

Elegies for Empire

The Poetics of Memory in the Late Work of Du Fu (712-770)

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2013

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation explores highly influential constructions of the past at a key turning point in Chinese history by mapping out what I term a *poetics of memory* in the more than four hundred poems written by Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) during his two-year stay in the remote town of Kuizhou (modern Fengjie County 奉節縣). A survivor of the catastrophic An Lushan rebellion (756-763), which transformed Tang Dynasty (618-906) politics and culture, Du Fu was among the first to write in the twilight of the Chinese medieval period. His most prescient anticipation of mid-Tang concerns was his restless preoccupation with memory and its mediations, which drove his prolific output in Kuizhou. For Du Fu, memory held the promise of salvaging and creatively reimagining personal, social, and cultural identities under conditions of displacement and sweeping social change. The poetics of his late work is characterized by an acute attentiveness to the material supports—monuments, rituals, images, and texts—that enabled and structured connections to the past.

The organization of the study attempts to capture the range of Du Fu's engagement with memory's frameworks and media. It begins by examining commemorative poems that read Kuizhou's historical memory in local landmarks, decoding and rhetorically emulating great deeds of classical exemplars. The second chapter explores the shifting boundaries Du Fu draws between the customs of Kuizhou's local people and the orthodox ritual practices that defined his identity as a scholar-official. This is followed by

an interlude that discusses poems on housework, in which domesticating projects spur reflection on poetry's capacity to create cultural value through commemoration. Chapter three turns to poems on paintings, arguing that for Du Fu painted images served as a vital support for memory of pre-rebellion court society, and that in writing on them he both drew upon and redefined a medieval visual aesthetic of craft and pictorial illusionism. The fourth and final chapter analyzes the rhetoric of narrative autobiographical poems, traditionally approached as non-figurative factual records, in order to elucidate Du Fu's retrospective construction of a self. A picture thus emerges of a body of work in which memory, mediated through material objects and practices, functioned to envision and rebuild frameworks of identity in an age of upheaval and transition. This study contributes to a more critical understanding of a major poet, of the representation and uses of memory in traditional Chinese poetry, and of the emergence of new forms of expression and literati identity in late medieval China.

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Acknowledgements

This dissertation could not have been written without the generous support and encouragement of many people. I would first of all like to thank my advisor, Wendy Swartz, who taught me to read medieval Chinese poetry, and who has been a model of generosity and scholarly dedication. I am deeply grateful to Shang Wei for his keen insights and sage advice, and for always setting aside another hour to talk with me about Du Fu. I thank Pauline Yu, who introduced me to the fascinations of Tang poetry as an undergraduate, for many years of guidance and support. Bob Hymes's incisive comments helped set the project on track in its early stages. Finally, I am indebted to Eva Shan Chou for agreeing to spend a sweltering New York summer reading the entire project, and for her expert criticism.

I would also like to acknowledge the generosity of several teachers who, though not members of my committee, gave me their time and thoughtful advice. Lydia Liu welcomed my queries even when they were misguided, and always challenged me to think with greater precision and imagination. David Lurie offered invaluable counsel on a range of matters late in the game, with unfailing good sense and wry humor. I thank the members of the Chinese Medieval Studies Workshop for including me, year after year, in their stimulating and convivial meetings.

My friends and colleagues in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures have been constant sources of inspiration and comfort. I can hardly thank them enough for making my years in Morningside Heights such happy ones. Thanks especially to Dan

Asen, Anatoly Detwyler, Linda Feng, Noga Ganany, Arunabh Ghosh, Gal Gvili, Nan Hartman, Sara Kile, Nate Shockey, Myra Sun, and Zhong Yurou.

Many thanks are due to my teachers and friends in Taiwan, both at the International Chinese Language Program and at National Taiwan University. Cheng Yu-yu, my advisor at NTU, deserves my special gratitude for her many helpful comments and suggestions during the research phase of the project.

Research for the dissertation was made possible by a Fulbright-Hays fellowship in 2009-10. The Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation provided funding for the completion of the project in 2012-13. I gratefully acknowledge the support of both of these institutions.

Last but certainly not least I would like to thank my family. My parents have given me limitless love and encouragement throughout all my unorthodox endeavors. As has my sister, Kate, the kindest of kin. I lovingly thank my wife, Peggy Hung, for everything.

Introduction

On November 15, 767, the poet Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) attended a dance performance in Kuizhou 夔州 (modern Fengjie County 奉節縣), a remote town at the mouth of the Yangzi River Three Gorges where he had lodged for two years. Overcome by a sense of déjà vu, he inquired about the aged dancer's past. She told him her name was Miss Li the Twelfth 李十二娘, and that she had once been a disciple of the great Madame Gongsun 公孫大娘, a star at the glamorous court of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712-756). This explained the poet's dawning recognition, for he had seen Madame Gongsun dance in the capital when he was a boy. Those days, though still fresh in his memory, were now a world away. Xuanzong's court had been dispersed in early 756 by the devastating rebellion of An Lushan 安祿山 (703-757), which nearly toppled the Tang Dynasty (618-906). Many courtiers and entertainers fled the war-torn capital region in search of safety and sympathetic patrons. And thus a new figure appeared on the cultural stage: the displaced survivor of the "flourishing times" 盛時, refugees and exiles like Du Fu and Miss Li who had once performed for princes, but now resembled itinerant peddlers. They were figures of memory, living ruins of a bygone age.

There was something irresistibly compelling about these spectral figures, and they proliferated in the literature of the decades following the rebellion. We come upon scores of them in both poetry and prose: anonymous, impoverished, solitary, and yet bearing some mark of grace or distinction that betrays their hidden pasts and provokes our fascination. They have stories to tell. Susan Stewart has written of the souvenir that it "must remain impoverished and partial so that it can be supplemented by a narrative

discourse...which articulates the play of desire.”¹ The partial and abject object calls out to be filled in and made whole by memory. This describes well the role of the survivor of flourishing times in post-rebellion Tang literature, who “articulated the play of desire” for the world from which they came.

Du Fu was among the first to introduce these souvenir figures into cultural consciousness, through poems like “A Ballad on Viewing the Sword Dance of a Disciple of Madame Gongsun” 觀公孫大娘弟子舞劍器行.² However, such poems were but one expression of a much more pervasive preoccupation with memory and forms of survival that characterizes his work from Kuizhou in particular, and which is the subject of the present study. Like the river that filled his eyes and ears while he wrote, memory courses through these works, welling up in commemorations of local history, spilling over in descriptions of visual art, and flashing forth in pieces on ordinary, everyday events. As these examples suggest, memory in these poems is not only ubiquitous, but manifests itself in many ways. There is an abundance of personal (or autobiographical) memory, but its social, historical, and cultural forms are just as prevalent. A primary goal of this project is to map out and describe different “frameworks of memory” in Du Fu’s late works, and to explore their functions.³ I will argue that for Du Fu in Kuizhou, memory functioned as a particular kind of world-making, a “poetics” which enabled him to envision frameworks of identity and belonging that had become destabilized in the wake

¹ *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 136.

² Qiu Zhao’ao 仇兆鰲 (1638-1717), ed., *Du shi xiangzhu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 20.1815-20. Hereafter cited as *DSXZ*.

³ The concept of “frameworks of memory” (or *cadres de la mémoire*) was first developed by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), to describe the social contexts within which remembrance occurs. See *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994); and *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). This will be discussed further below.

of dynastic crisis. A second, related strand of the argument is that this poetics is characterized by an acute sensitivity to the material supports—the body of the dancer, the historical monument, the painted image, the poem—that make the transmission of the past possible. In this introduction I will present the historical context of Du Fu’s late work, define the main concepts of memory that inform the study, and situate it in relation to existing scholarship on Du Fu, closing with a preview of the individual chapters.

Memory became a concern for Du Fu as a result of a specific confluence of historical, biographical, and environmental circumstances. The defining historical event of Du Fu’s generation was the rebellion of An Lushan and Shi Siming 史思明 (703-761), colloquially referred to as “The Rebellion of An and Shi” (*An Shi zhi luan* 安史之亂).⁴ A frontier general who had amassed enormous power and resources through close connections at court, An launched his revolt on December 16, 755, on the pretext of punishing his rival, Yang Guozhong 楊國忠 (d. 756). He swept down from his base in the northeast, quickly captured Loyang 洛陽, the eastern capital, and declared himself emperor of a new dynasty, the Yan 燕. Originally blocked from advancing on the imperial city of Chang’an 長安 by loyalist armies, An was able to rout them in an ambush after they abandoned their defensive position to mount a premature attack. This

⁴ For accounts of the rebellion in English, see, on the conditions leading up to it, Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The Background of the Rebellion of An Lushan* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1955); and Denis Twitchett, “Hsüan-tsung,” in *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 3: Sui and T’ang, Part I*, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 409-63. On the rebellion’s consequence for Tang state and social structures, see Pulleyblank, “The An Lu-shan Rebellion and the Origins of Chronic Militarism in Late T’ang China,” in *Essays on T’ang Society: The Interplay of Social, Political, and Economic Forces*, ed. John Curtis Perry and Bardwell L. Smith (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 32-60; and C. A. Peterson, “Court and Province in mid- and late T’ang,” in Twitchett, 468-560.

left the road to Chang'an open, and the City of Eternal Peace fell to An's forces in the sixth month of 756.

Hearing the news of An Lushan's victory at Tong Pass 潼關, Xuanzong fled his palaces during the night and, accompanied by a small entourage of attendants, made his way along difficult mountain roads to safety in the western city of Chengdu 成都.⁵ In the story's most famous episode, the troops escorting the emperor mutinied, murdered Yang Guozhong, and demanded the death of Yang Yuhuan 楊玉環 (719-756), Xuanzong's "Precious Consort" 貴妃. With the emperor powerless to refuse, she was strangled at a roadside post station. Meanwhile, the heir-apparent had set up his own base from which to direct military operations against the rebels, and, under pressure from his officers, claimed the throne as Emperor Suzong 肅宗 in August of 756. A year later, taking advantage of dissension among the rebels, and aided by Uighur mercenary troops, Suzong's generals recovered Chang'an. Loyang remained capital of the rebel Yan Dynasty until late in 762, when a Tang-Uighur joint offensive crushed Shi Chaoyi 史朝義, the last emperor of Yan, and drove him north.

With the death of Shi Chaoyi in 763, the rebellion begun by An Lushan had come to an end. However, it had catalyzed fundamental changes in the organization of state power and has long been viewed as a key turning point in the history of imperial China. The most decisive changes included widespread militarization and the devolution of power from the crippled central court to the provinces, many of which fell under the control of

⁵ The classic account is *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒, comp. Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086) et al (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 218.6970-74. For an annotated English translation, see Paul W. Kroll, "The Flight from the Capital and the Death of Precious Consort Yang," *Tang Studies* 3 (1985), 25-53.

semi-independent “military governors” 節度使. The most extreme example of such provincial autonomy was in the northeast, where former rebel governors remained in open defiance of the court. The loss of the northeast coincided with large-scale movements in the general population, as people fled the war-torn central plains for the fertile regions of the southeast. Tax and land allocation systems fell apart and had to be massively restructured. Finally, the new power of military and provincial leaders created increased social mobility for those who were not members of the long-dominant aristocracy, changing the social makeup of the ruling elite.⁶ On these and other fronts, the rebellion ushered in the twilight of the centralized, aristocratic society that defined the Chinese medieval period.

Along with these transformations of social institutions came dynamic changes in the cultural sphere. Intellectual historian Peter Bol has written of a “crisis of culture after 755,” during which the predominant moral and philosophical outlooks of scholar-officials (or “literati,” *shi* 士) shifted dramatically. Bol argues that in the wake of the rebellion scholars turned from heaven and cosmic processes to the ancient sages as the authoritative guides for thought and action.⁷ This “turn away from heaven” coincided with a turn away from the central court as the principal locus of cultural prestige, and is exemplified by the writings of Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) and his circle. And yet Han Yu’s resounding call for a “return to antiquity” 復古 was part of a larger trend among his contemporaries to look nostalgically to the past—not only to remote antiquity but to recent times as well. Specifically, there arose an intense fascination with the pre-rebellion

⁶ These are the primary developments summarized by Peterson. See “Court and Province,” 485-6.

⁷ Peter K. Bol, *“This Culture of Ours”: Intellectual Transitions in T’ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 2.

period of dynastic power and prosperity that reached an apex during Emperor Xuanzong's Kaiyuan 開元 (713-741) and Tianbao 天寶 (742-756) reign periods. Stories of these “flourishing times” proliferated, telling of the tragic romance between the emperor and his prized consort, but also recounting the recollections of eyewitnesses like Miss Li.⁸ In other words, the rebellion produced something like what Richard Terdman termed the “memory crisis” of European modernity, when sudden and sweeping social transformations called into question existing relations with the past, and thrust them into the spotlight.⁹ Du Fu's work from Kuizhou was the initial flare of a glow that would soon spread across the sky.

Du Fu's turn to memory owed as much to biographical as to historical conditions, though the two were never separable for him. Like the An Lushan rebellion, Du Fu's life has been the subject of many studies, and here I will only recount the most relevant points.¹⁰ By the time he arrived in Kuizhou, in 766, he had spent much of a decade as a refugee from violence unleashed by the rebellion, and had endured a series of tragedies

⁸ The canonical example of Kaiyuan nostalgia literature is, of course, Bo Juyi's 白居易 (772-846) “Song of Everlasting Pain” 長恨歌. However the phenomenon was more extensive. See especially Robert Joe Cutter, “History and ‘The Old Man of the Eastern Wall,’” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106:3 (1986), 503-28; Paul W. Kroll, “Nostalgia and History in Mid-Ninth-Century Verse: Cheng Yu's Poem on the ‘Chin-yang Gate,’” *T'oung Pao* 89 (2003), 286-366; Anna M. Shields, “Remembering When: The Uses of Nostalgia in the Poetry of Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 66.2 (Dec. 2006), 321-61; and Luo Manling, “Remembering Kaiyuan and Tianbao: The Construction of Mosaic Memory in Medieval Historical Miscellanies,” *T'oung Pao* 97 (2011), 263-300.

⁹ Richard Terdman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1993).

¹⁰ The classic biography in Chinese is Chen Yixin 陳貽焮, *Du Fu pingzhuan* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, rpt. 2011); see also Mo Lifeng 莫礪鋒, *Du Fu pingzhuan* (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1993), 66-195. In English, see especially William Hung, *Tu Fu: China's Greatest Poet* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1952); A.R. Davis, *Tu Fu* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1971), 13-34; Stephen Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High T'ang* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 183-224; and Eva Shan Chou, *Reconsidering Tu Fu: Literary Greatness and Cultural Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2-11.

that left an indelible mark on his poetry. His son died of starvation from a famine that struck the capital region in 755. He was captured and imprisoned in occupied Chang'an while attempting to reach Suzong's court in exile. Managing a daring escape, he was rewarded with an official post, only to be demoted soon after and sent off to the provinces in disgrace. Shortly thereafter he resigned, and set out west across the war-torn country, arriving finally in the city of Chengdu, where Xuanzong had taken refuge just years before. Here he enjoyed five years of relative tranquility, before hostilities erupted nearby and displaced him once again. Now old and in poor health, he fled south by boat along the tributaries leading to the Yangzi River on the empire's southwestern border. The great river carried him east into the Three Gorges, where he stopped in Kuizhou to recover his health, and stayed for two years.

For a man of letters from the north, Kuizhou was practically another world. Located on the main river route from the west to the southeast, it was a market town and stopover for merchants and officials making the perilous trip through the Gorges. In medieval writings Kuizhou was associated above all with the terror of this passage, and was treated as a place to be left behind as soon as possible. It had served as a military stronghold for short-lived separatist regimes of the first and third centuries, but was otherwise unknown to history. Though several poets had passed through the area and written about its scenic wonders from a traveler's perspective, Du Fu is the first poet we know to have stayed in Kuizhou for any length of time. Its strangeness and lack of a poetic past challenged and inspired him, while his own advancing age and failing health reminded him that his time to write was running out. He had long ago chosen poetry over a political career, "words" (*yan* 言) over "merit" (*gong* 功), as the means through which he would try to leave

behind a lasting name. Now, having survived dynastic collapse and years of personal displacement, and having arrived in this strange, isolated place, he set to work. In a remarkable burst of creative energy, he wrote over 400 poems, filling them with his memories.

This relation between Kuizhou and memory is well illustrated by “Autumn Meditations: Eight Poems” 秋興八首, a *tour de force* of heptasyllabic regulated verse (*qiyan lüshi* 七言律詩, or *qilü* 七律) written in 767.¹¹ Widely considered among the greatest masterworks of the entire Chinese poetic tradition, the “Autumn Meditations” series has been copiously studied, and is available in several English translations.¹² It describes the movements of memory, as encounters with a dark and unsettling Kuizhou landscape elicit brilliant but ephemeral visions of a past Chang’an. The Kuizhou that begins the series is a scene of decay and entropic flux, in which autumnal leaves are “withered and wounded” (*diao shang* 凋傷), and the seething river merges with a gloomy sky. Against this backdrop, objects appear that awaken the poet’s memory:

Clumped chrysanthemums, twice opened—

I cry for other days.

叢菊兩開他日淚

A solitary boat, tied once and for all—

My mind is on my old home.

孤舟一繫故園心

¹¹ *DSXZ*, 17.1484-99.

¹² For a collection of selected pre-modern commentaries on the series that runs to over 600 printed pages, see Ye Jiaying 葉嘉瑩, *Du Fu “Qiuqing ba shou” jishuo* (Taipei: Guiguan congkan, 1994). For English translations and analyses, see especially William Hung, *China’s Greatest Poet*, 233-35; Angus C. Graham, *Poems of the Late T’ang* (New York: Penguin, 1965), 51-56; Tsu-lin Mei and Yu-kung Kao, “Tu Fu’s ‘Autumn Meditations: An Exercise in Linguistic Criticism,’” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 28 (1968), 44-80; David R. McCraw, *Du Fu’s Laments from the South* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 200-214; and Stephen Owen (ed.), *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), 433-38.

Du Fu's late imperial commentators identified this reference to "my old home" (*gu yuan* 故園) as the thematic kernel of the series as a whole, a seed of memory that develops, in the second poem, into a nightly "gazing toward the capital" 望京華, and blossoms fully in the fifth poem's mythic vision of an audience with the emperor.¹³ In the following pieces, the memories become increasingly abstract and ambiguous—abandoned pleasure boats, solitary statues, bright flowers against black clouds—conjuring what has been aptly described as "the confused lucidity of a deepening dream."¹⁴ The entire dreamlike cycle of memories in "Autumn Meditations" arises from and returns to the tumultuous and disquieting landscape of Kuizhou. In this way, the famous series exemplifies how Kuizhou instigated the memorial imagination explored in the pages that follow.

This study makes use of certain concepts and methods, derived mostly from recent work on what has been termed "cultural memory," that can help us understand Du Fu's late poetry in new ways, and which will be explained here. First among these is the concept of memory's social frameworks, pioneered by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. From Aristotle to Locke and Bergson, memory was conceived of primarily as a process of cognitive retrieval, whereby an individual accessed contents that were stored or impressed in the mind. Halbwachs was among the first to call attention to memory's social character, to the fact that people necessarily remember as members of groups, not as isolated individuals. This is not only because it so often takes place in group settings, such as at parades or around campfires, but because one "cannot in fact think about the events of one's past without discoursing upon them," and this inevitably involves

¹³ See Wang Sishi 王嗣爽 (1566-1648), cited in Ye: 147, 173.

¹⁴ Mei and Kao, 68.

connecting our ideas to “those of our circle.”¹⁵ As soon as they are thought or talked about (which is to say, always), even our most intimate, personal memories are not entirely our own. Halbwachs wrote of the memory of the family, of religious orders, of different social classes, as well as of guilds and professions.

A major component of Halbwachs’s theory was what could be called an extension or externalization of memory, traditionally understood—it was no longer only what was in one’s head, but what one shared with others, and involved social practices and symbolic representations (he was a student of Durkheim). A counterpart to this expansion of memory’s domain beyond individual cognition was an emphasis on the ways in which representations of the past were determined by the group’s present needs, desires, and beliefs. “Collective frameworks,” he wrote, “are...precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society.”¹⁶ This amounted to proposing an alternative to the predominant conception of memory as a storage-retrieval system (on the model of printing or archives, for example). Rather, he shifted to metaphors of construction and reconstruction, and to “images of the past” instead of the past “as it was.”

Halbwachs’s ideas have been of fundamental importance for the theory of cultural memory, which has been developed most systematically in Germany by Jan and Aleida Assmann. The work of the Assmanns can be seen as building upon a fundamental insight of Halbwachs that, in the words of Lewis Coser, “Just like God needs us, so memory

¹⁵ *On Collective Memory*, 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

needs others.”¹⁷ For Halbwachs, these “others” consisted of the fellow members of living communities; for the Assmanns, however, they include members in the more distant past, and the diverse forms through which they become accessible to us. Jan Assmann distinguishes “communicative memory,” or the memory of a single generation (which requires co-present communication), from “cultural memory,” which refers to the “connective structures” through which communities are maintained and transmitted over long periods of time.¹⁸ This temporal expansion leads to a focus on memory’s external supports, for it is only through durable media (rituals, texts, images, etc.) that we communicate with generations past and future. Media, then, are perhaps cultural memory’s most significant others. Without them we would lose our memories, which, in the cultural as in the social and personal realms, would result in forgetting who we are.

The memories of cultures are thus necessarily external, which makes them highly susceptible to disruption. Natural and manmade disasters, as well as revolutions and other sweeping social changes, can result in the destabilization and destruction of the supports on which collective identity depend. As mentioned above, Richard Terdiman has written of a “memory crisis” that swept western Europe in the wake of large-scale industrial modernization. Rapid transformations in the lived environment (Hausmannization in Paris, for instance) provoked deep anxieties about the workings of memory and the accessibility of the past. From the perspective of cultural memory, this is explainable as a crisis resulting from disturbances in the media that make up the connective structure of

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁸ See especially Jan Assmann, trans. John Czaplicka, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique* 16 (1995): 125-33; *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 21-28 on Halbwachs; and Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1-14.

societies, on which identity depends. Above, I suggested that the sudden preoccupation with memory in mid-Tang writings, anticipated by Du Fu, can be understood similarly as a reaction to the trauma of the An Lushan rebellion.

However, I want to argue that, for Du Fu at least, the turn to memory was not merely a passive reaction to or traumatic symptom of crisis conditions, but was an active attempt to counter forgetting. This is what I am terming Du Fu's *poetics of memory*. The phrase is meant to highlight memory's active, formative, and *performative* capacities by invoking the ancient Greek idea of *poiesis*, the "making" of physical things like houses or poems, but also less tangible things, like images, concepts, and memories. Halbwachs pointed in this direction with his proto-constructivist description of social frameworks as "instruments" used to "reconstruct an image of the past." And yet these frameworks themselves are continually under construction through acts of memory, as the Assmanns and others have argued.¹⁹ In Kuizhou, I contend, Du Fu approached poetry as a medium through which to build frameworks of memory, to recapture senses of belonging, and to orient himself in the twilight of his life and times.

Previous studies have not adequately addressed these crucial roles of memory and its mediums in Du Fu's late poetry. Du Fu was not recognized during his lifetime. He was admired by the most talented writers of the following generation, but was not widely appreciated until the Song Dynasty (906-1279), when he was canonized and made into a cultural icon. His preeminence has never been seriously questioned since. To writers of the Song, Du Fu's greatness consisted in his embodiment of Confucian virtues, especially

¹⁹ See especially Mieke Bal, "Introduction," in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Mieke Bal et al (Hanover: Dartmouth College, 1999), vii-xvii.

his unflagging loyalty to the emperor and concern for the people of the empire. His iconic status was increasingly consolidated under the title of “Poet Historian” (*shi shi* 詩史), which primarily referred to his compassionate and vivid portrayals of human suffering in the wake of the An Lushan rebellion. This appellation and the prophetic vision it ascribed to Du Fu deeply influenced the mainstream of traditional scholarship. It asserted that his poetry documented his life and times with unfailing accuracy, and contained the infallibly correct moral judgments of a sage. Accordingly, pre-modern readers focused overwhelmingly on determining the precise referents of his poems and debating whether the judgment fell into the category of praise or blame.²⁰

In modern China, Du Fu has continued to receive enormous scholarly attention, a summary of which is quite impossible here, though prevailing tendencies and a few recent landmarks may be indicated.²¹ Early in the last century, the treatment of the poet as a cultural hero was adapted to the concerns of the developing nation-state by leading intellectuals such as Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) and Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962). The character of the man remained a primary focus of debate throughout the following decades. As in the pre-modern period, such a focus underwrote intense inquiry into the poet’s biography, which continues to be a primary subfield of Du Fu studies in China. Another important subfield has sought evidence in the poems for the author’s social and political philosophies. Like biographical studies, the stakes of such investigations,

²⁰ On the Song reception of Du Fu, see especially Chou, 20-28; and Charles Hartman, “The Tang Poet Du Fu and the Song Literati.” *CLEAR* 30 (Dec. 2008): 43-74. On the history of the “Poet Historian” concept, see Zhang Hui 張暉, *Shi shi* (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 2007).

²¹ For an invaluable annotated, topically arranged bibliography of major twentieth century works on Du Fu, which I have made use of, see *Sui Tang Wudai wenxue yanjiu*, ed. Du Xiaoqin 杜曉勤 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2001), 871-965.

whether affirming or modifying traditional appraisals, are very much bound up with an underlying concern with the author as an exemplar of cultural values.

Certain works stand out that cannot be classed according to the trends noted above. These include *Du Fu pingzhuan (A Critical Biography of Du Fu)* by Mo Lifeng 莫礪鋒, one of China's foremost living Du Fu scholars. This is a comprehensive study that contains chapters on the poet's life, social philosophy, literary theory, place in literary history, and historical reception, engaging with current debates in each of these domains. Ye Jiaying's 葉嘉瑩 *Du Fu "Qiuxing bashou" jishuo (Du Fu's "Autumn Meditations, Eight Poems": Collected Commentaries)* is a massive collection and analysis of major pre-modern writings on the series considered by many to be Du Fu's masterpiece. Ye's lengthy introduction places it within the history of its prosodic form, heptasyllabic regulated verse, showing its indebtedness to earlier practice, and wherein it broke new ground.²² The studies of Mo and Ye are landmarks in recent Du Fu scholarship from mainland China and Taiwan.

In the West, the traditional approach was largely continued by William Hung, whose *Tu Fu: China's Greatest Poet* became the authoritative study when published in 1952. Hung scrupulously dates each of the 374 poems he translates, placing them into a biographical timeline with reference to current historical events. Throughout, he portrays Du Fu as a paragon of virtue, albeit from a humanist standpoint, and reads the poems as testaments to the greatness of the man. Hung's study thus exhibits the combination of philological fastidiousness and interpretive focus on the character of the author characteristic of a long tradition of reading Du Fu as moral history.

²² Ye, 1-72.

The one major scholarly monograph devoted to Du Fu to have appeared in English since *China's Greatest Poet* is Eva Shan Chou's *Reconsidering Tu Fu: Literary Greatness and Cultural Context*, published in 1995.²³ As its title suggests, this study takes on the received image in an attempt to “reach an understanding of the poet’s cultural legacy and its formation that will allow us to work with that tradition, rather than merely to follow it.”²⁴ To this end, Chou identifies the moral criteria (unflinching loyalty, compassion) upon which Song scholars based their praise of Du Fu, as well as the preoccupations that gave rise to it. In short, she historicizes the image of the Poet-Historian, noting that it has resulted in circular affirmations (Du Fu wrote great poetry because he was a great man, and *vice versa*). As an alternative, her study departs from biographical presentation, instead reading the poems according to thematic and formal categories: topicality and juxtaposition. Under the heading of topicality are treated poems Du Fu wrote on unconventional themes in the “ancient style” 古體, poems regularly cited by traditional critics as proof of his compassion. Juxtaposition refers to abrupt shifts in tone and subject matter between couplets in a single poem, as when a landscape depiction jumps suddenly to thoughts of the poet’s family, friends, or the troubled empire. Chou’s readings are thus guided by a concern with the relation of form to meaning that departs significantly from traditional approaches, and which has influenced the present work.

²³ Other English-language monographs on Du Fu include David Hawkes, *A Little Primer of Tu Fu* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), a translation and explication of 35 poems; A.R. Davis, *Tu Fu*, a short biography with translations, followed by brief essays on Du Fu’s views of poetry, his major forms and themes, and his influence on later writers; David R. McCraw, *Du Fu’s Laments from the South*, a translation and explication of about 100 poems from Du Fu’s later period, grouped thematically.

²⁴ Chou, 13.

Perhaps the most influential writings on Du Fu in English have been those of Stephen Owen, whose most thorough discussion of the poet appears in a chapter of *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High T'ang*. Here, Owen stresses the difficulty of interpreting Du Fu alongside other poets of the tradition, for the reason that, like Shakespeare in the West, his poetry has so decisively shaped conceptions of what good poetry is. Du Fu's work, he argues, echoing the judgment of Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831), can only be defined by its multiplicity, its lack of unitary voice. For Owen, multiplicity refers first of all to Du Fu's departure from the subgeneric conventions that so heavily determined the production and reception of previous poets. It also refers to the changes Du Fu's style underwent at different periods in his life—the difference between the “Thatched Hut” Du Fu of Chengdu and the Du Fu of the Kuizhou years, for instance. Within poems, multiplicity appears as a “shifting style,” the sudden changes in topic and tone analyzed by Chou under the rubric of juxtaposition. It prevails even at the level of the line, in Du Fu's characteristic syntactic ambiguity, of which the couplet from “Autumn Meditations” cited above is a well-known example. Thus, Owen's Du Fu is a resolutely “negative” figure: indefinable, compellingly complex—quite the opposite of the familiar iconic image.

As Owen observed, the moods, themes, and concerns of Du Fu's poetry changed dramatically over the course of his life. He was the first poet to have his works organized into a “chronology” (*nianpu* 年譜), an acknowledgment of their unprecedented focus on life circumstances outside the standard repertoire of poetic occasions.²⁵ The chronological ordering was also a spatial mapping of Du Fu's travels, and it invited

²⁵ The earliest known *nianpu* was created for Du Fu by Lü Dafang 呂大防 (1027-1097), and was called *Zimei shi nianpu* 子美詩年譜 or *Du shi nianyue* 杜詩年月. See Zhang Zhonggang 張忠綱 et al, eds. *Du ji shulu* (Jinan: Qi Lu shushe, 2008), 19-20.

division into different periods according to the stations on the itinerary. Thus there emerged the “early Du Fu” of the pre-rebellion years in the capital; the Du Fu of the war years, in flight and serving the restoration court; Du Fu in Chengdu from 760 to 765, enjoying hard-won peace; and the “late Du Fu” of Kuizhou and the final wanderings among the lakes. This final period has long stood out for readers, both for the stunning quantity and quality of the poems, but also because of its distinguishing themes, so heavily influenced by Kuizhou’s unique landscape and culture. Scholars writing on the Kuizhou poems have rarely failed to identify memory as a guiding motif, though the modalities of these memories (as distinct from their referents) has remained largely unexamined.²⁶ A notable exception is a recent article by David McMullen, which examines Du Fu’s memories in poems on flowers, mostly from the late years, and shows how they articulate differing views of state ritual.²⁷ Unlike previous studies, this dissertation will address memory in late Du Fu as a topic in itself, approaching it as a project of mediated identity construction.

The structure of the dissertation attempts to capture the range of Du Fu’s engagements with memory’s frameworks and mediums. It is composed of four chapters, which proceed overall in a telescoping fashion, moving from poems on the historical memory of monuments, to those on painting and social memory, and then to constructions of the

²⁶ Mo Lifeng organizes his discussion of the Kuizhou poems into four classes of memory: personal, social, political, and historical. See *Du Fu pingzhuan* (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1993), 172-93. For monographs on the Kuizhou poems that include discussions of memory, see especially Fang Yu 方瑜, *Du Fu Kuizhou shi xilun* (Taipei: Youshi wenhua shiye gongsi, 1985), 129-63; and Feng Ye 封野, *Du Fu Kuizhou shi shulun* (Nanjing: Dongnan daxue chubanshe, 2007), 64-95.

²⁷ David McMullen, “Recollection Without Tranquility: Du Fu, the Imperial Gardens, and the State,” *Asia Major* 14.2 (2001): 189-252.

autobiographical self in poetry. Far from emphasizing incompatibilities between these realms, this nested organization is intended to convey their differential and interdependent relations.

The first two chapters concern the role of historical and cultural memory in Du Fu's representations of Kuizhou's landscape and local culture. In chapter one I examine commemorative poems in which Du Fu reads local landmarks as encoding the defining deeds of figures from the classical tradition. I argue that the poems rhetorically reenact these deeds through a number of highly imaginative formal devices, thus creating a tangible connection with the historical past, while actively shaping the identity of a place. Chapter two examines Du Fu's use of classical allusions in poems on Kuizhou's local culture, approaching this as a practice of cultural memory through which a literati self is defined in relation to foreign others. I take issue with the consensus view that Du Fu uniformly presented classics and customs in antagonistic opposition to one another, and demonstrate the variety of his positions through close readings of poems, many of them never before studied in English, on a wide range of local activities.

An interlude follows, which examines a particularly fascinating set of poems on housework. These poems explore the analogy between the conversion of wilderness into habitable space, and poetry's capacity to invest value in private affairs by commemorating them in the serious, public language of the classics.

The third and fourth chapters analyze Du Fu's memories of the pre-rebellion period in their social and autobiographical forms, as represented through paintings and narrative poetry. Du Fu's many poems on paintings (*tihua shi* 題畫詩) established this topic as a major poetic subgenre, and chapter three explores the significance of memory at the

center of these groundbreaking inter-medial works. Building on the arguments of chapter one, I contend here that Du Fu approaches painting as a vital material support for remembrance of pre-rebellion court society. The chapter situates Du Fu's poems in relation to those on the same subject by his predecessors and contemporaries, showing that they stretched the limits of prevalent aesthetic values of craftsmanship and illusionism, especially in the representation of memory. Chapter four considers poetic narrative as a medium for constructing the self, focusing on extended autobiographical works that have played a key role in scholars' efforts to piece together Du Fu's biography. The main focus of this chapter is on the formal narrative devices of pieces like "Travels of My Prime" 壯游, which have rarely, if ever, been approached otherwise than as troves of biographical data. Reading for their rhetoric allows us to better understand the strategies whereby "Du Fu" took shape through acts of self-representation.

Du Fu's poetics of memory left a lasting imprint on the history of Chinese literature, and on Chinese imaginings of empire more generally. Among the defining symptoms of the mid-Tang memory crisis was a widespread fascination with pre-rebellion court memorabilia, best represented by Bo Juyi's 白居易 (772-846) famous "Song of Everlasting Pain" 長恨歌 but also including many works of poetry, fiction, and popular anecdote. This project's larger significance lies in its elucidation of the origins of an elegiac tradition that remained tremendously popular during the imperial period not only in China, but throughout East Asia.

Chapter One

The Potter's Wheel and the Temple:

Placing and Performing Historical Memory in Du Fu's Late Poetry

From the spring of 766 to early 768, an undistinguished scholar-official who would one day be considered China's greatest poet made his home in a remote settlement nestled beneath the soaring cliffs of the Yangzi River Three Gorges. Running throughout the more than four hundred poems Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) wrote during this short stay in Kuizhou 夔州 (modern Fengjie County 奉節縣, Chongqing Municipality 重慶市), as their driving concern and defining theme, is memory—of youth and of old friends; of the imperial court in its time of prosperity; and of historical figures whose monuments marked Kuizhou's grimly spectacular landscape. Du Fu's search for lost time has been plausibly explained as a response to his experience of the near-collapse and fragmentation of the Tang empire (618-906) following the An Lushan rebellion (755-763), bereavement over the recent loss of several comrades and patrons,²⁸ and a sharpened sense of his own mortality.²⁹ However, perhaps the most decisive memory-trigger of all was Kuizhou itself, which in the rhetoric of this period became a symbolic antithesis to a peaceful pre-rebellion capital of memory.³⁰

²⁸ Zheng Qian 鄭虔 (685-764), Su Yuanming 蘇源明 (707-764), and Yan Wu 嚴武 (726-765) all passed away within two years of Du Fu's arrival in Kuizhou.

²⁹ These are the primary explanations offered by Mo Lifeng (173), for example.

³⁰ As Eva Shan Chou has written, "Chang'an acquired an antonym in Kuizhou...each comes to depend on the other for definition." See *Reconsidering Tu Fu: Literary Greatness and Cultural Context*, 175. Here and throughout the dissertation I have emended quotations to pinyin Romanization so as to avoid confusion.

This had much to do with Kuizhou's particular history and roles, both of which were a result of its location. Situated midway between the prosperous regions of Shu 蜀 in the west and Chu 楚 to the south, Tang Dynasty Kuizhou was a transit depot and market town perched at the entrance to the most hazardous stretch of river highway in the empire. From the traveler's point of view the Three Gorges were terrifying, a death trap to be passed through and left behind as soon as possible.³¹ The region also straddled the Tang Empire's southwestern border, and was home to a large and diverse population of settled and nomadic tribes. These groups were both feared and exploited by Han settlers, whose own local customs were quite foreign and alienating to outsiders, as will be discussed in Chapter Two. There were hardly any literati living there, and, apart from scattered banquets with the local magistrate and the occasional visitor, Du Fu was left to himself, his family, and his thoughts. The social and cultural isolation of Kuizhou, in addition to the more general contexts of rebellion and old age, was an important catalyst both for his unprecedented productivity and for the turn to memory. Poetry and/as memory became a way to traverse distances and fill the void.

The same geographical conditions that made Kuizhou a traveler's nightmare made it militarily indispensable, and it was known to history primarily as a stronghold of short-lived regimes based in the city of Chengdu. The first of these was led by Gongsun Shu 公孙述, who governed Shu under Wang Mang 王莽 (r. 9-23 A.D.),³² and in the war to

³¹ Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126-1193) put it succinctly: "This is probably the most dangerous place in the entire world." See *Riding the River Home: A Complete and Annotated Translation of Fan Chengda's (1126-1193) Diary of a Boat Trip to Wu (Wuchuan lu)*, trans. James M. Hargett (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2008), 135.

³² On Wang Mang, see Hans Bielenstein, "The Reign of Wang Mang," in *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 1: The Ch'in and Han Empires (221 B.C.-A.D.220)*, Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 223-240.

succeed Wang set himself up in Kuizhou as the White Emperor.³³ White Emperor was unsuccessful in his bid for the throne, but left behind a city bearing his name that became one of the region's defining landmarks.³⁴ It was occupied again after the fall of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) by the armies of the Shu-Han 蜀漢 state (221-263 A.D.), led by Liu Bei 劉備 (161-223) and his famed minister, Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (180-234). Shu-Han also failed to win the empire. However, its claim was widely regarded as legitimate, and its defeat was contemplated as a mysteriously fated tragedy. These lost causes of past civil wars spoke hauntingly to Du Fu about his own chaotic times.

It would thus seem that Kuizhou was a richly storied place; however, for Du Fu it was also profoundly without memory. Its history as a military outpost associated it with destruction and loss rather than preservation, and its monuments reminded him of the erasure and forgetting brought about by war. However, its amnesia was even more the result of a paucity of poetry. To have a history was one thing; to have it widely known through poems was quite another. Kuizhou had been the site of the heroic struggles of the Shu-Han state, and yet prior to Du Fu no prominent poets had settled there long enough to establish it as such. It was in this sense that Du Fu gave Kuizhou a past it did not have before.

The concept of historical memory is useful for thinking about the commemorative poems Du Fu wrote in Kuizhou because it highlights relations between history and the

³³ For Gongsun Shu, see *Hou Han shu*, 13.533; and Bielenstein, "The Later Han Dynasty," in *ibid.*, 254-6. In Han cosmology, white was the color associated with the west, where Gongsun was based.

³⁴ For early Tang poems on the city, see especially Chen Zi'ang 陳子昂 (661-702), "Yearning for Antiquity at White Emperor City" 白帝城懷古, (*QTS*, 84.912); and Li Bo 李白 (701-762), "Departing Early from White Emperor City" 早發白帝城 (*QTS*, 181.1844), among many others. For a discussion of Du Fu's six poems on the city see Jiang Xianwei 蔣先偉, *Du Fu Kuizhou shi lungao* (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 2002), 48-59.

construction of identity. In the poetry of medieval China, places were defined in large part by the significant events that occurred there. As poets commemorated different figures and different deeds, they altered the meaning of the locale in the minds of readers. Thus we can speak of the changing historical memory of Kuizhou and the Three Gorges. However, such invocations of the historical past served at least as much to fashion the identity of the writer, for whom history was above all a reservoir of lessons and role models to be applied in the present. Commemorating a figure like Zhuge Liang was a performance of identification with him through a telling of his story in the place it happened, and as such was an act of self-definition. Du Fu's poetics of historical memory refers to these transformations enacted in and through poems on the identities of place and persona.

The present chapter begins with a brief history of poetry on the Three Gorges region up to Du Fu's time, which will allow us to better understand the cultural and discursive traditions within and against which Du Fu worked. Arguably the most important of these was the subgenre of classical poetry called *huaigu* 懷古, or "yearning for antiquity," the Chinese poetry of place. In the second section I will show that although *huaigu* commemorative poems typically mourned the remoteness of a place's given historical past, there existed a counter-model that explicitly placed a past where none had been previously. This prepares the way for an analysis of Du Fu's commemoration of Yu the Great, the mythic king who created the empire by taming a primal flood. I will argue that Du Fu takes this founding act as a model for his own creation of historical meaning in Kuizhou. The chapter will end with a discussion of Du Fu's commemorations of Zhuge Liang, a minister of the third century. Here I will make the case that Du Fu portrays

Zhuge as a figure of loyal remembrance, and that he approaches the temple as memory's material embodiment and the model for his poems' performances. Throughout I will be arguing that a vital but neglected feature of Du Fu's commemorative poems is what I refer to as "performing the past," which denotes the unconventional rhetoric through which he replicates commemorated acts in poetic form. While placing the past gave meaning to the Three Gorges, performing it invested significance in Du Fu's presence there.

The Three Gorges in Medieval Chinese Poetry

Shortly after arriving in the Three Gorges, Du Fu wrote a series of ten quatrains called "Songs of Kuizhou" 夔州歌, in which he surveys the region's history, topography, and famous landmarks. A kind of versified local gazetteer, "Songs of Kuizhou" will serve as a guide throughout this study, orienting our explorations of a variety of Du Fu's major themes. We begin where his series ends, at a mountain that was without doubt the region's most famous emblem:

Langfeng, Xuanpu,

And Penghu;³⁵

閩風玄圃與蓬壺

In the center there is Gaotang,

Like nothing under heaven.

中有高唐天下無

May I ask, what place is it

That crowns Kuizhou,

借問夔州歷何處

³⁵ Langfeng and Xuanpu are two peaks in the mythical Kunlun 崑崙 mountain range, home of the Queen Mother of the West 西王母. Penghu is another name for Penglai 蓬萊, a mythical mountain in the Sea that was also believed to be inhabited by immortals.

At the Gorges' Gate, where the river's belly

Cradles the city's edge?³⁶

峽門江腹擁城隅

The place that “crowns Kuizhou” is Gaotang 高唐, which Du Fu identifies as the central peak in a topography of sacred mountains. It is fitting, given this aura of mystery, that the poem ends with a question: “what place is it?” also translatable as “where is it” (*he chu* 何處)? The mountain that defines Kuizhou's identity more than any other landmark remains shrouded and unknown. And for good reason, because elusiveness was the signature trait of the spirit whose story first put the Three Gorges on the literary map.

Gaotang was home to the shrine of the Goddess of Wu Mountain 巫山神女. The pair of rhapsodies attributed to Song Yu 宋玉 (fl. 3rd c. B.C.) that first immortalized her—the “Rhapsody on the Gaotang Shrine” 高唐賦 and “Rhapsody on the Goddess” 神女賦—inaugurated the tradition of poetry on the Three Gorges region, and she has remained perhaps its most recognizable representative.³⁷ Her story, as it was known and retold by medieval poets, is encapsulated in the following exchange between King Qingxiang of Chu 楚頃襄王 (r. 298-263 B.C.) and his courtier, which begins the “Rhapsody on the Gaotang Shrine”:

Once King Xiang of Chu and Song Yu were strolling about the terrace of Yunmeng, and they sighted the Gaotang shrine. Above it there was only a cloudy vapor:

³⁶ *DSXZ*, 15.1306-7.

³⁷ For instance, Mao Zedong ended his famous 1956 poem, “Swimming” 游泳, with the lines: “Walls of stone will stand upstream to the west / To hold back Wushan's clouds and rain / Till a smooth lake rises in the narrow gorges. / The mountain goddess if she is still there / Will marvel at a world so changed.” See Mao Tsetung, *Poems* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press: 1976), 31-2. For the Song Yu rhapsodies, see Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531), comp., *Wenxuan*, ed. Li Shan 李善 (630-689) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), 19.875-892.

Abruptly it rose straight up,
 Then suddenly changed appearance.
 In the space of a brief moment,
 It made countless changes and transformations.

The king asked Song Yu,
 What manner of vapor is this?"
 Song Yu replied, "it is what is called Dawn Cloud."

The king said, "What is meant by Dawn Cloud?"

Song Yu replied, "Once when a former king was visiting Gaotang, he became tired and took a daytime nap. He dreamed that he saw a woman who said to him, 'I am the maiden of Wu Mountain, and I am a guest at Gaotang. Having heard that my lord is visiting this place, I wish to offer him pillow and mat.' The king then favored her with his bed. When she left, she bade farewell saying:

'I live on the sunny side of Wu Mountain,
 Among the defiles of a lofty hill.
 Mornings I am Dawn Cloud,
 Evenings I am Pouring Rain.
 Dawn after dawn, dusk after dusk,
 Below the Sun Terrace.'³⁸

This portrayal of the Goddess had become so synonymous with the Gorges by the medieval period that if a poet wished to refer to them, perhaps in a parting poem for an

³⁸ Translation by David Knechtges, *Wen xuan, or, Selections of Refined Literature (Vol. 3)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 325-327.

acquaintance who would be passing through, he had only to mention “the rains of Wu Mountain” 巫山雨, “morning clouds” 朝雲, or any number of similar turns of phrase.

The connection between story and place was no accident of reception, as the rhapsodies themselves present the Goddess as an embodiment of the landscape. No sooner has Song Yu described the dream tryst of the “former king” than he sets off on a virtual tour of the region, offering it to the present king as a series of dazzling, fleeting appearances that “overwhelm one’s power of sight” 奪人目精, and “cannot be fully described” 不可殫形, much like the Goddess herself. The erotic encounter with the Goddess thus becomes an allegory for the acquisition of the territory over which she presides. In both cases, the very qualities of distance, illusoriness, and protean transformation that make the object of desire so alluring also make true possession impossible. No sooner has the king taken them in than they shift shape and depart, leaving him to desire them—and the rhapsody that reveals them—all the more. The Goddess/landscape can only appear, in Edward Schafer’s words, “as a vanished dream, a playful fantasy, or a symbol of an irrecoverable past.”³⁹ The Gorges thus enter poetry in a parable about the impossibility of full description, possession, or mastery.⁴⁰

Song Yu’s telling of the Goddess story set the basic terms for early medieval *shi* poetry on the Gorges. Much of this poetry was written under the *yuefu* title “Wu Mountain is High” 巫山高, after an anonymous ballad of Han Dynasty provenance:

³⁹ Edward H Schafer, *The Divine Woman: Dragon Ladies and Rain Maidens in T’ang Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 83.

⁴⁰ For studies of desire and gender in the Song Yu rhapsodies, see Wai-ye Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3-46; Paul Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 39-72; and Cheng Yu-yu 鄭毓瑜 *Xingbie yu jiaguo: Han Jin cifu de Chu sao lunshu* (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 2006), 2-53.

Shaman Mountain is high, high and huge;	巫山高，高以大
The river Huai is deep, deep and swift.	淮水深，深以逝
I long to return east. Why don't I go?	我欲東歸，害不為
I've perched and have no oars;	我集無高曳
How the waters toss and churn!	水何湯湯回回
Looking out over these waters and gazing afar,	臨水遠望
Tears fall, wetting my clothes.	泣下霑衣
Men on distant paths, in their hearts long to return—	遠道之人心思歸
But what is to be done? ⁴¹	謂之何

The speaker of the original ballad is a stranded traveler, longing to return home in the east, but prevented by the river waters that “toss and churn” 湯湯回回. The rushing river is all that the poem shares with the rhapsodies of Song Yu. It makes no mention of the Goddess. Interestingly, it was not until poems on the Gorges expanded beyond the generic territory of *yuefu* during the Tang that this voice of the homesick traveler would return, adopted by scholar-officials.

In the interim, many *shi* poems were written under the title “Wu Mountain is High”; except for the first line, however, they took the story of the Goddess as their theme. The following version by Wang Rong 王融 (467-493), a prominent poet during the Southern Qi Dynasty (479-502), gives a sense how the story was distilled down to a handful of highlights and a defining mood:

⁴¹ Lu Qinli 逯欽立 (ed.), *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbei chao shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), Han 4.158. See also Yan Qilin 顏其麟 (ed.), *San xia shihui* (Chongqing: Xinan Normal University, 1989), 123. All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

An image in the mind, Shaman Mount is high;	想象巫山高
In faint twilight, Sunlit Terrace is within its folds.	薄暮陽臺曲
Mist and clouds in a moment unfurl then roll up;	煙雲乍舒卷
Ape cries and birdcalls at times cease, then continue.	猿鳥時斷續
That beauty, as if a date could be arranged;	彼美如可期
Waking, she spoke, still fresh in his vision.	寤言紛在矚
Disconsolate, he sat and thought of her;	惓然坐相思
As the autumn wind descended on the courtyard's green leaves. ⁴²	秋風下庭綠

This rendition of the Goddess story reflects the literary tastes of the courtly salons of the Southern Qi in which Wang Rong operated. It is told from the perspective of the Chu king, who, in a witty inversion of stock poetic personae, is cast in a role similar to that favorite object of the literati gaze—the forlorn palace lady. Intermittent ape cries combine with the shifting clouds and mist to create a scene where all is evanescence and illusion, or what the opening line calls “an image in the mind” (*xiang xiang* 想象). This,

⁴² Lu Qinli, Qi 2.1388. Wang’s poem is notable as an early annexation of the trope of saddening ape cries by the Goddess theme. The apes, which soon became ubiquitous in poetry on the Gorges and the Ba region generally, seem to have originated in an anonymous Northern Wei (386-534) tune, “Song of the Three Gorges in Eastern Ba” 巴東三峽歌, which survives in several variants:

In the Three Gorges of Eastern Ba,	
Shaman Gorge is longest;	巴東三峽巫峽長
When apes cry three times,	
Tears soak our skirts.	猿鳴三聲淚湛裳
In the Three Gorges of Eastern Ba,	
Ape cries are sad;	巴東三峽猿鳴悲
When apes cry three times,	
Tears soak our clothes.	猿鳴三聲淚湛衣

Lu Qinli, Jin 18.1021-22. On Wang Rong see Richard Mather, *The Age of Eternal Brilliance: Three Lyric Poets of the Yung-ming Era (483-493) (Volume Two: Hsieh T'iao (464-499) and Wang Jung (467-493))* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 289-292.

The more I think of it, the more vivid it becomes.⁴³

一想一氛氲

Much in this poem affiliates it with Wang Rong's "Wu Mountain is High." It condenses the Gorges region into a handful of mostly familiar landmarks: we recognize signs of the Goddess (the clouds, her shrine), and the ape cries. Most of all, the third couplet's surreal landscape portrayal, which Shen describes "as if within a dream" (*ru meng li* 如夢裏), is clearly intended to recall the disorientation of King Qingxiang, much like Wang's "image in the mind." However, such familiar tropes highlight the poem's central innovation: Shen Quanqi presents them not as motifs drawn from a famous story, but as personal experiences recalled from childhood. He thus makes the king's memory his own, appropriating the Goddess *topos* and redeploying its rhetoric autobiographically. Conversely, however, by taking King Qingxiang as a model, and accordingly emphasizing his memory's dreamlike qualities, Shen calls the substance of his past experience into question. Making his memory like the king's, it becomes as chimerical and mysterious as the Goddess herself. Shen Quanqi's poem thus demonstrates nicely how Song Yu's rhapsodies set the terms in and against which innovative portrayals of the Gorges had to work, even when they were presented as true to life.

As Shen Quanqi's poem attests, a major new development in poetry on the Gorges during the early Tang was the representation of personal experience. Whereas previously the region had been treated predominantly as the setting of an historical romance, retold in the third-person, it was increasingly written of as a place passed through by staffers of the Tang bureaucracy. The circulation of elites through the Gorges was of course nothing

⁴³ Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 (1645-1719) *et al.* (eds.), *Quan Tang shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, rpt. 2003), 96.1038. Hereafter cited as *QTS*. On Shen Quanqi see Liu Xu 劉昫 (887-946) *et al.* (eds.), *Jiu Tangshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 190B.5017 (hereafter *JTS*); Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of the Early T'ang* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 339-363.

new. What *was* new, or what the surviving record suggests became more prevalent, was their treatment of the region as a setting for their own stories and as a mirror of their concerns. Although the Goddess continued to exert considerable influence on such depictions, beginning in the Tang, she was increasingly displaced by the literati and the figures from imperial history which whom they chose to identify.

This new development is exemplified by the poems of Yang Jiong 楊炯 (650-c. 694). A literary prodigy who enjoyed a mostly successful career at the court of Empress Wu 武則天 (r. 690-705), Yang was demoted in 685 to a provincial post as punishment for an uncle's rebellious activities.⁴⁴ On the way he traveled through the Three Gorges, and wrote poems on each of them in extended pentasyllabic "old-style" verse. These are the first poems we have that present the Gorges largely as they would be in the classic works of Li Bo 李白 (701-762) and, especially, Du Fu. Rather than treating them as a single region represented by Wu Mountain and the Goddess, Yang approaches each gorge as a distinct locale with a history of its own. "Guangxi Gorge" 廣溪峽 devotes many lines to the history of the Shu-Han state (221-263), which would become synonymous with the region through Du Fu's works. "Xiling Gorge" 西陵峽 laments the fall of the Chu capital, Ying 郢, at the hands of invading Qin armies. Even "Wu Gorge" 巫峽, which obliquely refers to the Goddess, treats her not as the seductress of King Qingxiang, but as the daughter of the God of Heaven 天帝 who died young and was posthumously enfeoffed on Wu Mountain, in the form of a fragrant plant:

But where, now, is the Fair One?

美人今何在

⁴⁴ On Yang Jiong see *JTS*, 190A.5000-4; Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 *Tangdai shiren congkao* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 1-21.

The *lingzhi* wafts its scent in vain.⁴⁵

靈芝徒有芳

By reading the Gorges as sites of imperial history—thereby displacing the Goddess from her dominant position—and by relating them all to his own concerns as an exiled official, Yang Jiong’s triptych anticipated much of the best-known poetry on the region.

During the High Tang, poetry on the Gorges tended increasingly to associate them with the great figures and events in the political history of the empire, and less with the story of the Goddess, who lived on in *yuefu* versions of “Wu Mountain is High.” As an example of this trend, it is worth noting that of the nearly 400 poems that survive from Du Fu’s two years in Kuizhou, not a single one is wholly devoted to her. She is mentioned in a number of pieces, but only in passing. Rather, alongside the heroes of imperial history, Du Fu chose to commemorate the author of her story, in the second of five “Singing My Feelings at Ancient Sites” 詠懷古跡:

Fluttering, falling—how deeply I know

Song Yu’s grief,⁴⁶

搖落深知宋玉悲

Gracefully free and classically elegant,

He also is my teacher.

風流儒雅亦吾師

I gaze in sadness over a thousand autumns

With the same sprinkling tears.

悵望千秋一灑淚

Desolate and remote, in other dynasties,

⁴⁵ For the three poems, see *QTS*, 50.611.

⁴⁶ Du Fu alludes here not to the rhapsodies on the Goddess but to another piece attributed to Song Yu, the first of “The Nine Arguments” 九辯 included in the *Lyrics of Chu* 楚辭 anthology, which begins, “Alas for the breath of autumn! / Wan and drear! flower and leaf fluttering fall and turn to decay” 悲哉秋之為氣也。蕭瑟兮草木搖落而變衰。 Translation by David Hawkes, *Ch’u Tz’u, The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 92. Hong Xingzu 洪興祖 (1090-1155) ed., *Chuci buzhu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 8.182.

We live in different times.	蕭條異代不同時
In his old house amidst rivers and mountains	
His writings survive in vain.	江山故宅空文藻
Clouds and rain and the terrace in the wilds—	
How could they have been but dreams?	雲雨荒臺豈夢思
In the end, the palaces of Chu	
Were entirely destroyed.	最是楚宮俱泯滅
The boatmen point and gesture	
But up to now they are unsure. ⁴⁷	舟人指點到今疑

This turn to the author, apparent also in the poems of Li Bo, is part of the more general turn, signaled already by Yang Jiong, from the Goddess to political figures and the pathos of literati exile in *shi* poetry on the Gorges. The structure of the series in which the poem above appears demonstrates this orientation by placing literary exemplars in a sequence connecting them with heroes of the political realm, discussed below. As in the poems of Shen Quanqi and Yang Jiong, Du Fu's piece displaces the Goddess in favor of a topic more rooted in autobiography, but still employs the language of her story. Here she still provides the terms for the speaker's relation to Song Yu—described as a “teacher,” or “model” (*shi* 師)—and his time. Traces of the teacher (a house, writings, and the palaces he served in) appear now to be “empty” and insubstantial; the signature attributes of the king's dream now appear in the form of ruins and remnants. Thus, like Shen Quanqi, Du Fu takes the figure of King Qingxiang as paradigmatic for a site-specific representation

⁴⁷ *DSXZ*, 17.1501-02. For another translation, see Hans Frankel, “The Contemplation of the Past in T'ang Poetry,” in *Perspectives on the T'ang*, ed. Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 359.

of memory. However, unlike Shen, this memory is not Du Fu's own, but is a commemoration of a figure with whom he identifies.

In sum, this history of the Three Gorges region in *shi* poetry up to Du Fu's time shows that place was first and foremost a *topos*, a construct of cultural memory mediated by historically shifting discursive practices.⁴⁸ This point is only reinforced by the fact that when, during the early Tang, writers like Shen Quanqi and Yang Jiong sought to represent more personal experiences of the region, the Goddess story still provided their basic terms. However, poems on places were not *only* products of trends in poetic practice, but also played a significant role in shifting the terms by which place was known and written of. The Goddess was displaced by concrete acts of representation that turned from her to other figures, a discursive counterpart to the assertion of Tang power over far-flung localities. In the following section, we will argue that such revisions of regional identity were an essential function, from its inception, of the dominant poetic mode in which places were represented during the Tang.

***Huaidu*: Placing the Past in Chinese Poetry**

Given poetry's ubiquity in the social and political life of imperial China, it is no surprise that poems played a crucial role in the construction of a place's cultural meanings; to think of a place was to recall its famous poems. This interdependence of poetry and place is captured most vividly in "inscribed landscapes": text written directly

⁴⁸ Stephen Owen, from whom I borrow the notion of a "Kuizhou of poetry," has made a comparable argument about the city of Jinling (modern Nanjing). See "Place: Meditation on the Past at Jinling," *HJAS*, 50.2 (December, 1990), 417-57.

on the land.⁴⁹ However, poems often laid even stronger claim to a place by becoming popularly associated with it in cultural memory, as Du Fu's poems became associated with Kuizhou. Such poems were not necessarily chiseled into cliff faces, but most were written in accordance with the conventions of a particular subgenre of classical poetry, called *huaigu*, or “yearning for antiquity.”⁵⁰

Medieval Chinese poetry was a social art, and consisted of a repertoire of subgenres corresponding to a fixed number of occasions. Banquets, farewells, visiting a friend—these were some of the occasions that traditionally called for poetry, and each had by the eighth century acquired conventions that defined the expectations of readers and writers. *Huaigu* was the subgenre employed when visiting an historic site, or, as an eighth-century source put it, “passing by where the ancients met victory and defeat” 經古人之成敗.⁵¹ As this definition makes clear, the defining feature of *huaigu* is the presence of the writer in a place. Being there is what separates it from the “poem on history” (*yongshi shi* 詠史詩), which was written in response to reading. This is why Kuizhou could appear to Du Fu as a blank slate, awaiting inscription. Unlike most other places, no poets had stayed in Kuizhou long enough for its landscape to be inscribed with *huaigu*.

⁴⁹ Richard E. Strassberg, *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁵⁰ *Huaigu* has been the subject of a number of studies. See especially Stephen Owen, “Deadwood: The Barren Tree from Yu Xin to Han Yu,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, and Reviews (CLEAR)* 1.2 (July, 1979), 157-79; “Place: Meditation on the Past at Jinling”; *The Poetry of the Early T'ang*, esp. 38-40, 206-9; and *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Traditional Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), esp. 16-32. Other important studies include Hans Frankel, “The Contemplation of the Past in T'ang Poetry,” 345-65; and Zhang Runjing 張潤靜, *Tangdai yongshi huaigu shi yanjiu* (Shanghai: Sanlian, 2009). For a study of how time is treated in *huaigu*, see Chi Xiao, “Lyric Archi-Occasion: Coexistence of ‘Now’ and Then,” *CLEAR* 15 (Dec. 1993), 17-35.

⁵¹ Wang Liqi 王利器 (ed.), *Wenjing mifulun jiaozhu* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuike chubanshe, 1983), 298.

A typical example of the subgenre will help clarify how Du Fu's *huaigu* both build on and go beyond convention. This is "Climbing Mount Xian With Others" 與諸子登峴山 by Meng Haoran 孟浩然 (c. 689-740):

In human affairs there is succession and loss;	人事有代謝
Departures and arrivals make up past and present.	往來成古今
Mountains and rivers retain magnificent scenic traces;	江山留勝跡
Now my generation ascends to take in the view again.	我輩復登臨
The falling tide is shallow in Yuliang;	水落魚梁淺
In a cold sky, you can see deep into Meng marsh.	天寒夢澤深
Yang Gong's stele is still here;	羊公碑尚在
We read it through and tears wet our sleeves. ⁵²	讀罷淚沾襟

In its structure and mood, Meng's poem is characteristic of eighth-century *huaigu* generally. He begins with a truth: people live and die, coming and going in cycles. He then refers to the present occasion as an instance of this truth: his group has now come to Mount Xian like those who came before. Next we have a description of the view he sees, and the poem closes with tears for the figure commemorated by the stele. Variations on this formula are found in the great majority of *huaigu* poems.

The melancholy fixation on transience and repetition is also common to the subgenre, though Meng's poem takes it further than most. The reason for this lies in the place he is

⁵² *QTS*, 160.1644. Translation modified from Owen, *Remembrances*, 24. See also Frankel, "The Contemplation of the Past in T'ang Poetry," 345.

writing on, Mount Xian, and the man associated with it, Yang Hu 羊祜 (221-278).⁵³ A local magistrate, Yang Hu was known for climbing Mount Xian to gaze out and lament the generations that had come and gone before him. A stele was erected after he died, preserving his memory and giving others like Meng Haoran a site at which to reenact his rite of mourning in poetry. This illustrates how the conventions and particular elegiac mood of typical *huaigu* depend on a place being already inscribed with a past, and preferably a richly layered one, like Mount Xian. A place with little or no apparent history, like Kuizhou, would call for different, unconventional *huaigu*.

Stephen Owen has persuasively traced the origins of Chinese commemorative poetry to a poem from the *Shijing* (*Classic of Poetry*) and its canonical Mao School interpretation.⁵⁴ Here is the first stanza of “The Millet is Lush” 黍離:

There the millet is lush, so lush	彼黍離離
There the grain is going to sprout	彼稷之苗
I walk here slowly, slowly	行邁靡靡
My heart within is shaking, shaking	中心搖搖
Those who know me	知我者
Say my heart is worried;	謂我心憂
Those who know me not	不知我者
Ask what I am seeking.	謂我何求
Ageless Gray Heaven—	悠悠蒼天

⁵³ Yang Hu’s official biography is *Jin shu* 34.1013-25.

⁵⁴ See Owen, *Remembrances*, 20-22.

What kind of man is this?⁵⁵

此何人哉

An emotionally distraught speaker walks by a field of millet, and complains of being misjudged, a common *topos* in the first section of the *Classic of Poetry*. Where is the commemoration here? This does not appear to be a place where the ancients met victory and defeat. However, to the early scholastic commentators, appearances were almost always deceiving, and they read the poem differently:

“The Millet is Lush” is a lament for the Zhou ancestral capital. A Great Officer of Zhou was passing the former ancestral temples and palace buildings, which were entirely covered by millet. He lamented the collapse of the Zhou royal house and tarried there, unable to depart. He then wrote this poem.⁵⁶

黍離，閔宗周也。周大夫行役至于宗周，過故宗廟宮室盡為禾黍。閔周室之顛覆，彷徨不忍去而作是詩也。

The ingenious reader transforms the anonymous speaker of the poem into a “Great Officer of Zhou” 周大夫, and the millet, rather than filling just any field, is said to cover the ruins of the Western Zhou capital. Passing by these buried ruins, the minister mourns the fall of the great dynasty, and *huaigu* is born—not in a poem but in the Mao Preface’s interpretation of a poem. This anonymous Zhou Dynasty official has been taken as a prototype of *huaigu* poets like Meng Haoran; however, I claim that *huaigu* originates not only with the figure of the minister, but in the feat of forced interpretation that invented him out of thin air, and which was the specialty of Han Dynasty allegorists.⁵⁷ These

⁵⁵ *Mao shi zhushu* 1/4.147-8. Translations of the poem and preface are modified from Owen, 20-22.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ See Haun Saussy, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), esp. 103-5.

readers place the ruins beneath the millet field, constituting it as a site of imperial history. *Huaigu* as an act of “placing the past,” more than the typical *huaigu* represented by Meng Haoran, provides the precedent for Du Fu’s commemorations in Kuizhou.

The Force of the Potter’s Wheel

When Du Fu came to the Three Gorges he faced a problem opposite to that of Meng Haoran on Mount Xian. Rather than a place saturated with history, Kuizhou seemed to lack historical traces. *Huaigu*, again, required the presence of a poet; and it was primarily this kind of poem that put a place on the map in medieval China. Before Du Fu, the Three Gorges region was mainly associated with the Goddess of Wu Mountain, whom poets could write about without ever leaving the capital. Du Fu, however, sought out a representative of the region whose story could mirror his own venture into this uncharted territory.

In “A Song of Kuizhou” 夔州歌 a series of ten quatrains on Kuizhou’s landmarks written shortly after his arrival there in spring of 766, Du Fu orients his panoramic vision by picturing the region at the mythical beginnings of imperial history:

To the east of Central Ba

Are the Eastern Ba mountains;

中巴之東巴東山

The Long River, opened and cleared,

Flows in between them.⁵⁸

江水開闢流其間

The Yangzi River was “opened and cleared” (*kai pi* 開闢), a term that refers in a general way to the ancient sages’ acts of subduing wild nature and laying the foundations of

⁵⁸ *DSXZ*, 13.1302.

Chinese civilization. The same term appears again in this couplet from “The Mouth of the Gorges” 峽口:

Since opening and clearing it has faced natural barriers;	開闢當天險
Guarding this far corner, a single river pass. ⁵⁹	防隅一水關

Kai pi is a common expression in classical literature, and Du Fu’s words would be unremarkable were they uttered elsewhere. In relation to Kuizhou, however, they point to a more specific act of “opening and clearing,” carried out by one of the figures Du Fu most closely associated with his new home.

This was Yu the Great 大禹 (also known as “Yu of Xia” 夏禹, or “The Xia Descendant” 夏后), the mythical sage king and founder of the legendary Xia Dynasty, whom Du Fu invokes at the end of “Written on Moving to Kuizhou” 移居夔州作, his first poem from the region:

I lay sick on my pillow in Yun’an county,	伏枕雲安縣
Then moved to dwell in White Emperor City.	遷居白帝城
Spring knows the parting of hastened willows;	春知催柳別
The river offers its freshness to a departing boat.	江與放船清
There is farm work—I hear people talking;	農事聞人說
In mountain light I see the feelings of the birds.	山光見鳥情
From the feats of Yu, a surplus of broken rock;	禹功饒斷石
Proceeding further, the land levels slightly. ⁶⁰	且就土微平

⁵⁹ DSXZ, 18.1554.

Du Fu reads the jagged rocks strewn along the banks of the Yangzi as the traces of “the feats of Yu” 禹功. These were the labors for which Yu was credited in a number of early texts: quelling a great flood that had plunged the realm into chaos by dredging the rivers and leading the floodwaters to the sea.⁶¹ In the same act, Yu gave archetypal shape to the imperial state, as the newly cleared rivers formed the boundaries of the “Nine Provinces” 九州. Yu traveled along them, assessing the character and productivity of each province and delivering samples to the centrally located court. His flood-quelling “feats” (*gong* 功) led directly to the circulation of “tribute” (*gong* 貢) that defined the empire as an ordered political-economic space.⁶² The portrayal of these founding acts in the “Tribute of Yu” chapter of the *Shangshu* (*Classic of Documents*) inaugurated the tradition of Chinese geography.

Du Fu’s association of Yu with the Three Gorges, novel in the classical poetry of the time, was an act of memory and personal identification. “Written on Moving to Kuizhou” installs Yu as a representative, not only of Kuizhou, but of Du Fu as well in the context of his search for a dwelling place there. Seeking a place to settle in this strange and forbidding land, Du Fu suggests he is following in the footsteps of the civilizer of the diluvian world. This is not unlike Meng Haoran’s identification with Yang Hu in “Climbing Mount Xian with Others.” There too the focus was on “knowing” a historical figure for what they did through a repetition of their defining deeds in the place they were

⁶⁰ *DSXZ*, 15.1265.

⁶¹ For an in-depth study of the Yu legend in the context of ancient Chinese flood myths and cosmogonies, see Mark Lewis, *The Flood Myths of Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

⁶² In Lewis’s words, “While tribute was a movement of goods, it was a movement that served to define the structure of space. The arrival of tribute marked the capital as the center of the world, while the sending of tribute identified each region as a periphery.” See *Flood Myths*, 31.

done. This may help explain why Du Fu should be among the first *shi* poets to consistently associate Yu with the Gorges. While he was not the first to write about traveling in the region, he was certainly the first that we know of to write about making a home there.⁶³

A closer look at the language of “Written on Moving to Kuizhou” reveals more about Du Fu’s image of this place. Du Fu’s exact phrase is: “the land levels slightly” 土微平. Wang Zhu 王洙 (997-1057) elaborates: “Moving through the Gorges, all was brought about by opening and chiseling (*kai zao*). Therefore there is little level land, and only Kuizhou is a bit level” 沿峽皆因開鑿而成，故少平土，惟夔州稍平耳。⁶⁴ Du Fu thus presents the physical rock formations of the Gorges as an ambivalent monument. They commemorate the making-habitable or “leveling” 平 (*ping*, also “pacifying”) of a primordial wilderness, but do so precisely by displaying the uneven, uninhabitable remains left over from Yu’s work.⁶⁵ Kuizhou, the Gorges say, is only “slightly” civilized, only slightly fit for human life; they are monuments to Yu’s hydrology as an unfinished project that, Du Fu suggests, his act of moving in will take up and carry out.

Du Fu’s most in-depth portrayal of and identification with Yu, however, occurs in “Yearning for Antiquity at Qutang Gorge” 瞿唐懷古, also from 766. This poem is devoted entirely to Qutang Gorge as Yu’s monumental inscription, commemorating the

⁶³ The hypothesis that Du Fu identified Yu with the act of “making a home” in Kuizhou is strengthened by the allusion to him in “Brushwood Gate” 柴門 (discussed below), another poem on moving house.

⁶⁴ Quoted in *DSXZ*, 15.1265.

⁶⁵ Du Fu’s association of Yu’s deeds with *ping* and the habitability of land likely derive from *Mencius* 3a.4 and, especially, 3b.9, in which the taming of the flood results in the land becoming habitable and inaugurates a history of civilizing figures in which Mencius includes himself. See D.C. Lau, trans., *Mencius* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 72-3.

creation of the place. It differs from Du Fu's other invocations of Yu also in the present occasion which Yu's deeds are made to reflect, and in the unconventional way in which the poem mirrors the commemorated act. I will delve into this poem in some detail, in order to show how Du Fu imagines Yu as an assistant to a larger creative force, and that this enables him to present Yu's inscription of the land as a model for his own writing of place.

From the southwest, a myriad valleys pour forth;	西南萬壑注
A formidable opponent, two cliffs open apart.	勁敵兩崖開
The earth and the mountain's roots split;	地與山根裂
The river arrives from the moon cave.	江從月窟來
The carving accomplished, it faces White Emperor,	削成當白帝
And empty mountain folds hide Yang Terrace.	空曲隱陽臺
Yes, the feats of channeling and chiseling are lovely,	疏鑿功雖美
But O, how great was the force of the potter's wheel! ⁶⁶	陶鈞力大哉

In “Yearning for Antiquity at Qutang Gorge,” Yu's deed is represented through a series of its colossal consequences: the river gushes forth; great masses of rock crack open. Each of the first four lines ends with a verb—“pours,” “opens,” “splits,” “arrives”—simulating the force behind the act. Halfway through the poem, however, the action abruptly stops. “The carving accomplished,” Qutang Gorge stands as a made thing, a carved and “lovely” (*mei* 美) work of art. However, this aesthetic appraisal of the poem's subject is explicitly contrasted, in the exclamation of the final line, to a more adequate

⁶⁶ DSXZ, 18.1558.

interpretation: “But O, how great was the force of the potter’s wheel”! In order to understand the poem we need to take a closer look at these final lines. What is the significance of this contrast between “deed” 功 and “force” 力? What does Du Fu mean by the “the force of the potter’s wheel” 陶鈞?

The potter’s wheel began as a metaphor for kingship, specifically the ideal of transformative rule by virtuous example.⁶⁷ However, it belongs to a larger rhetoric of creative transformation employed by Tang poets, often to write about natural wonders. This rhetoric drew heavily on an artisanal vocabulary; alongside the potter’s wheel are found carpenters’ squares and compasses, smelting furnaces, and other tools of various trades. At its center was the force/figure of *Zaohua* 造化, the meanings of which range from a natural process of “transformation” to a quite anthropomorphic “Fashioner.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ For example, we read in the “Biographies of Lu Zhonglian and Zou Yang” 魯仲連鄒陽列傳 in Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (c. 145-87 B.C.) *Shiji*: “The sage king controls the age and tames customs; he alone transforms them upon the potter’s wheel.” 聖王制世御俗，獨化於陶鈞之上。A gloss on this passage explains the logic of the figure: “The wheel is the round thing that turns underneath the potter’s model. Because of its ability to regulate/control (*zhi*) the size of implements, it is compared to heaven.” 陶家名模下圓轉者為鈞，以其能制器為大小，比之於天。The potter’s wheel thus refers to the potter and the craft of pottery in general, which in turn functions as a metaphor for the creative powers of Heaven 天。Read back into the *Shiji* passage, Heaven-as-potter becomes a model for conceiving the work of the sage king, who “regulates the age and tames customs” (*zhi shi yu su* 制世御俗)。Heaven and the ruler are defined, through this metaphor, by their shared capacity to *zhi* 制 (“control,” “determine”) the raw material of nature and humanity upon which they work. See Sima Qian, *Shiji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 83.2477.

⁶⁸ Traceable to the “Great Ancestral Teacher” 大宗師 chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, *Zaohua* and its kin were regularly invoked in Tang poems on mountains, and, especially on marvels located in far-flung regions of the empire. See Edward H. Schafer, “The Idea of Created Nature in T’ang Literature,” *Philosophy East and West* 15:2 (1965), 155. On the Fashioner as an image for the poet in the mid-Tang poetry of Han Yu (768-824) and Meng Jiao (751-814), see Shang Wei, “Prisoner and Creator: The Self-Image of the Poet in Han Yu and Meng Jiao,” *CLEAR* 16 (1994), 19-40. Du Fu may well have contributed to *Zaohua*’s mid-Tang rise to prominence.

Many of Du Fu's commentators took his potter's wheel to be an indirect reference to *Zaohua*.⁶⁹

However, if *Zaohua* is behind the wheel, so to speak, where does that leave Yu? As we have noted, Du Fu seems to credit Yu with “channeling and chiseling” the Gorges, following a solid tradition. Is “Yearning for Antiquity at Qutang Gorge,” after all, a commemoration of the Fashioner? This is unlikely, for it would be a strange *huaigu* indeed that commemorated a transcendent force or being outside of human history (even that of the sages).⁷⁰ And *Zaohua* was so often featured in poems praising natural wonders that it would be only natural for Du Fu to credit him (or it) here.

I would argue that a better reading of Yu's relationship to *Zaohua* in “Yearning for Antiquity at Qutang Gorge” would not pit them against each other as rivals, forcing an either/or decision between “authors” of the gorge, but would see them as collaborators. Du Fu suggests the solution himself in the following excerpt from “Brushwood Gate” 柴門, another Kuizhou poem on moving house:

Here begins the gateway of the gorges;	峽門自此始
Narrowest of all, it contains but a floating raft.	最窄容浮查
Yu's feats assisted the Fashioner (<i>Zaohua</i>);	禹功翊造化

⁶⁹ A certain “Mr. Shi” 師氏, cited by Qiu Zhao'ao, asserts that the potter's wheel “is borrowed to evoke the Fashioner” 借以喻造化. See *DSXZ*, 18.1559. Tang poets used *taojun* and *Zaohua* in similar contexts and in similar ways.

⁷⁰ Huang Sheng 黃生 (1622-after 1696) recognized the conundrum. His solution was to suggest that Du Fu included Yu to accord with the conventions of the subgenre: “It seems that since the poem was a *huaigu*, [Du Fu] did not dare forget Yu's traces; and yet the barrier [of the Gorges] was fashioned by Heaven, so he also could not cover up Heaven's craftsmanship.” 蓋題屬懷古，不敢忘禹之迹。而險由天造，亦不可沒天之工。 See *DSXZ*, 18.1558-9.

Channeling and chiseling, he ventured into uneven lands.⁷¹ 疏鑿就鼓斜

Yu's labors "assisted" (*yi* 翊) *Zaohua*. Not only is there no question of who (or what) is doing the dredging (it is clearly Yu), but the verb *yi* places the figures in a specific relationship—of minister to ruler or servant to master. Yu, the poem says, carried out his particular works in the service of the Fashioner's more comprehensive project. This is the relation that best explains the final couplet of "Yearning for Antiquity at Qutang Gorge." Praise for the "force of the potter's wheel" does not transfer credit for the gorge's creation from Yu to *Zaohua*, but adds glory to Yu's deeds by commemorating them as part of an even grander enterprise.

The upshot of this reading is that, as an assistant to the Fashioner, Yu becomes a figure of self-identification for Du Fu as a writer. Though they began as figures for sagely kingship on a model of heavenly transformation, potter's wheels began working shortly thereafter as metaphors for artistic conception and production. The following passage from Liu Xie's 劉勰 (c. 465-522) famous sixth-century literary treatise, *Wenxin diaolong* (*Dragon Carvings of the Literary Mind*), provides an example:

Therefore, for the smelting (*tao jun*) of literary thought, what is valuable is to be empty and quiet.⁷²

是以陶鈞文思，貴在虛靜。

Here, the potter's wheel evokes the process of formulating ideas for literary composition. The potter's wheel worked in aesthetic discourse much as it did in the discourse on kingship: as a byword for Heaven conceived as a creative, shaping, regulatory force. In

⁷¹ *DSXZ*, 19.1643.

⁷² Zhou Zhenfu, ed. *Wenxin diaolong xiangzhu* (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005), 396.

the same way, potters and other divine artisans (notably the personified *Zaohua*) provided models for poets, painters, and others who could thereby conceive of their work as participating in the total artwork of the imperial cosmos. In one poem, Du Fu writes, “In court debates, I responded to the Fashioner” 廷爭酬造化; in another, he praises his friend by saying, “Your feats were fit for the Fashioner’s furnace” 功安造化爐.⁷³ Thus, when he writes, “Yu’s feats assisted the Fashioner” (explicitly in “Brushwood Gate” and implicitly in “Yearning for Antiquity at Qutang Gorge”), he places Yu in the grammatical position of the great artist, an association reinforced by praising the gorge as “lovely.” All of this strongly suggests that in “Yearning for Antiquity at Qutang Gorge” it is writing that Yu’s labors are meant to symbolize.

It thus appears that, in commemorating Yu’s founding inscription, Du Fu’s poem tells an allegory of its own creation of place. Read in this way, the final line’s opposition between a lovely “feat” 功 and the “force” or “strength” 力 of the potter’s wheel presents a choice not only between ways of considering the landscape, but between modes of reading and writing *huaigu*. Like the monument that it portrays, a *huaigu* can be read as a fixed and finished “deed,” or it can be read as a “force,” something that continues to act upon and shape its surroundings.

Du Fu declares his preference for this second, active reading of commemorative art at the end of the poem; but I claim that his poem also “performs” it in another way. A

⁷³ The first line is from Du Fu’s poem on departing from the Three Gorges, “In spring of the third year of the Dali reign period, at White Emperor City, I set out by boat through Qutang Gorge. I have lived in Kuifu a long time but am going to drift around in Jiangling, and composed a poem of forty rhymes in all” 大曆三年春白帝城放船出瞿塘峽久居夔府將適江陵漂泊有詩凡四十韻 (*DSXZ*, 21.1870). The second is from “Mourning for Revenue Manager Zheng of Taizhou and Vice Director Su” 哭台州鄭司戶蘇少監 (*DSXZ*, 14.1191). For similar uses by other Tang poets, see Schafer, “The Idea of Created Nature.”

typical *huaigu*, we remarked earlier, would begin with a statement of general principle (“In human affairs there is succession and loss”) or a reference to the site of the commemorative occasion. Du Fu’s poem, however, begins with neither, but starts in *medias res*, with cracking rock and gushing water. The full first half of the poem dramatizes Yu’s work in narrative time, and even simulates its power with a string of final, active verbs. Narrating the making of the gorge itself (instead of describing its finished form) Du Fu’s poem performs the kind of reading it advocates in the final couplet, and calls to be read accordingly.

This plea was not lost on Huang Sheng, who wrote in his concluding comments to the poem: “This poem’s exquisitely craggy lines are also like something the Five Strongmen chiseled out” 此詩奇險之句亦若假鑿於五丁者。⁷⁴ Whether these “exquisitely craggy lines” refer to content or to prosody, Huang recognizes the poem as an inscription of labor, just as Du Fu had recognized the gorge, adding a link to the chain of commemorative reading.⁷⁵ I would suggest that Huang’s remark points us toward an important and largely unexplored dimension of *huaigu* commemoration: the performative representation of exemplary deeds. This will be explored in greater detail in the following section.

To summarize, in this section I have shown how, in “Longing for the Past at Qutang Gorge,” Du Fu places Yu the Great in Kuizhou as its creator and historical representative. For Du Fu, Yu fashioned the Three Gorges in the service of *Zaohua*, thus making them comparable to his own act of writing. Yu’s inscription of imperial time/space becomes a

⁷⁴ *DSXZ*, 18.1559.

⁷⁵ I am indebted to Wendy Swartz for the alerting me to the possibility that Huang is talking about sound here, not sense.

model for Du Fu to conceive of himself and his poetry as actively shaping Kuizhou into a site of history, something his poems would indeed go on to do.

Zhuge Liang and the Temple

Zhuge Liang towers over all the other figures Du Fu memorialized during his time in Kuizhou. The poems dedicated to him stand alone both in number, and in their great formal variety, which ranges from the quatrain to regulated verse and the old-style ballad. It seems that Du Fu sought to lodge Zhuge's memory in every poetic form available to him. But what has characterized these poems most of all for centuries of readers, what has made some of them among the most famous poems in the Chinese language, is their emotional intensity. They have been read as exemplifying the passionate identification with a figure from the past, through which a poet expresses his present concerns, that is often taken to be the essence of *huaigu* in general. However, as I have suggested regarding Du Fu's commemoration of Yu the Great, such mutually defining identification is asserted through a number of rhetorical means, only one of which is explicit verbal statement. Analysis of this rhetoric promises a fuller understanding of the production of exemplarity—how the selection of defining traits or deeds helps shape the memory of figures from the past—as well as its transmission—how a poem stages a translated reenactment of those same symbolized virtues. I will argue in this section that Du Fu singles out loyal remembrance as Zhuge's defining virtue, that he focuses on the temple as its material embodiment, and that he takes the structure and function of the temple as the model for his poems' performances.

The penultimate quatrain of “A Song of Kuizhou” begins with a declaration concerning a temple:

The Martial Lord’s memorial temple

Must never be forgotten.⁷⁶

武侯祠堂不可忘

According to Du Fu’s phrasing, it is not Zhuge Liang (“the Martial Lord”), but his memorial temple (*citang*, 祠堂), that “must never be forgotten.” This seemingly slight distinction is in fact an instance of a significant pattern. Similar displacements of the commemorated subject by memorial objects and acts recur in nearly all the Zhuge Liang poems. It is the cypress tree in the temple courtyard that occupies the following three lines of this quatrain, and which is the subject of the famous “Ballad of an Ancient Cypress” 古柏行, discussed below. Zhuge’s wall-painted portrait is the focus of two other quatrains. A temple to his patron, Liu Bei, was located nearby, and Du Fu repeatedly casts it as a counterpart to Zhuge’s own. Finally, there was the temple in Chengdu, which Du Fu had visited and written of in 760, and which provides yet another counterpoint to the temple in Kuizhou. Before considering these poems in more detail, it suffices to note that they give the media of memory (temples, trees, and portraits) a prominence far in excess of convention. Much more than backdrops for reflections on exemplary deeds, mere spurs to the proper subject of remembrance, they become poetic subjects in their own right. Why this inordinate focus on media in *huaigu* for Zhuge Liang?

The portrayal of Zhuge in his *Sanguo zhi* (*Record of the Three Kingdoms*) biography, which Du Fu certainly knew well, played an important part. One of its most prominent

⁷⁶ *DSXZ*, 13.1305.

themes is Zhuge's loyalty to Liu Bei, the ambitious garrison commander who would later declare himself emperor of the state of Shu-Han.⁷⁷ Their rapport was memorably encapsulated in the so-called "Three Visits to the Thatched Hut" (*san gu maolu*) episode, in which Liu Bei repeatedly called on Zhuge in person to secure his help in opposing Cao Cao's 曹操 (155-220) northern armies. This classic recognition scene established their relationship as one of singular mutual understanding and interdependence.⁷⁸ Zhuge Liang at once became Liu's closest advisor, serving in turns as ambassador, battle strategist, administrator, and regent to his ineffectual heir. Through such devoted service, as portrayed in his biography, he proved his loyalty and gratitude to the one who had recognized and employed his talent.

Kuizhou was a site of particular significance in this story. In 219, Liu Bei had attempted to retake Jing province from Sun Quan 孫權 (182-252), and to avenge the death of his longtime friend, Zhang Fei 張飛 (d. 221). His army was badly beaten, and he retreated by stages up the Yangzi River, eventually settling at the mouth of the Three Gorges. He built a palace, which he named "Eternal Peace" 永安, and died there in 223. Before his death, Liu Bei summoned Zhuge Liang and gave his final orders: Zhuge was to act as regent to his son, Liu Shan 劉禪 (207-271), and if the boy should prove incapable, he was to take the throne himself. Zhuge declined this last offer, though its conditions seem to have been met, and served the benighted "Later Ruler" for his remaining ten years.

⁷⁷ Zhuge Liang's official biography is found in Chen Shou 陳壽 (233-297), *Sanguo zhi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 35.Shu 5.

⁷⁸ See Eric Henry, "Chu-ko Liang in the Eyes of His Contemporaries," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52.2 (1992), 589-612.

In the hindsight of history, the death of Liu Bei and accession of Liu Shan marked the beginning of the end for Shu-Han, which even Zhuge's preternatural prowess could not reverse. The passing of the virtuous ruler signaled the passing of Heaven's favor, and with it any hope of winning the empire. Kuizhou was the site of this tragic turn, which was captured in a final exchange that sounds an unmistakable dark echo of the "Three Visits" scene. Zhuge's pledge to carry out his lord's dying wishes marked a transformation of his character into a figure of mourning and sacrifice, committed to a dead ruler and a hopeless cause. Precisely because of their futility, however, his subsequent deeds gained symbolic value as tribute to his patron's memory. Zhuge's loyalty was thus redefined and reoriented in Kuizhou; cast back into the past, his loyalty became commemorative.

Zhugue Liang's unflagging loyalty went unrewarded in life; however, he was repaid in kind after his death in 234, and this is where temples reenter the story. In an elegy for his former benefactor and long-time ally, Yan Wu (726-765), Du Fu likened Yan's local popularity to that of the great Shu-Han statesman:

Like Zhuge, loved by the people of Shu;

諸葛蜀人愛

Like Wen Weng, he completed Confucianization.⁷⁹

文翁儒化成

This phrase—"loved by the people of Shu"—may refer to events that transpired in the wake of Zhuge's death. He had attracted a wide and fervent following in various localities of modern Sichuan, due in no small degree to his pacification campaigns against the tribes of the deep southwest. After his passing, according to contemporary sources, the administration of Liu Shan was flooded with requests to build temples to his

⁷⁹ "For Left Vice Director and Duke of State Zheng, and the Noble Yan Wu" 贈左僕射鄭國公嚴公武(八哀詩). *DSXZ*, 16.1387.

memory. Perceiving a threat to his own clan's authority, the Later Ruler rejected them all. To no avail, however: offerings took place *en masse*, outside of officially sanctioned places of worship. Alarmed by such a sudden devotional uprising, the state attempted to mollify Zhuge's followers by permitting a few structures to be built at a safe remove from those dedicated to the Liu ancestors.⁸⁰

The hagiographic flavor of this account is undeniable, but more important for us than its historical veracity is the way it makes the temple an expression of popular loyalty and love, the irresistibility of which is only highlighted by the state's futile attempt at suppression. Moreover, the episode associates the local people's commemorative devotion to Zhuge Liang with Zhuge's own undying dedication to Liu Bei. Just as the great minister never forgot his deceased lord, so his followers will never forget him. However, whereas Zhuge's loyal service was cut short by fate, commemorative service to him cannot be stamped out. Commemoration becomes a form of recompense for the injustice of history.

This was a story that would surely have spoken to Du Fu, who had more reason to identify with a figure of defeat than of victory. Du Fu had years before given up on a career at court, the one truly respectable occupation for a man of his class. Instead he turned wholeheartedly to poetry as a calling in life, the first Chinese writer in history to do so. Du Fu invested in poetry as a means to secure a name for himself independently of official service, a gamble that brought with it immense anxiety. This helps explain the intense focus on memory in his late work, and his identification with Zhuge Liang as a figure whose memory was so tenuously bound to the physical structures and

⁸⁰ This anecdote is recorded by Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372-451) in his commentary to *Sanguo zhi*, 35.938-9.

commemorations that preserved it. The temple, and the poem, were all that kept memory alive.

It is in this context that the following oft-neglected little poem takes on paradigmatic value. It is addressed to Du Fu's uncle on his wife's side, Cui Qing 崔卿, and its title makes its purpose clear.

Respectfully Sent to Old Qing Requesting the Repair of a Damaged and Decayed
Portrait in the Temple of the Martial Lord, When Qing Had Charge of Kuizhou
上卿翁請修武侯廟遺像缺落時崔卿權夔州

Since the Great Worthy's governance

Is heard so much of,

大賢為政即多聞

The Prefect's "true tallies"

Need not be divided.

刺史真符不必分

Still, in the western outskirts,

There is Zhuge's temple.

尚有西郊諸葛廟

The Sleeping Dragon, headless,

Faces the river's spray.⁸¹

臥龍無首對江濱

The poem is a petition, and employs flattery and shock in equal measure to persuade its addressee. The striking closing image of Zhuge Liang's portrait, decapitated on a crumbling wall that stands exposed to the river's corrosive torrent, works rhetorically to spur Cui to action: this, Du Fu implies, is not something a man of Cui's moral standing should allow. However, it is the functional and performative character of the poem that makes it paradigmatic for Du Fu's other Zhuge commemorations, which all dwell on the

⁸¹ *DSXZ*, 20.1803.

various material supports on which memory depends: temples, commemorative portraits, and acts of remembrance. This poem literally participates in the project of the temple's physical restoration—the very act through which the people of Shu were said to have expressed their devotion. The poem works to maintain the physical and symbolic space that embodied Zhuge's loyalty and that of his local followers, and which elicited Du Fu's more famous commemorations. In this way Du Fu establishes a direct connection between poem and temple as media of Zhuge's memory.

The petition to Cui Qing is an attempt, using poetry, to ward off the effacement so hauntingly captured in the image of the headless portrait, while commemorating the attempt itself. References to entropy and neglect are mainstays of *huaigu* rhetoric, where they most often function to distinguish the poet-commemorator as master of the past and the lessons of history. In the case of Zhuge Liang's monuments, however, the resistance of manmade forms to nature's erosion takes on special meaning as a representation of Zhuge's persistence in the service of his dead ruler and doomed state. Arguably the most eloquent emblem of this struggle was the Diagram of the Eight Battle Formation 八陣圖, a set of boulders protruding from the Yangzi, supposedly one of three such arrangements left behind by Zhuge Liang as an illustration of military strategy. In the following poem, however, it carries a different meaning:

Diagram of the Eight Battle Formations

八陣圖

His feats covered the Three Divided Kingdoms;

功蓋三分國

His reputation was completed with the Eight Battle Formations.

名成八陣圖

The river flows, but these stones do not turn;

江流石不轉

A lingering resentment for failing to swallow Wu.⁸²

遺恨失吞吳

Standing for centuries against the river's flow, the rocks of the diagram "do not turn." It resurfaces every year above the waters, as Zhuge's reputation resists being swept away into oblivion. This persistence of form against dissolution commemorates Zhuge Liang by perpetually reenacting his defiance of Heaven out of loyalty to Liu Bei. The memorial artifact thus wins a symbolic victory—cold comfort, however, for it inevitably also recalls Shu-Han's defeat. Zhuge continues to speak through the diagram, but only of a "lingering resentment" (*yi hen* 遺恨).

The prospect of gaining immortality through art increasingly preoccupied Du Fu in his late years, which no doubt helps explain his fascination with Zhuge Liang. Zhuge became an ideal subject through which Du Fu could exercise poetry's memorial capacities and explore its similarities with other means of posthumous survival. The petition poem, discussed above, is one particularly remarkable example, as it was designed to realize the preservation of a decaying temple structure. "Diagram of the Eight Battle Formations" displays its affinity with its subject in another way: through its citation of a classical text in the third line. "The rocks do not turn" (*shi bu zhuan*) modifies a line from the *Shijing* Ode, "Cypress Boat" 柏舟 in which a jilted or maligned speaker compares his/her heart to a stone: "My heart is not a stone / it cannot be turned" 我心非石，不可轉也。⁸³ On the one hand, the specific content of the cited text underlines the basic meaning of Du Fu's poem: unlike the *Shijing* stone, Zhuge's monument remains immovable, a mirror of his steadfast heart rather than its inversion. On the other hand, in a quatrain about the

⁸² *DSXZ*, 15.1280.

⁸³ *Mao shi zhushu*, 2a/6.74; Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes: Chinese Text, Transcription, and Translation* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950), 15.

persistence against time (of man and monument alike), the *act* of so prominently citing the poetic tradition's founding anthology becomes meaningful as a display of a similar durability. Carrying within it the stone of the *Shijing*, Du Fu declares his little poem to be as lasting as the diagram in the river.

It was the temple, however, that provided Du Fu with his primary model for such performative emulation, just as the Gorges provided the model for rhetorical reenactments of Yu's founding labors. Gorge and temple were "ancient traces" 古跡 that, like footprints, were both the signature of an absent person and a track to be followed. The temple embodied Zhuge's loyalty most of all through its spatial relation to the temple of Liu Bei. Temples to the two men stood in both Chengdu, the capital of Shu-Han, and in Kuizhou, the site of Liu Bei's death and delegation of the regency. However, their proximity differed in the two places. In Chengdu the temples were adjacent to each other, connected by an adjoining wall; in Kuizhou, by contrast, they stood apart.⁸⁴ Such contrasting architectural arrangements were easily taken to represent relations between the commemorated figures; and insofar as this ruler-minister relationship was thought to have been politically decisive, the placement of the temples articulated nothing less than the story of Shu-Han's rise and fall. Du Fu had retraced the arc of this story in his own recent travels. Faced with a reminder of its tragic ending in Kuizhou's remote temples, he went about reuniting lord and minister in poetry, symbolically reversing the tide of history.

⁸⁴ In "Ballad of an Ancient Cypress" 古柏行, examined below, Du Fu writes that in Chengdu, "The Former Lord and Martial Marquis shared a single compound" 先主武侯同閼宮. The different locations of the temples in Chengdu and Kuizhou is reported by Zhao Cigong 趙次公 (fl. 1134-1151), as quoted in *DSXZ*, 15.1357.

One striking way in which Du Fu accomplished this reunification was by suggesting or establishing linkages between separate poems, thus replicating the effect of the conjoined temple spaces of Chengdu. A first example of this can be seen in the poems, “Temple of the Martial Lord” 諸葛廟 and “Visiting the Temple of the Former Ruler” 謁先主廟.⁸⁵ The latter piece is longer, and contains moments of autobiographical reflection absent in the former. However, the similarities between the poems far outweigh the differences, and go beyond the titles and immediate subject matter. They are both written in long form, pentasyllabic regulated verse (*pai lü* 排律). Their thematic organization is similar as well, interspersing references to events of Shu-Han history with portrayals of the temple characterized by the presence of local worshippers. Qiu Zhao’ao has dated them to 766 and 767, respectively, on the evidence that, in the opening couplet of the Zhuge poem, Du Fu writes that he “often has entered the Martial Lord’s shrine” 屢入武侯祠. However, this could just as easily refer to the temple in Chengdu, in which case a dating of the poems closer together would be entirely possible.⁸⁶ It is likely that they were meant as a pair, thus replicating the effect of the conjoined temple spaces of Chengdu.

The finest example of this rhetorical strategy is found in the conjunction of the final pieces in the “Singing My Feelings on Ancient Sites” 詠懷古跡 series. Here, Du Fu both describes and performs the reunification we have seen in the previous examples:

The ruler of Shu looked covetously at Wu

And visited the Three Gorges.

蜀主窺吳幸三峽

In the year of his death, also, he was

⁸⁵ *DSXZ*, 19.1674-5; 15.1353-7

⁸⁶ Pu Qilong 浦起龍 (b. 1679) places them together. See *Du Du xinjie* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2000).

In the Palace of Eternal Peace.	崩年亦在永安宮
The halcyon banners are an image	
In the empty mountains,	翠華想像空山裏
The jade palace is a void	
In the wilderness temple.	玉殿虛無野寺中
In the pines of the ancient temple	
Aquatic cranes nest;	古廟杉松巢水鶴
At seasonal festivals through the year	
Village elders scurry about.	歲時伏臘走村翁
The Martial Lord's memorial shrine	
Is always close at hand;	武侯祠屋常鄰近
As one body, ruler and minister	
Share the sacrifices together.	一體君臣祭祀同
 Zhuge's great name	
Hangs over the world,	諸葛大名垂宇宙
The honored minister's commemorative portrait	
Is solemnly lofty and pure.	宗臣遺像肅清高
Triple division and separate holdouts	
Twisted his stratagems,	三分割據紆籌策
In the skies of a myriad ages	
He was a single feather.	萬古雲霄一羽毛

He could be ranked among	
Yi and Lü;	伯仲之間見伊呂
If his orders had been established,	
He would not have done worse than Xiao and Cao.	指揮若定失蕭曹
As fate moved the fortunes of Han,	
In the end they were hard to restore;	運移漢祚終難復
His aim was cut off and his body destroyed	
As he labored with the army. ⁸⁷	志決身殲軍務勞

The strong narrative connection between these two poems distinguishes them from the preceding three poems in the series, which are relatively freestanding, and makes them stand out as a pair. This connection is established by the final couplet of the poem on Liu Bei:

The Martial Lord's memorial shrine	
Is always close at hand;	武侯祠屋常鄰近
As one body, ruler and minister	
Share the sacrifices together.	一體君臣祭祀同

This is by far the most dramatic instance of the pattern we have been exploring, in which poetry offers a compensatory counter-image to the historical tale of death and separation, reenacting Zhuge's loyalty. The temples are clearly anthropomorphized as substitutes for the men, enacting their roles in a virtual realm. And, unlike our other examples, here the enactment gains by being translated into stone. The physical separation of the structures is no longer an obstacle, but rather forms an image of constant intimacy: Zhuge's

⁸⁷ *DSXZ*, 17.1505. The translation is modified from Frankel, 360.

memorial shrine is “ever nearby” (*chang lin jin* 常鄰近); the men’s spirits merge into “a single body” (*yi ti* 一體) to partake of the mingling smoke of the sacrifices.

The significance of this “single body” of sacrificial smoke derives in part from the way it contrasts with images that directly precede it in the poem. Couplet two is a masterpiece of the rhetoric of perceptual uncertainty discussed earlier in connection with the Goddess tradition, and which Du Fu employed in the second poem of the series, discussed above. Liu Bei’s Palace of Eternal Peace and the imperial banners flicker into ghostly existence from out of the present temple scene, as if hallucinated by a drowsy Chu king. The couplet that follows portrays the temple grounds in the present, now absent palace and banners, occupied only by cranes and local elders. While some critics have read these figures as signifying that the temple has continued to be well cared for, I would argue that, on the contrary, they mainly signify by contrast with the images of imperial glory. The thrust of their meaning is, “this is all that is left.” It is against this scene of desolation that the constant presence of Zhuge’s temple has a redeeming function. His temple makes up for the loss of the past by providing a communion of ruler and minister more enduring and intimate than was ever possible in life.

Finally, such evocations of intimacy make meaningful the relation between this poem and the one that follows. The analogy between the poems and the temples they portray becomes apparent: the proximity of the poems replicates, and even surpasses, that of the temples, establishing, in yet another medium, the perpetual intimacy of ruler and minister evoked in the couplet that joins them. The connection is even focalized in the final word, “together” (*tong* 同), which acts as a hinge between the bodies of poems and persons, both marking separation and overcoming it, like the wall of Chengdu’s adjacent temples.

It remains finally to discuss the most fascinating of Du Fu's rhetorical imitations of Zhuge Liang's loyalty: his repeated references to acts of memory. Zhuge Liang's loyalty to Liu Bei after the latter's death was, above all, a feat of unflagging remembrance. In many of his Zhuge poems, Du Fu represents memories of his own, for example in this line from "A Song of Kuizhou":

The Martial Lord's memorial temple

Must never be forgotten...⁸⁸

武侯祠堂不可忘

Acts of memory work, like temples or portraits, as media of memory; they call to mind the absent object of devotion. And yet, as this very calling-to-mind, they are that which the other media of memory exist to elicit. Here are some more examples:

Long I've traveled in the country of the sons of Ba,

久遊巴子國

And many times entered the Martial Lord's shrine.⁸⁹

屢入武侯祠

Suddenly I remember him chanting "Liangfu,"

歎憶吟梁父

Not yet too late to pursue a life of farming.⁹⁰

躬耕也未遲

Still I hear him taking leave of the Later Ruler;

猶聞辭後主

Never again would he rest in Nanyang.⁹¹

不復臥南陽

⁸⁸ *DSXZ*, 15.1309.

⁸⁹ A couplet from "Zhuge's Temple" 諸葛廟 (*DSXZ*, 19.1675-6).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ From "The Temple of the Martial Lord" 武侯廟 (*DSXZ*, 15.1277-8).

“Many times [I’ve] entered,” “suddenly I remember,” “still I hear”: these phrases all draw attention to the act and occasion of remembering, rather than simply to its object. Their subject is “Du Fu” rather than “Zhuge Liang.” Self-reflexive gestures in *huaigu* are common; taken alone, any one of these would be unremarkable. Taken together, however, they reveal a significant pattern, one that deeply resonates, moreover, with the rhetorical *topoi* we have explored above. They belong at the center of a commemorative apparatus framed by temples and focused by portraits and trees, all of which embodies defining traits of the remembered figure. Representing not only his thoughts of the dead but his *thinking* of them, Du Fu casts himself in the position of the “people of Shu,” “never forgetting” the paragon of loyal remembrance.

A particularly elaborate and illuminating example of this occurs in “Ballad of an Ancient Cypress” 古柏行, one of Du Fu’s most famous poems. The following excerpt is two-thirds of the whole composition:

In front of Kongming’s temple

There is an ancient cypress.

孔明廟前有老柏

With a trunk like green copper

And roots like stone.

柯如青銅根如石

Its frosted bark, rain-streaked,

Runs forty spans around.

霜皮溜雨四十圍

Its blackened form, level with heaven,

Stands two thousand feet.

黛色參天二千尺

Ruler and minister, in their times,

Already had their meeting.

君臣已與時際會

But this tree is still loved	
And cherished by the people.	樹木猶為人愛惜
Clouds arrive, ethers meet,	
In Wushan Gorge, so long.	雲來氣接巫峽長
The moon comes out, the cold penetrates,	
To White Snow Mountain.	月出寒通雪山白
I recall where the road skirted	
East of Brocade Pavilion.	憶昨路繞錦亭東
The Former Lord and Martial Marquis	
Shared a single compound.	先主武侯同閼宮
Towering, majestic, the trunks and branches	
Entwined from times most ancient;	崔嵬枝幹郊原古
Secluded and remote, the portrait paintings,	
Doorways and casements empty.	窈窕丹青戶牖空
Shedding leaves, it perches, coiled,	
And though it's found a place.	落落盤踞雖得地
Darkly, darkly, alone it towers,	
In so much violent wind.	冥冥孤高多烈風
Holding it up can only be	
The force of shining spirits.	扶持自是神明力
Its true uprightness has as cause	

The feats of the Fashioner...⁹²

正直原因造化功

Far from attempting a comprehensive reading of this canonical work, we will approach it within the specific context of Du Fu's commemorations of Zhuge Liang. The cypress was, after all, located on the grounds of the same temple Du Fu portrays in these other poems; and some of their dominant themes reappear here. For instance, in line two, where Du Fu first describes the tree, he compares its trunk to bronze (*qing tong* 青銅) and roots to stone; likening it to a ritual implement that communicates with the spirit of the dead. This is another case of associating Zhuge Liang with the commemorative media of the temple, here a sacrificial vessel.

However, our focus will be the act of memory beginning in the ninth line with the words "I recall" (*yi zuo* 憶昨). What distinguishes this instance is that it features Du Fu's own experience—his visit, years before, to Zhuge's shrine in Chengdu. This sets it off from the examples above, in which the memories are of Zhuge or his temple. How does the poem's narrative prepare for this? Interestingly, with a couplet, two lines before, that associates Zhuge and Liu Bei's rapport to the local people's devotion:

Ruler and minister, in their times,

Already had their meeting.

君臣已與時際會

But this tree is still loved

And cherished by the people.

樹木猶為人愛惜

The people's love for the cypress is the counterpart of the ruler-minister relationship. Here Du Fu gives exemplary expression to our thesis that commemoration of Zhuge

⁹² *DSXZ*, 15.1357-62. For another translation, see David Hawkes, *A Little Primer of Tu Fu*, 156-64.

Liang echoes and emulates Zhuge's loyalty to Liu Bei.⁹³ It is this "loving and cherishing" (*aixi* 愛惜) that reads as the narrative impetus to the personal memory which begins two lines later.⁹⁴ The poet's memory is thus framed as a reenactment of or participation in the popular devotion responsible for the care of tree and temple.

What Du Fu found most memorable about his earlier visit to Zhuge's shrine was that it was directly connected to the temple of Liu Bei: "Ruler and minister shared a single compound." However, he also remembered ancient trees, similar to the one standing in Kuizhou, and portraits hanging deep within dark chambers—in short, a scene whose basic contours very much resembled the one he wrote of often in Kuizhou. This similarity gave rise to differences of interpretation. Most commentators read the memory as occupying two couplets ("four lines of Chengdu, four of Kuizhou," as Pu Qilong puts it).⁹⁵ Zhu Heling 朱鶴齡 (1606-1683) provides a good explanation for such a reading, noting the emphasis, in the line directly following, on the precariousness of the tree's perch and its exposure to "so much violent wind."⁹⁶ This does fit Du Fu's image of Kuizhou as only "slightly level" and difficult to take root in.⁹⁷ Zhu suggests that, whereas the cypresses in Chengdu could flourish from remotest antiquity (*yuan gu*) because of hospitable terrain, the Kuizhou counterpart must rely on the assistance of spiritual forces.

Holding it up can only be

⁹³ William Hung's translation of the second line emphasizes this connection: "Their memory is as much revered as this tree is treasured in the region." See *Tu Fu: China's Greatest Poet*, 226.

⁹⁴ The intervening landscape couplet's expansion outward in space can also be read as anticipating the mental journey back to Chengdu. However, this couplet's position has been questioned by Qiu Zhao'ao, who places it in the third position, before the lines on Zhuge and Liu Bei. Qiu comments: "'Ruler and minister's meeting' gives rise to the following 'Former Ruler and Martial Marquis'" 君臣際會，即起下先主武侯 (*DSXZ*, 15.1358).

⁹⁵ *Du Du xinjie*, 23.298.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ See the discussion of "Written On Moving to Kuizhou," above.

The force of shining spirits.

扶持自是神明力

Its true uprightness has as cause

The feats of the Fashioner.

正直原因造化功

Just as divine agency was imagined as aiding Yu's creation of the gorges, it helps explain the endurance of this monument to Zhuge Liang. In both cases, intimations of the divine correlate with a conception of Kuizhou as a fundamentally hostile environment that produces strange and wondrous things. It is a place that could only have been created by supernatural force, and what survives and flourishes there must have the help of spirits.

Without disputing the persuasiveness of the “four Chengdu, four Kuizhou” reading, it is nevertheless important to account for the ambiguity that demands an interpretive choice in the first place. For, despite the memory marker (*yi zuo*) that signals a shift to another time, it is the resemblance between Chengdu and Kuizhou that makes it difficult to tell, in the poem, where the past ends and the present begins. As if to blur the boundary further, Du Fu uses a repetitive prosodic pattern in just this place. The final Chengdu couplet begins with the rhyming pairs *cui wei* 崔嵬 (“towering, majestic”) and *yao tiao* 窈窕 (“secluded, remote”); the Kuizhou lines start with the reduplicative binomes *luo luo* 落落 (“shedding leaves”; lit., “falling, falling”) and *ming ming* 冥冥 (“darkly, darkly”).

Du Fu thus maintains an aural continuity across what most readers take to be a spatial and temporal gulf. However, it is a continuity that contains the minimal difference between rhyme and reduplication. Here, I think, Du Fu manages to evoke through his prosody an effect very similar to what can happen in the wake of memory, when the illusory likeness of past and present gives way to a sense of their disparity, all the more poignant for its slightness. Du Fu's minimal prosodic shift underlines the essential ambiguity of his

memory as portrayed in “Ballad of an Ancient Cypress,” in which the boundary between past and present can only be drawn with the finest of lines.

However, this memory stands out most of all because it recalls an occasion on which another poem, still extant, was written. This is “Chancellor of Shu” 蜀相, which dates to 760, shortly after Du Fu arrived in Chengdu:

The Great Minister’s shrine,	
Where is it to be sought?	丞相祠堂何處尋
Outside Brocade Official City,	
Where the cypresses grow dense.	錦官城外柏森森
Shining on stairs, emerald grass	
Is the natural image of spring.	映階碧草自春色
Behind the leaves, yellow orioles	
Sing sweet songs in vain.	隔葉黃鸝空好音
The repeated effort of the Three Visits—	
All for strategy to win the empire.	三顧頻煩天下計
The founding and transitioning of two courts	
Came from an old minister’s heart.	兩朝開濟老臣心
That leading the army, and not yet prevailing,	
He first met with death,	出師未捷身先死
Will always cause heroes	
To wet their robes with tears. ⁹⁸	長使英雄淚滿襟

⁹⁸ DSXZ, 9.736-8. Hawkes, *A Little Primer of Tu Fu*, 103-8.

Like many Tang poems on visiting temples, “Chancellor of Shu” begins with a search that leads to a deserted structure, the sight of which gives rise in turn to the remembrance of Zhuge’s great deeds and a lament for his untimely death. Interestingly, Du Fu’s memory of this visit in “Ballad of an Ancient Cypress” also begins with a path:

I remember back to where the road skirted

East of Brocade Pavilion.

憶昨路繞錦亭東

Unlike in the earlier poem, no convention I am aware of is responsible for *this* winding path. It appears that Du Fu chose to represent his past experience in terms of the poetic form proper to the occasion, thus making his memory a kind of *huaigu* within a *huaigu*. Not only that: since he had already commemorated his visit with “Chancellor of Shu,” a poem he had with him in Kuizhou, it is very likely that this poem in particular, and not just *huaigu* in general, informed the structure of his recollection in “Ballad of an Ancient Cypress.”

Writing on the Kuizhou cypress, which resembles a sacrificial vessel and stands in the courtyard of Zhuge Liang’s temple, Du Fu recalls visiting the temple in Chengdu and the poem he wrote at that time. With himself in the picture, the past event corresponds to the present even more completely. More is at stake, however, in this elaborate doubling, than preparing for the pathos of discovering all that separates now from then. Du Fu’s poems on Zhuge Liang are about mediation, specifically the media that represent the dead to the living and through which the living commemorate the dead. The basic meaning of “medium” is “that which lies in between,” and one of the many mysteries of this “in-between-ness” is the way it combines proximity and distance, access and obstruction. Temples, trees, portraits, and poems are ways of establishing and maintaining

connections with the departed. And yet they also lie in between, like the walls of adjoining rooms. Du Fu's memory of Chengdu in Kuizhou, his poem within a poem, is yet another interface between him and Zhuge Liang—another wall, another winding path.

Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆 (1610-1661), one of Du Fu's most perspicacious readers, noticed an inconspicuous partition in "Chancellor of Shu" that could serve as a perfect example of what we have been discussing under the rubric of mediated memory. Commenting on the fourth line ("Behind the leaves, yellow orioles sing sweet songs in vain"), Jin writes:

The means by which the oriole seeks its friend is how gentlemen move each other across a hundred generations. They have a desire to befriend the ancients, and yet alas the ancients can never be seen, as if separated by leaves.⁹⁹

黃鳥所以求友，君子曠百世相感。有尚友古人之情，而無如古人終不可見，如隔葉也。

Jin Shengtan finds in Du Fu's image of birds calling to each other from behind the canopy an allegory for commemoration in general, or "befriending the ancients." According to him, visiting a temple—but also contemplating a portrait or reading ancient texts—is an attempt to encounter a person who is concealed behind monuments like orioles in the dark foliage. The visitor hears voices of uncertain origin, and, following them, moves from room to room among the representations of the dead, never meeting the friend he seeks. He writes a poem, and casts it into the echo chamber. Jin's allegory of the orioles is thus not only about the separation of the dead and the living. It is about how partitions act as media of memory, eliciting and structuring communication with those who lie beyond.

⁹⁹ Jin Shengtan, *Jin Shengtan xuanpi Du shi* (Yonghe: Dexing shuju, 1981), 79.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have seen how Du Fu represented Kuizhou through what may be called a poetics of historical memory. Places in medieval China were both physical sites and cultural entities whose meanings were produced and transformed through acts of representation. Poets played an important role in this process by identifying places as the sites of stories. When early medieval literati wrote of the Three Gorges, they most often approached them through the story of the Goddess of Wu Mountain, as told in the rhapsodies attributed to Song Yu. Early Tang poets such as Yang Jiong gave the region new meanings by identifying it with episodes from imperial history, often in the commemorative subgenre of *huaigu*, which had its origins in the Mao commentator's placement of Zhou Dynasty ruins under an anonymous millet field. As a medium of historical memory, *huaigu* consisted first of all in such transformations of place through the installation of new historical representatives, and the revision of existing narratives. This aspect of *huaigu* is vividly illustrated by Du Fu's commemorations of Yu the Great, whose founding inscription of imperial time and space provided a model for his own creation of historical meaning in Kuizhou.

Thus, while *huaigu* created meaning in a place, they also served as vehicles of self-definition and presentation. "Yearning for Antiquity at Qutang Gorge" was as much about Du Fu's identification with Yu the Great as it was about identifying Kuizhou as the site of his deeds. Here the poetics of historical memory consists in the poet's appropriation of the stories he has inscribed on a place. I have argued that this appropriation was not only a matter of explicit verbal expression, but was rhetorically

demonstrated in the formal features of the texts, through what I referred to as “performing the past.” In Du Fu’s poems on Yu, and even more in his commemorations of Zhuge Liang, we saw how he reproduced his subjects’ defining acts, making them his own. Finally, at the center of this poetics of historical memory we found the medium of the monument, which served as the interface between the poem and the figure of identification. Du Fu accessed the stories of Yu and Zhuge Liang through cliff faces and temples, and his poems show a remarkable sensitivity to these material traces. We will see a similar preoccupation with the supports of other frameworks of memory and identity in the chapters to come.

Chapter Two

Shifting Boundaries of Customs and Classics:

Locality and Cultural Memory in Du Fu's Poetics of the Southwestern Frontier

This chapter explores several of Du Fu's portraits of Kuizhou's local culture, focusing especially on the interplay therein between representations of cultural otherness and references to the textual canon—the wellspring of literati collective memory and identity. How did Du Fu envision local customs in relation to the orthodox norms he identified with and promoted as an imperial civil servant? How did he rhetorically position himself in relation to people whose behaviors diverged from propriety as defined by the classics? Previous studies of these poems have sought to determine the author's attitude toward local people, and have generally concluded that he held them in low esteem.¹⁰⁰ While not unfounded, such readings tend to overlook the divergent agendas and rhetorical strategies proper to specific poems, and the plurality of relations they establish between the observer and the observed. As we will see, Du Fu wrote on an array of local practices—from rainmaking rituals to everyday manners, from work to song—and approached them with varieties of hostility, humor, and admiration. A shift of attention from authorial judgment to the interactions between discourses of customs and classics will help bring this range of mutually defining encounters—Du Fu's poetics of the frontier—into view.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ See for example Jiang Xianwei, *Du Fu Kuizhou shi lungao*, esp. 1-18, 98-122; Chen Yixin, 785; Mo, 171.

¹⁰¹ I borrow the concept of a “poetics of the frontier” from Tamara T. Chin's study of Han Dynasty ethnography and foreign relations. See “Defamiliarizing the Foreigner: Sima Qian's Ethnography and Han-Xiongnu Marriage Diplomacy.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 70.2 (Dec. 2010): 311-354.

Such many-sidedness is surprising, for Tang literati antagonism toward local practices was both ideologically ingrained and institutionally reinforced. Going back to founding classicist (*ru* 儒) texts of the Warring States period (403-222 B.C.), “local customs” (*su* 俗, *fengsu* 風俗) were conceived as the narrow, limiting habits instilled by native environments, which it was the task of “ritual” 禮 and classic texts to “correct.”¹⁰² Texts like *Mengzi* and *Xunzi* established a defining antagonism that would be systematized in the emergent ethnographies of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) and bequeathed to centuries of scholar-officials.¹⁰³ Reinforcing this ideological anti-customs bias for Tang literati were the rigors of the provincial administration system and the common punishment of exile. The former all but guaranteed a life of perpetual displacement to those lucky enough to pass the civil service examinations (officials were prohibited from serving in their home provinces, and were transferred every three years); the latter meant disgraceful banishment to untamed wildernesses beyond the emperor’s civilizing influence. Given this system, in which they encountered regional cultures by and large as temporary overseers, and in which increased distance from the capital signified

¹⁰² In the words of Mark Edward Lewis, “The lessons imparted by custom made people partial and limited, trapping them within the narrow confines of their own region and era. It led them to be farmers or craftsmen rather than scholars, to value material goods rather than moral virtues, and to be the slaves of objects rather than their masters.” See his “Custom and Human Nature in Early China,” *Philosophy East & West* 53.4 (July 2003): 316; see also Lewis, *The Construction of Space in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 189-211.

¹⁰³ Ban Gu 班固 (32-92 B.C.), in the “Geographical Treatise” 地理志 to the *Han shu*, defines customs (*fengsu*) as follows:

All people possess in their nature the five constant virtues, but their robustness or weakness, slackness or anxiousness, and the dissimilarities in musical tones are bound to the wind and qi of the water and earth, and so are called feng. Their likes and dislikes, desires and disinterests, motions and stillnesses, forgotten and preserved things, follow the desires of their lord and superiors, and so are called su.

Translation by Andrew Chittick, “Pride of Place: The Advent of Local History in Early Medieval China” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1997), 14. See *Han shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 28b.1640. For a discussion of concepts of customs in the early medieval geographical traditions, see Chittick, 7-15.

diminished favor and prestige, it is no wonder that Tang literati on the whole viewed them as painful reminders of their distance from family, friends, and court.¹⁰⁴ Against this background of ideological and institutionally supported aversion, the variety of Du Fu's positions *vis à vis* Kuizhou's customs is quite remarkable.

Du Fu generally articulated his positions by citing canonical texts, figures, and norms of propriety, in relation to which local practices appeared as forms of cultural difference. Classical citation in Tang poetry has been approached as a practice of literati identity formation and maintenance.¹⁰⁵ For individuals, felicitous citation demonstrated cultural competence, proving one's scholarly credentials and claiming membership in a trans-generational community of scholar-officials. Reciprocally, this community owed its continuing existence over time to the constant reactivation of foundational texts. Classical citation can thus be understood as a practice of cultural memory, in the sense given this term by Jan and Aleida Assmann.¹⁰⁶ It was a key mode of sustaining the stream of

¹⁰⁴ On the Tang literati's aversion to provincial service, see P.A. Herbert, "Perceptions of Provincial Officialdom in Early T'ang China," *Asia Major* 2.1 (1989): 25-57. On exile see especially Richard E. Strassberg, *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China*, 33-44, and Shang Yongliang 尚永亮, *Tang Wudai zhuchen yu bianzhe wenxue yanjiu* (Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 2007). Stephen Owen has praised Du Fu's late work as the highpoint of the exile tradition, in *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High T'ang*, 6.

¹⁰⁵ See Graham Sanders, *Words Well Put: Visions of Competence in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006). Other major studies, approaching citation as a literary device, include David Lattimore, "Allusion and T'ang Poetry," in Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds., *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 405-39, Eva Shan Chou, "Allusion and Periphrasis as Modes of Poetry in Tu Fu's 'Eight Laments,'" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies (HJAS)*, 45.1 (1985): 77-128, and James Hightower, "Allusion in the Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien," *HJAS* 31 (1971): 5-27.

¹⁰⁶ Jan Assmann, trans. John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 16 (1995): 125-33: "The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image" (132). See also Assmann, David Henry Wilson, trans., *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), and Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

tradition, and of performing one's literati identity. However, as Du Fu's poems on Kuizhou's local culture underscore, the specific circumstances that incited citations introduced contingency and instability into these performances. The discourse of the literati "we," as a practice of cultural memory, was situated, relational, and mutable; it was the product of unpredictable encounters with its "others." This is vividly illustrated by Du Fu's uses of the classical past to respond in a variety of ways to the local culture of the southwestern frontier.

Inflammatory Rites

Tang Kuizhou was located on the empire's southwestern border, and was home to a culturally diverse population. Directly to the south lay Qianzhong 黔中 (called Nanzhong 南中 before the Tang), a massive region of dense forests and inaccessible mountains inhabited by numerous indigenous groups.¹⁰⁷ Chinese diplomatic contacts with these groups are recorded as far back as the Warring States period (403-221 B.C.), and claims to the resource-rich region began under Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (r. 141-87 B.C.). However, imperial control was limited to isolated colonial outposts and the symbolic power of titles conferred upon local elites.¹⁰⁸ Resistance to Chinese encroachments was fierce and persistent, and expansion campaigns, notably those of Sima Xiangru 司馬相如

¹⁰⁷ On the early history of Chinese contacts with the kingdoms of the southwest, see John Herman, "The Kingdoms of Nanzhong: China's Southwest Border Region Prior to the Eighth Century," *T'oung Pao* 95 (2009): 241-86, Charles Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom and T'ang China's Southwestern Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 6. For a study of the settlement of the southwest border, including Kuizhou, during the Song Dynasty (960-1276), see Richard von Glahn, *The Country of Streams and Grottoes: Expansion, Settlement, and the Civilizing of the Sichuan Frontier in Song Times* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987). For the early history of Sichuan, see Steven F. Sage, *Ancient Sichuan and the Unification of China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁸ Backus, 6.

(179-117 B.C.) and Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181-234), at best succeeded in securing temporary semblances of sovereignty.¹⁰⁹ Even as late as the eighth century, after influxes of northern settlers and repeated military campaigns had significantly increased the Chinese presence in the region, the southwest remained for all intents and purposes outside the empire, politically and culturally. Tang Kuizhou was a contact zone in which long-term residents, recent Chinese settlers, and descendants of the southwestern tribes (some assimilated and some not) lived alongside and intermixed with one another.¹¹⁰ Kuizhou's local customs, which Du Fu found so remarkable, were products of this frontier location and diverse cultural milieu.

In the spring and summer of 766, a severe drought afflicted the empire.¹¹¹ A sign of divine displeasure, droughts required policy changes, prayers, and displays of contrition.¹¹² Faced with a drought years earlier in Chengdu, Du Fu had written a

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, Sage, 181-92.

¹¹⁰ Notable among these tribes was the Lao 獠, whose spectacularly savage customs were vividly rendered in Wei Shou's 魏收 (506-572) *Wei shu*, and re-presented in several later works. The only Lao that Du Fu encountered in Kuizhou were fellow settlers, and slaves (he owned at least two). He most likely included these assimilated Lao in general categories such as "people of Kuizhou" 夔人. On the Lao, see *Wei shu*, 101.2248, Von Glahn, 20-24, Inez de Beauclair, "The Keh Lao of Kweichow and Their History According to Chinese Records." *Studia Serica* 5 (1946): 1-44, and Ying Ji 應驥, *Baren yuanliu ji qi wenhua* (Kunming: Yun'an daxue chubanshe, 2007), 69-74. On the southern "Man" 蠻 barbarians generally (of whom the Lao were classified as a subgroup) in Tang writings, see Edward Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird: T'ang Images of the South* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 48-78, 48-50.

¹¹¹ The *Jiu Tangshu* (11.283) records that "only in the sixth month (of the lunar calendar) did it start to rain." Cited in Jiang (207), who notes that in the southwest the drought would have been even longer. Du Fu penned several poems during this period bemoaning the oppressive weather. In addition to the two discussed in this section, these include "Three Poems on the Heat" 熱三首 (*DSXZ*, 15.1300-2), and "Poisonous Heat, Sent as a Letter to Younger Brother Cui the Sixteenth, Case Reviewer" 毒熱寄簡崔評事十六弟 (*DSXZ*, 15.1307-09). None of these, however, concern local customs.

¹¹² Tang Ci 唐次 (d. 806) wrote three such prayer texts while serving as prefect of Kuizhou from 803 to 805, two of which seek to bring rain and one of which seeks to end it. See Dong Gao 董誥 (1740-1818) et al., eds., *Quan Tang wen* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 480.4901-2 (Hereafter, *QTW*). Many of the exemplary tales of procuring rain available to a Tang literatus are assembled

memorial to his patron and superior, Yan Wu 嚴武 (726-765), entitled “Explaining Drought” 說旱.¹¹³ The text begins by citing the *Zhouli* 周禮 and *Zuozhuan* 左傳, both of which prescribe the performance of the *Yu* Dance 雩舞.¹¹⁴ Noting that it is not the proper month for the *Yu*, however, Du Fu advocates alternative measures, chief among which is the release of lesser criminals from the empire’s prisons. Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 626-649) serves as an authoritative precedent for his proposals which, he claims, will decrease drought-inducing “resentful *qi*” (*yuan qi* 怨氣). The memorial closes with a plea to “respond to things with the correct way” 以正道應物. With its clear correlation of ritual efficacy and classical/imperial precedent, “Explaining Drought” provides an instructive comparison to the poems Du Fu wrote on the drought of 766, in which he encountered very different ways of “responding to things.”

Localities had their own gods responsible for timely precipitation, and their own methods of obtaining it when the spirits were negligent. Kuizhou’s local rain rituals were particularly spectacular, and were memorably described by Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (d. 527), in his *Shuijing zhu* 水經注:

in the *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, Ouyang Xun’s 歐陽詢 (557-641) practical compendium, under the headings of “Drought” 旱 and “Praying for Rain” 祈雨, both in the “Disasters and Anomalies Section” 災異部. See *Yiwen leiju*, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), 100.1721-28. For a detailed examination of the conventions and changing uses of Tang prayer texts, or “orisons of appeal” 祝文, see Alexei Kamran Ditter, “Genre and the Transformation of Writing in Tang Dynasty China (618-907)” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2009), 153-210.

¹¹³ *DSXZ*, 25.2209. Ditter, 176-7.

¹¹⁴ The *Zhouli* citation is from the “Commander of Shamans” 司巫 chapter: “If there is a great drought in the state, lead the shamans in dancing the *Yu*” 若國有大旱，率巫而舞雩. The reference to the *Zuozhuan* is to Duke Huan 5. See *Zuozhuan zhushu*, 6.108. In *Shisan jing zhushu*, ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1965).

Up the mountains on the northern bank is a spirit spring. North of the spring is White Salt Crag. It is more than a thousand *zhang* high and overlooks the spirit spring. The local people noticed its height and whiteness and thus gave it this name. When there is a drought, they burn trees on top. The ashes are then pushed over, soiling the spirit spring below; before long, rain falls.

北岸山上有神淵，淵北有白鹽崖，高可千餘丈，俯臨神淵。土人見其高白，故因名之。天旱，燃木崖上，推其灰燼，下穢淵中，尋即降雨。¹¹⁵

Du Fu wrote vivid accounts of these rites in two long heptasyllabic poems, “Fire” 火 and “Thunder” 雷, in which local cultural practices are placed squarely at odds with literati norms.¹¹⁶ As the titles suggest, “Fire” focuses on the rites themselves, while “Thunder” is concerned with Heaven’s reply. In the latter poem, Du Fu offers his own ideas about how to bring rain, attempting to persuade local leaders to abandon their pyromania in favor of social remedies resembling those put forth in “Explaining Drought.” Examining the progress of the poem’s argument, however, shows that it stages a breakdown of its original antagonistic certitude, leading up to the boom from above. I will argue that Du Fu contrasts himself to the locals, whose attempts to coerce the spirits he deplores as a form of rebellion, while using classical citation to inscribe the divinities into a discourse of ritual obligation.

Appended to “Fire” is an “Original Commentary” 原注, plausibly attributed to Du Fu, that identifies the local rain ceremony with a little-known text: “It is a Chu custom during great droughts to burn mountains and beat drums, some of which accords with *The*

¹¹⁵ Yang Shoujing 楊守敬 et al, eds., *Shuijing zhushu* (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1999), 33.2819. Translation modified from Strassberg, 84-5.

¹¹⁶ *DSXZ*, 15.1295-1300. Qiu presents the poems in reverse order.

Divine Farmer's Book 楚俗，大旱則焚山擊鼓，有合神農書。¹¹⁷ The *Yiwen leiju*, an early Tang compendium, contains an extract from an otherwise lost text entitled *The Divine Farmer's Book on Seeking Rain* 神農求雨書, to which Du Fu likely alludes. This text begins with a calendrical classification of droughts, each of which is correlated to a “charge” 命 (i.e., “The Fire Dragon is in the west” 火龍西方) and a group to perform ritual dances (“Have the elderly dance for it” 老人舞之). The passage then continues, “If you do this and it does not rain” 如此不雨:

Dwell in seclusion. Cover your southern gate, and place water outside it. Open your northern gate. Obtain human bones and bury them there. If you do this and it does not rain, summon a shaman leader and expose them. If you expose them and it does not rain, go to the spirit's mountain and pile up kindling. Beat drums and burn it.

潛處。闔南門。置水其外。開北門。取人骨埋之。如此不雨。命巫祝而曝之。曝之不雨。神山積薪。擊鼓而焚之。¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ That Du Fu traces aspects of the local rite to *The Divine Farmer's Book* is not a sign that he grants it legitimacy or efficacy, as the poems make clear. The problem with the rite is its lack of *canonical* textual precedent. For the importance of this distinction, see the commentary of Shi Hongbao 施鴻保 (1804-1871), *Du Du shi shuo* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 15.146-7.

¹¹⁸ *Yiwen leiju*, 100.1723. Edward Schafer has argued that the final line should be translated as “burn them,” i.e., the shamans. He cites an identical passage from an early version of the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露, and relates it to several other references to “exposing” 曝 shamans in early texts. However, while Schafer claims the passage leaves 焚之 referentially ambiguous, the grammatical pattern established in the *Shennong qiuyu shu* by the phrase “Obtain human bones and bury them” 取人骨埋之, and earlier by the repetition of “Have X dance for it” X舞之, suggests that the pronoun's referent should shift again in this case, making the timber the thing that burns. Du Fu seemed to regard this passage as descriptive of the events he witnessed in Kuizhou, but he does not mention burning shamans in either “Fire” or “Thunder,” though he does mention whipping them. See Edward H. Schafer, “Ritual Exposure in Ancient China,” *HJAS* 14.1/2 (1951): 141-2.

Here the burning of mountain forests accompanied by drums appears at the end of a list of rainmaking measures. Seen through the lens of *The Divine Farmer's Book*, the fires are a last resort, signaling that all other methods, including the “exposure of shamans” 曝巫, have failed. This matters because Du Fu will insist on the futility of the fires as well, and argue for a different remedy altogether, more in keeping with the models contained in the official ritual code, *Rites of the Kaiyuan Era of the Great Tang* 大唐開元禮, and “Explaining Drought.”¹¹⁹ But first let us see how he represents the ritual itself.

Du Fu begins “Fire” by explaining that the mountain has been ablaze for a month already, and offers his understanding of the logic behind the rite:

It is an old custom to scald the dragons; 舊俗燒蛟龍

Startled and alarmed, they will bring thunder and rain. 驚惶致雷雨

Du Fu’s explanation accords with the *Shuijing zhu* account, which tells how the ashes of burnt trees are pushed into a “spirit spring” 神淵 beneath White Salt Mountain. This “old custom” 舊俗, Du Fu specifies, has the purpose of “scalding” reclusive rain dragons, startling them out of their hiding places and up into the skies. An understanding of the local rites as violently coercive of the spirits thus orients the perspective of “Fire.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ On the *Kaiyuan li* see David McMullen, “Bureaucrats and Cosmology: The Ritual Code of T’ang China,” in David Cannadine and Simon Price, eds., *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 181-236. On the official code’s prescriptions for rainmaking and rain cessation rituals, see Ditter, 155-62. Ditter (156, n.10) notes that the *Jiu Tangshu* and Du You’s 杜佑 (735-812) *Tong dian* 通典 (*Compendium of Institutions*) contain prescriptions that vary slightly from the *Kaiyuan li*, including one to “reexamine cases resulting in unjust incarceration” 審理冤獄.

¹²⁰ Although Du Fu criticizes the local rite as overly coercive, medieval officials were known to employ aggressive tactics, including threatening or even punishing local spirits, to bring rain during droughts. See Alvin P. Cohen, “Coercing the Rain Deities in Ancient China,” *History of Religions* 17.3/4 (1978): 244-65. Indeed, from the mid-Tang onward prayer texts exhibit precisely

The bulk of “Fire” is given over to a fantastic and macabre portrayal of the conflagration, in which Du Fu conveys awe at the enormity of the spectacle, while expressing horror at its destruction of the local landscape:

On erupting peaks, ghouls and goblins sob;	爆嵌魑魅泣
As ice shatters, mountain mists flicker in the flames.	崩凍嵐陰曠
The fallings from the trees could boil a hundred lakes;	羅落沸百泓
These roots and sources are all of remotest antiquity.	根源皆萬古
Verdant forests are at once reduced to ashes;	青林一灰燼
Clouds and ethers have nowhere to go.	雲氣無處所
When night falls it burns especially brightly;	入夜殊赫然
In early autumn, it shines on the Oxherd and Weaving Girl.	新秋照牛女
When the wind gusts, towering flames arise;	風吹巨燄作
And pillars of smoke shoot up to the River of Stars.	河漢騰煙柱

This panorama of charred ancient trees, boiling ponds, and suffocated skies treats the local rite as an offence against the cosmic order, using a language of transgression and encroachment:

Its force seems aimed at burning Mount Kunlun;	勢欲焚崑崙
Its growing light will broil the river islets.	光彌燠洲渚

The fire rages out of control, threatening to burn away the very boundaries of the known world. Du Fu wonders who will put it out, and fears he won’t escape alive.

this tendency toward blaming and threatening recalcitrant spirits, conceiving them as counterparts, equal in status and responsibilities, to earthly officials. See Ditter, esp. 208-9.

Terrified by the inferno, Du Fu turns at the end of “Fire” to the responsible parties, and takes them to task:

Are the lot of you seeking to slander and insult? 爾寧要謗讟

For this way approaches disgrace and ignominy. 憑此近熒侮

Du Fu speaks here in the haughty voice of official power, chastising and threatening unruly subjects. His language of “slander” and “ignominy” casts the ritual as a form of insubordination and criminality, suggesting that the participants are courting punishment. This is Du Fu’s hostility to Kuizhou’s customs expressed most unequivocally.

Such direct confrontation is exceptional, however, even in the poems on the fire ceremony. Du Fu’s main strategy is to argue that the local methods are counterproductive, as in these lines, which precede those just cited:

The divinities have already flown aloft; 神物已高飛

They do not perceive rock and earth. 不見石與土

The fire has succeeded in frightening the dragons, but rather than coercing them into causing rain, it has simply scared them off. Like all the other prescriptions in *The Divine Farmer’s Book*, the forest fires have failed to achieve their aim. In sum, “Fire” portrays this Kuizhou custom as an extravagantly destructive and futile exercise based on the presumption that spirits can be forced to obey human commands.

In “Thunder,” Du Fu counters local practices by arguing for a response to the drought informed by classical texts and rituals. The poem begins with a lament for the drought’s baleful effects on him and local society, while decrying the violence and futility of the local rituals. Unlike in “Fire,” however, he introduces normative counter-examples into his criticism, and juxtaposes Kuizhou’s drought rituals with those of the capital region:

Within the fiefdoms, they must be dancing the *Yu*; 封內必舞雩

In the Gorges there is only the raucous beat of drums. 峽中喧擊鼓

Here the local rite becomes the antithesis of the proper dances performed “within the fiefdoms” under the auspices of his fellow officials: there in the capital “we” dutifully perform the *Yu* dance prescribed by the *Zhouli*, whereas here on the frontier “they” merely create a chaotic ruckus. The comparison with capital norms implicitly faults Kuizhou’s rites for deviating from classically sanctioned practice.

Du Fu then recapitulates his lament for the drought, expanding his scope of concern. It is not only he himself, but the elderly of Kuizhou, and even the state at large, that are its victims:

O! this illness of each and all; 吁嗟公私病

Taxes are lacking and are not refilled. 稅斂缺不補

Elders look to the sky in tears; 故老仰面啼

To whom can they recount their complaints? 瘡痍向誰數

Depleted tax revenue and the sufferings of seniors are symptoms of the drought as a public as well as a private affliction, an “illness of each and all” 公私病.¹²¹ With his opening exclamation (吁嗟) Du Fu proclaims his sympathy for the tearful elders of the second couplet. He frames the broader tragedy of the drought in Mencian terms,

¹²¹ Du Fu’s language here strongly echoes that found in contemporary prayer texts. See for instance Zhang Yue’s 張說 (667-731) “Sacrifice to the River, Praying for Clear Skies” 祭江祈晴文 (*QTW*, 233.2358): “In public and private people are worried and indigent” 公私憂窘. Translation by Ditter (167). Du Fu recapitulates and elaborates this metaphor of illness later in the poem when he describes his own physical ailments (see below).

presenting himself as an impassioned caretaker of beleaguered local patriarchs in desperate need of an effective solution to the crisis.

Having emphasized the drought's full human cost, Du Fu turns back again to his critique of local ritual, though with a marked qualification that anticipates a shift in his polemical stance:

Exposing cripples was perhaps heard of once;	暴尫或前聞
But whipping shamans is not what the ancients taught. ¹²²	鞭巫非稽古

As with the foregoing antithesis of Kuizhou and the capital, Du Fu again insists on the heterodoxy of local rain rites, examples of which he draws upon for comparison. What changes here is that he now grants some of these violent practices (the technique of “exposing cripples” 暴尫) the authority of textual precedent—it was “perhaps heard of in the past” 或前聞. This qualification is significant as a first expression of hesitancy or doubt that increasingly creeps into the argument of “Thunder.” Caught between the two evils of drought and the local rites, Du Fu begins to complicate his own position.

This weakening of his initial polemical stance continues in the second section of “Thunder.” Now Du Fu pleads with the participants to desist:

First, I implore you, lay down your arms,	請先偃甲兵
And listen to your ruler in matters great and small.	處分聽人主
When all the states tend to their own affairs,	萬邦但各業
Each thing partakes fully of the bounty.	一物休盡取

¹²² Pu Qilong ingeniously argues that, as examples of the practices Du Fu refers to can all be found in ancient texts, the second line should read “Whipping shamans is not simply an allusion to antiquity”; in other words, it is actually taking place. See *Du du xin jie*, 1/4.128. On practices of exposure, see Shafer, “Ritual Exposure in Ancient China,” and below.

While the analogy of the ceremony to armed rebellion (“lay down your arms” 偃甲兵) and the call for obedience builds on the dominant themes of “Fire,” the tone of this address could not contrast more sharply with that poem’s strident admonitions.¹²³ Du Fu pleads for an end to the rite and provides a justifying rationale, the substance of which is that dutiful execution of ordained roles (但各業) promotes a greater harmony the benefits of which are reaped by all. The logic of this program, as with the focus on privileged Mencian social categories of community elders and the state, very much resembles that of “Explaining Drought,” with its calls for “clearing the jails” (*jue yu* 決獄) and lightening taxes (specifically on the elderly), all in the interest of reducing “resentful *qi*.” As militant interference in a harmonious natural order, the fire is contributing to the drought it aims to remedy, and the solution is for local actors to return to peaceful private pursuits.

Du Fu ends his entreaty to the local people by providing a final reason to extinguish the fires; he claims, rather surprisingly, that the drought is not really so bad, at least when compared with unruly ritual violence. This natural calamity, after all, is regularly occurring:

Droughts have been innumerable;	水旱其數然
Could Yao and Tang not witnessed them as well?	堯湯免親睹
High Heaven melts metal and stone;	上天鑠金石

¹²³ As Qiu Zhao’ao points out, the phrase “lay down your arms” 偃甲兵 is a citation from “Reproving the Elders of Shu” 難蜀父老, in which Sima Xiangru, the celebrated Han Dynasty rhapsodist and frontier general, lectures frustrated representatives of Ba and Shu provinces on how to promote constructive relations with their tribal neighbors to the southwest. Transposing this phrase to his present context, Du Fu likens the rain ritual to armed conflict, an analogy anticipated by his descriptions of the fire’s effects, and likewise assumes Sima Xiangru’s rhetorical stance. Though a poem, the tone and purpose of “Thunder” is indeed similar to the genre of “reproof” 難, a kind of reproof in verse. Sima Xiangru’s piece is collected in Xiao Tong 蕭統, comp., *Wenxuan*, ed. Li Shan 李善 (630-689), 44.1992-7.

Brigand hordes make a chaos of jackals and tigers.	群盜亂豺虎
But of these two, if one was to be preserved;	二者存一端
Is not an excess of <i>yang</i> still not the better?	愆陽不猶愈

There are worse things to fear than droughts, Du Fu writes, which have after all recurred throughout history, even in ancient times of perfect sagely government. Their regularity makes them preferable to the violence of “brigand hordes” run amok in the post-rebellion empire (again with an implicit analogy to unruly local rites). Compared to this, the “illness of each and all” is in fact a mere “excess of *yang*” (*qian yang* 愆陽).

The uncertainty of Du Fu’s address to the people of Kuizhou reaches a tipping point with this dubious rhetorical question. How, after so passionately lamenting the drought’s devastation, can he now attempt to downplay its severity? I would suggest that this contradiction is deliberate. The question of preferring divine violence to human turmoil is deliberately dubious, and only thinly disguised as rhetorical. It is an impossible question—open, hanging, awaiting a reply—that expresses the impasse at the heart of the poem.

The reply arrives in the form of the thunder we had been promised in the title, but which has been saved until the poem’s final section. It is also with the thunder that classical texts reenter the argument against inflammatory local customs:

Last night, “Boom Went the Thunder”;	昨宵殷其雷
With wind like a myriad crossbows shot at once.	風過齊萬弩
Again it blew, and dispersed the screen of haze;	復吹霾翳散
One could sense the spirits gathering.	虛覺神靈聚

Du Fu's Heaven, like a mighty yet merciful king, displays its awesome force ("wind like a myriad crossbows") and beneficent intent ("one could sense the spirits gathering"). However, Du Fu delivers "Heaven's" message most powerfully through a classical citation encoded within the account of the event itself. "Boom Went the Thunder" 殷其雷/雷, as any contemporary reader would have immediately recognized, is the title of an Ode from the "Shao nan" 召南 section of the *Shijing* 詩經, an Ode which, according to the dominant Mao School 毛詩 commentary, "exhorts to righteousness" 勸以義也.¹²⁴ The thunder in "Thunder" is thus a meteorological and textual event, a "natural" phenomenon that speaks the language of Confucian culture, and through which Du Fu enlists the highest authority in his exhortation to the people of Kuizhou.

Thunder's late appearance in the poem helps account for the puzzling tentativeness of the preceding argument. As we have seen, the poem unfolds as a series of objections to a bad problem (the drought) and a worse solution (the coercive rites), none of which, however, provides any satisfying alternative. Seen as a prelude to the thunder, this makes rhetorical sense as a performance of the poem's central point: that it is seditious folly to try to manipulate divinities (frightening dragons with fire). What better way to demonstrate this than through displays of humility and hesitancy, which moreover dramatize the report of the thunder by building it up as the only voice that matters? The

¹²⁴ The Mao preface to "Boom Went the Thunder" (Mao 19) reads:

The great officers of Shao nan traveled far on government business, and did not have leisure to rest. Their families ably lamented their diligent labors, and exhorted them to righteousness. 《殷其雷》，勸以義也。召南之大夫遠行從政，不遑寧處。其室家能閱其勤勞，勸以義也。

See *Mao shi zhushu*, 1/4.58. For an English translation of the Ode see Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes: Chinese Text, Transcription, and Translation* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950), 11.

poem simulates a process of elimination (like *The Divine Farmer's Book*: “if you do this and there is still no rain...”) that ultimately includes its own proposals, all in order to delegate authority to the divine speech that delivers its message.

And yet, Heaven's answer is no solution. The thunder happened the night before, and, despite its impressive show of force and strong moral message, did not bring rain. Both “Thunder” and “Fire” end in similar ways, with unpleasant descriptions of the poet's suffering body:

Dripping sweat, I recline in my river pavilion;	流汗臥江亭
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As night deepens, my breath is like ragged thread.	更深氣如縷
--	-------

(“Fire”)

Sunstroke has given me diarrhea;	氣暈腸胃融
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Perspiration has soiled my clothes.	汗溼衣裳污
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Grown old, I'm quite a poor planner;	吾衰尤計拙
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And have lost hope of constructing my yard and garden.	失望築場圃
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(“Thunder”)

“Thunder” began with personal complaint; the language of disease appeared again when Du Fu described the drought as an “illness of each and all” 公私病, and declared his solidarity with suffering local elders. Here he returns to this analogy, placing himself center stage as a victim of the epidemic, and displaying his afflictions in disturbing detail. In this way he presents himself as a representative victim, one who suffers visibly on behalf of the local people.

The logic behind these gestures of self-abnegation may be found in a ritual called “exposure” 暴, in use among Du Fu’s contemporaries, and which he mentions earlier in “Thunder” (“Exposing cripples was perhaps heard of in the past” 暴尫或前聞).¹²⁵

Originally denoting the sacrificial killing of spirit mediums and those with physical deformities, ritual exposure was appropriated by emperors and officials of the medieval period, who transformed it into a symbolic display of contrition for administrative oversights.¹²⁶ In the updated version, imperial representatives replaced spirit mediums as the primary actors, and violent acts of immolation and fatal exposure were sublimated into milder forms of self-sacrifice. The *Shuijing zhu*, for instance, provides the following account of a mayor of Luoyang during the second century, who

exposed his body in the staired court, demonstrating his sincerity and drawing the blame on himself from morning until noon. Purple clouds rose in piles and the sweet rain fell forthwith.

曝身階庭，告誡引罪，自晨至午，紫雲沓起，甘雨登降。¹²⁷

Similar acts were performed during the Tang by local officials and emperors, including Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712-756), who is said to have “stood exposed” 暴立 for three days in response to a drought in 723.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ *The Divine Farmer’s Book on Seeking Rain* also mentions exposure (of “shamans” 巫) as the measure to be taken before resorting to forest fires. See above.

¹²⁶ A medieval commentary to the *Zuozhuan* explains that the sacrifice of “cripples” or “crook-backs” 尫 sprang from a belief that Heaven, pitying their physical deformities, refused to unleash rain lest the water enter their upturned noses. See Duke Xi 21; cited in *DSXZ*, 15.1296. Schafer (160-2), following Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, points to the etymological connections between 尫 and 王 (“king”) to suggest that this “cripple” refers back to an ancient figure of the king-as-shaman, enduring disfigurement and delirium in self-sacrifice for his subjects.

¹²⁷ *Shuijing zhushu*, 15.1315, citing *Changsha qijiu zhuan* 長沙耆舊傳. Translation based on Schafer, 134.

Du Fu's final lines in "Thunder," I would submit, should be read as a response, employing an affective vocabulary akin to the exposure ritual, to Heaven's message in the lines before, in an attempt to "demonstrate his sincerity and draw the blame on himself" 告誡引罪. Arguing against the violent insubordination of local rites, Du Fu thus displays a contrasting, and potentially more efficacious ritual posture, one that leads to the final "exposure" of his debilitated body.

In sum, a close reading of "Fire" and "Thunder" shows that Du Fu indeed wrote in opposition to certain of Kuizhou's customs, as has often been claimed; more importantly, however, it reveals specific conditions and strategies of his antagonistic position: a condemnation of the local rainmaking ceremony as a fruitless and offensive attempt to coerce divinities; entreaties to abandon it in favor of more reverent behaviors; and an enactment of such a position through self-abnegating rhetoric. We have seen how, in these poems, Du Fu cites canonical texts and orthodox ritual norms to define his position in contrast to local practices, using the thunder of the classics to extinguish inflammatory customs, as it were. However, such antagonism is not representative. In the poems considered next, Du Fu does not treat Kuizhou's cultural otherness as deviance, but rather as an incitement to question, playfully, the distinction between familiar and foreign ways.

Of Raven Ghosts and Other Anomalies

¹²⁸ See Xuanzong's "Rhapsody on Enjoying the Rain" 喜雨賦, (*QTW*, 12.233); also recorded in *Xin Tangshu*, 35.916. The *Jiu Tangshu* tells of a Tian Renhui 田仁會 (*jinshi* c. 618) who, faced with a drought as prefect of Yingzhou 郢州 in 651, "exposed himself and prayed, in the end obtaining sweet rain" 自曝祈禱, 竟獲甘澤. The *Xin Tangshu* places Tian in Pingzhou 平州 at the time, and records a slightly modified encomium reportedly sung by the local populace. See *Jiu Tangshu*, 185a.4793, *Xin Tangshu*, 196.5623, Schafer, 136.

Du Fu wrote of the strangeness of everyday local customs in a pair of poems entitled “Playfully Written in the Teasing Form to Dispel Gloom” 戲作俳諧體遣悶.¹²⁹ As the title suggests, their tone is far lighter than that of “Fire” and “Thunder,” though they depict Kuizhou’s culture as an utter inversion of orthodoxy, a veritable world turned upside down. And yet, as a tour of their gallery of curious figures will show, this leads not to hostility or remonstrance, but to ironic laughter and playfully obscure quotations. Here is the first poem:

These strange customs are so bizarre!	異俗吁可怪
Such people are difficult to live with.	斯人難並居
House after house raises raven ghosts;	家家養烏鬼
Meal after meal they eat yellowfish.	頓頓食黃魚
Old acquaintances put on superficial airs,	舊識能為態
New ones are already cold and distant.	新知己暗疏
To manage life, keep on plowing and digging;	治生且耕鑿
The only thing is to have nothing to do with them.	只有不關渠

Du Fu follows his boisterous exclamation about the absurdity of local ways with a list of examples, and ends by ruling out the possibility of any and all association with his neighbors. The paradox, however, is that he *is* living among them, and writing poems about their bizarre habits. On the one hand, Du Fu claims they are fundamentally incomprehensible, and yet his ethnographic poetics involves translating “them” into intelligible language, language comprehensible to “us.” Trying to know the local other as

¹²⁹ DSXZ, 20.1793-4.

unknowable—relating while rejecting the possibility of relation—these paradoxes animate the poems, an awareness of which lends them their peculiar playfulness. It is a poetics of the “bizarre” 怪 that laughs at its own attempts at understanding, and solicits a similar stance from the reader.

The first anomaly in these poems is the title. While the terms “playfully written” 戲作, and “dispelling gloom” 遣悶 appear frequently in the titles of Tang poems, the “teasing form” 俳諧體 is otherwise unattested.¹³⁰ While it is certainly possible that more examples once existed, and have since been lost (along with references to them in our other extant sources), we must wonder whether it is merely a coincidence that this singularity occurs in a poem “playfully written” on this particular subject. It seems more likely that Du Fu, whose penchant for subtle humor is well known, chose to “tease” his readers with an invented or exotic form, thereby simulating the estranging effects of the foreign practices he writes about.¹³¹ As we will see, making the “body” 體 of his poems bizarre is only the first bit of fun Du Fu has with his readers.

Just as the strange title toys with the reader’s expectations, the anomalies within the poems lure us into a playful search for elusive knowledge in the margins and dark corners

¹³⁰ The closest apparent relative is a short piece called “Teasing” 俳諧 by Li Shangyin 李商隱 (c. 813-858). However, as Ren Bantang 任半塘 has shown, the teasing in Li’s poem does not refer to its subject matter, but to its implied performance by an entertainer. See his *Tang xi nong* (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, rpt. 2006), 1288-92. It thus belongs to a category distinct from Du Fu’s poem, and does not offer clues for reading the latter. Another possible affiliation is to a satirical genre of “teasing prose” 俳諧文, attested to by a lost work of 15 *juan* by that title recorded in the *Jiu Tangshu* “Jingji zhi” 經濟志 (47.2079), attributed to Yuan Shu 袁淑 (408-453). However, this cross-genre resemblance would still make Du Fu’s “teasing form” an anomaly within poetic practice of its time, presenting readers with an object lacking ready rules of interpretation.

¹³¹ On Du Fu’s sense of humor, see Christopher G. Rea, “‘I Envy You Your New Teeth and Hair’: Humor, Self-Awareness, and Du Fu’s Poetic Self-Image,” *T’ang Studies* 23/24 (2005-2006): 47-89.

of the textual past. An obscure oddity in the first poem's second couplet, and the debate over its identity, is paradigmatic:

House after house raises raven ghosts;	家家養烏鬼
Meal after meal they eat yellowfish.	頓頓食黃魚

In poems filled with cryptic references, the mysterious-sounding “raven ghost” (*wu gui* 烏鬼) has proved hardest to track down. What is a *wu gui*? In his own exemplary attempt to solve the riddle, Cao Mufan 曹慕樊, a modern scholar, counts sixteen works, from the Song to the Qing dynasties, which have weighed in on the subject, and which he narrows down to the following six answers:

- 1) A raven spirit 烏神 (Cai Juhou 蔡居厚 [d. 1125], in his *Cai Kuanfu's Remarks on Poetry* 蔡寬夫詩話).
- 2) A new year's ritual for warding off disasters (Shao Bo 邵博 [d. 1158], in *Mr. Shao's Record of Things Seen and Heard* 邵氏聞見錄).
- 3) Another name for a cormorant 鷗鷺 (Shen Kuo 沈括 [1031-1095], in *Brush Talk from Dream Creek* 夢溪筆談).
- 4) Baby crows raised for sacrifices (Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 [1045-1105]).
- 5) Another name for a pig (Ma Yongqing 馬永卿 [*jinshi* c. 1107]).
- 6) A Sichuan “altar god” 壇神 (Li Shi 李實, *jinshi* 1442).¹³²

After adjudicating between these explanations, Cao, following Qiu Zhao'ao and others, opts for the first as the most persuasive. Cai Juhou, a Song scholar, was the first to

¹³² Cao Mufan 曹慕樊, *Du shi zashuo quanbian* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2009), 281. See also DSXZ, 20.1793.

identify a couplet from Yuan Zhen's 元稹 (779-831) "Replying to Hanlin Scholar Bo in Place of a Letter, One Hundred Rhymes" 酬翰林白學士代書一百韻 as a valuable comparison:

When sick, [the local people] sacrifice to ravens, calling them ghosts; 病賽烏稱鬼
Shamans divine with tiles in place of tortoiseshells.¹³³ 巫占瓦代龜

Yuan's poem dates from 810, when he was posted not far from Kuizhou in Jiangling 江陵 (in modern Hubei Province), and is thus temporally and spatially proximate to Du Fu's poem. Punctuating it throughout are the author's own explanatory comments, including this one on the couplet in question:

When people of the south contract an illness, they strive to sacrifice to raven ghosts. The Chu shamans set up stands in rows, each one selling divination services using tiles.

南人染病，競賽烏鬼；楚巫列肆，悉賣瓦卜。¹³⁴

Yuan Zhen's "sacrifice to ravens called ghosts" 賽烏稱鬼, which his commentary rephrases as "sacrifice to raven ghosts" 賽烏鬼, is extremely similar to Du Fu's "raises raven ghosts" 養烏鬼. As Qiu Zhao'ao notes, it is possible that "raise" 養 is in fact a scribal error for "sacrifice to" 賽; however, such a hypothesis is unnecessary, for when applied to members of the spirit world, 養 and 賽 could be used in similar ways.¹³⁵ If we accept this evidence, it thus appears that when Du Fu writes "house after house raises

¹³³ *Quan Tang shi*, 405.4521; Yang Junwen 楊軍文 and Lü Yanfang 呂燕芳, ed., *Yuan Zhen shiwen xuan* (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 114-125.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*; *Yuan Zhen shiwen xuan*, 116.

¹³⁵ Wang Li 王力 *et al.*, eds., *Wang Li Gu Hanyu zidian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 1663.

raven ghosts” he is referring to a Chu area custom of sacrificing to raven spirits, or ravens thought to represent the dead. Cao points out several other poems by Yuan Zhen that allude to local practices of raven worship, suggesting that the custom was widespread. It would seem that the riddle of the *wu gui* has been solved.

However, more than any particular solution (this being the most persuasive I have found), it is the search itself that may best help us understand what is going on in Du Fu’s poems. Carried out by centuries of industrious readers, the search for the *wu gui* wonderfully illustrates the effects of Du Fu’s poetics of the bizarre. Like the “teasing form,” reference to the *wu gui* elicits the desire for knowledge only to deny or defer its attainment by remaining outside or at the margins of existing frameworks of reference. The *wu gui* (or something like it) may be spotted between the lines of a Yuan Zhen poem or in other out-of-the-way places, yet its identity *as an anomaly* requires that such identifications remain provisional. As Du Fu writes at the end of the second poem: “Right or wrong, from where would one decide?” 是非何處定. What distinguishes this from innumerable other unsolved philological mysteries in the field of Du Fu studies is that it occurs in a poem in which interpretive difficulty is the central theme. It thus takes on demonstrative value, placing the reader in a position of befuddlement analogous to that which Du Fu professes *vis à vis* his neighbors.

Other anomalies in these poems invite similar intertextual expeditions through their deliberate obscurity, but lead to more assured destinations. The second poem’s second couplet, for instance, on top of presenting bizarre phenomena specific to the Chu region, refers to them in local dialect, adding to their opacity:

Westward I passed the plains of the Emerald Qiang tribe;

西歷青羌坂

And in the south came to stay at White Emperor City.	南留白帝城
Here, tigers infringe on a lodger's resentment;	於菟侵客恨
Honey cakes establish personal relations.	糒糝作人情
Divination by tiles transmits the speech of the gods;	瓦卜傳神語
Slash-and-burn farming squanders plowing with fire.	畚田費火耕
Right or wrong, from where would one decide?	是非何處定
From my lofty pillow I laugh at this floating life.	高枕笑浮生

The term “*wu tu*” 於菟, which Du Fu uses for “tiger” in the third line, is a Chu regional expression, as reported in a passage of the *Zuozhuan*.¹³⁶ “Honey cakes” (*ju nü* 糒糝) are a Chu product that appears in the “Summoning the Soul” 招魂 poem of the *Chuci* 楚辭 collection.¹³⁷ Before the reader can puzzle over the strangeness of living among tigers, or of using honey cakes as tokens of friendship, they must first translate the foreign-sounding expressions of *wu tu* and *ju nü*. Much as with the *wu gui* and the poem’s “teasing form,” this surface obscurity erects an initial barrier to understanding that teases the reader and elicits the desire to decode. By contrast, however, these expressions *can* be satisfyingly deciphered, as they are in fact allusions to specific, if marginal, passages in classic texts. This knowledge can be found out, in texts on or from Chu—the ancient southern state to which the Three Gorges region once belonged. In this way, Du Fu leads his readers on an excursion into the margins of the known (textual) world that approximates his own adventures and strange encounters on the periphery of the empire.

¹³⁶ Duke Xuan 6. *Zuozhuan zhushu*, 21.370, Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, ed., *Zuozhuan zhu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 683.

¹³⁷ Hong Xingzu, ed. *Chuci buzhu*, 9.208.

As such textual allusions suggest, the bizarre can only be spoken of through familiar references. Thus, to evoke Kuizhou's strangeness, Du Fu relies in part on citations of the canon. More generally, however, he relies on framing his examples in a way that enables the perception of difference to emerge against a ground of similarity. Only by approaching Kuizhou's customs as variations on "universal" categories of experience and behavior can they be perceived as anomalous. Thus, while focused on portraying the other, these poems are at the same time exercises in self-definition, which, however, are distinct from that of "Fire" and "Thunder." The latter poems were admonitions, and in them Du Fu explicitly and forcefully contrasted local rituals with the orthodox norms he espoused. In "Playfully Written in the Teasing Form..." the contrasts remain implicit, and collective norms are only covertly asserted. Interestingly, this shift from admonition to ethnography corresponds to a shift in the observer's position relative to the observed. The rites in "Fire" and "Thunder," which Du Fu found so threatening, took place on remote mountaintops; the customs in "Playfully Written in the Teasing Style..." happened all around him. Thus, in these two examples, the proximity (and frequency) of foreign practices coincides with a less explicitly judgmental, less clearly oppositional stance.

Finally, however, Du Fu's increased proximity to the local lifestyles of Kuizhou also registers in his self-portrayals, which picture him in positions of aloof detachment. Such poses are made explicit in the final couplets of both poems, though they inform the playful tone throughout:

To manage life, keep on plowing and digging;

治生且耕鑿

The only thing is to have nothing to do with them.

只有不關渠

(Poem 1)

Right or wrong, from where would one decide?

是非何處定

From my lofty pillow I laugh at this floating life.

高枕笑浮生

(Poem 2)

Coming after the lists of anomalous customs, the subjective response of both couplets affirms the distance between Du Fu and his neighbors. This is clear in the self-exhortation of the first, but is just as pronounced in the second, in which the laughter that echoes throughout these poems is related not only to a sense of the ultimate relativity of customs and values, but to a place from which this relativity can be seen: the “lofty pillow” (*gao zhen* 高枕) high above the fray. This is the destination to which Du Fu has led us at the end of the two poems, the position from which the voice in the poems speaks. It is not a real place, but a figurative one—the detached, reclusive state of mind that allows for spiritual retreat amidst discomfiting realities. The lofty pillow enables Du Fu to establish a virtual distance from his neighbors and their practices while living among and writing about them, affording a perspective that encompasses not only Kuizhou, but all places, each with their own peculiarities, none of which can claim to represent a universal standard.

In sum, “Playfully Written in the Teasing Form to Dispel Gloom, Two Poems,” while portraying Kuizhou’s customs as exasperatingly bizarre, responds to them with ironic laughter and allusive play, in marked contrast to the stern admonitions and desperate entreaties of “Fire” and “Thunder.” Du Fu’s playful writing takes the form of deliberately obscure figures—the “teasing form,” the raven ghost, the Chu regional expressions, and more—which, like Kuizhou’s customs, invite interpretation only to evade it, or lead the

exegete to the margins of the canon. While the tone is humorous rather than hostile, these poems, like those on the rain rituals, emphasize the utter incommensurability of local and literati worlds. In the poems that follow, however, the border between these spheres opens, and contrastive oppositions are replaced by interaction and influence as the operative dynamic.

Redeeming Occupations

Among Du Fu's most often anthologized pieces are a pair of *yuefu* ("music bureau") ballads on local people at work—"Ballad of the Boatmen" 最能行 and "Ballad of the Firewood Carriers" 負薪行.¹³⁸ The dominant interpretation of these ballads takes them as exposés of injustices suffered by the common people of the region, and evidence of Du Fu's "compassion," a signature trait of his posthumous image.¹³⁹ In this narrative, they stand alongside warhorses like "Ballad of the Beauties" 麗人行 and the so-called "Three Clerks" 三吏 poems, as anticipations of the "new *yuefu*" 新樂府 poetry of Confucian social criticism associated with the names of Bo Juyi (772-846) and Yuan Zhen. This reading has the merit of emphasizing the poems' generic determinations; however, it tends both to homogenize the descriptions of local labor and to treat them as factual, journalistic reports rather than rhetorical constructions of persons and their milieu.

They are, among other things, perhaps Du Fu's most detailed and vivid depictions of local life in Kuizhou. While taking into consideration the implications of the ballad genre,

¹³⁸ *DSXZ*, 15.1284-7.

¹³⁹ On compassion as a central feature of Du Fu's post-Tang image, and the importance of topical "new *yuefu*" poems in this connection, see Eva Shan Chou, esp. 61-66. For interpretations of these poems that emphasize Du Fu's deep sympathy for his subjects, see, for example, William Hung, *Tu Fu: China's Greatest Poet*, 223, and Xiao Difei 蕭滌非, ed., *Du Fu shi xuanzhu* (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1998), 230-1.

we will thus read them primarily for how they represent customs, as well as inquiring into how they position the poet-observer in relation to his subjects. As we have seen, writing of the local other is also an occasion for self-definition, often articulated through identification *with* examples from the classical past, and *against* behaviors that depart from them. The relation can be antagonistic or aloof, and yet the structure of mutually defining oppositions (literati/native, imperial/local, antiquity/present) remained central. While the ballads still underscore the discrepancy between classical ideals and local manners, they portray local people as embodying certain of these ideals, thus making them possible objects of literati identification and bearers of classical culture.

“Ballad of the Firewood Carriers” and “Ballad of the Boatmen” are a pair of formally identical poems in the long (seven-syllable) line treating typical occupations of local women and men, respectively. Together they present a comprehensive picture of local society defined in terms of gender-specific labor. “Ballad of the Firewood Carriers” tells a story of the “the maidens of Kuizhou” 夔州處女, most of whom remain unwed even at an advanced age, and eke out a living by selling firewood at the market and toiling at salt wells. “Ballad of the Boatmen” tells of “the grown men of the Gorges” 峽中丈夫, who ply their boats through treacherous rapids in the employ of merchants, risking life and limb. Like “Playfully Written in the Teasing Form...” these poems may be characterized as ethnographic, since they portray local behaviors through categories (here gender and work) laden with norms and expectations from which the described behaviors depart, thus appearing strange and worthy of comment. However, these anomalous customs are neither threatening nor laughably absurd; rather, in the case of the men they are ambivalently heroic, and in the case of the women, unjust.

This treatment of local occupations owes much to the conventions of the ballad form. The Tang “ballad” (*xing* 行) or “song-ballad” (*gexing* 歌行) evolved out of the “music bureau” (*yuefu* 樂府) tradition of folk-inspired poetry, the earliest surviving examples of which date to the late Han Dynasty.¹⁴⁰ Early *yuefu* was a narrative poetry that told the stories of a limited number of stock figures—the dashing and patriotic young bravo, the beautiful and chaste maiden, the homesick and battle-weary soldier, and so on—often in their own voices. Their stories comprised defining moments in which the protagonist’s virtues were proven and vividly displayed. Right and wrong, heroes and villains, were clearly defined and held up to the court of public opinion. *Yuefu* therefore lent itself to the exposure of social injustice: the virtuous, humble hero suffering deprivation or persecution by the powerful and corrupt, kindling the moral indignation of the audience. This was the kind of *yuefu* that accorded most closely with the origin myth of the genre, which held that it began, like the *Shijing*, as a form of imperial census, with government agents combing the countryside for folksongs indicative of popular sentiment.¹⁴¹ Thus

¹⁴⁰ The literature on *yuefu* poetry is extensive. Representative modern studies include: Hans Frankel, “Yuefu Poetry,” in *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres*, ed. Cyril Birch, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 69-107), Frankel, “The Development of Han and Wei *Yüeh-fu* as a High Literary Genre,” in Shuen-fu Lin and Stephen Owen, eds., *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice: Shih poetry from the Late Han to the T’ang* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 255-86, Zhou Zhenfu 周振甫, “The Legacy of the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties *Yüeh-fu* Tradition and Its Further Developments in T’ang Poetry,” in Lin and Owen, 287-295, Wang Yunxi 王運熙, *Yuefu shi shulun* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996), Joseph R. Allen, *In the Voice of Others: Chinese Music Bureau Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1992). For the complex history of *yuefu* as the name of a subgenre, see Stephen Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 301-307.

¹⁴¹ This is the theory of “plucking poems” 采詩 whose *locus classicus* is the “Treatise on Arts and Letters” 藝文志 in Ban Gu’s *Han shu* (30.1708): “In ancient times, there was the office responsible for plucking poems. It was the means by which rulers observed local customs, knew of successes and failures, and personally investigated correctness.” 故古有采詩之官，王者所以觀風俗，知得失，自考正也。 A less influential explanation, that of He Xiu 何休 (129-182) in

interpreted, tales of injustice in *yuefu* were read as indirect criticisms of the government, and ultimately of the emperor himself, whose civilizing example was held to be responsible for the moral conditions of society.

It was this socially and politically “serious” branch of the *yuefu* genre that Du Fu took up and transformed, applying it to people and situations he encountered in the aftermath of the An Lushan rebellion. Though his protagonists were mostly drawn from life, and not from the stock repertoire of archetypal fictional personae, Du Fu’s treatment of them as symbolic victims of social injustice grew directly out of this tradition.¹⁴² Such is certainly the case for “Ballad of the Firewood Carriers” and “Ballad of the Boatmen.” Like many early *yuefu*, these ballads feature symbolic protagonists enacting their definitive roles—the representative local man and woman, engaged in their emblematic and presumably timeless labors. But it is in the portrayal of these occupations that the *yuefu* tradition is most decisively at work. Du Fu presents his local heroes at work as versions of two common *yuefu* types: the martyr and the bravo.¹⁴³

Du Fu distinguishes between the plight of the men and women on several levels, beginning with his initial characterizations. He introduces the “maidens” of Kuizhou through their “faded locks” and with the information that, “at ages of forty or fifty” they

his commentary to the *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳, held that localities voluntarily submitted poems to state authorities, who passed them to the emperor. *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* (Duke Xuan 15), 16.208.

¹⁴² On Du Fu’s *gexing* and their relation to the Tang ballad more generally, see Xue Tianwei 薛天緯, *Tangdai gexing lun* (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2006), 200-40.

¹⁴³ Du Fu also had a tradition of *yuefu* on the Yangzi river culture of merchant boatmen to draw upon, from the early anonymous “Wu Mountain is High” 巫山高 up through Li Bo’s “Ballad of Changgan” 長干行. However, the comparison immediately highlights the absence of that tradition’s central theme: the longings of separated lovers. One of the peculiarities of Du Fu’s ballads, which are so clearly presented as companion pieces, is that there seems to be no relation between the main characters; as if, living in the same place, they inhabited different (generic?) worlds.

are unable to find husbands. Their predicament is exacerbated, Du Fu writes, by the wars, endemic in the post-rebellion period, which have conscripted bachelors away from their native villages. Imagining their disappointment and frustration, he concludes: “A lifetime of stored-up resentment—it is truly enough to make one sigh” 一生抱恨堪咨嗟. In this frame story the local women are characterized by their lack of marriage. The very term “maidens” 處女 names them in terms of the very thing denied them by local conditions.

“Ballad of the Boatmen” also begins with a background story establishing its subject as deviating from an implied norm. The “grown men” 丈夫, Du Fu begins, “have no fear of death” 絕輕死, “Few are in the government office, while many are in the water” 少在公門多在水. Like the women, the local men are out of place. They *should* be in the government office, pursuing studies or some form of public service, just as their female counterparts should be happily wedded in the bloom of youth. The difference would seem to be a matter of agency—the men are defined by a deviant occupation that they have chosen while the women’s marital status is beyond their control. Du Fu problematizes such a distinction, however, when he remarks on the economic motivations behind the men’s work:

The rich and powerful, possessing wealth,

Ride on giant ships.

富豪有錢駕大舸

While the poor and hard up, to make ends meet,

Ply their leaf-like skiffs.

貧窮取給行牒子

Thus, the men’s absence from government offices seems less like a objectionable decision and more like a survival strategy, comparable to that of the women who “sell

firewood to get cash and provide for basic necessities” 賣薪得錢應供給. They act under pressure of poverty, and thus elicit more sympathy than criticism.

But Du Fu cites other causes of hardship, including, for the women, a particular “local custom” 土風:

It is local custom that men will sit

And women are made to stand.

土風坐男使女立

The men occupy the household

While the women go in and out.

男當門戶女出入

This inversion of implied norms by local mores echoes the many examples of bizarre anomalies from “Playfully Written in the Teasing Form...” with the key difference that here the inversion is coded as injustice.¹⁴⁴ Custom has caused a reversal of gender norms, which is partly responsible for the women’s exhausting toil. Du Fu sees a cultural factor behind the men’s pursuits as well:

The little boys’ education

Gets no further than *The Analects*

小兒學問止論語

Once the big boys get their caps

They’re off following the merchants.

大兒結束隨商旅

There is an implicit causal relation between these lines, whereby insufficient schooling in classic texts early on results later in the descent into ignoble mercantile occupations. Du

¹⁴⁴ The same trope of inversion could produce laughter or outrage depending on how it was read. Wang Sishi 王嗣爽 (1566-1648) reads these ballads as satires of local customs: “The two poems came about because Kuizhou’s customs were base and shallow. Then again with the closing allusions to Zhaojun and Qu Yuan he defends them from mockery. Such were the games Du Fu played with his brush.” 二詩為夔州風俗惡薄而發，末引昭君、屈原，又為夔人解嘲，筆端遊戲如此。 *Du yi*, quoted in *DSXZ*, 15.1287.

Fu thus treats an education deficit much as he treats the customary inversion of classical gender norms: both are cultural conditions in Kuizhou's local society that lead to predominant kinds of work. These, together with the other forms of deprivation, help identify his protagonists, according to genre expectations, as victims of unjust conditions.

Work itself, however, is treated very differently in the two ballads. For the local women, carrying firewood is a literal burden weighing them down, as well as a symbolic extension of the hardships that characterize them throughout the poem. Men sit and women move about—the rhetoric of inverted norms makes the women's work itself a denial or degradation of essential identity. In the role of the martyr, or suffering hero, their triumph will be to preserve something of that identity *despite* the burden imposed on them by custom. Therefore, after reporting that most of the women sell firewood for a living, Du Fu includes only one further couplet on their labor:

With all their strength they scale the heights

To gather at the market gates.

筋力登危集市門

In life-or-death bids for gain

They work the salt wells too.

死生射利兼鹽井

In contrast are the two couplets that precede and follow this one, both of which focus on the women's adornments:

Even in old age their hair in double buns

Hangs only to their necks.

至老雙鬟只垂頸

Wildflowers and mountain leaves

Are paired with silver hairpins.

野花山葉銀釵並

The aging women of Kuizhou keep the hairstyle of the young and unwed. The incongruous mixture of their ornaments—rustic local flora and refined silver hairpins—encapsulates the larger incongruity between ideals of feminine beauty and harsh local conditions. The penultimate couplet focuses more closely on the ornaments themselves:

On facial powders and head adornments

Are scattered tracks of tears.

面妝首飾雜啼痕

In the narrow places, with flimsy clothes,

They are trapped among craggy foothills.

地褊衣寒困石根

Insofar as for Du Fu normative womanhood itself is invested in such things as makeup and jewelry, the image of these tear-streaked surfaces symbolizes, in condensed form, the plot and pathos of the ballad as a whole: the difficulty, if not impossibility, of “being a woman” in Kuizhou. Yet the ultimate effect of such images is not to make the maidens appear defeated by their environment. On the contrary, through the neatly bound hair, the adornments, and the powder, Du Fu would show that they have managed to preserve honor and integrity (classically defined) despite the crushing burdens of environment and custom enumerated throughout the poem.

In “Ballad of the Boatmen,” by contrast, Du Fu portrays the men’s work not in conflict with their essential identity, but as the medium of its realization. Above we saw how, when introducing his male subjects, Du Fu bemoans the fact that so many forgo study or service in favor of a dangerous but potentially lucrative life on the river. However, when he begins describing the boatmen in action, deftly navigating the deadly rapids, he quickly changes register, and launches into praise:

With sails aslant and rudders turned

They enter the mighty waves.	鼓帆側舵入波濤
Parrying whirlpools and brushing breakers,	
Without peril or obstruction.	撇漩捎潰無險阻
“In the morning depart White Emperor,	
By evening reach Jiangling.”	朝發白帝暮江陵
Lately, having witnessed it myself,	
I have proof the saying is true. ¹⁴⁵	頃來目擊信有徵
Qutang Gorge fills the sky;	
Tiger Whiskers Shoal roars.	瞿塘漫天虎鬚怒
But the grown men of Guizhou	
Pilot their boats the best.	歸州長年行最能

After vividly describing some of the boatmen’s techniques, Du Fu confirms their legendary speed, and then invokes the perilous landmarks against which they prove their skill. With these lines he has modulated from a *yuefu* of social injustice, in which the hero prevails despite difficult circumstances, to a *yuefu* of praise and celebration, in which the hero is shown thriving in his element. The effect is to create greater contrast with the companion piece, and thus greater mutual definition of the characters and virtues presented through the respective narrative modes. In almost symmetrical contrast to the local women, for whom work weighs them down and wears them out, the men’s work buoys them up and carries them along, “without peril or obstruction” 無險阻.

¹⁴⁵ The saying, made famous by Li Bo 李白 (701-762) among others, was recorded in Sheng Hongzhi’s 盛弘之 (fl. 5th c.) *Record of Jingzhou* 荊州記: “In the morning depart White Emperor, in the evening reach Jiangling” 朝發白帝, 暮到江陵。 See *Shuijing zhushu*, 34.2834, Li Bo, “In the Morning, Departing White Emperor City” 早發白帝城, in *Quan Tang shi*, 181.1844.

This shift in tone is thrown into even greater relief by the penultimate couplet, which returns to the minor, mildly disparaging key of the poem's beginning. Du Fu writes:

The people of this village

Have narrow capacities.

此鄉之人器量窄

Mistakenly competing southern airs

Alienate the northern guest.

誤競南風疏北客

In the first line, Du Fu seems to be saying that the boatmen may be highly proficient at their specific trade, but that this specialization is “narrow,” perhaps in contrast to the “broad” knowledge expected of a good scholar-official. The second line draws from a passage in the *Zuozhuan*, in which Music Master Kuang 師曠, speaking to the people of Jin, dispels alarm about an advancing Chu army by claiming familiarity with Chu “airs” 風: “The southern airs are uncompetitive, and contain many sounds of death. Chu will surely not succeed” 南風不競，多死聲。楚必無功。¹⁴⁶ Du Fu’s phrase, “mistakenly competing southern airs,” would thus seem to contrast the contentious *feng* of the boatmen to a “correct” regional *feng* defined by Master Kuang. Whether, as Qiu Zhao’ao believes, this refers to their “reliance on strength” (*shi qiang* 恃強), or it describes an ethos of “death-defiance and profit seeking” (*qing sheng zhu li* 輕生逐利), as Pu Qilong argues, such deviant behaviors estrange Du Fu, the “northern guest,” something he complains of in several other poems.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ *Zuozhuan zhushu* (Duke Xiang 18), 33.579, *Zuozhuan zhu*, 1043. “Airs” can of course refer both to songs and to customs more generally.

¹⁴⁷ For instance, in the first poem of “Playfully Written in the Teasing Form to Dispel Gloom,” discussed above. For the disagreement between Qiu and Pu, see *DSXZ*, 15.1287 and *Du shi xin jie*, 2/2.297.

However, to take these lines as Du Fu's definitive statement on the local men, as is often done, is to minimize the manifestly positive portrayal of their exploits in the majority of the poem. Du Fu qualifies his praise in the penultimate couplet—the boatmen excel at a “narrow” skill and their “contentiousness” can be off-putting to a literatus like himself—but such qualifications in no way negate the poem's central affirmation of their talent. This interpretation is borne out by the final couplet.

In the final couplets of both ballads, Du Fu uses an identical construction, common in *yuefu* poetry, to challenge readers' negative conceptions of the people he has portrayed. He stands his humble subjects alongside famous heroes of imperial history who hailed from the region, and asks:

If you say that near Wu Mountain

The women are crude and ugly,

若道巫山女粗醜

How is it that in this place is

Zhaojun's village?

何得此有昭君村

And, regarding the men,

If you say these gentlemen lack

Distinguished and heroic talent,

若道土無英俊才

How is it that in the mountains lies

Qu Yuan's estate?

何得山有屈原宅

These lines have been interpreted as reinforcing an overall negative depiction of the men and women of Kuizhou.¹⁴⁸ In this view, Du Fu responds to the hypothetical disparaging

¹⁴⁸ Xiao Difei's reading is representative: “Du Fu believes that the boatmen's narrow capacities are not due to geography or environment, but to their lack of education. He uses Qu Yuan as

remark not by disagreeing with regard to the present inhabitants, but by protesting that the region has in the past produced worthy figures, and therefore may do so again. This reading draws support from lines, discussed above, in which Du Fu decries the discrepancy between ideal gender roles and those obtaining in Kuizhou. However, it overlooks the more thematically central sections in which he showcases the women's beauty and the men's prowess. These are the centerpieces of the poems, and provide the basis for a more adequate reading of the closing lines. Wang Zhaojun and Qu Yuan are not examples of quality regional products the likes of which have long died out. On the contrary, the beauty and talent they exemplified lives on in the firewood carriers and boatmen along the river.

Portraying local women and men as *yuefu* martyrs and bravos in the mold of Zhaojun and Qu Yuan, Du Fu complicates the opposition between literati and local, ritual and custom. Customs are still disparaged, as “local ways” 土風 that the virtuous protagonists must surmount, either by resisting or mastering their respective labors. However, labor is a special kind of custom, a medium through which the local men and women of the ballads transcend locality's constraints, and appear as likenesses of the region's classical representatives. If this may be described as a “trickle-down” vision of cultural influence, the final section will show, through an examination of literati imitations of Kuizhou's local song, how Du Fu imagined culture “bubbling up” from below.

Beyond the Boundaries

evidence.” See *Du Fu shi xuanzhu*, 230. For Xiao and others, Du Fu's celebrated sympathy for Kuizhou's local people manifests itself in pity for their “backward” (Jiang, 60) and benighted ways.

The main subject of this section is a set of ten quatrains, entitled “Songs of Kuizhou” 夔州歌十絕句, which Du Fu very likely wrote in imitation of local song styles. The prospect that these poems are, to one extent or another, imitations is of great interest for our study, as such would represent a more intimate transaction between literati and local cultures than any examined thus far. It would take us beyond the realm of rhetorical positions of classics and customs, and reveal a cultural heterogeneity at the heart of Du Fu’s poem series itself, in its very conception and composition. In order to question whether this is the case, we will compare “Songs of Kuizhou” with imitations whose status is certain: Liu Yuxi’s (772-842) “Bamboo Branch Lyrics” 竹枝詞, a series of nine quatrains written in Kuizhou some sixty years after Du Fu’s, and explicitly labeled as adaptations of local song. The comparison will strongly suggest that “Songs of Kuizhou” are indeed imitations, and precursors of the literati “Bamboo Branch Lyric” tradition. Not only this: the comparison will also reveal scenes of singing within the songs, scenes that represent the series’ model or inspiration, and characterize their relations to oral origins. Du Fu’s model singers, it turns out, are themselves familiar figures of border crossings and exchange.

Eastern Sichuan was famous for its song and dance traditions.¹⁴⁹ The region’s “Bamboo Branch Lyrics” 竹枝詞 became especially popular among mid-Tang literati

¹⁴⁹ In the battles that led to the founding of the Han Dynasty, Liu Bang 劉邦 (r. 202-195 B.C.) dispatched a contingent of Ba tribesmen to the frontlines—the so-called “Banxun barbarians” 板楯蠻夷—whose martial valor was equaled by their musicality. The *Hou Hanshu* reports: “By custom they delight in song and dance. Gaozu (Liu Bang) observed them and said, ‘This is the song of King Wu’s expedition against Jie [which brought about the founding of the Zhou Dynasty].’ Thereupon he ordered his musicians to study it. It became known as the Bayu Dance, and has been continued by successive generations.” 俗喜歌舞，高祖觀之，曰：「此武王伐紂之歌也。」乃命樂人習之，所謂巴渝舞也。遂世世服從。 See Fan Ye 范曄 (398-445), *Hou Hanshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 86.2842. Sage, 169-70.

through the imitations of Liu Yuxi, who served as prefect of Kuizhou from 822 to 824. Shortly after arriving in the area, Liu wrote a sequence of nine “Bamboo Branch Lyrics,” which are credited as having inaugurated what became an influential subgenre of classical poetry used throughout the imperial period to depict the manners and customs of exotic places. Kuizhou’s local songs thus provided the archetype for literati imaginings of cultural otherness in poetry. Liu appended a long preface to his series, in which he describes the songs, explains his imitative method, and situates it within a tradition of elite adaptations.

The songs of the four quarters have different tones, but are all similarly music. In the first month of the year (822), I came to Jianping (Kuizhou’s name during the Jin Dynasty [265-420]). Here, the village boys sing medleys of Bamboo Branch Songs, playing short flutes and beating drums to keep rhythm. The singers wave their sleeves and dance joyfully; those with many songs are considered sagely.

Listening to the tone of these songs, it corresponds to the *yu* note of the Yellow Bell scale,¹⁵⁰ and the final sections are wild and exuberant, like the “Wu Sounds.”¹⁵¹ Though they are rough and messy, and cannot be separated out, they

¹⁵⁰ *Yu* 羽 was the fifth note in the classical pentatonic scale.

¹⁵¹ “Wu sounds” refer to the *Wu sheng ge* 吳聲歌, local songs from the Jiankang (Nanjing) area that became popular at the courts of the Southern Dynasties (317-589). See Marsha Wagner, *The Lotus Boat: The Origins of Chinese Tz’u Poetry in T’ang Popular Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 55-6, Allen, 124-6. Many of these songs and subsequent imitations are collected in Guo Maoqian’s 郭茂倩 (1041-1099) *Yuefu shiji* anthology under the heading of *Qingshang quci* 清商曲辭. See *Yuefu shiji*, 44-7.639-88.

feature restrained longings, and are charmingly indirect. There is the sensual tone of “Qi ao” in them.¹⁵²

In the past, when Qu Yuan was living by the Yuan and Xiang rivers, the local people sang songs to welcome spirits, many phrases of which were vulgar and crude. He thus composed the “Nine Songs.” Down to the present day, people in the Jing-Chu region sing and dance to them. Therefore, I also composed nine “Bamboo Branch” pieces, so as to let good singers spread them, placing them at the end [of this preface]. Those who hear songs of Ba and Yu will know that the origin of the “Altered Airs” lies herein.

四方之歌，異音而同樂。歲正月，余來建平，里中兒聯歌竹枝，吹短笛擊鼓以赴節。歌者揚袂睢舞，以曲多為賢。聆其音，中黃鐘之羽，卒章激訐如吳聲，雖儻儻不可分，而含思宛轉，有淇澳之豔音。昔屈原居沅湘間，其民迎神，詞多鄙陋，乃為作九歌。到于今荆楚歌舞之。故余亦作竹枝九篇，俾善歌者颺之，附于末。後之聆巴歎，知變風之自焉。¹⁵³

Of particular interest for our discussion is the complex interplay between locality and the classical tradition in this document. On the first and most basic level, Liu Yuxi is explicitly basing his “Bamboo Branch Lyrics” on a song style of the Kuizhou area, thus

¹⁵² “Qi ao” 淇澳, or “Qi River Cove” (Mao 55), is the first poem in the “Airs of Wey” 衛風 section of the *Mao Shi*. *Mao shi zhushu*, 3/2.126-28. For a translation see Karlgren, 36-7. Along with Odes from the state of Zheng 鄭, Wei poetry was synonymous among traditional commentators with romance and other illicit subjects.

¹⁵³ Qu Tuiyuan 瞿蛻園, ed., *Liu Yuxi jijianzheng* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, rpt. 2005), 852-7. The “altered” (or “mutated”) airs 變風 refer of course to Odes deemed indecent by the Mao School commentators, who justified them as ironic satires of a decadent age, penned by conscientious “historians of the state” 國史. See Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 47-8; Haun Saussy, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic*, 94-5; and Steven Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 102.

taking a local custom as his model. More than mere subject matter, locality here enters into the space of the classical literati *shi*, as its foundation and inspiration.

However, this influence from “below” coincides with a two-fold operation from “above.” First, when describing the local songs, Liu defines them in terms of canonical texts, for instance identifying their “tone” 音 within the Yellow Bell 黃鐘 scale, and comparing it to “Qi ao” 淇澳 (“Qi River Cove”), an Ode from the *Shijing*. These associations would no doubt raise the respectability of the non-canonical songs of Kuizhou in the eyes of literati readers, and thus help legitimize Liu Yuxi’s imitations. In this way Liu effaces the specific local character of the songs by making them into examples of “locality,” classically defined.

However, the more decisive transformation occurs through Liu Yuxi’s revisions, the nature and purpose of which he foregrounds in the preface. Liu makes clear that his project is not to copy all aspects of the local songs, for he notes that, despite certain charming resemblances to the *Odes*, “they are rough and messy, and cannot be separated out” 儻儻不可分. Rather, his project is to transform them, to clean them up by rewriting them in classical poetic language. This is already signaled when Liu identifies them with “Qi ao,” not just any Ode, but one from the ancient state of Wey 衛, legendary as a land of loose morals and “altered airs” 變風. Kuizhou’s airs, Liu suggests, beg similarly for alteration. That is not all, however, for improving the poems has as its ultimate goal the improvement of local society itself. His model for this is Qu Yuan, who, according to Liu, based his “Nine Songs” 九歌 on the “vulgar and crude” 鄙陋 spirit invocations sung in his place of exile. “Down to the present day,” Liu writes, “the people still sing and dance to them.” Following this example, Liu Yuxi presents his “Bamboo Branch Lyrics” not

only as elevated revisions of local originals, but as their prospective replacements in the musical and ceremonial culture of the region. They are tools, crafted from the raw material of local culture, whose function is to civilize the culture from which they came.

Living in Kuizhou, Du Fu could hardly avoid encountering local songs. He mentions them in several poems, as disconcerting reminders of Kuizhou's foreignness and his distance from home:

Barbarian songs rise up, violating the stars;	蠻歌犯星起
And in vain I am aware of being on heaven's edge. ¹⁵⁴	空覺在天邊

(From "Night, two poems" 夜二首)

Ten thousand miles of tunes from Ba and Yu;	萬里巴渝曲
After three years I've truly heard my fill. ¹⁵⁵	三年實飽聞

(From "Late spring, written on my newly rented thatched cottage in Nang West, five poems" 暮春題瀼西新賃草屋五首)

I am not yet fond of Bamboo Branch Songs	竹枝歌未好
Do not be slow returning in your painted boat. ¹⁵⁶	畫舸莫遲回

¹⁵⁴ *DSXZ*, 20.1790.

¹⁵⁵ *DSXZ*, 18.1611.

¹⁵⁶ *DSXZ*, 15.1294.

(From “Respectfully sent to Secretary Li
Wenyi the Fifteenth, two poems” 奉寄李十
五秘書文巖二首)

Such references to “Barbarian songs” 蠻歌, “Tunes of Ba and Yu” 巴渝曲, and “Bamboo Branch Songs” 竹枝歌 testify that Du Fu was in close contact with the musical culture Liu Yuxi drew upon for his adaptations.

An argument has recently been made that Du Fu also wrote imitations of local song, though without advertising his enterprise, as Liu did sixty years later.¹⁵⁷ The most compelling evidence for this comes from comparing Liu’s “Bamboo Branch Lyrics” to Du Fu’s “Songs of Kuizhou.” Formally, the two sets are very similar. Both are quatrain cycles of several poems (Liu Yuxi has nine, following the “Nine Songs,” where Du Fu has ten). Recall that Liu remarks in his preface that the local boys sing “medleys” 聯歌, and that “those who sing the most are considered sagely” 以曲多為賢. The two sets are similar in their prosody and verbal patterning as well. Not only are they both in the long (heptasyllabic) line, but both are distinguished by prominent wordplay involving repetition and the use of numbers, directions and colors to create connection and contrast within and between lines of a couplet, all in exuberant violation of stylistic norms. Note, for example, the similar play with directional markers and word repetition in the following couplets:

In Nang East and Nang West

¹⁵⁷ Jiang Xianwei, “The Breakthrough of Literati ‘Bamboo Branch Lyrics’—‘Songs of Kuizhou, Ten Quatrains,’” in *Du Fu Kuizhou shi lungao*, 18-33.

Are a myriad households;

灑東灑西一萬家

North of the river, south of the river

Are spring and winter flowers.¹⁵⁸

江北江南春冬花

(“Songs of Kuizhou” #5)

East of the bridge, west of the bridge,

There are fine willows.

橋東橋西好楊柳

People come and people go,

Singing song ballads.¹⁵⁹

人來人去唱歌行

(“Bamboo Branch Lyrics” #3)

Du Fu’s lines both begin with a place name and a relative direction (“Nang East,” “North of the River”), followed by the same name repeated with the opposite direction (“Nang West,” “South of the River”), thus including all four directions in a single couplet. Liu Yuxi uses the same pattern of repetition and variation, with the difference that his second line replaces places with people (“People come and people go”). Such conspicuous, playful repetition, especially of directions and places, seems to have been a defining stylistic trait of Kuizhou’s local song adopted by Du Fu and Liu Yuxi alike.

More generally, it is the prevalence in both sets of local landmarks and place names that is their most striking commonality, and that which is most suggestive of a shared source. They are truly “Songs of Kuizhou,” in the sense that almost every quatrain takes as its subject at least one local topographical feature, presented along with defining attributes or associations. Kuizhou, The Long River, White Emperor City, White Salt

¹⁵⁸ *DSXZ*, 15.1304.

¹⁵⁹ *Liu Yuxi jijianzheng*, 853.

Mountain, Red Armor Mountain, Wu Mountain and the Goddess Shrine—these and other names make up the texture of these poems, as can be seen, for example, in the first quatrains of both sets:

To the east of Central Ba

Are the Eastern Ba mountains;

中巴之東巴東山

The Long River, since “opening and clearing,”

Flows in between them.

江水開闢流其間

White Emperor, so high,

Is garrison of the Three Gorges;

白帝高為三峽鎮

Kuizhou is even more precipitous

Than Bai Lao pass.¹⁶⁰

夔州險過百牢關

(“Songs of Kuizhou” #1)

Atop White Emperor City’s walls

Spring grass grows.

白帝城頭春草生

Below White Salt Mountain

The Shu River is clear.

白鹽山下蜀江清

The southerners come on up

And sing a single song.

南人上來歌一曲

The northerner does not arise,

Stirred by thoughts of home.¹⁶¹

北人莫上動鄉情

(“Bamboo Branch Lyrics” #1)

¹⁶⁰ *DSXZ*, 15.1302.

¹⁶¹ *Liu Yuxi jijianzheng*, 852.

Woven together, the poems thus compose a kind of verbal map of the region. The sagely singer who strings together the most “Bamboo Branches” is the one who most completely encompasses Kuizhou in words. In sum, then, Du Fu’s “Songs of Kuizhou” share significant formal, prosodic, and thematic characteristics with Liu Yuxi’s “Bamboo Branch Lyrics,” which was explicitly based on Kuizhou’s local song styles. Such similarities strongly suggest that Du Fu’s series shares similar sources, and is “of Kuizhou” in this more emphatic sense as well.

But the most fascinating shared feature of the medleys is their representation of song performance, in scenes that evoke the generative situations of the poems, inscribing their oral origins within their written forms. A comparison of these “performance scenes” reveals suggestively contrasting relations to their local models. Liu Yuxi foregrounds his performance scene, placing it in the first quatrain of his “Bamboo Branch Lyrics”:

The southerners come on up

And sing a single song.

南人上來歌一曲

The northerner does not arise,

Stirred by thoughts of home.¹⁶²

北人莫上動鄉

情

“The northerner,” of course, is Liu, who portrays himself as the audience for the local singers (“the southerners”), whose songs he will represent, transformed, in the poems we are reading. The scene is neatly choreographed into oppositions between southern/northern, local/literati, singer/writer, performer/audience. The local singers actively present their songs to the literati auditor, whose passive reception (he “does not

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

arise”) anticipates his translation of song into text. A space is opened—between singer and poet, between the time of performance and the time of writing—that is itself essential to Liu’s project as his preface describes it. There, Liu complains that the local songs are “rough and messy, and hard to distinguish.” His transposition will bring clarity and order in the form of divisions and spacing lacking in the originals. Liu’s performance scene of a carefully staged concert gives palpable form to the ordering transformations undertaken in and through the poems.

Du Fu’s “Songs of Kuizhou” contains a description of local song that, while certainly less conspicuous, may similarly be read as the generative performance scene of the series. It occurs in the seventh quatrain, in which Du Fu writes of the local boatmen:

Hemp from Shu and salt from Wu

Have always circulated;

蜀麻吳鹽自古通

Boats that carry countless bushels

Travel like the wind.

萬斛之舟行若風

As the old captain sings a

Song that’s long and loud,

長年三老長歌裏

On a bright day they are gambling,

Amidst the towering waves.¹⁶³

白晝攤錢高浪

中

This is the sole depiction of song performance in a series entitled “Songs of Kuizhou,” and may be read, like Liu’s concert scene, as an inscription in the series of its own inception. It differs from the concert in several respects, however, and these differences

¹⁶³ DSXZ, 15.1305.

of staged origins suggest larger discrepancies in the relations of the two literati medleys to their local models. Whereas Liu Yuxi's set originates in an audition setting, Du Fu's scene includes only the singer, the "old captain" 長年三老; the poet's presence is left implicit, as if he were overhearing a performance not intended for him. The captain sings a "long song" 長歌—perhaps a reference to the medley form—as the boatmen gamble aboard their ship, the sun shining on them and boat rocking on the river waves. This image of insouciant freedom and poise amidst instability closely resembles scenes from "Ballad of the Boatmen," and makes local song an expression of the same local "talent" or virtuosity. Song, gambling, and the boatmen's dangerous trade are presented as aspects of a life characterized by flux and circulation: of goods, of the boats that carry them, and of the money changing hands through the boatmen's wagers. It is also a scene of circulation between elite and local practices, as the captain's song, which seems to contain this general back-and-forth (Du Fu's phrase is "*within* the long song" 長歌裏), is presented as the model for Du Fu's poem series. This performance scene strikingly contrasts that of Liu Yuxi. Like Liu's "Bamboo Branch Lyrics," Du Fu's "Songs of Kuizhou" rework fluid oral originals into fixed texts, transposing local customs into classical forms; however, unlike Liu's static and hierarchical performance setting, which presages his ordering of the songs in writing and the ordering of local society through his poems, Du Fu models his series on a moment of exuberant and unpredictable exchange out on the wild river.

Conclusions

Du Fu's prodigious outpouring of poetry in Kuizhou, so much of which was given over to remembrance of personal and cultural pasts, was in large part a response to the disconcerting unfamiliarity of the southwest frontier, epitomized by its local culture. This chapter has examined a representative selection of poems on local customs from this period, not to uncover the author's subjective judgments and attitudes so much as to elucidate how they represent local behaviors in relation to media of literati cultural memory—classic texts, orthodox ritual norms, and exemplary figures. It is no surprise that some of Du Fu's portrayals of local customs are disparaging, as previous studies have repeatedly emphasized; for denigrating locality was another way of affirming a capital- and classics-based identity. However, as the chapter has tried to show, such a characterization hardly does justice to the complexity and variety of Du Fu's poems.

The poems analyzed above represent a series of encounters with Kuizhou's customs that move from rhetorical positions of distance and mutual antagonism to those characterized by proximity and interchange.¹⁶⁴ The former is best represented by "Fire" and "Thunder," in which Du Fu portrays local rainmaking ceremonies as violently destructive, offensive to the spirits, and generally ineffective. He positions himself in opposition to local ritual practice by countering coercion with appeal and interpretation as rival strategies for influencing divine will. "Playfully Written in the Teasing Form to Dispel Gloom" represents an encounter with Kuizhou's local culture marked by distance and difference despite physical proximity—the ironic vantage point of the "lofty pillow." From here the otherness of local customs can be approached without moral judgment, and rather as a riddle, an incitement to impossible understanding. "Ballad of the Firewood

¹⁶⁴ It must be stressed that this narrative is simply one way of organizing and presenting what is in fact a taxonomy, and should not be taken as suggesting any linear "evolution" in Du Fu's relation to Kuizhou's local culture.

Carriers” and “Ballad of the Boatmen” feature local women and men as complimentary *yuefu* heroes—the martyr and the bravo—who exhibit, in the execution of their respective labors, the virtues of classical exemplars from their region. As latter-day Wang Zhaojuns and Qu Yuans, they appear to transcend the stigma of locality, and inhabit a liminal frontier between local and literati worlds. Finally, the scene of the singing boatmen in “Songs of Kuizhou” suggests an inverse model of transcultural influence, in which local practice provides a model for literati imitation. This is a scene of circulation—of money and the mariners themselves, but also of song crossing borders between locality and literati, customs and classics.

Interlude

Private Investments:

Housework, Poetry, and the Production of Value

Du Fu's complex relation to locality in Kuizhou, and the role of the classical tradition in navigating this foreign environment, is perhaps most vividly illustrated in poems on his domestic spaces, specifically those that portray repair and construction projects.

Especially late in life, Du Fu wrote extensively on the physical structures he inhabited, imbuing them with significances they never had in previous poetry. This preoccupation with domestic space emerged in response to experiences of forced flight and prolonged displacement during and following the An Lushan rebellion. The rebellion left Du Fu homeless, and he spent the remainder of his life traversing the empire in search of safe havens for himself and his family. These experiences understandably transformed the value and meaning of houses in his poetry. With the outside world full of violence and uncertainty, houses became precious sanctuaries, and provided a fertile topic for poetry. Du Fu's late poetry on housework illuminates a key transitional moment in Chinese literati identity, when one structure (the state) was being replaced by another (the private dwelling) as the main stage of elite self-representation and framework of belonging.¹⁶⁵

Domestic themes are usually associated with the period between 760 and 765 when Du Fu resided in Chengdu, rustivating in his famous "Thatched Hut by Flower-Washing Stream" 浣花草堂. He was clearly obsessed with his new property, the first he had

¹⁶⁵ On the urban garden as a "private sphere" of literati self-representation from the ninth to the eleventh centuries, see Xiaoshan Yang, *Metamorphosis of the Private Sphere: Gardens and Objects in Tang-Song Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003).

enjoyed since the outbreak of hostilities. Poems tell of acquisitions of saplings and building materials, sagging porches and blown-off roofs. By contemporary standards, these topics were beneath the dignity of classical verse. But standards were in flux, and Du Fu found profundity in the trivia of his dearly bought domestic life. Household dilapidation became a particularly poignant metaphor for the fragility of larger social institutions. In “A Deck by the Water” 水檻 from 764, for example, Du Fu justifies his concern for a drooping porch by citing Confucius’s injunction in *Analects* 16.1 to “support that which totters” 扶顛.¹⁶⁶ A disciple’s duty to support his blind master is here a metaphor for the minister’s duty to correct his lord. Applying this lofty maxim to his deck, Du Fu “makes a poetic move that would become commonplace in the mid-Tang, imposing an overlarge interpretation on something small, thereby calling attention to the interpretive act.”¹⁶⁷ In this case, he even remarks on his own overreach: “I suspect I’ll be laughed at by those who know.” How can he liken something as inconsequential as a sagging deck to the troubles facing the empire at large? At the end of his poem, Du Fu explains that they are both “familiar things” 故物, and thus elicit equal sympathy. However, as Stephen Owen has argued, the principal effect of his self-conscious overstatement is to underscore the discrepancy between classical language of politics and the trivial private subject matter, highlighting rather than resolving the breach. In the hands of later poets, most notably Bo Juyi, such interpretive excess would become conventional, a witty affirmation of the superfluity of private space, and thus of the author’s right to possess it. With Du Fu, however, it serves to express his appreciation of

¹⁶⁶ *DSXZ*, 13.1120-1.

¹⁶⁷ Stephen Owen, *The End of the Chinese Middle Ages: Essays in Mid-Tang Literary Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 90.

the various “life supports” he has come to rely on in the post-rebellion world, however lowly or unpoetic, to “support that which totters” with exalted classical forms.

In fact, the most conspicuous examples of Du Fu’s interpretive excess come not from Chengdu, but from Kuizhou, where his obsession with private property persisted, but changed in accord with the new location and changed life circumstances. Unlike Chengdu, Kuizhou was not a planned destination, but a mere stopover on his river trip to the Dongting Lakes region. The accidental, temporary nature of his residency led him to invest in a series of short-term rentals; he occupied no fewer than four different domiciles in the space of just under two years.¹⁶⁸ In addition he acquired farmland and an orange orchard, which provided him with supplemental income.¹⁶⁹ At odds with the popular image of the ailing old poet in his river tower—solitary, homesick, worrying for his country through endless rainy nights—Du Fu’s poems from Kuizhou evoke a life full of productive activity, cultivation, and home improvement.

There was plenty to attend to. Many of his projects involved procuring remedies for his long list of ailments. However, most of the challenges came from Kuizhou itself: the climate was intemperate, the terrain was rugged and steep, and the mountains teemed with tigers. These and other difficulties required effort and technical ingenuity to overcome. Kuizhou had to be made livable through domesticating projects, which therefore took on a significance they did not have in Chengdu, where the living was

¹⁶⁸ These were, chronologically: a house in the Nang East 灋東 neighborhood (spring-autumn of 766); the Western Pavilion 西閣 in Kuizhou City (autumn 766 to spring 767); properties in Nang West 灋西 and East Village 東屯 (Spring 767-Spring 768). See Hung, 222.

¹⁶⁹ On the status of Du Fu’s property in East Village, see Cao Mufan, *Du shi zashuo quanbian*, 56-64. On Du Fu’s agricultural and domestic topics in poems from Kuizhou more generally, see Fang Yu 方瑜, *Du Fu Kuizhou shi xilun*, 37-49; and Feng Ye 封野, *Du Fu Kuizhou shi shulun* (Nanjing: Dongnan daxue chubanshe, 2007), 39-57.

comparatively easy. The head of a sizeable household, Du Fu acted as director of operations, dispatching sons and servants to carry out his tasks, and often writing poems to commemorate the occasions. The act of writing on these trivial topics, I will be arguing, invested them with meaning and value by representing them in the serious, public language of poetry and high culture. Writing of chicken coops and fences with reference to the *Odes* and *Documents*, Du Fu began constructing the private space of the post-rebellion literati with the textual supports of the tottering imperial state.

“With These I Repay Your Respect and Caution”: Water Pipes and the Currency of Poetry

The first part of his house to capture Du Fu’s attention after his arrival in Kuizhou was an elaborate network of bamboo tubes that conveyed drinking water from distant mountain springs. Du Fu wrote three poems on these water pipes, of which “Guiding Water” 引水 appears to be the first, written after first learning of the system and its function.¹⁷⁰

Moon Gorge and Qutang

Have clouds for mountaintops.

月峽瞿塘雲作頂

In the jumbled rocks, towering and majestic,

By customs there are no wells.

亂石崢嶸俗無井

This local custom very likely leapt out at Du Fu because it was extremely useful to him: as a diabetic, he required drinking water in large quantities. Thus, while Kuizhou’s lack of water wells could have appeared as merely another perplexing, alienating anomaly, the

¹⁷⁰ DSXZ, 15.1270.

local technology appeared instead as a boon. And not only to himself, as the next couplet continues:

In Yun'an buying water

Brought my servants grief.

雲安沽水奴僕悲

Having moved to Yufu

They can save their strength.

魚復移居心力省

Before moving to Kuizhou in spring of 766, Du Fu had lived upriver in Yun'an county 雲安縣, where he spent a year recovering his health for the journey ahead. His servants evidently had the arduous task of buying and transporting water from a local market. Kuizhou's water pipes, Du Fu realized, would spare them this hardship. Thus, despite its promise of personal benefit, noted in the third couplet, Du Fu presents the pipes first of all as a gain for his workers.

However, professing concern for his retainers was not enough to redeem a topic so seemingly inconsequential, and in the final lines of "Guiding Water" Du Fu anticipates readers who might take exception, offering a justification for his subject matter only to reject it from a political perspective:

When a person's life is at a standstill

Ordering it is hard.

人生留滯生理難

But how could one quart of water be enough

To alleviate a hundred worries?

斗水何直百憂寬

These lines recall the self-mockery of "Deck by the Water," mentioned above, in their attempt to balance two incompatible viewpoints. Du Fu wants his readers to know the value of this ingenious local custom, how it saves his servants trouble while providing for

his needs; but he also wants us to know that he knows it is not a truly serious topic. It is worth writing about as an illustration of the difficulty of “ordering one’s life” (*sheng li* 生理) when stuck in an unfamiliar place; and yet, as the last line suggests, its worth is called into question by comparison with the realm of politics. Du Fu poses the question of relations of cultural value (high/low, serious/trivial, public/private, etc.) in distinctly economic terms, asking rhetorically, “how could one quart of water be enough to alleviate a hundred worries” 斗水何直百憂寬. Not only is it a matter of weighing quantities (one against one hundred), but the verb “to be enough” (*zhi* 直) is a market term, meaning “to be equal to,” or simply “to be worth.” Is private welfare possibly as valuable as the wellbeing of the state? Is this implied by the very act of writing a poem on Kuizhou’s water pipes? Staying close to the text, we note that the last line is phrased as a question—rhetorical, yes, but still open-ended. More important than finding the answer is to note the emerging consciousness, in questions such as these, of an opposition between private and public realms of value.¹⁷¹

Some of the ways in which poetry functioned to *recognize* (and thereby produce) private value are exemplified by a longer poem, written for one of Du Fu’s servants, entitled “Xin Xing Fixed the Far-off Water Pipes” 信行遠修水筒.¹⁷² It is in the five-character line, a more “serious” form, and, at twenty lines, is more than twice as long as

¹⁷¹ As Owen has perceptively argued, “Du Fu assumed the role of the self-consciously public poet, in ways that his contemporaries, who were often far more deeply engaged in public events, did not. The possibility of representing a distinct realm of private life goes hand in hand with the representation of political engagement as something to be affirmed, rather than accepted as a given.” See *The End of the Chinese Middle Ages*, 89.

¹⁷² *DSXZ*, 15.1309-10.

the other poems on this topic. The poem does not begin by recounting Xin Xing's deeds, but addresses him at once with praise for his character:

You are by nature vegetarian;	汝性不茹葷
Pure and quiet is the servant's inner world.	清靜僕夫內
Using your heart, you know the original source;	秉心識本源
In tasks you are rarely obstructed.	於事少滯礙

This is not only praise for the risky repair of the pipes, but for the kind of person who accomplishes such things. Combined with the greater formality of the five-character line, such high compliments suggest that there is more to this occasion than the specific job indicated by the title. Indeed, as we discover in the following couplets, the occasion of the poem is Du Fu's belated recognition of Xin Xing's hardship. "I came upon you in the kitchen," Du Fu writes,

Coming and going, it was forty <i>li</i> ;	往來四十里
Wild and steep, the cliffs and valleys are large.	荒險崖谷大
In the twilight glow, I was shocked you had not eaten;	日曛驚未餐
Blushing, I was too ashamed to face you.	貌赤愧相對

Du Fu realizes that he had not only been unaware of his servant's strenuous labors, but that he had failed to provide him so much as a meal in return. This context helps explain its greater formality and higher praise: both are elements that enhance the poem's value, thus making it suitable as a form of repayment.

The poem, which was part of a transaction between master and servant, makes exchange and the question of relative value its explicit theme. Having recognized Xin

Xing's suffering and his own responsibility for it, Du Fu presents him with two dishes, which, he declares, are more than they appear:

The floating melon that treats my old illness,	浮瓜供老病
The crispy cakes that you have always loved—	裂餅嘗所愛
With these I repay your respect and caution,	於斯答恭謹
They are adequate to distinguish you among the ranks.	足以殊殿最
What need is there for a sorcerer's tally?	詎要方士符
What use the waist pendants of generals?	何假將軍佩
Your conduct is as straight as a brush;	行諸直如筆
Your purpose takes you beyond the cliffs and crags.	用意崎嶇外

Melons and cakes are not easily recognized as treasures, just as a servant's housework was not readily acknowledged as a deed worthy of commemoration. What Du Fu does in these lines is to convert the dishes (and the deed) into objects of value by acts of interpretation. The melon is precious, Du Fu writes, because it treats his sickness; Xin Xing prizes the cakes because he is partial to their flavor. The value of such seemingly humdrum things consists in their personal uses, the private needs they fulfill. It is vital that Du Fu describe them in this way, because it makes them similar to Xin Xing's service, the value of which also lies in its contribution to the household. Similarity, or equivalence, is necessary for exchange and reimbursement. Du Fu can thus proclaim: "with these I repay your respect and caution" 於斯答恭謹.

He then goes further, and compares the dishes to insignia of official rank bestowed by the emperor, suggesting that they are every bit as good, every bit as capable of

“distinguishing you among the ranks” 殊殿最. This is a special, paradigmatic example of “over-interpretation”; for tallies and pendants are the very archetypes of symbolic value-production. The signs whereby emperors bestow favor and promote status, they are figures of over-interpretation itself. Comparing them to the melon and cakes, Du Fu enables the dishes to recognize value in Xin Xing’s labor, which produced value out of the broken water pipes. Making tallies out of melons, the poem thus becomes a kind of tally; it posits the equivalencies between trivial and serious realms that are the basis for producing private significance.

Construction as Instruction in “Hurrying Zongwen to Set Up the Chicken Coop”

Another household task that Du Fu saw fit to commemorate is the subject of “Hurrying Zongwen to Set Up the Chicken Coop” 催宗文樹雞柵, an unregulated (“ancient-style”) pentasyllabic poem of 36 lines.¹⁷³ It is addressed to Du Zongwen 杜宗文 (born c. 750), Du Fu’s eldest son, who is charged with overseeing the coop’s construction and continued maintenance. The poem’s basic function thus differs from those on water pipes: it is not a repayment for a completed task but the instructions for a future one. Accordingly, its primary concern is with making clear the necessity, methods, and goals of the project. Like the poems on water pipes, “Hurrying Zongwen” creates value in a domestic task by equating it with more glorious events. However, this poem both frames the larger significance of the coop, and, as a kind of instruction manual, is instrumental in determining its physical form. It is above all a lesson for a somewhat simpleminded son, who needs to be guided carefully each step of the way. The poem

¹⁷³ *DSXZ*, 15.1311-13.

teaches Zongwen to attend to apparently trivial details, because they produce great consequences. And it teaches him to read closely, for the poem explains which details deserve attention. It thus could also be addressed to a more general audience who, like Zongwen, may have difficulty appreciating the value of chicken coops as a subject of poetry. Most generally, “Hurrying Zongwen” is a lesson in taking small things seriously. Lu Yuanchang 盧元昌 put it well, in neo-Confucian parlance: “Setting up chicken coops is fundamentally a trivial affair, but when Du Fu speaks of it, the meaning of completing humaneness and exhausting righteousness becomes apparent.”¹⁷⁴

Du Fu had a chicken problem in Kuizhou.¹⁷⁵ He started raising fowl, his poem explains, because the meat and eggs were supposed to benefit his poor health. However, they quickly proliferated and overran the house, which descended into pandemonium. Du Fu describes the predicament:

I drive them out but they cannot be controlled;	驅趁制不禁
A noisy racket fills our villa in the foothills.	喧呼山腰宅
Treading about, they upset the tables and plates;	蹋藉盤案翻
All day long I hate the sight of their red turbans.	終日憎赤幘

¹⁷⁴ Quoted in *DSXZ*, 15.1313.

¹⁷⁵ Chickens appear often in Du Fu’s poems, sometimes as nuisances, sometimes as objects of pity, respect, and nostalgia. In addition to “Hurrying Zongwen,” pieces in which chickens figure prominently include the third of the three “Qiang Village” poems (羌村三首; *DSXZ*, 5.393-4), and, all from Kuizhou: “Cockfight” 鬥雞 (*DSXZ*, 17.1523-4), “A Chicken” 雞 (*DSXZ*, 17.1534-5), and “Ballad of the Bound Chickens” 縛雞行 (*DSXZ*, 18.1566-7). Robert Joe Cutter discusses “Cockfight,” a miniature elegy for one of the festive spectacles of Xuanzong’s court through which is evoked the lost glory of the pre-An Lushan rebellion empire, in his study of pre-modern Chinese writings on the sport: *The Brush and the Spur: Chinese Culture and the Cockfight* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1989), esp. 68-72.

The coop project is a response to this outbreak. Du Fu relates that he has already instructed his servants to fell bamboos and build a partition to keep the chickens from the house. However, this is only a preliminary measure. The coop, as Du Fu explains to his son, will divide space in such a way as to benefit man and beast alike:

You should erect a number of coops in the enclosure;	織籠曹其內
Put the birds in and keep them from jumping out.	令入不得擲
Plant the palings closely, lest they wriggle through,	稀間苦突過
And return to soil my mat with their dirty beaks and claws.	嘴距還污席
We will spare the ants from meeting them;	我寬螻蟻遭
They will be safe from martens and foxes.	彼免狐貉厄
You should distribute them among the coops according to age,	應宜各長幼
This way they will be equal in case of a fight.	自此均勑敵

While the primary function of the coop complex is to keep the chickens away (the bars on the enclosure must be sufficiently close to prevent any breakouts), it will also prevent them from coming into conflict with other animals. They will not be able to feed on ants (something the Du family found particularly disturbing, according to another poem),¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Du Fu's chickens apparently had quite a taste for ants. Standing up for the tiny victims, his family ordered the fowls trussed up and deported to market. However, Du Fu intervened at the last moment, as he describes in "Ballad of the Bound Chickens":

My family cannot stand the chickens	
Feeding on the ants;	家中厭雞食蟲蟻
Not knowing that, after the chickens are sold,	
They will end up boiled.	不知雞賣還遭烹
In people's relation to ants and chickens	
What preference can there be?	蟲雞與人何厚薄
I shout out to my servant boy	
To undo their bindings.	吾叱奴人解其縛

and will be kept safe from larger predators. Not only this, for Du Fu instructs his son to organize them by age, thus protecting the weaker ones from injury by the stronger. What began as a project to protect a domestic space under siege becomes a way of creating harmony among the offending fowls and their fellow creatures. The coop is less a prison than a project of social engineering. With this shift of emphasis we can already see Du Fu reframing the significance of his subject, expanding it outward from the sphere of selfish needs, making it more “serious,” investing it with greater value.

Further along, after setting forth the advantages of a well-built coop for the animal kingdom, Du Fu reframes the project yet again, asserting that it will enable the birds to benefit the household, beyond merely supplying meat and eggs. In fact, it will take what is currently most obnoxious about them—their noise—and make it into a source of comfort:

We will not be in the dark on mornings of wind and rain,	不昧風雨晨
Reducing worry and confusion amidst chaos and displacement.	亂離減憂感
Though they belong to the run of common birds,	其流則凡鳥
In spirit they have ‘a heart that is not a stone.’	其氣心匪石

On mornings that are murky and confusing, the cock’s crow can be counted on to mark the time, ensuring that Du Fu and his family are “not in the dark” 不昧. By regulating their “noisy racket,” the coop will transform the chickens from enemies of the domestic peace into beacons of order in troubled times. Indeed, it will allow them to express their true “spirit” 氣, that which makes them more than “common birds” 凡鳥. Du Fu writes that “In spirit they have ‘a heart that is no stone,’” citing a line from the *Shijing* Ode,

For a prose translation, see Hung, 226.

“Cypress Boat” 柏舟 (Mao 26) in which the speaker declares her unwavering resolve in the face of persecution: “My heart is not a stone, / it cannot be turned” 我心匪石，不可轉也。¹⁷⁷ Du Fu likens the chickens’ constancy in announcing the dawn to the steadfastness of this voice of antiquity. With this citation, Du Fu transforms the humble structure into the means for the chickens to participate in the ordering of the household through the performance of classical virtues.

Thus far, Du Fu has been getting increasingly serious about his chicken coop, identifying its benefits in spheres increasingly removed from the self. This reaches a high point with the citation of the *Shijing*, a serious text if ever there was one. But then Du Fu abruptly changes course in the two couplets that follow to end the poem. He promises to keep the chickens only through the year, assuring his son that, with them gone, all the trouble they have caused will “melt away like ice.” It is as if he had forgotten all about their transformative new living quarters. What has happened, I would argue, is that with the *Shijing* citation his investment in the coop, which had increased steadily over the course of the poem, became too conspicuous, too obviously exorbitant, and thus required a compensatory gesture of withdrawal and qualification, not unlike that with which he closes “Guiding Water.” Du Fu has to assure his sensible audience that he has not lost all sense of proportion. He thus protests, in the poem’s final lines, that he “does not yet resemble” 未似 the Old Man of Shixiang 尸鄉翁 from the *Liexian zhuan*, who, over a century, accumulated a flock of one thousand fowls, each of which he named and trained

¹⁷⁷ *Mao shi zhushu*, 2a/6.74; Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes: Chinese Text, Transcription, and Translation* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950), 15.

to respond when called.¹⁷⁸ But this denial is of course a tacit admission: by taking his chicken coop so seriously, Du Fu has indeed come to resemble this legendarily laughable figure of over-investment.

“Hurrying Zongwen to Set Up the Chicken Coop” reflects upon its own over-investment to an extent that is unique among Du Fu’s poems on trivial topics. It concerns not only a chicken coop, but the details of the coop’s construction—the trivia of the trivial. This is how the poem works as a lesson for Zongwen: it tests his attention and teaches him to see the value in what might appear inconsequential. In the context of instruction, triviality becomes an asset. After presenting a list of these details, Du Fu addresses his audience, whose concentration he suspects has slackened:

You must understand these instructions very clearly; 明明領處分

Carry them out with care, one by one. 一一當剖析

Here Du Fu is not concerned with the task itself, but with his son’s understanding of it in all its minutiae. This makes it a moment of key significance in the poem, first of all because of its self-referentiality. After having provided Zongwen his detailed instructions in the preceding lines, Du Fu calls on him to reread them carefully, to analyze and distinguish them “one by one.” He thus relates the process of parsing the poem to the project of building the chicken coop both causally and by resemblance: on the one hand, as a set of instructions, the careful interpretation of the poem will lead to proper construction; on the other hand, construction is akin to interpretation conceived as a process of clarification by division and organization. The full meaning of these lines, I would argue, lies in the fact that Zongwen, as the somewhat dim and easily distracted

¹⁷⁸ Cited in *DSXZ*, 15.1313.

reader who does not realize the seriousness of the task at hand, is in the position of all those readers for whom household affairs were too trivial for poetic treatment. They too are disposed to overlook the significance of chicken coops or water pipes, and the difference that each piece of material makes to the functioning of the whole. Delivering this point, Du Fu's language directs his readers' attention to those most basic building blocks—the lengths of bamboo—whose likeness appears in the morphology of his graphs (“one by one” 一一).

The Classical Significance of Home Improvement: “Overseeing Woodcutting”

A primary way for poetry to invest value in a trivial affair was by citing the classics, as shown in “Hurrying Zongwen to Set Up the Chicken Coop” where Du Fu equates the chickens' indomitable spirit to that of the speaker of “Cypress Boat.” There was no greater source of cultural value than the Confucian canon, and Du Fu drew from it heavily to generate significance in his everyday tasks. The relations between domesticating construction and classical citation are vividly illustrated by the following little-known poem about a fence, with which we will close our discussion.

“Overseeing Woodcutting” 課伐木 is an unregulated pentasyllabic poem of 36 lines dated to the summer of 767.¹⁷⁹ Accompanying it is a lengthy preface that presents the circumstances of the composition in prose, the bulk of which is then repeated in poetic form. As it will serve as a key reference for the discussion, and because to my knowledge it has never before appeared in English, it is translated here in full:

¹⁷⁹ *DSXZ*, 19.1639-42.

I directed my servants, Bo Yi, Xing Xiu, Xin Xing and others, to enter the valley and fell trees on shaded slopes. The limit per person was four logs a day. And the branches, and the rods, were to be tall, straight and true. Setting out in the morning, in the evening they returned, making a pile in the courtyard. We have a fence; its holes will now be fixed. Carry the cut bamboos, big and small. These will serve as supports. Thus our traveler's dwelling will have a little security. There are tigers in the mountains, but it is known how to keep them out. If they are going to rely on the advantages of their claws and teeth, it will definitely be in the dark that they go out marauding. The people of Kuizhou plant white grape trees in lines around their houses, shoveling [earth] to make walls. These they fortify with bamboo, and 'show how to curb and restrain.' Because we are nearby tigers, and there are good-for-nothings mixed in among us, a lodger worries about 'those who hurt horses.' I think it good fortune just to survive, and would settle here in silence. I made this poem and showed it to Zongwu for him to recite.

課隸人伯夷、幸秀、信行等入谷斬陰木，人日四根止，維條伊枚，正直挺然。晨征暮返，委積庭內。我有藩籬，是缺是補，載伐篠簜，伊仗支持，則旅次於小安。山有虎，知禁，若恃爪牙之利，必昏黑橈突。夔人屋壁，列樹白菊鏹為牆，實以竹，示式遏。為與虎近，混淪乎無良，賓客憂害馬之徒，苟活為幸，可默息已。作詩示宗武誦。

Du Fu's preface presents a record of overseeing his servants felling timber for the repair of a fence. It provides detailed information, including the names of several servants, the specific kind of trees to be cut and how many were to be transported per person per day—all evidence of his meticulous and thoughtful management. He explains that the

fence is necessary to protect against tigers, which are native to the surrounding mountains, and which go on the prowl at night. The local people have a special kind of fence for this purpose, and Du Fu goes on to relate the basics of how it is built. He adds that certain unseemly local characters also pose a threat, and that the point of the barrier is to provide basic security, writing, “I think it good fortune just to survive” 苟活為幸. The preface ends by recording that the poem was shown to Zongwu, Du Fu’s younger son, to be recited.

The poem reiterates much of this information in different language, but adds some notable details to the story. Whereas the preface states laconically that the servants “heaped [the cut bamboos] in the courtyard” 委積庭內, in the poem Du Fu presents the lumber pile as a lovely sight, even addressing it in the second person:

Dark tree bark becomes a heaping mound;	蒼皮成委積
Light bamboo lengths shine upon each other.	素節相照燭
We will use you to reach over the small fence,	藉汝跨小籬
Where should stand bamboos both bitter and hollow.	當仗苦虛竹

In a manner not unlike his praise for the chickens and his servants, here Du Fu recognizes the beauty and the use-value of the raw material of the fence, addressing the bamboos as participants in his household project. In another significant addition, the poem contains a section describing the local prefect, identified by many commentators as Bo Maolin 柏茂林:

In the city the worthy prefect,	城中賢府主
Lives nobly as if he had empty rooms.	處貴如白屋

Whistling, whispering, his governing body is pure; 蕭蕭理體淨

Wasps and scorpions do not dare to sting. 蜂蠆不敢毒

This seems to be praise of benevolent administration. However, the contrast between the city purified of “wasps and scorpions,” and the suburbs infested by tigers, could easily imply a criticism of Bo’s limited influence. Finally, the poem significantly fills in the preface’s description of the occasion with its closing address to the servants:

Toiling in the heat, you all took it lightly, 爾曹輕執熱

Putting up with bothersome demands for me. 為我忍煩促

When the autumn light draws near to emerald peaks, 秋光近青岑

Under the full moon we will float chrysanthemums. 季月當泛菊

To repay these efforts with a little coolness, 報之以微寒

I will bestow on you a jug of wine. 共給酒一斛

Such an offering of thanks changes our understanding of the poem’s situation and function; the poem now appears, not unlike the poems for servants discussed above, as a token of gratitude and repayment for hard work. The preface tells us that Du Fu “made this poem and showed it to Zongwu for him to recite” 作詩示宗武誦. The composition of the poem and its oral reproduction is thus included in the narrative as a component of the woodcutting project. This closing address suggests that Zongwu may have recited the finished poem to the servants, as an initial repayment containing the promise of more to come. In this context, the promised gift of wine (“a little coolness” 微寒 to offset the present summer heat), like the special dishes offered to Xin Xing, is a figure for the poem

itself as a token of exchange. However, this transaction differs in being but one of the components of the exemplary project management that is the poem's primary subject.

“Overseeing Woodcutting,” like “Hurrying Zongwen to Set Up the Chicken Coop” and “Xin Xing Fixed the Far-Off Water Pipes,” is a classical poem on a private household task, and therefore is centrally concerned with justifying the value of its subject. It does so, however, not by advertising the project's wondrous benefits (Du Fu makes clear that its sole function is to guard against tigers and malefactors); nor does it rely on presenting itself as a prestigious payment for the work performed by servants. Rather, Du Fu makes his project serious by presenting it as a model of circumspect administration and commemorating it in the highest classical language.

The preface plays a key role in this assertion of value. First of all, a preface directs and determines the significance of a poem by giving it a context. A poem with no explicit political import could thus be upgraded to a serious work with but a little supporting information. This of course was precisely what the canonical Mao school commentaries on the *Shijing* accomplished, converting many poems of private sentiment into allegorical reflections on the fortunes of the Zhou Dynasty. Part of the significance of writing a preface to one's poems during the medieval period was that it imitated and reenacted the Mao readers' production of public meaning. The act itself was a classicizing gesture that made one's work more serious and politically significant. This is the first level at which Du Fu's preface to “Overseeing Woodcutting” works to build up the value of the fence and its materials.

The complimentary but more conspicuous way the preface creates value is through its notoriously archaic language. Du Fu's commentators have long found fault with his prose

style in general, and the preface to “Overseeing Woodcutting” in particular, which they have characterized as “antique and clumsy” 古拙 and “just about unreadable” 幾不可讀.¹⁸⁰ This charge of near-illegibility has contributed to the poem being cast off as so much unusable timber by anthologists and scholars. What is this “antique clumsiness” that has consigned the poem to the woodpile? We noted above the scrupulous detail in which Du Fu describes his directions for the project. Not only does he stipulate the kind of trees to be felled—*yin mu* 陰木—but he bases this order on the *Rituals of Zhou* 周禮, a classic of imperial bureaucracy, which contains the lines: “In the middle of winter cut *yang* trees; in the middle of summer cut *yin* trees” 仲冬斬陽木，仲夏斬陰木.¹⁸¹ Shortly thereafter he mimics the *Shijing*, both in the names he uses for the bamboos and in his particle-heavy prosody: 維條伊枚 (“And the branches, and the rods...”).¹⁸² Farther down he refers to the bamboos in language taken from the “Tribute of Yu” 禹貢 chapter of the *Shangshu*: 載伐篠簜 (“Carry the cut bamboos, big and small”).¹⁸³ And his archaism reaches a height with an expression—“We have a fence; its holes will now be fixed” 我有藩籬，是缺是補—in which the use of solemn *Shijing*-ese verges on parody.¹⁸⁴ This is

¹⁸⁰ The first quote is from Qiu Zhao’ao, the second is from Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049—1100), quoted in *DSXZ*, 19.1640.

¹⁸¹ *Zhou li zhushu*, 16.248.

¹⁸² These terms derive from the first line of “The Bank of the Ru” 汝墳 (Mao 10):

I go along that bank of the Ru,	遵彼汝墳
I cut the branches and rods.	伐其條枚

In Karlgren’s translation (7); *Mao shi zhushu*, 1c.43.

¹⁸³ *Shang shu zhushu*, 6.82.

¹⁸⁴ The phrase “I/We have XX” (我有XX) is widely employed in the *Classic of Documents* (*Shang shu*), and is found in several Odes, such as “Deer Cry” 鹿鳴 (“I have an honored guest” 我有嘉賓, repeated in “Crimson Bow” 彤弓). The construction 是X是Y likewise belongs to the “idiom of archaic ritual language” (Kern, 16) common to Zhou Dynasty bronze inscriptions, the early strata of the *Odes*, and the royal speeches of the *Documents*. On the rhetorical and

the language that has been called “just about unreadable”—a language positively saturated with classical citation. While many have lamented its infelicity on various aesthetic grounds, to my knowledge no one has inquired into its function. Clearly it represents a conscious rhetorical strategy. What was its purpose?

Like the preface as a whole (and extending the logic exemplified by the Mao commentaries), I would argue, it is a way of producing value in a private undertaking by representing it in terms of highest cultural authority. Just as the preface shapes the poem’s meaning into a politically valuable form, Du Fu’s archaic language represents the bamboo in the image of the *Odes* and *Documents*. Ironically, it was precisely this investment of worth through classicizing gestures that wound up diminishing it in the eyes of many later readers.

It is worth observing that Du Fu’s focus of attention and praise in “Overseeing Woodcutting” is on bamboo, the very raw material that served as the basis for the contrivances he celebrated in the other poems we have been discussing in this section. The water pipes were built from it, as was the chicken coop. It was perhaps inevitable that, as he turned his attention increasingly to the various supports of his increasingly fragile existence, he would come to recognize value in the substance of which they were made. In his poem on the chicken coop, I attempted to draw attention to the significance of Du Fu’s language when he exhorted his son to follow his instructions in detail, and to “carry them out with care, one by one” 一一當剖析. I suggested that this injunction, equally applicable to construction and reading, expresses something fundamental about

functional similarities between early literary genres and media, see Martin Kern, “Early Chinese Literature: Beginnings through Western Han.” In Stephen Owen, ed., *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature: Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7-28, 39-43.

Du Fu's approach to trivial household tasks, and that even the visual appearance of the written numerals (一一) evoked lengths of bamboo as basic (not to say "trivial") units of use value. Such an interpretation may be exorbitant, though appropriately so given the theme under discussion; however, it is supported by the starring role Du Fu gives to the bamboo in "Overseeing Woodcutting." As shown above, Du Fu sets forth detailed and classically sanctioned instructions for gathering it in both the preface and the poem. He refers to it in the honorific terms taken from the *Odes* and *Documents*. Furthermore, the poem anthropomorphizes the freshly cut stalks, addressing them with the pronoun "you" 汝, hailing their beauty and announcing the service they will perform. Thus, in "Overseeing Woodcutting," Du Fu focuses his praise on the most basic building materials, exemplifying the connection we have been exploring between domestic construction and poetry as producers of value.

In this interlude, we have seen that Du Fu's domestic projects were attempts to make Kuizhou into a livable place for an aging, ailing literatus of the northern plains. They are thus particularly illustrative of a more general project, visible in poems on topics from historical monuments to local customs, of appropriating, organizing, translating, and transforming Kuizhou into more intelligible, useful, and valuable forms. I have argued that these poems consciously participate in the production of private value by investing significance in topics that were considered trivial and unworthy of poetry. Not only did Du Fu render these unpoetic subjects into classical verse, he reflected intently upon the questions of cultural value that such acts entailed. For Du Fu, the canon of elite cultural memory was not only a resource for the imagining of identity; it was a form of symbolic

capital with which to stake out, define, and legitimize new, private territory for literati self-representation in poetry. In the following chapter we will return to questions of memory's mediations, this time in the visual domain, in an examination of Du Fu's poems on paintings.

Chapter 3

Memory Images:

Craft, Illusion, and Fidelity in Du Fu's Poems on Paintings

The singing boatmen in the seventh quatrain of “Songs of Kuizhou” 夔州歌 lead Du Fu to remember his visit to a marketplace years earlier, where he happened upon a painted screen. In hindsight, the encounter appeared eerily fateful:

I recall the past, when in

The Xianyang marketplace

憶昔咸陽都市合

A landscape painting

Was spread out for sale.

山水之圖張賣時

Once then I saw Wu Gorge

Upon the precious screen;

巫峽曾經寶屏見

But I doubt that the Chu palaces

Still face the emerald peaks.¹⁸⁵

楚宮猶對碧峰疑

Looking back, Du Fu realizes that the “precious screen” 寶屏 in the market bore an image of the place that now, years later, has become his home. What had at the time seemed a chance encounter appears prophetic in the light of memory, as if the painting had been telling his future. “Memory,” Walter Benjamin observed, “points out to everyone in the book of life writing which, invisibly, glossed the text as prophecy.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ *DSXZ*, 15.1306.

¹⁸⁶ Cited by Peter Szondi, “Hope in the Past: On Walter Benjamin,” in *On Textual Understanding and Other Essays*, trans. Harvey Mendelsohn (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 157.

This is a fine gloss on the quatrain above, and on the revelatory role of memory in much of Du Fu's later poetry, especially the poems on paintings we will explore in this chapter.

In addition to memory as prophecy, the quatrain introduces the key association of memory and painting as modes of illusory appearance, of absent things made vividly present. Just as memory allows for the recovery of the past encounter, the painting allowed Du Fu to see the Three Gorges in faraway Xianyang. Du Fu is here grafting memory onto an existing rhetoric of illusionism in Tang poems on painting, which we will discuss below. Furthermore, he presents this play of appearances in relation to social and economic conditions of displacement: the screen's circulation (its appearance in the marketplace) mirrors his own transient wanderings in the wake of the An Lushan rebellion. This is an example of how Du Fu's memory discovers pattern and meaning in the face of seeming randomness and disorder in the post-rebellion period. It is the world of society and politics that is illusory, as attested by the vanished palaces of Chu kings. Compared to Kuizhou, and to the present chaos for which it provides the mirror, the painting in memory seems decidedly more real, more certain.

Scholars have long recognized the importance of “poems on paintings” (*tihua shi* 題畫詩) in Du Fu's corpus as a whole, as well as their formative role in the history of this mixed-media subgenre of Chinese classical poetry. Du Fu wrote more *tihua shi* than anyone of his time or before, the imaginative fecundity of which was arguably never surpassed. In the formidable body of criticism that has grown up around them, certain of their features have been illuminated while others have remained occluded. One dimension that has been largely overlooked is memory—a strange omission, given that remembrances figure centrally in several of the most famous pieces. What explains the

preponderance of memories in Du Fu's *tihua shi*? What memories does painting elicit and how does this medium structure and otherwise determine (i.e., mediate) them? What mode of *ekphrasis* ("the verbal representation of visual representation") do they participate in?¹⁸⁷ This last question concerns the poetic subgenre of *tihua shi* that Du Fu inherited, within which and against which he wrote. Only by understanding this culturally and historically specific practice of verbalized viewing can we perceive Du Fu's pictorial poetics of memory as a figure on a ground.

The chapter will begin with a critical discussion of recent scholarship on Du Fu's *tihua shi*, which I argue has inadequately understood the ways of seeing specific to his historical moment. Next, I trace the beginnings of *tihua shi* back to the late Southern Dynasties (420-589), where an aesthetic of pictorial illusionism emerges along with a strong association of images with the figure of the palace lady. The following section compares poems on paintings of cranes from early in the dynasty to a piece by Du Fu on the same subject, showing that, while each writer thematizes the image's relation to its medium, only Du Fu considers both in light of the painter's biography, as carriers of memory. The question of why this might have been leads to a discussion of the relations between Tang perceptions of the painter as an artisan and the aesthetics of craftsmanship and illusionism, most clearly visible in poems on landscape paintings. Illusionism was perhaps the defining value of Du Fu's *tihua shi*, which he encapsulated in his oft-repeated keyword, *zhen* 真. I explore the valences of Du Fu's *zhen* in light of a Tang parable about a man who falls in love with a painting, and argue that the concept links aesthetic and

¹⁸⁷ This is the often-cited definition offered by James A. W. Heffernan in his *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3.

political concepts of fidelity. The foregoing prepares us to read the memory passages in Du Fu's *tihua shi*, which recognize these faithful images as records of past events replete with secret meanings, and indicate the identity of their ideal viewer. The chapter as a whole will argue that Du Fu approached paintings as a vital medium of memory, specifically the social memory of their makers and of the pre-rebellion era they inhabited, and that he did so by transforming the Chinese tradition of poems on images.

***Tihua shi* Before *Wenren hua*: Some Interpretive Issues**

Du Fu's poems on paintings have been interpreted predominantly, and problematically, in the relation to the subgenre they are often credited with founding. Literally "poems written on paintings," *tihua shi* originally referred to the practice of physically inscribing metrically patterned text into the margins of an image. This practice is traceable to the pre-imperial era, according to traditional sources, and includes such non-poetic genres as the "encomium for painting" 畫贊.¹⁸⁸ The definition of *tihua shi*, however, expanded early on to include all classical poems that made painting their primary subject matter, whether or not they were actually placed alongside an image. *This* kind of poem caught on in earnest during the Song Dynasty (960-1279), largely through the efforts Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105), and other taste-making pioneers of what became known as "literati painting" (*wenren hua* 文人畫). It was these men who, in

¹⁸⁸ The *Jinshu* "Biography of Shu Xi" records the discovery, in a plundered tomb from the ancient state of Wei 魏, of textual and visual representations of "The Biography of Emperor Mu" 穆天子傳 including a "picture-poem" 圖詩 and "encomia for painting" 畫贊. Cited in Cao Yusheng 曹愉生, *Tangdai shilun yu hualun zhi guanxi yanjiu* (Taipei: wen shi zhe chubanshe, 1997), 8. The Emperor Mu story is a *locus classicus* for the genre of horse portraits. See footnote 60, below. For a discussion of what have traditionally been considered ancestors of *tihua shi* in non-poetic genres, see Da'an Pan, *The Lyric Resonance Between Chinese Poets and Painters* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2010), 1-15.

defining a new practice of painting fit for the gentleman scholar, also established new norms for writing about it in poetry, norms that would characterize *tihua shi* throughout the imperial period. The longstanding dominance of Song literati aesthetic values and vocabulary has made it difficult to understand the specific ways Tang writers like Du Fu looked at and wrote about visual art. A first step toward such an understanding must involve historicizing Song literati aesthetics.

Changes in *tihua shi* from Tang to Song were intimately bound up with larger historical changes in the theory and practice of painting, changes that had everything to do with the appropriation of image production by the literati class. Prior to the Song, painting was primarily done by anonymous and often unlettered craftsmen, who were referred to as “painter artisans” (*hua gong* 畫工) and “master painters” (*hua shi* 畫師). Painters were not accorded biographies in the standard histories, and numerous anecdotes attest to the stigma attached to the skill.¹⁸⁹ As will be argued in more detail below, this association was reflected in prevailing aesthetic values. Unlike their Song counterparts, Tang writers did not disdain traces of the hard work that went into painted images; on the contrary, they praised craftsmanship and painstaking effort. They admired the artifice of images and their powers of illusion. In sum, the painting in Tang poems was an intensely *visual* painting; it was an “illiterate” art addressed to the eye and the beholder’s visual imagination, rather than to the scholar’s literary mind.

¹⁸⁹ On the low social status of painters in medieval China and pre-Renaissance Europe, see Hans Frankel, “Poetry and Painting: Chinese and Western Views of Their Convertibility.” *Comparative Literature* 9.4 (1957), 289-307. This is of course not to deny that there were members of the early medieval elite who painted and valued the art highly, as witnessed by numerous well-known anecdotes and treatises. However, they were the exception rather than the norm. Moreover, most of the now-canonical early writings on painting survive only through late Tang compilations, notably Zhang Yanyuan’s 張彥遠 (c. 815-c. 877) *Record of Famous Painters Through the Ages* (*Lidai minghua ji*), and Zhu Jingxuan’s 朱景玄 *Famous Painters of the Tang Dynasty* (*Tangchao minghua lu*), which further suggests their belated valuation.

Song scholars taught painting to read, and made it a medium for their collective self-representation by giving it a new set of values that would distance it from the lower classes, on the one hand, and the court, on the other. These were predominantly values derived from the respectable art of poetry, which favored elegant understatement, casual spontaneity, and above all the expression of the “aims” 志 and “sentiment” 情 of the writer. Such prescriptions rejected Tang ideals of craftsmanship, artifice, and illusionism. The colorful and lifelike images that had so captivated Tang poets were branded vulgar and replaced by the calligraphic depiction of symbols of literati virtues in monochrome ink. Seen from the perspective of what came before, the Song literati’s aesthetic regime may thus be described as an iconoclastic movement, a conquest of images by writing. The celebrated “harmony,” “resonance,” or “sisterhood” of Chinese painting and poetry could be otherwise described as an unequal relationship in which one party had been purged of its previous identity and remade in the image of the other. It was only after the image had been taken out of painting that Su Shi could give definitive (verbal) form to the new “convertibility” of the arts in his chiasmic praise of Wang Wei 王維 (699-759): “When savoring Mojie’s poems, there is painting in poetry; when regarding his paintings, there is poetry in painting.” 味摩詰之詩，詩中有畫；觀摩詰之畫，畫中有詩。¹⁹⁰

This formula and others derived from it have served as a mainstay of Du Fu criticism, praising his poems on paintings in terms that cannot but overlook or diminish those qualities that diverge from Song ideals. From a Song perspective, Du Fu’s taste for simulacra and heightened visuality could seem vulgar or immature; his narrative

¹⁹⁰ “On Mojie’s ‘Mist and Rain Over Lantian’ Painting” 書摩詰藍田煙雨圖. See Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 (ed.), *Su Shi wenji* (Beijing: Xinhua shuju, 1986), 70.2209. On the convertibility of painting and poetry as a distinctly Song development, approached in comparison with European art history, see Frankel.

recollections, spurred by the vivid images, mere external distractions from more essential matters. There exists a tendency, even among modern scholars, to speak of Song literati aesthetics as a developmental improvement over earlier “mimetic” paradigms. Such progressivist narratives treat the literati’s denigration of verisimilitude as the rightful triumph of an intellectually mature abstraction over a childlike love of imitation, rather than as an attempt at self-definition on the part of a class threatened by (and dependent on) unprecedented social mobility. It is a story that distinctly parallels the classic account of the rise of modernism in Western art history, in which getting “beyond” representation was equated with historical and scientific progress.¹⁹¹ This was a powerfully influential equation, but also a quite biased one.¹⁹² The myth modernism told about itself turned out not to be the best guide to the history of Western art. In much the same way, Song literati painting theory can easily mislead regarding the kinds of painting and viewing it claimed to supersede.¹⁹³

However, the answer should not be to replace Su Shi’s vocabulary with that of canonical pre-Tang painting theory. In a recent trans-dynastic history of *tihua shi*, in which Du Fu plays a central role, Da’an Pan ably critiques the tendency among scholars to adopt the language of Song criticism when discussing the art of earlier periods.¹⁹⁴ It is

¹⁹¹ See Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting.” In Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 773-779.

¹⁹² For a critique of this and other influential modernist narratives, see Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).

¹⁹³ As Craig Clunas writes in his fine analysis of the issue, “a concern with the ‘traces of the brush’ is in Chinese theory an essentially *social* discourse, predicated on the elite status of the artist, on the possession of certain types of cultural capital and generally on certain levels of economic capital too.” See his *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 16. Other challenges to the hegemony of amateur-literati aesthetics include James Cahill, *The Painter’s Practice: How Artists Lived and Worked in Traditional China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); and Richard Barnhart, *Painters of the Great Ming: The Imperial Court and the Zhe School* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1993).

¹⁹⁴ Pan, 198-200.

surprising, then, when he opts instead for the first of Xie He's 謝赫 (c. 459-532) "Six Laws" 六法: painting should have *qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動 ("animation through *qi* resonance," in one possible translation). Written two and a half centuries prior to Du Fu's time, this canonical saying from one of the earliest extant treatises on painting, the *Gu huapin lu* 古畫品錄, is hardly less anachronistic than anything from the Northern Song. More problematic, however, its fame is matched only by its ambiguity.¹⁹⁵ It has meant many things to many people, depending on the interpreter's needs, while serving mainly to burnish the aura of the work it ostensibly helps explain. Pan places Xie's first law at the center of his discussion, even referencing it in the title of his monograph, *The Lyric Resonance Between Poets and Painters*.¹⁹⁶ He thus repeats the Song literati's iconoclasm in a new key: the "resonance" between the visual and verbal arts is predicated on seeing them both as kinds of "lyric."

I want to argue that a better approach to Du Fu's poems on paintings would begin by doing away with the rhetoric of resonance and harmony altogether, which in the post-Tang Chinese tradition and its translation by modern scholars has too often been code for repressing the "visuality" of images. A salutary alternative is suggested by W.J.T.

¹⁹⁵ For a survey of debates up to the eighties over what is surely the most contested phrase in all of Chinese art history, see Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, eds., *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 10-17.

¹⁹⁶ An earlier reader of Du Fu by way of Xie He (and *vice versa*) was Qian Zhongshu, who argued, against what he saw as rampant misunderstandings of the term, that "'breath resonance' 氣韻 [in the Xie's first law] is none other than making the person in the painting appear fully vital and alive." Translation by Ronald Egan, in *Limited Views: Essays on Letters by Qian Zhongshu* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998), 99. Note that the word "lyric" in Pan's title takes the place of "breath" (*qi*) in Xie He's original formulation. Thus, whereas Xie's resonance (in Qian Zhongshu's reading) referred to the liveliness and animation of images, for Pan it signifies a relation to orthodox conceptions of classical poetry.

Mitchell, who, in a recent critique of inter-artistic comparison, advises attending to the disharmony and incommensurability in composite media:

The necessary subject matter is...the whole ensemble of *relations* between media, and relations can be many other things besides similarity, resemblance, and analogy. Difference is just as important as similarity, antagonism as crucial as collaboration, dissonance and division of labor as interesting as harmony and blending of function.¹⁹⁷

The phrase “dissonance and division of labor” nicely counters the persistent rhetoric of resonance in discussions of Chinese poetry and painting by evoking the social stakes attendant upon relations between different media and how these relations are understood. Visual and verbal media were unequal during the Tang, being the products of unequal social classes. This dissonant division of labor made itself felt in the ways poets looked at and wrote about paintings, especially in their focus on craft and illusionism. As the following section will show, Tang poets were not the first to show a fascination with the image as something that is simultaneously there and not there, the unreal inviting misrecognition as the real.¹⁹⁸

Alluring Illusions: *Tihua shi* Before the Tang

¹⁹⁷ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 89-90.

¹⁹⁸ “An image is always both there and not there, appearing *in* or *on* or *as* a material object yet also ghostly, spectral, and evanescent.” W.J.T. Mitchell, “Image.” In Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen, eds., *Critical Terms for Media Studies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), 39. In addition to Mitchell’s work, my approach to images and media in Tang *tihua shi* has been especially informed by Hans Belting (Thomas Dunlap, trans.), *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); and Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Paintings entered poetry for the first time during the late Southern Dynasties, as one of the many elegant “things” (*wu* 物) that furnished the chambers of the elite and served as subjects of “poems on things” (*yongwu shi* 詠物詩). Perhaps the earliest extant such “*yonghua*” poems are the set of short pieces by Yu Xin 庾信 (513-581), entitled “Poems on Painted Screens” 詠畫屏風詩. The following is the first of the series, and in it we find that the description of images blocks out almost any reference to the medium whatsoever. It is difficult to tell that what we are reading about is in fact a painting at all:

The bravos ride with connected bridle bits;	俠客重連鑣
Golden saddles cover Cassia Branch horses.	金鞍被桂條
Fine dust arises on the road from Zhang;	細塵鄣路起
Startled flowers flutter about, confusing the eyes.	驚花亂眼飄
Tipsy with wine, the men are half-drunk;	酒醺人半醉
Moist with sweat, the horses are full of pride.	汗濕馬全驕
They have saddled up for fear the day is getting late;	歸鞍畏日晚
And jockey for the road to mount the river bridge. ¹⁹⁹	爭路上河橋

Yu Xin presents the horsemen with their golden saddles, the swirl of flowers and dust around them, and their corresponding disarray as they drunkenly strive to be the first onto the narrow bridge leading home. The scene could describe a live event or an imaginary

¹⁹⁹ Lu Qinli 逯欽立 ed, *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbei chao shi*, Bei Zhou 4.2395 (hereafter cited as Lu Qinli). The poem has also been anthologized under the title of “Ballad of the Bravos” 俠客行. Lu Qinli follows *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 and *Yu Kaifu shiji* 庾開府詩集 in placing it in the “Poems on Painted Screens” series. Whether or not this poem (certainly one of the earliest *tihua shi*) was or was not on painting thus came down to an editorial decision. An act of reading made it about an image rather than a living scene.

one, but unless we read it in relation to the title of the series, we would have no way of knowing that it describes a painted screen.

The key to the poem, then, lies in its relation to its title, which takes on a special interpretive burden. Titles always serve to orient and guide understanding; like prefaces and other paratexts, they frame and interpret whatever they are affixed to. Their external, supplemental position allows them to perform any number of functions—including, as in René Magritte’s famous *Ce n’est pas une pipe*, those that comment on or call into question their own performance. Yu Xin’s title, like a riddle or a magic trick, pleases by revealing the poem to be other than it seems. What appear to be scenes from life are revealed by the title to be pictures. In this way, Yu Xin’s early poem on painting introduces (albeit obliquely) one of the central themes of the *tihua shi* tradition as it subsequently took shape: illusion, or what the poem aptly refers to as “confusing the eyes” (*luan yan* 亂眼).

If Yu Xin’s poem achieves its effects by hiding the medium of its images, the “Poem on a Painted Fan” 詠畫扇詩 attributed to both Gao Shuang 高爽 and to Bao Ziqing 鮑子卿, foregrounds the image-bearing object and its association with the figure of the palace lady.

Fine silk threads are always naturally light;	細絲本自輕
How are faded colors worth disliking?	弱采何足眇
Set on revealing rouged complexions,	直為發紅顏
I mistakenly became a fan within the tent.	謬成幄中扇

Suddenly I present the tears from Changmen, ²⁰⁰	乍奉長門泣
At times I carry on the banquet at Boliang. ²⁰¹	時承柏梁宴
Melancholy makeup—open me and it is concealed;	思妝開已掩
Singing faces—hide me and they are displayed.	歌容隱而見
Please only paint a pair of yellow swans;	但畫雙黃鵠
Do not make a solitary flying swallow. ²⁰²	莫作孤飛燕

This poem speaks in the melancholy voice of the fan deriving from the Consort Ban 班婕妤 tradition and the “Poem of Resentment” 怨詩 attributed to her.²⁰³ In that piece, the fan’s white silk (“fresh and pure as the frost and snow” 鮮潔如霜雪) symbolized the consort’s faultless purity, and testified against the fickle lover who cast her aside, “affections cut off midway” 恩情中道絕.²⁰⁴

Like its pure and unmarked predecessor, the painted fan speaks the language of “resentment” (“How are faded colors worth disliking?” “I mistakenly became a fan within the tent”), complaining of neglect and pleading for attention. However, its painted surface makes it a likeness not of inner moral virtue, but of outward beauty—specifically

²⁰⁰ An allusion to the “Changmen *fu*” 長門賦 by Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179-127 B.C.E.), which supposedly moved Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (r. 141-87 B.C.E.) to end his neglect of the Empress Chen 陳嬌 (r. 141-130 B.C.E.). See Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-531), comp., *Wenxuan*, ed. Li Shan 李善 (630-689), 16.712.

²⁰¹ A famous banquet held by Emperor Wu.

²⁰² Lu Qinli, 2.1542.

²⁰³ For the story of Consort Ban and a translation of her poem, see J.D. Frodsham and Ch’eng Hsi (trans.), *An Anthology of Chinese Verse: Han, Wei, Chin, and the Northern and Southern Dynasties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 21-22.

²⁰⁴ Maija Bell Samei: “The fan is like a semi-translucent screen behind which the poet hides herself, designed both to reveal her complaint and to protect her from exposure.” *Gendered Persona and Poetic Voice: The Abandoned Woman in Early Chinese Song* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 54.

through an analogy to the palace ladies' cosmetics, which conceal and transform the face beneath. This is emphasized in the fan's self-presentation in the third line and fourth couplet, where it speaks of concealing and revealing "rouged complexions," "melancholy makeup," and "singing faces." If the simple purity of the white fan symbolized Consort Ban's moral constancy, this one's "faded colors" associate it with the seductive dissimulations of consorts performing for the emperor's desiring gaze.

Its equation of painting and palace ladies as figures of alluring appearance makes this poem a precursor of the better-known "Poem on a Lovely Woman Looking at a Painting" 詠美人看畫詩 by Prince Jianwen of Liang 梁簡文帝 (503–551), Xiao Gang 蕭綱. In Xiao Gang's poem, the palace woman and the painting look so alike that the poet-prince is at pains to tell them apart:

In the hall a goddess is portrayed;	殿上圖神女
A beauty emerges from within the palace.	宮裏出佳人
How adorable: both are painted;	可憐俱是畫
Who can distinguish the false and the true?	誰能辨偽真
Clear and distinct: eyes with brows so pure;	分明淨眉眼
Of a kind: the body with a slender waist.	一種細腰身
The thing that lets them be told apart:	所可持為異
One is always in good spirits. ²⁰⁵	長有好精神

A woman looks at a painting under the gaze of the prince, who exclaims, "How adorable: both are painted," playing on the analogy between painting and cosmetics. However,

²⁰⁵ Lu Qinli, 22.1953.

Xiao Gang expands the trope. Rather than focusing on concealment and exposure as the central dynamic of the illusory painting/woman, he shifts attention to the painted image itself, and its uncanny verisimilitude. The concern is now with illusionism as such, the image's power to deceive the eye into mistaking it for reality. This would become central to poems on painting during the Tang, especially those of Du Fu. It is important to note that Xiao Gang's choice of image is not arbitrary. "The goddess" 神女 was a figure in whom desirability and danger were essentially combined, deriving from her chimerical, cloud-like transformations. Xiao Gang's palace lady is thus looking at an archetype of the woman-as-image. The irony, cleverly inserted at the end of the poem, is that once captured in a painting the protean goddess "is always in good spirits"—she is more dependable than her living counterpart.

The foregoing has shown that, though often thought to originate in the Tang, poems on paintings can in fact be traced to the late Southern Dynasties. Poems from this period established themes and representational conventions that became central to the subgenre as it subsequently took shape, most importantly the approach to painting as a form of illusion or pleasurable deception. Returning to the pre-history of *tihua shi* reminds us of the centrality of the palace lady to this tradition, as a figure of illusion and object of the imperial gaze. Tang poets may have turned to other subjects, packing her away like an autumn fan; however, we will see that she continued to haunt their visual imaginations.

Image, Medium, and Memory: Four Tang Poems on Crane Paintings

Tihua shi developed in extraordinary new directions during the Tang Dynasty, as writers began expanding the repertoire of occasions on which they wrote, expressing their

concerns and fashioning identities as representatives of a unified and expansionist empire. Among the outstanding *tihua shi* from the early Tang is the following short piece by Song Zhiwen 宋之問 (c. 656-702) about a painting he found on the wall of a government office:

A Poem on Cranes Painted on the Wall of the Secretariat	詠省壁畫鶴
On the whitewashed wall are drawn immortal cranes;	粉壁圖仙鶴
Regal and imposing, with abundant true spirit.	昂藏真氣多
Soaring in flight but not departing,	騫飛竟不去
It must be that they cherish waves of royal kindness. ²⁰⁶	當是戀恩波

Let us remark on the many features that mark this as a distinctly Tang *tihua shi*. First and foremost, its subject is presented as a specific painting encountered by the poet in a certain place and time. We have left the stylized and impersonal world of the Southern Dynasties courtly *yuefu*, in which paintings served mainly as accessories to other subjects, and have arrived in the world of poet-officials writing about personal experiences.

Viewing a painting itself has become an occasion for poetry. This is indicated by Song's first line, which introduces the painting as a specific image ("immortal cranes") "drawn" upon a particular medium (the "whitewashed wall" of the government office) by a human hand. This attention to the location, medium, and especially the imagery of a painting became basic to *tihua shi* of the Tang and beyond.

Staging his viewing as an individualized encounter, Song Zhiwen nonetheless draws upon a preexisting poetic discourse on painting: namely, the language of illusion. Song

²⁰⁶ *Quan Tang Shi*, 53.658 (Hereafter *QTS*). Kong Shoushan 孔壽山, ed., *Tangchao tihua shi zhu* (Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chubanshe, 1988), 40.

writes that the cranes have “abundant true spirit” (*zhen qi duo* 真氣多). Indeed, they appear so vigorous and full of life that it is a wonder they do not fly off the wall entirely. This rhetoric of the animated image allows Song to interpret the cranes’ remaining presence in the secretariat as a sign of loyalty to the Tang emperor: “It must be that they cherish waves of royal kindness.” We will have more to say on this association between vitality and fidelity below.

Song Zhiwen thus remarks on another feature of the painted image also remarked upon by Xiao Gang: its permanence. The sole difference between the painting of the goddess and the living palace lady, for the Liang prince, was that the former was “always in good spirits.” Song Zhiwen suggests a converse relation between the permanence of the painting and its subject matter. In contrast to the goddess, the cranes signify the immortal’s transcendence of time and change. Their symbolic meaning is thus echoed and reinforced by the sturdiness and solidity of the wall that provides their color and material support.

The same subject was taken up from a very different perspective by Chen Zi’ang 陳子昂 (661-702), Song Zhiwen’s reformist colleague at the court of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 690-705). Chen encountered his crane painting in the residence of an acquaintance he refers to simply as “My Host” 主人, most likely after he had quit his capital post in frustration over a demotion, and returned west to his native Shu.²⁰⁷ Addressed to two fellow courtiers, Qiao Zhizhi 喬知之 (d. 690) and Cui Rong 崔融 (653-706), its focus is not on the image’s illusory life, but on the cranes’ forlorn isolation, which is evoked most powerfully by the deterioration of their medium:

²⁰⁷ On Chen Zi’ang’s career see Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of the Early T’ang*, 157-183.

A Poem on Cranes Painted on My Host's Wall, Sent to Recorder Qiao and Editor Cui²⁰⁸ 詠主人壁上畫鶴寄喬主簿崔著作

On the ancient wall there is a painting by a transcendent;	古壁仙人畫
The pigments still retain their distinctive patterns.	丹青尚有文
Dancing alone, they are scattered like snowflakes;	獨舞紛如雪
In solitary flight, they are as indefinite as clouds.	孤飛曖似雲
Boasting of the richness of their colors,	自矜彩色重
They preferred to recall the flock from their old pond.	寧憶故池群
On rivers and seas is a great chain of wings;	江海聯翮翼
But who will ever hear their long cries again? ²⁰⁹	長鳴誰復聞

Whereas Song Zhiwen's cranes appeared vital and vivid, Chen's are fading and obscure, conditions that correlate to the proximity of the paintings (and the poets) to the center of political power. Images fade the further they are removed from the emperor's beneficent influence, making them useful analogs to officials in or out of favor. In order to highlight the sorry plight of his allegorical creatures, Chen also focuses on the image's material supports. Whereas Song starts with a "whitewashed wall" 粉壁, Chen begins with an "ancient wall" 古壁. His cranes survive despite the deterioration of their medium; however, they appear scattered and indistinct, tenuous as snowflakes or clouds. They require a discerning viewer whose sympathy may be a first step toward physical repair. Chen's reading of the faded cranes thus presents his audience in the capital with a plea

²⁰⁸ All translations of official titles follow Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).

²⁰⁹ *QTS*, 84.905; Kong, 43-4.

for his own political “restoration.” He is the painted crane on the remote and ruined wall, calling out to his comrades and readers—future viewers of his image—to help bring him back.²¹⁰ The poem ends on a note of despair. He is only one among countless cranes—“a great chain of wings”—that makes it all the less likely his call will find a sympathetic ear to match his sympathetic eye.

Neither Song Zhiwen nor Chen Zi’ang identifies the painter of these images by name (Chen refers to him as a generic “immortal” [*xianren* 仙人]). However, later writers associated them with Xue Ji 薛稷 (649-713), the most famous crane painter of the Tang.²¹¹ The scion of an illustrious northern clan (his uncle held the post of prime minister), Xue Ji rose to the highest official posts under Empress Wu and Emperor Zhongzong 中宗 (r. 705-710). Besides being an accomplished calligrapher, he painted, and his cranes won him special renown. However, Xue’s good fortune did not last. He cooperated in the Taiping Princess’s (d. 713) plot to poison her rival, the newly enthroned Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712-756). After the plot was uncovered, the high official known for his images of immortality was ordered to commit suicide.²¹²

The discrepancy between Xue Ji’s sudden death and the enduring life (materially and symbolically) of his cranes captured the imagination of Du Fu, who encountered two of

²¹⁰ As images of the supplicating civil servant, Chen’s cranes recall those of the *Mao School Commentary to the Classic of Poetry* 毛詩, which established the analogy: “When a crane calls at the nine swamps / Its voice is heard in the wild.” Translation by Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs*, ed. Joseph R. Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 158. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) read the poem as instructing King Xuan to recruit sagely men from their places of hiding.

²¹¹ The *Tangchao minghua lu* claims that at his time there were crane paintings by Xue Ji in the capital and in Shu: “At present there are painted cranes [by Xue Ji] in the secretariat, and the age calls them ‘one [art’s] perfection’” 今祕書省有畫鶴; “In Shu commandery [Xue Ji] also has cranes transmitted through generations” 蜀郡亦有鶴傳於世. Cited in Kong, 43.

²¹² On the plot against Xuanzong, see Denis Twitchett, “Hsuān-tsung.” In Twitchett (ed.), *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 3: Sui and T’ang, Part 1*, 344-5.

Xue's works during his brief flight from Chengdu to Zizhou in 763. One of these pieces, "Viewing Junior Guardian Xue's Calligraphy and Wall Painting" 觀薛稷少保書畫壁, laments Xue's disgrace, but suggests that his art may redeem him:

The Junior Guardian had an ancient air;	少保有古風
His "Outskirts of Shan" poem captured it.	得之陝郊篇 ²¹³
How lamentable! His reputation was stained;	惜哉功名忤
We only see his calligraphy and paintings passed down. ²¹⁴	但見書畫傳

Unlike Song and Chen, Du Fu approaches Xue's visual artworks together with poetry in the context of his tragic life story, as evidence that can speak in the condemned man's defense.²¹⁵ Du Fu laments that Xue's "reputation was stained" 功名忤 by his involvement in the regicide plot. However, his poem reveals an "ancient air" 古風, and his calligraphy and paintings survive, thus offering the possibility of some form of posthumous redemption. Du Fu ends the poem in a manner similar to Chen Zi'ang:

A century hence, I do not know	不知百載後
Who will come to visit Tongquan again?	誰復來通泉

Whereas Chen asks who will hear the cranes (as allegories for himself) calling out from the wilderness, Du Fu wonders who in the future will seek them out in such a remote location. His focus is thus the survival of Xue's memory, and only implicitly his own.

²¹³ Du Fu refers here to a poem by Xue Ji, 秋日還京陝西十里作 (*QTS*, 93.1006), the first line of which is "The carriage passes the outskirts of Shan" 驅車越陝郊.

²¹⁴ *DSXZ*, 11.960.

²¹⁵ It is remarkable indeed that Du Fu could celebrate the work of a man involved in an attempted assassination of Xuanzong, to whom he remained deeply loyal throughout his life. One possible explanation for this is that it suggests the extent to which he came to value art as a vocation separable from politics.

The question recognizes that memory depends on more than an enduring medium; it requires that images be reproduced and transmitted through the minds and hands of others. Xue Ji's "remnant traces" 遺跡 (as Du Fu calls them later in the poem) may stand in Tongquan for all time, but it matters little if they are not disseminated to a larger audience. Nobody may come to visit, which is why poetry is needed to spread the word.

The story of the painter's disgrace lurks in the background of another poem Du Fu wrote on the same visit: "Xue Ji's Painted Cranes on the Outside Wall of the Tongquan Office" 通泉縣署屋壁後薛少保畫鶴. Du Fu has discovered Xue's images facing a worse fate than neglect in a provincial mansion. Exposed on an "outside wall" 屋壁後, they have been reduced to the barest outlines. Yet Du Fu wants to believe that they do not depend solely on their material forms:

Master Xue's eleven cranes	薛公十一鶴
All capture the true likeness of those from Qingtian.	皆寫青田真
Long ago the painting's color had nearly disappeared;	畫色久欲盡
But though obscure, they still rise above the dust.	蒼然猶出塵
High and low, each has its purpose;	低昂各有意
Elegant and imposing, they are like tall men.	磊落如長人
How fine, this far reaching aspiration;	佳此志氣遠
How could it only come from ink and powder being fresh? ²¹⁶	豈惟粉墨新

²¹⁶ *DSXZ*, 11.962. For another English translation of the poem, see A.R. Davis, *Tu Fu*, 136-137. Hereafter cited as Davis.

Du Fu begins by identifying Xue's cranes with Qingtian, or "Greenfarm," which according to legend was home to a pair of birds whose offspring departed, never to return, as soon as they learned to fly.²¹⁷ Like Chen Zi'ang, Du Fu focuses on the painting's physical deterioration, which makes the surviving images appear even more distinguished. Xue has captured their untamable spirit by depicting each in a distinct and lively posture, and for Du Fu, this extends to independence from their medium. Praising their "far reaching aspiration" 志氣遠, he maintains that this cannot be due merely to "ink and powder being fresh."

But surely, as images, the cranes must ultimately rely on some medium so as not to disappear entirely. Du Fu acknowledges as much in the following section, where he contrasts their current diminishment with a former time when their supporting structure remained intact.

When the high hall had not yet collapsed,	高堂未傾覆
They were always able to comfort honored guests.	常得慰嘉賓
Exposed to sun and dew on the outside of the wall,	曝露牆壁外
Alas, they will meet their end in the frequent wind and rain.	終嗟風雨頻

Ink and powder, walls and roofs—these things matter indeed. Deprived of the shelter of the "high hall," Du Fu sees that the cranes are facing extinction. However, to end the poem he presents an enigmatic counter-image that suggests another possible fate:

Among the crimson clouds there are "true bones,"	赤霄有真骨
Ashamed to drink at a muddy pond.	恥飲洿池津

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

In darkness, they go where they will;

冥冥任所往

Free of all bonds, who can tame them?

脫略誰能馴

Most commentators take these “true bones” 真骨 as actual cranes that Du Fu sees flying off as he turns from contemplating Xue’s images.²¹⁸ However, there is nothing in the poem’s language that requires this reading. In the context of the poem’s larger concern with the survival of fading traces of memory, does it not make better sense to read the birds “among the red clouds” as a vision of Xue Ji’s cranes liberated from the materiality that threatens them? Like the cranes of Qingtian, these images survive by staying in motion, and never settling in one place for long. Their life depends on moving between abodes—a wall, a scroll, and the minds of posterity. Xue Ji’s memory will live on as long as his cranes can migrate between media, flying off the wall and into a poem.

Xue’s cranes survived on the wall of the secretariat through to the end of the dynasty, when Zheng Gu 鄭谷 (849-911) encountered them there, as Song Zhiwen had two centuries before. They carried quite a different meaning at a time when the Tang empire was nearing its final collapse. Zheng’s poem, “On Duty at the Secretariat” 秘閣伴直, like those of Du Fu and Chen Zi’ang, centers on a contrast between decay and survival. However, now it is the structures and spaces of the imperial court that appear unkempt and neglected, while the cranes remain as a memory of their maker and of a realm that transcends dynastic rise and fall.

Cold weeds enter the shallow well;

淺井寒蕪入

²¹⁸ For instance, Qiu Zhao’ao writes that, just as the painted cranes succumb to erasure: “then he sees something rising, indistinct among crimson clouds; thus real cranes at times cast off their outward forms” 然看赤霄冥舉，即真鶴有時遁形。Here Qiu employs an opposition between the painted 畫 and the real or true 真 that was a favorite motif of Du Fu commentators. See *ibid.* A.R. Davis echoes this motif in his translation: “Among the red clouds is a real bird” (137).

Layered mosses invade winding halls.	迴廊疊蘚侵
At leisure, I regard Xue Ji's cranes,	閒看薛稷鶴
And they give rise to thoughts of the Five Lakes. ²¹⁹	共起五湖心

In images redolent of *huaigu* elegy, nature returns and reclaims the space of politics and history. However, Zheng Gu does not mourn the overgrown wells and winding halls. Rather, he portrays the entropic scene as a utopia of harmony between man and nature. The secretariat itself is transformed into a Qingtian or Five Lakes, the natural habitats of Xue Ji's cranes. The cranes, which for Song Zhiwen signified the irresistibility of Tang power, in Zheng Gu's eyes survive among the ruins of the court as symbols of spiritual freedom.

Poems on paintings of cranes are among the earliest extant Tang *tihua shi*, and our examples have shown that poets from Song Zhiwen and Chen Zi'ang to Du Fu focused consistently on the image's clarity or obscurity, and its dependence on or transcendence of its medium. Du Fu's innovation was to have read the cranes in light of the life (that is, the disgrace and death) of the painter, Xue Ji. For him, the survival of the cranes on a remote and ruined wall was a question of memory, embodied in the remnant traces of artworks, outliving and potentially redeeming worldly, political failure.

The Artificial Landscape

It is remarkable that none of Xue Ji's contemporaries praised him as a painter. In the poems considered above, both Du Fu and Zheng Gu identify the cranes as his works, yet neither of the early Tang poets do. The silence on Song Zhiwen's part is especially

²¹⁹ *QTS*, 674.7707-8.

interesting, for he knew Xue Ji well as a colleague in the Office for Expanding Literature (*Guangwen guan* 廣文館) with whom he attended many literary gatherings. Why did it take so long for poets to give Xue credit for his cranes?

This returns us to the issue of painting's low social status during the early Tang, which, I will argue, informed the aesthetic values of *tihua shi*. Given contemporary prejudices, Xue may not have wanted to be remembered as a mere maker of images. Early Tang scholars' anxieties about painting are well illustrated by the story of Yan Liben 閻立本 (c. 600-673), a prime minister and one of the "Master Painters" (*hua shi*) employed at the court of Tang Taizong 唐太宗 (r. 626-649). Yan's official biography contains an anecdote in which, having been summoned by the emperor to paint a flock of geese, he arrived drenched with sweat. He was so mortified that, after finishing his composition and returning home, he warned his son against following in his footsteps:

When I was young, I loved to read books and write literary compositions. Now, I am only recognized for painting and have to do menial tasks personally. There is no greater disgrace than this! It is proper that you be seriously warned: do not study this trivial skill.²²⁰

吾少好讀書，幸免牆面，緣情染翰，頗及儕流。唯以丹青見知，躬廝役之務，辱莫大焉！汝宜深誠，勿習此末伎。

Clearly the problem was that painting did not command the respect accorded to literary work. The painter was subject to impromptu imperial commands, and his performances could easily misfire, causing him humiliation and confirming his inferior status in the

²²⁰ Translation modified from Bush and Shih, 87. See Liu Xu 劉昫 (887-946) et al, ed., *Jiu Tangshu* 77.2680; and Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), Song Qi 宋祁 (998-1061), ed., *Xin Tangshu* 100.3941-3942.

eyes of the court. Most shameful of all was the manual labor involved in painting. The court painter's lower status (and thus that of his art) was due to the fact that he had "to do menial tasks personally," erasing the distinction between him and the masses who sweated and worked with their hands.

Another anecdote, contained in Zhang Yanyuan's 張彥遠 (c. 815-c. 877) *Record of Famous Painters Through the Ages* (*Lidai minghua ji*), illustrates painting's association with craft by telling of a Jiang Shaoyou 蔣少遊 (d. 501), who "despite having both talent and knowledge" 雖有才學,

was constantly surrounded by gouges and chisels, marking lines and ink, [working] at the sides of gardens, lakes, towns, and palaces. The cognoscenti bemoaned this, but Shaoyou was undisturbed, considering this his responsibility, and never complained of fatigue.²²¹

常在剗刷繩墨之間，園湖城殿之側。識者歎息，少遊坦然。以為已任，不告疲勞。

We see here the same disdain for painting expressed by the Yan Liben story, though it is attributed to general literati opinion, and is implicitly criticized. However, in this way Jiang Shaoyou is the exception that proves the rule. His story indicates more specifically that painters were widely perceived as artisans, whose "gouges and chisels, marking lines and ink," marked them off from masters of the written word.²²²

²²¹ Translation based on Bush and Shih, 86.

²²² Another indication of painting's disrepute during the early Tang is its inclusion in the "Skills and Arts" 巧藝 section of the *Yiwen leiju* encyclopedia (*juan* 74), alongside games like chess, archery, and gambling. As the *Yiwen leiju* was used primarily as a handbook to aid poetry composition, this provides further evidence that painting was an uncommon topic for poetry at

This began to change during the reign of emperor Xuanzong, when we begin to see painters (and not just paintings) appearing in poems as named participants in literati gatherings. In the eighth century it was apparently becoming more socially acceptable for literati to self-identify as painters, and to recognize others as such in verse. The result was nothing less than the appearance, for the first time in the history of Chinese poetry,²²³ of the painter as a named individual, and the first steps toward viewing painting “poetically”—as a medium of literati self-representation. Individual painters who were not members of the imperial family, men like Yan Liben who may have previously cringed at the thought, were now being remembered for their images. Xue Ji’s cranes became “Xue Ji’s cranes.”

However, painting remained closely identified with the artisan class, and this association had a great impact on the dominant aesthetic values and conceptual vocabulary of *tihua shi* as it took shape in the High Tang. At the center of this aesthetics were values of craftsmanship and illusionism. The notion of craft linked qualities or effects of an image to its production: praising a painting for its wondrous wealth of detail was not very different from praising the painter for his painstaking labor, as we will see. These ways of writing about visual experience were in turn not far removed from the language of illusion and “verisimilitude” (*xingsi* 形似). The distinguishing features of

the time; witness the total absence of *shi* poems in the encyclopedia’s list of examples (organized by genre).

²²³ That is, the history of Chinese poetry as we know it from the poems that have survived—not the hypothetical history of everything ever written.

Tang poems on paintings thus point to a more general aesthetics of craft, in which the manual labor for which painters had been stigmatized was re-imagined and revalued.²²⁴

This aesthetics of craft is particularly noticeable in poems on landscape paintings. With nature as their subject matter, landscapes brought the artificiality of the painting into the foreground for Tang writers. The poem below by Sun Ti 孫逖 (696-761), a prominent courtier under Xuanzong, is notable for being among the earliest extant *tihua shi* addressed to an individual painter. It is addressed to none other than Li Linfu 李林甫 (d. 753), a member of the imperial family who, on top of notoriously dominating the court as chief minister from 736 to 752, found time to devote to “blue-green landscapes” 青綠山水 in the style pioneered by his uncle, Li Sixun 李思訓 (651-716).²²⁵ The following is an excerpt of just over half of the full piece:

Respectfully Matching Chancellor of the Right Li's Landscape Painting on the

Wall of the Secretariat.

奉和李右相中書壁畫山水

In the temple hall there are many days of leisure;

廟堂多暇日

Mountains and rivers perfectly match the mood.

山水契中情

You desired to paint lofty and remote charms,

欲寫高深趣

²²⁴ An example of this new valorization of craft was the association of painters with the figure of the Divine Artificer, or Creator (*zaohua* 造化), whom we met in chapter one. See for example Du Fu's "Ballad of a Painted Falcon" 畫鶻行: "Now I know the Master Painter's miracles; His works are plundered from the Creator's lair" 乃知畫師妙, 功刮造化窟 (*DSXZ*, 6.477). Here "Master Painter," the court title held by Yan Liben, parallels the cosmic Creator. See also Cen Shen's 岑參 (715-770) "Minister Liu's Screen Painted with Mountains and Rivers in the Secretariat" 劉相公中書江山畫障: "Then I realized that the painter's brush / Could capture the works of the Creator" 始知丹青筆, 能奪造化功 (*QTS*, 198.2049). In both instances, the painter is a Promethean thief of a creator-divinity's secrets, and thus comparable to a new kind of poet as well.

²²⁵ On Li Linfu's regime, see Twitchett, 409-447.

By means of pattern and color it was done.	還因藻繪成
The Nine Rivers overlook windows and casements;	九江臨戶牖
The Three Gorges coil about eaves and pillars.	三峽繞檐楹
Flowers and willows sprout forth throughout the year;	花柳窮年發
Smoke and clouds are born following intention.	煙雲逐意生
It can make ten-thousand miles seem nearby;	能令萬里近
We do not notice the four seasons passing... ²²⁶	不覺四時行

When Sun begins describing the image in the third couplet, he does not treat it on its own, but in relation to its surroundings and supporting surfaces. The result, in couplet three, is a trope that would become a mainstay of Tang *tihua shi* rhetoric: “The Nine Rivers overlook windows and casements; / The Three Gorges coil about eaves and pillars.” Famous scenic sites seem to have been imported indoors; and what’s more, the images appear to have sprung to life thanks to the active verbs, “overlook” 臨, and “coil” 繞. In the following couplet Sun finds flowers that do not wither, and smoke that is man-made. In the first case, that which should be inanimate (the painting) has come alive as wilderness invading interior space; in the second, that which should be alive (the nature within the painting) has been embalmed, preserved, mortified. Sun Ti’s vision of the landscape painting thus emphasizes the artificiality of its images and their illusory play of life and death, reality and representation.

²²⁶ *QTS*, 118.1196; Kong, 55-57. Sun’s title and opening exposition treat Li’s painting like a poem, for it was customary to “respectfully match” (*feng he* 奉和) poems, not paintings. This gesture serves to declare the painting equivalent to (exchangeable for) an art traditionally accorded much higher value. Similarly, Sun writes that the painting was inspired by the workplace’s leisurely atmosphere (resulting from the chief minister’s wise policies, no doubt). It is thus an appropriate response to an eliciting occasion, much like an act of poetic composition, classically conceived.

Around the same time, other poets began writing of landscapes in remarkably similar ways, employing a consistent set of tropes to praise the artist's illusionism.²²⁷ In “Respectfully Viewing a Painting of Min Mountain and Tuo River in the Office of Yan, Duke of Zheng, Ten Rhymes (Having Received the Character ‘Loss’)” 奉觀嚴鄭公廳事岷山沱江畫圖十韻 (得忘字), Du Fu elaborated variations on Sun Ti's third couplet throughout nearly an entire extended regulated verse, which begins as follows:

Tuo River overlooks our seats,	沱水臨中座
Min Mountain has arrived in this hall.	岷山到此堂
White waves blow against powdered walls,	白波吹粉壁
Green cliffs jut into carved beams... ²²⁸	青嶂插雕梁

As Ronald Egan has observed of this poem, “Every line of description, without exception, presents a paradox, and every paradox derives from the fact that the painting is a representation of reality and not reality itself.”²²⁹ Seen in the context of contemporary *tihua shi* practices, what is unique and significant about Du Fu's poem is that it limits itself to this single trope, rather than drawing on the many that were available at the time. What is the point of this conscious repetition?

The first explanation is that it is perfectly suited to the literary game the poem was written for. As the title indicates, this was the popular amusement in which players were assigned a word by chance (in Du Fu's case, “loss” 忘), and then had to compose a poem

²²⁷ A wonderful example is Li Bo's 李白 (701-762) “Viewing Yuan Danqiu's Screen Painting of Wu Mountain” 觀元丹丘坐巫山屏風 (*QTS*, 183.1870).

²²⁸ *DSXZ*, 14.1186-8. Translation modified from Ronald Egan, “Poems on Paintings: Su Shih and Huang T'ing-chien.” *HJAS* 43.2 (1983): 439-40.

²²⁹ Egan, 440.

that rhymed throughout with that word, usually taking as subject matter an object near at hand (a painting, for example). Adding to the difficulty (and the fun) was that the poems were composed according to the strict prosodic patterns of regulated verse. Such restrictions of content and prosody (and time) were the challenges against which the poet proved his dexterity and technical skill. By writing an entire poem using a single trope (and exceeding the expected length), Du Fu was making the game even harder for himself, the better to display his virtuosity.

However, he could have done the same for any subject. A fuller explanation, then, might be that such a playful technical display would have accorded with the dominant perception of painting as a not-quite-serious artisanal skill that emphasized technique above all. As we will see, this applied in particular to landscapes, especially those of the Li family's "blue-green" school. However, Du Fu's redundancy does not only respond to landscape paintings, but plays on the language in which poets had come to write about them. It repeats the specific trope that had become the most conventional, the most often repeated. It was a kind of master- or meta-trope of the subgenre, a figure of reproducibility. By subjecting it to successive variations in his poem, Du Fu was highlighting this very modularity, suggesting it as a kind of poetic artifice comparable to the craftsmanship of the painting.

This concept of the artifice of landscape images as modular and repetitive comes to the fore in "A Song Playfully Inscribed on a Landscape Painting" 戲題畫山水圖歌,

which starts by emphasizing the time that Wang Zai 王宰, a painter Du Fu befriended in Chengdu, takes to produce his work.²³⁰

In ten days he paints one river;	十日畫一水
In five days he paints one rock;	五日畫一石
This skilled work does not admit	
Hurrying and pressure;	能事不受相促迫
Wang Zai only now consents	
To leave behind true traces. ²³¹	王宰始肯留真跡

Time and obsessive attention to detail are required in order to produce what Du Fu calls Wang's "true traces" (*zhen ji* 真跡). During this period, the time a painter took to complete his work was a major factor in distinguishing styles, or schools, as attested by an anecdote that tells of a contest between Li Sixun and Wu Daozi 吳道子 (active c. 710-760). The latter, already a legend in his own time, was particularly famous for the speed of his execution. Challenged by Emperor Xuanzong to depict the same stretch of river scenery, they set to work, the tortoise and the hare. In the end, the emperor declared the contest a draw: "Li Sixun's labor of several months and Wu Daozi's traces of a single

²³⁰ On Wang Zai see *Tangchao minghua lu* in translations by Alexander Soper, "T'ang Ch'ao Ming Hua Lu, Celebrated Painters of the T'ang Dynasty by Chu Ching-hsuan of T'ang." *Artibus Asiae* 21.3/4 (1958): 219-20. Zhu Jingxuan claims to have seen two of Wang's paintings, one of a pair of trees and the other depicting "scenes of the four seasons." He recalls especially the exhaustive detail and comprehensiveness of both works. On the latter he enthuses, drawing on a familiar rhetoric, that "it was as if he had brought Creation itself into the sitting-room—the ultimate of subtlety" 若移造化風候雲物，八節四時於一座之內，妙之至極也。Notably, Wang is not the only painter Du Fu associated with whose background remains obscure. This further indicates the class distinction between men of the word and men of images; the painter's medium was unlikely to "make a name" for them.

²³¹ *DSXZ* 8.754; Davis, 138-139.

day, both exhausted the limits of their mysteries”²³² 李思訓數月之功，吳道子一日之跡，皆極盡其妙處。The demonstrable fictiveness of this account suggests that the protagonists represent not individuals so much as competing schools.²³³ Du Fu’s portrayal of Wang Zai thus drew upon contemporary time-based classifications of painters, and associated him with the “slow school” represented by Li Sixun.

Slowness was in turn associated with craft, which Du Fu underscores with a playful quip at the end of the poem. After commending Wang’s skill at rendering “distant formations” (*yuan shi* 遠勢), Du Fu writes that he would like to take some of the finished product home with him, if only the right tool were handy:

He is especially skilled at distant formations,

And has no equal in antiquity.

尤工遠勢古莫比

In the space of feet and inches one must

Speak of ten thousand *li*.

咫尺應須論萬里

How can I get a pair of

Sharp Bingzhou scissors

焉得并州快剪刀

To snip off and take for myself

Half of the Wusong River?

翦取吳松半江水

Scissors, like the rulers measuring “feet and inches” 咫尺 (*zhi chi*), belonged to the craftsman’s toolkit (recall the implements surrounding Jiang Shaoyou). By referencing

²³² For slightly different translations see Soper, 209; Bush and Shih, 68.

²³³ This point is made by Wu Hung: “Instead of being real historical personages, the masters stand for art traditions or schools. Their competition symbolizes the tension and conflict between these traditions or schools in terms of style, medium, function, artist, and audience.” See Wu, in Richard Barnhart et al, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 71.

them at the end of this poem he is associating them (and a concept of “craft” more generally) with Wang Zai. More specifically, he is suggesting an analogy between his hypothetical scissor-work and Wang’s time-consuming method. The similarity, I would argue, lies in the fact that to compose a painting over a period of days and months is to build it up discontinuously, as opposed to the (relatively) unbroken expressive gestures of faster painters like Wu Daozi. The time Wang spends thus results in a kind of composite painting, in which each carefully rendered element (each river and rock) draws the eye and maintains an integrity of its own. It is an assemblage, not unlike a poem made up of variations on a single trope, and thus asks to be clipped and cropped and reorganized.²³⁴

The poems by Sun Ti and Du Fu discussed in this section show how landscape paintings were valued during the Tang for their artificiality and optical illusions, and how these values were conceptually linked to the perception of painters as artisans.²³⁵

Illusionism was not only produced by meticulously crafted landscapes, however. The section that follows explores this concept—central to Du Fu’s *tihua shi* and medieval visual culture generally—by concentrating on one significant little word.

²³⁴ There is evidence that Tang landscape paintings were indeed reformatted, a screen image cut out and remounted as a scroll, for example. Du Fu’s joke about the scissors may allude to this practice, which was likely widespread, as well as to the painting’s composition. See Wu, *Double Screen*, 138-141. It is important to stress how different this conception was from those that came to dominate what would be called “literati painting” beginning in the Song. Perhaps the single most defining value under the new regime was that a painting should express the mind, sentiments, and intentions of the painter, which required that the artifice of the creative process be elided as nearly as possible. Du Fu’s poem makes clear the challenge Wang’s painting would pose for a “literati reading,” foregrounding as it does the mediating labor that interrupts the smooth expressive gesture, cutting off the painter/author’s voice/presence.

²³⁵ The appreciation of painstaking effort applied to other kinds of images as well. In a poem praising a friend’s painting of pine trees, Du Fu writes, “Now I realize how singularly the heart of a good artisan suffers” 更覺良工心獨苦. See “Song Inscribed on Li’s Screen Painted with Pine Trees” 題李尊師松樹障子歌 (*DSXZ*, 6.459-460).

Zhen: The Fidelity of Images

Perhaps the most central, recurrent keyword in Du Fu's language of pictorial illusionism is *zhen* 真, a term usually translated as "real" or "true." We have seen *zhen* more than once already, first in Xiao Gang's poem, in which, observing a palace lady looking at her portrait, the poet-emperor wondered "who can distinguish the false and the true?" 誰能辨偽真. Here *zhen* seems to refer to the palace lady as opposed to her painted representation; and yet this very opposition has the effect of confusing the two. Song Zhiwen also employed the term when he wrote that painted cranes on the office wall had "abundant true spirit" (*zhen qi duo*). Song seems mainly to be evoking the vitality or "life" of the image; however, this *zhen* is, again, only remarkable in relation to an assumed "falsity" (偽 in Xiao Gang's terms). It is thus problematic to understand *zhen* in the discourse of early *tihua shi* as simply referring to a reality outside the painting, the object represented as opposed to the representation itself. *Zhen* is very much *inside* these paintings, evoking the *seeming* or *virtual* reality that was a defining quality of Tang images.

A good place from which to begin rethinking *zhen* in Du Fu's *tihua shi* is Wu Hung's insightful discussion of one of its conceptual counterparts, *huan* 幻 ("illusion," "metamorphosis") in the discourse of pictorial illusionism in medieval China. In the following passage, Wu distinguishes between "illusion" and "illusionism" as contrasting *huan/zhen* effects:

When used in the sense of *illusion*, [*huan*] denotes verisimilitude in representation: the spectator feels he is seeing an actual object or space, but knows clearly that what he looks at is a picture. The underlying notion is therefore the dualism of

huan and *zhen* (‘real’ or ‘realness’)—an *illusory* pictorial image mirrors reality and thus opposes reality. *Illusionism*, on the other hand, confuses and dismisses such distinctions: by employing certain media or techniques, the artist is able to deceive not only the viewer’s eye but also his mind, at least temporarily. The viewer is persuaded to take what is painted for real.²³⁶

The distinction here is between an experience in which *huan* and *zhen* remain in opposition as illusion and reality, and one in which this opposition gives way, after which there is no longer any such thing as illusion (for it becomes reality in the mind of the viewer). The result of illusionism’s canceling of *huan/zhen* distinctions is a new kind of *zhen*, one that no longer refers to reality as opposed to representation, but, on the contrary, to images *experienced as* realities.

Wu illustrates his concept of illusionism with a short tale preserved in the *Taiping guangji* called “Zhen Zhen” 真真, which, I will argue, can help us better understand illusionism in Du Fu’s *tihua shi* as well.²³⁷ The tale concerns a man named Zhao Yan who, having fallen in love with a woman in a painting, is advised by the image’s creator (a “divine painter” [*shen hua* 神畫]) on how he can obtain her for his wife:

She also has a name. It is Zhen Zhen (“Real Real”). Call out her name for a hundred days, day and night without cease, and she will certainly respond. When

²³⁶ Wu, *The Double Screen*, 103.

²³⁷ Although “Zhen Zhen” is part of a specific tradition of writings on “screen women,” in which anxieties about images are explicitly linked to male fears of female beauty (and the *femme fatale* figure), I contend that it speaks to Tang hopes and fears of images more generally. In a sense, Zhen Zhen stands for a wide variety of Tang pictures, which wanted more than anything to become real; Zhao Yan represents the viewers, like Du Fu, whose verbal invocations brought them to life.

she responds pour her a libation of “Hundred Families’ Colored Ash” wine, and she will surely come to life.²³⁸

此亦有名。曰真真。呼其名百日。晝夜不歇。即必應之。應則以百家彩灰酒灌之。必活。

Zhao does as he is told, and Zhen Zhen steps out of the screen. She offers herself to him, and within a year they have a son. Soon thereafter, however, a friend of Zhao’s warns him that his new wife is a “demon” 妖, and sends him a “divine sword” 神劍 with which to slay her. Discovering the plot, Zhen Zhen tearfully confronts her husband: “you called my name, and I did not resist your wishes. Now you doubt me. I cannot stay.” 君又呼妾名。既不奪君願。君今疑妾。妾不可住。 She then steps back into the screen, taking their child with her. “Observing the screen now, a child had been added; both were there, as paintings.” 觀其障。唯添一孩子。皆是畫焉。

“Zhen Zhen” is a parable about images and their relations to desire and reproduction. An image herself, Zhen Zhen’s very name establishes the motif of replication and doubling dramatized in her story: the notion of the image as a replica of reality that causes a confusion of *huan* and *zhen* in which only the latter remains (transformed into its opposite).²³⁹ As a name, Zhen Zhen also implicates the viewer in the production of

²³⁸ Li Fang 李昉 (925-996) et al, eds., *Taiping guangji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 286.2283.

²³⁹ Zhen Zhen’s name calls to mind the Derridean notion of the “remark” as explained by Rosalind Krauss: “The sign, [Derrida] insisted, is a form of re-mark, with the second syllable of a pair of sounds (as in pa-pa and ma-ma) both differing from the first, as an outside to the first, and coming after it. This coming after (which defers meaning) reaches back to transform the first, changing it from the random babble of the infant into a signifier—the coming-after of the second a requirement of meaning that nonetheless cleaves the signified in two, splitting presence from itself as well, with its outside to the ‘now’ of self-presence inexorably opening the self to difference.” See *Under Blue Cup* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), 24. It is intriguing to

pictorial illusion. The image must be called real in order to become so, hence Zhao Yan's repetitive incantation. But the process of replication does not stop there. Once animated, Zhen Zhen promptly bears him a son. Visual representation and verbal repetition are thus linked to biological reproduction, which is treated as the counterpart of the imaginative animation of images.

Indeed, the story presents animation and procreation as a reciprocal exchange that binds the viewer and the image together in mutual obligation. Thus, when Zhen Zhen learns of Zhao's "doubt" (or "suspicion" 疑), she accuses him of breaking their pact, and transforms back into a painting. The image's "faithfulness" or "fidelity" is in the eye of the beholder. Once the viewer's faith is broken, illusionism reverts to illusion—*huan* reenters the picture. Remarkably, in this story the female image is shown to be more faithful than the male word, which serves as the instrument of deception. We do not come away thinking that Zhao was mistaken in falling for or believing in his love, only in heeding his friend's loose talk. "Zhen Zhen," then, is a Tang tale that takes the side of images, treating *zhen* as fidelity in the social as well as visual realms.

Because of its articulation of this specific double meaning, I contend, "Zhen Zhen" helps us understand illusionism in Du Fu, who used the term *zhen* no fewer than twelve times in his *tihua shi*. We have already seen how he envisioned Xue Ji's cranes flying off of their decaying wall, and how he praised landscape paintings for their artful simulations of natural scenery.²⁴⁰ Although he did not refer to the latter explicitly as *zhen*, he clearly

think of the second "real" in Zhen Zhen's name as the deconstructive supplement to the first—i.e., the image as reality's parasite.

²⁴⁰ "But surely there is an important difference," the reader might respond. "Du Fu, unlike Zhao Yan, knew he was looking at paintings. This is illusion, not full-fledged illusionism." Perhaps, but the distinction is difficult to maintain. When a "serious" poet writes that the image before him

focused on their illusory “reality effects,” drawing upon landscape *tihua shi* conventions of the time. *Zhen* he reserved for living subjects—paintings of birds and horses, in particular. He wrote that Xue Ji’s cranes “All portrayed the truth (*zhen*) of Qingtian” 皆寫青田真, and referred to them metonymically as *zhen gu* (“true bones”) later in the same poem. These two constructions—*xie zhen* and *zhen gu*—appear together again in the following couplet from “Song of Jiang, Duke of Chu’s Painting of a Horned Hawk” 姜楚公畫角鷹歌:²⁴¹

This hawk’s true portrait

Resides in Eastern Mian;

此鷹寫真在左綿

Alas, therefore, these “true bones” are

Handed down in vain.²⁴²

卻嗟真骨遂虛傳

Xie zhen and *zhen gu* face each other from identical positions in the two lines.²⁴³ This doubling of *zhen* may be taken as sheer wordplay, but it also undeniably reflects back

is *zhen*, or that it seems alive, are we to protest he does not really mean what he says, that he knows better, or is employing “mere” figures of speech?

²⁴¹ Zhu Heling 朱鶴齡 (1606-1683) makes the intriguing claim that Jiang received his fief as a reward for “punishing” Dou Huaizhen, leader of the plot to assassinate the young Xuanzong. It was participation in this plot, of course, that cost Xue Ji his life. See *DSXZ*, 11.924.

²⁴² *Ibid.* The phrase *zhen gu* is used eight times in the *Complete Tang Poems*. Du Fu, who uses it in three pieces, is the only poet to apply it specifically to paintings of birds. In the hands of others, such as Li Bo and Chu Guangxi 儲光羲 (c.706-763), it was something cultivated by humans and possessed by immortals; that the latter could fly like birds and lived at least as long as paintings would be one explanation for Du Fu’s novel usage. *Zhen gu* had been used in Zhong Rong’s 鍾嶸 (c.468-c.518) *Shi pin* to describe strong poems (affiliating it to keywords like *feng gu* [風骨 “bones of wind”]; it could also connote political “talent” through its similarity to *jun gu* 駿骨 “bones of a fine horse”).

Xie zhen, which came to mean portraits of persons, during the Tang meant realistic or “faithful” representations of any subject. Li Bo uses it to refer to a painting of a waterfall, for instance, and Du Fu applies it to paintings of birds and horses.

²⁴³ While *xie zhen* refers to the painting unambiguously, most commentators take *zhen gu* as referring to the real hawk, which is “handed down in vain” because it is now a mere image.

upon the image as the double of a real thing, as did Zhen Zhen's name. Here too, the image seems to come alive: Jiang's hawk, Du Fu writes in the second couplet, causes viewers to anxiously imagine that it will fly off.²⁴⁴ The final couplet returns to the theme of animation:

Swallows and sparrows among the rafters,

Do not be alarmed;

梁間燕雀休驚怕

Indeed it will not yet rise on the void

And ascend to the Ninth Heaven.

亦未搏空上九天

These lines have too often been read over-literally as a reassurance about the powerlessness of the painted image. However, within the larger context of the poem (praising the vivacity of Jiang's hawk) this “reassurance” is surely figurative, and in fact underscores the perceived threat. So does the wording of the last line: “indeed it will not yet” 亦未 take flight is not to say it cannot, but that it might still. The hawk could fly off, but does not. Like Zhen Zhen (and the cranes described by Song Zhiwen) it is doubly faithful.

In “Song of a Painted Horse Inscribed on a Wall” 題壁畫馬歌, the *zhen* of the representation is associated both with its verisimilitude and vitality, and also with the creative act of the painter, Wei Yan 韋偃.²⁴⁵

Lord Wei bid me farewell,

However, this iconophobic note jars with the poem's praise for Jiang's painting. I would argue that *zhen gu* refers rather to the painted hawk, the “vanity” of which results from its distance from centers of appreciation (i.e., the fact that it “resides in Eastern Mian”). See *DSXZ*, 11.924.

²⁴⁴ This is Qiu's reading of the third line, “Viewers sigh with gusto that it will tug the armband and fly 觀者貪愁掣臂飛. He takes “sigh with gusto” 貪愁 as expressing both hope and fear.

²⁴⁵ On Wei Yan, who was known for his quick execution and unorthodox painting techniques, see Soper, 219.

For he had somewhere to go.	韋侯別我有所適
He knew I cherished his	
Peerless paintings.	知我憐君畫無敵
In play he grasped a thinning brush,	
And stroked out a Hualiu.	戲拈秃筆掃驊騮
Suddenly I saw Qilin	
Emerge from the eastern wall.	歛見麒麟出東壁
One of them crops the grass,	
While the other neighs;	一匹齧草一匹嘶
Sitting, I see a thousand <i>li</i> ,	
Fit for frosty hooves.	坐看千里當霜蹄
In troubled times how can one find	
Fidelity (<i>zhen</i>) like this?	時危安得真致此
With people sharing the same life,	
And also the same death. ²⁴⁶	與人同生亦同死

A playful, spontaneous flurry of brushwork produces horses that spring magically to life before the poet's eyes. As in the poem on Wang Zai's landscape, the speed of the artist's execution is again correlated with the qualities of the image. However, whereas Wang's patient meticulousness made for landscapes that seemed to encompass all times and places, Wei Yan's brisk on-demand performance issues in horses ready to gallop across

²⁴⁶ *DSXZ* 8.753; Davis, 136.

vast distances. And they are *zhen*, which as the final couplet makes abundantly clear, means both “lifelike” and “loyal.”

In Du Fu’s *tihua shi*, then, *zhen* is not a reality beyond the image, but the image’s virtual reality or uncanny life. The word is given dramatic form and new meaning in the Tang tale, “Zhen Zhen,” whose eponymous heroine combines perfect verisimilitude with perfect faithfulness to her viewer-lover (who fails to reciprocate). *Zhen* thus connects illusionism with loyalty, suggesting a translation of “fidelity” or “faithfulness.” Du Fu, we saw, exploited precisely this double meaning in his poems on Jiang’s hawk and Wei Yan’s horse. In the next and final section, we will see how such a concept of *zhen* enjoins the poet to bring to life not only the images themselves, but the past worlds of which they were a part.

The Faithful Memory of Paintings

The notion of *zhen* as fidelity (of image to reality, word to deed, or servant to master), leads us to the final and most extraordinary feature of Du Fu’s *tihua shi*: his vivid evocations of specific past events. Significantly, these memories appear only in poems on paintings of hunting birds and horses. The fidelity of these animals to their masters, echoed in the faithful representations of painters, is reproduced yet again by the poem as it traces the production of the image to a specific time, place, and milieu—the court society of the Kaiyuan (713-741) and Tianbao (742-756) periods. By preserving a faithful image of the past, the paintings encode a hidden truth that can be recovered through the poem’s memory as a mode of recognition.

A first example of this kind of memory is “Yang Jian Then Brought Out a Fan of Twelve Leaves with Painted Hawks” 楊監又出畫鷹十二扇, a poem written in Kuizhou in 766. Unlike those discussed previously, this poem is addressed not to an artist, but to a collector, Yang Jian. Accordingly, rather than focusing on the painting’s production, Du Fu turns to questions of attribution:

In recent times, Feng Shaozheng	近時馮紹正
Was skilled at painting birds of prey.	能畫鷲鳥樣
The Brilliant Master has brought out this painting,	明公出此圖
Does it not transmit their features? ²⁴⁷	無乃傳其狀

As a collector’s item separated from its maker and context of production, the painting’s past is in question; its value and meaning now depend on attribution and transmission, rather than on the character of the creative act. Du Fu thus provides a pedigree, identifying the work as a fine specimen of a known master of hunting birds, Feng Shaozheng. He goes on, in the following four lines, to describe the images, praising the hawks’ apparent strength and swiftness in a manner reminiscent of the poem for Jiang, Lord of Chu. Unlike that piece, this “animation sequence” leads someplace unfamiliar, back in time to a scene conjured by the viewing poet’s memory:

²⁴⁷ *DSXZ* 15.1340-42; Davis, 138. This is one of two poems Du Fu wrote for Yang Jian, whose name, according to Wang Sishi (cited by Qiu), alludes to the title of Director of the Palace Administration. The other poem is about a piece of calligraphy by the famed master of cursive script, Zhang Xu 張旭 (fl. 8th c.). See *DSXZ*, 15.1338-40.

Scholars have noted that the An Lushan rebellion, just as it scattered courtiers like Du Fu across the land, also scattered the imperial painting collection. The result was an unprecedented circulation of artworks formerly belonging to the emperor. Some of these fell into the hands of officials, who took on the role of custodians. Others wound up on the market. In the eighth “Song of Kuizhou,” discussed at the beginning of the chapter, Du Fu recalls seeing a painting of the Three Gorges in a marketplace. This dissemination of imperial property is another crucial context for understanding Du Fu’s acts of memory in *tihua shi*.

I remember when to Lishan Palace ²⁴⁸	憶昔驪山宮
The Hanyuan guards were moved in winter; ²⁴⁹	冬移含元仗
Under cold skies there was a great archer's hunt;	天寒大羽獵
These things were all of regal spirit. ²⁵⁰	此物神俱王
At that time there were no mediocre talents;	當時無凡材
On target every time, each exerted their strength. ²⁵¹	百中皆用壯

Du Fu identifies the hawks in Yang Jian's painting with the outstanding hunting birds he recalls seeing years before on an excursion with the court. Coming on the heels of a descriptive passage that evokes their strength, swiftness, and intensity of purpose, the memory reads as an effect or extension of the image's faithful illusionism. In terms of narrative sequence, it is thus a structural analogue to passages we have discussed in which images seem ready to leap (or fly) out of the painting. However, here the faithfulness of the images serves to link them to a specific past event, a memory of which they awaken in the viewer.

²⁴⁸ The luxurious pleasure palace and hot springs frequented by Emperor Xuanzong and his beloved, Yang Yuhuan 楊玉環 (719-756). Lishan became synonymous with their glamorously irresponsible romance, widely blamed for enabling An Lushan's devastating revolt.

²⁴⁹ The Hanyuan Hall 含元殿 was the "official hall" 正殿 of the Palace of Great Brilliance 大明宮.

²⁵⁰ I.e., the hawks.

²⁵¹ Qiu Zhao'ao cites Zheng Gu's commentary to his "Poem on the Jinyang Gate" 津陽門詩 which says:

The Prince of Shen had a Korean red hawk, and the Prince of Qi had a yellow falcon from the northern mountains. With untrammelled energy and strange looks, they were especially distinguished from the others. Every time the emperor went out hunting he would put them in front of his carriage, looking on them as sons who assure victory.

申王有高麗赤鷹，岐王有北山黃鶻，逸氣奇姿，特異他等。上每校獵，必置於駕前，目為決勝兒。

See *DSXZ*, 15.1341.

On the one hand, like the attribution to Feng Shaozheng, this memory passage provides a prestigious pedigree for the painting of a collector. Yang Jian certainly would have been pleased to have his hawks recognized not only as the work of a renowned artist, but as the hunting birds of Emperor Xuanzong's glorious pre-rebellion court. However, the vision of this court that they elicit is deeply unsettling: a scene of violence at Xuanzong's infamous pleasure palace. In hindsight, the image of hawks swooping down on their prey is an ominous portent of the destruction to come. The painting thus acquires value as a piece of history the darker significance of which is only available to those with eyes to see:

In the realm of powder and ink and resemblances 粉墨形似間

Those who recognize will share the same sigh of grief. 識者一惆悵

“Those who recognize” (*shi zhe* 識者) will understand—those, like Du Fu (and perhaps Yang Jian), who can make out the hawks of the pre-rebellion court, and can see them retrospectively as harbingers of the rebellion, prophetically glossing the book of life. Yang Jian may or may not have been a member of Xuanzong's court; Du Fu hardly was, himself. What matters more, however, is that they can come together in a present act of remembrance and recognition, to “share the same sigh of grief” 一惆悵. The faithful images thus also contain a hidden truth, the recognition and remembrance of which constitutes a community of viewers. They invite and anchor acts of collective memory.

On a basic level, memory in Du Fu's *tihua shi* is a way of telling stories about images that, of course, have no voice of their own. The poem makes the faithful image speak and testify to the past events it witnessed. However, the mute painting must be identified with a particular past before it can divulge its secrets; it will only speak to “those who

recognize.” In “Song of a Painting of a Horse from the Imperial Stables” 天育驃圖歌, Du Fu compares the recognition of an image to the selection of fine horses and talented officials. After first describing the marvelous horse portrayed in the painting, he recognizes it, in the following memory sequence, as the product of a past act of recognition:

I recall that in the past, the Director of the Imperial Carriages,	
Zhang Jingshun,	伊昔太僕張景順
Supervised the herds, broke the colts,	
And inspected the finest among them.	監牧攻駒閱清峻
Thereupon he ordered the head groom	
To keep them in the Tianyu stalls.	遂令大奴守天育
He raised this thoroughbred separately,	
Cherishing its divine beauty.	別養驥子憐神俊
At that time there were four hundred	
Thousand horses in all,	當時四十萬匹馬
But Master Zhang lamented that their	
Talents were all inferior.	張公歎其材盡下
So of this one alone he had a portrait painted	
To hand down through generations.	故獨寫真傳世人
Seeing it beside one’s seat,	
With time it is even more novel.	見之座右久更新
After many years things transform	

Into empty shadows.

年多物化空形影

Alas for these strong feet

With no way to gallop.²⁵²

嗚呼健步無由騁

The horse in the painting, Du Fu writes, was selected for its excellence by Zhang Jingshun, the director of the imperial stables during Xuanzong's Kaiyuan reign period. According to a prose piece by Zhang Yue 張說 (663-730), horses increased from 240,000 to 430,000 over a thirteen-year period under Jingshun's supervision.²⁵³ However, Du Fu focuses not on the population explosion, but on the process of sorting and selecting, whereby Jingshun elevated one single candidate above the multitudes and had it immortalized in a commemorative portrait.²⁵⁴ Du Fu's present recognition of the painted horse in memory and poetry thus echoes and reproduces the past selection and commemoration of the horse in painting. As such, Du Fu suggests that his poem may be all that saves the painting (and the horse it commemorates) from oblivion:

And today, how could it be that there are no

Yaoniaos and Hualius?²⁵⁵

如今豈無驤裊與驂騮

²⁵² DSXZ 4.253; Davis, 135-136.

²⁵³ Cited in DSXZ, 4.253.

²⁵⁴ In the background of Du Fu's poems on horse portraits is the archetypal presentation of the subject in the story of King Mu of Zhou's (r. 1023-983 B.C.E.) fantastic journey to the west, *The Biography of Emperor Mu* 穆天子傳. Captivated by the pleasures of foreign lands, King Mu remained abroad, allowing his kingdom to fall under the sway of his rival, the ruler of Xu. Apprised of the threat, the king raced home, crushed his enemies, and reclaimed his kingdom. The journey back dramatizes the restoration of sovereignty as a spatial itinerary. After his victory, King Mu commissioned a portrait of eight horses that drew his returning carriage. Later rulers followed his example, and horse portraits became powerful symbols of imperial authority. Titles of now-lost paintings make reference to the First Emperor of Qin's seven horses, Han Wendi's nine, Tang Taizong's ten, and Xuanzong's nine. On the significance of the King Mu story to the genesis and symbolism of horse paintings, see Hou-mei Sung, *Decoded Messages: The Symbolic Language of Chinese Animal Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 172-3.

²⁵⁵ Famously fine horses from ancient times.

But the times lack a Wang Liang or Bo Le,

So they die and are no more.²⁵⁶

時無王良伯樂死即休

These issues of recognition and memory coalesce in two of Du Fu's most extraordinary *tihua shi*: "Song of a Painting, Presented to General Cao Ba" 丹青引贈曹將軍霸, and "Song of a Horse Painting by General Cao, Seen in the House of Recorder Wei Feng" 韋諷錄事宅觀曹將軍畫馬圖,²⁵⁷ on the life and work of Cao Ba 曹霸, a painter active at Xuanzong's court who specialized in horses. As the titles indicate, the poems are addressed to the artist and to a collector, respectively, and, though their content differs accordingly, the similarities are even more striking, most notably the long memory passages that take up the bulk of both compositions. In fact, each piece contains remembrances of two distinct events, which we will examine in the context of the poems and Du Fu's *tihua shi* more broadly.

"Song of a Painting, Presented to General Cao Ba" was written for a painter formerly of Xuanzong's court, who had fallen into poverty and obscurity in the years following the rebellion. A down-and-out maker of monuments to Kaiyuan glory, Cao Ba's story in many ways mirrored Du Fu's own, and it is hard not to see the poet's desire, in the memories of "Song of a Painting," to relive Cao's past vicariously. The poem begins by contrasting the fame of the Cao ancestors (who included Cao Cao 曹操 [155-220] the great general and founder of the Cao-Wei Dynasty [220-265]), with the family's current

²⁵⁶ Wang Liang and Bo Le were legendary connoisseurs of fine horses.

²⁵⁷ *DSXZ*, 13.1147-1152; 13.1152-1156; for other translations of "Song of a Painting," see Davis, 134-5; Hawkes, *Little Primer of Tu Fu*, 133-44; for "Song of a Horse Painting by General Cao," see Egan, 412-13; Hawkes, 145-55.

humble status. Cao Ba still preserves the honor of the clan, Du Fu writes, though with the brush rather than the sword:

Though the age of heroes in strongholds	
Is now done and gone,	英雄割據雖已矣
Literary flair and breezy elegance	
Still very much remain.	文彩風流猶尚存

Du Fu promptly pivots to Cao's equally impressive artistic lineage, which includes the great calligraphers Madame Wei 衛夫人 (Wei Shuo 衛鑠, 272-349) and Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361). Art is a continuation of his family's military legacy by other means.

This vision of painting as cultural preservation is elaborated in the following section in a first memory of Cao's days as a court painter in the service of Emperor Xuanzong. Du Fu recalls that "During the Kaiyuan period he was constantly summoned to appear" 開元之中常引見, and pictures him restoring the portraits in the imperial gallery:

The meritorious officials of Lingyan Pavilion	
Were lacking in color;	凌煙功臣少顏色
The General set his brush to work	
And brought their faces to life.	將軍下筆開生面
On the heads of able ministers he placed	
"Promoted Worthy" hats; ²⁵⁸	良相頭上進賢冠
At the waists of fearsome generals he hung	
Great-feathered arrows.	猛將腰間大羽箭

²⁵⁸ The ceremonial hats worn by officials at court.

Master Bao and Master E's

Hair he made to move;

褒公鄂公毛髮動

Their heroic bearing and martial air

Evoked a love of battle.

英姿颯爽來酣戰

Just as Cao's vocation as a painter carries on ancestral and artistic traditions, his work in the portrait gallery preserves the memory of exemplary servants of the state. Du Fu praises the results using the language of animation that was characteristic of early Tang *tihua shi*: the images become so vividly present that they stir beneath his brush. Again, he closely associates pictorial illusionism with memory. However, here the illusion is embedded within a memory sequence, producing a doubling effect similar to that of the poem on Zhang Jingshun: the poet's recollection of the past scene both frames and mirrors the painter's restoration of the portraits.

The scene then shifts from the secluded recesses of the gallery to the open air of the palace courtyard, where Emperor Xuanzong has summoned Cao to paint "Jade Flower" 玉花, one of his prized horses. Du Fu writes that, of the "mountains" of court painters (*hua gong* 畫工), none had been able to successfully capture its likeness ("they made its appearance different" 貌不同). The curtains of the memory theater reopen as the Master Painter takes the stage and performs to satisfy the emperor's appetite for images:

An edict ordered the General

To spread out white silk;

詔謂將軍拂絹素

He crafted his thought and struggled bitterly

With plans for composition.

意匠慘澹經營中

Then suddenly, from the Ninefold Heavens,	
A true dragon appeared, ²⁵⁹	斯須九重真龍出
At once wiping out a myriad ages	
Of mediocre horses.	一洗萬古凡馬空
Jade Flower was actually <i>there</i>	
Above the emperor's couch;	五花卻在御榻上
Above the couch and in front of the courtyard	
They faced each other, towering.	榻上庭前屹相向
His Royal Highness smiled softly	
And pressed gold upon him;	至尊含笑催賜金
The stable boys and the chief grooms	
All sighed in sorrow.	圉人太僕皆惆悵

The scene begins with the image's creation in response to imperial command. Cao labors over the planning of the composition, but then executes it in a flash: the image appears “suddenly,” putting the competition to shame “at once.” This portrayal of the creative act as instantaneous, as if the image appeared magically out of nowhere, echoes the poem for Wei Yan, whose quick work embodied the swiftness and fidelity of his subject. Again the resulting image is *zhen* (in this case, a “true dragon” 真龍), a likeness so faithful it is deceptive. (“Jade Flower was actually *there* above the emperor's couch” 五花卻在御榻上.) The image that perfectly mirrors its model is thus the product of and counterpart to a performance that seamlessly echoes imperial command.

²⁵⁹ Horses were often called “dragons,” or “dragon mediums” 龍媒.

The scene that follows, in which the horse stands face to face with its image, under the delighted gaze of the emperor, strikingly resembles the scene Xiao Gang describes in “Poem on a Lovely Woman Looking at a Painting,” discussed above. This raises the issue of the relation of the medieval aesthetics of craft and illusionism to political ideology. We saw above, in the poems on crane paintings by Song Zhiwen and Chen Zi’ang, that the fidelity of the images correlated to their proximity to the capital. The “abundant true [or faithful] spirit” of Song’s cranes was related to their dwelling on the wall of the secretariat; whereas, languishing on the outskirts of the empire, Chen’s images (and Du Fu’s) wasted away. We can perceive in this contrast the imperial geographical imaginary in which the emperor’s virtue and favor was the very real source of light and life, for images as for persons, plants and animals.²⁶⁰ Just as imported plants were believed to thrive in the gardens of the capital, I am suggesting that images became more faithful and true to life the closer they approached the imperial eyes. The achievement of perfect *zhen* in painting is thus a reflection and result of the power and influence of the sovereign, whose appetite for simulacra is the desire to see his power made visible.²⁶¹ For this reason, we can posit the emperor as the paradigmatic pre-rebellion Tang viewer, whose vision organized and underwrote the aesthetics of craft and illusionism generally. Cao Ba’s production of Jade Flower’s image in the sight of Xuanzong exemplifies this ideal of painting as a manifestation of imperial glory.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ David McMullen explores how Du Fu’s botanical references make use of this particular outgrowth of Chinese political theology in his article, “Recollection Without Tranquillity: Du Fu, the Imperial Gardens and the State,” 189-252.

²⁶¹ Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*, trans. Martha M. Houle (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 3-15.

²⁶² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 3-16.

However, whereas the Liang prince remained an unseen observer, Xuanzong views his spectacle in public, and is himself the object of multiple gazes. Rewarding Cao with smiles and gifts, he is watched by “stable boys” and “chief grooms,” whose rueful sighs bear witness to the painter’s triumph: their real horses cannot compete with such perfect images. This audience of bested competitors adds a line of sight to the field of vision; the emperor is seen seeing double. However, these onlookers too are taken in by the most commanding view, that of the poet and his painter friend, who look back on the entire scene from their position in the present. The remembering poet now takes the place once occupied by the voyeuristic Xiao Gang, and places the sovereign observer himself on stage. In this way, Du Fu’s memory makes visible the source of a regime of visibility just after its sun had set.

In “Song of a Horse Painting by General Cao, Seen in the House of Recorder Wei Feng,” Du Fu recalls another of Cao Ba’s performances for imperial command. The focus of this scene, however, is not on the performance itself so much as the responses it elicits:

Once he portrayed the Former Emperor’s

Night-Shining White;

曾貌先帝照夜白

And for ten days, over the Dragon Pool,

Thunder and lightning flew.

龍池十日飛霹靂

From the inner palace,

A dark red agate bowl.

內府殷紅馬腦碗

Palace ladies relayed the order

And consorts sought out the gift.

婕妤傳詔才人索

With his proffered bowl, the General

Made bows and started home.

碗賜將軍拜舞歸

Light fabrics and fine silks,

Trailed behind him, flying.

輕紈細綺相追飛

Cao's painting is so perfectly faithful and responsive to executive orders that it elicits responses of its own, both from Heaven and from the celestial court. The thunder that peals outside the palace and the delivery of a precious bowl as a gift from the emperor are presented as part of the same cosmic *ganying* 感應 (“stimulus-response”) chain-reaction set in motion by the making of the image. After receiving his gift, Cao bows and takes his leave, continuing the seamless succession of events. The image of the painter departing the court, with materials for future paintings fluttering at his back, opens onto a cyclical repetition even as this first narration of memory comes to a close.

In contrast to “Song of a Painting,” this poem is for a collector, Wei Feng, and, like the poem on Yang Jian's hawks, it ascribes value to the painting as the work of a famous Kaiyuan artist and a carrier of secret messages from the past. In that piece Du Fu suggested that “those who recognize” would remember the hunting party at Lishan and its portentous meaning. Cao Ba's painting, too, Du Fu writes, “again causes those who recognize to sigh at length in admiration” 復令識者久歎嗟. Later in the poem, following a vivid descriptive passage, he praises Wei Feng as an “assiduous lover” 苦心愛者 of fine horses. Du Fu thus invokes the select community of viewers who can understand the painting's secrets. Memory is again the way the poet demonstrates his recognition and makes the image speak:

I recall, in the past, the imperial progress

To Xinfeng Palace.

憶昔巡幸新豐宮

Kingfisher banners, brushing the sky,

Came toward the east.

翠華拂天來向東

Prancing and galloping in amassed abundance

Were thirty thousand of them.

騰驤磊落三萬匹

The muscle and bone of each

Were the same as in this painting.

皆與此圖筋骨同

Just like in the poem for Yang Jian, Du Fu recognizes these images as faithful representations of animals he had witnessed at a court event during Xuanzong's reign. Again, this gives the painting value as a record and product of a prestigious, vanished society, of which Du Fu can claim to have been a member. Unlike the hunt at Lishan, however, this ghostly procession does not seem especially fateful in itself. It does not appear to bear any secret messages that would offer material for communal decoding. In this poem, Du Fu shifts the interpretive burden to the cryptic couplets that follow, like one of Benjamin's prophetic glosses illuminated in the glow of memory:

But ever since the presenting of treasures

At the audience with the River God;

自從獻寶朝河宗

Never again was a dragon shot

In the waters of the Jiang.

無復射蛟江水中

These hermetic lines offer up the painting's secrets, as the memory of Lishan did on its own. The first line's allusion to the *Biography of Emperor Mu*, in which the Zhou king visited the court of the "Earl of the Yellow River" 河伯 on his journey west, has been taken by most commentators to indirectly refer to Emperor Xuanzong's westward flight from the rebels. The line that follows alludes to a mighty catch made by Emperor Wu of

Han, which signified the legitimacy and power of his reign. Xuanzong's loss of the capital, Du Fu seems to suggest, signaled the passing of authority out of his hands, and perhaps even away from the Tang royal house altogether. Insofar as horse paintings, like the legendary "Nine Tripods" 九鼎 were potent symbols of dynastic legitimacy, the very fact that Wei Feng was in possession of Cao Ba's "Nine Horse Painting" 九馬圖 would have raised such questions.²⁶³ We have seen, in the poem on Yang Jian's hawks, another Kaiyuan image in the hands of a collector that appeared to Du Fu as evidence of dynastic collapse and a mirror of his own displacement. The poem for Wei Feng ends on this note of lamentation, with a scene at Emperor Xuanzong's desolate and deserted grave:

Sir, haven't you seen?	君不見
In the pines and cypresses	
In front of the Jingu Tombs,	金粟堆前松柏裏
The dragon-mediums are all gone,	
And the birds sing in the wind.	龍媒去盡鳥呼風

Conclusions

Du Fu's poems on paintings have an important place in his larger poetics of memory. This chapter has shown that memory is central to many of his most ambitious *tihua shi*, and that most of his recollections concern the court life of the pre-rebellion period. Paintings of horses and hawks, we saw, reminded Du Fu of their makers and of the era of

²⁶³ According to Guo Ruoxu in the *Tuhua jianwen zhi* (5.67-8), the original painting of Muwang's eight horses was passed down to the Western Jin ruler, Wudi (r. 265-90). It was fading, so Wudi ordered Shi Daoshuo to copy it. Shi's copy was then passed down to the Chen rulers, who lost it to the Sui. The King of Qi bought it from a He Ruobi, and presented it to Yangdi (thus maintaining it within the secret royal possession). Only in the Zhenguan era (598-649) did it become known to outsiders. See Sung, 173.

peace and plenty in which they thrived. The memory-image's relation to the world it preserved was treated analogously to the relation of the animal subjects to their masters. Both were characterized by their fidelity, or *zhen*, a concept linking mimetic illusionism with ethical and political loyalty. *Zhen* was a defining aesthetic ideal of the Tang period, and was linked to values of meticulous detail and craftsmanship. An important condition for this appreciation of craft, artifice, and illusionism in *tihua shi* of the Tang and earlier was the dominance of image-production by artisans in the employ of emperors, and those in the elite who imitated artisanal styles. This was a quite different visual imagination than obtained after the literati appropriated painting during the Song, and marginalized the Tang court aesthetic that Du Fu exemplified even as he marked its passing.

Chapter Four

Travels on the Stage of Brush and Ink:

Autobiographical Memory in Du Fu's Late Narrative Poems

In the preceding chapters we have seen how Du Fu wrote on historical monuments and works of visual art as media of memory through which to imagine frameworks of historical and social belonging under conditions of dynastic crisis and personal displacement. We now turn to the medium of poetry, with which each of these other media were thought and represented. For Du Fu, poetry was one medium among others, part of a larger ecology of artistic and commemorative forms. The language and conventions of High Tang *shi* clearly determined the ways he wrote about other media; however, the influence worked in the other direction as well. His poetic innovations should be seen as one symptom of a broader turn to the material underpinnings of memory in the wake of the An Lushan rebellion. Writing about painting, for example, afforded him new ways of conceiving the creative and commemorative capacities of his own art. Perhaps the best example of how he reworked classical verse into a more subtle and powerful mnemotechnology is his narrative poetry, and autobiographical narrative in particular.

Autobiographical narrative is widely recognized as one of Du Fu's defining innovations; one has only to think of "Singing My Feelings on Going from the Capital to Fengxian, Five Hundred Words," "Journey North," and "Ballad of Pengya"—all of them ubiquitous anthology pieces from his early period. These long accounts of painful journeys undertaken during the rebellion suggest that Du Fu's narrative impulse was

closely related to his experience of dynastic collapse. This relation is made clearest by the case of “Singing My Feelings...in Five Hundred Words,” which was written in response to the poet’s horrific discovery, at journey’s end, that his son had died of hunger. The first of its kind, the poem was the prototype for Du Fu’s subsequent experiments with the form. The endpoint toward which and in light of which it advances is not knowledge or meaning but meaningless loss and suffering; the journey away from the capital toward private tragedy mirrors the empire’s concomitant descent into civil war. Speaking from a condition of crisis rather than resolution, this autobiographical voice, which resounds throughout Du Fu’s narratives of “disaster and displacement” (*luanli* 亂離), protests the unfolding of events, powerless to reverse them.

Du Fu wrote far more autobiographical narrative verse during his late years, and travel is also their primary subject. However, it is travel of a very different sort. Whereas the earlier pieces tell of forced flights during wartime, poems like “Travels of My Prime” 壯游, “Past Travels” 昔游, and “Expressing My Cares” 遷懷 mainly recall happy excursions of the poet’s youth and early maturity, when the empire was at peace. They are for the most part nostalgic reminiscences rather than testimonials of recent traumas. Their narrator is an aging refugee and solitary exile looking back on youthful tours in the company of friends.

However, the late life-narratives have garnered little attention as literary works. They have been approached primarily as data mines containing precious information about Du Fu’s life, information that was used to construct his biography and to interpret his other poems. This approach was largely the result of Du Fu’s canonization as the “Poet Historian” 詩史 (and “Poet Sage” 詩聖) during the Song Dynasty, after which his poems

were read predominantly as a form of authoritative historiography. As minority opinion has long pointed out, this way of reading left little room for considerations of form or figural language of any kind, especially in poems treating his life and times. Modern scholars have also neglected the later narratives, preferring to focus on their more famous early counterparts. They thus invite reinterpretation as an autobiographical project of personal memory, part of Du Fu's larger mnemonic preoccupation, whereby he attempted to construct a coherent and enduring self.

Worrying Over Form: “History in Verse” and its Legacy

The peculiar reception of “Travels of My Prime” and its companion pieces by modern Du Fu scholars is representative of dominant approaches to the autobiographical narratives, which tend to treat them as authoritative sources of historical evidence about the poet's life. For example, in a recent monograph, Feng Ye 封野 writes of “Travels of My Prime” that “all the major events of [Du Fu's] life are included within it,” and his explication focuses entirely on fleshing out this poetic curriculum vitae with the help of supplementary materials.²⁶⁴ Chen Yixin 陳貽焮, in his classic *Critical Biography of Du Fu* (*Du Fu pingzhuan*), praises the poem as “the most complete and historically valuable poetic autobiography.”²⁶⁵ However, rather than discussing it along with other Kuizhou poems, Chen refers the reader back to his book's earlier chapters, where it provides supporting evidence for readings of other pieces. A.R. Davis treats the poem similarly in his account of Du Fu's formative years.²⁶⁶ Approached in this way, “Travels of My

²⁶⁴ Feng Ye, *Du Fu Kuizhou shi shulun*, 65.

²⁶⁵ Chen Yixin, *Du Fu pingzhuan*, 806.

²⁶⁶ A.R. Davis, *Tu Fu*, 13-34.

Prime” disappears as a Tang *shi* with its own set of tropes and generic determinations, and becomes instead an archive of information at the biographer’s disposal.

Such characterizations and uses of the poem as veritable historiography have their origins in the long tradition of Du Fu interpretation known by the phrase with which it designated Du Fu’s poems in general: “history in verse” 詩史.²⁶⁷ Though it only gained widespread currency during the Song Dynasty,²⁶⁸ the basic meanings of “history in verse” can be found in its first appearance in the following anecdote from Meng Qi’s 孟榮 (*jinshi* 875) *Storied Poems* 本事詩:

When Du [Fu] met with the troubles of [An] Lushan and drifted displaced in Long and Shu, he fully presented this in poetry, extending the visible and bringing forth the hidden, and barely leaving anything out. Therefore people of the time called it “history in verse.”

杜逢祿山之難，流離隴蜀，畢陳於詩，推見至隱，殆無遺事，故當時號為詩史。²⁶⁹

As the *locus classicus* of the “history in verse” concept, this passage bears close scrutiny. Particularly, it is worth asking what is meant by history here. What perceived qualities of Du Fu’s poems make them “historical”? According to the language of the anecdote, it is first of all a kind of completeness: Du Fu’s poems “fully present” 畢陳 his experiences

²⁶⁷ For a recent in-depth study of the concept and its historical transformations, see Zhang Hui 張暉, *Shi shi*. *Shi shi* quickly caught on as an epithet for the author, as well as for his poems. When referring to Du Fu the term is translated as “Poet Historian.”

²⁶⁸ Charles Hartman, “The Tang Poet Du Fu and the Song Literati,” 43-74. Hartman argues persuasively that the formation of “history in verse” approaches to Du Fu were effects of literati responses to major political events of the Song. See also Eva Shan Chou, *Reconsidering Tu Fu: Literary Greatness and Cultural Context*, 20-8.

²⁶⁹ Meng Qi, ed., *Ben shi shi*, in Ding Fubao 丁福保, ed., *Lidai shihua xubian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 15. Zhang Hui, 9.

during the rebellion; they “barely leave anything out” 殆無遺事. Now, taken literally this is a rather strange assertion. The passage must be speaking figuratively and relatively. Du Fu presented *more* topics in his post-rebellion poems than was customary by the standards of the day, thereby giving the impression of comprehensiveness. Praising Du Fu’s poems as good historiography—appealing to values such as thoroughness and completeness—would have been a way to avoid judging them to be bad or inelegant poetry. At any rate, Meng Qi’s passage shows that “history in verse” referred in the first instance to a kind of total documentation, a notion that continues to echo in modern scholars’ descriptions and uses of the life-narratives.

Another consequential implication of this formulation, which goes hand-in-hand with the attribution of completeness, is that Du Fu’s poems provide a transparent window onto his life and times. Just as he wrote on topics of more historical than poetic interest, he wrote of them in the language of a diligent historian. That is to say, whereas ordinary poets communicated through metaphor, evocative imagery, and other strategies of indirection, Du Fu “fully presented” his subject matter; he was unfailingly explicit and direct.²⁷⁰ This belief gave rise to the literalism that characterized centuries of “history in

²⁷⁰ Scholars have long explained this perceived referential directness as an effect of Du Fu’s heavy use of the rhetorical mode of *fu* 賦 (“exposition”), one of the “Six Arts” 六藝 enumerated in the “Great Preface to the *Mao Odes*” 毛詩大序. Etymologically linked to concepts of tribute and the rendering of taxes, *fu* was distinguished from its more celebrated cousins, *bi* 比 (“analogy”) and *xing* 興 (“stimulus”), by its directness. Whereas *bi* and *xing* implied and evoked through metaphor and allegorical imagery, *fu* was supposed to tell things as they were, through propositional language, descriptive display, and narrative more generally. There was thus a significant overlap between the mode and the genre that shared its name, and it has been suggested that Du Fu’s penchant for long-form *shi* (in which the *fu* mode predominated) was connected to his self-identification as a rhapsodist. See Susan Cherniack, “Three Great Poems by Du Fu: ‘Five Hundred Words: A Song of My Thoughts on Traveling from the Capital to Fengxian,’ ‘Journey North,’ and ‘One Hundred Rhymes: A Song of My Thoughts on an Autumn Day in Kuifu, Respectfully Sent to Director Zheng and Adviser to the Heir Apparent Li,’” Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University (1988), 34.

verse” interpretation. As Susan Cherniack has observed, “the presence of figures of speech, the role of poetic conventions, and the use of rhetorical techniques associated with imaginative literature, including hyperbole and irony, are elements commonly ignored or denied. Figurative statements are consistently read as statements of fact.”²⁷¹ From its earliest attestation, “history in verse” thus put forth an ideal of immediate and comprehensive communication, in which the silences and mediating tropes of poetic language were bypassed or overcome.

This ideal of immediacy found its most eloquent modern exponent in William Hung (Hong Ye 洪業, 1893-1980), author of the standard biography of Du Fu in English. Published in 1952, *Tu Fu: China’s Greatest Poet*, paradoxically, contains no poetry at all. That is, Hung renders all 374 of the poems he translates, regardless of their formal and rhetorical differences, into flowing sentences of English prose. The decision to ignore the formal features of Du Fu’s poetry was both conscious and necessary, he explains, in order to “to tell what I think the poet is trying to communicate in the light of the text and the context...” Hung argues that the problem with previous translators of Du Fu is that they have been more concerned with the medium of Chinese written characters than with their messages, resulting in wild, Fenollosan failures of communication.²⁷² In response, Hung would turn attention away from the misleading letter: “I try, therefore, to convey only Tu Fu’s thought and spirit, and cease to worry over form.”²⁷³

Reading through his introduction, however, we find that Hung cannot stop thinking about form and mediation. Arriving at key points in his argument, he almost invariably

²⁷¹ Cherniack, 25.

²⁷² Hung is especially critical of imagist poet Amy Lowell and her collaborator, Florence Ayscough. Like many modernist poets, their interest in Chinese poetry was part of a broader fascination with Chinese writing.

²⁷³ Throughout this section I will retain Hung’s Wade-Giles romanization.

resorts to metaphors and parables—the very “poetic” formal devices he would have us leave behind when reading Du Fu. Not just any metaphors, either, but metaphors *of media*. Classical Chinese poems, Hung explains, are like modern communications technologies: “A written communication, like a cablegram, can hardly be understood without a knowledge of the sender, the time, and the place. A Chinese poem is very much like a telegram wherein verbal economy is very desirable.”²⁷⁴ Curiously enough, Hung employs media metaphors in order to claim that media (and metaphors) do not matter. What matters is context (“knowledge of the sender, the time, and the place”); and as if to show that media and metaphors are exchangeable and extraneous, he mixes them freely. Before a poem is like a telegram, it is like a “cablegram.” Before that, it is like a phonograph, as we read in the following, oddly comical passage:

Suppose we make a record of the bird’s song and play it somewhere near the North Pole, in icy darkness. We can still imagine the background of the bird’s singing and appreciate at least in part its meaning. Would a polar bear who happens to be listening appreciate it as much? The polar bear has no knowledge of the atmosphere of spring.

Here the media metaphor is mixed with an animal allegory, in which birds and polar bears stand for the writers and readers of poetic communications. The polar bear hears the record just like we do, but cannot understand its contents because it lacks the bird’s “knowledge of the atmosphere of spring.” Trying to understand Du Fu’s real meaning by focusing on his form is just as silly and fruitless.

²⁷⁴ The association of Chinese poetry with media technologies, made famous by Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), was popular among a host of influential modernist writers, including Pound, Segalen, Benjamin, and Valery. See Christopher Bush, *Ideographic Modernism: China, Writing, Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Presented with this bizarre image, however, we cannot help suspecting that Hung is himself being silly, and yet in a serious, purposeful way.²⁷⁵ He apparently wants us to read his metaphors as *mere* figures of speech that are inessential to his argument, just as Du Fu's poetic language is allegedly extraneous to his meaning. However, he uses them so often, with such relish, and at such crucial points in his exposition, as to contradict himself: media metaphors do most of the work of getting his point across.

In sum, then, dominant modern approaches to Du Fu's late autobiographical narratives as supporting sources of biographical information are underwritten by the long hermeneutic tradition of "history in verse" dating back to the late ninth century. A defining assumption of this tradition was that Du Fu's poems thoroughly documented his life and times in a direct language free of poetic indeterminacy. Arguing that form does not matter in Du Fu, William Hung brought "history in verse" and its dream of immediacy into the twentieth century. However, Hung's own ingenious media metaphors strongly suggest that Du Fu's form is still well worth worrying about. We will attempt to do just that in what follows, first by delving into the tradition of poetic autobiography to which the late life-narratives belong.

Life Journeys: Autobiography and Travel Narrative

Though frequently used to describe classical Chinese *shi* poetry from the pre-modern period, the word "autobiography" originated in modern Europe, where it was applied to

²⁷⁵ Taken seriously, the analogy raises serious questions. Is the act of composing a poem really of a kind with the phonograph's mechanical inscription of sound? Is its verbal meaning comparable to birdsong? What counts as "knowledge of the atmosphere of spring"? Such questions come off as ridiculous or importunate because the claims that prompt them are supposed to be self-evident. When listening to a bird, the non-ornithologist generally does not respond to it as they would to a difficult text from the remote past. The same should go for Du Fu's poetry, according to Hung, who asks us to imagine that both, in their original, "natural" state, could be understood intuitively.

quite different kinds of writing.²⁷⁶ Combining the Greek for “self” (*autos*), “life” (*bios*), and “writing” (*graphē*), it thereby denotes the writing of a life by the one who lived it. However, the emergence of the term does not, for most critics, coincide with the origins of the practice, and discussions of autobiography as a literary genre usually trace it back to the fourth-century *Confessions* of St. Augustine (354-430). Augustine recounted the course of his life as a progress toward conversion and his discovery of God’s guiding hand behind each of his past experiences. His central claim to disclose an uncensored interior existence remained decisive for Jean-Jacques Rousseau, generally considered the first modern autobiographer. Internalizing and secularizing the role of God in Augustine, Rousseau transferred the omniscient narrative perspective to his own reasoning conscience, articulating a private, individual subjectivity in opposition to the social customs of his age. This secular confessional mode had an enormous impact during the Romantic period, when writers increasingly looked back to childhood as a lost time of unsullied individual authenticity. And it has even set the basic parameters for the most influential life-writings of recent decades, such as Frederick Douglass’s autobiographies and Anne Frank’s diary, in which an individual life story represents the historical struggles of a larger group. Despite the variety of its permutations, in terms of generic and stylistic conventions the written presentation of self in modern autobiography remains profoundly Augustinian.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Scholars disagree about the precise date of the term’s first appearance, but concur that it was coined sometime around the turn of the nineteenth century in both England and Germany. See James Olney (ed.), *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), esp. 5-7; and Robert Folkenflik (ed.), *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 1-7.

²⁷⁷ James Olney, *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1-83.

Now, this is certainly only *one* tradition of autobiography, one that, although it has strongly shaped contemporary concepts and practices, should neither be considered universal (as autobiography “properly speaking”), nor permitted to set the terms and standards against which other traditions are judged.²⁷⁸ However, neither should the term be dispensed with entirely if the subject is classical poetry from medieval China; for its basic definition as “self-life-writing” so aptly characterizes this literature’s dominant modes and concerns. The challenge is to conceive of this “other” autobiography without reducing it to an image (however inverted) of a more familiar Augustinian self.

This challenge was taken up by Stephen Owen in his 1986 essay, “The Self’s Perfect Mirror: Poetry as Autobiography,” which remains arguably the most influential and provocative study of the subject.²⁷⁹ Owen’s essay rethinks the problem of self-presentation in poems of Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (or Tao Qian 陶潛, 365?-427) and Du Fu, the two medieval writers whose lives were of greatest interest to themselves and their readers through the ages. At variance with traditional approaches to classical *shi*, which tended to understand them as transparent windows onto their authors’ authentic personalities, Owen insists on the inevitable “double-ness” produced by the autobiographical enterprise, in response to which writers must struggle to authenticate a

²⁷⁸ Scholars in Republican-era China constructed a tradition of Chinese autobiography by compiling anthologies of classic works they interpreted as sharing defining features of the modern Western genre. For a critique of this project and its ahistorical reading of medieval prose autobiographies, see Matthew V. Wells, *To Die and Not Decay: Autobiography and the Pursuit of Immortality in Early China* (Ann Arbor: The Association for Asian Studies, 2009). For a critique of the “have and have-not” approach more generally, in which Western cultural concepts and practices are sought for in China with predictably unsatisfying results, see Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 412 (n.3).

²⁷⁹ In Shuen-fu Lin and Stephen Owen (eds.), *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice: Shih Poetry from the Late Han to the T’ang* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 71-102. For a discussion of critical responses to Owen’s essay, see Robert Ashmore, *The Transport of Reading: Text and Understanding in the Poetry of Tao Qian (365-427)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010), 12-15.

textual reflection to themselves and their readers.²⁸⁰ The personae projected by Tao and Du Fu in their poems, he argues, should not be taken as identical with the persons projecting them, but rather should be seen as efforts to convincingly establish and convey this identity of self and role, truth and appearance. Though reading somewhat against the grain of the mainstream tradition's self-understanding, such an approach to autobiography in *shi* succeeds admirably in opening these poems to examination, on their own terms (beyond Augustine), as projects of self-construction.

By approaching autobiography in *shi* as reflection rather than transparency, mirror rather than window, Owen's study raises interesting questions about the role of narrative in his texts. His opening section characterizes *shi* autobiography as primarily "non-narrative," by contrast with the emphasis on progressive *Bildung* in the Augustinian tradition.²⁸¹ What mattered most was the disclosure of a person's character. And yet, as Owen goes on to argue, this act of disclosure or "making known" is itself the result of a complexly motivated process of self-definition and staging. It thus turns out that the poem-as-mirror tells a story: the story of the thought processes and conscious reflections that attended its composition. This suggests a qualification of the privative definition of *shi* autobiography as "non-narrative." *Shi* invite readers to narrate a drama of disclosure, whether conceived of as psychological or, as was more often the case historically in China, as social.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ Owen, 74.

²⁸¹ "Here, rather than in narrative, was the center of interest for traditional theorists—not how a person changed over time, but how a person could be known at all or make himself known." *Ibid.*

²⁸² The best account in English of the Chinese tradition of telling stories about poems and how they came to be written is Graham Sanders, *Words Well Put*. Owen has discussed this practice himself in "Poetry and Its Historical Ground." *CLEAR* 12 (Dec. 1990), 107-118.

However, Tao and Du Fu did not leave the narration of their lives and works wholly to their readers, but actively sought to determine the parameters of their reception. This is the effort that Wendy Swartz, writing on Tao Yuanming, has termed his “autobiographical project.” Tao’s autobiographical project consisted first of all of techniques whereby he guided interpretation of his poems, techniques that included “paratexts”—detailed titles that specified the place, time, and occasion of a poem’s composition, and prefaces explicating its intended meaning. Through such paratexts, Swartz writes, “Tao became the first editor, in effect, of his own works.”²⁸³ Du Fu made extensive use of these very same devices, and even explicitly mentions editing his own poems while in Kuizhou.²⁸⁴ The second, equally important component of both writers’ autobiographical projects was the life-narrative. Tao’s autobiographical prose works are among his most well-known and best-loved experiments in self-definition. As Swartz has written, Tao’s fictive “Elegy for Myself” 自祭文 “implies a gesture to claim the last word on Tao Yuanming.”²⁸⁵ Du Fu’s narrative poems, I would argue, fulfill a similar desire. Although they were in verse, late imperial commentators repeatedly described these works as *zizhuan* 自傳 (“autobiography”), thus comparing them to the *liezhuan* 列傳 (“biographies,” or “arrayed traditions”) of the official dynastic histories. A component of a larger autobiographical project, they were ways of making retrospective sense of his experiences, of constructing a coherent and favorable self-image, and of trying to control how he would be known.

²⁸³ Wendy Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming: Shifting Paradigms of Historical Reception (427-1900)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 137.

²⁸⁴ Molding and smelting inner nature is proper to this thing [poetry]; / Done editing my new poems, I intone them at length” 陶冶性靈在底物，新詩改罷自長吟。See the seventh poem in the series of twelve entitled “Releasing My Burden” 解悶十二首 (*DSXZ*, 17.1515).

²⁸⁵ Swartz, 140.

In terms of genre, however, the primary materials of Du Fu's narrative autobiographies were not drawn from historiography, but from the tradition of the poetic traveler's tale. The main source of this tradition was the *Lyrics of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭) anthology, in which autobiographical travel accounts are numerous. To take the most well-known example, much of the "Li Sao" 離騷 ("Encountering Sorrow") consists of the protagonist's flight through the cosmos after suffering the disfavor of his lord or deity. This is the theme of the spirit journey, found elsewhere in the *Chuci* as well as in texts such as the *Biography of Emperor Mu*, that David Hawkes famously dubbed *itineraria*, in order to emphasize its focus on spatial movement rather than temporal succession.²⁸⁶ Indeed, Hawkes questioned whether these texts could be justly described as "narratives" at all, arguing that they were essentially "enumerations" of the hero's destinations. However, insofar as these visits succeed one another in an order that cannot be reversed without altering the effect of the whole (that is, if their temporal order matters), narrative should be retained an apt and useful analytical category.²⁸⁷

One of its uses is to encourage thinking about the narrator's perspective and voice, which, along with the theme of the itinerary, strongly influenced later autobiographies. The narrator of the "Li Sao" (identified since the Han Dynasty with the name of Qu Yuan 屈原) speaks as a martyr and an exile, whose travels through the heavens are an

²⁸⁶ David Hawkes, "The Quest for the Goddess." In Cyril Birch (ed.), *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 42-68.

²⁸⁷ For a similar argument that sequence still matters in the enumerations of *itineraria*, see Dore Levy, *Chinese Narrative Poetry* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), 45. Narrative, of course, is a broad and flexible category whose boundaries are hotly contested. For a useful collection of essays debating the subject, see W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), *On Narrative* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980). In my own thinking about narrative for this chapter I have referred to Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

extension of and counterpart to his banishment. The search for a celestial king or spirit lover demonstrates his steadfast determination while reproving the benighted ruler who cast him out. However, because the narrator speaks in the lachrymose language of *tristia* (Hawkes) throughout, we know from the beginning that the heavenly voyage will have been in vain. It must fail for the protagonist to become the storyteller. And indeed, the story concludes with the hero looking back longingly at his hometown from his flight through the sky, suggesting he will soon abandon his search. There is a distance, discontinuity, and contrast here between narrated and narrating selves: the past, traveling self appears as the mirror opposite of the present self in exile with nowhere to go. The model of the “Li Sao” thus presents an intimately opposed relation between exile and the travel narrative, *tristia* and *itineraria*, which it would bequeath to later poems on this theme.

Travel became an important topic for writers of *fu* (“rhapsodies”) during the Han Dynasty, who, in adapting *Chuci* models to their excursions on state business or into banishment, paved the way for the accounts of later *shi* poets such as Du Fu. The standard occasion for travel remained political misfortune, and thus the narrative voice of these accounts often echoed the *tristia* of the “Li Sao.” However, in contrast to the cosmic progresses of the latter, the journeys of Han *fu* travelogues tended to remain rooted in the world of politics and history. Poets would describe their movements through the provinces of the empire, identifying historic sites and ruminating on the lessons of the past.²⁸⁸ Showing an increasing “specificity of time, place, and voice” over the course of

²⁸⁸ As Richard E. Strassberg has written, emphasizing the connection between travel and political misfortune in early China, “The journey marks the irony felt by the individual writer forced to travel, while his rectification of the past substitutes for the world he has lost.” See his *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China*, 25.

the dynasty, these *fu* anticipated the formative *shi* poetry of the Jian'an-period.²⁸⁹ They also looked forward to the more lyrical and expressive “small *fu*” 小賦 of the Six Dynasties (220-589), which strongly influenced narrative *shi* during the Tang.²⁹⁰ When Du Fu wrote his famous account of journeying from the capital to see his family in Fengxian, as rebellion and dynastic collapse loomed on the horizon, he wrote in a form inherited from the Han travelogue.²⁹¹

In addition to *Chuci* and Han *fu* sources, a more proximate context for Du Fu's recollections of youthful excursions was the poetic subgenre of “recalling travels of the recent past” (*yi jiu you*) 憶舊遊. *Yi jiu you* were most often written by poets later in life, and typically focused on happy events—besides sightseeing, singing and drinking are common themes. They are thus nostalgic evocations of a highly idealized past time when all was well, by contrast with the time of writing, conventionally defined by old age, exile, or separation from friends. As Anna Shields has pointed out, such poems performed a particular social function: “Since they were usually written for the person or persons who shared the poet's adventures, [*yi jiu you*] reaffirmed a social tie in the face of the status changes that may have occurred in the intervening years.”²⁹² Their narrowly circumscribed subject matter, however, meant that they did not typically function as a vehicle for exploring a shared identity or retracing processes of self-understanding. On the contrary, they were primarily a form of lighthearted entertainment. Shields has shown

²⁸⁹ David R. Knechtges, “Poetic Travelogue in the Han *Fu*.” In *Court Culture and Literature in Early China* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 127-152.

²⁹⁰ Levy, 44-53.

²⁹¹ David R. Knechtges, “What's in a Title?” In Pauline Yu, Peter Bol, Stephen Owen, and Willard Peterson (eds.), *Ways With Words: Writing About Reading Texts from Early China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 149-160.

²⁹² Anna M. Shields, “Remembering When: The Uses of Nostalgia in the Poetry of Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen.”

how the mid-Tang poets Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831) and Bo Juyi 白居易 (772-846) expanded and deepened the *yi jiu you* subgenre in their many exchange poems, revising their remembrances over a period of years in accord with their changing life circumstances and outlooks. I will argue that Du Fu broadened it in somewhat different directions. On the one hand, like Yuan and Bo, he adapted the conventional stylization of the form to represent his own life experiences. On the other hand, he did not address his poems to any particular correspondents, but seems to have written them primarily for himself, or for some unspecified future audience. This suggests that they performed a different kind of memory-work, less collective and more personal, though social connections still figure prominently in them. Du Fu's recollections of past travels, I will argue in the following readings, are part of an autobiographical memory project, in which he employed the medium of narrative *shi* to give retrospective sense and shape to an extraordinarily eventful life.

Travels on the Stage of Brush and Ink

Du Fu's most detailed autobiographical narrative, "Travels of My Prime" is a poem of 112 lines in five-character, "old-style" verse.²⁹³ The life-narrative takes up 98 lines, and covers a time span from Du Fu's adolescence in the early years of Emperor Xuanzong's Kaiyuan reign (713-741) to his departure from office in 759, in the fallout from the Fang Guan 房琯 (697-763) affair.²⁹⁴ The following is a general plot summary that will be useful for grasping the larger contours of the poem. The first section (lines 1-14) introduces early signs of literary talent and moral character; the second (lines 15-34) tells

²⁹³ *DSXZ*, 16.1437-47.

²⁹⁴ This will be discussed below.

of a sightseeing tour in the Southeast. Section three (lines 35-52) has Du Fu returning to the capital, failing the imperial examination, and setting out again, this time on hunting excursions in the Northeast. He returns to Chang'an in the fourth section (lines 53-72), and gains recognition for his writing; however, he turns down his first official job offer and returns home to manage clan affairs, just as the court is falling under the insidious sway of the Yang family. Section five (lines 73-98) tells of the rebellion, recounting in highly allusive language the loss of the capital and the defeat of the imperial troops, the passing of the crown to Suzong 肅宗 (r. 756-762), Du Fu's appointment as Reminder, and his eventual demotion after angering the new ruler. In the remaining 14 lines (section 6), the narrator speaks from an unspecified time of writing in the voice of the loyal but impotent courtier-poet in exile.

In general, then, this life is composed mainly of two kinds of “travel,” or “wanderings” (*you* 游/遊): those preceding the rebellion and those following it. The former, which are the focus of roughly the first two-thirds of the poem, are the kind known as *manyou* 漫遊 (“pleasure trips”)—journeys frequently undertaken during the medieval period by aspiring men of letters, usually with the aim of establishing and maintaining social networks.²⁹⁵ The aspirant would seek out friends, family members, and prospective patrons who, if sufficiently impressed, could open doors of opportunity and provide lifelong support. Du Fu's travels in the northeast, for instance, consist in his memory largely of hunting parties with Su Yuanming 蘇源明 (d. 764), one of his most politically prominent associates. Recollecting such travels was not only to trace the

²⁹⁵ For a concise description of Tang *manyou*, see Chen Yixin, “Du Fu zhuangyou zongji chutan,” excerpted in *Tangdai yanjiu lunzhu jicheng* (vol. 4), ed. Fu Xuancong, Luo Liantian (Xi'an: San Qin chubanshe, 2004), 158.

development of the self, but, as in the *yi jiu you* subgenre, to recall the formation of social and political bonds.

However, these memories of peacetime voyages are only part of the story, the latter portion of which tells of their dark post-rebellion counterpart: *luanli* 亂離 (“disaster and displacement”). Here, the focus shifts from the life of the poet to the travails of the Tang state, from the personal to the political. The only personal experiences Du Fu relates from this period are his brief appointment and subsequent disgrace, which lead into the closing exile’s lament. This portrayal of politics as a series of misfortunes draws attention to the near-absence of the political sphere in the preceding life narrative. Strikingly, Du Fu barely mentions the successes in the capital he recalled in so many other poems as his proudest moments. His repeated examination attempts are similarly alluded to only in passing, as pauses between journeys. Perhaps most tellingly, he writes that he declined his first appointment to return to his native village in advance of the rebellion, as if in a prophetic act of renunciation. The poem’s image of rambling youth thus takes on its nostalgic glow as a time of innocence undisturbed by the political forces that brought it to an end.

Bearing in mind these larger themes, we can now examine the poem in more detail. If the ends of life stories often reveal the identities, perspectives, and agendas of their narrators, the beginnings tend to establish essential traits that will remain constant and give direction and coherence to the narrated life. Such is indeed the case with “Travels of My Prime.” As his title would lead us to expect, Du Fu begins with a maiden voyage, though of a metaphorical sort:

In the past when I was fourteen or fifteen,

往昔十四五

I began my travels on the stage of brush and ink.	出遊翰墨場
Followers of This Culture like Cui and Wei, ²⁹⁶	斯文崔魏徒
Thought that I resembled Ban and Yang. ²⁹⁷	以我似班揚
At the age of seven my thoughts were already brave.	七齡思即壯
Opening my mouth I would sing of phoenixes. ²⁹⁸	開口詠鳳皇
At nine I could write large characters,	九齡書大字
And had works that filled a whole bag.	有作成一囊

Du Fu's first travels take place on the "the stage of brush and ink" (*hanmo chang* 翰墨場). This phrase, coming at the outset of the life story, characterizes the protagonist first and foremost as a writer. Significantly, this metaphorical use of the term "travel" (*you* 遊) associates writing with the journeys to be recounted in the rest of the poem, and encompasses these within a larger literary life-journey. The second couplet introduces another of the poem's central themes: the subject's participation in a literati community of past and present: here the young Du Fu gains the approval of established figures, which they express by comparing him to great litterateurs of antiquity.²⁹⁹ Du Fu presents

²⁹⁶ "This Culture" 斯文 is a reference to *Analects* 9:5. See Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. D.C. Lau (London: Penguin Books, 1979), 96. "Cui and Wei" are Cui Shang 崔尚 (*jinshi* 700) and Wei Qixin 魏啟心 (fl. c. 725), two of Du Fu's early patrons about whom little is known. See Chen Guanming 陳冠明 and Sun Suting 孫愷婷, eds., *Du Fu qinjuan jiaoyou nianbiao* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006): 157, 228.

²⁹⁷ Ban Gu 班固 (32-92 A.D.) and Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.-13 A.D.) were two prominent Han Dynasty writers known for their *fu*.

²⁹⁸ Phoenixes were harbingers of a sage ruler.

²⁹⁹ Readers in the "history in verse" tradition, taking these and the following lines as statements of fact, formed an enduring image of the young Du Fu as a boy genius whose bagful of early poems have tragically been lost. More recently, scholars have pointed out that these claims—the early recognition by respected figures, the precocious achievements—are well-attested forms of

his definitive self-characterization in the fifth line when he writes that at seven years of age his “thoughts were already brave” (*si ji zhuang* 思即壯). “Bravery” (*zhuang* 壯) is of course central to the poem, as indicated by its appearance in the title, where it applies to all of Du Fu’s travels. It is the quality that defines Du Fu as a talented young writer, further underscoring the association of writing and travel, writer and traveler, throughout the autobiography.

The young Du Fu thus appears as a precocious and “brave” traveler on the “stage of brush and ink.” The following section expands this characterization beyond writing in its presentation of the poet’s “nature” 性:

By nature heroic, it was my lot to love wine;	性豪業嗜酒
I detested evil, and had guts of steel.	嫉惡懷剛腸
I freed myself from the generation of my youth;	脫略小時輩
My associates were all old and gray.	結交皆老蒼
Drunk, we would set our sights on the horizons,	飲酣視八極
Oblivious to all vulgar things.	俗物都茫茫

Du Fu describes his nature as “heroic” (*hao* 豪), a trait largely overlapping in its associations with his early “bravery.” In the literary imagination of Du Fu’s time, both of these qualities were embodied in the figure of the “bravo” (*xia ke* 俠客) or “wandering

conventional hyperbole serving, much like the formulaic incidents of official biographies, to indicate the life-long consistency of the subject’s character. See Yang Chengzu 楊承祖, “Du Fu yongshi houren wuwei shishi lie,” excerpted in *Tangdai wenxue yanjiu lunzhu jicheng*, 159-63. On the formulae and ideology of traditional biographies, see Denis Twitchett, “Problems of Chinese Biography.” In Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett (eds.), *Confucian Personalities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), 24-39; and Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History Under the T’ang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 62-83.

bravo” (*you xia* 游俠). The fierce sense of justice, love of drink, and exclusive social ties based on shared disdain for “vulgar things” have unsurprisingly invited comparison with famed bravo archetypes like Sima Qian’s Jing Ke 荊軻.³⁰⁰ The *you xia* inhabited a world outside of official politics, a society knit together by values of intense personal loyalty and strict adherence to a private ethical code. It was thus a role that lent itself to appropriation by poets who sought to carve out identities and form social networks based primarily on their skill with the brush. As is well known, the bravo was a favorite persona of Li Bo 李白 (701-762), whom Du Fu greatly admired, and traveled with for a short time in the northeast. Two narrative poems, discussed below, attest to Du Fu’s nostalgia for these tours late in his life, and in them the bravo theme predominates. Although Li Bo does not appear in “Travels of My Prime,” it is difficult not to imagine, given his impact on Du Fu generally, that he did not inform the autobiographical memory presented here.

These introductory character-portraits frame the poem’s first travel account, in which Du Fu recalls the formation of his sense of history. He presents this trip first of all as an outgrowth of his heroic and expansive nature, which led him to “set his sights on the horizons.” In fact, he claims to have had in mind a much grander odyssey:

To the east I went down to Gusu Terrace, ³⁰¹	東下姑蘇臺
And had already prepared a seafaring ship.	已具浮海航
To this day I still have regrets	到今有遺恨
That I was not able to reach Fusang. ³⁰²	不得窮扶桑

³⁰⁰ See commentaries compiled in Chen Bohai 陳伯海 (ed.), *Tangshi huiping* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang chubanshe, 1995), 1058.

³⁰¹ Located in modern Suzhou, Gusu Terrace was built by Helü 闔閭 (r. 515-496), a king of the state of Wu 吳.

Perhaps Du Fu did actually plan a trip to Japan, as many readers have maintained. And yet the hyperbole of the passage should not be missed, especially in light of what we have been told of this traveler's nature. The figurative point is that his youthful ambitions exceeded the realm of possibility. The bravo's excessive appetite manifests itself here in a desire to conquer limitless distances.

Another main effect of beginning with this unrealized journey is that it makes the earthly travels recounted next seem even more impressively exhaustive. These are presented, in lines like the following, as an extended list of historic sites and the narrator's recollected observations:

Long gone was the breezy style of the Wangs and Xies, ³⁰³	王謝風流遠
The grave mound of Helu was weed-covered. ³⁰⁴	闔廬丘墓荒
The stone wall at Sword Pond was slanted, ³⁰⁵	劍池石壁仄
The lotus and caltrop of Changzhou were fragrant. ³⁰⁶	長洲荷芰香

The references to local places follow one after another in breathless succession. Again, the meaning of this litany exceeds whatever documentary value it may possess. The narrator hardly seems interested in any of the individual places he visited, which he describes so cursorily. What matters more is their sheer quantity. Though Du Fu was not able to cross the sea, we are to believe, he did traverse every inch of storied ground in the regions of Wu and Yue. The poet-bravo's desire to conquer space is also an appetite for history, and his sightseeing thus represents a crucial stage in his education as a writer. It

³⁰² Mythical islands of the undying in the east; also used as a name for Japan.

³⁰³ Two of the most illustrious aristocratic clans of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420).

³⁰⁴ An alternate transcription of Helü. See note 26, above.

³⁰⁵ Sword Pond was located on the same mountain in modern Suzhou as Helu's grave.

³⁰⁶ Changzhou was the name of a famous garden.

is significant that he appears to be alone on this trip, as so much of the poem highlights social connections, from the literati who praise his childhood efforts to the wise elders with whom he associated. The southeastern tour represents an induction into a different kind of community, the formation of an identity based on knowledge of the historical past.

This first trip concludes with Du Fu setting sail for Loyang, the eastern capital, where he represented his home district in the imperial examinations. The first mention of politics in the poem tells of high expectations disappointed:

My returning sail brushed Tianlao; ³⁰⁷	歸帆拂天姥
In middle age I became tribute from my old village. ³⁰⁸	中歲貢舊鄉
My spirit would cut to pieces a heap of Qus and Jias; ³⁰⁹	氣劇屈賈壘
In my eyes, a wall of Caos and Lius was short. ³¹⁰	目短曹劉牆
Perversely, I was failed by the Ministry of Merit Assessment, ³¹¹	忤下考功第
And all alone took leave of the capital prefect's halls.	獨辭京尹堂

Such a crushing defeat receives only these two lines, an indication of the poem's prioritization of the personal and social spheres.³¹² It moves quickly to a second account

³⁰⁷ A mountain in modern Zhejiang province on the river route north to Loyang.

³⁰⁸ Candidates sent to the capital by counties and provinces were known as "village tribute" 鄉貢.

³⁰⁹ Qu Yuan 屈原 and Jia Yi 賈誼 (200-169 B.C.), a famous rhapsodist and early admirer of Qu.

³¹⁰ Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232) and Liu Zhen 劉楨 (d. 217). Famous poets of the Jian'an 建安 period (196-220).

³¹¹ Significantly, 736 was the year that the Board of Rites 禮部 took over the administering of examinations from the Bureau of Merit Assessment 吏部, with the result that more Grand Secretaries were in positions to promote literary composition as a criterion of selection. Du Fu obviously did not benefit from the change. See David McMullen, *State and Scholars in T'ang China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 229.

³¹² Xiao Difei takes this as evidence that Du Fu was not much bothered by his failure. This seems unlikely, given the importance Tang literati generally (and Du Fu in particular) attached to official careers. The brevity of this passage should be understood in the context of the poem's

of travels, this time in the northeastern regions of Qi and Zhao (in modern Shandong and Hebei provinces). This is a different kind of journey than the preceding one, as suggested by the opening description:

I let loose in the regions of Qi and Zhao,	放蕩齊趙間
With furs and horses I went quite elegantly wild.	裘馬頗清狂
In spring I sang songs on the Cluster Terrace, ³¹³	春歌叢臺上
And hunted in winter beside Verdant Hills. ³¹⁴	冬獵青丘旁

Whereas Du Fu presented his travels in the southeast as an immersion in local history, this trip is recalled as a period of sporting and socializing. He writes that he “let loose” (*fang dang* 放蕩), and was “elegantly wild” (*qing kuang* 清狂), both of which evoke precisely the kind of swaggering hedonism that defined the classic bravo character-type. The majority of the account recalls hunting expeditions and displays of youthful prowess. It is here, in the martial counterpart to the literary tour, that the theme of social connections reenters the story:

Up in the saddle, Lord Su was delighted;	蘇侯據鞍喜
Suddenly it was as if he clasped hands with Ge Qiang. ³¹⁵	忽如攜葛強

“Lord Su,” the poem’s “original commentary” 原注 specifies, refers to Su Yu of the Palace Gate Guard’s Helmets Section 監門胄曹蘇預, or Su Yuanming. Su was one of Du Fu’s closest and most politically well-connected friends, and had died just two years

negative portrayal of politics and nostalgic focus on the personal and social realms. See Xiao, *Du Fu shi xuanzhu*, 260.

³¹³ Built by King Wuling 武靈王 of Zhao (r. 325-299 B.C.).

³¹⁴ In Qi.

³¹⁵ Ge Qiang was a general and friend of Shan Jian 山簡, a governor of Jingzhou 荊州 during the Western Jin Dynasty (265-316) known for his drinking.

before the poem was written.³¹⁶ Placing him at these hunting parties in the northeast is a way for Du Fu to commemorate their friendship; and yet it also allows him to represent his period of “letting loose” as socially formative. The Qi and Zhao trip thus becomes not only an expression of the bravo’s wild side, but signifies the establishment of a network of appreciative friends and allies, a theme amply foregrounded in the poem’s introductory sections.

This theme continues in the account that follows of Du Fu’s time in the Tang capital, Chang’an, seeking patronage and a government post. From descriptions lodged in other poems, we tend to think of this as a period full of desperation and indignities: “In the mornings I knock at rich kids’ doors, / In the evenings I follow in the dust of fat horses” 朝扣富兒門，晚隨肥馬塵。³¹⁷ It is thus surprising to find it recalled, in “Travels of My Prime,” as a brisk and unobstructed ascent to the pinnacles of prestige:

I would only consort with established wordsmiths;	許與必詞伯
Indeed, I attended pleasure outings with a worthy prince. ³¹⁸	賞遊實賢王
I trailed my skirts in the place of ritual offerings,	曳裾置醴地
And, presenting my rhapsodies, entered the Mingguang Palace. ³¹⁹	奏賦入明光

³¹⁶ Du Fu dedicated one of his “Eight Laments” 八哀詩 to Su, also in 766. See “Former Vice Director of the Palace Library, Su Yuanming of Wugong” 故秘書少監武功蘇源明 (*DSXZ*, 16.1403-9).

³¹⁷ “Respectfully Presented to Assistant Director of the Left, Mr. Wei, Twenty-two Rhymes” 奉贈韋左丞丈二十二韻. *DSXZ*, 1.73-80. Much in this early poem’s autobiographical portrait resembles that of “Travels of My Prime,” especially its account of the child genius, bursting with talent, pride, and ambition, who subsequently falls on pitifully hard times. In a poem addressed to the powerful Wei Ji 韋濟 such a study in self-pity would clearly function as a plea for favor. Similar purposes should not be ruled out in the autobiography of “Travels of My Prime,” which, though lacking an immediate addressee, may well have been designed to win over a future benefactor.

³¹⁸ Most likely a reference to Li Jin 李璡, Prince of Ruyang 汝陽王 (d. 750), one of Du Fu’s patrons in Chang’an.

The Emperor put aside his meal to summon me, 天子廢食召
 And the crowd of masters gathered in their carriages and robes. 群公會軒裳

The nostalgic, idealizing tenor of this passage is unmistakable. It is a highlight reel, evoking an image of Du Fu as the toast of the town. The presentation of *fu* and receipt of imperial summons, above, is often compared to the treatment of the same event in “Do Not Suspect One Another, a Ballad” 莫相疑行:

I recall offering my three rhapsodies
 In the Penglai Palace; 憶獻三賦蓬萊宮
 And thought it strange that in one day
 I could gain such renown. 自怪一日聲烜赫
 The Assembled Worthies scholars
 Surrounded me like a wall, 集賢學士如堵牆
 To watch as I lowered my brush
 In the hall of the secretariat. 觀我落筆中書堂

In 751, Du Fu submitted his “Three Rhapsodies on the Great Rites” for personal consideration by Emperor Xuanzong. These pieces (which centuries of readers have found insufferably turgid) captured the emperor’s eye, and gained Du Fu a place in the Academy of Assembled Worthies, where he awaited an official appointment. He was given a special decree examination there in 752, and it is this performance that he remembers in the ballad’s second couplet, the theatricality of which distinctly resembles the memory of Cao Ba’s performance in “Song of a Painting,” discussed in Chapter 3.

³¹⁹ The Mingguang (“Brilliant Light”) Palace was a Han Dynasty structure (erected in 101 B.C.). Du Fu uses it to refer to a Tang palace.

The same event is given far less importance in “Travels of My Prime,” where it is treated not as a focus of nostalgia but as one example among many of success and recognition. Associations with other writers and literary patrons are as important here as imperial favor.

Unlike Du Fu’s other autobiographical personae, the poet-bravo cares little for honors from the political establishment. Thus, he attains the heights of status and acclaim only to renounce them without a second thought in the following lines:

I then freed myself—there was nothing to be attached to;	脫身無所愛
I drank with gusto, placing trust in “acting” and “hiding.” ³²⁰	痛飲信行藏
I did not avoid donning sable coats,	黑貂不免敝
A graying elder calling for another toast.	斑鬢兀稱觴

After years of waiting following his decree examination, Du Fu was appointed Police Commissioner of Hexi 河西尉. He declined this position, a decision he alludes to in the passage above and in a number of other poems. What is exceptional about this particular version is that it treats the event as liberating, and the period generally as one of carefree indulgence. This starkly contradicts the picture of poverty and hardship presented in so many poems from that time, leading at least one modern critic to question the accuracy of Du Fu’s memory on this occasion.³²¹ However, I would suggest that it is precisely such departures from what other sources tell us that highlights the memory-work so central to

³²⁰ A reference to *The Analects*, 7:11: “The Master said to Yan Yuan, ‘Only you and I have the ability to act 行 when employed and to hide 藏 when set aside.’” Translation modified from D.C. Lau, 87.

³²¹ Xiao Difei insists that Du Fu must mean the opposite of what he seems to be saying, and cites a poem from the early 750s as evidence that he was in fact impoverished at the time. See *Du Fu shi xuanzhu*, 261. William Hung edits out all reference to sable coats in his translation, and, like Xiao, makes the lines describe poverty. See *China’s Greatest Poet*, 182.

this poem and those like it. “Travels of My Prime,” like the *yi jiu you* tradition it comes from, responds to the needs and desires of a present moment more than to an imperative to document the facts exactly as they happened. Du Fu may have declined the commissionership full of anxiety about his welfare and that of his family. And yet, looking back on this prewar era of plenty from his sickbed in Kuizhou he would have wanted to see himself in grander terms, turning down the petty post and heading for the taverns dressed in furs.

The theme of political renunciation continues as Du Fu recounts leaving the capital city to return to his native village of Duling 杜陵 (southeast of modern Xi’an). He writes that many of the village elders had passed away, and that during this time he busied himself making funeral arrangements. Just as his own clan was suffering these losses, powerful clans were perpetrating violence on their enemies back in the capital, amidst a general atmosphere of increasing decadence and waste:

The great clans of the capital plundered with impunity;	朱門任傾奪
One after another met with the calamity of extermination.	赤族迭罹殃
Grain and beans were used up feeding government horses;	國馬竭粟豆
Rice and millet were shipped for officials’ gamecocks.	官雞輸稻粱

This portrait of heedless violence and extravagant consumption resembles many others in Du Fu’s poems, which led Bo Juyi to claim him as an ancestor of the “new *yuefu*” poetry of social criticism. Here however, the image of the people’s sustenance being squandered on the nobility’s pampered pets figures as an extension of the same elite’s blind savagery toward each other. This violence, in turn, mirrors the deaths taking place in Duling, which prompt Du Fu to abandon the capital just as it descended into chaos. His retreat

into the private realm is thus perfectly synchronized with the collapse of the Tang state; it is yet another expression of his inborn aversion to politics, which appears increasingly prescient in light of unfolding events.

Du Fu makes clear that his narrative, while focused on his individual experiences, is meant to demonstrate history's moral law. Having evoked the crimes being committed in the capital, the narrator pauses to reflect on their meaning in hindsight:

Raising this corner, one can see the troubles and the waste;³²² 舉隅見煩費

Drawing on antiquity, I lament dynastic rise and fall. 引古惜興亡

This commentarial aside is a turning point in the poem, marking the end of the youthful travels that are the subject of nostalgic recollection, and the beginning of the troubles that have defined the writer's present conditions and perspective. The narrator shifts position here to become the interpreter of the events he has just presented, which he suggests are the "one corner" from which the worthy student of Confucius can infer the other dreadful three.

The story shifts its focus accordingly, turning from the affairs of the young Du Fu to those of the empire at large in the throes of civil war. In quick succession are presented the outbreak of rebellion ("North of the river, wind and dust arose" 河朔風塵起); Xuanzong's escape into Shu ("Near Min Mountain, the imperial procession was long" 岷山行幸長); and on through Xuanzong's abdication, and the imperial army's back-to-back losses to rebel forces. It is at this perilous juncture that Du Fu returns to the stage, in the role of Reminder at the restoration court in exile. After emphasizing his all-consuming

³²² A reference to *The Analects* 7:8: "The Master said... 'When I have pointed out one corner of a square to anyone and he does not come back with the other three, I will not point it out to him a second time.'" Translation by D.C. Lau (86).

concern for the state and its people, he brings us to the knotty core of the entire tale, the moment in his life when friendship and politics came into greatest conflict.

This was his defense of Fang Guan, a general, high official, and favorite of Emperor Xuanzong, who in late 756 led two campaigns against the rebels using military tactics derived from classic texts.³²³ Fang's troops were routed in both battles, and he returned to face a furious Emperor Suzong, who had already begun suspecting the general of divided loyalties.³²⁴ Some months later, Fang was accused of consorting with a disreputable musician, and was dismissed from office. Du Fu had become a part of Fang Guan's network, which included the prominent poets Gao Shi 高適 (c. 707-765) and Cen Shen 岑參 (715-770), and he submitted a memorial pleading on behalf of his beleaguered patron. This only served to strengthen the prosecution's characterization of Fang as a scheming factionalist. The new Reminder was brought up on charges, and barely escaped with his life. Instead, he shared the fate of Fang's other friends, and was banished to a provincial post.

In "Travels of My Prime," Du Fu recalls the event quite differently. He portrays his memorial as an attempt to guard his beloved ruler from error, rather than (as it was seen by some at the time) as a blatant display of partisan loyalty:

My ruler was dishonored, so I dared not fear death;

君辱敢愛死

Fortunately, his mighty wrath caused no harm.

赫怒幸無傷

³²³ Though Fang Guan's disastrous oxcart maneuvers have been ridiculed for centuries as the height of Confucian impracticality, they were not nearly so outlandish in the context of the time. See David A. Graff, "Fang Guan's Chariots: Scholarship, War, and Character Assassination in the Middle Tang," *Asia Major (3rd Series)* 22.1 (2009), 105-30.

³²⁴ On the souring of Fang's relationship with Suzong, and Du Fu's attempt to defend him after his dismissal, see Hung: 102, 109.

Sagely and wise, he embodies humane forbearance,

聖哲體仁恕

And has restored a measure of peace to the empire.

宇縣復小康

No mention at all is made of Fang Guan, the central actor in the whole affair. There is only the emperor, who is showered with fulsome praise. Du Fu refers to his memorial only in the most general, elliptical terms, focusing instead entirely on the pure motives of the offending minister, and the offended ruler's sagacious restraint. He would thus absolve both parties, hiding the breach behind a screen of perfect harmony.

The rewritten Fang Guan episode is the culminating endpoint of the poem's life-narrative, the destination to which the travels have been leading all along. As such, it helps explain the main themes and perspectives of the life-narrative as a whole, which can be understood as an apology or theodicy. Du Fu constructs a self—the literary traveling bravo—whose essential nature inclines him toward the company of like-minded friends and away from the political arena. His inner tendencies prove wise when the rebellion plunges the empire into chaos. More specifically, however, they provide an excuse for his personal clash with the emperor over his defense of Fang Guan, the absent center of the account. The poem's narrative explains this clash as an expression of Du Fu's "heroic" nature and life-long vocation as a traveler on the stage of brush and ink.

Recalling Fellow Travelers

The affirmation of social bonds is thus a key subject of "Travels of My Prime," and its articulation of a literati identity outside the realm of court politics. The commemoration of social networks is even more central to "Expressing My Cares" 遣懷 and "Past Travels" 昔遊, both of which recount tours in the region of Liang-Song (modern Henan

province) with Gao Shi and Li Bo, in 744. Li Bo had just finished his brief stint at the imperial Hanlin Academy 翰林院, where his larger-than-life personality had both gained him fame and secured his prompt dismissal. Gao, on the other hand, had yet to make a name either in office or in letters, and had spent much of his life in Songzhou (modern Suiyang district, Shangqiu city, Henan), where the three writers met. In the following years, Li would continue to travel in search of adventure and wealthy patrons, his reputation as a writer and entertainer continuing to spread. After the outbreak of war in 756, he attached himself to the entourage of a rebel prince, and landed in jail when his employer was put down by Suzong's troops.³²⁵ Accompanying the imperial army on this campaign was Gao Shi, whose fortunes had risen years earlier after he joined the retinue of the great general, Geshu Han 哥舒翰 (d. 757). Gao was later purged along with other associates of Fang Guan, and sent west to Shu, where he distinguished himself as a capable military commander. By the times of their deaths, in 762 and 765, respectively, both men were considered among the greatest poets of their age.³²⁶

Du Fu was second to none in his praise for both Gao and Li, which he expressed in several poems throughout his career. Du Fu's friendship with Li Bo in particular is legendary; however, it seems to have been mostly a product of the younger poet's vivid and imaginative memories, and more specifically the poem. The same may be said for his rapport with Gao Shi. In both cases, Du Fu retrospectively constructed friendships that had little basis in reality. Much in the same way that our picture of Du Fu's biography is

³²⁵ On Li Bo, see Stephen Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High T'ang*, 109-46; and Paula M. Varsano, *Tracking the Banished Immortal: The Poetry of Li Bo and Its Critical Reception* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003).

³²⁶ On Gao Shi, see Owen, *Great Age*, 147-61; and Marie Chan, *Kao Shih* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), esp. 17-45.

shaped by the hyperbolic self-characterization of “Travels of My Prime,” what we know of his social network is largely based on openly nostalgic pieces like “Expressing My Cares” and “Past Travels.” These are the life stories that Du Fu, an aged and unrecognized poet on the outskirts of the empire, wished to be remembered by. The discrepancy between the tales they tell and what we know from other historical sources is an indication of their *poetic* or performative function: they attempted to produce these personal relationships in the realm of memory and belief. And they succeeded: Du Fu would be remembered in the company of his famous friends.

In addition to recalling the same group excursions, “Expressing My Cares” and “Past Travels” remember the tours in and around Songzhou in remarkably similar ways. In both poems, short recollections of these trips are followed by large-scale memories of the pre-rebellion age in which they took place. This narrative ordering presents them as an example of the larger power and prosperity of the early Tianbao period. Also in both poems, these prospects give way abruptly to the narrator’s present lamentation for all that has since been lost, though these differ in emphasis, as we will see. The memory of shared travels thus leads to remembrance of the times in which they occurred, which then highlights the contrasting conditions of the remembering poet.

However, these resemblances set off significant differences in the poems’ presentation of their subjects. For example, “Past Travels” starts right away with the excursion itself:

In the past, with Gao and Li,	昔者與高李
Late in the year I ascended Shanfu Terrace.	晚登單父臺
Cold weeds extended to the boundary of Stone Tablet Mountain;	寒蕪際碣石
And wind came over a myriad miles.	萬里風雲來

The description continues with four more lines of falling leaves and frost, evoking a vast expanse of wintry desolation. And there the memory of the trip ends, making way for twelve lines describing the peacetime empire's material abundance and military strength, or a "prospect of great peace" 太平景象, as one commentator described it.³²⁷

In these times the granaries were full;	是時倉廩實
And everywhere the empire's districts were open.	洞達寰區開
Fierce warriors thought of vanquishing the barbarians;	猛士思滅胡
And commanders aspired to become grand councilors.	將帥望三台

Several more examples of power and plenty follow. Thus, although the travels with Gao and Li take narrative priority in "Past Travels," they are represented only through a description of the wintry view from Shanfu Terrace, and serve primarily as a preface to the grand prospect of the past empire.

The longest section of "Past Travels," however, is the closing lament, which takes up 16 lines. It begins, in the following three couplets, with a highly self-reflexive comment on memory and the poem's composition:

Separated by a river, I recall the long view;	隔河憶長眺
My tender years already lie in ruins.	青歲已摧頽
I cannot reach my childhood days;	不及少年日
Never to return: the cups of my old friends.	無復故人杯
Making poems, alone, my tears flow;	賦詩獨流涕
In troubled times I think of worthy talents.	亂世想賢才

³²⁷ Zhong Xing 鍾惺 (1574-1624), cited in *Tangshi huiping*, 1034.

The passage starts with the act of remembering itself, which is compared to peering across a river of time separating past and present. On the distant bank the narrator sees his unreachable childhood and old friends. He writes his tearful poem, thinking of how his talented comrades are needed in the present age of instability. The closing reflection thus connects the two preceding sections by making the meeting of the three talents on Shanfu Terrace an instance of the greater well-being of the empire, which, Du Fu suggests, cannot be restored until similar gatherings of talents become possible once again. The poem ends by recalling a series of examples of able ministers called into service by wise rulers.

“Expressing My Cares” remembers the same travels differently, beginning not with the group excursion, but with a recollection of the city of Songzhou. He presents the city of his travels as wealthy and wild, brimming with pleasure-seekers and men of action:

In the past when I traveled in Song,	昔我游宋中
It was in Prince Xiao of Liang’s old capital. ³²⁸	惟梁孝王都
Its fame today is on par with Chenliu, ³²⁹	名今陳留亞
And in unruliness is equal to Bei and Wei. ³³⁰	劇則貝魏俱
In the city there were some ninety thousand houses,	邑中九萬家
With lofty ridgepoles gleaming over the thoroughfares.	高棟照通衢
Boats and carriages stretched over half the earth;	舟車半天下

³²⁸ In Songzhou. King Xiao of Liang was Liu Wu 劉武 (d. 144 B.C.), a son of Emperor Wen of Han 漢文帝 (r. 180-157 B.C.).

³²⁹ Chenliu is modern Kaifeng City, Henan Province.

³³⁰ Tang Beizhou and Weizhou are the modern counties of Qinghe and Daming, in Hebei Province. In the post-rebellion period, Hebei was governed by local military leaders hostile to and largely independent from the restoration court in Chang’an.

Hosts and guests shared so many pleasures.	主客多歡娛
With bright blades, injustices were avenged,	白刃讎不義
And yellow gold was poured out for expenses.	黃金傾有無
Men were killed in the red dust,	殺人紅塵裏
Retribution handed out in an instant.	報答在斯須

Du Fu's description of Songzhou leads quickly from pleasure to violence, from bustling boulevards to bodies falling in the dust, cut down by righteous assassins. As Wang Sishi points out, the second couplet introduces the twin characteristics of the city that are elaborated in the subsequent eight lines: "fame" 名 and "unruliness" 劇. Lines 5 through 8 illustrate Songzhou's fame with images of opulence, or "the rich flourishing of people and things" 人物之殷盛; and the fatal swordplay in lines 9 through 12 shows that "bravo behavior is a local custom" 風俗之任俠.³³¹ Du Fu thus portrays Songzhou as a bravo's town, and evokes a familiar self-characterization: this is a place where the young poet of "Travels of My Prime" would feel right at home.

It is against this backdrop that the poet's friends take the stage. At eight lines, Du Fu's recollection here is longer and more detailed than that of "Past Travels." It carries on the bravo theme introduced in the portrait of the city, linking it to literati fraternity in a way that distinctly recalls the longer life-narrative examined above:

I recall being together with the likes of Gao and Li,	憶與高李輩
Entering the taverns for friendly discussions.	論交入酒壚
These two masters had such brave thoughts on literature;	兩公壯藻思

³³¹ Cited in *DSXZ*, 16.1447.

And adding me, their countenances brightened.	得我色敷腴
Invigorated, we climbed Whistling Terrace, ³³²	氣酣登吹臺
Yearning for antiquity as we regarded the weedy plain.	懷古視平蕪
The clouds over Mount Mangdang had vanished once and for all, ³³³	芒碭雲一去
And the geese and ducks cried to each other in vain.	雁驚空相呼

This gathering begins in the taverns of the wild city, with conversations that partake of the lively surroundings. Du Fu's description of his friends associates them with the type of character found roaming the streets of Songzhou, swords at the ready: "These two masters," he recalls, "had such brave thoughts of writing" (*zhuang zaosi* 壯藻思). There is an unmistakable echo here of Du Fu's account of his own youthful literary accomplishments in "Travels of My Prime," where he writes that at seven years his "thoughts were already brave" (*si ji zhuang* 思即壯). In "Expressing My Cares," "bravery" is again a quality of "thought" (*si* 思) characteristic of the talented writer, and is again part of a broader association with the traveling bravo as a figure of retrospective self-identification. By recalling the older poets' delight in his company, moreover, Du Fu suggests that they recognized similar qualities in him.

Despite such differences in the poems' accounts, the fundamental similarities between them are even more striking. One of these is the pairing of names, which takes on significance in light of the poems' larger theme of friendship. The wording of the first

³³² According to Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559), the terrace derived its name from the blind 6th c. music master, Shi Kuang 師曠, and was later rebuilt by Prince Xiao. Cited in *DSXZ*, 16.1448-9.

³³³ Mount Mangdang was where the founder of the Han Dynasty, Liu Bang 劉邦 (temple name, Gaozu; r. 202-195 B.C.), took refuge with his followers before leading his successful insurrection against the Qin. Legend has it that clouds appeared above their hideout, an auspicious sign indicating that he would become emperor.

line (憶與高李輩) of the travel memory in “Expressing My Cares” is almost identical to the opening of “Past Travels” (昔者與高李). This seemingly slight detail is significant, as it places Gao Shi and Li Bo together in the kind of “paired epithet” (*bingcheng* 並稱) that was common when referring to great writers of the past. In Du Fu’s poems and those of his contemporaries one finds “Qu and Song” 屈宋 (Qu Yuan and Song Yu), “Tao and Xie” 陶謝 (Tao Yuanming and Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 [385-433]), and a limited number of other masters brought together in this way. Later in “Expressing My Cares,” Du Fu writes: “I will never again see Yan and Bao” 不復見顏鮑, thus comparing his departed friends to Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384-456) and Bao Zhao 鮑照 (414-466), famous writers of the Southern Dynasties. An intimate honorific, such *bingcheng* expressed a respectful familiarity between the writer and his subjects, as well as between the subjects themselves. As a performative assertion of a community of the elect, it presents in microcosm the gesture that defines Du Fu’s two recollections of past travels more generally.

Another important commonality between the poems is that they focus on precisely the same activity as the consummation of friendship: “ascending a height” 登高. The sole activity remembered in “Past Travels,” which therefore defines the friendship in that poem, is the ascent of Shanfu Terrace and the view of the wilds from above. Likewise, in “Expressing My Cares,” the three poets emerge from their invigorating barroom discussion to climb Whistling Terrace and take in the scenery. During the medieval period ascending a height was one of the occasions most associated with the composition of poetry. Surveying a landscape from a height, the poet would reflect upon the historical

events that took place there, often identifying with one or another figure from the past, and lament the vanishing of their traces. This ritual act was known as “yearning for antiquity” (*huaigu* 懷古), which is precisely what Du Fu recalls doing with Gao and Li on Whistling Terrace as they “regarded the weedy plain” 視平蕪.³³⁴ He even relates the specific past event that they yearned for at the time: the appearance of clouds that portended the founding of the Han Dynasty. The ascent of Shanfu Terrace in “Past Travels” is the same kind of occasion, though Du Fu’s memory of it does not contain any specific references to history. Nevertheless, the two poems, which are dedicated largely to remembering friendship with Gao and Li, focus on this particular activity as the consummation of their bonds. Du Fu recalls the formation of friendship in past acts of remembering together.

As in “Past Travels,” the end of the gathering on the terrace in “Expressing My Cares” leads to a larger view of “the times.” However, whereas “Past Travels” illustrated the empire’s prosperity through “images of great peace”—overflowing granaries and smoothly flowing channels of communication—here Du Fu evokes the darker side of imperial power: the militarism that paved the way for dynastic collapse. The passage begins with the remark that “The Former Emperor [i.e. Xuanzong] was truly fond of warfare” 先帝正好武, and follows with examples of the brutal excesses that resulted:

A million men would attack a single city;	百萬攻一城
Victories were reported, but losses never spoken of.	獻捷不云輸
Those in soldier’s garb were cast off like mud;	組練去如泥

³³⁴ For an extended discussion of Du Fu’s *huaigu* from Kuizhou in the context of the conventions of the subgenre, see chapter one.

For a foot of ground a hundred lost their lives.

尺土負百夫

The emperor's love of war inspires generals to conquer distant lands, opening and securing the very routes through which the wealth of the Tang state poured in. However, in this recollection it also results in exaggerated reports of victories and pointless loss of life on a massive scale. How is this dark vision of the pre-rebellion period, so different from that of "Past Travels," to be explained? It is in large part a function of the different thematic focuses of the two poems. "Past Travels" was chiefly concerned with the poet's friends; this can be seen in its title, its opening scene, and most of all in its ending, in which the narrator longs at length for his companions. This poem's portrait of empire-wide prosperity figured as an extension of the poets' gathering; to recall these past travels was thus to recall the empire at peace.

"Expressing My Cares," on the other hand, indicates by its title and narrative presentation that its focus is on the past experiences and present "cares" of the poet-narrator. This difference is brought out most clearly in the extended *tristia* lament of the final section, which carries over directly from the criticism of military overreach:

Acts of frontier expansion have yet to cease;

拓境功未已

And primal harmony has departed the great furnace.³³⁵

元和辭大爐

In disaster and displacement, my friends are all gone;

亂離朋友盡

One after another the years and months proceed.

合沓歲月徂

Throughout this section, Du Fu's mourning for his companions is subordinated to a lament for his own advancing age and frustrated ambitions. This closing emphasis on the

³³⁵ The "great furnace" 大爐/爐 was a euphemism for the world derived from the *Zhuangzi*. See *Zhuangzi jishi*, ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (1844-1896) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, rpt. 2006), 3a.262.

personal helps explain the preceding portrayal of imperial militarism, which Du Fu presents as the source of his deprivations. Thus, the nostalgic gaze in “Expressing My Cares” is directed at the travels in Songzhou, and this recollected world of the literary bravo is once again valorized by contrast with the war-torn public realm of the empire at large.

Conclusions

The narrative poems analyzed above are yet another expression of the larger mnemonic preoccupation exhibited during Du Fu’s Kuizhou years, which I am referring to as his poetics of memory. This chapter has examined representative examples of these works, and has described them as a project of autobiographical memory in which Du Fu threaded together events of his life into coherent and compelling stories. Such a project, like those in the domains of historical, cultural, and social memory, served a definite purpose at a time when dynastic collapse, old age, and displacement on the southwestern frontier had radically destabilized familiar frameworks of belonging. Poetry provided Du Fu with a medium in which to remember and re-imagine these identities, one of which was personal.

The chapter began by showing that Du Fu’s late life-narratives have overwhelmingly been approached not as whole poems in themselves, but as “secondary” sources of biographical information for the interpretation of other poems. We traced this approach to the “history in verse” tradition of Du Fu studies, and its founding claim that Du Fu’s poems were complete in their documentation of their subjects, and utterly explicit in their

language. The implication, elaborated in the modern period by William Hung, was that their specific form is accidental and irrelevant; however, the importance of form in Hung's own exposition (his media metaphors) argued otherwise.

Du Fu's life-narratives fall outside the Western Augustinian and Chinese poetic mainstreams. Their formal and thematic sources lie in the tradition of travel poems that goes back to the spirit journeys of the "Li Sao," Han *fu* travelogues, and Tang poems in the "recalling past travels" subgenre. We closely examined three of Du Fu's major autobiographical works, all of which center on accounts of journeys, and found each of them employs a number of "literary" devices to construct memories responsive to present needs and desires. For instance, in "Travels of My Prime," his longest and most detailed autobiography, Du Fu presents himself from his childhood in the role of a poet-bravo roaming "the stage of brush and ink." Crucial to this persona, we saw, was a preference for private associations over engagement in court politics, despite the conflicts this produced with the remembrances in other poems. The rebellion proved the wisdom of this disposition, which the aged narrator claims was innate. But the primary use of this self-portrait, I argued, was as a form of apology for Du Fu's clash with Suzong over his defense of Fang Guan, the event that ended his political career, and nearly cost him his life. Instead, his poem produced a life story that explained his exit from the political stage as an expression of his identity as a writer.

"Past Travels" and "Expressing My Cares" present different recollections of Du Fu's excursions with Gao Shi and Li Bo in and around Songzhou in 744. As in "Travels of My Prime," journeys are again the main subject of these life-narratives. However, rather than tracing the development of a life over a long period, they focus on a single socially

formative experience, framing it in relation to the pre-rebellion age in which it occurred. Though the basic elements of the poems are the same, their narrative orders differ, as do their portrayals of conditions in the empire of the time. “Past Travels” begins with the poets’ gathering, proceeds to an evocation of peace and plenty throughout the land, and concludes by lamenting the loss of these talented friends at a time of dynastic crisis. “Expressing My Cares” opens with a portrayal of Songzhou as a city of wealth and danger, setting the stage for the meeting of the three literary bravos. This nostalgic memory jars with the following scenes of slaughter on the empire’s frontier, which lead into a closing lament more focused on the narrator’s present straitened circumstances. The same meeting of friends thus becomes material for narrating divergent memories of prosperity and incipient disaster. At the center of both stories is the formation of friendships through collective remembering. The poems recall that Du Fu’s bonds with Gao and Li were forged when the poets climbed terraces together to look across the plains and yearn for the past. They thus produced these friendships anew, for Du Fu in Kuizhou as well as for future readers of his poems, giving them concrete, transmissible form.

Conclusion

“Twilight is that moment of the day that foreshadows the night of forgetting, but that seems to slow time itself, an in-between state in which the last light of the day may still play out its ultimate marvels. It is memory’s privileged time.”³³⁶

Du Fu is a figure of memory in more than one sense. He is the most remembered of Chinese poets, having occupied the very center of the literary canon for almost a millennium. However, prior to gaining his privileged position in Chinese cultural memory, he made memory the driving force and guiding theme of his own poetry, especially the work he wrote during two remarkably productive years in Kuizhou between 766 and 768. This study has described this surge of creative remembering as a poetics of memory, a phrase meant to highlight relations between memory and “making” (*poiesis*). Memory was above all a way for Du Fu to imagine and produce frameworks of belonging and identity that had become destabilized or lost in the aftermath of the catastrophic An Lushan rebellion. In writings on monuments, local customs, and paintings, and through narrative autobiography, he created worlds of historical, cultural, social, and personal memory just as dusk was gathering on his own life and times. In this conclusion we will briefly revisit the arguments of the preceding chapters, and consider their implications.

Monuments and historical memory played crucial roles in defining the significance of Kuizhou, and in constructing an identity for the poet who dwelt there. Places are among the most fundamental media of memory, as they provide a spatial anchor for culture-defining histories and myths, and allow for their continual reactivation and negotiation

³³⁶ Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 3.

through pilgrimage and various commemorative practices. Kuizhou, by contrast, was a *lieu d'oubli*. A fortress of failed states at the mouth of a deadly river corridor, its history and topography evoked the destruction and erasure brought about by the rebellion, thereby provoking Du Fu's memorial efforts. However, it did have a history of representations in poetry, beginning with the story of the Goddess of Wu Mountain and broadening out during the early Tang to include historical figures commemorated by traveling poet-officials. Tang poets defined the significance of a place primarily by identifying it as a site of history, and did so in the specific subgenre of *huaigu* ("yearning for the past"), which had its origins in a commentator's imagining of Zhou Dynasty ruins under an anonymous millet field. Tang *huaigu* consisted first of all through such acts of "placing the past," in the installation of new historical representatives and the revision of existing narratives. This poetics of place is vividly illustrated by Du Fu's commemorations of Yu the Great and Zhuge Liang, neither of whom had previously represented the region in poetry.

Huaigu also served as vehicles of self-definition, allowing writers to place themselves within a larger historical framework and to identify with the past exemplars they made representative of a given place. Such acts of identification were not only a matter of explicit verbal expression, and in Du Fu's texts were carried out through the rhetorical reproduction of his subjects' defining deeds. These "performances of the past" displayed a keen attentiveness to the monument as a material medium of historical memory, in whose forms Du Fu read the traces of heroic acts. The story of Yu the Great's founding hydrology was literally inscribed in the cliff faces of the gorges, and Zhuge Liang's

undying loyalty to his dead ruler was embodied in the structure and placement of his temples.

Another powerful spur to Du Fu's memory was Kuizhou's local culture, which he wrote of in a large number of ethnographic poems. Straddling the southwestern border of the Tang empire, Kuizhou was home to a diverse population, whose customs often clashed with notions of propriety as defined by the classic texts that were the wellspring of literati cultural memory and identity. In a number of foundational sources, the correct ritual practices of the sages were defined in explicit opposition to the diverse behaviors, knowledges, and beliefs prevailing in localities. It is thus unsurprising that Du Fu, a literatus of the northern plains, would decry certain acts he encountered in Kuizhou, such as the fires intended to frighten a resident dragon into producing rain, and would argue for the adoption of methods derived from canonical sources. However, it is inaccurate to treat this hostility as representative of his writings on local customs in general. On the contrary, the poems exhibit a remarkable variety of responses, including ironic bewilderment, admiration, and even gestures of emulation (in the treatment of local song styles). Du Fu approached local mores as a medium of regional traditions, which intersected in surprising ways with the norms of the orthodox canon. The boundary between these two domains of cultural memory was shifting and permeable, the product of an ambivalent poetics of the frontier.

Many of Du Fu's poems on Kuizhou's local culture never gained widespread appreciation, and, despite the canonicity of their author, remained on the obscure periphery of his corpus. This was largely because such topics were not considered appropriate for poetry, during Du Fu's time or in later centuries. Throughout the

medieval period, the poetic repertoire consisted almost exclusively of the public, social rituals of elite life, occasions like “yearning for the past” or “seeing off a friend” with long and distinguished pedigrees that authorized and valorized the present moment of writing. Du Fu’s unprecedented expansion of the repertoire was thus truly revolutionary, as it called into question the very sources of value that dominated literary production, and heralded the move into the private sphere that gathered momentum during the mid-Tang. To write classical poems on topics such as fixing water pipes, constructing a chicken coop, or building a fence was to recognize and declare the worth of private events with no existing pedigree. Du Fu did this by equating them with hallowed events and symbols of the public realm. For instance, he compared his repayment of a servant’s plumbing work to an emperor’s bestowal of official tallies upon a deserving minister; he wrote of chickens, properly caged, as possessing the constancy of a figure from the *Shijing*; and he affixed a lengthy preface, written in the most archaic classical language, to a poem praising the construction (and building materials) of a fence. This was to amplify the significance of household affairs by giving them a prestigious memory, making them instantiations of canonical norms. Du Fu’s poems on housework from Kuizhou test their own capacity to produce value in uncharted literary territory at a moment when established standards of worth had been destabilized.

One of the topics that Du Fu helped pioneer for poetry was painting. He approached painting as a vital medium for the memory of pre-rebellion court society, as evidenced by several of his most celebrated *tihua shi*. Du Fu’s image-memories are best understood in the context of the *tihua shi* tradition he inherited and its particular ways of seeing. This tradition emerged during the late Southern Dynasties (420-589), in poems that associated

paintings with the figure of the palace lady due to their shared ability to please and deceive the (male, imperial) eye. The first extant poems that present particular viewings of paintings by named literati date from the early Tang. Comparing two seventh-century poems on crane paintings to one by Du Fu from 763 show that although they all focus on the condition of the medium in relation to the image's symbolism of immortality, only Du Fu approaches them in light of the painter's biography, as carriers of his memory. The anonymity of the painter in the earlier poems was likely due to the fact that during the early Tang, image making was primarily in the hands of artisans, and was stigmatized by masters of the text. This also helps explain the aesthetic of craftsmanship and illusionism that predominated in early *tihua shi*, which we saw exemplified in poems on landscape paintings. If any single term epitomized this aesthetic, it was *zhen* ("truth," "reality"), so vividly illustrated in the story of Zhen Zhen, the virtuous woman-image who comes alive only to be betrayed by her suspicious husband-viewer. Zhen Zhen embodied the "fidelity" of images, and Du Fu played on this connotation in his frequent use of *zhen* to describe paintings of hawks and horses. Significantly, it is images of these imperial pets that elicit Du Fu's vivid memories of the pre-rebellion court. The fidelity of these animals to their masters, echoed in the faithful representations of painters, is reproduced yet again by the poem as it traces the painting's production to specific court events. Such acts of memory, moreover, serve to constitute communities of viewers who share in the recognition of the images and their hidden meanings.

Du Fu's late narrative autobiographical poems functioned as a medium of personal memory. Just as monuments provided a tangible interface through which to envision history, and paintings supported the memory of the pre-rebellion court, these innovative

poems recalled a life story and constructed a coherent self-image. They have been treated overwhelmingly as repositories of documentary fact, and as supports for the biographical readings of other poems. Such approaches are heir to the long tradition of literalist “history in verse” interpretation, with its constitutive aversion to form and figurative language. As titles like “Travels of My Prime” and “Past Travels” suggest, the poetic travel narrative was an important source, notably the spirit journeys of the *Chuci*, Han *fu* travelogues, and the subgenre of medieval verse known as “recalling past travels.” In “Travels of My Prime,” his definitive narrative autobiography, Du Fu presents himself in the role of the brash young wandering bravo, and recounts his sojourn on “the stage of brush and ink.” Throughout, it associates his literary vocation with travel and sociability, and downplays involvement in politics. This self-presentation makes sense as an apology for Du Fu’s disastrous defense of his patron—the event that ended his tenure at court, almost ended his life, and with which he ends his life story.

“Past Travels” and “Expressing My Cares,” by contrast, recount two versions of Du Fu’s meeting, two decades prior, with Li Bo and Gao Shi in Songzhou. “Past Travels” presents the poets’ friendly gathering as a symbolic of the “flourishing times” in which they lived, and laments that Gao and Li are no longer alive to assist the dynasty in its present time of need. This is reversed in “Expressing My Cares,” which more resembles “Travels of My Prime” in its portrayal of Songzhou as a land of adventure, and the three friends as swashbuckling bravos. As in that piece, and in sharp contrast to “Past Travels,” the times are here presented through warfare and suffering, as if developing the theme of violence associated with the bravo character. “Expressing My Cares” ends with the narrator lamenting his own uncertain fate. The same occasion is thus approached from

two different angles in these poems, as material for reflection on dynastic prosperity and crisis, respectively, while in both cases commemorating the formation of friendships.

Such pervasive memorial efforts across a range of poetic subgenres suggest that the prevailing image of Du Fu's Kuizhou poetry needs rethinking. This is the image, produced and reproduced through anthologies, textbooks, translations, and other necessarily selective techniques of cultural memory, of the old and ailing poet in his solitary river tower, worrying for his country through endless rainy nights. It is inadequate, on the one hand, because it is based on a tiny sample of poems, such as the "Autumn Meditations" series, and the exclusion of a vast number of others, which show the poet in a very different light. Poems on local customs and housework, for example, reveal that he was quite active and engaged in the strenuous work of making a home in an inhospitable place. These lesser-known pieces highlight the productivity and creative energy that characterizes Du Fu's poetics of memory more generally, which the familiar image obscures. Memory in late Du Fu is not the incapacitating repetition of melancholia but the vital activity of constructing frameworks of identity, connecting past to present, and thereby providing orientation toward the future.

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