

Classic Poetry Series

Meng Jiao
- poems -

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Meng Jiao()

Meng Jiao (Chinese: 孟郊; Wade–Giles: Meng Chiao; 751–814) was a poet of the Tang Dynasty, in China. Two of his poems have been collected in the popular anthology *Three Hundred Tang Poems*. Meng was the oldest of the Mid-Tang poets and is noted for the unusual forcefulness and harshness of his poems. Meng Jiao's courtesy name was Dongye (traditional Chinese: 孟郊; simplified Chinese: 孟郊; pinyin: Dongye).

Meng Jiao was born into difficult times. His pursuit of poetry and reluctance until late in life to write and pass the imperial examinations (which if taken earlier in life might have eventually lead to a well-paid political career) resulted in his living a life in which necessities were scarce. Nevertheless, his commitment to poetry resulted in him becoming an influential leader in terms of poetic innovation.

Autumn Thoughts

Lonely bones can't sleep nights. Singing
insects keep calling them, calling them.
And the old have no tears. When they sob,
autumn weeps dewdrops. Strength failing

all at once, as if cut loose, and ravages
everywhere, like weaving unraveled,

I touch thread-ends. No new feelings.
Memories crowding thickening sorrow,

how could I bear southbound sails, how
wander rivers and mountains of the past?
Bamboo ticking in wind speaks. In dark
isolate rooms, I listen. Demons and gods

fill my frail ears, so blurred and faint I
can't tell them apart. Year-end leaves,

dry rain falling, scatter. Autumn clothes
thin cloud, my sick bones slice through

things clean. Though my bitter chant
still makes a poem, I'm withering autumn

ruin, strength following twilight away.
Trailed out, this fluttering thread of life:

no use saying it's tethered to the very
source of earth's life-bringing change.

Meng Jiao

Complaints

Let's compete with our tears,
let them pour into a lotus pond;
then we'll wait this year and see
whose flowers drown in salt water.

Meng Jiao

Departure In Ancient Times

I clutch your clothes when you leave.
Please tell me where you are going.
I don't complain if you come back late.
Please don't go to the brothel.

Meng Jiao

Despair

Despise poetry, and you'll be named to office.
But to love poetry is like clinging to a mountain:
frozen, holding tight, facing death,
days of sorrow followed by sorrow.

The bourgeoisie are jealous of those
who love poetry: they flash teeth like knives.

All the old sages are long since dead,
but bureaucrats still gnaw their bones.

Now I'm frail, dying like a frond.
All my life I sought a noble calm,

a calm I could never achieve.
And the noisy rabble mocked me.

Meng Jiao

Frustration

Write bad poems and you're sure to earn a post,
but good poets can only embrace the empty mountains
Embracing mountains makes me shake with cold.
My face is sad all day long. ?They are so jealous of my good poems?
words and spears grow out of their teeth!
They are still chewed by jealousy
of good poets who are long dead.
Though 'my body's like a broken twig.

Meng Jiao

Laments Of The Gorges

Triple Gorge one thread of heaven over
ten thousand cascading thongs of water,
slivers of sun and moon sheering away
above, and wild swells walled-in below,

splintered spirits glisten, a few glints
frozen how many hundred years in dark

gorges midday light never finds, gorges
hungry froth fills with peril. Rotting

coffins locked into tree roots, isolate
bones twist and sway, dangling free,

and grieving frost roosts in branches,
keeping lament's dark, distant harmony

fresh. Exile, tattered heart all scattered
away, you'll simmer in seething flame

here, your life like fine-spun thread,
its road a trace of string traveled away.

Offer tears to mourn the water-ghosts,
and water-ghosts take them, glimmering.

Water swords and spears raging in gorges,
boats drift across heaving thunder. Here

in the hands of these serpents and snakes,
you face everyday frenzies of wind and rain,

and how many fleeing exiles travel these
gorges, gorges rank inhabitants people?

You won't find a heart beneath this sheen,
this flood that's stored away aftermath

forever. Arid froth raising boundless mist,

froth all ablaze and snarling, snarling

what of that thirst for wisdom when you're
suddenly here, dead center in these waters.

Meng Jiao

On Failing The Examination

The dawn moon struggles to shine its light.
the man of sorrows struggles with his feelings.
Who says in spring things are bound to flourish?
All I see is frost on the leaves.
The eagle sickens, his power vanishes,
while little wrens soar on borrowed wings.
But leave them, leave them be!
these thoughts like wounds from a knife!

Meng Jiao

Song Of A Traveling Son

Thread in the hands of a loving mother
Turns to clothes on the traveling son.
She adds stitch after tight stitch until he leaves
and worries about his return.
A grass blade is bathed in spring sun;
how can its inch-sized heart return such love?

Meng Jiao

Song Of Fidelity

Parasol trees age side by side,
Mandarin ducks die together in pairs.
A pure woman would die with her husband,
just give her life away,
no waves stirring in
her heart calm as water in a well.

Meng Jiao

Wanderer's Song

The thread in the hand of a kind mother
Is the coat on the wanderer's back.
Before he left she stitched it close
In secret fear that he would be slow to return.
Who will say that the inch of grass in his heart
Is gratitude enough for all the sunshine of spring?
Yarns after yarns,
Mother's busy weaving,
It is a coat for my son who will be leaving.
Stitches upon stitches,
Mother toiled all night,
Please return home soon if you might.
Your graceful love was sunshine in the spring
for me, this unworthy seedling,
Oh, who can tell me how to express my gratitude,
my aching heart is bleeding.

Meng Jiao