

**TRANSLATION AS A MEANS TO
THE DISCOVERY OF POETIC ARGUMENTATION:
AN EXPERIMENT WITH THE TANG POET LIU ZHANGQING[§]**

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ABSTRACT This essay uses translation to explore the art of argumentation in Tang poetry, and what Tang poetry can tell us about a certain model of argumentation. The underlying premise is that argumentation is a key feature of Chinese poetry. A basic set of four “topics” of argumentation (definition, consequence, analogy/contrast, circumstance) is introduced, and translation is used to discover the deployment of these topics in fourteen poems by the Tang poet Liu Zhangqing (ca. 726-ca. 790). Translations by Herbert A. Giles (1845–1935) and Witter Bynner (1881–1968) are also considered. It is hypothesized that the topic of circumstance will be a key element in poetic argumentation. After the “experiment”, however, it is concluded that the poems are best regarded as acts of definition, with circumstance as an important balancing element. Analysis of the poems also suggests that the four topics are not a homogeneous group, but belong to two different levels of argumentation.

KEYWORDS Tang Poetry, The Art of Argumentation, Liu Zhangqing, Translation

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INTRODUCTION TO THE “EXPERIMENT”

The word experiment has two different senses—two in addition to the colloquial sense of “let’s just see what happens”. The first is “product oriented”. An end result is imagined, in greater or lesser degree of clarity, and certain processes are applied to a base material to achieve that result. The experiment is a success, or is most successful, when it reveals a way of making the desired product. The second is “process oriented”. A process or theory is formulated and it is applied to a material. The resulting product may be worthy in itself, but it exists primarily to reveal the potential of the processes that created it, or of unknown potential in the material used in the experiment.

Placing the translation of poetry in this framework, “experiment” in the first sense entails taking some idea of how poetry might be translated, applying it to a given body of poetry, and then appraising the results: does the method produce a “good” translation? If not, how can the method be changed to produce a more satisfactory one? Insofar as poetry is a matter of aesthetics (and the translator a creature of vanity), translation is indeed a product-oriented task. However, the process-oriented side of experimental translation is worthy of special consideration. In “experiment” in the second sense, the translations are primarily a heuristic tool, used to explore unknown qualities of both the theory and the “raw material”—the poems—used in the experiment. The translations are a by-product—almost. This essay adopts a process-oriented approach. A certain theory of argumentation is held to be worthy of exploration, and translation is the means by which it is applied to a certain body of poetry. Discoveries are expected regarding the potential of the theory and the qualities of this selection of poetry, if not of some more general subject—poetry of the eighth century, Tang poetry, or classical Chinese poetry in the whole.

The raw material here is a selection of poems by the Tang poet Liu Zhangqing 劉長卿 (ca. 726-ca.790).¹ Roughly fifteen years the junior of Du Fu and twenty five of Li Bai, Liu Zhangqing’s large extant corpus of poetry—more than five hundred poems—reflects both his output and the coalescence of a readership around him. This readership has not always been completely positive: from his entry into the critical record he has been criticized for repetitive imagery and diction, and the most extensive discussion of him in English describes him

1 These are the dates proposed by Chu Zhongjun; see Chu Zhongjun 儲仲君, ed. *Liu Zhangqing shi biannian jianzhu* 劉長卿詩編年箋注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996, preface dated 1993; hereafter “Chu”). The most thorough discussion of Liu’s life, Jiang Yin 蔣寅, *Dali shiren yanjiu* 大歷詩人研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), pp. 21–50 and 431–451, endorses the birthdate of ca. 726, but further suggests (p. 451) that Liu died by 789. On the pronunciation of Liu Zhangqing’s name, often read and romanized “Liu Changqing”, see Xu Xiaofeng 徐曉峰, “You jinti shi de pingze lü lun Tangren Liu Zhangqing mingzi de duyin” 由近體詩的平仄律論唐人劉長卿名字的讀音, *Renwen congkan* 7: 287–92 (2012).

as “undeniably bland”.² The Qing critic Fang Dongshu 方東樹 (1772–1851) offered a more positive description:

He only uses the language of everyday life, but his thoughts are always deep, and his words always resonate in the spirit. His invention is clear and delicate, and his diction is never dead or sluggish ... We may compare him to a fine chef, who uses only chicken, duck, fish and ordinary meats but cooks with just the right methods and brings out the perfect taste. Meanwhile, a vulgar chef might use orangutan lips and leopard fetuses but it still just would not taste right. Indeed you would spit it out in disgust.

文房只用眼前習見字、習見語，而無一意不深，無一字不靈，思致清綺，絕無滯相死語。……譬如良庖，只用雞鴨魚肉，而火候烹煮有法，則至味存焉。俗庖雖用猩唇豹胎，而不爽於口，祇取唾惡也。³

We shall not find any orangutan lips in the following poems, but Liu Zhangqing was a skilled craftsman, and his poetry, narrowly represented in English, is well worth understanding better both in its own right and as a representative of Tang poetry in the mid-eighth century.

The theory is a four-fold scheme of “topics”. The word “topic” likely calls to mind specific topics of discussion, but in the rhetorical tradition it has a more general sense. The topic, or “topos”, refers to the general strategies of argumentation one may resort to in the development of arguments about specific subjects. This sounds rather abstract, but it is actually very practical. Confronted with a specific subject, one mentally runs it through a set of argumentative strategies, looking for the ones that feel persuasive in this specific case. The topics are the “regions of experience from which the substance of an argument can be drawn”.

The quotation just given comes from a 1953 article by a group of writing instructors at the College of the University of Chicago, entitled “Looking for an Argument”.⁴ The problem is exactly how many “regions of experience” one ought to identify. Classical and medieval rhet-

2 For the former, see the note accompanying his poems in the eighth century anthology *Zhongxing jianqi ji* (Collection of the Stalwarts of the Restoration); Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, ed., *Tangren xuan Tangshi xinbian* 唐人選唐詩新編 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1996), p. 502. For the latter, see Stephen Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High Tang* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 258–61, quote on p. 258, continuing: “but Liu’s very blandness touched the aesthetic interests of many later readers”.

3 Cited at Chu p. 466.

4 See Manuel Bilsky, McCrea Hazlett, Robert E. Streeter, and Richard M. Weaver, “Looking for an Argument”, *College English* 14.4: 210–16 (Jan. 1953). For developments of the topical scheme that is the basis for the one utilized in this essay, see Richard M. Weaver’s widely anthologized lecture “Language is Sermonic”, included in Weaver, *In Defense of Tradition: Collected Shorter Writings of Richard M. Weaver, 1929–1963*, ed. and introduced by Ted J. Smith III (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000), pp. 352–370; and, with analysis of specific texts, Richard M. Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1953).

oric differentiated between a rather large number of topics. Aristotle identified twenty eight in the *Rhetoric*—not to mention the hundreds in the *Topics*. Cicero reorganized the subject into some eighteen categories, and Boethius gives twenty eight.⁵ To be sure, there is value in applying fine distinctions to the evaluation of arguments, but there is also something to be said for simplifying one's toolkit. A simple set of tools is easier put to use. Moreover, simpler tools are easily customized, to fit the needs of a given subject matter. The authors of "Looking for an Argument" proposed a much more manageable set of four topics, and it is these that I adopt here, with one crucial modification.

The first topic is *definition*. An argument from definition refers to what a certain thing is, especially to the class (or "genus") to which it belongs. In the pithy example used in "Looking for an Argument", a student is being robbed at gunpoint. Turning to the topic of definition, he points out to the would-be robber that his action is a "crime". His action defined in a bad way, the robber will stop. Or not. If the student worries that this argument from definition will not prove persuasive to a gun wielding assailant, he may move to the second topic: *consequence*, or "cause and effect". In this case, the student would warn the robber that his actions will cause him to go to jail. And if this approach again fails, the third topic may prove useful: *analogy and contrast*. In the example in "Looking for an Argument", the student asks the robber to imagine himself the victim of a robbery, but the topic of analogy and contrast should be understood much more broadly than that. *Definition* has to do with the essence of a matter, and *consequence* with facts that follow from that matter, or lead to its presence; with *analogy and contrast*, the argument steps away from the matter at hand and moves fully into the realm of thought. Perhaps the robber could be told that in taking the student's wallet, he is acting like an early frost, ruining the wheat before the harvest.

Our fourth topic is *circumstance*, referring both to the context in which the subject of debate is found in the world and to the contexts in which it is placed in discourse. This is a substitution in the original formulation, which listed "authority" as a fourth topic. The authors themselves acknowledge that authority—"because the Bible tells me so" is their example—is not a full-fledged topic. It merely bolsters the first three topics. Though similar criticism might be made of circumstance—that when an argument is made, the circumstances will be converted into one of the other topics—the identification of circumstance as a topic is useful, for two specific reasons. First, "Looking for an Argument" is a prescriptive account of the topics. Students are being told how to write. But a critical version of the topics will better draw on the descriptive side of rhetoric, and when we look at arguments, and especially arguments in literary works, we will find them furnished with a great deal of circumstance. Second, the substitution of circumstance for authority corrects a flaw in the original conception. The author of the article most prominently associated with this topi-

5 These figures are extracted from Michael C. Leff, "The Topics of Argumentative Invention in Latin Rhetorical Theory from Cicero to Boethius", *Rhetorica* 1.1: 23–44 (Spring 1983), pp. 39, 43.

cal scheme was Richard M. Weaver (1929–1963), who would continue to use and develop it over the next decade. But Weaver was also an ardent segregationist, and there is a close connection between his promotion of *definition* as the ultimate topic and his resistance to the American civil rights movement, which aimed to reform the problematic social definitions of mid-twentieth century American society. Weaver was unable to accept that definitions mean different things depending on the circumstances in which one encounters them. Promoting the topic of circumstance—once described by Weaver as “a surrender of reason”—restores a balance to this set of topics.⁶

What could all this have to do with Chinese poetry? My proposition is this: poetry is not just lyrical expression. It is the articulation of a train of thought, and thought proceeds like an argument, with oneself or with an imagined reader. Or perhaps “a train of thought” is a good *definition* of what lyrical expression really is. The four topics, I suggest, provide a useful way of analyzing the intentional structure of a poem.

The following hypothesis was formulated before the topical analysis of the poems was undertaken: Circumstance will be a key poetic topic. Specifically, it was thought that we will see how circumstance bends toward the other topics, while also retaining its circumstantial quality.

TOPICAL DISCUSSIONS

Fourteen poems divided into three groups follow, with literal translations, Chinese texts, notes, topical translations, and discussions of each poem. By “literal” is meant a translation that focuses on equivalences at the word and sentence level, weighted toward the latter where necessary. The topical translations serve a heuristic function. The literal ones, in their relative transparency, are a check on experimental chicanery.

GROUP A. EIGHT SONGS AT DRAGON GATE 龍門八詠⁷

Form: Each poem consists of six five-syllable lines – not a common form.

Title: Beginning in the late fifth century and continuing through the Tang, some 2,300 caves and niches with over 110,000 images, “some no bigger than a thumbnail”, were carved into the limestone banks of the Yi river, just southeast of Luoyang. For an il-

6 Weaver’s philosophy of rhetoric should be read with Sharon Crowley, “When Ideology Motivates Theory: The Case of the Man from Weaverville”, *Rhetoric Review* 20.1–2: 66–93 (Spring 2001), and a sampling of the essays collected in Weaver, *In Defense of Tradition*. For the “surrender of reason”, see Weaver, “Language”, p. 363.

7 Chu pp. 54–58. Also Yang Shiming 楊世明, ed., *Liu Zhangqing ji biannian jiaozhu* 劉長卿集編年校注 (Beijing: Renminwenxuechubanshe, 1999, preface dated 1987; hereafter “Yang”), pp. 64–70. The base text for both modern editions is a 1498 printing. The texts given here follow Chu Zhongjun unless otherwise specified; variant readings from a partially extant Northern Song printing are noted, from Chu’s collation.

illustrated introduction in English, see Jan van Alphen, ed., *The Buddha in the Dragon Gate: Buddhist Sculpture of the 5th-9th Centuries from Longmen, China* (Antwerp: Ethnographic Museum, 2001), quotation on p. 55.

References to Buddhist concepts in the following notes rely primarily on Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., ed., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014); all Sanskrit terms cited here can be found in that work. For additional information on Liu Zhangqing's Buddhist poetry, see He Jianping 何劍平, "Liu Zhangqing yu fojiao xiangguan shiji kao" 劉長卿與佛教相關事蹟考, *Wuhan daxue xuebao (renwen kexueban)* 62.5: 528–33 (2009), and Zhao Junsheng 趙君生, "Liu Zhangqing yu Liu Zongyuan de Tiantaizong foyuan" 劉長卿與柳宗元的天台宗佛緣, *Nanchang gaozhuan xuebao* 75.2: 56–58, 61 (2008).

No. 1: At the Mouth of the Watchtowers of Yi 關口

The autumn mountains, day by day, enter a more fallen, desolate state,
As the autumn waters rush the waves on faster.
All I see is the vapor-breath of fish—and dragons—
That forever makes cold the mist and rain.
Who can fathom the power of nature's forces of creation and transformation?
Emptily I look toward the paired cliffs.

秋山日搖落，秋水急波瀾。獨見魚龍氣，長令煙雨寒。誰窮造化力，空向兩崖看。

Title: As the Yi river flows into the Dragon Gate area, hills on either bank stand like the "watchtowers" (*que*, a word that literally suggests the "gap" between two such towers) that mark the gates to a palace.

Line 3: The dragons are the Buddhist *nāga*, which "inhabit an underwater kingdom filled with magnificent palaces"; see Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary*, s.v.

Line 6: "Emptily" (*kong*), conveying Buddhist emptiness (*śūnyatā*), is a key word in this poem series, and is used liberally throughout Liu Zhangqing's poetry.

Topical translation

Autumn is falling, ever more, rushing the river.
In this, all I see is cold mist, rain.
What causes it? The cold breath of the dragon.
No. No one can fathom the creative power of nature
That I look upon, emptily, between the palace cliffs.

Discussion

The topical progression of this poem is: circumstance (first couplet, condensed to one line in the topical translation), which sets the ground for a defining force (second couplet), followed by a return to circumstance (third couplet). About to enter the temple complex, the poet finds himself in vaguely ominous circumstances. The season is taking the life out of the wooded hills, and the swelling waters are becoming dangerous. It turns out, however, that the barren circumstances clear the way for a vision of a source of definition: the chilly mists are a sign of the numinous dragon that is the lord of Dragon Gate. Feeling the cold there, he senses its power. But this knowledge is countered by the realization that he cannot comprehend the causation or definition of what he is witnessing. All he can do is stare into the empty space of circumstance. Yet it is in this empty, circumstantial space that the deepest Buddhist definition (*sūnyatā*, “emptiness”) resides.

No. 2: The Eastern Crossing 水東渡

The leaves on the mountains cover the cliffs, red—
Autumn colors on the thousand peaks, abundant.
A night spring releases a pure resounding sound,
A cold shoal gives life to sublime waves.
Bit by bit I see, on the moonlight on the sands,
The returning ones, struggling to cross the river.

山葉傍崖赤，千峰秋色多。夜泉發清響，寒渚生微波。稍見沙月上⁸，歸人爭渡河。

Title: “Crossing” (*du*) symbolizes the Buddhist adherents’ passage across the sea of *samsāra* to the “other shore” of *nirvāna*.

Lines 1–2: “Cliffs” and “peaks” is a gross exaggeration of the topography: the “mountains” of Dragon Gate are rounded hills. For *pang* (literally “accompanies”, “sits beside”) as “covers the ground”, see Paul W. Kroll, *A Student’s Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 335.

Lines 2–3: The bare juxtaposition of day, when autumn colors would be apparent, and night seems artless, but is likely explained as allegory, the “colors” (*se*) of autumn being the phenomenal world of *rūpa*.

Line 4: The “subtle waves” (*wei bo*) would allude to the *pāramitās* (*boluomi* 波羅蜜, *bo* literally meaning “wave”), the means of reaching (“crossing to”, *du*, in line six) *nirvāna*.

8 Chu follows the received edition, which reads 沙上月. The more unusual syntax followed here is found in the Northern Song printing, and in the *Wencui* (comp. 1011; Chu, citing Ming printing in SBCK).

Lines 5–6: Note the very similar image in the poet’s “On the Yangtze, Facing the Moon” 江中對月 (Chu p. 523; translation in Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry*, p. 261). The recycling of images and even entire lines is a much remarked upon feature of Liu’s poetry.

Topical translation

Autumn cliffs, red. The color is abundant—
 But it only accompanies.
 Then,
 Released as if from a drawn bow, a hidden spring’s sound,
 Giving birth by the shoal to sublime waves.
 But then,
 The moonlight comes to the sandy banks, and there I see
 People struggling to make themselves make the crossing.

Discussion

A topical analysis of this poem’s three couplets reveals: a definition that shifts into circumstance (couplet one), contrasted with a strong definition that issues strong consequences (couplet two), which in turn is contrasted with a scene of weakened consequence (couplet three), the product not of definition but circumstance. The red autumn leaves would seem to define the scene the poet faces, but, in this Buddhist allegory, the colors are revealed to be the illusory phenomenal world (*se*, “color,” but also *rūpa*). The red is actually circumstance, “accompanying” the Buddhist peaks but not truly part of them. This false definition contrasts with the real one that appears, in a telegraphed fashion, in the second couplet. There we hear and see the signs of the Buddhist truth, the gurgling spring and the soft waves being the effects of that sublime cause. That the definition is hidden and known by its signs takes us into the topic of consequence, which is mirrored in the last line of the poem. There, the pilgrims are struggling to *cause themselves* to “cross the river”, that is, to reach the *nirvāna* of true definition. This difficult course of consequence stands in contrast with the easy and natural one of the spring and its waves. The pilgrims find themselves mired in the circumstances of the phenomenal world.

No. 3: The Pagoda of the Lord of Prosperity 福公塔

In silence, facing the River Yi,
 Which travels along, forever, never having reversed course,
 Flowing east, on its own, from dawn to dusk,
 And he, for thousands of years, emptily, clouds and mountains.

Who is there to see the white gull?
Without a mind, between the isles.

寂寞對伊水，經行長未還。東流自朝暮，千載空雲山。誰見白鷗鳥，無心洲渚間。

Title: Yang (p. 66) identifies the “Lord of Prosperity” as the monk Yifu 義福, who died in 732 and was interred at Dragon Gate.

Line 1: “Silence” gestures to the practice of “seclusion” (*jimo*, written as 寂默) in Buddhist meditation (*pratisṃhalayana*). See also line five of “The Stone Tower”.

Line 2: *Jingxing* (“travels along”) alludes to the Buddhist concept of *caṅkama*, which includes both meditative walking and the wandering life of the ordained monk. It is used again in the poem presented to a nun translated below.

Line 5: Following the *Tangshi pinhui* (comp. 1393), Chu reads 唯 (“One only sees”, or perhaps, “He only sees”) for 誰 (“Who is there to see”).

Topical translation

In eternal silence, he faces the River Yi,
Which moves along, as he sits there, forever,
Emptily, with the clouds and the mountains.
A gull, unmoved by consciousness,
Flits amongst the isles.
But who, moved by consciousness, would see it?
And who, unmoved?

Discussion

This poem presents a balance of analogy and contrast. Through analogy, one moves closer to definition; through contrast, toward mere circumstance. On the one hand, the state of the monk’s bones, interred in the pagoda, is the very opposite of the river below, which is in constant, immortal motion. This is contrast. On the other, the monk has merged into nature, become a fixture of the motionless mountain that corresponds to the eternally flowing river. Thus the river, described here as “travelling” like a Buddhist monk, is analogy, and the monk is a part of the natural “emptiness” of hills that forms a coherent scene with the river. And yet, the poet cannot help but feel that the monk is “emptily” left behind there, in the lonesome silence of the mountains. The tension carries over into the final couplet, in which a gull on the islets is seen by no one. The gull represents unconscious participation in the defining power of nature. This is available to no one—or, alternatively, it is available to those who, like

the monk, have passed on into nature. Or, perhaps, the participation in definition is available, momentarily, to the poet, and to the reader of a poem on this subject.

No. 4: The Altar-niche of Lord Distant 遠公龕

The pine road goes toward a spirit lodge;
 To a florid altar-niche returns an old monk.
 Free clouds follow his tin-tipped staff,
 The setting sun lowers upon the golden ropes.
 As we enter night, in the subtle kingfisher green—
 A thousand peaks are brightened by a single lamp.

松路向精舍，花龕歸老僧。閒雲隨錫杖，落日低金繩。入夜翠微裏，千峰明一燈。

Title: Yang Shiming (p. 67) identifies “Lord Distant” as a sixth-century monk named Huiyuan 慧遠 (to be distinguished from the more famous late fourth-century figure of that name); both this Huiyuan and another eighth century candidate are proposed in He Jianping, “Liu Zhangqing yu fojiao” p. 530.

Line 1: The “spirit lodge” (*jingshe*) is where monks live and practice.

Line 2: Syntactically, the altar *causes* the monk to return. Compare “brighten” in line six. *Gui* means both “return” and “die”, and as a noun refers to the monk’s living residence, the *lena*.

Line 3: The tin (or brass) ring staff (*khakkhara*) is a common image in poetry about monks; see John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 113–115, with a photograph.

Line 4: Golden ropes are used to mark off the roads in the Land Free from Impurities; see *The Lotus Sutra*, tr. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), Ch. 3, pp. 52, 53. The term appears elsewhere in Tang poetry and would seem to refer to some real feature in the temple scene—Yang suggests the pathways within the temple precincts. The *Hanyu dacidian*, citing this poem, claims that it refers to the horizon.

Line 5: *Cuiwei* (“subtle kingfisher green”), a rhyming binome, is a longstanding epithet for the colors of the wooded middle ranges of a mountain. See also line six of “Come Down from the Mountain”.

Topical translation

The pine road leads to the temple.
 It takes the monk—this one or *that* one—
 Where he was meant to go—
 To the altar,
 Where free clouds follow him, and—
 But—the sun sets on his shining scene.
 The mountain's colors darken, a thousand peaks dim—
 Making his lamp all the brighter.

Discussion

In the topical motion of this poem, consequence (the first two couplets) is diminished by circumstance (line four), but then restored by it. Two monks may be discerned in the “return” (*gui*): the deceased one of the title and a living one who, in the poet's field of vision, is returning to his temple lodge. Both are following a “pine road” path of consequence, to death or to rest, and the poet is also, like the floating clouds, caused to follow the clanging of the monk's staff. Then the sun sets. Circumstance imposes itself upon the poet's experience. And yet, what would appear to be circumstance introduces another kind of consequence: the setting sun brings darkness, and darkness facilitates the greater illumination of the definition at the heart of the poem, in the form of the lamp of the monk's teachings.

No. 5: The Stone Tower 石樓

Hidden there, I see the garland tower,
 Illuminating the green woods, across and in the river.
 On watery fields, autumn geese come down
 At the mountain temple, the night bell is deep.
 In the silence, all animals rest,
 The wind and the spring purify a mind set on the Way.

隱隱見花閣，隔河映青林。水田秋雁下，山寺夜鐘深。寂寞群動息，風泉清道心。

Title: Yang identifies the “stone tower” as a structure in the Fragrant Hills temple. A “tower” is simply a building of two stories or more.

Line 1: “Garland” (*hua*) may mean that it is painted with ‘flowery’ designs. The *Tangshi pinhui* reads *wei* 危, “teetering”.

Line 6: Yang identifies a hot spring known as the Stone Tower Pool 石樓潭.

Topical translation

Distant, almost hidden—

From across the river, it illuminates,

Flowers within deep green woods.

And so the watery field reflects the geese.

Reflections all.

But deep in darkness the temple bell sounds,

And so brings silence to the geese, and to all animate things,

And so the silence lets the sound of the wind and the flowing spring

Purify the mind, that meditated upon this.

Discussion

A topical reading of this poem finds a motion from definition to analogy, to a surprising source of consequence, on to a pregnant circumstance, and finally a return to definition. The basis of the topical movement is a parallel presentation of sight and sound, a common technique in Tang poetry. The parallel occurs in the second couplet, but it also divides the whole poem, the first three lines being oriented around sight and the latter three sound. What is *seen* is mysterious, perhaps wonderful, an “illumination”—but it is only a reflection, of the tower, the hills, and the geese. It is definition that gives way to likeness, or analogy. The second half proceeds back toward definition. Sound would seem more intangible than sight, but it is sound that carries consequence here. The sound of the bell in line four clears the way for the silence of evening in line five. Silence then becomes the sublime circumstance within which the subtle tones of the breeze and the gurgling spring become audible, and these in turn *cause* the purification of the poet’s mind—a mind which was “set on the Way”, or the correct definition, but needed this stimulus to join with it.

No. 6: Coming Down From the Mountain 下山

Who knows what they mean, coming and going?

The solitary clouds are forever free, on their own.

The wind is cold—even before I cross the water—

And in the sunset—again I turn to look upon the hills.

With the trees shorn of leaves, the array of peaks stands out,

Dragon Palaces nestled in the hazy kingfisher mountainsides.

誰識往來意，孤雲長自閒。風寒未渡水，日暮更看山。木落眾峰出，龍宮蒼翠間。

Line 1: *Shi* (“Who knows”) is both the common verb “to know” and the Buddhist term for consciousness (*vijñāna*).

Line 6: “Dragon Palace” is a kenning for “Buddhist temple”.

Topical translation

The clouds move, as they will, always
 Beyond knowing.
 Prior, too, the cold wind at the crossing here.
 But the sunset is momentary, and the moment causes me to look,
 And see, in the autumn moment, with the trees stripped of leaves,
 The peaks emerge, with their temples,
 Not quite hidden in the hills’ blue dusk.

Discussion

This poem presents a definition and then gestures toward a way of perceiving it: through the consequential capacities of circumstance. The first couplet presents an essential definition, or a sign of one: the clouds, like the gull in poem three, are “free” participants in nature, beyond the strictures of conscious knowledge. To presume to know them is to attribute to them a conscious intention (*yi*, “what they mean”) alien to their nature. (As if, for instance, one were to claim to “understand” a rock.) The second couplet shows the way forward, operating through a pair of complementary grammatical function words, *wei* 未 (“even before”, or “not yet”) and *geng* 更 (“again”). The poet expects the cold wind to be felt as an accompanying circumstance of the open water on the crossing, but it arrives before it should, because like the play of the gull, the cold is part of a definition that is prior to his experience of the scene. In the following line, expected circumstance is restored, as the moment of sunset catches his attention, but this circumstance is given a gentle consequential effect. The sunset causes him to turn his head back to the hills, which the autumn—another circumstance, the revolution of the seasons—has cleared. Upon that sunlit canvas, he witnesses the source of definition again—the “dragon temples” in which the Buddhist truth is stored and practiced. Yet their radiance remains half-hidden in the mountain blue.

No. 7: The Western Crossing 水西渡

The River Yi sways its mirrored light:
 It is as if the fine scales of the dragon (or the fish) are not separated from me.
 Thousands of altar niches, accompanying the Way, ancient,
 One bird, on the sand, white:
 How is it that the clouds going back to the mountain
 Are able to retain this traveler heading back to town?
 伊水搖鏡光，纖鱗如不隔。千龕道傍古，一鳥沙上白。何事還山雲，能留向城客。

Form: Poems seven and eight switch to deflected tone rhymes—a significant formal feature?

Lines 3-4: The “Way” is both the Way of Buddhism and the literal “path” on the mountain.

Topical translation

The river a bright, rippling mirror, as if
 The scales of the fish—or the dragon!—were no longer separated from me.
 Ancient and white, altars and the paths and birds and sand—
 A single white bird on the sand.
 Ancient and white.
 Clouds, from their mountain, would make me stay, from my town.
 They would. As if.

Discussion

This poem features a strong definition in the middle, couched between illusory analogies in the first and last couplets. At the beginning, the river is like a mirror, and in its dazzling light the numinous fish—or the dragon lord of Dragon Gate—is now visible to the poet. At the end, nature has taken on a human aspect, the mountains and clouds beckoning him to linger on. This is all poetic conceit. The dragon scales are an illusion produced by the sun’s glint on the river, and of course the clouds have taken no notice of him. As the topical translation indicates, it is a world of “as if”. Nested in that world of illusion, however, we find the topic of definition. “Ancient” and “white” would appear to be mere adjectives, attached to the temples and the birds respectively, but they are actually essential properties: “ancient” is to say “eternal”, and “white” is “colorless”, or beyond the phenomenal world of consciousness, as was the white gull in the third poem. These transcendental qualities signal a hidden defining power. And the poet, having witnessed this, has joined, however briefly, with that source of definition.

This is the positive reading of this poem’s topical structure: that although he must return to the world of illusion, that world now serves as a frame, setting this experience of the eternal and colorless off in contrast. In the problematic reading, the scene of definition becomes *to him* mere circumstance, participation in it denied to him by his bonds with the phenomenal world. The difference between these two readings is a question of the power attributed to poetry: if it is acknowledged to be a power of definition, then the former, positive interpretation should hold.

No. 8: Crossing 渡水

At sunset I come down from the mountain,
 From a thousand mountains the evening bells are released.
 I had not thought that, with my oar upon the waves,
 I could also toy with the moon amidst those mountains.
 The River Yi merges with white clouds.
 The southeast, in the distance, now brightens, now is extinguished.

日暮下山來，千山暮鐘發。不知波上棹，還弄山中月。伊水連白雲，東南遠明滅。

Line 6: The Dragon Gate grottoes are south and somewhat east of Luoyang. He appears to be seeing the temple lights recede in the distance. “Extinguished” (*mie*) alludes to passage into *nirvāna*, one of the Chinese terms for which was *miedu* 滅度, “to be extinguished and cross over”. *Yuan*, “distance”, alludes to *viveka*, “seclusion” from the sensual world.

Topical translation

Day’s end causes me to descend,
 Causes the bells to be released,
 Causes the moon in the mountain,
 To appear, somehow, under my freely playing oar.
 But then all this merges, with the river and the clouds.
 There is a distance.
 And yet, from the southeast, there are still lights, bright—
 Then, “extinguished”.

Discussion

The final poem is built out of a sentiment felt by many a tourist: “I sure spent a long time at this place”. The first two couplets construct a consequential chain, resolving in the poet’s release from consciousness—the act of play. He plays with the reflection of the moon, properly engaging with the illusion of the world. So he does participate in definition. The closing couplet modulates this engagement with a tight set of contrasts. First, the poet takes leave of the scene and it disappears into the distance, the moonlit waters he toyed with blanketed by white mists. The poet’s relation to definition again becomes circumstantial. Nevertheless, he can still glimpse the illumination—as before, in poem four—in which he has just participated. But again, the lights of the temples fade to darkness. And yet once more, in a final reversal, this fading is to be construed as an enlightening kind of darkness, truth’s extinction of mere perception, the final conflux of definition and circumstance.

GROUP B. THREE WITTY POEMS WITH BUDDHIST THEMES

The poems in the preceding series exhibit a poetic engagement with Buddhism, or at least engagement with a vein of poetry meant to represent religious experience. But Buddhism was a pervasive “circumstance” in Liu Zhangqing’s life, as the three poems in this section demonstrate. Here, the poet engages with Buddhist themes dramatically, or, to use the terms of the title of the second selection, “playfully” (*xi* 戲).

In Jail, I See a Mural of the Buddha 獄中見壁畫佛⁹

I had not thought that in this place, where I suffer such injustice,
I would have been able to catch a glimpse of the Great Compassion:
Alone I was perched amongst the clustered brambles,
But turning about I saw the moment of raining flowers;
The place is narrow and the green lotus is small,
The wall is tall and the white sun moves slowly;
I am fortunate indeed, to be personally favored by the power of Expedient Means—
Yet still I fear, that I may be cheated by the Poisonous Dragon.

不謂銜冤處，而能窺大悲。獨棲叢棘下，還見雨花時。地狹青蓮小，城高白日遲。幸親方便力，猶畏毒龍欺。

Form: Five syllable regulated verse (? – with weak parallelism in the second couplet)

Title: In 757 or 758, in the aftermath of the An Lushan rebellion, Liu Zhangqing was prosecuted for some uncertain offense. This is one of five extant poems written while he was imprisoned. The “mural” is more accurately just “a painting on the wall”.

Lines 3–4: “Clustered brambles” is a kenning, from the *Book of Changes* (Hexagram 29, Kan), for prison. “Raining flowers” is a scenic feature of colloquy with the Buddha, who “rains down” his teachings; see e.g. Watson, *The Lotus Sutra*, Ch. 1, pp. 15, 17.

Line 5: The Buddha’s face was likened to a lotus. That is, the mural is small.

Line 6: Longing for sunlight is a common metaphor for seeking imperial grace. Upon his release from prison, Liu would write a poem (Chu p. 165) celebrating this grace.

Line 8: The Poisonous Dragon refers both to the political powers who would prosecute him and to the internal desires a Buddhist adept must overcome.

9 Chu pp. 164–65. Yang pp. 174–75.

Topical translation

A place of injustice, yet also of Great Compassion,
 Under the brambles of jail, yet also under the rain of Buddha's flowers.
 And yet—the place is small and so then is the painting—and
 The wall is tall and so then the sun that might shine upon me is delayed behind its height –
 And yet—I am fortunate to experience such Expedient Means—
 And yet—some poisonous dragon—within me or without me—may still delay me further.

Discussion

This poem is an exercise in the art of contrast. The poem's opening (the first two couplets of the original, condensed to two lines in the topical translation) states the contrast directly, first diegetically, contrasting injustice with compassion, and then mimetically, with the jail incongruously providing space for a Buddhist painting. More specifically, this is a case of *contrary consequences*, for while the innocent man ought to regard jail as an injustice, jail has instead led the innocent man to something good—the Buddhist truth.

Bad has been turned into good, but the third couplet reverses the motion. The jail cell is far too cramped for such a painting, and though the poet feels the propinquity of the “Great Compassion”, he now remembers how figuratively tall the walls of imprisonment really are. And yet, with the penultimate line comes another reversal: he is able to see all this suffering as a form of *upāya*, an “expedient means” by which the Buddha is conveying him into the realm of enlightenment. From this perspective, simple consequence is restored. How right that the wall should be high, and the painting short on distinction! And yet—in the final line, a final contrast reverses the argument's direction once again, for the resolution of his trial is not certain. A “poisonous dragon”—in his heart or in the hearts of his political foes—may keep him locked inside the expedient means, forever unable to pass through to the reality to which it is meant to lead him.

The next selection also passes through a series of contrasts: alternate ways of “defining” a young nun and the poet's attitude toward her.

A Song Playfully Presented to a Nun in Ganyue 戲贈干越尼子歌¹⁰

This girl by Lake Poyang, fifteen years of age,
 Her family is from the northern Qin, but now she is in southern Chu.

Tired of emptily “washing silk” in the spring river,
 In a Dragon Palace she sheared off her hair and draped herself in a nun's cloak,
 And for five years she has followed the monastic rules, always taking only one meal—

10 Chu pp. 221–23. Yang pp. 197–98.

And yet even today she retains the visage of a flower—

So upright and fine, she stands beneath the green lotus,

With Grasses of Endurance and Branches of Meditation encircling her spirit lodge.

She used her own gold to buy a place to live here—

She had the wherewithal to look down on those little girls Jade, who were married off.

But now, this northern traveler meets her, and wonders if she might be the beauty named Qin,

For having discarded her mascara flowers she still looks pretty as the green spring.

And so each flower here, each strip of bamboo, they all seem to have intentions on me,

Not speaking, nor smiling, but able to make a person linger on.

Now the orioles are going to roost, the pale sun is setting,

But the Heavenly Fragrance does not disperse from where she moves about.

Turning toward the incense stove, she freely chants the sutras—

A spring spring gargling with jade, cold and whistling.

Her cloudy chambers have gone silent, after the evening bell,

And her southern voice is pure and crisp, demanding the listener's attention—

And so this listener listens to the southern singer's song,

And is transported into the distance, as if to the star lodgings in the Deva Heavens:

But what can I do, tugged on by the affairs of this mundane world?

Desolate, I return to my boat—on the Yangtze waters clear.

鄱陽女子年十五，家本秦人今在楚。厭向春江空浣沙¹¹，龍宮落髮披袈裟。五年持戒長一食，至今猶自顏如花。亭亭獨立青蓮下，忍草禪枝繞精舍。自用黃金買地居，能嫌碧玉隨人嫁。北客相逢疑姓秦，鉛花拋卻仍青春。一花一竹如有意，不語不笑能留人¹²。黃鸝欲棲白日暮，天香未散經行處。卻對香爐閒誦經，春泉漱玉寒冷冷。雲房寂寂夜鐘後，吳音清切令人聽。人聽吳音歌一曲¹³，杳然如在諸天宿。誰堪世事更相牽¹⁴，惆悵迴船江水滌。

11 For *kong* 空 (“emptily” or “in vain”) the Northern Song printing reads *han* 寒, “coldly”. This seems to be a graphic corruption.

12 The Northern Song printing reads 言 for 語. These are synonyms, though in different tone classes.

13 Here the Song printing reads “And sometimes amidst the scents of southeastern Wu there is a song” 有時吳香歌一曲. “Scent” 香 may be a graphic error for “sound” 音; “sometimes” is hard to reconcile with the poem’s narrative, and may be filler to replace the words 人聽, which are repeated from the end of line 20.

14 The Song printing reads 仍 for 更. Chu also notes 又 in the *Tangshi pinhui*. These have little if any effect on the meaning of the line.

Form: Seven-syllable lines in an informal quatrain-based rhyme scheme. Stanza breaks in the literal translation, but not in the topical version, correspond to rhyme shifts in the original.

Title: Ganyue was in Yugan 餘干 county, on the southeast side of Lake Poyang. Liu spent time there ca. 760–762.

Line 2: The poet sees someone like himself, a northerner sojourning in the south in a time of trouble. “Qin” simply means “the north”, “Chu” “the south”.

Line 3: The legendary beauty Xi Shi “washed silks” in a stream, and Tang entertainers performed a song by that name.

Line 5: Taking only “one meal” (*yi shi*) per day is part of Buddhist discipline (*dhūta*).

Line 7: The lotus was an epithet for the Buddha, who was often depicted with one, as in the preceding poem.

Line 8: The Grass of Endurance seems to refer to “enduring insult” (*renru* 忍辱), one of the six *pāramitās*. Presumably the present poem would qualify the nun for this. “Meditation” (*dhyāna*, or Zen) is the fifth *pāramitā*.

Line 9: Yang (p. 198) associates the gold in this line with the term “golden ground” (*jindi* 金地, or *jintian* 金田), the gold paved temple the Buddha was said to have dwelt in. But there is no reason to push aside the literal, materialistic reading of the line.

Line 10: “Little girl Jade” (Bi Yu) was the subject of an early medieval love song.

Line 11: Qin was the surname of Luofu, the alluring mulberry picking girl of the popular song “Mulberries on the Path”.

Line 13: Perhaps flower and bamboo are metonymy for the young nun.

Line 18: Both “spring” the season and “spring” the source of water are common in Chinese poetry—a translator’s headache. Here they appear together.

Line 20: The “southern voice”, actually “southeastern”, apparently hints at young northerners acquiring southern accents, a detail that features elsewhere in Liu’s poetry (Chu p. 197), but it also leads into the “southern songs” (*Wu ge*, “songs of Wu”) of line twenty one, a romantic and even sexually allusive genre.

Topical translation

The young girl is from the north, but in the south—as am I.

She is—beautiful. But she shaved her hair and became a nun.
 But she is still beautiful. And how much more so, under the lotus-seated Buddha,
 Framed by the Grass of Endurance and the boughs of the Meditation Tree.

But she had money. How else would she be above being married off
 Like other pretty little girls? She had gold.
 And when a northern traveler—me—happens upon her, he sees a glimpse of what she *is*,
 The country beauty of the northern folk songs, who has done away with flowery make-up,
 But remains a spring flower, a slip of bamboo, who though silent, taciturn,
 Holds me here entranced all the same—and even more!

Her heavenly fragrance lingers with me, as the sun sets and the orioles perch
 And she idly turns to her scriptures.
 It's a chilly voice. Hard, like a spring bobbling over jade.
 Then the bell, and silence—
 Then her voice still more crisp—
 It forces me to listen—
 It is crisp like—a southern singer girl's! Listen!
 It is almost about to carry me off
 To sleep in *heavenly* lodgings...

But I am a mortal man, tugged about by mundane things.
 Spent, I return to my boat—
 On the river clear!

Discussion

The core of this clever dramatic monologue is a modulation of the topic of definition: shared, then divided, then usurped. The poem's "playful" (or perhaps "taunted") addressee is a young nun, introduced as sharing a common identity with the poet: they are northerners driven to the south, suffering hardship. She finds religion, apparently reconciling herself to life's vicissitudes, but the poet, in the turmoil of his desire, cannot accept the beautiful girl's renunciation of the world.¹⁵ He insists that, despite her shaven head, she essentially remains a beautiful creature. That is her true definition, and far from being altered by her entry into the Buddhist order, her allure is only enhanced by the graceful trappings—circumstances!—of monastic life. Furthermore, she is rich. Her chosen path is not a pure act of will and devotion, not an

15 This poem may be placed in the context of what has been identified as "the sexualization of poetic and musical performance" in the Tang; see Mark Edward Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 101–09, quotation on p. 107, and pp. 213–14 on the erotic literary treatment of female religious figures.

act of self-definition, but a product of mere circumstance, her wealth allowing her, unlike her peers, to escape from the world of the two sexes.

The poet's fancy stirred, he moves to intervene in her act of self-definition. But though her beauty dazzles him and her heavenly scent beguiles him, her visage is beyond emotion as she goes about her monastic duties, her voice distant as she recites her other-worldly sutras. All this lures the poet in even more, and when the temple bell tolls and silence is left in its wake, he is on the cusp of a carnal sort of epiphany. In a scene that recalls the silence that followed the night bell in the fifth poem of the Dragon Gate series, the tapering toll of the bell primes his senses for intuition of something subtle, some deep truth. He finds it in the sound of the northern girl's "southern voice"—he is so entranced that he is mixing his metaphors. In that voice he confounds the reveries of sensual pleasure and spiritual transfiguration, as her song transports him (or *causes* him to be transported) to the "heavens". These are the heavens of Buddhist lore, but it is not too impolite to construe this as metaphor for "her bed".

And yet, he goes neither to heaven nor to her bed. At first, it would seem that his fantasized consummation is contrasted with a melancholy return to his boat on the river, pulled by mundane affairs far removed from the ethereal aura of this nun. His conquest of her self-definition is in vain. Or, he politely retreats, having playfully made his case. At the same time, however, there is one final twist to his discourse. With the final word of the poem, "clear" (*lu* 淥), the poetic alchemy of circumstance and definition arrives to cleanse him of his passions. The poet does not come to accept her self-definition as a nun, beyond the human passions. Rather, he assumes that definition for himself.

The following poem also playfully addresses a Buddhist devotee, but without the antagonistic edge. Addressing an esteemed monk, the poet endeavors to create a shared definition.

At Changsha, Presented to the Dhyāna Master Prajñā, of Mount Heng's Fire God Peak 長沙贈衡岳祝融峰般若禪師¹⁶

Prajñā Lord, Prajñā Lord!

When did you haul your bowl of alms down from Fire God Peak?

Looking back upon the path by which you might return, you might see, beyond the soaring birds,

Your meditation chambers—emptily hidden within the white clouds.

There, solitary cassia flowers fall willy-nilly, of their own accord,

While the water wanders, without mind, now going west, now east.

般若公，般若公，負鉢何時下祝融。歸路卻看飛鳥外，禪房空掩白雲中。桂花寥寥閒自落，流水無心西復東。

16 Chu p. 339. Yang p. 333.

Form: Three seven-syllable couplets, with the first line shortened to six characters with an implied caesura.

Title: Mount Heng (“Mount Balance”?) is China’s southernmost major mountain, south of Changsha. A major peak is named for Zhurong, the Fire God who guards the south. Yang Shiming suggests that the recipient was a South Asian monk. Dhyāna is Zen, or Chan.

Line 2: On the cultural significance of the alms bowl, see Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary* (“pātra”), and Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism*, pp. 107–111.

Lines 3–4: This couplet is parallel, but reads as a relative clause attached to a main clause.

Lines 5–6: The water, and the cassia—or “osmanthus”—flowers floating upon it, may refer to the temple grounds, or to the Xiang river, which winds its way between Mt. Heng and Changsha.

Topical translation

Enlightened Master!

Enlightened—and yet you’ve hauled your weighty alms bowl down to this town.

Why?

Turn your head and see how, on your homeward path,

Beyond the free flying birds, hidden in the clouds,

Your temple sits empty.

Empty, with cassia flowers just falling, in their solitude,

While waters (and you?) just wander, east or west, unconsciously.

Discussion

The poem is an exercise in light irony, which is a trope of the topic of definition: a definition is given, one that is true in a certain regard, but conceals a very different meaning. When we meet the wise monk, he is “hauling” (there is bathos in this verb?) his beggar’s bowl around the town of Changsha. The poet—as if the master needed a novice’s advice—purports to put the monk back on the proper path, turning his head to the mountain peak where his temple sits hidden in the clouds. The epithet *kong*, “emptily”, holds an ambiguity. The natural syntax of the line has the temple sitting there “in vain”, lacking its master; but the symbolic weight of this term invokes the “emptiness”—in the *śūnyatā* sense of transcending phenomenal attachments—that the enlightened monk so clearly embodies. The final couplet again makes use of the pathetic fallacy. The flowering groves of “cassia”, a symbol of reclusion, are painted

pathetically, “solitary” (*liaoliao*), perhaps one could even say “lonesome”. The scene at once fits the master, quiescent and transcendent, while also engaging in emotions that he would have cast off. Or are we so certain that he has? The stream in the final line is superficially a mimetic description of the temple grounds, but figuratively, together with the forlorn trees, it represents the monk himself. “Without mind”, he has released himself from conscious action, but the poet also implies that he is wandering about ‘aimlessly’, just when his lonely garden is beckoning him. For the poet, this is a veiled self-portrait, Liu being caught somewhere between transcendence and itinerancy. In this poem, unlike the last, the two men share equally, artist and subject, in an ironic definition.

GROUP C. THREE WELL-KNOWN POEMS—WITH REFERENCE
TO TRANSLATIONS BY GILES AND BYNNER

In their integration of the plain and the ineffable, the following three selections are typical examples of Liu Zhangqing’s style. The second and third selections were included in the *Three Hundred Tang Poems*. (With eleven poems in the edition translated by Witter Bynner and Kiang Kang-hu, Liu is the best represented minor poet in that influential mid-eighteenth century anthology.) The first poem was also much remarked upon by traditional critics.

Passing the Grave of the Washerwoman 經漂母墓¹⁷

The worthy of old remembered that single meal—
This story is already a thousand autumns old.
Now, her ancient grave is known (only) by the woodsmen,
While that dynasty of a past age (simply) flows by with the waters of Chu.
Water-clover from the shoals—the passing traveler makes his offerings—
Trees on the hill—the cuckoo mourns—
The spring grasses are a blur of green—
Here where, long ago, the Prince once roamed.

昔賢懷一飯，茲事已千秋。古墓樵人識，前朝楚水流。渚蘋行客薦，山木杜鵑愁。春
草茫茫綠，王孫舊此遊。

Form: Five-syllable regulated verse.

Title: See discussion below for the story of Han Xin. The *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 (*Annotated Classic of Waterways*, comp. early sixth century) records a large grave mound, several hundred paces in circumference and over thirty meters (“over ten

17 Chu pp. 271–73. Yang pp. 283–85.

zhang) high; see *Shuijing zhu jiaoshi* 水經注校釋. comp. Li Daoyuan 酈道元, ed. Chen Qiaoyi 陳橋驛 (Hangzhou: Hangzhou daxue chubanshe, 1999), 30.537.

Line 2: “A thousand autumns” accurately reflects the span of time between the story and the poem, but it is also a classical euphemism (see David R. Knechtges, “*Wen xuan*”, or *Selections of Refined Literature* Volume Three [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996], p. 194) for the death of a monarch—in this case, Han Xin, the erstwhile King of Chu.

Line 4: Han Xin was made King of Chu by the Han founder, but quickly fell from favor.

Line 5: The “water-clover” (*pin*) is a humble temple offering—Yang cites a *Zuozhuan* passage (Yin 3). It is also close to the duckweed (*ping* 萍), conventional poetic symbol for the rootless existence of a traveler.

Line 6: See the discussion below. The cuckoo was a general symbol of death.

Lines 7–8: This couplet bears a striking resemblance to the closing couplet of a famous Wang Wei quatrain, which itself alludes to the *Chuci*: “When the spring grasses are green next year, / Will the Prince return—or not?” 春草明年綠，王孫歸不歸。 This intertext weaves neatly into the story of Han Xin, in which the washerwoman addresses him as “Prince”, even before his rise; see *Shiji* 史記 92.2609.

Topical translation

He remembered her.
 But that was so long ago....
 Now, only woodsmen know her grave, and
 Long ago ages flow by in the river.
 In that flow, a traveler,
 Who gathers a floating weed, to remember her.
 In the unmoved trees.
 Where the king’s spirit bird mourns.
 Spring is here:
 A blur of spring upon this hill.
 On which that prince set foot, long ago.

Discussion

Fang Hui 方回 (1227–1307) observes that “Zhangqing does not show his hand” 長卿意深不露 in this poem.¹⁸ The subject matter is straightforward enough. When Han Xin, later a

18 Cited at Yang p. 284.

general involved in the establishment of the Han dynasty, was young and in dire straits, a “washerwoman” fed him a meal, and when he became “King of Chu” he summoned her and repaid her in gold. Here, the poet is passing by her grave site. The poem’s diaphanous quality seems to derive from the fact that there is only one single action in the whole poem—the offering, in the fifth line.

Topically, the loose knit of the poem derives from an ambivalence toward definition. The first line of the poem delivers, concisely and clearly, the kernel of the backstory—a good man who remembered the good deed done to him—but the second line is open to two parallel interpretations. Either we understand it to mean that this fine deed is *still* remembered even after a thousand years, or that, such a long period having passed, it is scarcely remembered at all. In fact we take it that the poet has installed both of these senses in the line. The second couplet delivers a similar effect. The poet affirms that the woman’s gravesite is still known—but it is remembered by woodsmen, who symbolize the wisdom of those who live on the boundary of human society, thus suggesting that, to the contrary, the grave is forgotten by most. Have the ancient times washed away with the eternal flow of the river beneath the grave, or do they flow along forever in its waters?

Then the poem’s action, an apparently solid moment of definition. The poet sees a passerby making an offering—or that passerby is the poet himself, as weakly rooted as his waterborne offering. But this action quickly dissolves into the depths of allusion, in the cuckoo’s call from the wooded hills. “Trees on the hill” (*shan mu*) is the title of a chapter in the *Zhuangzi*. In its opening anecdote, a great tree on a mountain is spared the ax because it is too great to be *useful*.¹⁹ This resonates ironically with Han Xin, who met his death after proving *all too useful* to the founder of the Han dynasty, and quietly reframes the poet’s checkered political career. “Trees on the hill” was also the title of a song sung by an exiled king, a detail that ties it to the “cuckoo”.²⁰ According to legend, a king abdicated in favor of his meritorious minister, taking himself sadly but dutifully into self-exile in the southlands, where he died and became the cuckoo, the bird with the mournful call.²¹ This does not exactly fit the story

19 See Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (1845–1891), ed., *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 20.667–68. For examples of this allusion in Tang poetry in this sense, see Fan Zhilin 范之麟 et al., ed., *Quan Tangshi diangu cidian* 全唐詩典故辭典 (Rev. ed. Wuhan: Hubei cishu chubanshe, 2001), pp. 102–03.

20 The song title would not appear to be a common allusion—dictionaries cite Li Shan’s *note* to Jiang Yan’s “Rhapsody on Resentment”—but it fits too well with the cuckoo here to ignore.

21 For the basic sources see Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518–1593), *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 (Punctuated edition. Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1982), 49.2665–66. There is some further information on this bird in C.M. Lai, “Messenger of Spring and Morality: Cuckoo Lore in Chinese Sources”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118.4: 530–42 (1998).

In the fuller version of the story, the king fled in shame after having an affair with his minister’s wife, while the worthy man was off on state’s business. Might our poet have felt some shame standing at the washerwoman’s grave, his water-clover offering drooping in his hand? Might he have made sense of a contrast between his humble tribute to the ancient washerwoman and his “playful” one to the young nun?

of Han Xin, but he was a king who met a sad death, and it echoes the personal narrative of Liu Zhangqing, wandering forlorn in the south. As poet and reader ponder the depths of this allusion, the “blurry” nature of definition appears mimetically, in the insistence of *circumstance*, in the poem’s final couplet: the blurry spring, in which one can almost perceive the ancient worthy himself, but not quite.

In the context of the foregoing discussion, what is most notable in the translation of this poem by Herbert Giles is the decisive force of definition he installs in it:

Herbert A. Giles, trans., “The Washerwoman’s Grave”²²

The hero nêr forgot the meal she gave,—
 My tale is of a thousand years ago,—
 And every woodsman knows the time-worn grave,
 Though naught remains of dynasties save the river’s ceaseless flow.

With votive flower the traveler is seen,
 The while the grief-bird trills his mournful lays;
 Around, the grass of spring grows wildly green
 Where footprints of the “nobleman” were left in bygone days.

The opening of Giles’s version is particularly strong, boldly defining the subject of the poem as a “hero”. The meta-diegetic remark in line 2 reinforces the definition—I, the storyteller, will tell you the point of the story—and it marks the remainder of the poem as diegetic, the poet straightforwardly telling us what he has seen, not conveying his experience there. Even the poem’s sole action is elided (“the traveler *is seen*”). The poem has become a sharply defined narrative.

One particular area in which the topical approach may have potential is helping consolidate the couplets of a poem into a whole, to make a whole thought of the poem. The following poem, in limpid but loosely articulated seven-syllable lines, provides a good example:

Traveling from Hankou to Parrot Isle and Gazing Toward Yueyang at Sunset: Sent to Censor

Yuan 自夏口至鸚鵡洲夕望岳陽寄源中丞²³

On this river isle, there are no waves, nor is there any mist—

22 Herbert A. Giles (1845–1935), trans., *Chinese Poetry in English Verse* 古今詩選 (London: Bernard Quaritch and Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1898; accessed via a color scan on the Internet Archive, at <https://archive.org/details/cu31924008867222>), p. 102, with explanatory note, here omitted, on p. 203.

23 Chu pp. 360–61. Yang pp. 365–67.

The southern sojourner's longing for a friend stretches far into the imperceptible horizon.
 (Here,) at the Mouth of the Han, birds that cross in a slanted line in the setting sun—
 (There,) at the Hall of Dongting lake, a sky that merges distantly with the autumn waters.
 On a lonesome wall, turning its back to a ridge, a bugle coldly blown,
 A solitary outpost, overlooking the water, a boat moored in the night.
 Jia Yi submitted a memorial, worrying for the House of Han,
 And to Changsha he was sent off in exile, to be pitied by all, past and present.

汀洲無浪復無煙，楚客相思益渺然。漢口夕陽斜渡鳥，洞庭秋水遠連天。孤城背嶺寒
 吹角，獨戍臨江夜泊船。賈誼上書憂漢室，長沙謫去古今憐。

Form: Seven-syllable regulated verse.

Title: Xiakou is Hankou, the “Mouth of the Han” referred to in line three of the poem. Both Xiakou and Parrot Isle are in the region of present day Wuhan. The other place name in the title, however, was quite far away: Yueyang is on the northeast corner of Lake Dongting (“Cavernous Hall”, line four), several hundred winding kilometers from the place where Liu composed his poem. Thus, the poet would never have been able to see Yueyang—a geographical fact that sets up the poem’s first four lines. Chu and Yang identify the recipient as Yuan Xiu 源休, a court official in exile.

Line 2: The “southern sojourner” (lit. “traveler in Chu”) draws together the poet, his recipient, and Jia Yi, who appears in the poem’s closing couplet. See also line two of the following poem.

Line 6: The Song printing reads *du bu* 獨步 (“I pace alone”) for *du shu* 獨戍 (“solitary outpost”).

Lines 7–8: As a young man, Jia Yi set forth loyal and honest advice to the Han Emperor Wen. He was ignored and exiled to Changsha, in the southern reaches of Chu, where he paid obeisance to Qu Yuan and foresaw his own death— see the following poem.

Topical translation

There should be mist and waves here, but there is not.
 That would absorb me. Instead, this clarity extends me, into the receding horizon,
 Where you are, where we are together.
 The setting sun here at the mouth of the Han river, slantingly, birds crossing.
 The autumnal waters—I imagine them there—in the cavernous lake, distantly, absorbing the sky.

Gazing off, I see:

A solitary fort, back to the ridge, a cold trumpet emanating,
 A lonely outpost, overlooking the water, night boat mooring.
 In the Han, Jia Yi was here, like us. Loyal exile, like you. Pitied,
 Like us.

Discussion

Typically, this poem is about how circumstance can impinge upon definition. Structurally it consists of a scene (line one), a thought (line two), four more scenes (lines three to six) and a concluding thought (lines seven and eight). If we look first at the thoughts, we see *shared definition* as the central theme. In the second line, the term “southern sojourner” covers both the speaker and the recipient. (Below we will see Witter Bynner describe the recipient as the poet’s “friend”, but he may be better regarded as a potential future patron.) The mutual “longing” (*xiangsi*) expressed here indicates that the friendship emanates from a common source. The closing couplet openly adds a third member into their common definition—the Han statesman Jia Yi, who tried to serve the court loyally but was cast into southern exile. The immediate referent is the poem’s recipient, who was driven from court in a political dispute, but, as we shall see in the third poem in this section, Jia Yi symbolized the self of any loyal literatus roaming the southern regions. The commonality is confirmed, and enhanced by its extension into the classical past.

The descriptive passages in the remaining five lines show how circumstance can engage with definition. In line one, a circumstance is expected: the waters should be roiled with waves, the air soaked in obscuring mists. In that way, the scene would have matched the poet-traveler’s emotions. But it is not so. The coherent circumstance is nowhere to be found, replaced by an open space into which the poet’s thoughts extend indefinitely, and discomfortingly. This is a highly active form of the topic of circumstance: forming a contrast with an assumed definition (the poet’s muddled emotions), it serves as the efficient cause for the formation of a new, more developed definition (the shared identity of poet and recipient). But if the scene dissolves in the first line, it returns with special significance in the descriptive middle couplets. In my reading, the function of the *third* couplet is quite simple: the scene serves as an analogy for the physical distance separating the two friends. “Turning its back on the mountain”, the fort is resigned to a separation from the mountain on which it resides, to which it is physically attached. (*Bei* is used in this way nearly a dozen times in Liu’s poetry.) The wall registers as a fading perception—the cold call of the bugle. Meanwhile, a military outpost asserts its authority to “watch over” the river—but the object it monitors is simply the boat of some traveler, perhaps the poet himself. Like the sound of the bugle, this object will soon flow away, and with it the entire scene. In this way, the circumstance of the third couplet represents both unity and separation.

The action of the poem's second couplet depends on a grammatical tension. The basis of the tension is the pairing of transitive and intransitive verbs, and a shift in the position of the main verb when the lines are read most naturally. The natural reading of line three (Hankou *xiyang xie du niao* 漢口夕陽斜渡鳥) would seem to be as a noun phrase:

At the Mouth of the Han river, in the setting sun, birds crossing at a slant (*xieduniaio*).

Behind this primary reading lies a shadow reading, taking the sun as the subject and *xie* as a verb:

The sun at the Mouth of the Han river slants across the crossing birds.

“Sun” is indeed the subject of “slant” in the fourth line of the next poem discussed in this essay. Turning to line four of this poem (Dongting *qiushui yuan lian tian* 洞庭秋水遠連天), we can identify a reading that grammatically matches the primary rendering of line three:

In the Hall of the Dongting lake, in the fullness of its autumnal waters, a sky distantly merging.

But “merging” (*lian*) is a transitive verb, unlike “crossing” in line three. The natural subject for this verb, which is to say, the primary, natural reading of the line, is the “autumn waters”:

The autumn waters in the Hall of the Dongting lake distantly merge with the sky.

This turns the line from noun phrase into a full sentence, with “merge” the main verb and “autumnal waters” not a relative clause but a full-fledged subject. But the main verb (*lian*) is now in the sixth position, where in line three, if read as a full sentence, the main verb (*xie*) was the fifth character. Thus, the primary reading of line three corresponds to the shadow reading of line four, but the juxtaposition of the primary reading of line four with the shadow of line three is off-balance. Forcing them into parallel would lead to impossible (or improbable) subject-verb collocations: of “setting sun” (*xiyang*) and “cross” (*du*) or of “autumn waters” (*qiushui*) with “distant” (*yuan*).

The effect of all this grammatical gerrymandering is that a precise definition of the scene the poet viewed is overdetermined by its verbal representation. This intentional haziness emblemizes the dissolving of the borders that would mark separate definitions for the poet, the friend, and Jia Yi; but the indetermination of circumstance also undermines the very redefinition of those borders. In sum, this poem presents an identification, or definition, of the poet, the recipient, and a historical figure, but that identity is rendered ambivalent by the poem's imagery and its representation of that imagery, which insist on a circumstantial nature, that is, a nature beyond the poet's ability or authority to define it.

We may compare the foregoing analysis with the topical structure that motivates Witter Bynner and Kiang Kang-hu's translation of this poem:

Witter Bynner and Kiang Kang-hu, trans., “An Evening View of the City of Yo-chou After Coming from Han-k’ou to Parrot Island: A Poem Sent to My Friend Governor Yüan”²⁴

No ripples in the river, no mist on the islands,
 Yet the landscape is blurred toward my friend in Ch’u ...
 Birds in the slanting sun cross Han-k’ou,
 And the autumn sky mingles with Lake Tung-t’ing.
 ... From a bleak mountain wall the cold tone of a bugle
 Reminds me, moored by a ruined fort,
 That Chia Yi’s loyal plea to the House of Han
 Banned him to Ch’ang-sha, to be an exile.

Bynner, free from the stylistic strictures of Giles’s age, rewrites the Chinese poets in smooth syntax, speaking to the reader clearly and directly. It is image-energized prose, simple but stately. In the opening couplet, he stresses the contrast of percept and judgment. The second couplet remains circumstantial (if meaningless without footnote or interpolation to explain that the spatial relation of Hankou and Dongting does not afford an “evening view”), but he turns the third couplet into the first part of a long hypotactic sentence. As elsewhere in his translations, Bynner handles this conversion artfully, but here circumstance is wholly transformed into overt consequence, the bugle *causing* him to remember Jia Yi. Doing so, he forfeits the linkage of the subtle scenic perception of the third couplet with the emphatic statement of the poem’s theme in the final couplet.

Our final poem is a more expansive treatment of the poet’s “pity” for Jia Yi:

In Changsha, Passing by the House of Jia Yi 長沙過賈誼宅²⁵

Three years in demoted office, perched here, lingering,
 Where for ten thousand years of eternal antiquity there remains only the sadness of a Chu traveler.

In the autumn grasses I alone seek the man—after he has gone,
 In the cold woods I emptily see the moment where the setting sun slants.
 Emperor Wen of the Han was good—yet in patron’s kindness he was lacking;
 And the River Xiang is heartless—so how could your consolations have been understood?
 So silent, here when the rivers and mountains have reached a desolate, fallen state—

24 Witter Bynner (1881–1968), trans., with Kiang Kang-hu [Jiang Kanghu 江亢虎 (1883–1954)], *The Jade Mountain: A Chinese Anthology* (first published 1929; rpt. in James Kraft, ed., *The Works of Witter Bynner: The Chinese Translations*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1978), p. 137, with an explanatory endnote on Jia, omitted here, on p. 272.

25 Chu pp. 337–38. Yang pp. 214–16.

I pity you, sir, for your having arrived at the edge of the world—and for what reason?

三年謫宦此棲遲，萬古惟留楚客悲。秋草獨尋人去後，寒林空見日斜時。漢文有道恩猶薄，湘水無情弔豈知。寂寂江山搖落處，憐君何事到天涯。

Form: Seven-syllable regulated verse.

Line 1: Jia Yi was exiled for three years in Changsha.

Line 2: The “Chu traveler” refers first to Qu Yuan, the poet who was exiled to and died in this region; then to Jia Yi, who famously mourned him (line six here) as he suffered a similar fate; then to Liu Zhangqing, also wandering in these southern lands. “Ten thousand years of eternal antiquity” (*wangu*) is one of this poet’s stock phrases.

Lines 3–4: The fifth and sixth characters in both lines skillfully incorporate diction from Jia Yi’s “Rhapsody on the Owl”. See the comment of the nineteenth century critic Shi Buhua 施補華, quoted at Chu p. 338, Yang p. 216.

Line 6: The “consolation” alludes to Jia Yi’s “Consolation for Qu Yuan” 弔屈原文.

Topical translation

Lingering here, three years in exile, me, like you,
 Now, and for ten thousand years, the sadness of the sojourner in the south.
 In the withered autumn grasses I seek you—but it’s too late—
 Yet late in the day, empty, in this cold grove, I do find this moment—
 The slanting sunset.
 Rightfully, the good emperor should have favored you—yet he did not,
 Properly, it was impossible for the river to have understood you—and indeed
 it did not.
 But if they did not—I do,
 Here in the silence of fallen autumn, the rivers and the hills,
 Pitying you, as we ought,
 For your being sent here, as if you should not have been.

Discussion

The dominant topic of this poem is definition, the blending of two definitions as the poet “parasocially” engages with the thousand year old cultural paragon. The common definition is established in the first couplet, in which the poet writes of Jia Yi while clearly gesturing toward his own peripatetic life along the Yangtze. Like Jia Yi, Liu Zhangqing “lingers” there, and sets down his “sadness” for posterity—as we his readers can attest. The poem concludes in the same

place, the poet feeling the loneliness he knows Jia Yi felt, and expressing for Jia Yi the pity that he anticipates others, be they his contemporaries or readers of future ages, will feel for him.

Of course, Liu Zhangqing was not Jia Yi, and whatever degree of parasocial interaction he experienced with that cultural icon, our poet was not quite a madman. The middle couplets convey the consciousness of a distinction through their use of the topic of contrast. In the second couplet, “seeking” but being “too late” in line three forms a contrast with line four’s “seeing” (or “finding”) the “moment” of the sunset. This contrast leads to a fine circumstance—he finds the sunset to appreciate precisely because it is “empty” of what he sought. In that light, the poet experiences not identity with his idol but with the void in which his contemplation of identity takes shape.

The third couplet initiates a strong argumentative sequence, brought to denouement in the final line of the poem. Definitions motivate it: the Emperor of Jia Yi’s day is defined as “good” and the river Xiang as “heartless”. Implied within is the shared definition of the poet: his own emperor also declared “good”, his own experience in the hills of Hunan also “heartless”. Furthermore, the common definition is extended to their forbear, Qu Yuan, who was exiled by his king and whose spirit Jia Yi was “consoling” in the river. Here the argument bifurcates. The “heartless” element issues a proper consequence—being heartless, the river is ignorant of human fate—but the “good” emperor produces a consequence contrary to what it should: a good emperor should recognize the worth of Jia Yi (and the poet), but he does not. This sets the stage for the last line of the poem to twist this contrary consequence back into a “good” one. To be sure, the poet says, Jia Yi should have had a happy fate (as should I), but it is precisely the unhappy fate that has given him the definition—the loyal minister, done wrong by misunderstanding or outright calumny—that has made him the object of cultural admiration. The core sentence is “you came to the edge of the world” (君到天崖). This is a defining fact about Jia Yi—what would make him known as a poor exile to “ten thousand years of eternal antiquity”. This is framed with a “why?” (*heshi* 何事, “for what reason”), thus putting the defining fact in question. Its intelligibility is then restored through an action (“pity” *lian* 憐) performed by the poet, and contemporaries who participated with him in the cult of Jia Yi. Their line of thought can be read out as follows:

We pity you, not for the fact of your exile but for the unanswered *why* of this fact, the fact as a result of an unsatisfactory consequential chain. Had consequence taken its proper course, you, the loyal man would not have been cast out of court by the good Emperor; if nature were moral, the river Hsiang would have heard your plaint; if the world were just..... Yet, as our pity attests, such superficially proper consequence would in fact not fit with your identity, for you—and we as well—are defined not as “the loyal man” but as “the loyal man done wrong”. How fair that this definition should issue “wrong” consequence, for it is your wronged definition that causes our pity, and this poem. Were the world just, what would we have to say?

And yet—we might be satisfied with the clean lines of Bynner and Kiang's translation, a fine poem in its own right:

Bynner and Kiang, trans., "On Passing Chia Yi's House in Ch'ang-sha"²⁶
 Here, where you spent your three years' exile,
 To be mourned in Ch'u ten thousand years,
 Can I trace your footprint in the autumn grass—
 Or only slanting sunlight through the bleak woods?
 If even good Emperor Wên was cold-hearted,
 Could you hope that the dull river Hsiang would understand you,
 These desolate waters, these taciturn mountains,
 When you came, like me, so far away?

CONCLUSIONS

A successful "process-oriented" experiment will be one in which the process was run and results were observed. This sounds simple, but two difficulties are encountered in the process of "topical translation". The first is that a robust interpretation of the poems' arguments is predicated on accurate translations. In studies focused on literary history or even on traditional aspects of literary study like poetic imagery, interpretative flaws often are not fatal. Focusing on the poem's argument, however, requires getting to a "valid" interpretation of each of the argument's steps. Minor misapprehensions will give rise to errant topics. The second challenge is more troublesome. The application of the topical theory presents "laboratory" problems, because even where the poems are adequately construed, the topical processing is bound to be subjective. These topics are soft tools. The model is not complicated, but no strict rule decides which topic is best applied to a given line of the poem. This is not necessarily a defect, if one takes subjective engagement as a condition of literary criticism—and even a condition to be affirmed. It is a challenge. All that can be said on this point is that, though an effort has been made to preserve the original design of this experiment, it is in the most crucial matter that the most revision has taken place: the poem analyses. If this self-described experiment is not strictly "reproducible", it at least represents an effort to develop and document a skilled "benchwork" with this topical model.

This study proposed to use the poetry to examine the theory and to use the theory to examine the poetry. A set of "topical translations" has been made in the process; perhaps some of them can stand on their own, or with the literal versions that accompany them. With regard to the analysis of poetry, it was hypothesized that the topic of circumstance would be most prominent. With regard to the method of analysis, no specific hypothesis was ventured,

26 Bynner and Kiang, *The Jade Mountain*, p. 137; with reference to the same footnote on Jia Yi.

but it was assumed that, worked through this material, some unnoticed aspects of the four-fold topical scheme would come into view.

As a general conclusion, definition, not circumstance, would appear to be the most prominent of the four topics, although circumstance still plays an important role. Circumstance is essential to poetry because poetry describes the world. It conjures up images, which we may connect metonymically to experience. But this can be put another way. Images are selected, descriptions ventured, because they hold in them what the poet takes to define the world he or she sees. Poetry is less an act of expression than of definition, or of making a certain definition. Circumstance, then, becomes a part of the act of definition. As a topic in its own right, it is a means of balancing definition.

This seems to be the conclusion when the analyses above are viewed together. The focus of the three lighthearted dramatic narratives of Group B, for instance, is on presenting different perspectives on definition. In prison, the poet runs a definition of his plight through a series of contrasts, wistfully concluding with a defining force—the Poisonous Dragon—that may, or may not, controvert him. In the nun’s poem, he “circumstantializes” the definition of his female interlocutor, appropriating it for himself. When he turns to a male counterpart, he shares the monk’s self-definition more equitably, operating upon it with irony rather than sarcasm. In the poems of Group C, sober meditations on human civilization that we might label “serious poetry”, the poet’s own definition is the direct focus. These definitions are not stated directly, however, or if they are, they are tempered by the other topics. In the poem to the washerwoman, the poet’s sentiment remains “blurred” in the spring greenery. In the poem from Hankou, his participation in a common definition is countered with emptiness and transience, and a similar kind of definition in the poem to Jia Yi finds itself attenuated both by emptiness and in the tortuous logic of “contrary consequences” in the poem’s conclusion. Finally, the eight poems (or eight verse poem sequence?) of Group A represent a religious encounter with truth—that is, with true definition. A variety of topical progressions are identified in the analyses, the whole impression of which is an elusive engagement with definition.

These poems’ engagement with definition points to a somewhat different understanding of the structure of the four topics. In the model, the four are set out in parallel, but perhaps this simply reflects its origins as a “pedagogically useful list”, as the framework was described by its creators.²⁷ Based on the analyses in this paper, it may be suggested that they are not a homogeneous set and that they fall into two discrete groups: definition and circumstance, on the one hand, and consequence, analogy, and contrast on the other. Definitions reflect judgments about the world, that something has the weight of truth, while taking a “circumstantial” perspective means regarding something as trivial, as “accidental” to the essential

27 Bilsky et al., “Looking for an Argument”, p. 212. The authors also allow (p. 214) that analogy and contrast “are really two separate topics”, a distinction that may prove meaningful in further application of the model.

nature of things. Circumstance stands opposite definition, though it may still point in the latter's direction. These topics concern the kinds of statements one can make. The other two are a matter of how such statements about the world are put into relationship with one another. One statement leads to, or is mirrored by, or is contrasted with another. Thus, two of the topics operate at a semantic level, two at a syntactic one.

Perhaps with this structural reformulation in mind the topical interpretation of these poems may be stated more clearly. The poet is a definer, writing poetry an act of definition. Definition, however, is inextricable from its double, circumstance. Sometimes this shadow encroaches on the poet, but more often a poem engages with it constructively. Circumstance can represent the ineffability of true definition. It can be wielded as a weapon, circumstantializing other would-be issuers of definitions. And it can be used in the artful construction of a tactful ethos for the kind of poet represented by Liu Zhangqing, the poet who embraces his defining powers but also exhibits the deference and ambivalence proper to his role. In this sense circumstance is indeed, as proposed at the outset of the experiment, a key feature in the topical constellations of these poems, but in an interplay with the gravitational force of definition, aided by the topics of consequence and analogy and contrast.

由翻譯探索詩歌藝術中的「論證」面向： 以唐詩人劉長卿為對象的實驗

雷之波*

論文摘要 本文試圖探索中國詩歌的「論證」面向，即詩中如同論證般組織思想的表達方式。本文以唐代詩人劉長卿（約 726 – 約 790）的詩為對象，透過翻譯來觀察唐詩藝術中的論證表現，回過頭來，也藉由對詩的分析來檢視此一論證模式的解釋效力。本文首先從修辭學的「論題」學傳統中整理出一組分析框架，包括四種論題：「定義」、「因果」、「類比或對比」、「情境」，再以此解讀劉長卿的十四首詩。每首詩除了直譯之外，也以論題的形式翻譯，其中三首兼及前代著名翻譯家 Giles 與 Bynner 的譯作。在這場「實驗」開始時，本文的預設是：四種論題中的「情境」一項是這些詩中論證藝術的主要成分。然而，最終得出的結論是：詩作論證的重心在「定義」，「情境」則是關鍵的平衡要素。對劉長卿詩作的分析也顯示，本文所提出的四種論題並非同質的，應該分成兩個不同層次來理解。

關鍵詞 唐詩 論證藝術 劉長卿 翻譯

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