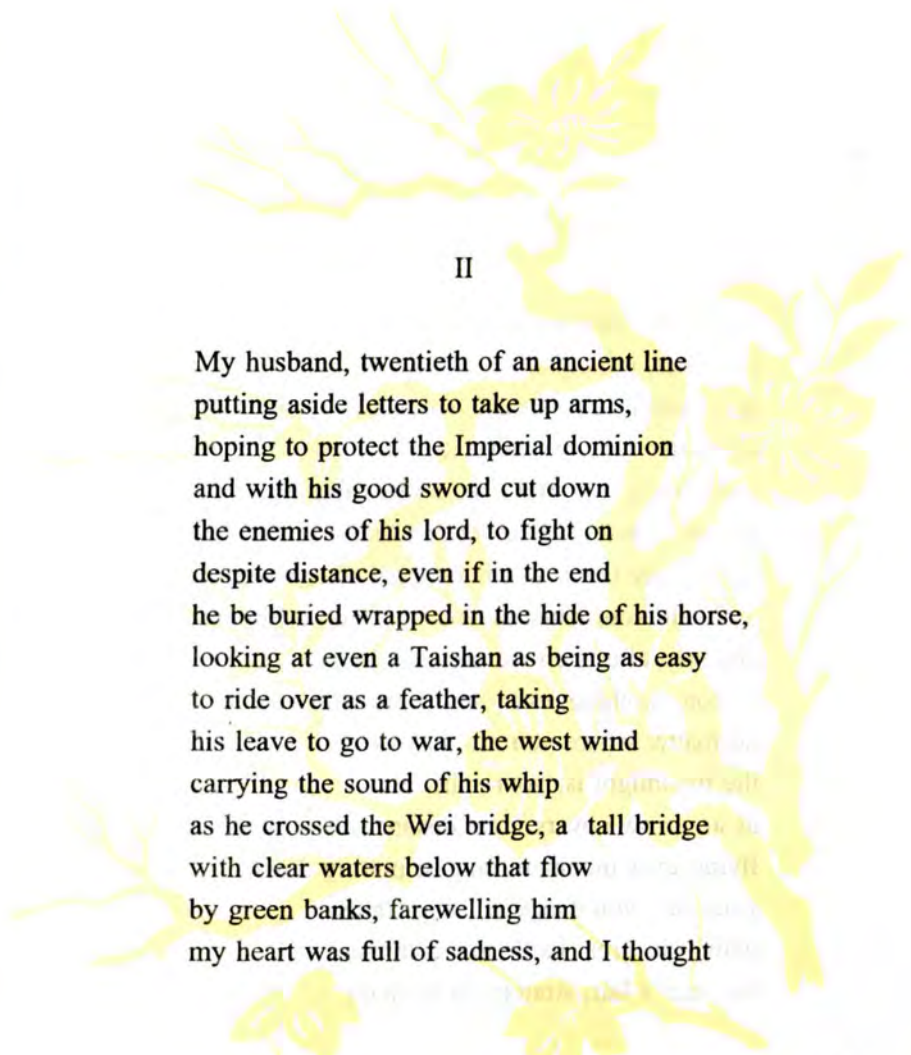
I

Everywhere is war: truly
a bad time for all women! even
as we do not understand the blue heavens
above, how can we know
why such things be? drums
roll incessantly along the Great Wall
making the very moonlight seem to tremble,
beacon fires⁽¹⁾ reflect their scarlet
against Kansu mountain snows,
the throne hands down a sword of command
to its chosen general, midnight
and his orders to march are given,
after three hundred years of peace
comes the time when the trappings of war
are worn again by courtiers, now

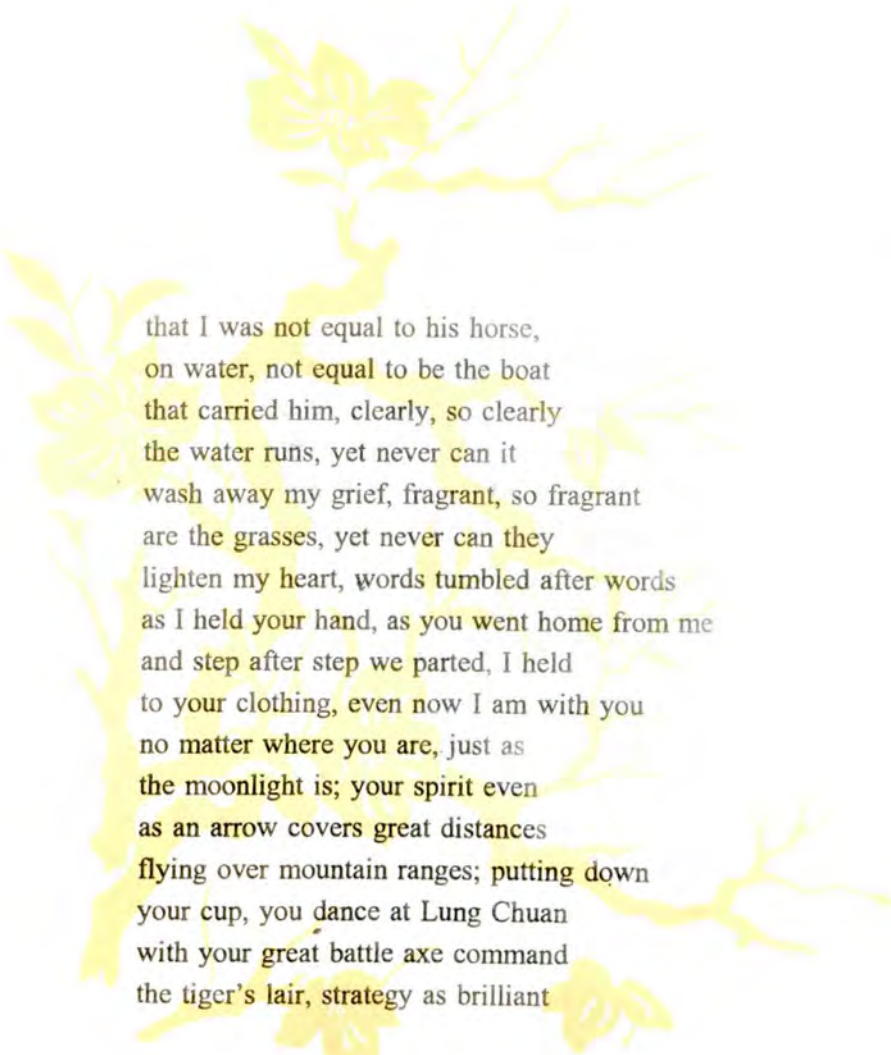
A decorative illustration in yellow ink on the left page, featuring a branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, set against a background of faint, stylized leaves and branches.

from the palace gallops a messenger
speeding the Army departure, soldiers
understand their orders, leaving
aside all affairs of home, with bows
and quivers of arrows slung from hips
they say farewell as they follow
their standards through the frontiers,
hollowly resounds the roll of drums
back into homes now left behind,
surely if there be bitterness
it should be shared, if there be grief
it should be borne together.

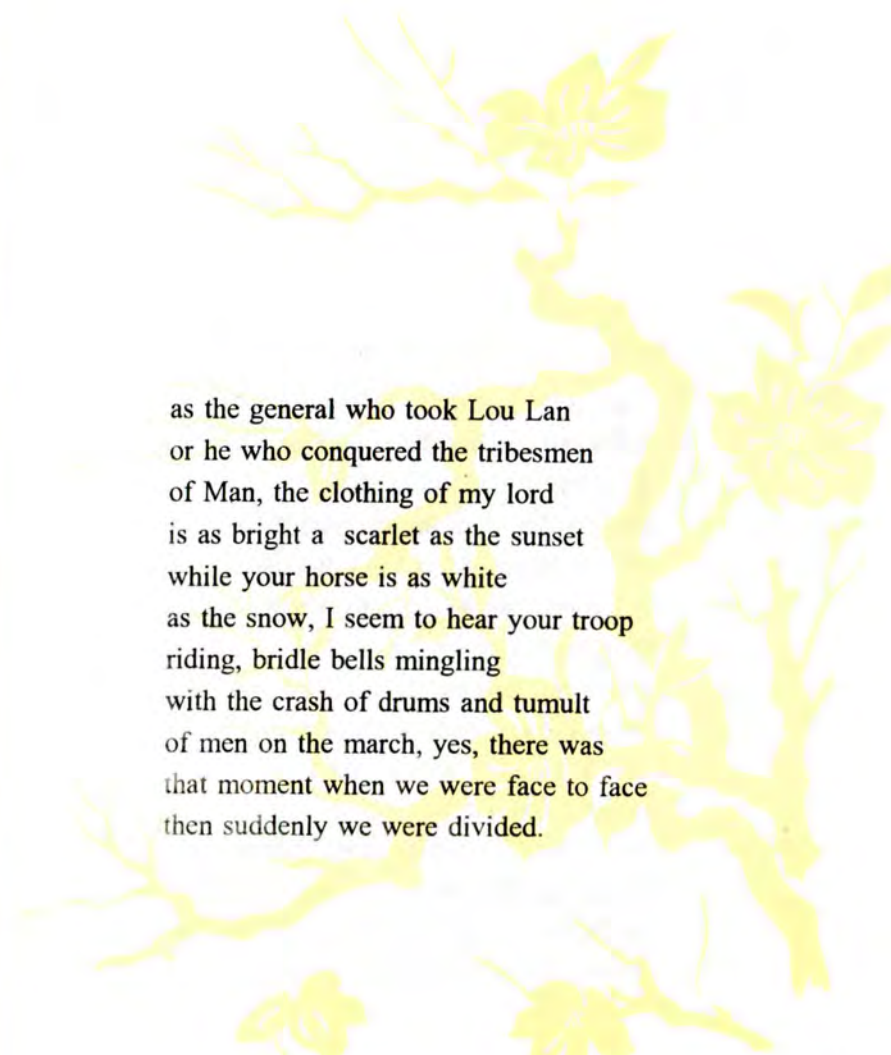
II

A decorative illustration in yellow ink on the right page, featuring a branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, set against a background of faint, stylized leaves and branches.

My husband, twentieth of an ancient line
putting aside letters to take up arms,
hoping to protect the Imperial dominion
and with his good sword cut down
the enemies of his lord, to fight on
despite distance, even if in the end
he be buried wrapped in the hide of his horse,
looking at even a Taishan as being as easy
to ride over as a feather, taking
his leave to go to war, the west wind
carrying the sound of his whip
as he crossed the Wei bridge, a tall bridge
with clear waters below that flow
by green banks, farewelling him
my heart was full of sadness, and I thought

A decorative illustration in yellow ink on the left page, featuring a flowering branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, set against a background of delicate, branching lines.

that I was not equal to his horse,
on water, not equal to be the boat
that carried him, clearly, so clearly
the water runs, yet never can it
wash away my grief, fragrant, so fragrant
are the grasses, yet never can they
lighten my heart, words tumbled after words
as I held your hand, as you went home from me
and step after step we parted, I held
to your clothing, even now I am with you
no matter where you are, just as
the moonlight is; your spirit even
as an arrow covers great distances
flying over mountain ranges; putting down
your cup, you dance at Lung Chuan
with your great battle axe command
the tiger's lair, strategy as brilliant

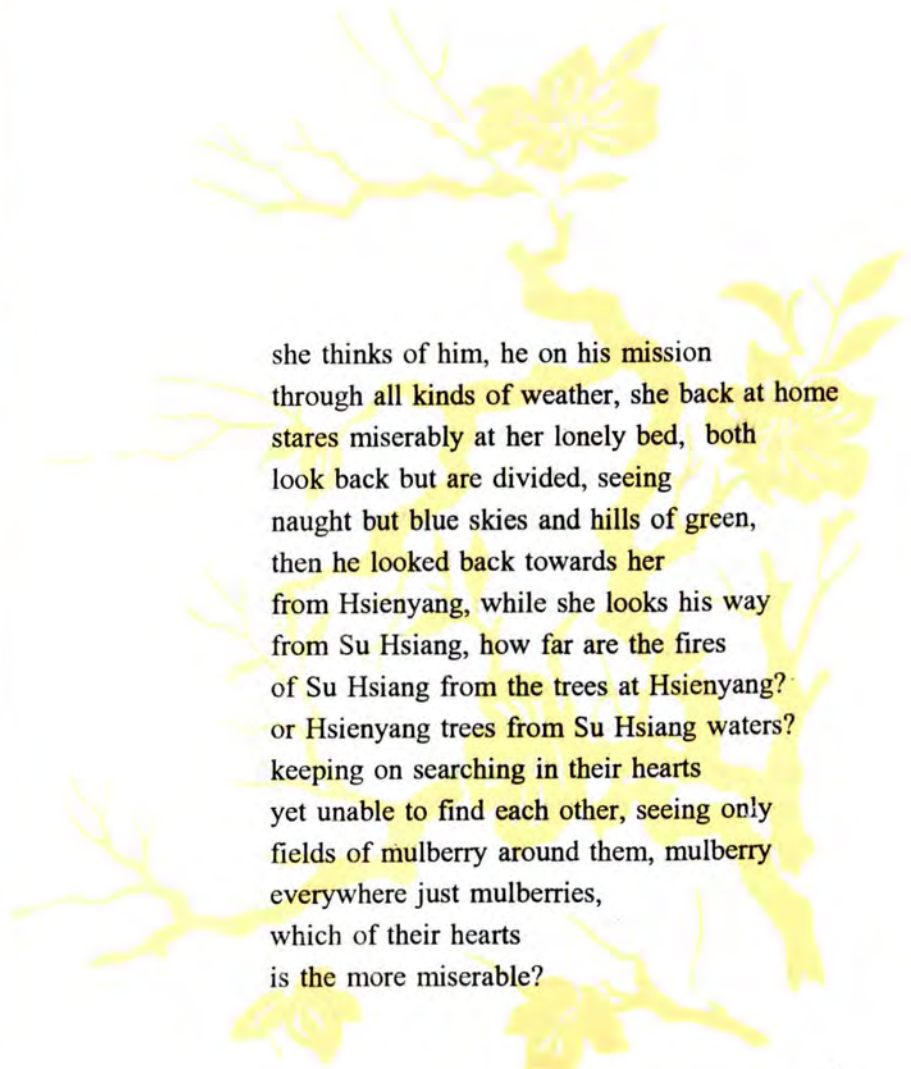
A decorative illustration in yellow ink on the right page, featuring a flowering branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, set against a background of delicate, branching lines.

as the general who took Lou Lan
or he who conquered the tribesmen
of Man, the clothing of my lord
is as bright a scarlet as the sunset
while your horse is as white
as the snow, I seem to hear your troop
riding, bridle bells mingling
with the crash of drums and tumult
of men on the march, yes, there was
that moment when we were face to face
then suddenly we were divided.

A decorative illustration in yellow ink on the left page, featuring a central branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds. The style is traditional Chinese ink wash painting.

III

They were parted by the bridge
and there she stood by the roadside
watching the pennants flutter
into the distance, the vanguard
already north of Tsi Lieu, horses
at the rear, west of Chang Yang,
his escort rides with him out
of the frontier, poplars and willows
stand silently beside her, how
can they understand her sorrow?
fading away are the sounds
of Army music, the color of moving
standards changes as they go, watching
the clouds pass, he thinks of her, and
staring at the mountains curling back

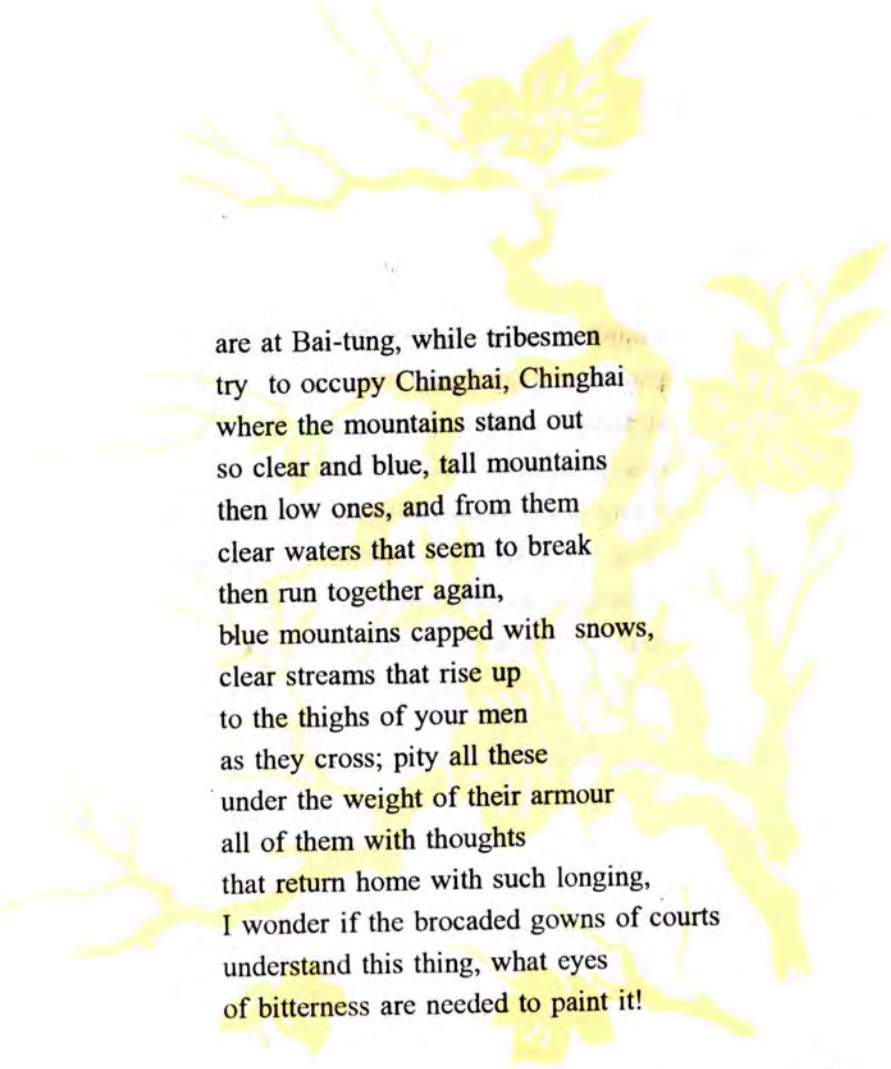
A decorative illustration in yellow ink on the right page, featuring a central branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds. The style is traditional Chinese ink wash painting.

she thinks of him, he on his mission
through all kinds of weather, she back at home
stares miserably at her lonely bed, both
look back but are divided, seeing
naught but blue skies and hills of green,
then he looked back towards her
from Hsienyang, while she looks his way
from Su Hsiang, how far are the fires
of Su Hsiang from the trees at Hsienyang?
or Hsienyang trees from Su Hsiang waters?
keeping on searching in their hearts
yet unable to find each other, seeing only
fields of mulberry around them, mulberry
everywhere just mulberries,
which of their hearts
is the more miserable?

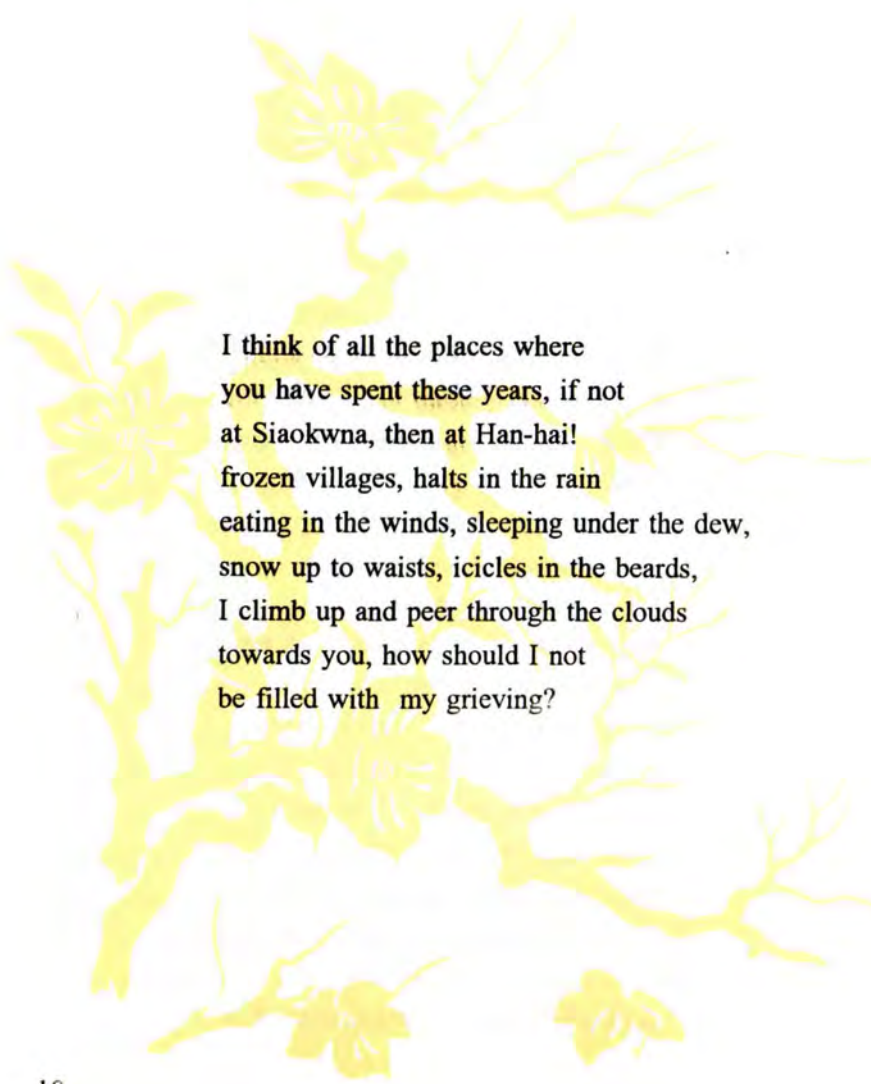
A decorative yellow floral illustration on page 8, featuring a central branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, set against a background of delicate, branching lines.

IV

Since you have ridden out
into the bitter wind, I wonder
where you sleep under
this same moonlight, I knowing well
that where you are has ever been
a battlefield, and that there are
great distances with never
a human habitation, only
the incessant wind, driving
against your face, and rivers
so deep your horses cannot hold
their footing, you sleeping
by the drums on desert sands
or against your saddle at Hu Lung,
this night the soldiers of Han

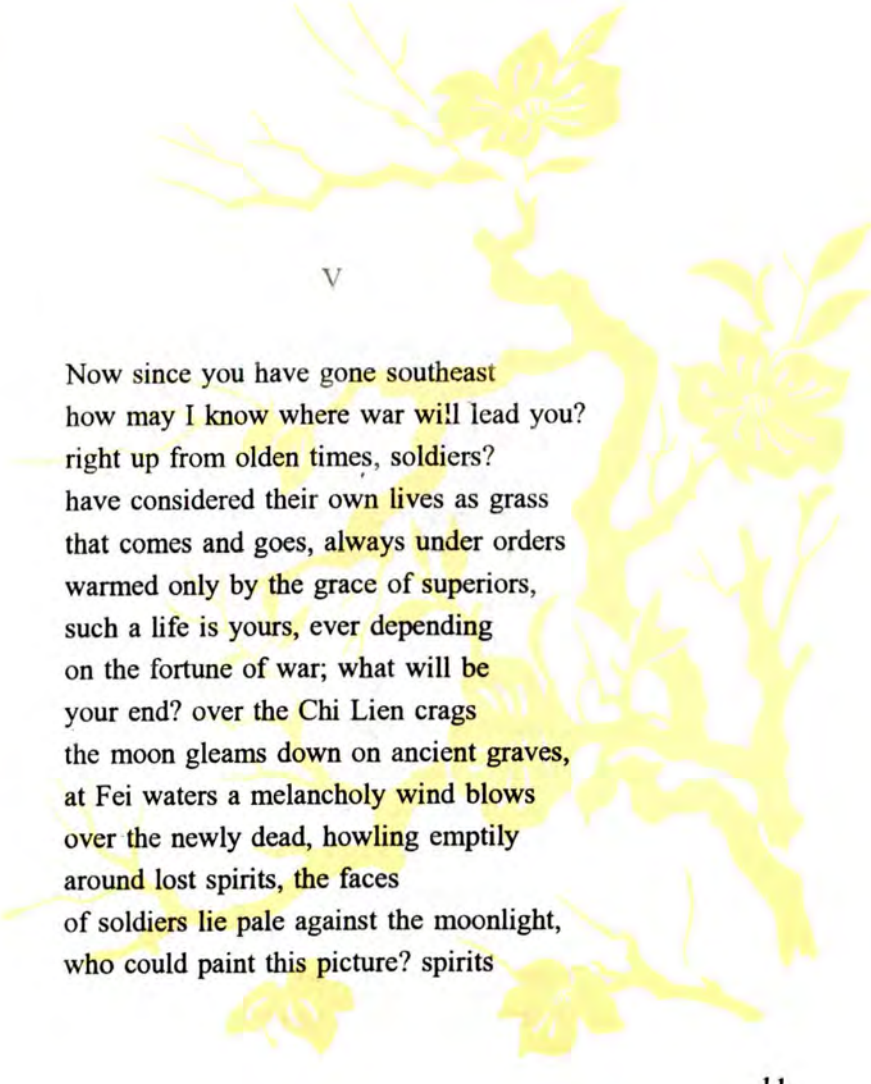
A decorative yellow floral illustration on page 9, mirroring the design on page 8, with a central branch, large flowers, and smaller buds, all in a light yellow color.

are at Bai-tung, while tribesmen
try to occupy Chinghai, Chinghai
where the mountains stand out
so clear and blue, tall mountains
then low ones, and from them
clear waters that seem to break
then run together again,
blue mountains capped with snows,
clear streams that rise up
to the thighs of your men
as they cross; pity all these
under the weight of their armour
all of them with thoughts
that return home with such longing,
I wonder if the brocaded gowns of courts
understand this thing, what eyes
of bitterness are needed to paint it!

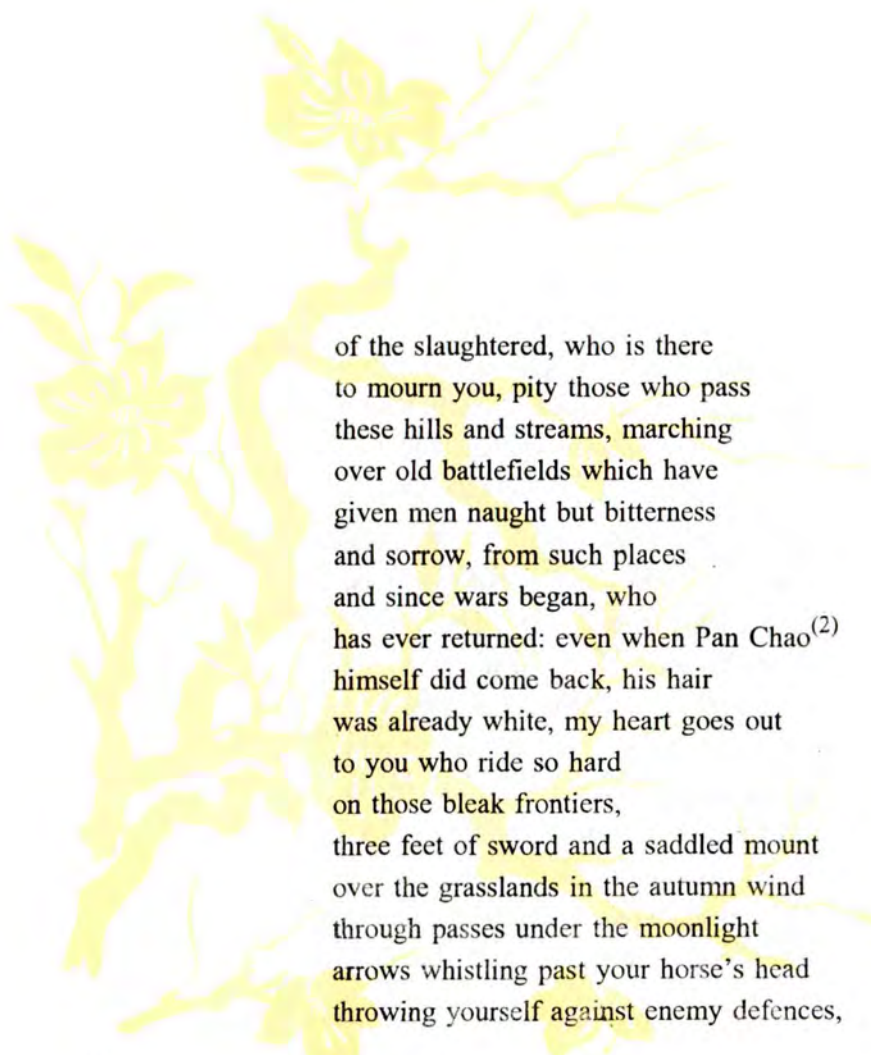
A decorative yellow floral illustration on page 10, featuring a central branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller blossoms, set against a background of delicate, branching lines.

I think of all the places where
you have spent these years, if not
at Siaokwna, then at Han-hai!
frozen villages, halts in the rain
eating in the winds, sleeping under the dew,
snow up to waists, icicles in the beards,
I climb up and peer through the clouds
towards you, how should I not
be filled with my grieving?

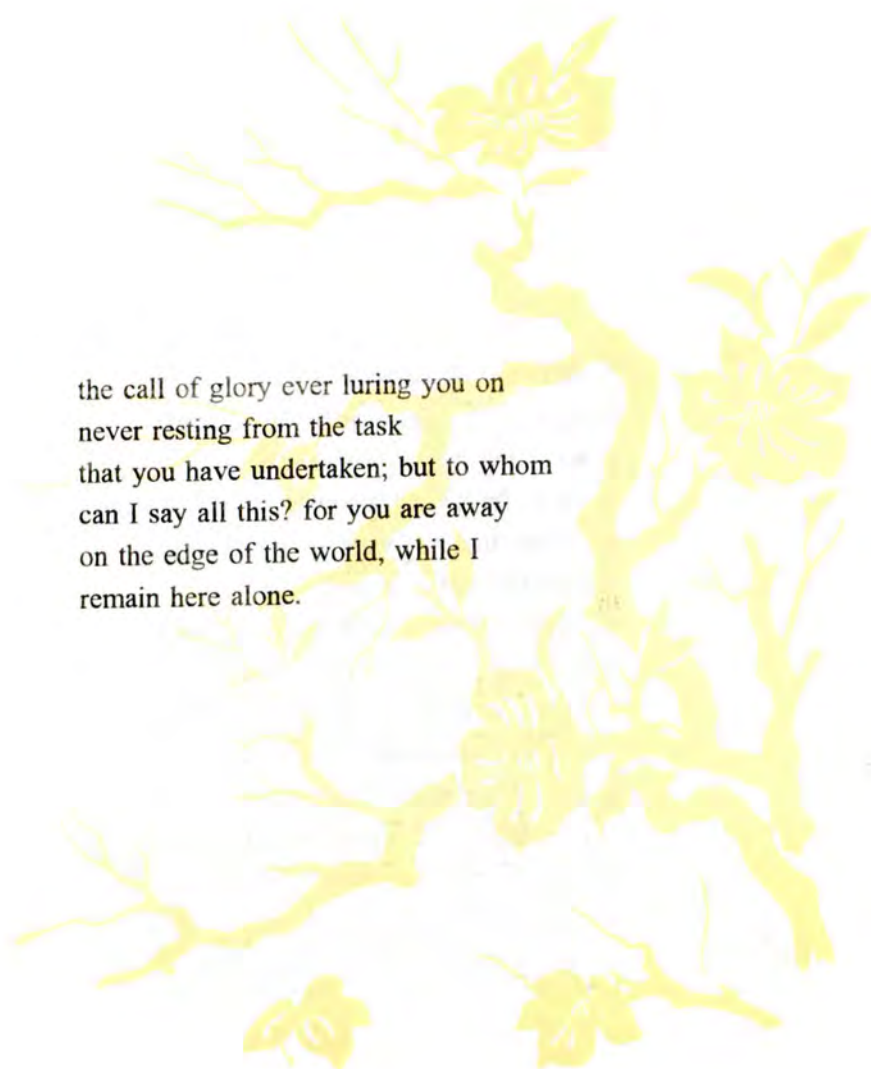
V

A decorative yellow floral illustration on page 11, featuring a central branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller blossoms, set against a background of delicate, branching lines.

Now since you have gone southeast
how may I know where war will lead you?
right up from olden times, soldiers?
have considered their own lives as grass
that comes and goes, always under orders
warmed only by the grace of superiors,
such a life is yours, ever depending
on the fortune of war; what will be
your end? over the Chi Lien crags
the moon gleams down on ancient graves,
at Fei waters a melancholy wind blows
over the newly dead, howling empty
around lost spirits, the faces
of soldiers lie pale against the moonlight,
who could paint this picture? spirits

A yellow ink illustration of a flowering branch, possibly a plum or cherry, with several large, five-petaled blossoms and smaller buds. The branch is gnarled and extends across the upper and left portions of the page.

of the slaughtered, who is there
to mourn you, pity those who pass
these hills and streams, marching
over old battlefields which have
given men naught but bitterness
and sorrow, from such places
and since wars began, who
has ever returned: even when Pan Chao⁽²⁾
himself did come back, his hair
was already white, my heart goes out
to you who ride so hard
on those bleak frontiers,
three feet of sword and a saddled mount
over the grasslands in the autumn wind
through passes under the moonlight
arrows whistling past your horse's head
throwing yourself against enemy defences,

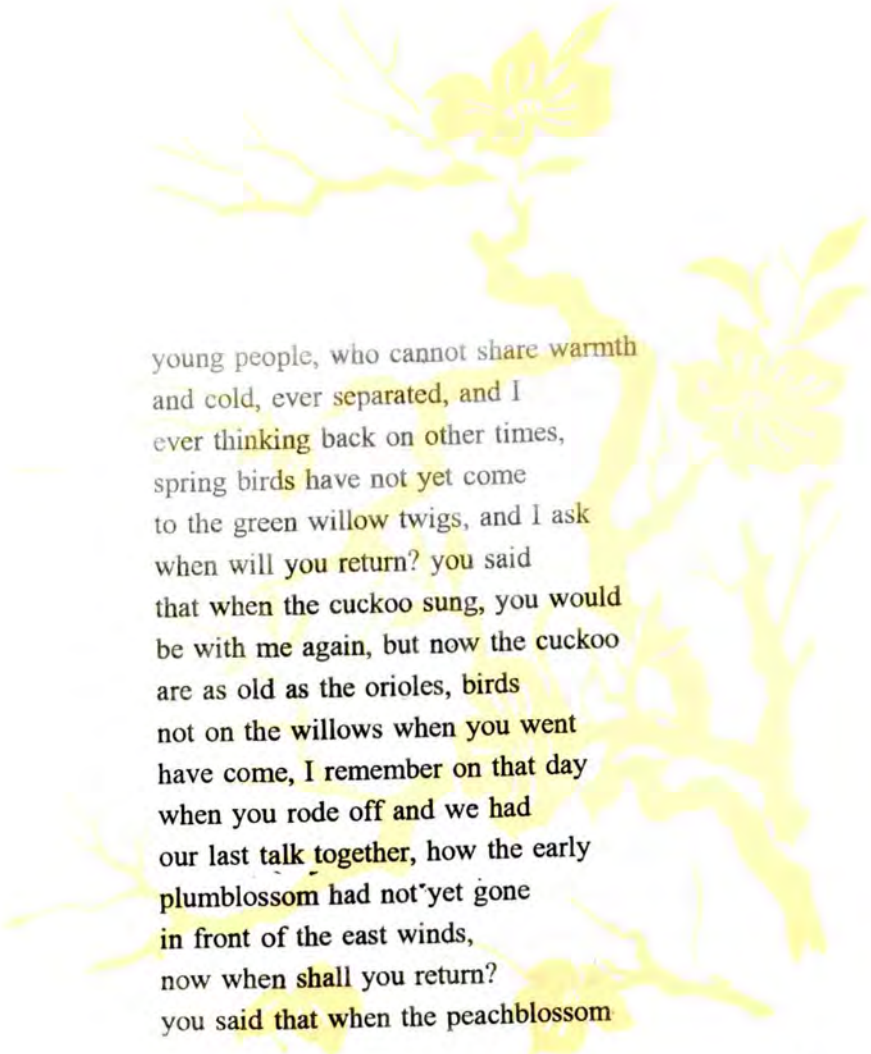
A yellow ink illustration of a flowering branch, similar to the one on page 12, with several large, five-petaled blossoms and smaller buds. The branch is gnarled and extends across the upper and right portions of the page.

the call of glory ever luring you on
never resting from the task
that you have undertaken; but to whom
can I say all this? for you are away
on the edge of the world, while I
remain here alone.

A decorative yellow floral illustration on page 14, featuring a central branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, set against a background of stylized, branching foliage.

VI

Now is my life shut in
behind doors, should it be my destiny
to so spend it, how could it be yours
to be so far away? who would have thought
that like fish and water, we should be
thus separated! it is as though
the waters were denied to the clouds,
how could I be a soldier's wife,
and then you imitate the careless gallant,
one of us ever south of the River,
and the other north! leaving me
sad enough in the morning, yet sadder
still in the evening, there on one hand
you are, a lad abroad, here on the other
am I, a girl at home, pitiful are we

A decorative yellow floral illustration on page 15, featuring a central branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, set against a background of stylized, branching foliage.

young people, who cannot share warmth
and cold, ever separated, and I
ever thinking back on other times,
spring birds have not yet come
to the green willow twigs, and I ask
when will you return? you said
that when the cuckoo sung, you would
be with me again, but now the cuckoo
are as old as the orioles, birds
not on the willows when you went
have come, I remember on that day
when you rode off and we had
our last talk together, how the early
plumblossom had not yet gone
in front of the east winds,
now when shall you return?
you said that when the peachblossom

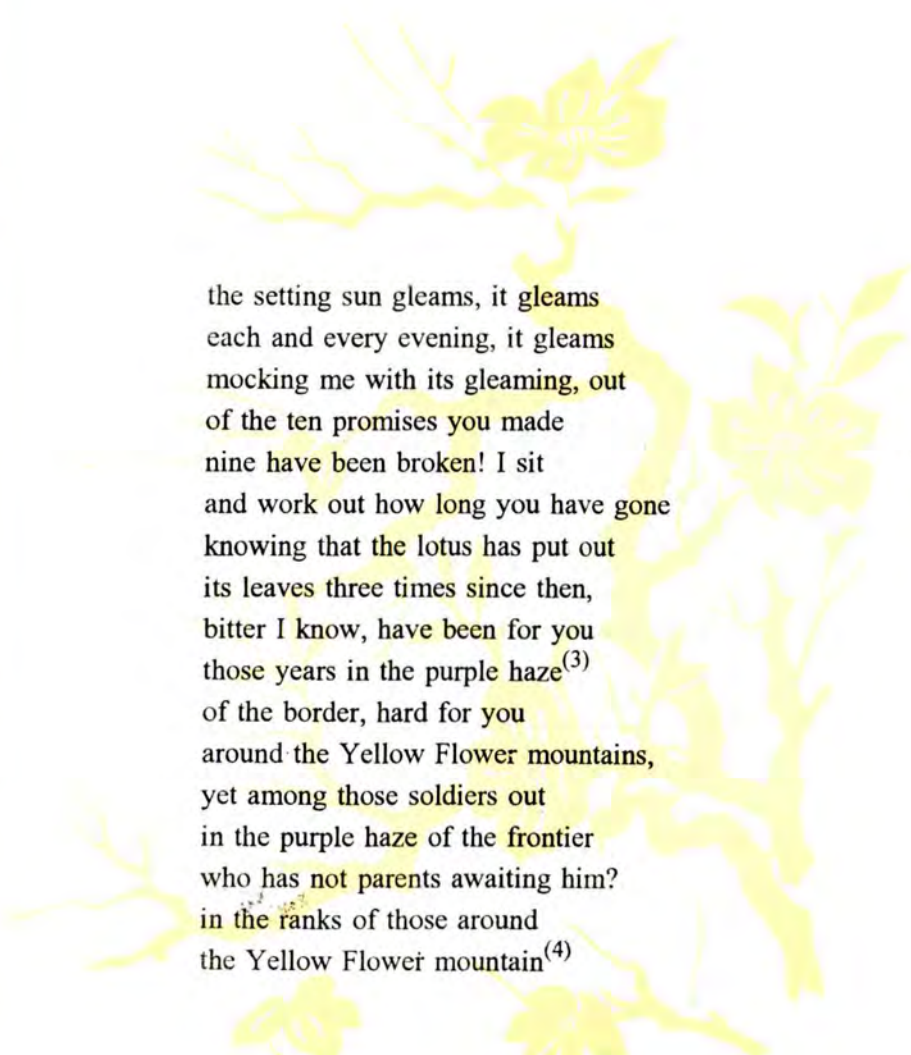
was red, that you would come
but the peachblossom has
been taken by the Spring winds,
and the fallen plumblossom petals
lie over the flowers on the river bank,
did you not tell me to wait for you
on Lung Hsi peak? I have waited
for you there when the sun was high
but you did not come, now the falling
leaves catch in my hairpins, and
as I stood weeping alone, from over
the silent village came the cry
of evening birds, you said that you
would meet me at Hanyang Bridge,
though I have gone there morning
and evening, still you have not come,
the wind blowing down the valley

blows my gown, as I stand and weep,
emptily weeping, then from the river
arises the evening mist.

A decorative yellow floral illustration on page 18, featuring a central flower with a stem and leaves, and several smaller flowers scattered around the page.

VII

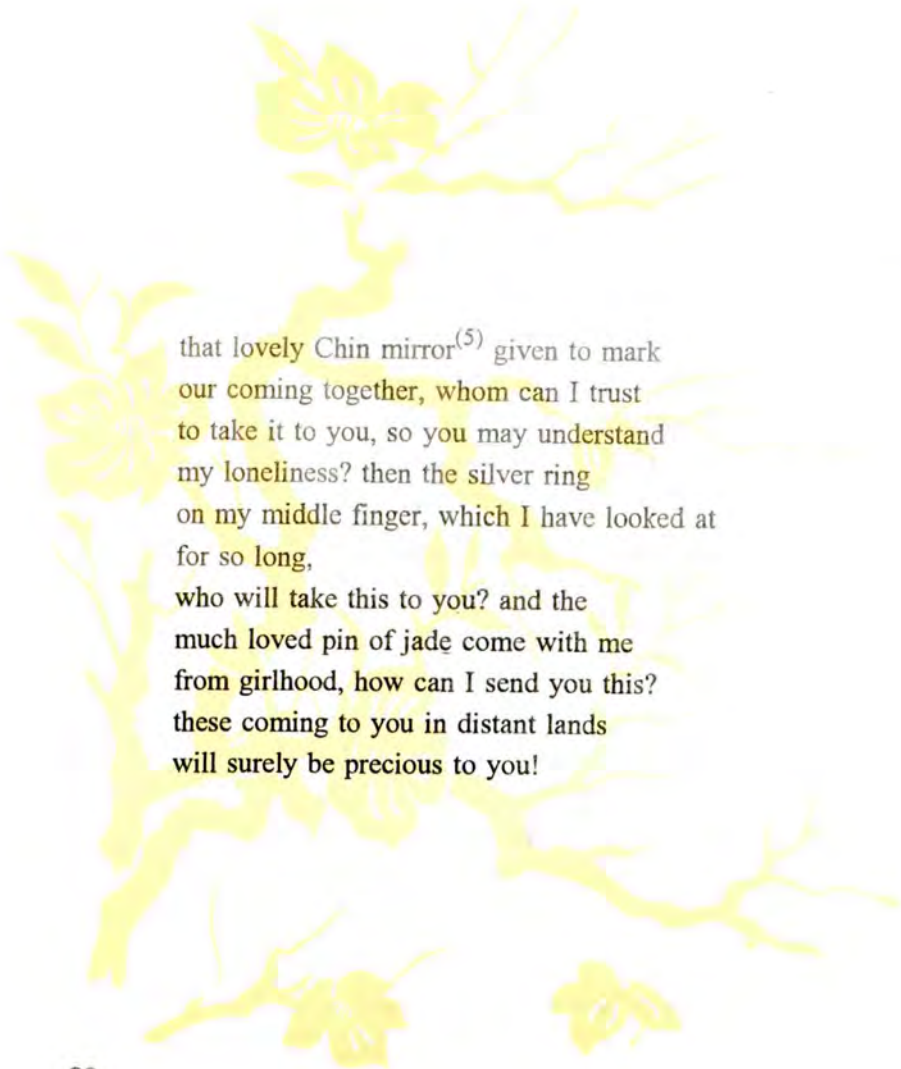
Last year I wrote you
urging your return, then again
this year, begging you to come,
my letters reach you, yet you came not!
poplar buds scatter over the green
below, all around me is green,
green again, then still more green!
with each halting step, my mind
fills with a hundred thoughts,
last year your letter came to me,
asking me to await you; this year
again you wrote, saying you would come
now here before me are your letters,
not you yourself;
through the screen on my window

A decorative yellow floral illustration on page 19, featuring a central flower with a stem and leaves, and several smaller flowers scattered around the page.

the setting sun gleams, it gleams
each and every evening, it gleams
mocking me with its gleaming, out
of the ten promises you made
nine have been broken! I sit
and work out how long you have gone
knowing that the lotus has put out
its leaves three times since then,
bitter I know, have been for you
those years in the purple haze⁽³⁾
of the border, hard for you
around the Yellow Flower mountains,
yet among those soldiers out
in the purple haze of the frontier
who has not parents awaiting him?
in the ranks of those around
the Yellow Flower mountain⁽⁴⁾

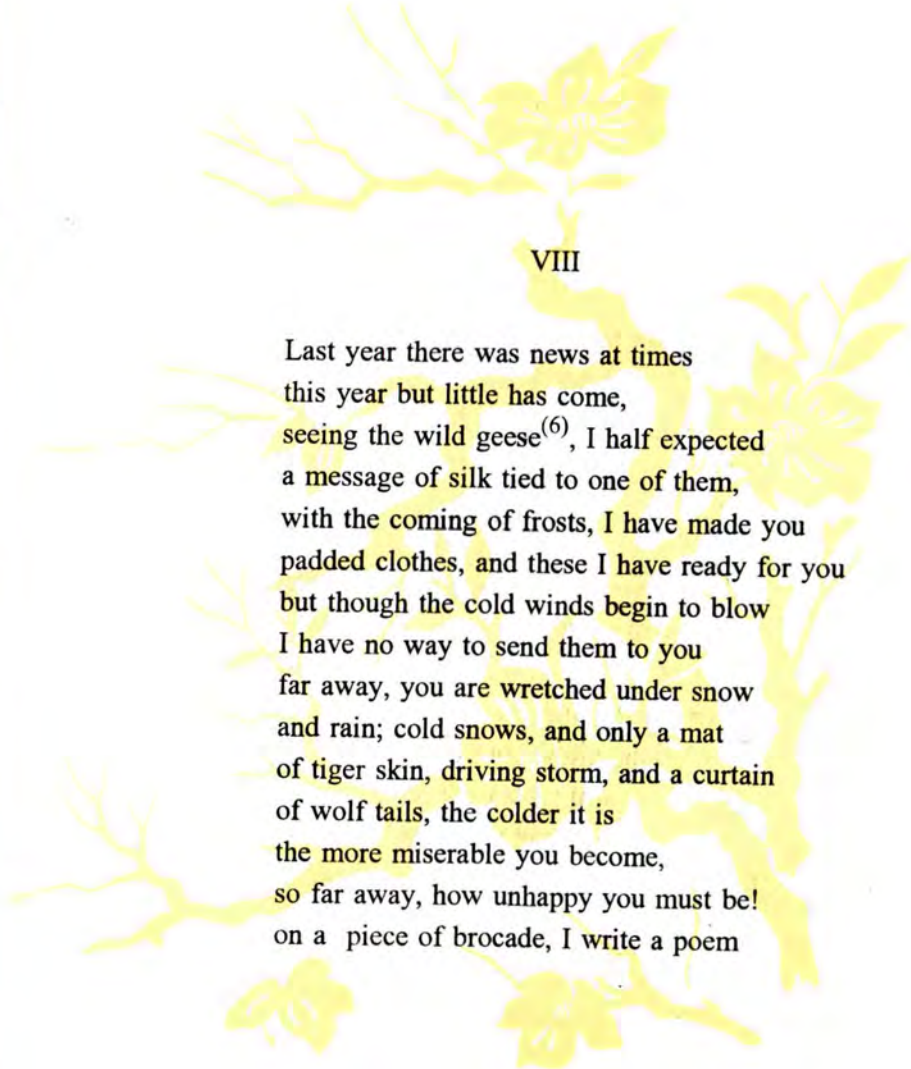
who has not a wife at home
longing for him? how many old parents are still
thinking of their parting
with soldiers sons, and now there
is your own wife, ever anxious
about you, the temples
of your own old folk are as white
as the frost, your child still sucks
at his mother's breast, while
your old mother stands ever grieving
by the door, your baby would have you
chew his hard rice for him,
your wife must be as son
to your parents, as father
to your child, to comfort the old
and teach the young, there is none

but myself, for how long must I
suffer a wounded heart? all
of last year I thought of you
and now last year is past, you
have never left my thoughts this year
and now this year will soon be over,
so hatefully have you tarried
these two years, three years
then four years, my heartache
has increased a hundred times,
a thousand times, then ten thousand;
could I be but with you, we could
tell out all our bitterness,
I have a hairpin from the Han palace,
a wedding present bestowed on me,
whom can I depend on to send it to you,
to show how I long for you? then there is

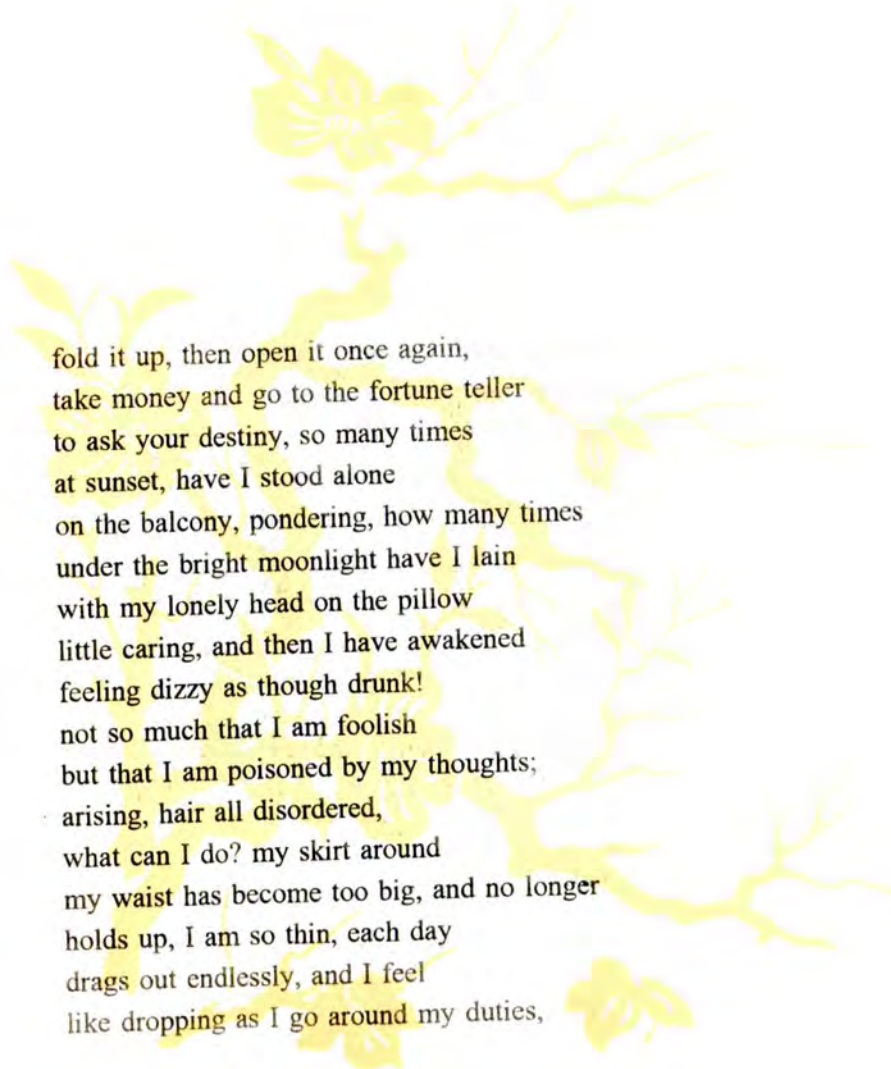
A decorative yellow illustration of a flowering branch, possibly plum or cherry, with several blossoms and leaves, extending across the top and sides of the page.

that lovely Chin mirror⁽⁵⁾ given to mark
our coming together, whom can I trust
to take it to you, so you may understand
my loneliness? then the silver ring
on my middle finger, which I have looked at
for so long,
who will take this to you? and the
much loved pin of jade come with me
from girlhood, how can I send you this?
these coming to you in distant lands
will surely be precious to you!

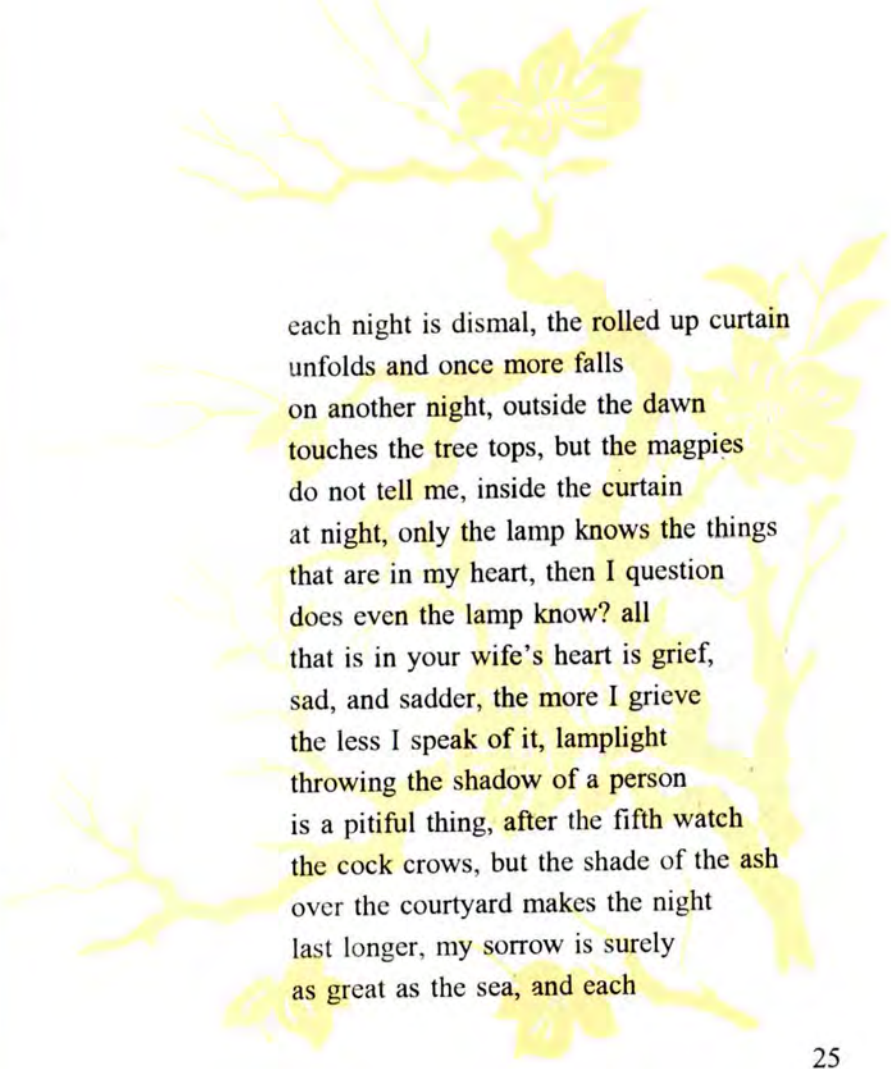
VIII

A decorative yellow illustration of a flowering branch, similar to the one on page 22, with blossoms and leaves, extending across the top and sides of the page.

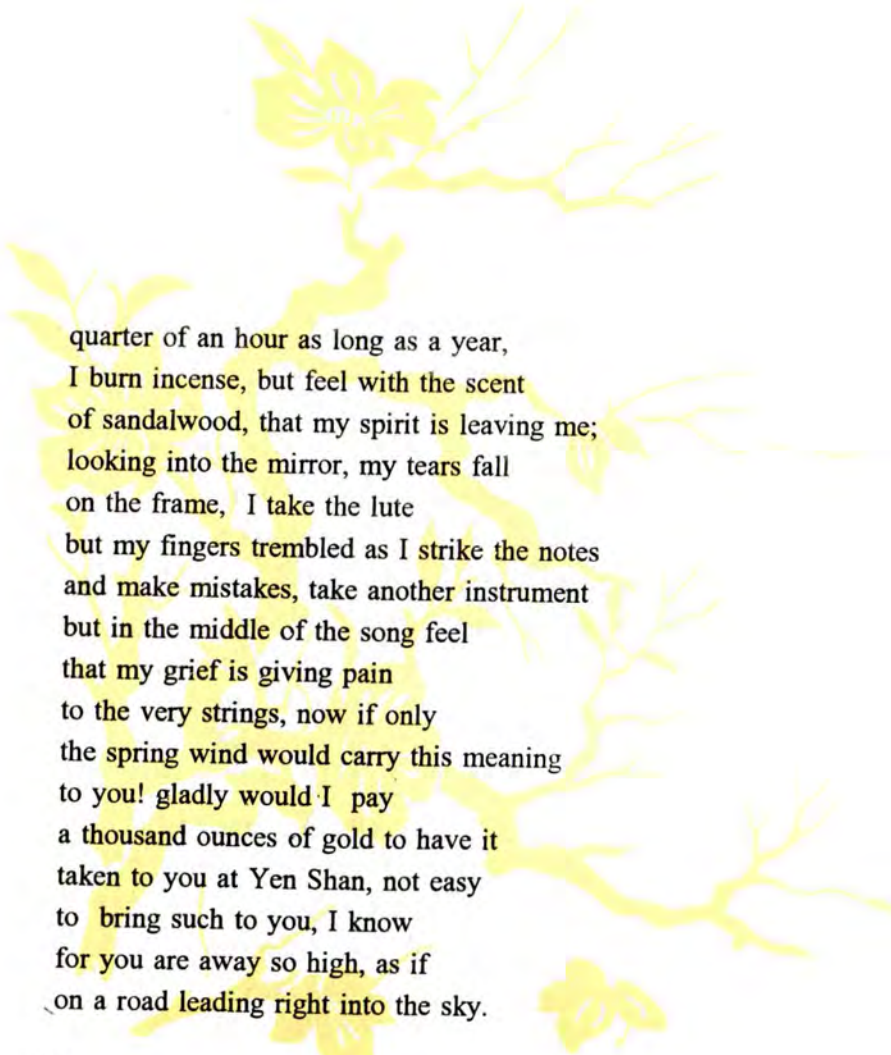
Last year there was news at times
this year but little has come,
seeing the wild geese⁽⁶⁾, I half expected
a message of silk tied to one of them,
with the coming of frosts, I have made you
padded clothes, and these I have ready for you
but though the cold winds begin to blow
I have no way to send them to you
far away, you are wretched under snow
and rain; cold snows, and only a mat
of tiger skin, driving storm, and a curtain
of wolf tails, the colder it is
the more miserable you become,
so far away, how unhappy you must be!
on a piece of brocade, I write a poem

A decorative illustration in yellow ink on the left page, featuring a flowering branch with several blossoms and leaves, extending across the top and down the side of the page.

fold it up, then open it once again,
take money and go to the fortune teller
to ask your destiny, so many times
at sunset, have I stood alone
on the balcony, pondering, how many times
under the bright moonlight have I lain
with my lonely head on the pillow
little caring, and then I have awakened
feeling dizzy as though drunk!
not so much that I am foolish
but that I am poisoned by my thoughts;
arising, hair all disordered,
what can I do? my skirt around
my waist has become too big, and no longer
holds up, I am so thin, each day
drags out endlessly, and I feel
like dropping as I go around my duties,

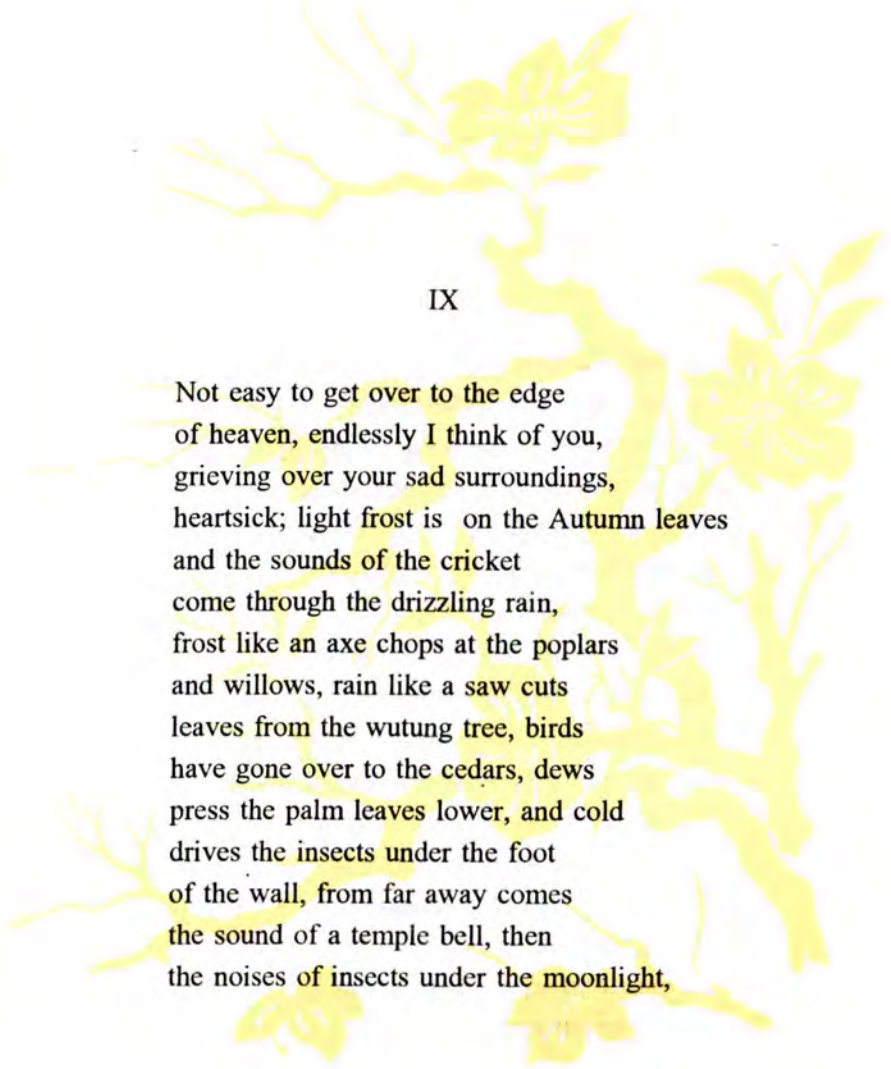
A decorative illustration in yellow ink on the right page, featuring a flowering branch with several blossoms and leaves, extending across the top and down the side of the page.

each night is dismal, the rolled up curtain
unfolds and once more falls
on another night, outside the dawn
touches the tree tops, but the magpies
do not tell me, inside the curtain
at night, only the lamp knows the things
that are in my heart, then I question
does even the lamp know? all
that is in your wife's heart is grief,
sad, and sadder, the more I grieve
the less I speak of it, lamplight
throwing the shadow of a person
is a pitiful thing, after the fifth watch
the cock crows, but the shade of the ash
over the courtyard makes the night
last longer, my sorrow is surely
as great as the sea, and each

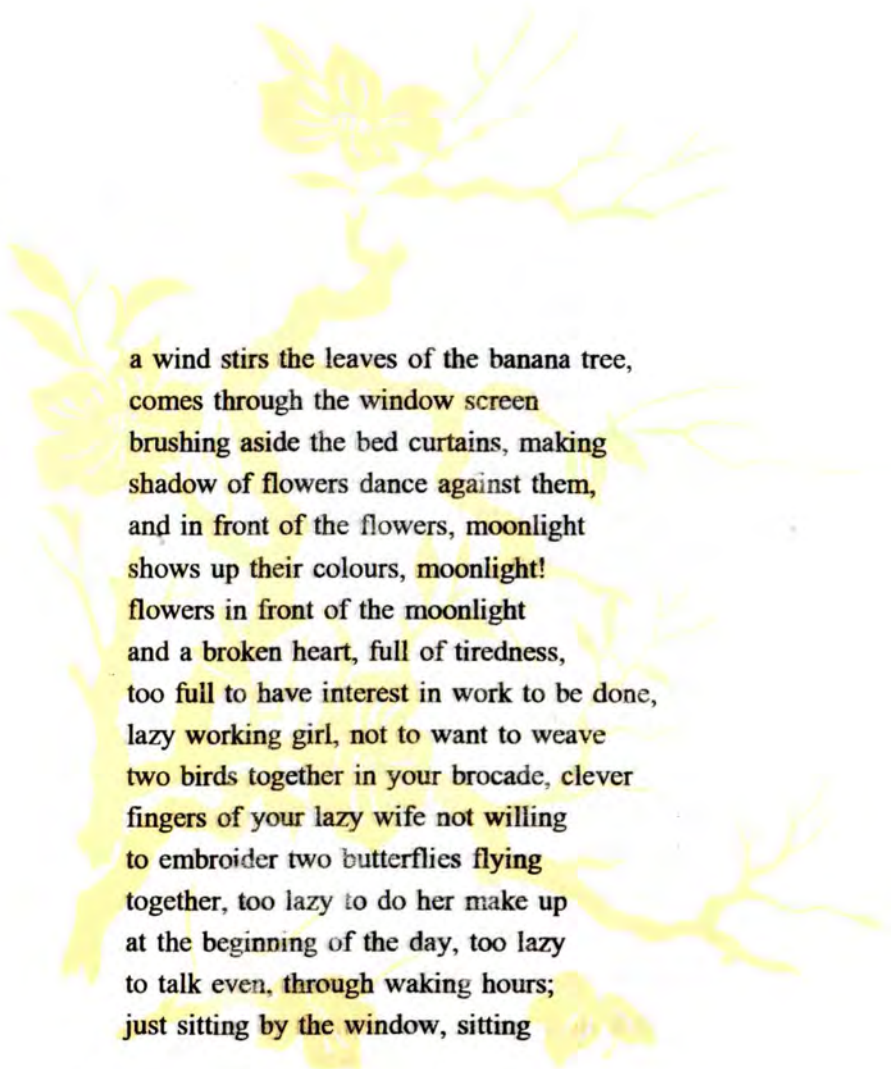
A decorative yellow floral illustration on page 26, featuring a central flower with five petals and a stem with several smaller flowers and leaves, all rendered in a simple, stylized manner.

quarter of an hour as long as a year,
I burn incense, but feel with the scent
of sandalwood, that my spirit is leaving me;
looking into the mirror, my tears fall
on the frame, I take the lute
but my fingers trembled as I strike the notes
and make mistakes, take another instrument
but in the middle of the song feel
that my grief is giving pain
to the very strings, now if only
the spring wind would carry this meaning
to you! gladly would I pay
a thousand ounces of gold to have it
taken to you at Yen Shan, not easy
to bring such to you, I know
for you are away so high, as if
on a road leading right into the sky.

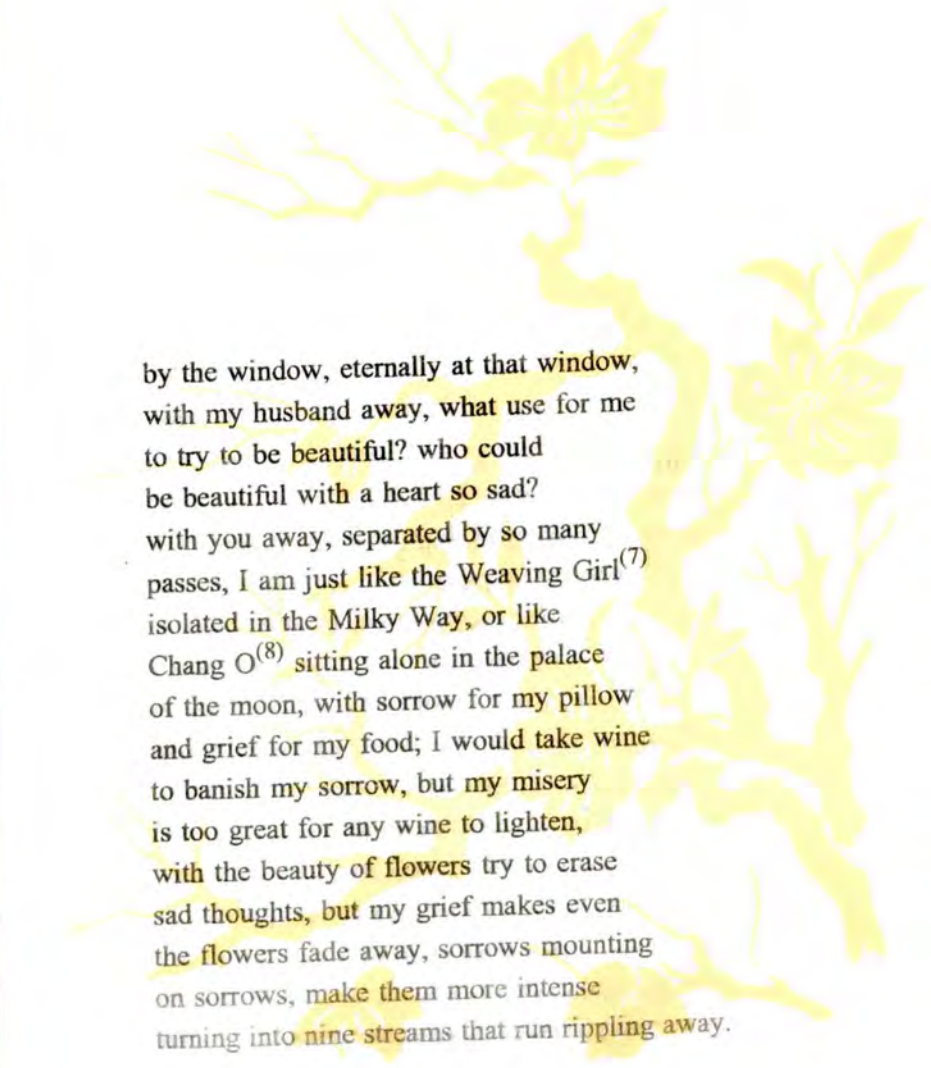
IX

A decorative yellow floral illustration on page 27, featuring a central flower with five petals and a stem with several smaller flowers and leaves, all rendered in a simple, stylized manner.

Not easy to get over to the edge
of heaven, endlessly I think of you,
grieving over your sad surroundings,
heartsick; light frost is on the Autumn leaves
and the sounds of the cricket
come through the drizzling rain,
frost like an axe chops at the poplars
and willows, rain like a saw cuts
leaves from the wutung tree, birds
have gone over to the cedars, dews
press the palm leaves lower, and cold
drives the insects under the foot
of the wall, from far away comes
the sound of a temple bell, then
the noises of insects under the moonlight,

A decorative yellow illustration on page 28 features a stylized branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds. The branch curves across the page, with some leaves visible. The background is plain white.

a wind stirs the leaves of the banana tree,
comes through the window screen
brushing aside the bed curtains, making
shadow of flowers dance against them,
and in front of the flowers, moonlight
shows up their colours, moonlight!
flowers in front of the moonlight
and a broken heart, full of tiredness,
too full to have interest in work to be done,
lazy working girl, not to want to weave
two birds together in your brocade, clever
fingers of your lazy wife not willing
to embroider two butterflies flying
together, too lazy to do her make up
at the beginning of the day, too lazy
to talk even, through waking hours;
just sitting by the window, sitting

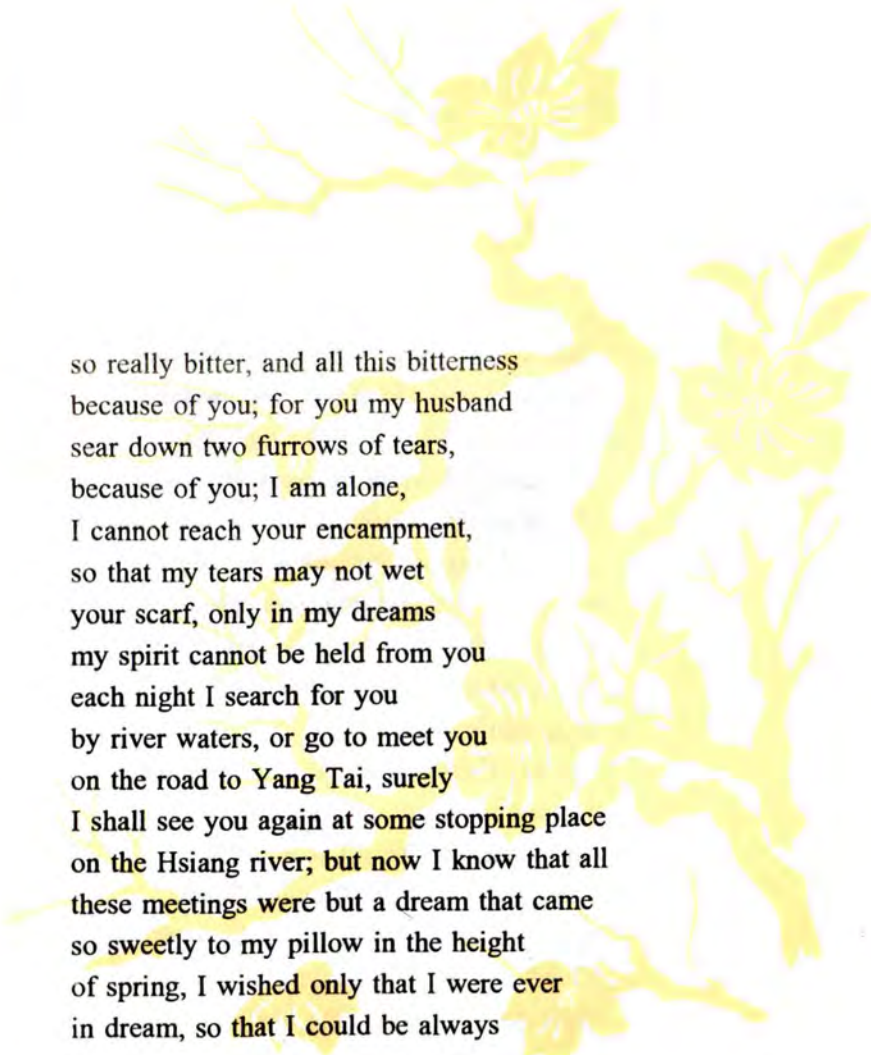
A decorative yellow illustration on page 29 features a stylized branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds. The branch curves across the page, with some leaves visible. The background is plain white.

by the window, eternally at that window,
with my husband away, what use for me
to try to be beautiful? who could
be beautiful with a heart so sad?
with you away, separated by so many
passes, I am just like the Weaving Girl⁽⁷⁾
isolated in the Milky Way, or like
Chang O⁽⁸⁾ sitting alone in the palace
of the moon, with sorrow for my pillow
and grief for my food; I would take wine
to banish my sorrow, but my misery
is too great for any wine to lighten,
with the beauty of flowers try to erase
sad thoughts, but my grief makes even
the flowers fade away, sorrows mounting
on sorrows, make them more intense
turning into nine streams that run rippling away.

A decorative yellow illustration of a flowering branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, set against a light background. The branch curves across the page, framing the text.

X

I try to play a flute
but no sound comes, take
a stringed instrument, but my fingers
fumble with the stops, ever
I think of you out on the frontier
in all your bitterness,
my soldier husband, deprived
of food and warmth! now the sound
of the cuckoo makes my tears fall,
the beat of the sentry's drum at night
gives me a queer feeling inside,
neither my good looks more my health
are as they were, truly at this time
do I understand the harshness
of separation, this bitter taste,

A decorative yellow illustration of a flowering branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, set against a light background. The branch curves across the page, framing the text.

so really bitter, and all this bitterness
because of you; for you my husband
sear down two furrows of tears,
because of you; I am alone,
I cannot reach your encampment,
so that my tears may not wet
your scarf, only in my dreams
my spirit cannot be held from you
each night I search for you
by river waters, or go to meet you
on the road to Yang Tai, surely
I shall see you again at some stopping place
on the Hsiang river; but now I know that all
these meetings were but a dream that came
so sweetly to my pillow in the height
of spring, I wished only that I were ever
in dream, so that I could be always

with you at Lung Shui, or Han Kwan
but as dreams faded out, and awakening
came, so did I feel cut to the heart,
so went back to sleep again, then with
dream coming anew,

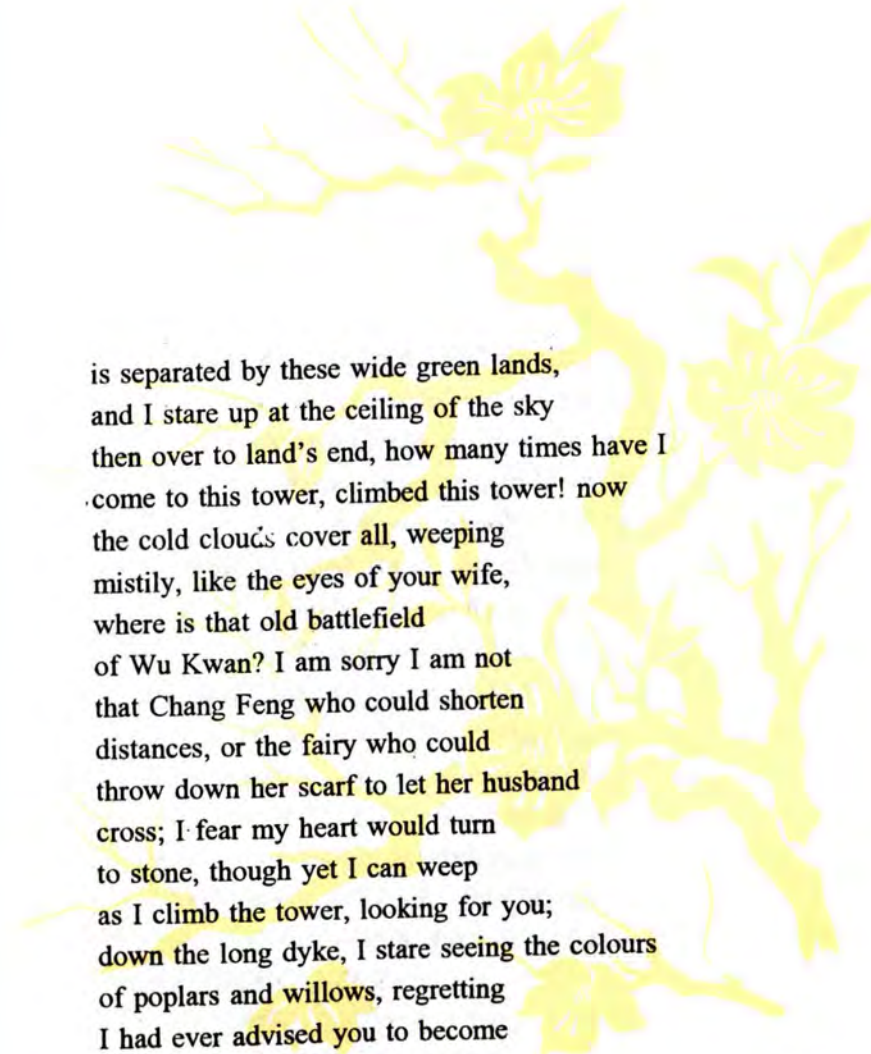
I feared that naught was true, only
my love remained, that still refused
to leave the you of my dreams so soon;
the heart that cannot leave you,
eyes that cannot see you; so often
have I climbed to the top of the wall
to look for army carts returning,
and what then have I seen? only
the grasses of Yen shining brightly,
the mulberries of Chin in a deep green
cloud, over on the south a village
with dust arising on the breeze,

sunset by the beach and a flock
of wild geese there, looking for you
what then have I seen? a line
of horse stations out along the roads,
through the clouds trees of Wu
showing green; the hills of Shu
gleam blue; across grain fields
to the North, a half deserted city;
to the house by the river comes
the sound of a flute at the end
of rain.

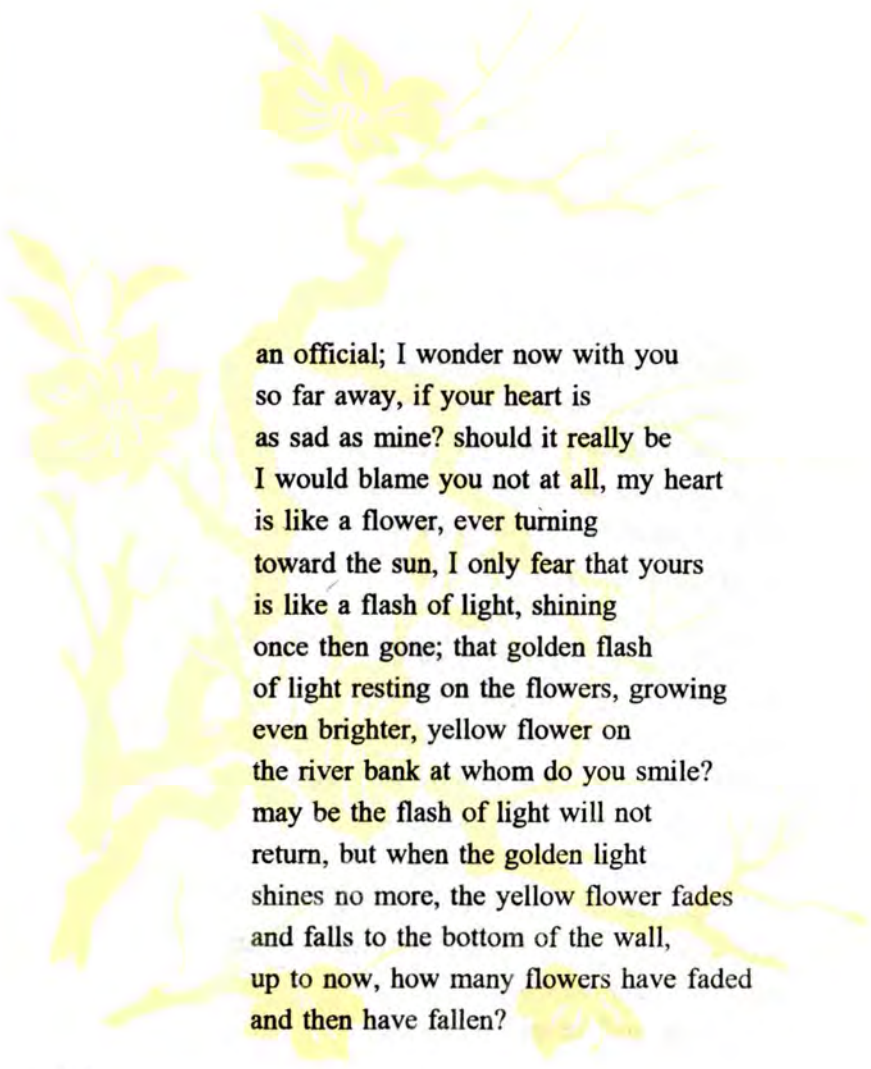
A decorative illustration of plum blossoms and branches in a light yellow color, framing the text on the left page. The blossoms are stylized with five petals and a central stamen, and the branches are thin and gnarled.

XI

Thinking of you what do I see
around me? autumn leaves piled
up on the scattered hills, a pair
of gorgeous pheasants, dancing
together on a plum tree by the river;
over on the east, smoke has not yet
cleared; comes the melancholy
sound of birds in the autumn wind,
thinking of you, what do I see?
winding rivers bent like a hook,
of flying geese, from far away
a little boat returns, on the west
are pines standing out from the
tall grasses; he who has gone so far

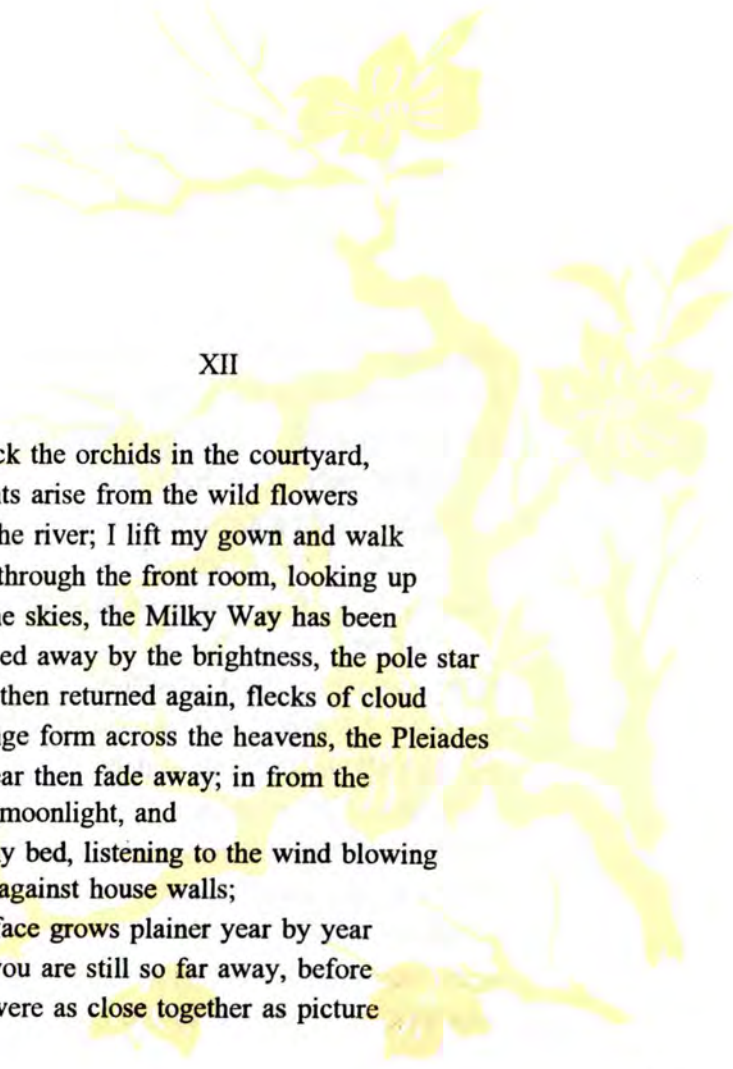
A decorative illustration of plum blossoms and branches in a light yellow color, framing the text on the right page. The blossoms are stylized with five petals and a central stamen, and the branches are thin and gnarled.

is separated by these wide green lands,
and I stare up at the ceiling of the sky
then over to land's end, how many times have I
come to this tower, climbed this tower! now
the cold clouds cover all, weeping
mistily, like the eyes of your wife,
where is that old battlefield
of Wu Kwan? I am sorry I am not
that Chang Feng who could shorten
distances, or the fairy who could
throw down her scarf to let her husband
cross; I fear my heart would turn
to stone, though yet I can weep
as I climb the tower, looking for you;
down the long dyke, I stare seeing the colours
of poplars and willows, regretting
I had ever advised you to become

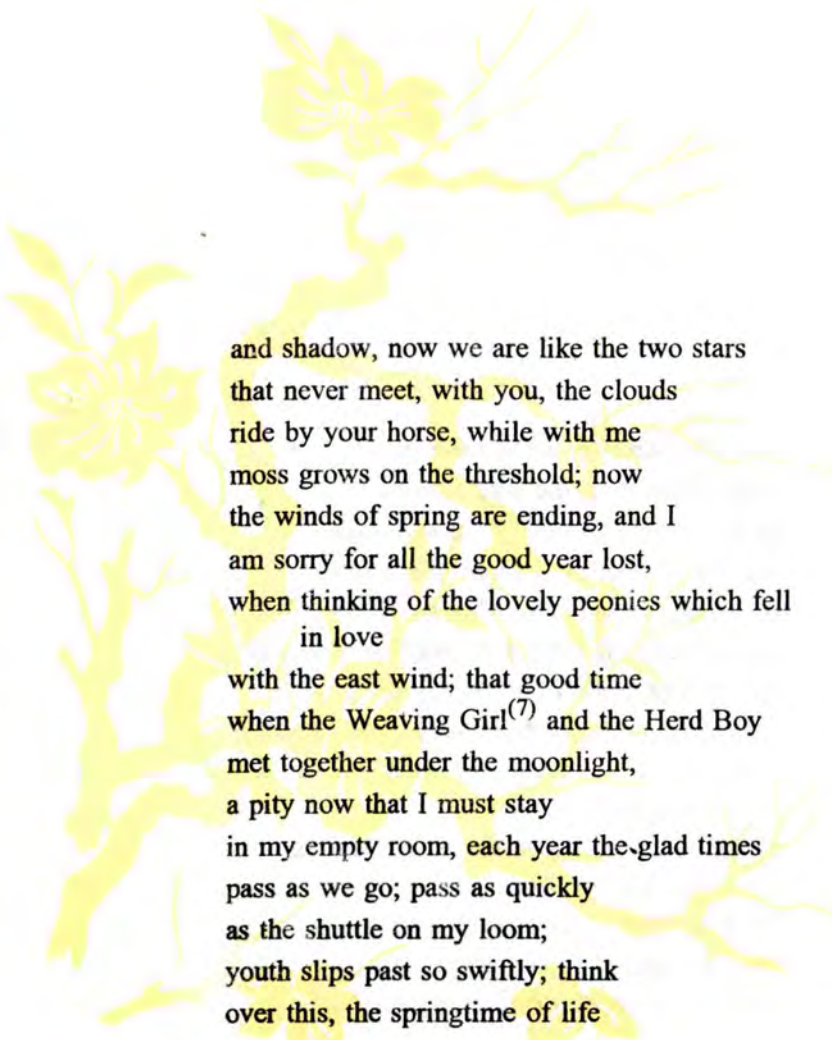
A decorative yellow floral illustration on page 36, featuring a central flower with a stem and leaves, and several other flowers scattered around the page.

an official; I wonder now with you
so far away, if your heart is
as sad as mine? should it really be
I would blame you not at all, my heart
is like a flower, ever turning
toward the sun, I only fear that yours
is like a flash of light, shining
once then gone; that golden flash
of light resting on the flowers, growing
even brighter, yellow flower on
the river bank at whom do you smile?
may be the flash of light will not
return, but when the golden light
shines no more, the yellow flower fades
and falls to the bottom of the wall,
up to now, how many flowers have faded
and then have fallen?

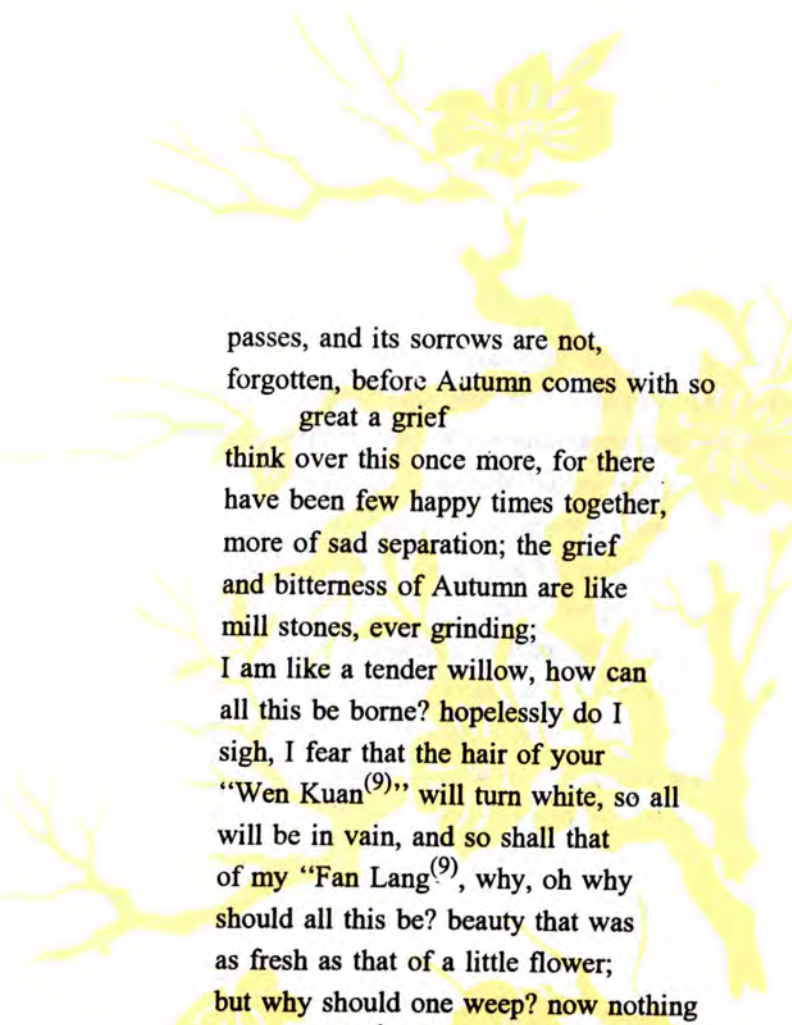
XII

A decorative yellow floral illustration on page 37, featuring a central flower with a stem and leaves, and several other flowers scattered around the page.

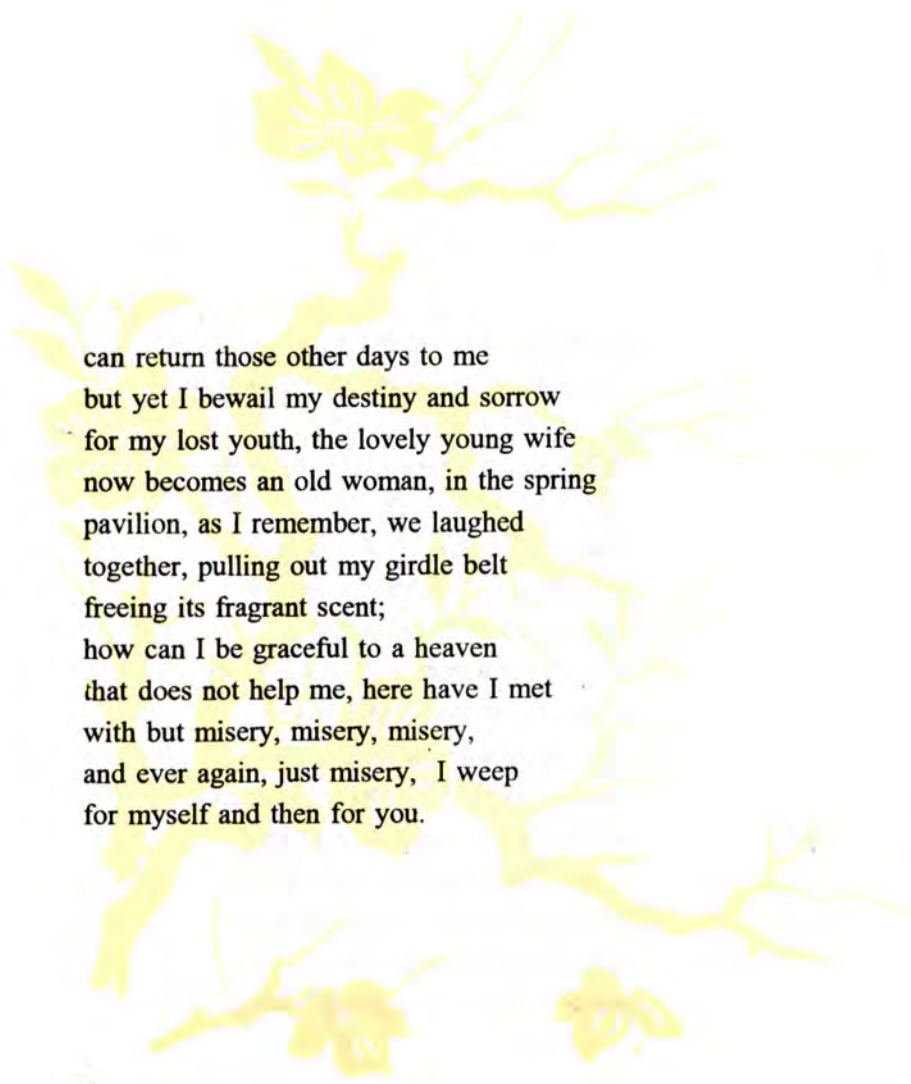
I pick the orchids in the courtyard,
scents arise from the wild flowers
by the river; I lift my gown and walk
out through the front room, looking up
at the skies, the Milky Way has been
chased away by the brightness, the pole star
lost then returned again, flecks of cloud
change form across the heavens, the Pleiades
appear then fade away; in from the
moonlight, and
to my bed, listening to the wind blowing
against house walls;
my face grows plainer year by year
for you are still so far away, before
we were as close together as picture

A decorative illustration in yellow ink on page 38, featuring a flowering branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, set against a background of delicate, branching lines.

and shadow, now we are like the two stars
that never meet, with you, the clouds
ride by your horse, while with me
moss grows on the threshold; now
the winds of spring are ending, and I
am sorry for all the good year lost,
when thinking of the lovely peonies which fell
in love
with the east wind; that good time
when the Weaving Girl⁽⁷⁾ and the Herd Boy
met together under the moonlight,
a pity now that I must stay
in my empty room, each year the glad times
pass as we go; pass as quickly
as the shuttle on my loom;
youth slips past so swiftly; think
over this, the springtime of life

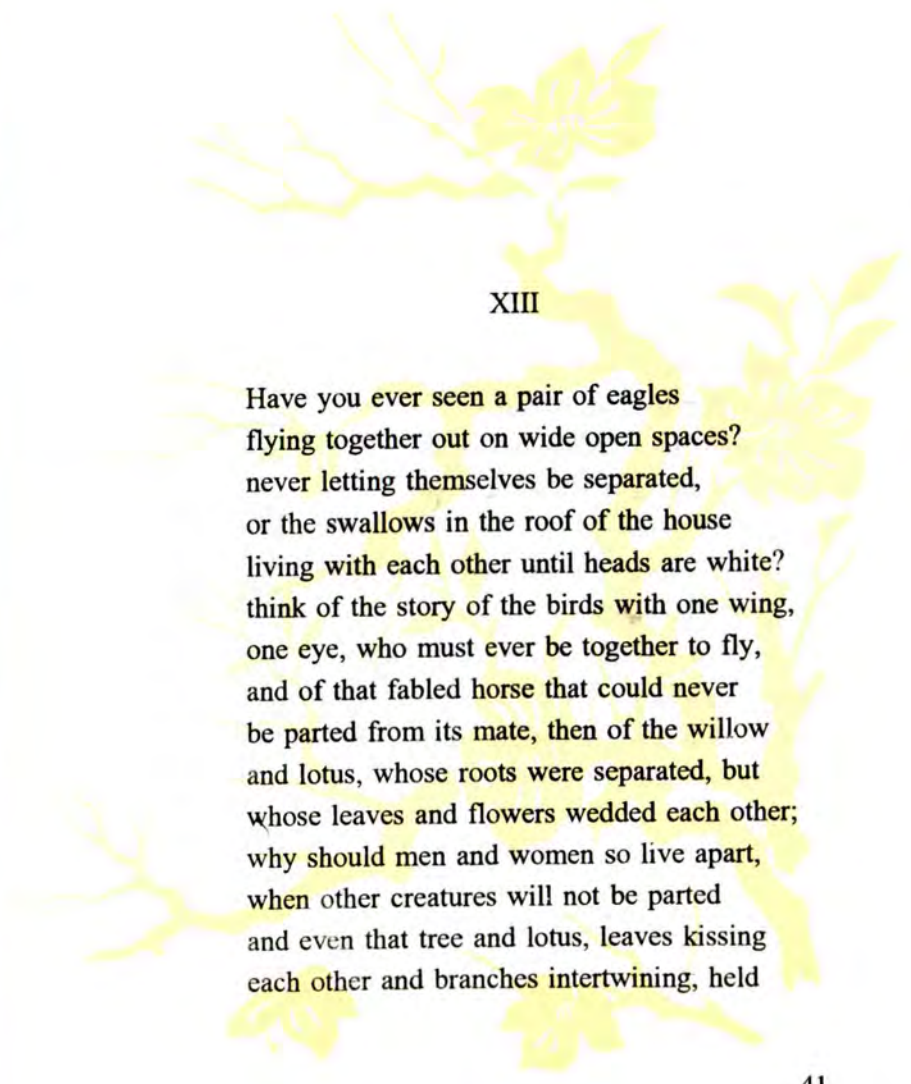
A decorative illustration in yellow ink on page 39, featuring a flowering branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, set against a background of delicate, branching lines.

passes, and its sorrows are not,
forgotten, before Autumn comes with so
great a grief
think over this once more, for there
have been few happy times together,
more of sad separation; the grief
and bitterness of Autumn are like
mill stones, ever grinding;
I am like a tender willow, how can
all this be borne? hopelessly do I
sigh, I fear that the hair of your
“Wen Kuan⁽⁹⁾” will turn white, so all
will be in vain, and so shall that
of my “Fan Lang⁽⁹⁾”, why, oh why
should all this be? beauty that was
as fresh as that of a little flower;
but why should one weep? now nothing

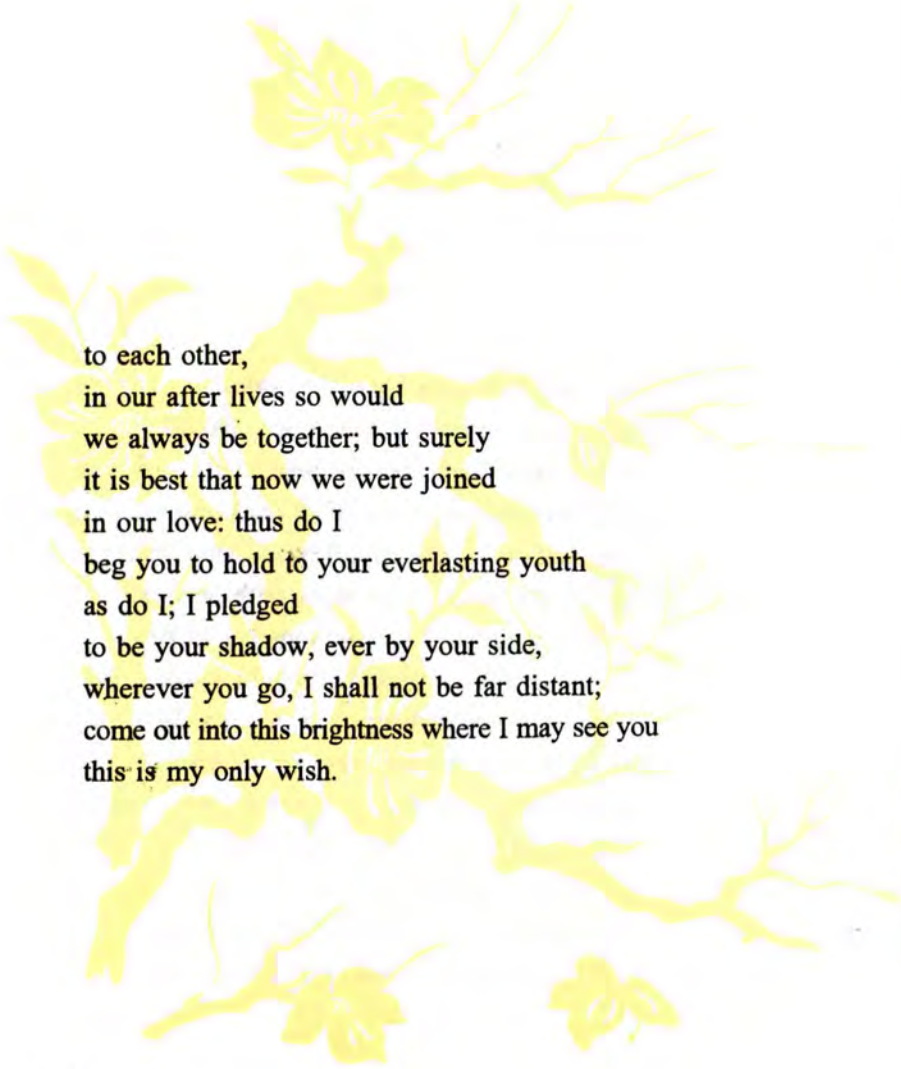
A faint, yellow-toned illustration of a flowering branch with several blossoms and leaves, positioned in the upper left and middle sections of the page.

can return those other days to me
but yet I bewail my destiny and sorrow
for my lost youth, the lovely young wife
now becomes an old woman, in the spring
pavilion, as I remember, we laughed
together, pulling out my girdle belt
freeing its fragrant scent;
how can I be graceful to a heaven
that does not help me, here have I met
with but misery, misery, misery,
and ever again, just misery, I weep
for myself and then for you.

XIII

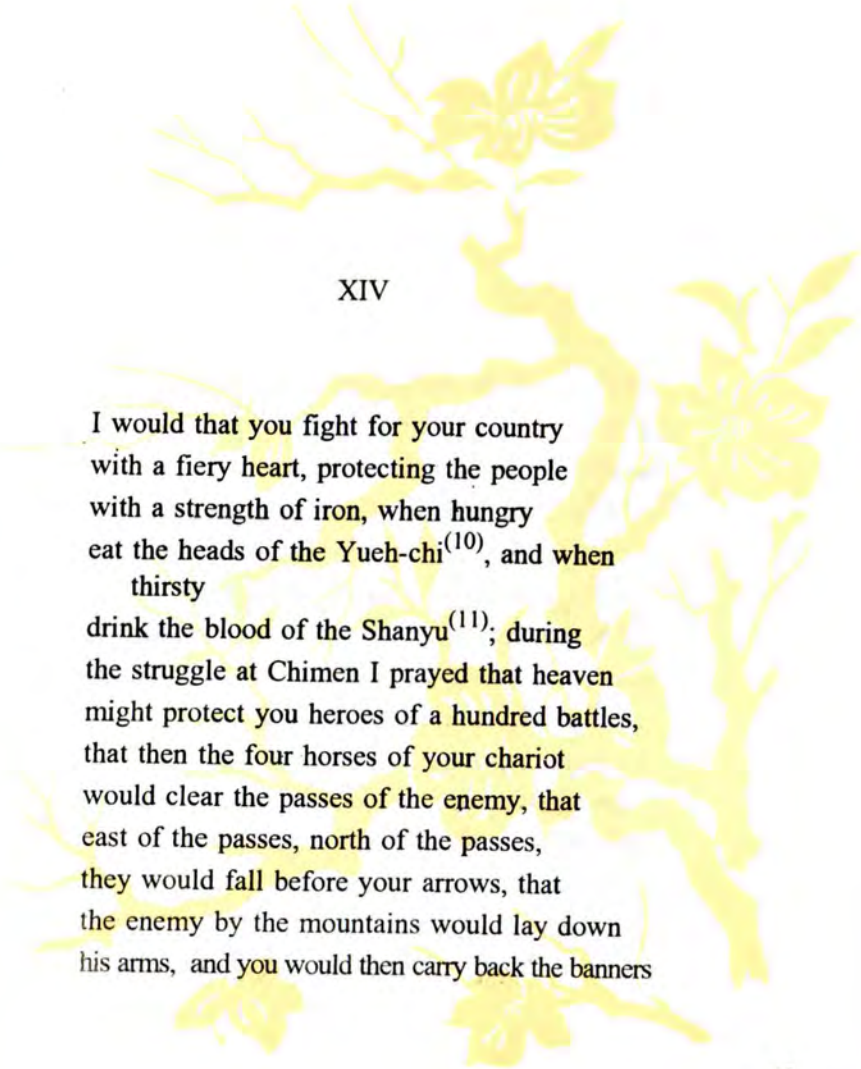
A faint, yellow-toned illustration of a flowering branch with several blossoms and leaves, positioned in the upper right and middle sections of the page.

Have you ever seen a pair of eagles
flying together out on wide open spaces?
never letting themselves be separated,
or the swallows in the roof of the house
living with each other until heads are white?
think of the story of the birds with one wing,
one eye, who must ever be together to fly,
and of that fabled horse that could never
be parted from its mate, then of the willow
and lotus, whose roots were separated, but
whose leaves and flowers wedded each other;
why should men and women so live apart,
when other creatures will not be parted
and even that tree and lotus, leaves kissing
each other and branches intertwining, held

A decorative yellow illustration of a flowering branch with several blossoms and leaves, extending across the top and sides of the page.

to each other,
in our after lives so would
we always be together; but surely
it is best that now we were joined
in our love: thus do I
beg you to hold to your everlasting youth
as do I; I pledged
to be your shadow, ever by your side,
wherever you go, I shall not be far distant;
come out into this brightness where I may see you
this is my only wish.

XIV

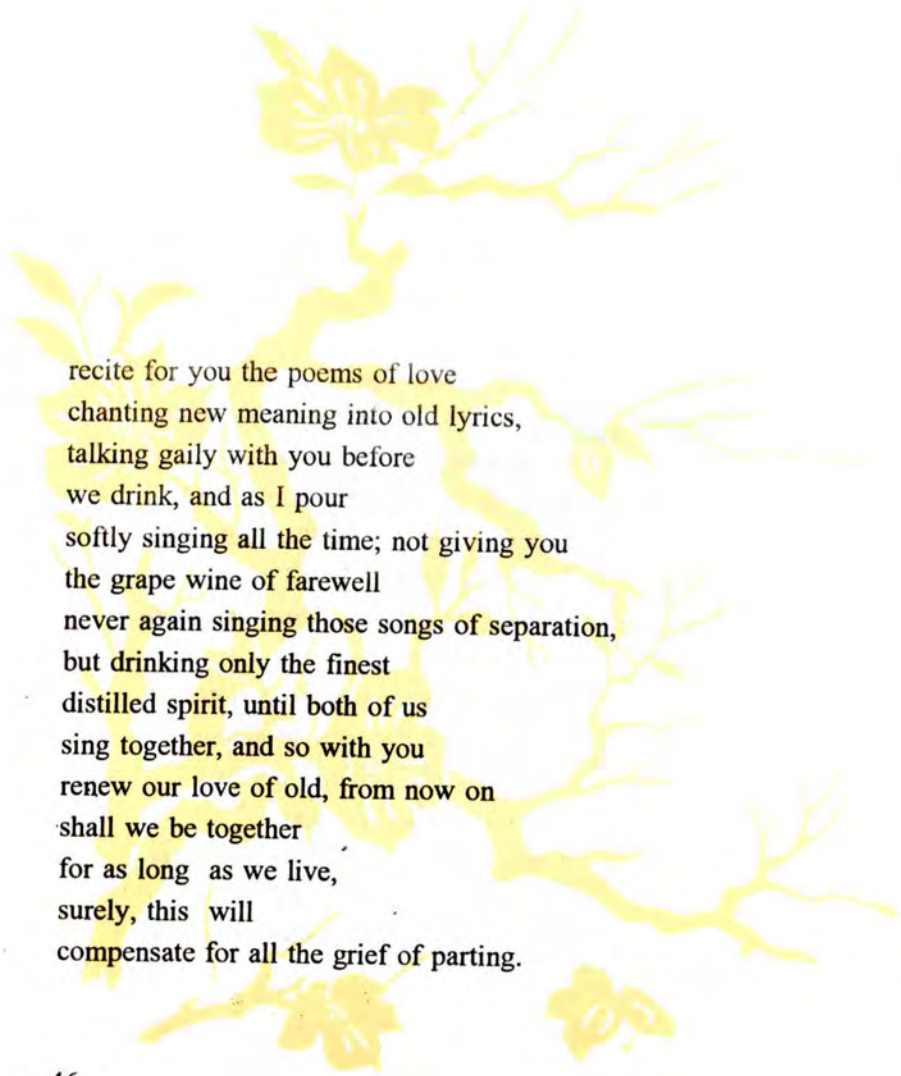
A decorative yellow illustration of a flowering branch with several blossoms and leaves, extending across the top and sides of the page.

I would that you fight for your country
with a fiery heart, protecting the people
with a strength of iron, when hungry
eat the heads of the Yueh-chi⁽¹⁰⁾, and when
thirsty
drink the blood of the Shanyu⁽¹¹⁾; during
the struggle at Chimen I prayed that heaven
might protect you heroes of a hundred battles,
that then the four horses of your chariot
would clear the passes of the enemy, that
east of the passes, north of the passes,
they would fall before your arrows, that
the enemy by the mountains would lay down
his arms, and you would then carry back the banners

of victory from the frontiers, singing songs
of triumph, soldiers farewelling frontier
winds, engraving their deeds on the stones
of Yen Shan, bringing back the head of
the enemy king as a trophy for the Court
the Emperor himself seeing it; washing
the blood from their arms in the Milky Way,
then poets would compose new songs of victory
singing ballads that compare you with
the great commanders of the past, so that
your achievements would stand for ever, as is
written on scrolls of honour, your child
and your wife would share your glory
and all your joy; now I sorrow
but then should my heart be full of gladness.

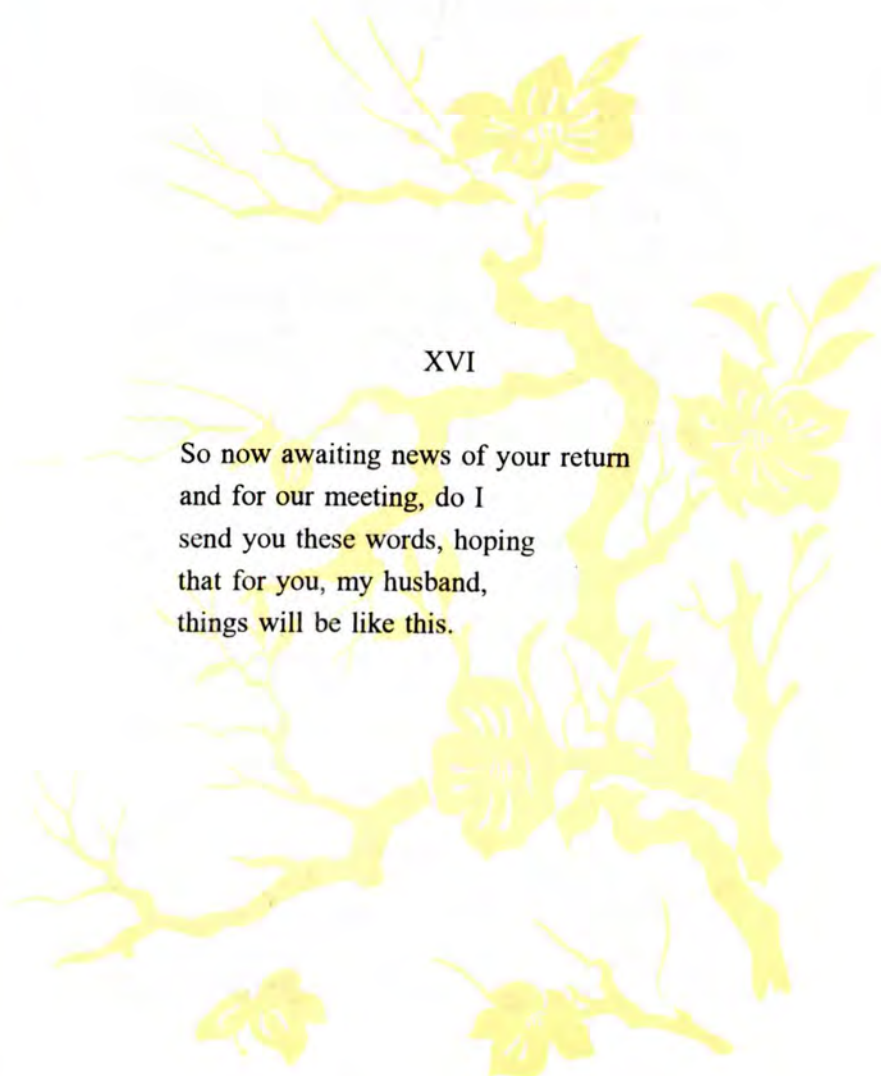
XV

Never would I be like
that wife of Su, who so lightly
treated her husband, you are
a young officer of Loyang, when
you come back with the golden seal
bestowed on you, I will not imitate her
refusing to get down from the loom,
I will come to help you
to take off your marching clothes,
pouring you the wine of victory,
for you I will beautify my hair
with all my art, for you
I will make up my face, and wear
my jade ornaments, and then will I
show you my tear stained kerchiefs,

A decorative yellow illustration of a flowering branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, set against a light background.

recite for you the poems of love
chanting new meaning into old lyrics,
talking gaily with you before
we drink, and as I pour
softly singing all the time; not giving you
the grape wine of farewell
never again singing those songs of separation,
but drinking only the finest
distilled spirit, until both of us
sing together, and so with you
renew our love of old, from now on
shall we be together
for as long as we live,
surely, this will
compensate for all the grief of parting.

XVI

A decorative yellow illustration of a flowering branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, set against a light background.

So now awaiting news of your return
and for our meeting, do I
send you these words, hoping
that for you, my husband,
things will be like this.

GLOSSARY

(1) *Beacon Fires*: Through the regions the poem refers to there was a defence in depth which consisted of towers beside the Great Wall, each tower with five beacons set beside it, which would be lit when the Tribesmen came on the march.

(2) *Pan Chao*: An ancient frontier general of the time of Han, who fought all his life and returned a grey haired old man.

Place names: These cover vast areas in a poetic way, and are not all confined to one area place. All are places well known in frontier history and the wars of the past, and in classical poetry. There are two of them that have a double meaning.

(3) *Purple Haze*: there were "Purple Haze gates" along the frontier, and then the whole frontier was a "purple haze" so that soldiers could be said to have come from the "purple haze" and be "purple haze men".

(4) *Yellow Flower Mountain*: a frontier mountain, but also meaning the soldiers who rotate during the ninth lunar month, the time of the "yellow flowers" or chrysanthemums. So soldiers were called the "Yellow Flower Soldiers" because they were those who went to the frontier in the ninth month.

(5) *Chin mirror*: the bronze mirrors of the Chin dynasty in the third century B.C. were very famous for their beauty.

(6) *Wild Geese*: There was a tradition that the wild geese flying southward from the frontier, brought messages from the men on the frontier to their homes.

(7) *Weaving Girl*: the story of the Weaving girl who was exiled to the earth by the Queen of the West and coming to earth married a buffalo boy. When recalled to heaven, she threw out her skein of silk so that the husband with their two babies in his carrying pole baskets, could follow. The Queen of heaven threw a river across the heavens to separate them, which is the Milky Way.

(8) *Chang O*: The goddess of the moon, exiled from the earth and her lover.

(9) *Wen Kuan and Fan Lang*: names of separated lovers in classic story.

(10) *Yueh Chi*: a pastoral people who lived on the frontier, who afterwards went to India and lived there.

(11) *Shanyu*: First the name of a Hun frontier chieftain, but afterwards used for his tribesmen also.

A decorative yellow floral illustration featuring a branch with several large, five-petaled flowers and smaller buds, set against a light background.

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MAI LÝ QUẢNG

Biên tập: ĐOÀN LÂM

Trình bày: MINH THANH

Sửa bản in: MAI HOA

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