

ZHU SHUZHEN

*Translated by Emily Goedde*

*Poems*

*Translator's note*

Zhu Shuzhen (朱淑真) has long been considered one of the most important female poets of pre-modern China. Her collected body of work, *Heartbreak* (*Duanchang shiji* 斷腸詩集), consists of more than three hundred poems, yet very little has been translated, and the poems here are appearing in English for the first time.

Because all the information we have about Zhu Shuzhen is found either in the poems themselves or in a short preface to the first edition of *Heartbreak*, scholars dispute even the most basic details of her life. Some believe she lived from 1063 to 1106. Others doubt she lived at all. They suggest, instead, that her collection was written by a man or perhaps even a group of men.

Speculations about Zhu and her poetry abound, yet having spent two years translating *Heartbreak*, I would argue that the unity of voice in the majority of poems suggests that there was indeed a poet, Zhu Shuzhen, and that she was often lonely and sad and direct in expression. I don't see in her poems the speculation of a male gaze. They do not seem allegorical or voyeuristic or eroticized. Her poems are filled with ordinary scenes from the natural world—rain showers, nighttime skies, birds in flight, falling blossoms. What follows are those common occurrences turned into events significant enough to write poetry of both complaint and joy.

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