

Eagle-shooting Heroes and Wild-goose Hunters: the Late Tang Moment

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The significance of my title will become clear as the discussion progresses, but for those of you in Chinese Studies, you will of course think of Jin Yong's novel Shediao yingxiong 射雕英雄, which drew its title from a passage in a lyric by Mao Zedong. Mao's lyric was using a common allusion that comes in two levels. The first level is found in the "Biography of Li Guang" in the Shi ji: a court eunuch was sent out to the great Han general Li Guang when he was on campaign. With a party of a few dozen men, the eunuch was out on the steppes when he encountered a group of three Xiongnu. The vastly superior Chinese party attacked the Xiongnu, who proceeded to ride around the Chinese party shooting, until many, including the court eunuch, were wounded. When the outraged eunuch reported the incident back to Li Guang, the general commented that the three Xiongnu must have been out eagle-shooting. He sent a detachment after the Xiongnu and captured them, and they had indeed been out to shoot eagles

At this point we should observe the obvious, that shooting eagles is no easy matter—far more difficult than shooting court eunuchs, who are slower, larger, and closer to the ground. "Eagle-shooting" later was transformed into the set phrase "master of eagle-shooting," shediao shou 射雕手; this phrase came from the History of the Northern Qi, where Hulü Guang, on a hunt with the Emperor, looked up and shot and brought down an eagle. Thereafter it became a standard figure of skill.

What I am looking for here is a kind of Tang poetry that is overlooked or underappreciated in standard accounts of Tang poetry, but a kind of poetry that was enduringly popular for more than a millennium. It was, perhaps, popular because it formed the basis of a skill that could be studied, learned, and mastered. It was a skill that did not require that a poet find an entirely distinct voice and mode of poetry. It was, however, a skill within which we can distinguish among eagle-shooting, shooting wild geese (fat, slow, and low-flying) or missing altogether.

As we begin to get the "complete poems" of dynasties after the Tang, we realize that this kind of poetry always continued in the background, behind more famous names.

Around 837 Yao He 姚合, one of the most prominent poets of his day, completed his anthology of poetry entitled *Supreme Mystery* (*Jixuan ji* 極玄集). A fragment of the preface survives, in which Yao He says: "These are all the masters of eagle-shooting among poets; I hope to avoid posterity's disagreement regarding my further selection from their collections of those pieces that show the supreme mystery" (此皆詩家射鵰之手也。合於眾集中更選其極玄者,庶免後來之非).

837 was the Kaicheng Reign of Emperor Wenzong. Wenzong's grandfather Xianzong had been the Yuanhe Emperor (806-820) and had presided over the single greatest reconsolidation of dynastic power since the An Lushan Rebellion in the middle of the eighth century. In 820 the forty-three year old Xianzong had died suddenly and of mysterious causes. Poisoning by court eunuchs was the favorite explanation, though it may have been the Emperor's own fascination with longevity drugs. Xianzong was followed by the brief reign of his son Muzong, an inconsequential, disinterested Emperor and a more certain victim of longevity drugs. He was followed by his teenage son Jingzong, whose favorite activity was hunting at night and having raucous drinking parties when he returned. In 827, after ruling only a few years, his eunuchs evidently decided that his self-indulgent stupidity was a liability and discreetly strangled him one night as he returned from relieving himself in one of his late night drinking parties. After an inner court struggle young Li Ang, Jingzong's brother, was put on the throne, destined to become the emperor Wenzong.

Wenzong never expected to become Emperor. He was a studious young man; and when he was made Emperor, he set out to try to be a very good Emperor. He understood that he had to break the power of his court eunuchs. This was no simple matter, since they controlled not only his physical person, they controlled the Shence Army, which was the military power in Chang'an. In 835 Wenzong almost succeeded in a plot to have them killed, but an unkind gust of wind, they say, blew aside the curtains and revealed armed men ready to fall upon the eunuchs. The eunuchs swiftly dragged the Emperor back into the Inner Palace, barred the gates, and unleashed the Shence Army. The bloodbath that followed led to an even greater consolidation of eunuch power. This was the famous "Sweet Dew Incident," and a new reign name was declared, Kaicheng, oxymoronically combining "beginning" and "completion"; I am tempted to translate it as "the beginning of the end."

Yao He's *Supreme Mystery*, compiled in the Kaicheng Reign, has several histories of poetry behind it. The Yuanhe Reign of Xianzong had been the culmination of what we now call the "Mid Tang," a period of diverse invention leading in many directions. Here we find some of the most distinctive poetic voices in the history of Chinese poetry: the strident harshness of Meng Jiao, the virtuosity of Han Yu, the fantasy of Li He, the social engagement and wit of Bai Juyi. By 837 most of those poets were dead; and those who survived, like Bai Juyi, were old men whose garrulous style was irritating to younger poets. From more than a thousand years perspective we may see a certain charm in Bai Juyi's ease; to some of his younger contemporaries he seemed to represent the utter ruin of poetic craft and the aesthetic discipline of form.

We now think of Tang poetry as a "history"; but when we look at the literary world of the 830s, they saw the famous Yuanhe poets as an aberration, and a poetic style continuing from the late 750s as the norm. For poetry lovers of the 830s there was no "Early," "High," "Mid" or contemporary "Late" Tang (of course, they could not imagine themselves as "Late"); there was "poetry" and there was the "Yuanhe style" 元和體. The history of poetry was not a series of changing styles or fashions as we might conceive it, but rather ongoing poetry, with a brief phase of aberration in the Yuanhe.

A few years after Yao He's anthology, Emperor Wenzong, the most poetry-loving Emperor of the Tang, took it in mind to establish a complete set of Hanlin Academy positions for poets. Court conservatives were outraged. Li Jue 李珣 offered the following critique:

To establish Academicians of Poetry would look rather bad at the present moment. Moreover, poets are generally poor and unreliable men, ignorant of the nature of office-holding. Our current Hanlin Academicians are all men well-versed in letters; it is quite all right that Your Majesty peruses past and present writers and finds amusement therein. If you have questions, it is quite all right that you consult with your Academicians. Some time ago Your Majesty commanded Wang Qi and Xu Kangzuo to serve as attendant lecturers, and all the world felt that Your Majesty loved antiquity and honored scholars, that you were devoted to and encouraged simplicity and depth. I understand that Xianzong [the Yuanhe Emperor] wrote poetry, and that his style matched that of the ancients. But back then, certain frivolous fellows displayed their rhetorical gifts and decorated lines, and with a grandiose, tortuous, and obscure style they satirized current events. Thereafter their reputations were bruited about, and they called it the "Yuanhe

Style.” It was certainly not that imperial preferences then were for things like this. If Your Majesty now goes on to establish Academicians of Poetry, I worry very much that frivolous and inferior men will try to outdo one another in verses of ridicule, giving their attention to clouds, mountains, plants, and trees. And might this not get called the “Kaicheng Style?” Such a blemish on the imperial civilizing mission would indeed be no small matter.¹

This is a fascinating text, both for the anxiety regarding difference that sees period style itself (and hence our whole notion of literary history) as a problem and for the poetic conservatism that is the desirable norm.

Such poetic conservatism was a strong force in the world of poetry for an entire century after the An Lushan Rebellion. When Gao Zhongwu 高仲武 compiled his poetry anthology *The Leisurely Atmosphere of the Restoration* (*Zhongxing xianqi ji* 中興閒氣集), in 785 or shortly thereafter, it is not surprising that he restricted himself to recent poems, composed between 756 and 779. Probably sometime between the ninth and twelfth year of the Yuanhe Reign (814-817), Linghu Chu 令狐楚 (766-837) compiled *Poems for Imperial Perusal* (*Yulan shi* 御覽詩).² The poems which Linghu Chu was offering for Xianzong’s reading pleasure were again primarily from the same poets anthologized by Gao Zhongwu thirty years earlier.³ As in Gao Zhongwu’s anthology, *Poems for Imperial Perusal* consisted primarily of quatrains and regulated verse in the five syllable line. Absent are all the contemporary poets whom we now see as major figures. As those now famous Yuanhe poets in many ways all set themselves against the contemporary literary establishment, Linghu Chu, representing that very literary establishment, ignored them in turn. Linghu Chu would eventually become Li Shangyin’s first patron and, as a patron he became a considerable force in poetry of the second quarter of the ninth century.

When, a half century after Gao Zhongwu’s anthology, we have Yao He’s *Supreme Mystery*, we find exactly the same late eighth century poets. This was a canon of major poets, though it is one we no longer recognize. There is, however, one difference that separates Yao He from his predecessors: Yao He included two poets from before the An Lushan Rebellion period, Wang Wei and Zu Yong 祖詠, both masters of polished regulated verse, giving an ancestry to the predominant representation of poets from the second half of the eighth century. Like the two earlier anthologies, Yao He’s anthology includes primarily regulated verse in the five syllable line, as well as quatrains in the five syllable line.

The eccentric poets of the Yuanhe Reign gave us the canon of Tang poetry we now have. It was they who raised Du Fu and Li Bai to central positions and placed “High Tang” poetry over the last part of the eighth

century. In his famous “Teasing Zhang Ji” 調張籍 Han Yu had compared the poetry of Li Bai and Du Fu to Great Yu, digging the channels for China’s great river. It is a grand image of the poet as demiurge, and indeed the analogy between the poet and “cosmic fashioning,” *zaohua* 造化, was common among the Yuanhe poets. It is this image of the work of poetry that we may contrast with a mastery of eagle-shooting, a skill of controlled precision.

It can hardly be an accident that the third poem in Yao He’s anthology of “masters of eagle shooting” is Wang Wei’s 王維 “Watching the Hunt.”

Watching the Hunt

The wind is strong, the horn-bow sings,
the general is hunting east of Wei City.
The plants are sere, the hawk’s eye keen,
snow is gone, horses’ hooves move easily.
Suddenly they are past Xinfeng market,
then back around to Thinwillow Camp.
Turn and look where the eagle was shot—
a thousand leagues of evening clouds flat.

觀獵

風勁角弓鳴，
將軍獵渭城。
草枯鷹眼疾，
雪盡馬蹄輕。
忽過新豐市，
還歸細柳營。
迴看射鵰處，
千里暮雲平。⁴

This is one version of the “High Tang” at its best. The images present the evidence of the senses: the sound of a bow twanging in the wind, which is the particular sensory evidence of the hunt. The fact that the leaves are dried and have fallen from the plants gives the hawk a better view, and the absence of snow (either in patches on the ground or falling) lets the horses move more easily. The poem ends beautifully with a view of absence, a vast skyscape in the distance in which there was a hawk—a small bird to shoot, and smaller still from a distance—that is now not there. Wang Wei’s poem illustrates one possibility for regulated verse, in which energy is represented under formal control, the precision of skill that masters dangerous force—

“eagle-shooting.” It is probably the strongest poem in Yao He’s anthology and an allegory of the poetic craft of “eagle-shooters.”

Most of Yao He’s poetic eagle-shooters belong to the past, from a century to a quarter century before Yao’s anthology. To have Yao He’s own day represented, we have to look to a future anthology, indeed an anthology that explicitly presents itself as the successor of Yao He’s anthology of poetry. This is Wei Zhuang’s *Further Mystery* (*Youxuan ji* 又玄集), from the turn of the tenth century. As Yao He’s anthology represents the continuity of conservative poetic taste among elite circles for a half century, *Further Mystery* opens with Du Fu, Li Bai, and Wang Wei, reconciling the values of conservatives and Yuanhe radicals and beginning to look like the canon of Tang poetry we now know. What had occurred in between *Supreme Mystery* in 837 and *Further Mystery* at the beginning of the next century was the complete destruction of the social world dominated by the conservative elite, the repeated sack of Chang’an, and the reduction of the dynasty to a handful of courtiers and palace guards surviving at the whim of various warlords.

As Wei Zhuang’s anthology was the sequel to Yao He’s it included not only Wang Wei’s “Watching the Hunt,” but also its sequel, Zhang Hu’s 張祐 poem probably composed in 820 right after the end of the Yuanhe Reign.

Watching His Excellency Li of Weibo in the Hunt

At dawn he goes out east of the district walls,⁵
dividing, encircling among the low grasses.⁶
Red banners unfurl toward the sun;
white horses dash into the wind.
Hand reaching to his back, he draws the metal barb,
bending, he draws the horn-bow.
Where ten thousand people point together,
a single goose falls from the cold sky.

觀魏博[何]相公獵

曉出郡城東，
分圍淺草中。
紅旗開向日，
白馬驟迎風。
背手抽金鏃，
翻身控角弓。
萬人齊指處，
一雁落寒空。⁷

Zhang Hu’s poem has its own beauty, but it is an intensely theatrical poem, with Wang Wei’s control but without Wang Wei’s restraint. From encirclement we have the theatrical advance of red banners and white horses, focusing at last on the body of Military Commissioner Li, as he draws an arrow and bends his bow. The flight of that arrow is marked by ten thousand people pointing; the object of the arrow, the gaze, and ten thousand fingers is a wild goose falling from the sky. Shooting wild geese is not easy, but it is a skill considerably less than shooting eagles: wild geese are larger, fly lower and more slowly. In some ways it is the perfect analogy for Zhang Hu’s poetic skill compared to that of Wang Wei, the eagle-shooter.

We should note that Yao He, our anthologist who would later compare earlier poets to “masters of eagle-shooting,” was also at Weibo at roughly the same time and may have witnessed both the wild-goose hunt and Zhang Hu’s little poem.

What had occurred between Wang Wei’s masterful eagle-shooting and Zhang Hu’s easier and splendidly staged wild-goose hunt was the Mid Tang, culminating in the Yuanhe Period, which can be summed up in another hunting scene with a much gaudier bird. The poem is not regulated verse at all, but an old-style poem in the seven character line by Han Yu, probably written around 799.

The Pheasant Takes a Hit

On the plain the fire has burned, now calm and utterly still,
a wild pheasant, dreading the hawk, rises then sinks back down.
The general wants, by his skill, to humble others—
he wheels his horse, bends his bow, holds back, not shooting.
The space gradually narrows, the watchers grow many,
the pheasant springs, the bow full-drawn, the sturdy arrow notched.
Dashing towards people, it rises up sharply over a hundred feet,
the red fletches and silver barb arc after it.
The general looks up smiling, his subalterns congratulate him
as the many colors, rent asunder, plummet before his horse.

雉帶箭

原頭火燒靜兀兀，
野雉畏鷹出復沒。
將軍欲以巧伏人，
盤馬彎弓惜不發。
地形漸窄觀者多，

雉驚弓滿勁箭加。
 衝人決起百餘尺，
 紅翎白鏃隨傾斜。
 將軍仰笑軍吏賀，
 五色離披馬前墮。⁸

Here we can see the more recent ancestor of Zhang Hu's poem, with an even more explicitly staged scene of mastery, in which the landscape has been burned bare of everything but bird, performer, audience and arrow. What distinguishes Han Yu's poem from those of the earlier and later poet-craftsmen, Wang Wei and Zhang Hu, is the self-conscious and explicit pride in mastery: "the general wants, by his skill, to humble others." At the successful shot the general smiles; he is aware not only of his own skill but of the clapping audience. The prey ends up as a brightly colored trophy, pierced by the arrow, lying on the ground at his feet.

I hope my illustrations and allegory of the history of Tang poetry are clear. It was, after all, not I but Yao He who first compared mastery of the poetic craft to eagle-shooting. And it was Yao He who, in his selections, restricted the eagle-shooters to past poetry. The new poets, turning back to the craft of regulated verse after the Yuanhe Reign, were indeed wild-goose shooters: they were practicing a comfortable and easy craft, often with great success. Their craft was a theatrical one, but with less self-conscious mannerism and exaggeration than the Mid-Tang poets.

Yao He represents a poetic conservatism that continued through the Yuanhe Reign into the second quarter of the ninth century, which we call "Late Tang." His name was commonly linked to that of Jia Dao 賈島 whose poetic career spanned and embodied the transition from the Mid-Tang to the Late Tang. In the Tang social world, Yao He had good connections and was on an upward career path; his friend Jia Dao was quite different. Jia Dao had originally been a monk of Fanyang, near modern Beijing. His religious name had been Wuben 無本. Visiting first Luoyang and then Chang'an in the early Yuanhe Reign, he fell under the spell of Han Yu and his group; renouncing his religious vows, he tried to make his way in the political world—with very little success. Some of his early poems are highly mannered and clearly show the influence of the Han Yu group. In these poems he is very much part of contemporary literary and cultural history. Jia Dao is not, however, remembered for such poems. Jia Dao outlived Han Yu and Meng Jiao; and at some point in the latter part of the Yuanhe Reign he turned his attention entirely toward regulated verse in the five syllable line and the craft of the couplet.

Jia Dao has been remembered mostly for the apocryphal anecdote in which he was trying to make a choice between the words "shove" (*tui* 推),

and "knock" (*qiao* 敲), in a line, giving us the later term for decisions of poetic craft, *tuiqiao*. He is also remembered for some stylistically daring lines that bridge the mannerism of the Yuanhe poets and the craft of regulated verse.

In his turn to regulated verse in the five-syllable line Jia Dao was situating himself in a lineage of poet-monks who had been practicing this craft since the period after the An Lushan Rebellion. Only a small proportion of this tradition of works by poet monks survives, but we have enough poems and comments to recognize its extent and prestige. These poet-monks were the companions of the Dali Masters and other secular regulated verse poets of the second half of the eighth century, and they figure with their secular counterparts in Yao He's *Supreme Mystery*. Although Jia Dao himself renounced his Buddhist vows, his cousin, Wuke 無可, remained a monk and a practitioner of such verse like Jia Dao himself.

The Yuanhe poets clearly prized a certain flamboyance and self-advertisement of personality. The aesthetics of regulated verse in the five syllable line, particularly as practiced by the poet-monks could not have been more different. Such poetry represented an *askesis*. The relationship between the strict observance of the rules of craft (*lü* 律) and the *vinaya* (*lü*), the discipline that governs the *sangha*, the Buddhist monastic community, is suggestive; as the ninth century progressed, the analogy between Chan meditation and the reflective process of poetic composition became commonplace. The *askesis* of the poetic craftsman was, in many ways, a satisfying secular counterpart of the *sangha*, where a discipline with strict rules was the medium through which one could shed a secular identity. In striking contrast to the Yuanhe poets, for whom establishing poetic identity was central, the craftsmen of regulated verse are remarkably impersonal, even in their expressed sentiments.

In January 816, the last lunar month of the tenth year of the Yuanhe Reign, the Chan monk Baiyan 白巖 ("Cypress Cliff") passed away. On hearing the news, Jia Dao composed a regulated verse, one of whose couplets became famous because Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 made it an exemplary case of the potential misreading of poetry.

Lamenting the Monk Baiyan

The moss covering your stone couch is fresh,
 how many springs did the Master occupy it?
 They copied and kept your shadow, practicing the Way,
 burned away the body that sat in meditation.
 The pagoda garden bars snow on pines within;
 the sutra chamber locks in dust in the cracks.

I despise that this pair of tears streams down,
I am not one who understands the Emptiness of things.

哭柏巖和尚

苔覆石牀新，
師曾占幾春。
寫留行道影，
焚卻坐禪身。
塔院關松雪，
經房鎖隙塵。
自嫌雙淚下，
不是解空人。⁹

The famous couplet here is the second one, imitated within a few decades, anthologized in Wei Zhuang's *Further Mystery* at the end of the ninth century, and taken up again in the eleventh century in Ouyang Xiu's *Remarks on Poetry* (*Shihua* 詩話), where it comes up in a discussion of how a poem can fail to communicate some meaning in an elementary sense. Ouyang Xiu cites the couplet:

They copied and kept your shadow, practicing the Way,
burned away the body that sat in meditation.

寫留行道影，
焚卻坐禪身。

Then he comments that some readers thought that they had burned a living monk.¹⁰ Ouyang Xiu cites the case as a joke; and in a nice twist, he turns from poetry failing to make sense to the foolish failure of readers to make sense of poetry. There is something here about reading poetry and attention to traces.

The figuration in the second couplet exists only in a language without tense markers; it necessarily disappears in English translation. Chinese poetry, especially on the level of a single line, assumes a unity of time; and that assumption produces the potentially comic effect that Ouyang Xiu mentions: if there is "sitting in meditation" and "burning," one would normally take these as contiguous moments. The good reader, however, would recognize that the play between different moments in time was already announced in the third line, where the time of "practicing the Way" and the continued presence of the image are contrasted. To repeat that antithesis between present and past in the fourth line is a small triumph of

parallelism. Such a conflation of moments—the body in meditation and its cremation—is significant as well as poetically striking. The body in meditation is the vessel of a mind that is empty in being aware of the emptiness of appearances; it is that same body, empty of mind and soul, that is later cremated, literally "burned away."

In many ways this poem represents the shared craft of regulated verse in the five syllable line at its best, with a characteristic Mid-Tang inflection in the second couplet. The balance of level and deflected tones is perfect, the parallelism is technically skillful, and the rhyme-words are commonplace in the extreme. In some ways it was a comfortable and easy craft, within which the poet could sometimes achieve a remarkable beauty of pattern, pattern which could be significant. Every poetic form has its particular gift to poets. In regulated verse we often see a particular pattern or relationship recurring in various versions; and, as with metaphor, such homologies of pattern invite us to consider otherwise very different phenomena as in some way alike.

There is covering and ground, surface and depth. The covering is "appearance," in Buddhist terms, *se* 色, *rupa*, the sensuous surface of things. The surface changes; beneath is emptiness. Even the monk's name repeats this figure, "Cypress Cliff," the stone ground covered with the green of cypress, which in miniature reappears in the stone couch covered by moss. The moss replaces the monk, meditating presence kept the moss away. Moss and monk are both "coverings" and "overlays" of sorts, the loss of one being the gain of the other. Every spring that the monk sat on that bench—the enumeration of years that the second line invokes—was a spring when the moss could not grow. It was always there, always awaiting regeneration, like the tears that the poet sheds at the end.

The absent body is preserved as an "outline," reflection," or "shadow" (*ying* 影), the merest of appearances preserved in a representation, just another "image" in the "doctrine of images" (*xiangjiao* 象教), that teaches us through images the emptiness of the world beneath the images. The shadow is preserved while the body that cast the shadow is gone—an early eighth century anticipation of the pathos of the old photograph, enriched by the fact that the "reflection" or "shadow" is of the monk "practicing the way," learning within that surface of appearances the truth that all within is empty. The "body sat in meditation," became aware of Emptiness; and when that enlightened body died, it was burned and became smoke.

The ashes of the body go to the pagoda, in whose winter garden the pines have a covering of snow, pines being the standard figure for that which endures through change. As the body's ashes go to the pagoda, the painting of the body goes to the library where we have another covering of surfaces, a covering of dust, much like a covering of snow. But "dust" has

strong Buddhist overtones of the “six dusts,” the delusions of the senses, the attachment to images as surfaces rather than as self-consuming indices of the emptiness beneath the surface.

Through the habitual poetics of regulated verse, Jia Dao is “parsing” surface and depth in various versions: moss, body, snow, and dust. And at the end we have the tears, both as a response and as a cleansing. Something comes forth from within the body that should be emptied, the trace of mind not as mirror but as the sentimental heart. Failure to understand Emptiness is the claim of the secular man, who feels the loss of the person—even though he knows that any particular incarnation is only a moment in a continuous process of reincarnation. Poetically he says “I despise” the fact that I weep. He knows better. He does understand the emptiness of things, but he does not accept it.

It is difficult not to read the contradiction of poetics here as well: the showy daring of the Yuanhe poet working in a poetic discipline and representing the truth of a religious discipline that teaches the emptiness and extinction of self.

Before considering the direction that Jia Dao’s poetry was to take, I would like us to look at an imitation by the younger poet Zhou He 周賀, originally a monk and probably still so when he wrote the following piece. The poem cannot be dated precisely, but judging from Zhou He’s career, it probably postdates Jia Dao’s poem by at least a decade at the very earliest.

Lamenting the Monk Xianxiao

On the forests paths the west wind blows hard,
 pine boughs after reading sutra and explanation.
 His icy whiskers were shaved the night he died,
 the remaining *gatha*, written when he was sick.
 The ground was scorched after they cremated the body;
 the hall was empty when first revealed his outline.
 Lamenting him, tears often fall,
 and I recall that he came to my cottage.

哭閑霄上人

林徑西風急，
 松枝講鈔餘。
 凍髭亡夜剃，
 遺傷病時書。
 地燥焚身後，
 堂空著影初。

弔來頻落淚，
 曾憶到吾廬。¹¹

In the third couplet of this poem Zhou He is obviously imitating Jia Dao’s second couplet, but the epigone tropes on his predecessor in less obvious ways as well. Jia Dao opened with a stone bench covered with moss, a visual trace of absence. In the categories of parallel matching, Jiao Dao’s is a couplet of “seeing” (*jian* 見). Zhou He gives the proper answering category of “hearing” (*wen* 聞) for his trace of absence: the sound of the wind in the pines that marks the disappearance of Xianxiao’s sutra chanting and discourses.

The second couplet continues the motif of remainders, now the whiskers and the *gatha*, the devotional verse. I assume that the corpse is shaved (hence “icy” whiskers). In the third couplet Zhou He takes up Jia Dao’s earlier couplet; and in this case it would be hard to argue that the mannered and daring images of the Mid Tang disappeared entirely in the Late Tang. Here the epigone poet carries the image of the predecessor to new extremes. *Ying* 影 is “shadow” and “reflection”; the term was used for religious representations, hence the “hall of reflections,” *yingtang* 影堂, was where religious painting were displayed. Zhou He keeps the explicit reference to the portrait, but he adds another kind of grotesque “shadow” of the monk in the scorching on the ground left from the cremation of the corpse.

As Jia Dao had wept, so too Zhou He must weep the tears of the secular man. Zhou He, however, is not offering a grand opposition of his tears in contrast to those who understand the emptiness of things. Zhou He weeps from a memory of a visit, a remembered presence in face of Xianxiao’s absence.

Jiao Dao’s famous couplet represents the “strong line” in a Mid-Tang sense of the term, as Zhou He’s imitation shows how easily such lines can slip into almost comic grotesqueness. It was a style that Jia Dao was abandoning for a very different kind of “strong line” that characterizes the Late Tang. Already in 812 Han Yu had remarked that Jia Dao would turn away from mannered daring to a more “bland and even,” *pingdan* 平淡, style.¹² The “bland and even” best characterizes Yao He’s selection of earlier regulated verse in *Supreme Mystery*, and it characterizes most of Jia Dao’s lines. But as Jia Dao matured as a poet, he found a new kind of poetic beauty.

The following poem is also regulated verse in the five syllable line and also for a Buddhist monk. This poem can probably be dated to the Taihe Reign (827-35). By conventional periodization it belongs in the “Late Tang,” just as the lament for Baiyan belongs to the “Mid-Tang.” There is

something a bit absurd in giving different period names to two poems written by the same poet in the same form, both in a Buddhist social context, separated by one or two decades. Yet the contrast between the two poems seems to bear out the notion that a change in poetic sensibility had occurred in the interim.

The later poem lacks the modestly figurative couplet that caught Ouyang Xiu's attention, the couplet that was to become one of the touchstones of Jia Dao's craft. The poem also lacks the repeated patterns that function like metaphor.

Sent to Reverend Mo of White Tower Mountain

I know you have gone back to White Tower,
I watch that hill far in the clear evening sky.
In a stone chamber man's mind grows still,
on an icy pond moonbeams barely remain.
Wispy clouds melt, dividing in puffs,
ancient trees dry, shedding kindling.
Who hears chimes in the last part of night?—
cold is the highest summit of the western peak.

寄白閣默公

已知歸白閣，
山遠晚晴看。
石室人心靜，
冰潭月影殘。
微雲分片滅，
古木落薪乾。
後夜誰聞磬，
西峰絕頂寒。¹³

Reverend Mo is literally "Reverend Silence," and except for the peculiar question in the seventh line—asking, perhaps rhetorically, who hears chimes at a time when chimes would not be rung—the poem is one of silence.

Like the lament for Baiyan the poem begins with an image of absence as the poet stares toward the distant mountain to which Reverend Mo has gone. The images in the middle couplets all belong to that imagined distance. The stillness (*jing* 靜) is both the silence of the place and the serenity of mind, an enclosure stone that contains a mind rather than a body. In the capping line of the couplet Jia Dao flattens the space of containment

into a two-dimensional surface, playing on the Buddhist figure of the mind as a mirror, which in turn is the figure of the calm pool reflecting the moonlight. And the light is fading in that mirroring pool. The distance of speculation opens a space for images of nature and the person to merge. Self is obliterated here more effectively than in the lament for Baiyan.

In many ways this is a more beautiful and subtle poem than "Lamenting the Monk Baiyan." The fading daylight that opens the poem becomes fading moonlight in a pool that is the figure of the dispassionate mind. The third couplet continues the image of dissolution, first with light clouds breaking into pieces and disappearing (*mie* 滅 being, of course, the term for "extinction" in Nirvana), then in the trees shedding pieces of dry wood, specifically "kindling," the material for fire that will consume itself and the material body in a brief light. In the end we have an unheard sound in the darkness, the sound that is again the image of the immateriality of existence, until at last there is only cold.

Such regulated verse in the five-syllable line has a restrictive lexicon, and poems on monks have their own favorite images and terms. There is nothing daring in Jia Dao's poem here; it is, in some ways, highly conventional in the poetic practice of the age. Yet the images are deployed with a mastery of the craft that is as self-effacing as it is perfect.

During the 720 and 730s younger poets flocked to make the acquaintance of Yao He and Jia Dao, who duly celebrated their journeys, failures, and successes. Unlike so many "minor" poets of the eighth century we have their collections either complete or in substantial part. Such poets, often paying tribute to Jia Dao, continued to appear throughout the ninth century. The reason for their survival was their continuing popularity. They were, by and large, not the poets mentioned in serious accounts of the history of Tang poetry in prefaces, nor were they accorded more than minor status in anthologies like Gao Bing's 高棅 (1350-1423) 1393 *Tangshi pinhui* 唐詩品彙, which ranked and organized poets by period. These were the poets, however, who figured prominently in compositional anthologies like the Southern Song *Tang santi shi* 唐三體詩, the Yuan *Yingkui lüsuì* 瀛奎律髓 (combining Tang and Song regulated poems), *Tang guchui* 唐鼓吹, and a host of other anthologies. The *Tang guchui*, a very popular anthology indeed judging by the number of editions, is restricted to regulated verse in the seven syllable line: it begins with Liu Zongyuan and Liu Yuxi, then moves to Xu Hun, which makes no sense in any history of Tang poetry. What is of particular interest about these anthologies is their focus on late eighth and ninth century poetry and their relative indifference to those considered "major figures." Du Fu, Li Bai, and Han Yu may have received commentaries, but these "minor" poets accumulated a large body of critical comment on fine judgments of craft. When Ming plays combine lines of

Tang poets to cap a scene (always in the seven syllable line), it is usually from such late eighth- and ninth-century poets. Poetry manuals (*shifa* 詩法) and “illustrative couplets” (*jutu* 句圖) favor them. Their continuing popularity was the unstated cultural fact in the background of orthodox fulminations against the Mid and Late Tang from Yan Yu through the Ming archaists. This was another “Tang poetry” whose very existence has been all but forgotten, relegated to a few lines or paragraphs in histories of literature. Even the “Late Tang” is no longer theirs: Qing critics gave the period to Du Mu and Li Shangyin, who could be taken as “serious” in the way Qing critics liked poets to be serious.

To learn to love such poets is to think of poetry in a way very different from the way we think of the “major” poets. It is to accept poets who all sound very much alike, whose regulated poems in the seven character line sound more distinct from their poems in a five character line than they sound distinct from a poet writing seventy years later in the same form. To learn to love them is to accept the same images appearing over and over again, where the triumph is in pattern and choice of words. To learn to love them is to have no biography to speak of as a context to frame poems. Whether they are shooting eagles or slower and larger wild geese, theirs is a skill which has little to do with their names and life stories; it is a skill that appears at a certain moment within history but can be linked to history only in a troubled way. When Jia Dao wrote in the early 820s the empire had gone through a long phase of reconsolidation and seemed a strong and durable presence that would endure. Writing eighty years later, Wei Zhuang does not sound all that different; but Chang’an and the dynasty were in ruins. One might easily interpret the earlier as the voice of an age of peace and the latter as *wangguo zhi yin* 亡國之音, the “tones of a fallen kingdom.” Unless I knew which poet wrote which poem, however, I could not tell them apart. This then is “poetry” in a key that has no place any more in how we read literature and the way literature is taught.

Endnotes

1. Wang Dang 王謙, *Tang yulin jiaozheng* 唐語林校證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), p. 56.
2. Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, ed., *Tangren xuan Tangshi xinbian* 唐人選唐詩新編 (Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1996), p. 363.
3. There are some surprises (ten poems from the Daoist eccentric Gu Kuang 顧況), but the only inclusion of a now well-known Mid Tang poet is one quatrain by Zhang Ji 張籍.

4. Chen Tiemin 陳鐵民, *Wang Wei ji jiaozhu* 王維集校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), p. 609.
5. That is, the seat of government and headquarters for the Weibo military region.
6. Hunts used beaters to cover an area and drive animals in toward the center, where they could be easily killed.
7. Yan Shoucheng 嚴壽澄, *Zhang Hu shiji* 張祜詩集 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1983), p. 1. The title as it appears in *Further Mystery* has an officer surnamed He as the recipient; in the collected poems the title is given as “Watching Li Minister of Works of Xuzhou on the Hunt” 觀徐州李司空獵. The title in *Further Mystery* is probably in error and should be Li rather than He. This is probably Li Su 李愬 and the year was probably 820. Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, ed., *Tang Wudai wenxue biannian shi* 唐五代文學編年史, vol. 2 (Shenyang: Liaohai chubanshe, 1998), p. 808.
8. Qian Zhonglian 錢仲聯, *Han Changli shi xinian jishi* 韓昌黎詩系年集釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984), p. 111.
9. Qi Wenbang 齊文榜, *Jia Dao ji jiaozhu* 賈島集校注 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2001), p. 89.
10. Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *Ouyang Yongshu ji* 歐陽永叔集, vol. 5 (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1936), 14.116.
11. *Quan Tang shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 15.5724.
12. “Song Wuben shi gui Fanyang” 送無本師規範陽. *Han Changli shi xinian jishi* 韓昌黎詩繫年集釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984, 1998), p. 820.
13. Qi Wenbang 齊文榜, *Jia Dao ji jiaozhu* 賈島集校注 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2001), p. 110.

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Grace S. Fong, Editor

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