

CONTENTS

	PAGE
AUTHOR'S FOREWORD	iii
TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION	viii
NOTES ON TEXTUAL AFFINITIES	xxviii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xxix
DRAMATIS PERSONAE	xxx
SCENES	
SCENE 1	Prologue 001
SCENE 2	Go to the Countryside! For a View of Autumn Hues! 005
SCENE 3	An Immortal Descends to Render a Man Immortal 013
SCENE 4	The Beginning of a Magic Dream 035
SCENE 5	To the Imperial Examinations, Go! 061
SCENE 6	Money Will Buy You the Laureate 071
SCENE 7	Gold Wins the Exams, But Not Learning! 081
SCENE 8	Pride and Prejudice at the Banquet 089
SCENE 9	Tubo's Dreadful Preparation for War 103
SCENE 10	Misfortune out of a Mistake: From Capital to Provincial Office 111
SCENE 11	A Canal Construction Through Rocky Hills 121
SCENE 12	War! Bloody War at the Borderland! 135
SCENE 13	Procure Girls, Grain, and Gold, to Please the Touring Emperor! 143
SCENE 14	The Imperial Tour from the Western Capital to the Eastern Capital 159
SCENE 15	A Witty Spy Will Win the War in the West 183
SCENE 16	A Landslide Victory over the Tubo Troops by a Ruse 197
SCENE 17	Carve My Name in Glory on Yonder Cliff! 209
SCENE 18	A Cloistered Wife's Sorrow Washed Away by the Happy News of Victory in the Field 223

SCENE 19	Slander? Yes! But It Will Work!	233
SCENE 20	A Hair's Breadth Escape from a Broadsword Only to Be Sent to Deadly Banishment	243
SCENE 21	What Joy Is It to Kill with Tongues and Smiles!	271
SCENE 22	A Bloody Wheel of Poison, Fire, and Pain in Exile	277
SCENE 23	A Weaver's Sweat and Tears in Tribulation	293
SCENE 24	A True Hero Cannot Be Wronged Forever	315
SCENE 25	The Return from Exile to the Court by Imperial Summons	331
SCENE 26	The Joy of the Great Is the Joy of the Bureaucrats	345
SCENE 27	Extremes Meet: Power, Wealth, Vainglory and Appetite	355
SCENE 28	O, What a Fall Is This for Our Old Friend!	373
SCENE 29	I Die a Dreamlike Death, then Wake Up to Face the Ultimate Truth	379
SCENE 30	Convivial Gathering of the Taoist Immortals	411
译后记 AFTERWORD		435

SCENE



Prologue

CHORUS

Enter Chorus

CHORUS

Mark, gentles all, now the sun greets the moon
In the midst of this boundless airy roof;
But hark! O'er the commotion of the sea,
The immortal's donkey¹ is braying loud.
Let us, on our imaginary forces work,
And now see, within a brief span of time,
How, in the fairyland, the peach blossoms
Are blooming with petals falling all about.
Can it be that some idling man is needed
To clear away the fallen petals up there?
Sweet sleep on a pillow with fairy dreams
Lingers on from misty dusk till th' bright morn.
But who will ever come to transcend us
To enjoy eternity in the celestial hall?
Now hastening to the west, is the old sun
But to an immortal, this time is still young.
Smiling, he turns back to look at the road,
Only to find that Handan² is left far behind.

10

This little poem, fair beholders who pay,
May serve us well as a sign for our play:

20

1 Tradition has it that venerable Zhang Guolao, one of the Eight Taoist Immortals in Chinese folklore, travels by riding reversely on a donkey. He usually holds a piece of musical instrument made of bamboo, which is associated with the art of rap in Chinese opera.

2 Built since the Shang Dynasty, Handan is an ancient city with a rich cultural and historical legacy. Located in southern Hebei Province, it has long been an important transportation hub in North China.

*Amid flowers Aunt He¹ the fay strolls alone;
Three times Lü Dongbin² comes to Yueyang³
A fair maid named Cui has her luck to wed,
While Lu Sheng, a dreamer, is up from his bed.*

1 Lady He Xiangü is the only female among the Eight Taoist Immortals of the Tang Dynasty. She wanders through the mountains holding a lotus flower.

2 Lü Dongbin, one of the Eight Immortals of the Tang Dynasty, is one of the main characters in this play. He was renowned for his poetry and love of wine.

3 Yueyang is an ancient city built in the Western Jin Dynasty (265 CE-316 CE). Located in the northeastern part of Hunan Province, it is now a major tourist destination renowned for its cultural and historical heritage. A legend has it that Lü Dongbin visited Yueyang three times and, fascinated by the beautiful landscape and the lakes, got drunk in Yueyang Tower that still stands today.

SCENE



Go to the Countryside!
For a View of Autumn Hues!

LU SHENG

Go to the Countryside!
For a View of Autumn Hues!



Enter Lu Sheng

LU SHENG

Looking far off into the horizon,
I can see roads snaking into the clouds;
But, alarmingly, I come to be aware
That time goes on and will never return!
I live in three empty rooms poorly thatched
With a bed loaded with my sorrow and woe.
Opening the window, I gaze afar —
O, in this falling season of the year,
No fire beetles e'er stir in the grey grass;
10 There, standing by the side of ancient roads,
Are weeping willows where the cold crows
Are heard cawing loudly in the darkling air.
O, west wind, blow, blow, till my hair turns grey!

recites palindromic couplets¹

*Alarmed is the guest by the autumn hue
In his lonely home east of the Woody Hill;*

*East of the Woody Hill is his lonely home
Where by autumn hues, the guest is alarmed.*

*Lu is my name from a Confucian family;
By a Confucian family, I am named Lu.*

20 *Why may you ask do I conceal my first name?
My first name I conceal, but you may ask why.*

*Young as I am, I will hopelessly be wounded by love;
Wounded hopelessly by love, I am that man so young.*

1 The character Lu Sheng, a pedantic scholar who repeatedly failed the imperial examinations, is playing with words here to show off his poetic skills. As it is impossible to translate the Chinese sentences word for word, his palindromic wordplay in the original text has been rendered into paired English sentences that read nearly the same forwards and backwards.

Ah, farewell, my wordplay, for I have to tell you my true name. I am Lu Sheng, or Lu the Young, a man from Shandong Province, or the Land East of the Mountain. My earliest ancestors were natives of Fanyang County¹, where they were born and thrived. Then, my father moved away from his hometown and migrated to Handan County, where he settled in a village and lived on what he could grow in the fields. From the moment I was born, I grew up a sturdy boy with a sinewy back and a strong waist, handsome and smart. Then I went to school and learned quickly with quick eyes, a nimble tongue and a witty mind from reading every book I could find. For me, times were good, occasions agreeable, and my fortune favourable. So, I was acquainted with all the current affairs I needed to know about in this breathing world. Those ideas and doctrines, though exquisite and numerous like natural silk and woolly threads, all escaped not my writing brush. I copied them on my papers and wrote them out on my pages. Those articles by various writers, though armed with thorny arguments like a dragon's fangs or beautifully polished like a phoenix's tail, why, I can easily distribute them away from my satin satchel and then, if I like, summon them back. Well, well, I've been talking too much! Ha! I am now twenty-six, and no less, but I am still wandering, seeking office, but in vain. I often dream of being a superb scholar one day and will fancifully think of being an excellent sophist the next day. But alas! I wrongfully identified Li Chi, or Li the Red, as the elder brother of the poet Li Bai, or Li the White. My mind was crammed with all this stuff on how to achieve the top score in this or that exam, but alas, I took Liang the

1 This refers to a geographical location in ancient China. Both Lu and Cui were the family names of the noble houses in that region.

Ninth for the younger brother of Liang the Eighth by
mistake! I read and recite the words of the olden tongue
and resolve that no modern learning is superior to my
classical knowledge. But, farewell, boasts! I must rest,
60 for I have lagged far behind others even in my previous
life. So now, see what sort of scholar I have become!
I look tired and slothful, and my hair is dishevelled.
Seemingly, I've learned quite a few matters, yet I am still
ignorant of many things. All in all, I look so strange and
unfashionable that people frown at me when I halt by
them. I brag that I am acquainted with all the traditions
and customs of this breathing world, yet I behave like a
fool, dumb when I am asked to speak, and deaf when I
am told to listen, and I feel I am even bored with myself
70 and find any utterance tasteless. Do you know what
people say of this state of existence? They say that when
a slothful devil comes in, the vigour sneaks out, or more
clearly, when a family is in want of food and clothing, it
lacks the means to socialize. Yet fortune does not forsake
me, for I own a few acres of land that is not unfertile.
And now, the west wind blows, and the crops are ripe
for harvest. Well, methinks it is ten to one that cultural
sophistication is no match to native vulgarity in this. I
mean, in the matter of farming. Who would be foolish
80 enough to employ a courtly gentleman for the reaping?
So I have to worship an old villager as my master and
learn to rub shoulders with the wrinkle-faced farmers.
But why? Am I just a raw and base labourer? Tush, I
don't have to be so. Alack! When autumn is approaching
its end, and the cold air begins to spread over the land,
I have no good coat to put on nor homespun cloth to
wear. And I have my only trousers that are too short for
my legs, let alone any fur coat or sable hat. No matter.
I must now repair to the village inn for a change of
90 air, riding this horse. No, it is not a horse; it is rather

a donkey. No, it is neither a donkey nor a horse. It is a black mule in the likeness of a dog. Well, no matter what, it saves me the labour of walking. That is all. So, let me now harness my lame donkey and go. *pushes the donkey with the decorated end of his scabbard; the donkey brays* Ah, good donkey, my buddy, we have been keeping each other's company now for so many years. Gone are the days when I rode in a fancy carriage drawn by four proud steeds, heading to the imperial exams for fame!

proceeds across the stage

On my little black donkey, I ride on,
Against the chilly wind that shrewdly bites.
My short leggings barely cover my knees
That are laid bare by th' envious dusty wind.
My hands try to cover th' fluttering hems,
But how can I? Th' wind blows too hastily.
In the dusty fields, no people are seen
And crows come cawing home in the grey sky;
Astride, a boy sits on a buffalo's back
Teetering on against the setting sun,
Along th' ancient path, in the autumn gust.
The trees are painted rosy by th' afterglow,
Their boughs and branches and leafless forks
Are contending to reach the soft-woven sky.
O, what a picturesque scene I see here
In nature! Of the beauty of thee I'd sing!

100

110

Ah, the day is getting old. I'll stop at the West Village for the night, and then, tomorrow will be the day for me to labour in the field. But before I leave for that inn, let me read you a famous poem by a Tang poet, dear beholders all, to bring this scene to a close:

120

*The golden beams of the setting sun are waning
Through the empty lanes of a village joyless;
Forlorn! When the melancholy comes, surging,
With whom shall I converse to share my sadness?
Along the age-old road, few travellers ride,
While the west wind is caressing the crops ripe.*