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The Chinese sonnet: meanings of a form

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Lloyd Haft

The Chinese Sonnet
Meanings of a Form

THE CHINESE SONNET

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Meanings of a Form

Lloyd Haft

Research School of Asian,
African, and American Studies
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INTRODUCTION

Chinese sonnets exist. They have existed for a long time. There are many of them, and among them are some of the most beautiful 20th-century Chinese poems.

I stress these facts at the very beginning of this book because important though they are, it is amazing how little awareness there is of them. Though there is an impressive literature on 20th-century Chinese poetry including excellent anthologies, not only the general reader but even the specialized student in this field can easily get the impression that the Chinese sonnet is no more than a curiosity, a marginal by-product of early contacts between Chinese and Western culture, which has no more than historical importance. Not only is there widespread ignorance as to just how many of the most famous modern Chinese poets have written sonnets; even in the case of leading practitioners of the form, the scholarly literature has not been inclined to treat their sonnets as serious parts of their life work.

For example, Zhu Xiang (1904-1933) wrote a sequence of 71 sonnets, published posthumously in 1934, which showed fascinating interweaving of recurrent themes and thoroughgoing mastery of the Western sonnet form as well as the author's trail-blazing Chinese variations upon that form. The sequence makes him far and away a more prolific, and in some ways a more many-sided sonneteer than the more famous Feng Zhi (1905-1993), usually regarded offhandedly as *the* 20th-century Chinese sonnet writer, whose fame in this regard rests almost entirely on 27 poems published in 1942. Yet of Zhu Xiang's sonnets, not a single one is included in the selections of his poems in the standard anthologies of 20th-century Chinese poetry by Kai-yu Hsu¹ and Mary M. Y. Fung et al.² Bonnie S. McDougall, in an otherwise excellent article on Zhu Xiang, admits his sonnets to be "elegant" but concludes that because the "overwhelming number of contemporary poets inside and outside China prefer the flexibility of some kind of free verse," his sonnets "appear stiff and forced, and not surprisingly have long been ignored by poets and readers alike."³

McDougall wrote those words more than ten years ago, and it certainly cannot be said that in the meantime Zhu Xiang's sonnets, and those of other Chinese writers, have continued to be "ignored." On the contrary, the form is now not only making a comeback but, as far as I can see, gaining much new ground and securing for itself a position in the front ranks of Chinese poetry. In 1988, Qian Guangpei published an anthology of Chinese sonnets with a long preface.⁴ The book covers the period from 1920 to 1987 and includes some 270 sonnets by 58 poets. In his

¹ Hsu 1970.

² Zhang Manyi (Mary M. Y. Fung) et al. 1974.

³ McDougall 1989c, 284.

⁴ Qian Guangpei 1988. I would like to thank Iege Vanwallé for finding me a copy of this book which came as a godsend during an early stage of my research on the Chinese sonnet.

preface, Qian sketches the history of the sonnet form in China and points to a remarkable resurgence since the 1980s. That decade began, from the point of view of the sonnet, with the publication in the official *Poetry Journal* (*Shikan*) of a sonnet sequence (*zushi*, a form we will be examining in Chapter 7) by the woman poet Lin Zi (pseudonym of Zhao Bingyun, 1935-). The poems had actually been written in the 1950s, a period when Lin Zi was powerfully but secretly inspired by Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. As we will see in our first chapter, Mrs. Browning's sonnets, as translated into Chinese by the leading 20th-century poet Wen Yiduo (1899-1946), were one of the factors which brought the sonnet form decisively onto the Chinese scene in the 1920s. The publication of Lin Zi's sonnets in 1980, very soon after the end of the Maoist cultural policies under the Gang of Four, attracted quite some attention, and the poems received a national prize for the best new work of a young poet during 1979-1980. Lin Zi's sonnets were published in book form in 1985⁵ in more than 30,000 copies; the edition was immediately sold out. In general, the 1980s saw not only renewed interest in sonnets by such older writers as Zhu Xiang, Bian Zhilin (1910-), and Dai Wangshu (1905-1950), but many new publications in sonnet form including a book of original sonnets and a revised complete Chinese version of Shakespeare's sonnets by Tu An (pseudonym of Jiang Bihou, 1923-).⁶ After the long Maoist period in which anything smacking of "foreign" poetic forms had been politically taboo, it became evident that once the ban was lifted, the sonnet would quickly come to the forefront of attention in the world of Chinese poetry.

At the turn of the decade, the stage was set for further expansion of the form's influence. An impressive publication at the beginning of the 1990s was the 19-sonnet cycle *The Poet and Death* by Zheng Min (1920-), written in 1990 and published in 1991 in Hong Kong.⁷ Coming soon after the political events of June 1989, from the pen of one of China's most eminent woman poets and undoubtedly the one best known internationally, this cycle, with its subtle but unmistakable thematic references to the fate of Chinese intellectuals in the 20th century, came as proof of the vitality of the sonnet form. Evidence from another quarter was forthcoming from the pages of *Jintian* (Today), a Chinese literary and cultural journal that was once associated with the Democracy Movement of the late 1970s. The magazine served as an early forum for a number of Chinese poets who have gone on to become the most celebrated of their generation, including Bei Dao

⁵ *Gei ta* (For him). Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1985. The publication in *Shikan* was in the January, 1980 issue, pp. 29-31..

⁶ The original sonnets are entitled *Tu An shisi hang shi* (Sonnets by Tu An): Tu An 1986. My thanks are due to Tu An for making this book available to me. There have been several editions of the Shakespeare versions; the one I have consulted is Tu An 1991.

⁷ Zheng Min 1991.

(pseudonym of Zhao Zhenkai, 1949-) and Mang Ke (pseudonym of Jiang Shiwei, 1950-). Bei Dao and Mang Ke were the editors of *Jintian* during its original and highly precarious samizdat period in Beijing in 1978-1980. In 1980, soon after the appearance of an issue wholly devoted to work by Mang Ke, the magazine was suppressed by the authorities.⁸ Mang Ke has since then himself published at least one nationally known sonnet;⁹ this is just one more example of a phenomenon to which we will return at the end of Chapter 8: the fact that the sonnet form, ostensibly so "old" and thus conservative, is in fact often employed by poets whose political stance is progressive or even revolutionary. (In this connection, one recalls the American example of Robert Lowell's *Notebook 1967-68*, written entirely in 14-line sections which, though they were unrhymed, embodied what the author apologetically called "the themes and gigantism of the sonnet."¹⁰) Published abroad since 1990, *Jintian* has continued to be a focus of some of the most sophisticated writing by emigré poets and other writers. In the 1990s the magazine's poetry editors, Zhang Zao and Song Lin, have both published their own sonnets as well as accepting works in recognizable sonnet form by other poets.¹¹

It seems to me that Mary M. Y. Fung, when she set research on the Chinese sonnet miles ahead just six years ago with her revealing analyses of Chinese translations of Shakespeare's sonnets, was rather too cautious in her remarks about the status of the sonnet in the world of Chinese poetry: "Modern Chinese poets like Wen Yiduo, Zhu Xiang, Bian Zhilin and Feng Zhi have tried to introduce the

⁸ For a uniquely detailed account of the *Jintian* poets and the growth of the underground poetry scene in the People's Republic, see Van Crevel 1996, especially Chapter 2.

⁹ Qian Guangpei 1988, 326-327. The publication was in *Shikan* 1987:7. This case, it must be admitted, immediately plunges us into the difficult question of how a sonnet is to be defined. The poem in question, No. 15 of Mang Ke's cycle *Jiumeng* (Old dreams), has 14 lines and a strikingly rhymed final couplet which also rhymes with the poem's first line. In the minds of many modern European and American critics, these would be sufficient features to qualify a poem as a sonnet. On the other hand, the other poems in *Jiumeng* do not share these traits, and in the volume of selected poems (Mang Ke 1989) which Mang Ke published only a bit later, the same poem is adjusted to have one line less. (I would like to thank Mang Ke personally for giving me a copy of the book.) We will return later to the various definitions of "sonnet" in Chinese.

The same uncertainty applies to much 20th-century Western writing about Western sonnets. Walt Taylor, writing half a century ago in the Introduction to his *English Sonnets* (London, 1947, v), said: "No satisfactory definition of a sonnet has yet been made because critics have been trying to say what a sonnet ought to be instead of trying to say what a sonnet actually is...Most of them are written in fourteen lines; and nearly all of them are rhymed - to limit the definition of the form more closely than that would be to exclude some of our greatest sonnets." (Quoted in Kallich et al. 1973, 184)

¹⁰ Lowell 1969, 160.

¹¹ Zhang Zao in *Jintian* 1992:1, 92-97 and 1995:3, 24-31; Song Lin in 1994:4, 105-109. See also the rather free sonnets by Da Xian in 1991:1, 56, and the fourteen-line poems, some with rhymed final couplets, by Chen Dongdong in 1995:4, 203-206.

sonnet into China, and to a certain extent, naturalise it."¹² Surely the days are long past when the sonnet still needed to be "naturalised" in China. I venture to say that the sonnet is on its way toward becoming a standard to which other forms of modern Chinese poetry may hope to conform.

Besides pointing to this new trend, one of the things I hope this book will do is to attract due attention to the admirable and permanent things that have already been done in Chinese in the sonnet form. Zhu Xiang's work is but one example, albeit a glaring one, of an unjustly neglected legacy.¹³ Li Jinfa (1901-1976) is another Chinese poet who wrote sonnets in the 1920s – but again, the anthologies by Hsu and Fung, though they include numerous other poems by this outstanding early Symbolist, contain not one of his sonnets. It would seem the anthologists have, at least in part, let themselves be guided in their choice by the premature critical consensus which would have us believe that Li Jinfa was an *enfant terrible* whose work can be quickly dismissed as an obscure and inaccessible curiosity, remarkable chiefly for its illogical and fragmentary character. I am very much afraid that the real reason why many Chinese critics are in such haste to shunt Li Jinfa off what they would like to consider the main track of developments in the 20th century is the fact, to the modern cosmopolitan mind unremarkable to the point of banality, that he wrote about sexual relations. Proportionate attention to Li's sonnets would, I am sure, contribute to a less one-sided view of this poet, who seems to have been capable of great formal mastery and, in general, to have known very well what he was doing in both content and form.

Or consider the case of Liang Zongdai (1903-1983). Liang is nowadays perhaps best known as a translator; his works include the full translation of Shakespeare's sonnets that was included in the complete set of Shakespeare's works published by the Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe in 1978. He was, however, also a noted if not very prolific poet, and in the 1930s he wrote sonnets that were discussed by the eminent linguist Wang Li in a mammoth handbook on Chinese versification that for decades has been a standard reference and textbook in China.¹⁴ Yet in the anthology of Liang Zongdai's works published in Hong Kong in 1979,

¹² Mary M. Y. Fung 1994, 133. In footnote 6 on page 151, she also says: "Feng Zhi even published a collection entitled *Sonnets* in 1942...After the pioneering efforts of these poets the sonnet form is no longer a total stranger to the Chinese reading public."

¹³ To my knowledge, not a single full-length article, much less a monograph, has ever been written in English on Zhu Xiang. McDougall's (1984) translations of a number of his poems did not include sonnets. Since the 1980s there has been a great deal of new work in Chinese; some of the sources will be mentioned in Chapter 2.

¹⁴ Wang Li 1979.

which includes essays, translations, and original poems, not a single sonnet appears.¹⁵

This book is not intended as a general history of the Chinese sonnet. Rather, as its subtitle suggests, it addresses itself in some detail to a few aspects of the subject. Those aspects are not randomly chosen. They all involve, in one way or another, analysis of the *form* of sonnets written in the 20th century by various practitioners of the genre. Each chapter contributes in its own way to the development of a close-knit collection or organon of techniques for examining poems. In this last phrase I deliberately say "poems" rather than "sonnets" because I contend, as will emerge in Chapter 8, that the sonnet is not a *Fremdkörper* that somehow has got itself lodged into the outer margins of Chinese poetry. It is, rather, a form so versatile that it has become a unique common ground on which various streams in the history of modern Chinese poetry have converged: classical Chinese poetry, the formally precise Western verse of an earlier day, and 20th-century free verse. These affinities are not limited to vague thematic or contextual parallels; they can be demonstrated in concrete detail using the analytical apparatus developed in this book. Without going all the way with the very astute analysts who have at times found a way to claim that formally stringent or "bound" verse is actually a variant or a subset of "free" verse rather than the other way around,¹⁶ I do not hesitate to state it as my conclusion that the Chinese sonnet, in its streamlined modern form, can find room to accommodate in itself all the supposed virtues of "free" verse, though the reverse is certainly not the case. What is more, the modern Chinese sonnet is "Chinese" in the sense that it shares with classical Chinese poetry certain formal subtleties which the Western sonnet does not usually equal. The formal multi-dimensionality of the classical Chinese *lǔshi*, as we will see in our final chapter, finds in the modern Chinese sonnet counterparts of a truly striking kind.

In Chapter 1 we will establish an initial overview of the origins of the Chinese sonnet, some of the problems involved in adapting the form to Chinese linguistic material, and some of the solutions found by Chinese poets of the 1920s. In Chapter 2 we focus on Zhu Xiang, the most productive Chinese sonneteer of the first half of this century, who achieved subtle rhythmic effects through the interplay of punctuation and isosyllabicity (i.e., the use of an equal number of syllables in all the lines of a given poem). In Chapter 3, in the context of Chinese translations of

¹⁵ Liang Zongdai 1979.

¹⁶ This seems to me the implication of certain remarks by Clive Scott that we will encounter in Chapter 8. This or a point of view very like it could claim theoretical support from studies of prosody by linguists who are at pains to establish that the line structure of poetry ultimately depends on its grammar. On Hebrew verse, see O'Connor 1980; on Old English meter see Russom 1987.

Shakespeare's sonnets, we take on what is undoubtedly the most seemingly intractable problem in analyzing Chinese sonnets – the handling of rhyme – and propose a method of charting rhyme, supported by a particular native Chinese tradition, which we will claim to be applicable not only to the sonnet but to much modern Chinese poetry in general. In Chapter 4, during the course of a fine-grain analysis of a number of sonnets by Feng Zhi, we develop an original concept which we call "line assonance." This concept highlights the interplay of lineation and syntax, or lineation and sentence intonation, which some theorists have seen as the central distinguishing feature of modern free verse. In this context again, though our concrete focus is the sonnet, we are pointing out features which could be fruitfully pursued throughout modern Chinese poetry. In Chapter 5 we return to the differentiation of individual lines as shown in the practice of a number of Chinese poets of the 1940s. One of them, Zheng Min, is studied in more detail in Chapter 6, in which we discuss her recent cycle *The Poet and Death* from the viewpoints of form, allusion, and thematics. Once again, the conceptual apparatus developed in earlier chapters is highly applicable. In Chapter 7 we step briefly beyond the bounds of the sonnet as a self-contained poem, considering instead the *zushi* or "poem group" which is a Chinese parallel to the Western "cycle." We see that this form, too, has antecedents in the most ancient Chinese poetry; and as we identify "emanation" as one of its formal features, we will find this a useful concept in reading non-sonnet *zushi* as well. In our final chapter, we switch from the analytical to the synthetic mode. Placing the modern Chinese sonnet in the context of older Chinese as well as modern Western forms, we see how the concepts developed in this book not only fit into, but actually suggest, a much wider framework of relevant applications. I hope someone else may wish to extend my methods (correcting them where necessary) into areas of research that go beyond my present resources of time and expertise.

I am fully aware that some of the concepts I introduce in this book are controversial. I hope that will be taken to be exactly their value. If we can accept the idea that many different views of a poem can all be valid in their own way, the fact that we respect the traditional wisdom on a given subject should not need to prevent us from seeing an obviously valid alternative. For example, if I see a Chinese poet from a non-standard dialect background rhyming rather broadly in a way that lends itself demonstrably to generalization along lines that can be formulated without reference to that dialect, I am in no way denying or disparaging the dialect background. I am merely stating what seems to me a fact, on the basis of explicit logical steps which it seems to me can be checked by anyone. What I indeed am not doing is to throw the entire issue onto a huge and ill-defined heap called "dialect rhyme." What interests me is not how a Chinese poet originally

thought of using a given rhyme word, but why he evidently thought the word had sufficiently general plausibility to be left in in a poem or translation intended for an audience ignorant of his own dialect. The procedures of rhyme analysis I apply in this book are certainly not intended to invalidate the concept of dialect rhyme, but merely to get some light finally on what seems to me another, and too little considered, side of the same coin.

As I have indicated in the opening paragraphs of this Introduction, even ten years ago the study of the Chinese sonnet would have seemed to many a rather arcane undertaking at best. In the light of even such limited, and on some points perhaps conjectural, material as I have been able to present in this book, I think it is clear that the Chinese sonnet can now lay claim to being a central factor in the field of modern and present-day Chinese poetry, and one whose relevance for and positive influence on the rest of the field of Chinese verse represent whole new areas of needed research. My own prediction is that the present clearly discernible upsurge in the sonnet's popularity among Chinese poets will come in the long run to be seen as part of a larger international trend. After decades and even generations in which "serious poetry" and "free verse" have seemed almost synonymous,¹⁷ it may well be that poets and readers alike are ready for a fresh confrontation with the undiminished expressive possibilities offered by more explicitly formal poetry. On the American poetry scene, I would point to the interest now being taken in such poets as X. J. Kennedy, John Hollander, Tom Disch, and J. R. Cunningham. In present-day Dutch poetry, frankly traditional forms including the sonnet have a fully respected place; as three examples of poets who have succeeded in getting a wide hearing for their works in these forms I would mention Gerrit Komrij (1944-), Jan Kuijper (1947-) and Jan Kal (1946-). The last-named is, in the context of this book, especially remarkable for his 1984 collection *Chinese sonnetten*,¹⁸ which contains 36 sonnets based on specific Chinese poems which Kal had read in translation.

Anything like a full history of the Chinese sonnet would have to include studies of many more poets than I have been able to include here. They would certainly include Yang Mu (pseudonym of Wang Jingxian, 1940-; also known as Ching-hsien Wang or C. H. Wang), one of the most famous and sophisticated practitioners of the form outside the People's Republic. Tang Shi (1920-) is briefly mentioned in my chapter on the Nine Leaves group, but the spectacular oeuvre of this poet since the 1960s, amounting to more than a thousand sonnets, deserves

¹⁷ See Steele 1990.

¹⁸ Kal 1984.

serious study in itself. In general, I now feel confident in suggesting that sonnets by present-day poets from the People's Republic of China alone are so many as to constitute a *mer à boire*, and in saying that if it might be going too far to call them the Wave of the Future in Chinese poetry, they already are, to a degree that has been vastly underestimated, one first-rank Wave of the Present. Perhaps ironically, having come into a position to call attention to this vast field, I cannot for the moment go on to study it myself. In any case, there are many people better qualified than I for the difficult task of giving PRC poetry enough of the right kinds of scholarly attention without sooner or later falling into the usual trap of treating the poetry as no more than a footnote to political-science documentation – in other words, as merely a curious, needlessly cumbersome, and in any case less successful form of what could have been done and in fact has been done by many other writers, in prose.

Scholars in the PRC have produced recent studies in Chinese which will be indispensable aids to anyone wishing to study the history of the Chinese sonnet in more detail. I would like to mention specifically the work of Xu Ting and Lu Dejun, which unfortunately did not come to my attention until after the completion of my manuscript in 1997. In addition to an anthology (1996), Xu and Lu have published (1995) a study of the development of the sonnet in China which includes much valuable chronological and bibliographic information as well as analyses of the formal and technical features of many Chinese sonnets. In some cases, Xu and Lu address themselves to technical problems similar to those I discuss, and though their approaches and solutions are not the same as my own, I take their work in this respect as suggesting, from a somewhat different point of view, the validity of what I have attempted.¹⁹

If this book is read by present-day Chinese poets, I hope they will agree with me that, as I claim in Chapter 8, the differences between venerable poetic forms and "free" verse can be bridged far more easily than is often supposed, and that the sonnet in its freer present-day variants is an ideal form in which to bridge them. Surely the differences in approach between poets in "bound" and "free" forms are negligible compared with the differences between both of them on the one hand,

¹⁹ For example, Xu and Lu's concept of symmetrical patterns of sense-groups (*yiqun duichen*, discussed in 1995, 103-107), and their brief mention (375) of possible contrast between lines which are and those which are not self-contained sentences: both are in a general sense relevant to my own notion of "line assonance," though Xu and Lu do not seem to have developed their concepts into an integrated analytic system involving an explicit typology.

Wonderfully relevant to my final chapter is the case, discussed by Xu and Lu (361-362, 376-377), of Guo Moruo (1892-1978) and Chen Mingyuan (1941-) consciously exploiting the phenomenon I call "rhyme reduplication" as a structuring device in translating poems in the classical Chinese *lǔshī* form...into sonnets!

and on the other hand the vast bulk of readers in both East and West, who think it perfectly natural that they should spend years of effort learning to play tennis or use a computer, yet balk at the suggestion that half an hour of attention given to the rudiments of traditional poetic form is well spent.

It is a pleasure to thank the people and organizations that have helped make this study possible. Correspondence with Tu An, Zheng Min, Mary M. Y. Fung, Wang Hongzhi (Lawrence Wong), and Hans Peter Hoffmann was a major source of ideas and materials. Leung Ping-kwan commented helpfully on an earlier version of Chapter 4, which was presented at the IAS Seminar on Modern Chinese Poetry in Leiden in September, 1995 and has since been published in *Modern Chinese Literature*.²⁰ Thanks are due to the Universities of Heidelberg and Tübingen for invitations which enabled me to lecture on my research in the summer of 1996 and to profit from the responses of German colleagues. Wilt Idema, Michelle Yeh, Agnes van Rees, Maghiel van Crevel and Michel Hockx gave much time and energy to reading and commenting on an earlier version of this book. Jeroen Wiedenhof helped me on matters both linguistic and computational. Aurea Sison typed all the Chinese poems and did much else to transform my computer draft into a printable manuscript. Joyce Y. T. Wu, Librarian of the Sinological Institute at Leiden University, helped me to obtain needed materials; other persons who helped similarly will be mentioned by name in the footnotes on specific books. James Geary and Jan Kuijper were generous with their knowledge of modern American and Dutch poetry.

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March 2000

²⁰ Haft 1996.

CHAPTER 1

THE BEGINNINGS

In March 1928 a new journal appeared on the Chinese literary scene: *Crescent Monthly* (Xinyue yuekan). The inaugural issue began with a quote in English from Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" – "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"¹ The issue included a selection from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* in Chinese translations by Wen Yiduo, a young college teacher who was one of the magazine's editors. About two months previously, Wen Yiduo had published an impressive collection of original poetry, *Dead Water* (Sishui), which contained two sonnets of his own as well as many other poems modeled upon Western forms. The Browning sonnets, with their poignantly voiced themes of love, death, and devotion, were an immediate eye-opener for many an aspiring young Chinese writer; they would remain one of the best loved Western poetic works throughout twentieth-century China.² Together with Wen Yiduo's outstanding book, which cemented his reputation as one of the greatest twentieth-century Chinese poets, their publication made 1928 a red-letter year in the development of the Chinese sonnet. Qian Guangpei, the compiler of a groundbreaking anthology of Chinese sonnets, has described this period and its immediate aftermath as the first "sonnet rage" in China (there would be another in the 1940s).³

In 1928 Zheng Min was an eight-year old girl. By her early twenties, during World War II, she was writing poetry including sonnets. For several years she was a student majoring in philosophy in Kunming, where Wen Yiduo taught and lived until one afternoon in 1946 when he was gunned down in broad daylight by political assassins in the service of the Nationalist government.⁴ Zheng Min became one of the proponents of the sonnet during its second "rage" in the 1940s, which was principally instigated by another Kunming poet and professor, Feng Zhi. Nearly half a century later, in 1991, she published *The Poet and Death*, a sonnet suite in which the allusions included echoes of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and of Shelley's line on winter and spring; its main themes were death, love, and the fate of politically persecuted Chinese intellectuals in the twentieth century. The suite was, like Feng Zhi's sonnets, obviously influenced by Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*. Zheng Min's remarkable suite, written at the age of seventy by one of the most eminent living Chinese poets, whose life spans almost to the exact year the entire

¹ The quote is one of the two mottoes at the beginning of the initial editorial statement "'Xin yue' de taidu" on page 3, the other being "And God said, let there be light, and there was light."

² See Qian Guangpei's discussion of secondary-school students reading Mrs. Browning and secretly writing sonnets in the 1950s in Mainland China. In Qian Guangpei 1988, 19.

³ Qian Guangpei 1988, 10-15.

⁴ For a scholarly as well as inspired account of Wen Yiduo's life and work, see Hsu 1980. For a valuable study in German including excellent and memorable verse translations, see Hoffmann 1992.

period during which sonnets have been written in China, is practically an epitome of the development of the sonnet form in China as regards both form and content. We will examine it in some detail in Chapter 6. We will examine some of Zheng Min's 1940s poems in our Chapter 5 on the Nine Leaves group which, like Chapter 4 on Feng Zhi, has to do with the second "rage" in the 1940s. For the remainder of the present chapter, we will be concerned with the early development of the Chinese sonnet up to and including the first "rage" – that is, the late 1920s. Wen Yiduo plays a central role in this chapter not because he wrote many sonnets (though two of the ones he did write are still well known), but because his early and continuing interest in the sonnet form, his widely studied ideas on poetic form in general, and his personal role in guiding and influencing other poets combined to make him a catalytic figure in the development of the form. By far the most prolific sonnet writer of this period was actually Zhu Xiang, but for even an introductory discussion of Zhu's sonnets we will need space for so much detail that in the interest of clarity he is better reserved for the following chapter.

Wen Yiduo (1899-1946) is one of the towering figures in the history of modern Chinese poetry. Though his career as a scholar and teacher extended through several decades, his original poetry is associated with the 1920s – the turbulent years soon after World War I in which the Chinese cultural world was in the throes of adaptation to new times and new, often non-Chinese, values. The overall history of this complex period goes beyond the scope of this book.⁵ For our purposes, we can perhaps best begin by recalling the main factors affecting the development of Chinese poetry in the 1920s.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century the time-honored classical literary language of China, *wenyan*, had been displaced from some of its main functions in society. The centuries-old state examinations, in which candidates were required to demonstrate sound knowledge of classical literature as preparation for selection as members of the bureaucracy, were held for the last time in 1905. In 1920, the government decided that classical literary Chinese should no longer be the language of instruction in public schools; the period 1920-1922 saw the introduction of new textbooks in *baihua*, a written style based on the modern spoken language. Meanwhile, in 1917 Hu Shi (1891-1962), then a student in America, had published a landmark article in the controversial Chinese magazine *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian*), which was widely read by students and urban intellectuals. Entitled "A Modest Proposal for a Reform of Literature," Hu Shi's article, which was soon followed by other writings including a volume of

⁵ For an introduction to the political and intellectual background of this period, see Chow Tse-tsung 1967.

experimental poetry in which Hu Shi attempted to practice what he was preaching, actually provoked what was often called a Literary Revolution. The main tenets of the "Revolution" were that Chinese writers should write in the modern vernacular language rather than in the classical literary idiom, and that traditional allusions and clichés should give way to more direct representation of present-day situations or of the authors' individual feelings.⁶

The transition from traditional genres, written in classical Chinese, to modern vernacular forms meant that poets wishing to participate in the Literary Revolution were confronted with difficult technical problems of a linguistic and formal nature. Classical Chinese was mostly a monosyllabic language in which the "word" and the "syllable" usually coincided. The forms of classical Chinese poetry were defined most basically by specifying the number of syllables in each line; within this matrix, depending on the specific form, there were often additional rules specifying rhyme placement, the tone categories to which syllables in certain positions had to belong, and so on.⁷ On the other hand, the modern language had words of varying length, two- and three-syllable compounds being very frequent. In addition, the modern vernacular involved complicated accentual and prosodic features which often made it difficult even for native speakers to agree as to which syllables in a given string were the most prominent. These features of the modern language made it initially difficult to imagine what (other than free verse) might constitute the form or forms of modern Chinese verse. Many Chinese poets opted for free verse, but Wen Yiduo, influenced by his lasting respect for classical Chinese poetry and by his extensive knowledge of the Anglo-American poetic tradition with its concept of metrical "feet," eventually tried to develop a specifically Chinese formal equivalent of Western meter. We will shortly examine this concept in more detail; for the moment, let us note that from an early date Wen was studying traditional Western poetic forms and attempting to translate them into Chinese. In this context, his

⁶ There is an impressive literature on this period in Chinese literary history, and we cannot here cite more than a few outstanding works. For a more extensive bibliography and background, see Idema and Haft 1997.

A source which remains exceptionally insightful and valuable is Hsu 1970. The Introduction, especially, should be read.

An indispensable source which covers far more ground than its title implies is Hsia 1974.

Also excellent is McDougall 1971.

For a detailed study of developments in the poetic milieu of Hu Shi, his proposals, and his contemporaries, see Hockx 1994.

For introductions to some fifty twentieth-century Chinese poets and their best-known works, with an introductory essay on the social, psychological and technical aspects of the "new" poetry that emerged after the First World War, see Haft 1989.

An excellent study of modern Chinese poetry from the point of view of content is Yeh 1991.

⁷ For descriptions of classical Chinese poetic forms, see Idema and Haft 1997. Succinct descriptions with examples in translation are also given in Frankel 1976.

early enthusiasm for the sonnet form was only natural; it was part of an aesthetic and artistic quest which involved him both emotionally and technically.

When the Literary Revolution broke out, Wen Yiduo was a student at the Qinghua School (later Qinghua University) in Beijing. This institution "was a unique educational experiment in modern China. Founded in 1908 with Boxer Indemnity funds to train Chinese youth for their country's modernization, it offered a program roughly parallel to that of the American high school..."⁸ Though Wen concentrated especially on English, he found the traditional Chinese classics so important that he set himself "a self-study program, a two-year in-depth reading of poetry from the Qing dynasty back to pre-Qin works."⁹

Wen Yiduo started his studies at Qinghua in 1912. Before long he was involved in writing, and sometimes editing, the school's publication, *Ts'ing Hua Weekly*. His early writings in the *Weekly* included reflections on classical Chinese works which he had read. In 1921 he wrote what seems to have been his first published sonnet; according to his own comments in *Ts'ing Hua Weekly* he regarded it as a "failure"; he did, however, see fit to include it in the first of his two volumes of poetry, *Red Candle* (Hong zhu), which was published in 1923.¹⁰ The poem, originally entitled "Tempest of Love," appears in *Red Candle* as "Tempest:"

I played I burned strong sandalwood in sacrifice to you:
 how could I know it would burn so madly!
 Though it filled the whole world with its strange fragrance,
 the traces of your fragrant kiss, which cannot
 be erased, were transformed into mist
 that filled the sky and blinded my eyes;
 I couldn't see you, and burst out crying
 like a child unable to find its mother.
 At once you were by my ear, softly saying
 (but your heart also rumbled as thunder):
 "Come, come, what's all the fuss about?
 Let it teach you a lesson!" and you laughed.
 Beloved, I can't help playing this act again:
 letting the flames of your smile dry my tears!¹¹

⁸ Hsu 1980, 27.

⁹ Hsu 1980, 30.

¹⁰ See Xi Mi 1992, 46-47. On *Red Candle*, its contents and composition, see Sanders 1989.

¹¹ Translation mine. Original in Zhu Ziqing et al. 1948, Vol. 3, *ding*, 68-69.

風波

我戲將沈檀焚起來祀你，
 那知他會燒的這樣狂！
 他雖散滿一世界底異香，
 但是你的香吻沒有抹盡的
 那些渣滓，卻化作了雲霧
 滿天，把我的兩眼障瞎了；
 我看不見你，便放聲大哭，
 像小孩尋不見他的媽了。
 立刻你在我耳旁低聲地講：
 （但你的心也雷樣地震盪）
 「在這裏；大驚小怪地鬧些甚麼？
 一個好教訓哦！」說完了笑著。
 愛人，這戲禁不得多演；
 讓你的笑焰把我的淚曬乾！

Though the poem has a sophisticated rhyme scheme which makes it difficult to classify as strictly belonging to a specific traditional type of sonnet, the progression of thought clearly points to an overall model of the "Italian" type – that is, with an eight-line "octave" followed by a six-line "sestet." The last six lines, beginning with "At once you were...", give the response or denouement to the situation or question that was posed in the first eight. This justifies us in reading the transition from the eighth to the ninth line as the traditional "volta" or "turning point" in the Italian sonnet form.

The rhyme scheme is worth analyzing in detail; as our first instance of a pattern we will often follow in this book, we can set out the rhyme words in order of occurrence, assigning to each a letter, as is common in traditional studies of prosody.

ni	a
kuang	b
xiang	b
di	a
wu	c
xiale	d
ku	c

male	d
jiang	b
dang	b
naoxie shenme	e
xiaozhe	e
yan	f
gan	f

Noteworthy is the feminine rhyme ("d") on *xiale* and *male*; the syllable *le*, which in normal speech would be unaccented, is apparently supported in its rhyme function by the penultimate stronger syllables on *-a* in each case. As for the "e" rhyme in lines 11 and 12, though it might be plausible to read the last syllables of *shenme* and *xiaozhe* as rhyming, they too are not auditorily prominent in normal conversational pronunciation, so that perhaps here again, the preceding sounds are being used in a supporting role (i.e., *nao* and *xiao*; in the whole group *naoxie shenme*, *nao* could be the last syllable stressed).

Enjambement is a prominent feature of the original, and the length of the individual lines varies. The overall compositional thrust seems directed toward the cumulative effect of successive lines rather than toward the careful rhythmic sculpturing of individual lines which would shortly become one of Wen Yiduo's technical preoccupations. In view of the idiosyncratic rhyme scheme and the apparent lack of a governing principle as to the length of the individual lines, we may regard this poem as an example of a technical approach which has been very common among Chinese sonnetteers: observing the overall shape of the sonnet while not strictly following all requirements of any one traditional sonnet form. (In modern Western poetry, of course, the same thing is common.) This emphasis on the overall, most eye-catching features of the form is present even in the Chinese terminology of the form. The most common Chinese terms for "sonnet" are *shisihang*, literally "fourteen-line," *shisihang shi* "fourteen-line poem," and *shisihang ti shi* "poem of the fourteen-line form," though one occasionally also encounters the phonetically based term Wen Yiduo personally coined, *shanglai*. Though we must be careful not to attribute too much significance to etymologies, in this case it could well be argued that the *shisihang* family of terms itself has helped to perpetuate the notion that somehow the other features of the form are less essential than the sheer overall total of its lines – the more so as there are other famous modern Chinese poems comprising other than fourteen lines, which take

their titles from the number of lines they have.¹² In any case, the Chinese *shisihang* terms can be applied in a wide range of senses varying all the way from "any fourteen-line poem" to "poem imitating or observing any or all formal features of a recognizable Western 'sonnet' of the pre-modern period." In this respect *shisihang* can perhaps be compared to the English terms "quatorzain" and "fourteener" (the latter rare in this usage), which can be applied either to a very specific fourteen-line form or more generally to virtually any fourteen-line poem.

In view of the seeming impossibility of finding terminology that can unambiguously cover all possible variants of the sonnet or quasi-sonnet *form*, whether Chinese or Western, in this book the term "form" will be used in a variable, non-technical sense. Its meaning will, I hope, always be clear enough in context. "Line" will always be used to mean "line of typography" – that is, it has reference only and always to the visually perceptible "line" on the printed page without reference to rhythm, meter, syntax or sense. "Octave" and "sestet" will be used in a similar typographic sense to refer to the first eight and the last six lines, respectively, of a sonnet. "Quatrain" and "couplet," again, will mean typographical groups of four or two lines. Where convenient we will also use the term "strophe" to mean a typographically distinct group of any number of lines, preceded and followed by a blank line on the page.

Where it is useful to have a term meaning "block of fourteen lines, with or without rhyme and/or recognizable rhythmic patterning, presumably intended to have some sort of affinity with other poems called sonnets," we can apply the word "envelope." In other words, the "sonnet envelope" will mean the overall or "external" form implied in the mere fact of a poem's possessing fourteen lines. Wide as the scope of this term may be, it has the powerful advantage of not meaning many different things at the same time. As we will see in our final chapter, it actually turns out to be an indispensable factor in making explicit the formal workings and rhythmic beauty not only of sonnets, but potentially of poems in other forms as well.

The concept of "envelope" can be usefully applied to sonnets written by another Chinese poet of the 1920s, Li Jinfa. Li Jinfa is often called the first Chinese Symbolist. His enthusiasm for French poetry led him to read Baudelaire and Verlaine so intensively that their poems, in his own words, "never left my hand."¹³ In his famous book *Light Rains*, which came out in 1925 but was written for the

¹² On the Chinese terminology, see Qian Guangpei 1987, 216; Xi Mi 1992, 46.

A famous example of a poem named for a non-quatuordecimal number of lines is *Jiu hang* (Nine lines) by the Taiwan poet Zhou Mengdie: Zhou Mengdie 1981, 6.

¹³ Quoted from p. 154 of Tu Kuo-ch'ing 1989, which is also the source of the following brief remarks on *Light Rains*.

most part in 1922, Li Jinfa deliberately broke new ground for modern Chinese poetry, including in the book 28 translations from foreign verse in addition to 99 original poems which from their first appearance have evoked from Chinese critics such stock descriptions as "obscure," "neurotic" and "decadent." It is questionable whether he would have been received so dubiously in a Western context, but the premises of rationality and decorum were then, as they still are now, predominant in the Chinese critical world, and Li Jinfa's frank eroticism did not recommend him in the eyes of stodgier-minded reviewers. In the following poem from *Light Rains*, from a modern Western point of view it is truly difficult to see anything very "obscure" or "neurotic." The versification is free within the overall sonnet envelope, belonging to the rhymeless category which in Chinese is sometimes called *suti sishihang* or "blank sonnet," but the progression of thought is certainly no more "decadent" than in countless other love poems in East and West from time immemorial:

In Jest

Let spring come giggling over the plains,
running at you madly, open-armed,
and cold winter weep on all sides,
never able to find a resting place.

When summer comes, you go on as of old
wriggling under the sun.
Autumn, which yellowing leaves and crying bugs
can never restrain, comes and goes naked.

The withering rose will bloom again:
rustle of footsteps on the crooked path,
a laughing female voice behind

the forest echoing, staring you in the face!
Ah, my silence, my distress,
your cold aloofness!¹⁴

¹⁴ Translation mine. Original from Qian Guangpei 1988, 8.

戲言

任春天在平原上嬉笑，
張手向著你狂奔，
冷冬在四周哭泣，
永不得安息之所。

夏天來了，你依舊
在日光下蠕動。
黃葉與鳴蟲管不住
之秋，赤裸裸地來往。

玫瑰謝了還開，
曲徑裏足音之息息，
深林後女人笑語

之回聲，對著你睜視了！
呵，我之寂靜與煩悶，
你之超然孤冷。

The lines are of variable length and unrhymed. There is striking enjambement carrying over from the third to the fourth strophe. The poem perhaps represents an attempt to combine Western devices (rhymeless poetry as such; the sonnet envelope; the personification of spring and autumn) with traditional Chinese suggestiveness and finesse. Whatever its aesthetic value, it is, like Wen Yiduo's technically very different "Tempest," a good illustration of how far the sonnet had gone toward becoming a viable form in Chinese poetry by the very early 1920s.

Another poem based on a recognizable sonnet envelope was "Report of Heaven," written in 1924 by Xu Zhimo (1896-1931), who has often been called the greatest early twentieth-century Chinese poet. Xu Zhimo was closely associated with Wen Yiduo in various literary activities including editing the *Crescent Monthly*. The so-called "Crescent" poets (Xu, Wen and a number of poets initially associated with them including Zhu Xiang) were to go down in history as the outstanding adaptors of quasi-Western forms in their Chinese verse. This early

poem already shows Xu Zhimo following his preoccupation with the forms and themes of English Romantic poetry:¹⁵

Report of Heaven

Lovely autumn scene: soundless falling leaves
slender and lithe, spinning down to earth.
Somewhere across the fence, children's laughter.

A stream of fragrance babbles around the cottages' hush
as birds in a secluded valley, joyously chirping dawn,
drive away night's dark barriers, open unlimited light.

The joy of a moment, welling up like the Udumbara,
splits my pain open, and I forget spring's ties,
life's dread and sorrow, grief and brevity.
In this laugh of infant joy, I've seen Heaven!

Evening red overflows the golden maples.
A cool breeze strokes my body's lone form.
In the sea of my soul, great waves sound,
echoing greater pulses, soul's greater tides!¹⁶

天國的消息

可愛的秋景！無聲的落葉，
輕盈的輕盈的，掉落在這小徑，
竹籬內，隱約的，有小兒女的笑聲：

啞啞的清音，繚繞著村舍的靜謐，
仿佛是幽谷裏的小鳥，歡噪著清晨，
驅散了昏夜的晦塞，開始無限光明。

霎那的歡欣，曇花似的湧現，
開豁了我的情緒忘卻了春戀，

¹⁵ On Xu Zhimo's life and career, see Leo Lee 1973, chapters 7 and 8. On his experiments with Western verse forms, see Birch 1961.

¹⁶ Translation mine. Original from Dai Anchang (ed.), *Xu Zhimo shiji*. Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 1981, 37.

人生的惶惑與悲哀，惆悵與短促—
在這稚子的歡笑聲裏，想見了天國！

晚霞泛濫著金色的楓林，
涼風吹拂著我孤獨的身形；
我靈海裏嘯響著偉大的波濤，
應和更偉大的脈搏，更偉大的靈潮！

The Udumbara is, in Buddhist tradition, supposed to flower once every 3,000 years, signalling the rare appearance of a Buddha. It is a common enough image in modern Chinese poetry, combining the associations of rarity and a salvation knowable practically only in myth and rumor.

Formally, this poem throws into reverse the usual 4-4-3-3 strophic divisions of the Italian sonnet. The "volta" seems to fall in its usual position (that is, in this mirror-image form, after the first six lines): the first six lines describe the scene, while the last eight reveal the scene's effect on the poet. The rhyme scheme seems to be

a
b
b

a
b
b

c
c
d
d

b
b
e
e¹⁷

¹⁷ This is my own reconstruction; it is very liberal in grouping together syllables (e.g. *cu* and *guo* in lines 9 and 10) which undoubtedly sounded much more similar in Xu Zhimo's home dialect than they do in standard Mandarin. Zhu Xiang eloquently criticized both Xu Zhimo and Wen Yiduo for using non-standard pronunciation or being otherwise inconsistent in their rhyming practice: see Zhu Xiang 1926, 172-173 and Zhu Xiang 1928b, 209.

– in traditional Western terms a rather odd scheme, to say the least. The lines are of varying length and rhythm. The sonnet-like character of the poem inheres in its observance of the overall fourteen-line envelope and the clear division of labor between the sestet and the octave. "Report of Heaven" has not stood the test of time as well as many of Xu Zhimo's other poems, but this example from 1924 shows that he did have a sophisticated grasp of the sonnet form, though he wrote in it but rarely.

Meanwhile, Wen Yiduo had continued his quest for poetic beauty. By the time Li Jinfa's Symbolist volume *Light Rains* was published late in 1925, Wen Yiduo had written a poem (not in sonnet form) that was to stand ever after as the proverbial example of a poem in which the aural features of modern Chinese were adapted to the requirements of formally strict verse: in which the individual lines were built up of syllable-groups reminiscent of, but not identical to, the familiar "feet" of English poetry. This poem, written in April 1925,¹⁸ was "Dead Water" (Sishui). As it is one of the most famous of all twentieth-century Chinese poems, it will be appropriate to quote it here in full, in Kai-yu Hsu's translation:

Here is a ditch of hopelessly dead water.
No breeze can raise a single ripple on it.
Might as well throw in rusty metal scraps
or even pour left-over food and soup in it.

Perhaps the green on copper will become emeralds.
Perhaps on tin cans peach blossoms will bloom.
Then, let grease weave a layer of silky gauze,
and germs brew patches of colorful spume.

Let the dead water ferment into jade wine
covered with floating pearls of white scum.
Small pearls chuckle and become big pearls,
only to burst as gnats come to steal this rum.

And so this ditch of hopelessly dead water
may still claim a touch of something bright.
And if the frogs cannot bear the silence –
the dead water will croak its song of delight.

Here is a ditch of hopelessly dead water –
a region where beauty can never reside.

¹⁸ This is the date of composition given in Huang Bangjun and Zou Jianjun 1988, 122.

Might as well let the devil cultivate it –
and see what sort of world it can provide.¹⁹

Thematically, the obvious (and most common) interpretation here is that the "ditch of hopelessly dead water" stands for China in the 1920s which, whatever its obvious putrefaction, might still delude itself with fantasies of "something bright." Technically, each line embodies an intricate rhythmic structure which Wen Yiduo explained in his famous essay "The Formal Laws of Poetry" (*Shi de gelü*, originally published in the *Beijing chenbao* or *Peking Morning Post*, May 13, 1926).²⁰ The rhythmic structure, which holds throughout the poem, can be examined by looking at the first stanza in the original:

這是一溝絕望的死水，
清風吹不起半點漪淪。
不如多扔些破銅爛鐵，
爽性潑你的膿血殘羹。

As Wen explained it (pp. 252-253), the first line comprises nine syllables, which can be read in four groups as follows:

zhe shi/ yi gou/ jue wang de/ si shui
(This is/ a ditch of/ hopelessly/ dead water)

The line consists of one three-syllable group and three two-syllable groups. This structure is maintained in the following lines:

qing feng/ chui bu qi/ ban dian/ yi lun
bu ru/ duo reng xie/ po tong/ lan tie
shuang xing/ po ni de/ sheng cai/ can geng²¹

The notable feature of this "meter" is that it is regular in two dimensions simultaneously: the overall number of characters per line is always nine, and the number of "syllable groups" per line is always four, comprising three two-syllable groups and one of three syllables. For what we are calling "syllable groups," Wen Yiduo used the term *chi* "foot," obviously having in mind the "feet" of Western

¹⁹ Hsu 1970, 65-66.

²⁰ The text I have consulted is Wen Yiduo 1968.

²¹ For a more detailed discussion of this poem's form in relation to other poems of the 1920s, see Birch 1961.

poetry as he had encountered them in his studies. Later Chinese poets and theorists, in elaborating substantially the same concept, have often used the Chinese term *dun*, meaning "pause" or "pause-unit" – that is, in the words of *Lexicon of Chinese New Poetry*, "the fundamental linguistic sound-unit whereby we can naturally observe a slight pause while reading a line of poetry."²² In practice, the *dun* has meant slightly different things to different people, according as the definition is sought in audible stress-accent phenomena, relative time-duration in reading, relative semantic or syntactic weight, or whatever. But whatever the details, the *dun* constitutes a measurable or countable unit longer than the syllable but shorter than the line.²³

In Wen Yiduo's poem "Dead Water," regularity in the number of *dun* per line co-exists with an identical number of syllables (written characters) per line. In other words, at the same time that the poet counts out his *dun*, he is held to an overall premise of isosyllabicity.²⁴ But in other poems, and in the works of other poets, the isosyllabicity could be abandoned, the whole brunt of regularity being henceforth borne by the pattern of regularly recurrent *dun*.²⁵ For poets who worked with this latter concept alone, the *dun*-count might be said to be a modern vernacular Chinese equivalent of the strict syllable-count that had been the bread-and-butter basis of classical Chinese verse form.

Isosyllabicity and *dun*-regularity share one obvious common feature in that they both aim at a consistently recurrent or periodically regular line rhythm *based on something countable*. The question arises as to whether it is possible, while

²² Huang Bangjun and Zou Jianjun 1988, 44. The example they quote of this concept is the same poem we are now discussing.

²³ Though Wen Yiduo's name has become proverbially associated with this concept however exactly it is called, it would be going too far to attribute the idea exclusively to him. Xi Mi (1992, p. 49) traces it in a general way to Lu Zhiwei, whose reputation is now marginal though a few of his poems have won a lasting place in the anthologies. Lu suggested "variable five-beat verse" as a suitable type of line for modern Chinese poetry.

On the other hand, Zhu Xiang claimed, perhaps characteristically, that it had been a personal friend of his, the now-forgotten Liu Mengwei, who first achieved in Chinese the systematic integration of the three factors of rhyme, equal lines, and effective use of strophes. This was in the same piece in which he called Xu Zhimo a "fake poet," who owed his reputation only to the "established authority of academic warlords" and the "backwardness of the reading public." See Zhu Xiang 1928a.

Be all this as it may, what cannot be denied is that Wen Yiduo ultimately was the one who succeeded in presenting the idea to the public in a clear and memorable form at the same time that the quality of his own poetry lent credibility to the concept.

²⁴ In this book I use "isosyllabic" in a broader than usual sense, to signify lines which comprise an equal number of Chinese syllables. However the syllables are read or declaimed, they are represented in the writing system by an equal number of characters.

²⁵ See, for example, Lü Jin 1991 (p. 318 et seq.), in which isosyllabicity and *dun*-regularity are treated as separate but equally valid criteria for the classification of modern Chinese poems.

For a much more detailed discussion of *dun* in the works of a leading modern Chinese poet who has been one of the main exponents of this concept, see Haft 1983.

maintaining an overall framework of recognizable rhythmic recurrence, to introduce a principle of variability based on other types of formal devices.

One poet who did this with occasional great success was Mu Mutian (1900-1971). This Symbolist poet has remained deservedly famous on the basis of a single book, *The Traveler's Heart* (Lüxin), published in 1927. Mu Mutian is not well known as a sonnet writer. Nevertheless, in later chapters, when we discuss such concepts as regularity, recurrence, and the hierarchy of formal factors, we will be much concerned with factors that are relevant to his verse-building techniques. These techniques included, in the words of Michelle Loi, "the grammatically meaningful juxtaposition of auditorily similar syllables...chains of recurrent modifiers leading to the modified word as a climax...[and] the deliberate inclusion of unpunctuated blank spaces within otherwise normal sentences."²⁶

In the following translation of Mu Mutian's sonnet "Su Wu," the "unpunctuated blank spaces" are indicated typographically by blank spaces within the lines:

Su Wu

The moon shines through a desolate golden desert.
The moon raises delicate white waves on the Northern Sea.
Alone, facing the rippling herd he stands there;
he feels in his heart wild waves pound a sea of rage
 a river without end.

A gust of northern wind crosses cold over the lake.
A gust of northern wind blows cold into the desert.
Weakly he drags in vain his rotting staff in silence.
So many poems come to his lips he cannot sing his grief.

Once on the far horizon hurrying a shadow passed.
Ah who can tell him, has the khan won, lost? news from the front?
Now and then starting and stopping the sobbing desolate sounds of the barbarian
 flute.

The Great Wall of the King of Qin keeps away the gentle warm winds.
He cannot see the Yin Range but cannot forget Baideng Mountain..
Ah once a month the moon is full ah every month the khan's new
 recruits.²⁷

²⁶ Quoted from Loi 1989, 192. Loi's book on early twentieth-century Chinese poetry (1971) remains, despite numerous factual inaccuracies, a valuable, wide-ranging and thought-provoking study.

²⁷ Translation mine. Original from Qian Guangpei 1988, 24.

蘇武

明月照耀在荒涼的金色沙漠
 明月在北海面上揚著嬌嬌的素波
 寂寂的對著浮蕩的羊群 直立著
 他覺得心中激動了狂濤 怒海 一瀉的大河

一陣的朔風冷冷的在湖上渡過
 一陣的朔風冷冷的吹進了沙漠
 他無力的虛拖著腐爛的節杖 沉默
 許多的詩來在他的唇上 他不能哀歌

遠遠的天際上急急的渡過了一片黑影
 啊 誰能告訴他漢胡的勝敗 軍情
 時時斷續著嗚咽的 蕭涼的胡笳聲

秦王的萬里城絕隔了軟軟的暖風
 他看不見陰山脈 但他忘不了白登
 啊 明月一月一回圓 啊 月月單于點兵

The original is entirely without punctuation, but it does have the striking line-internal breaks shown in our translation.

Thematically, this poem is about the famous Chinese patriot Su Wu (d. 60 B.C.). In 100 B.C. Su Wu, sent as an envoy to the Xiongnu, was taken captive and banished to the northern borderlands where he was made to tend sheep for 19 years. After the Xiongnu signed a treaty with the Han in 81 B.C., he was allowed to return home. The theme of being exiled in the northern wastelands is a common one in Chinese poetry; we will encounter it again in our following chapter on Zhu Xiang.

The rhyme scheme is unusual: the first eight lines all rhyme on *-e* or *-(u)o* (the identity of this rhyme group is somewhat obscured in modern transcription; in the older Wade-Giles spelling, most of these sounds end in *-o*). The last six lines could also be considered as all rhyming (if we take *-eng* and *-ing* as rhyming); alternatively (if we read these as two rhymes), the pattern is *-ing, -ing, -eng, -eng, -eng, -ing*. (My personal choice would be to read all six of these lines as rhyming,

thus reinforcing the typographical break or "volta" between the first two strophes and the last two. We will defer detailed discussion of the considerations involved to our chapter on the Shakespeare translations.)

Noteworthy as the stark rhyme scheme is, the rhythm is at least as interesting. The lines seem clearly to be built on the *dun* principle, but in addition, the rhythmic groups of two or three characters often take additional emphasis from their cumulative syntactic and semantic weight, that is, Michelle Loi's "meaningful juxtaposition of auditorily similar syllables" and "chains of recurrent modifiers." Looking at the first six lines in transcription, for example, we can easily divide them into *dun*-groups as follows:

mingyue/ zhaoyaozai/ huangliangde/ jinse/ shamo
 mingyuezai/ beihai/ mianshang/ yangzhe/ jiaojiaode/ subo
 jijide/ duizhe/ fudangde/ yangqun zhilizhe
 ta juede/ xinzhong/ jidongle/ kuangtao nuhai yixiede/ dahe

yizhende/ shuofeng/ lenglengde/ zai hushang/ duguo
 yizhende/ shuofeng/ lenglengde/ chuijinle/ shamo

The almost hypnotic pile-up of compounds followed by the grammatical markers *-de*, *-le* and *-zhe* underscores the sense of repetitiveness generated by the recurrent two- and three-syllable *dun*. But in addition, the blank spaces, by interrupting this accumulation at the same time that they make the typographic line even longer, suspend both the sound and the sense, throwing a dramatic cross-light upon both rhythm and syntax. They break the lines in which they occur, as it were, into super-*dun*; in this respect their function is comparable to the use we will see Zhu Xiang making of punctuation in our next chapter.

But the blank spaces do still more. They are positioned in a subtly patterned way in such a manner as to affect not only lines, but the interrelationship of strophes as well. On close examination, we see that the blank spaces occur in the last two lines of each strophe, and only in those lines. In other words, they seem to delay and lengthen the last part of each strophe as if to mark the ending of a formal unit.

This sonnet of Mu Mutian's has an important contribution to make to our discussion of forms in Chapter 8. For the moment, we can summarize the relevant features as follows:

1) the individual lines vary, but *not in an arbitrary or meaningless way*, and

2) the lines of the poem do not *all* contain certain features which nevertheless, where they *do* occur, are meaningful.

As we will contend in Chapter 8, these features, though they may well be particularly effective in sonnets, are applicable in principle to other types of modern Chinese verse as well. It will be appropriate here to study another poem by Mu Mutian, this one not a sonnet, in which similar effects are achieved by somewhat different means. The poem, dating from 1925, is "Falling Flowers:"

Falling Flowers

I wish I could, through silent mist and slight, floating gauze,
listen attent to soughing slender rain slapping silently the eaves,
face from afar the sighing sound in emptiness the wind blows from afar,
aware of the lightish whitish falling flowers falling leaf by leaf.

Falling flowers cover the moss, the hidden path, the rocks, the deep sand.
Falling flowers waft whitish hidden dreams into the silent homes of men.
Falling flowers fall following graceful wrists of slender rain in silence.
Falling flowers press on our lips a kiss's lasting fragrance! Don't wake her!

Ah! Don't wake her! Don't wake the falling flower!
Leave her floating alone, floating, floating, floating in our hearts,
our eyes, singing: everywhere is life's home.
Ah! Where, oh where is life's home? Ah! Hearing the falling flowers in silence.

Love! Shouldn't we forever, through a floating gauze of mist,
subtly deeply savor the whitish falling flowers falling deep?
You leaning lightly on my arm, subtly hearing her sing:
"Remember the mountain peaks, the ends of the sea: you hail from everywhere,
everywhere you are the falling flowers!"²⁸

落花

我願透著寂靜的朦朧，薄淡的浮紗，
細聽著淅淅的細雨寂寂的在簷上激打，
遠對著遠遠吹來的空虛中的嗟嘆的聲音，
意識著一片一片的墜下的輕輕的白色的落花。

²⁸ Translation mine. Original from Zhang Manyi et al. 1974, 312.

落花掩住了蘚苔，幽徑，石塊，沉沙，
 落花吹送來白色的幽夢到寂靜的人家，
 落花倚著細雨的纖纖的柔腕虛虛的落下，
 落花印在我們唇上接吻的餘香！啊！不要驚醒了她！

啊！不要驚醒了她！不要驚醒了落花！
 任她孤獨的飄蕩，飄蕩，飄蕩，飄蕩在我們的心頭，
 眼裏，歌唱著：到處是人生的故家。
 啊！到底那裏是人生的故家？啊！寂寂的聽著落花。

妹妹！你願意罷：我們永久的透著朦朧的浮紗，
 細細的深嘗著白色的落花深深的墜下？
 你弱弱的傾依著我的胳膊，細細的聽歌唱著她：
 「不要忘了山巔，水涯，到處是你們的故鄉，到處你們是落花呀！」

Again the lines have the heavy "beat" or *dun* quality, this time very strongly accented by at times massive pile-ups of "auditorily similar syllables." The first strophe in transcription is a good example:

wo yuan/ touzhe/ jijingde/ menglong,/ bodande/ fusha
 xitingzhe/ xixide/ xiyu/ jijide/ zai yanshang/ jida
 yaoduzhe/ yuanyuan/ chuilaide/ kongxuzhongde/ xutande/ shengyin
 yishizhe/ yipian/ yipiande/ zhuixiade/ qingqingde/ baisedede/ luohua

This time, in the original, Mu Mutian does not use blank spaces; their function is taken over by punctuation, which seems to make some of the *dun* boundaries more emphatic than others. But these points in the line often serve as anchors for an additional formal device: internal rhyme, that is, syllables other than the final one rhyming with each other, with the end of the line, or with strongly placed words in a neighboring line. For example, in line 5, the last syllables of *xiantai* and *shikuai*, both occurring just before commas, chime in a way that is surely not coincidental. The third strophe is shot through with such cases. In line 9, the internal *ta!* clearly rhymes with the final *hua!* This same *-a* rhyme recurs, similarly patterned, in the last line of the same strophe, in *gujia* and *luohua*. The lines between show four occurrences of *piaodang*, all in line 10, chiming with each other and with the *gechangzhe* in the following line; of course, this sound also contains the *-a-* vowel. Carrying over to the next and last strophe, in line 13 there is similar rhyming of

internal *ba* with final *sha*, and the last line of the poem recapitulates the *-a-* sound with its *shuiya*, *guxiang* and (final) *hua ya*. As if we were not already convinced of the preponderance of the vowel *a* in this poem, we might observe almost anticlimactically that of the poem's 16 lines, 14 end in *-a*!

In this poem again, we see the tendency for the end of the strophe to be lengthened: in each case it is as long as or longer than any other line in the strophe, and in the one case where it is equal (strophe 3), it still seems auditorily longer owing to the three sentence-final punctuation marks it contains. Again the lines are variable but in a way that has a certain recognizable proportion or progression, and again some of the lines contain formally significant features which other lines do not contain. If the formal concepts which Wen Yiduo was developing seemed to work in the direction of making the lines uniform, these techniques of Mu Mutian, by contrast, showed the possibility of what we may call an expressive de-standardization of the individual lines: the lines of a given poem being asymmetrical and dissimilar, yet at the same time governed by identifiable formal premises. In Chapter 8, we will see that this concept forms a subtle and little-discussed bridge between twentieth-century Chinese poetry and the great tradition of classical Chinese verse.

Having examined some alternative developments in the Chinese sonnet during the mid-1920s, we can now return to Wen Yiduo's own development as a writer. His book *Dead Water*, which appeared in 1928, was a collection of 28 poems written between 1925 and 1928. It contained two sonnets, which may well both have been written in 1925.²⁹ Both have often been anthologized; for reasons of space we will here consider one, "Regain:"

Regain

That day, if Fate will let us go!
Have no fear; though we must walk a dark tunnel,
walk on bravely, let me take your hand,
don't ask where the somber wind is from.

Just remember what I say today; pay attention
to the palmful of warmth, the budding kisses, smiles that light our way.
Gather them up, that's right, remember my words –
gather them up, with the string of coral-colored heartbeats.

Today has made you suffer – heart longing for heart –
but then you will gather, gather to your heart's content,

²⁹ Xi Mi 1992, 50.

gather up all the gold we've lost today.

Those many-colored petals – all of them our love –
you'll gather them up and put them on.

You will wear a halo of love
as we walk on, and who cares whether to Heaven or Hell!³⁰

收回

那一天只要命運肯放我們走！
不要怕；雖然得走過一個黑洞，
你大膽的走；讓我握著你的手；
也不用問那裏來的一陣陰風。

只記住了我今天的話，留心那
一掬溫存，幾朵吻，留心那幾炷笑，
都給拾起來，沒有差；一記住我的話，
拾起來，還有珊瑚色的一串心跳。

可憐今天苦了你一心渴望著心——
那時候該讓你拾，拾一個痛快，
拾起我們今天損失了的黃金。
那斑斕的殘瓣，都是我們的愛，
拾起來，戴上。

你戴著愛的圓光，
我們再走，管他是地獄，是天堂！

The translation observes the strophic divisions in the original; like the original, it breaks the last line but one into two sub-lines, the second being indented. In the original, all the lines have 12 characters except the last three lines of the octave, which all have 13, perhaps marking a change in tone corresponding to the intensified intimacy of those lines. In general the versification seems less tightly structured than that in "Dead Water." Many of the lines clearly have five beats or *dun*, but there are others, especially where the language is conversational to the

³⁰ Translation mine.

point of casualness and enjambement occurs, in which it seems difficult to pinpoint a clear rhythmic structuring.

The rhyme scheme, on the other hand, is unambiguous. It is the Shakespearean pattern: abab/ cdcd/ efef/ gg. Not in all of Wen's poems is the rhyme structure as evident as in this case. But the subject of rhyme in modern Chinese poetry is exceedingly complex in ways that go beyond the scope of this chapter. In our chapter on the Shakespeare translations below, we will examine the problems posed by the rhyming practice of two translators, Liang Zongdai and Bian Zhilin, who like Wen Yiduo grew up speaking non-standard varieties of Chinese, and whose home dialect may have influenced their rhyming practice. Addressing the question of whether there is a least common denominator by which different standards of rhyme can all be brought under an overall shelter of acceptability, we will suggest a tentative solution, derived from the world of popular Chinese performing arts, which though not universally applicable can account for a very high percentage of cases.

In this chapter, without attempting to chronicle the early development of the Chinese sonnet with anything like completeness, we have discussed a number of outstanding poets who made lasting contributions to the genre. In choosing poems to read and analyze, our special focus has been upon examples of technical dimensions indispensable for full understanding and appreciation of the Chinese sonnet. It could be said that by the end of the 1920s – the decade with which we have been concerned in this chapter – those technical possibilities were all in existence and available to future poets.

The most obvious gap in our discussion, *qua* overview of the Chinese sonnet in the 1920s, is of course that we have scarcely said a word about the phenomenally prolific sonneteer, translator and theorist Zhu Xiang, whose sonnet production quantitatively towers over that of all the other names we have discussed so far as well as being of at least equal technical precision. This unjustly neglected poet will be the subject of our next chapter.

As for the two poets who are probably to be called the finest sonnet writers of the 1930s, Bian Zhilin and Dai Wangshu, we will not discuss them here as each has already been the subject of a book-length study which includes numerous translations.³¹

³¹ On Bian Zhilin, see Haft 1983. For an excellent Chinese study of his life and work including an admirably detailed bibliography and chronology, see Zhang Manyi (Mary M. Y. Fung) 1989.

On Dai Wangshu, see Gregory Lee 1989.

CHAPTER 2

LINES WITHIN THE LINES: ZHU XIANG

Historians of modern Chinese poetry have not been kind to Zhu Xiang or done justice to him. At the beginning of this book we noted the disproportionate neglect and occasional disparagement of his sonnets by anthologists and scholars whose work is well known in the West. In the People's Republic of China he was for many years even more dramatically underplayed. For example, in Wang Yao's long-standard *Draft History of Modern Chinese Literature*, there is but a brief discussion of Zhu Xiang, and his posthumous volume *The Stone Gate* (Shimen ji), in which his formidable array of 71 sonnets appeared, is not even mentioned.¹ In the PRC, not a single monograph on Zhu Xiang appeared until the 1980s; the first systematic scholarly treatment of Zhu's life and work was Qian Guangpei's *Xiandai shiren Zhu Xiang yanjiu* (A study of the modern poet Zhu Xiang), which appeared in 1987, more than half a century after the poet's death!²

I believe the reasons for this neglect are mostly extraliterary. It is understandable that historians in the PRC should not want to burn their fingers on a writer whose turbulent and unusual biography makes him very difficult to classify in terms of political or social correctness. The one fact everybody seems to agree on is that Zhu Xiang died by suicide; but in the Chinese context suicide traditionally calls for explanation, and the explanation is most often sought in presumably intolerable factors in the person's social environment. As Jiang Mu has shown in an informative and perceptive article,³ there seems to be virtually no high-grade evidence that Zhu Xiang's suicide was related to politics. In other words, he cannot be made out to be a martyr other than to the vagaries of his own character. But this very fact, in the PRC, would in many periods have been enough to make a person suspect of undue pessimism, negativity, and lack of due political enthusiasm and *engagement*. Add to this the fact that he was one of the very most prolific experimenters with non-Chinese poetic forms, which in many periods were anathema in the PRC,⁴ and it becomes clear why Zhu Xiang might not have seemed a comfortable or even a safe subject for study and discussion in the PRC.

Another reason for Zhu Xiang's neglected status (though it is undoubtedly subsidiary to the main problem of his political-social valence) may be the rather miscellaneous nature of his oeuvre. Many of his works were not published in book

¹ Discussed in Liu Wuji 1987.

² Qian Guangpei 1987. As Liu Wuji mentions (p.6), in Taiwan a number of important reprints of Zhu Xiang's works appeared in the 1970s. A particularly important volume is Ya Xian 1977; it includes biographical material and essays on Zhu Xiang by various authors.

³ Jiang Mu 1988.

⁴ See, for example, the discussion of the 1950s controversy on "National Forms" and "New Folk Songs" in Haft 1983, Chapter 5.

form, if at all, during his lifetime. *The Stone Gate*, in many respects an outstanding book showing its author to be of truly unusual gifts, versatility, and erudition, is perhaps unfortunately variegated in content. Its 71 sonnets alone could have filled a separate volume, but in *The Stone Gate* they are merely a part of one of the five chapters: the others include a full-length verse drama, a long narrative poem, a collection of short lyrics, and a trio of prose poems.⁵ The association of these extremely varied genres in a single volume may have made *The Stone Gate* appear something of an Old Curiosity Shop, the more so as many of the best poems in it were exactly those written in European forms. Typographically, too, the book was not free of growing pains. The sonnets, for example, were laid out one to a page, each with its fourteen lines divided into two blocks of seven vertically printed lines without stanza divisions, one block above the other. Symmetrical and neat though this arrangement was, it obscured the precision and intricacy of the stanza structures and rhyme schemes which Zhu Xiang had so meticulously observed.

By now it will be clear that I personally lament the slight and one-sided treatment that has been accorded to Zhu Xiang. As we are concerned in this book with the Chinese sonnet, this is not the place to discuss in detail the merits of other aspects of Zhu Xiang's poetic oeuvre. Suffice it to say that however much his wide reading and drive to experiment may have led him at times to produce works which seem at this distance in time more like brave attempts than achieved poems, it is exactly this feature which makes his works, in my view, a gold mine for anyone wishing to study the formal and linguistic dimensions of the development of modern Chinese poetry. And I do not hesitate to say here again, as I have said in the Introduction, that in the Western academic world his sonnets have been unduly victimized by the fashionable and ephemeral anti-formalism which has had such disproportionate authority in Western poetry during the past decades. I am confident that as the pendulum of critical taste swings back, as it now clearly is already doing, toward renewed appreciation of the traditional qualities of form, proportion and craftsmanship (i.e. the features of "terseness" and "elegance" which McDougall in 1989 did grudgingly allow to Zhu Xiang's sonnets), a few at least of his sonnets will take their rightful place in the front ranks of the preserved body of modern Chinese verse.

Difficult Poems, Difficult Poet

Despite great and obvious differences between the two men, it is often difficult to resist comparing Zhu Xiang to the 20th-century American poet Hart Crane (1899-1932).⁶ Both gave early evidence of phenomenal literary ability; both studied and

⁵ For a detailed description of *The Stone Gate*, see McDougall 1989c.

⁶ For an excellent biography of Crane, see Unterecker 1969.

admired intensely the classical traditions of their respective literatures, and both wrote at times almost impassably dense but precisely wrought verse which challenged to the fullest the interpretative faculties of their contemporaries. Both were given to sudden declensions into inaccessible states of oversensitivity and disproportionate anger which bewildered and alienated their friends and associates. Both were tortured and in the end literally destroyed by emotional and psychological factors apparently beyond their control. Not only did Zhu and Crane both die by suicide: even the ages and manner of their deaths are roughly comparable. Crane jumped off a ship in the Gulf of Mexico at the age of 32; Zhu Xiang was going on 30 when he jumped off a boat at the very place where Du Fu, whom the Chinese perennially call their nation's greatest poet, is said by one very dubious legend to have drowned himself.⁷

Both Crane and Zhu Xiang distilled, from notoriously turbulent and unconventional personal experience, poetry of paradoxically classical restraint and control. The poetry often seems to arise not at all from the world of experience conjecturable from the known facts of the poet's life, but in a rarer atmosphere of carefully cultivated consciousness and artistic discipline. In beginning this chapter with a few facts and anecdotes from Zhu Xiang's biography, I certainly do not mean to suggest that an anecdotic key must be used to approach the themes and images of his verse. But in view of the general dearth of information on Zhu Xiang, it will be useful to have at least a minimal backdrop of biographical scenery, if only to make clear that we should *not* read his poems merely as if they were diary entries.

Zhu Xiang was born in Yuanling County, Hunan, on October 4, 1904.⁸ His mother died when he was, according to Chinese reckoning, three years old. Starting in 1910, he received traditional-style tutoring in such classical Chinese texts as the *Shijing* (Book of Odes) – the oldest preserved body of Chinese poetry – and the *Shiji* (Records of the Historian), one of the most revered models of classical Chinese prose.⁹ In 1917, for a while he attended the preparatory course for an industrial school in Nanjing; at about the same time, he was taking a course in English offered by the YMCA. In the fall of 1919 he was admitted to Qinghua College. By 1921 he was writing vernacular poetry; the following year saw the first

⁷ Jiang Mu 1988, 54.

⁸ In addition to Qian Guangpei 1987, my biographical sources on Zhu Xiang include Wang Hongzhi 1988 and another chronology of the same title by Sun Yushi, which appeared in Sun Yushi 1985. The chronologies do not always agree. Sun's book includes a brief biographical chapter. Useful details and evaluative interpretations are also to be found in Jiang Mu 1988.

⁹ For an introduction to these texts and their role in traditional Chinese education, see Idema and Haft 1997.

of his many publications in *Short Story Monthly* (including translations of English poetry and fiction).

The year 1923 was marked by one of the first of many incidents in which a rupture between Zhu Xiang and his environment was caused by the extreme sensitivity and touchiness of his personality. Though there are conflicting stories as to Zhu's exact motivation, the fact is that he was expelled from Qinghua College. According to his friend of those days, the poet Sun Dayu, the reason was that Zhu Xiang rebelled against compulsory attendance at breakfast; he was later to elaborate in a letter to Luo Niansheng upon the "inhuman" life students led at Qinghua.¹⁰ Another version has it that Zhu Xiang flagrantly skipped classes to attend a rival university instead.¹¹ Whatever the exact details, this was perhaps the first of many cases in which Zhu Xiang was unable or unwilling to maintain himself in situations which must have seemed eminently desirable from the viewpoint of social, academic or literary advantage.

Soon after this incident, Zhu married. The supreme irony was that Zhu, who was in so many ways so cosmopolitan and undoubtedly one of the best-informed intellectuals of his day as regards foreign literature and culture, married a girl whom his parents had chosen for him even before he was born. The girl, Liu Nijun, was the daughter of a good friend of his father's, born just fifteen days earlier than Zhu Xiang. During the simultaneous pregnancies of Zhu's and Liu's mothers, they had agreed that if their babies turned out to be a boy and girl, they should later marry – this practice, the so-called *zhi fu wei hun* or "marriage by pointing to the (pregnant mother's) belly," was far from uncommon in the old China. As might have been expected in such a traditional Chinese setting, Zhu and Liu had two children within as many years after their own marriage. In the long run, however, their marriage turned out to be by any standards an unhappy one, marked by drastic long separations; the death in infancy of their last child is even said to have been caused by neglect and insufficient feeding during a period of separation.¹²

After the publication of his first volume of poetry, *Xiatian* (Summer) in 1925, in 1926 Zhu was re-admitted to Qinghua. This was also the year in which he had a

¹⁰ Not everyone would have agreed that conditions at Qinghua were "inhuman." Many of the students had personal servants who lived with them at the school, and Wen Yiduo personally wrote an article in the *Tsing Hua Weekly* (No. 185, April 24, 1920, pp. 22-23) criticizing his fellow students for their overindulgence in "tobacco, wine, sex, and decadent music." (Hsu 1980, 27-28, 38.) On the other hand, perhaps Zhu Xiang was thinking of the moral-rearmament-like countermeasures which the school mounted to oppose these very factors: according to Kai-yu Hsu (1980, 28), "to change the students' attitude toward manual labor, the school mobilized them to repair roads and later added boy-scouting and military drill." The letter to Luo Niansheng is quoted in Jiang Mu 1988, 51.

¹¹ Jiang Mu 1988, 51.

¹² Jiang Mu 1988, 53.

personal quarrel with Xu Zhimo which he seems never to have forgotten. The vituperativeness of some of his critical pieces on Xu Zhimo practically has to be seen to be believed: in published articles he referred to Xu, among other things, as a "fake poet"¹³ who wrote "banal" and "nauseating"¹⁴ verse. Coming from the pen of a writer like Zhu Xiang, who was capable of writing such elegant and balanced essays, these attacks must probably be seen primarily as examples of his disastrously erratic temper, which in the long run was to wreck so many of his vital relationships.

In 1927 he graduated from Qinghua. A few days after the publication of his second book of poetry, *Caomang ji* (The wilderness), he left for America on a scholarship to study at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. Arriving in September, he was placed in the senior year and attended classes in Western literature, Old English, Latin, and advanced French. The last-named field proved fatal to his stay at Lawrence, however: in December, when the students were assigned a passage by Daudet in which the author referred to the Chinese as "like monkeys," Zhu was so enraged that he summarily quit school despite the personal apology of his professor.

He went on to the University of Chicago, where Wen Yiduo had studied before him. Here, too, he quickly found grounds for offense. Though this was a productive period in which he studied advanced German and Ancient Greek as well as working on many of the translations which later appeared in his book *Panshiliu ji*, before long a professor suspected him of borrowing a book and not returning it – whereupon Zhu Xiang became so angry that he quit school.

This time he went on to the University of Ohio, but before long, at Wen Yiduo's urging, he returned to China and took up a seemingly desirable job: as head of the Department of Foreign Literature at Anhui University. For a while, things seemed to go well. In 1929 he published a volume of translations of contemporary English short stories. While at Anhui, he worked on many of the mature poems that were later to appear in *The Stone Gate*. Once again, however, personal factors proved insuperable. When the university administration changed the name of his department to "Department of English" rather than the "Department of English Literature" which Zhu Xiang preferred, he took irrevocable offense. When the school refused to give teaching jobs to several of his personal friends, he quit his job. By doing so, he plunged himself into a catastrophic period of poverty, uncertainty and instability which culminated in his suicide on December 5, 1933.

¹³ Zhu Xiang 1928a, 207.

¹⁴ Zhu Xiang 1928b, 209.

Sonnets from The Stone Gate

The sonnets in *The Stone Gate* are presented in two groups: 17 in the so-called "English (i.e. Elizabethan) style" and 54 in the "Italian (i.e. Petrarchan) style."¹⁵ As we will see shortly, especially in the "English" group, a number of poems depart from the textbook definition of the form. Whether in the "English" or the "Italian" style, the metric cornerstone of Zhu Xiang's sonnets is isosyllabicity. Almost without exception, all the lines of a given poem have the same number of written characters. In the "English" group, the number is nearly always 10 or 11. In the "Italian" group those are also far and away the most common lengths, but occasional use is made of a line as long as 12 or as short as 8 characters.

If isosyllabicity is the most immediately obvious feature of Zhu's form, it is almost equally obvious that in the individual lines, contrasting or contrapuntal rhythmic effects are often achieved through the use of enjambement on the one hand and punctuation on the other. Punctuation often marks off what are clearly syntactic or sense units having a peculiar rhythmic emphasis or weight of their own. Though these punctuated groups often would seem so emphatic as to demand a slight pause in reading – being in this respect reminiscent of the rhythmic suspensions which in the previous chapter we saw Mu Mutian creating through the use of blank spaces within the lines – nearly always Zhu Xiang steadfastly maintains the overall uniformity of line length no matter how complex these line-internal variations become. The result is often a surprisingly effective sense of cross-rhythms, or of the lines being somehow equal yet at the same time not equal, owing to the presence of these shorter units whose weight and placement can create the illusion that they are almost secondary, shorter lines in their own right: "lines within the lines."¹⁶

¹⁵ In this section we shall examine thirteen sonnets from *The Stone Gate*. In view of the great importance Zhu Xiang attached to the formal features of his poetry and of the sometimes intricate slight variations on the traditional forms applied, we shall present these poems in rhyming translations in which the rhyme structure is obvious to the eye. At times we have had to rhyme very liberally or leniently in a way that many traditionalists would undoubtedly reject. In any case, these translations make no claim to literary merit.

The text of all originals discussed in this chapter is taken from Zhu Xiang 1935.

¹⁶ Given the importance I attach to the role of punctuation in Zhu Xiang's sonnets, I must mention at the outset that existing printed editions may vary as to the type, and occasionally even the placement, of punctuation marks. In *The Stone Gate*, the volume from which I have taken all the originals, use is made of what are apparently intended to be points or periods of two different sizes, as well as question and exclamation marks, colons, semicolons, long dashes, and series of dots. In adapting the texts for this book, I have tried to transcribe each "small" point with a comma and each "large" point with a period, though the copy of the original which was available to me is at times not indisputably clear as to whether a point is "small" or "large." Since my argument depends not so much on the exact nature of the punctuation marks as on their placement, I have not judged this an impermissibly uncertain procedure.

This phenomenon, of course, immediately recalls Wen Yiduo's "Dead Water" meter, in which conscious use is made of line-internal rhythmic subgroups which are played off against an overall isosyllabic premise. The differences are that (1) in Wen's use of the "Dead Water" meter in the poem of the same name, the occurrence of the subgroups is predictable because it is defined in advance as applicable to all lines, and (2) in Wen's poem the subgroups, being all either two or three syllables long, still seem relatively close to the European idea of the regularly recurrent "foot" whose function and definition are predominantly rhythmic rather than syntactic, whereas Zhu Xiang's subgroups are much more various and unpredictable in composition as well as, in many cases, serving to mark ellipsis, apposition, and other grammatical structures rather than just aural weight per se.

The rhyme schemes of the corresponding European forms are in general observed, though there are occasional striking exceptions which show Zhu Xiang adapting the form ingeniously to the rich possibilities of rhyming in Chinese. Specifically, he often repeats a given rhyming sound more often than would have been customary in the strictly traditional European form (as we will often see, in the next chapter, Feng Zhi doing in his 1940s sonnets with their very different metric and lineation structure). In the "English" group the possibilities of variation include poem no. 1 with its alternation of two different line lengths, and even one poem (no. 6) of only ten rather than fourteen lines; the one factor which is invariably maintained, and which serves to define all these poems as belonging broadly to the "English" group, is that the last two lines rhyme.

Let us now turn first to the "English" sonnets. "English Sonnet 1" has one of the most intricately original structures in the whole sonnet sequence:

English Sonnet 1

Look at the distant beacon fires: how they
lift their splendor a hundred feet above the borderland...
They've shone on Tartar soldiers in array:
silent steeds galloping in stealth across the sand.

They've shone on a girl's green grave-mound,
on skies like tapestries, by the Tartar flute's sobbing spanned,
upon a defeated general, wrapped around

Later printed editions of Zhu Xiang's poetry from the PRC, though much more easily legible, are not uniform in their handling of this problem. Four which I have been able to consult are Qian Guangpei 1987 and 1988, Sun Yushi 1985, and the collected edition *Zhu Xiang shiji* published in Chengdu by Sichuan Wenyi Chubanshe in 1987.

I have not found it practical to try to represent the punctuation of the original in my translations.

in furs, seeing by a pair of stars the twinned Dippers stand.

The battlefield's a cemetery, so vast
who can say what mighty men it holds, what ladies grand?
Beacon fires are fireflies, flitting past
the graves, each grasped by a wavering revenant's hand.

This grieved night wind on barren ground –
what ghostly keening seeping through its sound!

看，看遠方的那團烽燧
在邊關百尺上揚起光華……
它曾經照過胡兵結隊，
悄無聲的駿馬馳走平沙；
也曾經照過美人青塚，
氈帳般的天邊哽咽胡笳，
或是降將掣重裘夜擁，
在雙星之下望斗柄移梭……
這疆場有如一片墳墓，
埋著不知多少名將，嬌娃；
烽火是燐，在塋前飛度，
照見憧憧鬼影飄忽紛拏；
那悲歎著的荒原夜風，
有多少啾啾淅淅在當中！

Thematically, this poem recalls Mu Mutian's "Su Wu" with its elegiac evocation of exile in the northern wastes.

Formally, an obvious and exceptional feature of the original is the patterned alternation of 9- and 10-character lines in parallel with the rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme is

a
b
a
b

c
b

c

b

d

b

d

b

c

c

All the lines having the "b" rhyme, and only those lines, are 10 characters in length; all the others are 9 characters. Neither the variation in line length nor the repetition of one rhyme throughout the first three stanzas is typical of the "English" sonnet as generally known; the only traditionally "English" feature here is the rhymed final couplet.

We next consider "English Sonnet 6," which has the deviant ten-line structure:

English Sonnet 6

If there had been no quake, there would remain
no precious ruins, records of Pompeii.
Columbus was a pirate: greed for gain
that gave us a bigger map, where more land lay.

The same "Bible" held millennia civilized
they almost murdered Galileo by.
Science fermented: hell grew authorized.
Saturn seen, disasters drop from the sky.

Hard to discern the cycle of man's lot...
Growth from wreck, evil in good begot.

沒有地震，那滂佩伊故墟
便無從留下珍貴的文獻。
科倫布是海盜；他的貪慾
卻拏新版圖加上了地面。
「聖經」撐起有千年的文化，
幾幾乎拿蓋里留給殺害—
科學釀成了地獄的批發，

都是土星見了，降下天災。
人事的循環太難於捉摸……
建設來自破壞，善產生惡。

Thematically, this is a good example of the motif of moral ambivalence or duplicity that is one of the recurrent ideas in Zhu's sonnets. The disaster of Pompeii, like the reprehensible "greed" of Columbus, has been a factor enriching the life of later generations. The same Bible which is the foundation of civilized life can mean death to an individual.

Formally, the original is isosyllabic with a constant length of ten characters. The rhyme structure is two successive quatrains each having alternate rhyme, followed by the final couplet in a new rhyme:

a
b
a
b

c
d
c
d

e
e

In other words, it is a regular Shakespearean sonnet with one quatrain less.¹⁷ In the original, four lines show the feature of line-internal subgroups marked by punctuation. These always take the form of the line's ten characters being divided into six and four. The poem as a whole begins and ends with a four-character group. The repetition of such a group at the end of line three as it were "sets" ten, six and four as the units that will be used, in addition to creating the expectation that another four-character group will come. This expectation is held in suspension until the third line from the end, whose final four-character group (lit. "down drop

¹⁷ As Qian Guangpei 1987 points out (p. 220-221), in Shakespeare's own sonnet cycle there are also poems of anomalous structure: the 15-line no. 99 ("The forward violet thus did I chide..."), which simply inserts one additional line on the "a" rhyme before proceeding normally for the last ten lines, and no. 126 ("O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power..."), which consists of only twelve lines arranged as six rhymed couplets.

Another parallel which comes to mind are the "curtal sonnets" of Hopkins: poems of sonnet-like appearance but fewer than fourteen lines. For examples and analyses, see Gardner 1979.

catastrophes from heaven") chimes well positionally and thematically with the equally succinct four-character group with which the last line ends ("good gives rise to evil").

In "English Sonnet 6" the theme of ambivalence or split appears as a feature of external reality. In the next poem we will consider, "English Sonnet 14," it is perceived as an internal feature of the lyrical subject's identity:

English Sonnet 14

Ah, soul! a pair of children, you and me!
For I need you, and you need an address.
We're learning to read in life's library,
together in play, in crying and gladness.

When spring has come, we cry in singleness:
to the road and the rose of sharon! Off! Away!
Taller than we the rose, and in the grass
are crickets – we hear their quivering bugles bray.

On the beach, together in the sand we play
and sun, hearing the tide lick the shore.
Water birds under the clouds' walkway,
tide, wind, and the two of us: no more!

And when evening's rung, and each bird in its nest,
we'll go back home together, to our rest.

啊，靈魂，我們是一對孩子——
我少不了你，你也要居所——
在人生的書裏我們認字；
一同遊戲；一同啼哭，快活。
春天來了。我們齊聲的說：
上路去罷！路邊有木槿花，
高過我們的頭；草裏藏躲
有金鈴兒。顫鳴著小喇叭。
在沙灘裏我們一起玩沙，
曬太陽；聽湖水舐岸作聲；
看雲行在天上，水鳥在下；
湖風吹著；只有我們二人！

等到晚鐘響了，鳥兒在巢，
我們也一起回家來，睡覺。

The theme of a duality or split between the poet and his soul, or of a divided soul, is a prominent one in Zhu's sonnets; we will encounter it again in our discussion of "Italian Sonnet 16" below. The theme of duality lends itself nicely to the parallelism which is one of the poem's obvious structuring devices: what "I" need is "you," and what "you" need is "an address" (i.e., "me" to dwell in). On the "road" of life we encounter things that are larger than ourselves (the "rose") as well as those that are smaller ("crickets").

The rhyme scheme here is the traditional "Spenserian" variant in which the last line of one quatrain rhymes with the first line of the next:

a
b
a
b

b
c
b
c

c
d
c
d

e
e

In the original (isosyllabic: 10-character lines), the last line of each quatrain begins with a punctuated four-character group. In the last quatrain, the penultimate line also ends with such a group, giving an added echo or emphasis to the group at the beginning of its last line. In addition, this fourth-from-last line, both by this four-character element and by the presence of the words *zai* and *niao*, chimes positionally, aurally and semantically with the four-character group of the second-to-last line, which also contains the same two words.

Our next poem, "English Sonnet 16," has longer lines (all of twelve syllables), as is evident in our translation:

English Sonnet 16

A single sickle moon bringing a couple of stars.
Cool. Unbound. The market-place, on the night set;
a dog barks in the distance. Through the street's heart, cars
rush but rarely; dimmed is care, quiet is fret.

Suddenly the breast is awash, an ancient longing swells.
And all around, an ancient scene, seeming sight
of wilds, frogs, willows, elms where the tiller dwells
and rivers unfold from foothills, out of the dew of night.

The mountain spirit whispers: there's a stream about.
As if forever. Pine, pagoda. Cypress, shrine:
they welcome not the traveler, nor cast him out.
If he has come, let him sit on the stone incline

and gaze on the always far and ancient – I'm imagining,
facing a couple of stars and a single sickle shining.

只是一鐮刀的月亮，帶兩顆星，
清涼，灑脫，在市廛定下來的夜；
遠方有犬吠，車輛奔走過街心，
寥落的；擾攘與喧囂已經安歇。
古老的情思蓦然潮起在胸頭，
以及古老的意境。仿佛有群蛙
搏動在原野內，榆柳，田舍河流
展開在夜露之中，在山麓之下。
山靈的喉舌微語著，一條山溪。
仿佛是終古的，松柏，寶塔，寺廟；
它們並不迎迓遊客，也不嫌棄，
要是他來了，坐在石磴上，閑眺。
總是這麼古老，悠遠的，我幻想，
對了兩顆星，與一鐮刀的月亮。

Thematically, here we see Zhu Xiang, as often, in a mood of reverie, rapidly building up a complex scene in which three levels interact: the objective scene, the

subjective mood, and an imaginative state, featuring images of the "always far and ancient," which arises in conjunction with the other two.

The rhyme scheme is the straight "Shakespearean" pattern:

a
b
a
b

c
d
c
d

e
f
e
f

g
g

Line-internal character subgroups abound in this poem. There are many, and they are irregular in composition and occurrence. Their effect is to generate a sense of broken or interrupted syntax within the lines. Their grammatical status is sometimes elliptical or ambivalent, e.g., *qingliang* and *satuo* in line 2 ("Cool. Unbound.") and the last six characters of line 10 ("Pine, pagoda. Cypress, shrine").

The device of using the final couplet to communicate a sudden awakening from the reverie occurs again in "English Sonnet 17":

English Sonnet 17

It's a field for frogs to work, reeds in a pool...
water birds steal kisses from sounds.
Though mules praise evening's sweet cool –
willows sigh, keep to proper bounds.

A train in the distance strings out its run
across the echoing valley, by the cascade.
A nearby bottle's in the belly having fun.
An oilpaper toy that a child has made.

In the water the moon, round-faced, idiotic,
has thrown his pearls, and on they roll. Crossing
the water the frog's twin legs kick
twin light trails. Above, white hair tossing.
Come back tomorrow; watch pale lotuses do
sketches in water of a peach that never grew.

是青蛙的稻田，這一片蘆葦……
急劇的，水鳥在與聲響接吻。
便是驢子都誇獎夜涼甜美——
柳條兒歎著氣，那更是本分。
遠處有火車，綿連的，奔走在
迴聲的山谷中，瀑布的崖下；
近處有綠瓶在肚子裏作怪，
有油紙作的玩具，孩童正要
月亮是團臉的白癡；在水裏，
他扔下來了許多珠子，滾動。
晃過水面的蛙兩條腿在踢
兩條白光，頂上是白髮蓬蓬。
到明天再來看小荷葉，淡青，
拿沒有熟的桃子畫在水心。

Here we see the landscape-reverie motif transposed into another key: the poet is at least slightly drunk. Toward the end of the third quatrain, the "frog" metaphorically enacts man's passage through life, leaving "light trails" which also suggest man's "white hair." The mention of "white hair," through its association with approaching old age, leads on to the thought of "a peach that never grew," i.e., failure and disappointment in love life.

Formally the poem is not remarkable: the lines are all 11 characters long, and the rhyme scheme is Shakespearean.

"Italian" Sonnets

Going on now to poems of the "Italian" group, we must accustom ourselves to their very different rhyme scheme. In the "Italian" model, the first eight lines (the "octave") are always two quatrains rhymed

a
b
b
a

a
b
b
a

As has often been pointed out, a subtle feature of this arrangement is that the last two lines of the first quatrain, together with the first two of the second, form a structure (b-a-a-b) which is the mirror image of the quatrains' a-b-b-a. As for the last six lines (the "sestet"), many different arrangements are possible, though in general a rhyming final couplet (i.e. the last two lines rhyming) is avoided.

Looking first at "Italian Sonnet 2," we will see how Zhu Xiang, while maintaining the overall formal tenor of the form, uses liberal rhyming and near-rhyming to achieve a still more close-knit structure:

Italian Sonnet 2

I'd lay aside all wide of sky or sea
if you'd leave me but one small tenement,
the way a seed in the fruit's core is pent,
to hide me from the outer world's cruelty

and the true road of living let me see:
emerge reborn as pine cone's subtle scent,
almond smooth, walnut rich but prudent.
Some go feeding the common gluttony,

some in spring sun overfly the peaks
and only then set roots and petal, slow,
after a hundred years reach out, clawed,

(what their deep cry by day and night bespeaks)
to grasp green, that ripened it not go:
and harden with that, while the four winds maraud.

我情願拿海闊天空扔掉。
只要你肯給我一間小房—
像仁子蹲在果核的中央，

讓我來躲避外界的強暴；
 讓我來領悟這生之大道，
 脫胎換骨，變成松子清香。
 核桃內豐外畲杏仁潤涼……
 有的去給世人越吃越要；
 有的，趁陽春飛越過山巔
 那時候，生根著葉起來，慢，
 很慢的……百年後他伸手爪
 [他高呼，低喚在黑夜，白天]
 要抓住那青，成年不變換，
 與那硬，任風在四邊騷擾。

Thematically we are on familiar Zhu Xiang ground here: much of the objectively given situation in this world is repellent, and the answer would have to be somehow to be "reborn." The various dry tree-seeds (of the pine, almond, walnut) may wait for "a hundred years" finally to divulge the violent vitality that was "pent" in them. They "grasp green, that ripened it not go." In the original, the "seed in the fruit's core" evokes richer associations as the *guo* (fruit) could also be taken in a Buddhist sense as "results, accumulated consequences of experience."

For clarity in discussing the rhyme scheme, we will first set out the rhyming syllables in order:

diao
 fang
 yang
 bao

dao
 xiang
 liang
 yao

dian
 man
 zhao
 tian
 huan
 rao

Reading for as many distinct rhyme sounds as possible (specifically, taking the vowel sound of *a* in *dian* and *tian* in its modern standard Mandarin pronunciation as subtly distinct from its sound in *man* and *huan*), we could identify this as a-b-b-a a-b-b-a c-d-a c-d-a. But in the rhyming practice of many styles of Chinese performative art, including the Peking Opera, use is made of a rather broad rhyming system called the Thirteen Tracks (*shisan zhe*). As this system will be a major focus of our following chapter, we will not discuss it here other than to point out that in the Thirteen Tracks system, *dian* and *tian* rhyme with *man* and *huan*, so that the rhyme scheme of the sestet can very plausibly be taken as

c
c
a

c
c
a

This gives us a remarkably compact scheme in which the whole poem is built on only three rhymes. But the compactness is actually even greater as all three of these rhyming sounds include *-a-* as their main vowel! In other words, there is at least an echo of *-a-* in every line-final syllable. Another linking feature is that the poem ends on the same rhyme as the last lines of both the initial quatrains.

In the original, between lines 10 and 11 there occurs what we have been calling a "rhythmic suspension": *man*, the last syllable of line 10, is set off by punctuation so as to stand as a single character. In itself this is already very effective, coming as it does soon after the two- and three-syllable groups with which lines 9 and 10 begin: the effect up to this point is that the rhythm somehow becomes locally "choppier" as the lines interact with these punctuational "lines within the lines." But at the beginning of line 11, the *man* occurs again, in the three-syllable group *hen man de*, which is dramatically followed by a long series of dots. In the vernacular, *man, hen mande* sounds like a coherent unit from an entirely different speech flow that has suddenly been inserted here despite the obstinately maintained overall isosyllabicity (10 characters per line). It is as if the *realizational rhythm* of the sentence as read aloud almost grinds to a momentary halt here – and the slow-down is semantically meaningful, since the literal meaning of *man, hen mande* is "slow, very slowly"! – while the *conceptual rhythm* of the overall line scheme simply marches on. This is an excellent example of the way Zhu Xiang brings about local rhythmic effects by using punctuation to highlight what are not so much sound- as meaning-units.

Our next poem is "Italian Sonnet 16":

Italian Sonnet 16

In curious dream's arena I caught sight,
in body's shell evolved, of two of me:
the left a singing, innocent beauty,
the right a sword-dancer, robed in light.

Radiance on all sides guarded them with white
nor granted a single sorrow-splash entry,
yet sorrow added watering waves, musically,
to measure grander, mood more rich and right.

Of this frame's remnants I'll not deign to reck
– distinguish as ye may the "life," the "wreck" –
for the eternal mates you've never found the word:

separate east and west their journeys seem.
Only in sky will song accord, in dream,
with the rise and falling of the shadow sword.

在一場奇特的夢裏，我瞧見
軀殼中化出來了一雙自我—
美麗，天真，左邊的她正唱歌；
右邊的，光芒繞體，他舞寶劍。
那護身的白光關照到四面，
不容煩惱灑的水絲毫透過，
同時，煩惱澆上了音樂的波，
那情調更豐富，節律更莊嚴。
這一架的殘剩我毫不關懷；
儘由你們去分了，「人生，」「破敗！」
你們抓不住那永恆的一雙……
雖說他們的途徑各自東西，
唯有在天空上，唯有在夢裏，
歌聲才叫得應那劍影低昂。

We have here another poem on the split-soul motif that we have seen above in "English Sonnet 14." Typical of Zhu Xiang is the scornful attitude in lines 9 and 10 toward the fate of the body in ordinary worldly terms (in the original, the word here translated as "frame" is very literally that: *jia*). Again, the desirable harmony or peace is only to be attained somewhere outside the experience of the objective world: in "sky" or in "dream."

The sestet rhymes according to the scheme

c
c
d

e
e
d

Echoing by near-rhyme is not as prominent here as in the previous poem, though it is worth noting that the final "c" rhymes (*huai* and *bai*) share their medial -a- sound with the two "d" rhymes (*shuang* and *ang*).

Rhythmic suspensions are shown by the punctuated two-syllable groups in lines 3 and 10: in the first case "beauty" and "innocence (or naivety)," and in the second "life" and "wreck," rhythmically underscoring in each case the parallel or contrast between two concepts. The overall line is isosyllabic: always 11 characters.

Our next poem is "Italian Sonnet 19," which bears the subtitle or dedication "Hawthorne":

Italian Sonnet 19, "Hawthorne"

If I could have your mossy cottage, free
to watch from the porch as shade is teased by morning;
and at night with books or friends, hear muttering
of logs and chestnuts warming the chimney —

if eyes as deep as yours were given me,
as Dante's, seeing in a bud, in a bee's wing
the bee's demise, the stripped bloom's trembling,
seeing new shoots sprout from the rotten tree...

if I, like you, could watch it all
as a man watches a sunset: knowing the glossed
blossom was but the sun god's guile;

insects' sound seemed ocean for a while
 but when it's gone, there's mist in vastness lost
 or – better – in the east, the moon's rising ball.

如其我能有你的那座苔屋，
 日裏在廊前看暖色逗清幽；
 晚上讀書，或許，陪伴著朋友，
 聽栗子與柴薪對語在牆爐……
 如其我能有你的深沉雙目，
 與但丁的一樣，在蜂翼，花頭
 看見死去的蜂，花裸裡，顫抖，
 又看苗條在已朽的根株……
 如其我能像你那樣，看人生
 像看晚景，知道那光華，形象
 只是日神在天上故弄狡獪；
 只是一霎那的，那蟲聲似海……
 等到他去了，唯有雲氣茫茫，
 或許，好些，有一輪皓白東升。

Typical of Zhu Xiang here are his admiration for the great writers of the world and his attributing to them an all-encompassing wisdom in which somehow transitoriness and decline can be seen to fit into a harmonious whole. As often, the imagery taken from nature is not an end in itself but a starting point for consequences to be drawn by a sensitive and reflective man.

Formally, this poem shows a rare departure from strict isosyllabicity: all lines have 11 syllables save line 8, which has 10. It is not immediately clear whether this deviation has a function. In itself, though this irregular line is followed by a long series of dots, it seems dubious to regard the dots as somehow compensating for the left-out character: in lines 4 and 12, which in the original are also followed by dots, no such shortening occurs. Also, in "Italian Sonnet 2" above, we saw that similar punctuation even in the middle of a line did not lead to disturbance of the established isosyllabicity. We can only guess that perhaps in this instance the end of the octave was intended to be specially emphasized. Alternatively, this may well be an error that crept into the manuscript: as McDougall (1989c, 282) points out, *The Stone Gate* was published posthumously by an anonymous editor, and "there is no evidence to show that they [the poems] were regarded by the author as ready for publication in this form."

The rhyme scheme shares a feature with many of the other "Italian" sonnets: the sestet is arranged concentrically:¹⁸

c
d
e

e
d
c

We may note here that in the octave, the lines having the "a" rhyme always read straight through without punctuation, whereas three of the four "b" lines are broken by contrast; the feature is especially striking in lines 6 and 7, which are so punctuated as to share an identical 6-3-2 grouping.

Our next poem, "Italian Sonnet 22," shows a close-knit structure in various formal dimensions:

Italian Sonnet 22

Proffering its sixty rings of jade, the soul
pays its respects at the shrine of life, where true
and false – the variously carved blossoms – through
circling months and years are threaded whole.

The modest temple plays its earnest role:
all beings' offerings are accepted, yet there do
remain but precious few, each strung onto
a necklace, or hung from a pavilion pole.

More than the sands in the Ganges, for all time
jade rings will be (be praised!), in fragrance,
in splendor and peace, in the reverence of descendants:

and even the souls be decked in lanterns green
while they gaze on old toils borne, old dreams seen –
till the whole body sinks in sweat and grime.

¹⁸ According to Qian Guangpei 1987, 222, twenty of the fifty-four "Italian" sonnets have this concentric sestet.

捧著六十塊圓璧，魂靈呈獻
 在人生的龕上：有真也有假；
 有精也有粗，那雕鏤成的花
 盤繞過小周的月，大周的年。
 並非無量大的，這廟宇莊嚴……
 眾生的敬奉雖是全部收下，
 存留的卻並不多；它們懸掛
 在楹柱上，或是佩帶在胸前。
 不作恒河的沙，長此有圓璧
 〔這是多麼可欽！〕陪侍著芬芳，
 光采，恬靜；長此供後人瞻仰；
 魂魄也能燃著碧色的燈籠，
 常來眺望往昔的辛勤，幻夢，
 一直到全身頹圯入了汗泥。

The "sixty rings of jade" are undoubtedly to be taken as "the full cycle of experience": they correspond numerically to the sixty possible combinations of cyclic characters by which the Chinese traditionally designate successive years.¹⁹ In this poem again, both "true" and "false" are present in the overall composition of the "months and years." Characteristically, "life" is not a place where the "soul" is at home, but rather a "shrine" at which, in passing through, it "pays its respects." The "souls" return in the sphere of ritual lantern-light to gaze upon their past experience. As in many other sonnets by Zhu Xiang, the reflection suddenly bumps to a crude and somber end at the very end of the poem as we are returned to the terminology of the body and its inevitable doom.

Formally, this poem's sestet is rhymed:

c
 d
 d
 e
 e
 c

¹⁹ See the discussion of these cyclic year-designations in Kennedy 1970, 16. In Kennedy's pithy formulation, one full cycle of the sixty possible combinations is "long enough for the average person's life or the average emperor's reign."

My thanks go to Lucien van Valen for pointing out this allusion.

The lines are isosyllabic, of 11 syllables. The first quatrain shows an intricately symmetrical punctuation structure as its lines are divided into subgroups comprising, respectively,

7+4 (line 1)

6+5 (line 2)

5+6 (line 3)

7+4 (line 4)

This structure is echoed in the last two lines of the second quatrain, in which again the subgroup at the end of one line is equal to that at the beginning of the next. This feature serves to demarcate the octave in a subtle way from the following sestet.

Our next poem is "Italian Sonnet 24":

Italian Sonnet 24

Again the blood, tide, knocked the red door
open, and was combed away. As in older days
you danced — heart! — again, not dead. What sways
you to stand, become a cliff, while breakers roar,

wave-tongues slap their question to the fore?
So proud and cold, unanswering you raise
your head at heaven (though in secret praise
his secret all the wise are waiting for) —

Or is it, at your very roots, that blaze
that dances, following the veins, hoping
to spout your breast's beauty in a giant bloom?

Will that day come?...And now, there's only room
for seeming pride to show: and a thermal spring
that of your riches some faint trace displays.

潮汐的血仍舊敲開了紅門
又帶攏，你仍舊跳著像當初一
你並不曾死去呀，心！是何故
你化成了崖石：任水沫狂噴，
任波濤鼓著長舌雷厲的問，

你總是冷然不答，昂然而顧
 那渾圓的天，在裏曲裏企慕
 它那尚不曾推測出的底蘊？
 除非是烈火，那在你的根株
 底下跳盪著的，循由了脈管，
 將你胸膛裏的美噴成巨花……
 那天會來麼？……如今，只有砢砢
 與冷漠流露在外；以及溫泉，
 它略為指示出了你的豐富。

Thematically, though this poem is not easily unlocked, it seems we are again faced with disappointment in love, together with the poet's doubts as to whether the day will ever (still) come when the "breast's beauty" will "spout...in a giant bloom."

Formally, the sestet shows the concentric structure we have already encountered, but in addition, it borrows its enclosing rhyme from the "b" lines of the octave. The actual rhyming syllables are:

men	(a)
chu	(b)
gu	(b)
pen	(a)

wen	(a)
gu	(b)
mu	(b)
yun ²⁰	(a)

zhu	(b)
guan	(c)
hua	(d)

cha	(d)
quan	(c)
fu	(b)

The poem is isosyllabic, with 11-syllable lines.

²⁰ Again here, *yun* is permissible as rhyming with the preceding *-en* sounds by virtue of Thirteen Tracks practice.

The next poem, "Italian Sonnet 28," is again named after or dedicated to a Western writer: this time W. H. Davies (1871-1940), the famous poet-tramp, a Welsh writer of humble origins whose colorful adventures included losing a leg while attempting to board a moving freight train. Davies was brought to the public's attention when George Bernard Shaw wrote an introduction to his autobiography. Eventually granted a Civil List Pension, Davies married, retired to the country, and published more than one volume per year for the last 36 years of his life. In the words of G. S. Fraser, in the poetry which Davies "produced much too prolifically," he makes the impression of being "a more simple-minded Blake."²¹

Italian Sonnet 28, "W. H. Davies"

I'm better off than you: though as a plain
worldling my status, admittedly,
has dropped whole grades already – I'm still me,
a poet, judged by more than loss and gain.

I'm better off than you. Ropes of cold rain
that penned you in the wilderness, unfree,
have yet to fall on me. But already
I know it well: cold wind's, cold man's pain.

I'm better off than you: despair, that dire
joylessness of helplessness in need,
I haven't yet attained. Thoughtfully, friends,

men, women, use more than thoughts: hands
to prop – not me, that we need not heed –
but Poetry: she's dropped on my body her fire.

我還比你好些：雖說就世人
看來，由地位上我已經墮落
有許多階級了……我仍舊是我，
一個作詩的，不靠貧富分等！
我還比你好些：那冷雨的繩
在荒野上圍住你無由擺脫，
它還沒有落在我的身，雖說

²¹ Fraser 1971, 137.

我已經認識了，風與人的冷。
 我還比你好些：暮色的絕望，
 那一種無憑倚，無歡的感覺，
 我還沒得：有心地好的朋友，
 男的，女的，不單用心，還用手
 來扶助——不是我，那原可忽略，
 是詩，她落了火在我的身上。

We see here Zhu Xiang's constant attitude of viewing the poet's personal life as unimportant: the "me" is something that "we need not heed." The poet is "judged by more than loss and gain" inasmuch as his life is dedicated to "Poetry," whose "fire" is more important to him than the "ropes of cold rain" that he may well expect to fall on him. (This attitude will be even more clearly present in "Italian Sonnet 34" below.)

The sestet shows the concentric rhyme structure. The poem is isosyllabic, with 11-syllable lines. Much use is made of punctuational subgroups, often setting apart a five-syllable unit: half of all the lines end in such a five-syllable "line within the line." Such units interact effectively with the six-syllable subgroups with which six of the fourteen lines begin. Toward the end of the poem, in lines 12 and 13, there is a sudden access of shorter subgroups of 2 or 3 characters. This subtly different cross-rhythm emphasizes the suddenly revealed irony: that although the lyrical subject has been claiming to be "better off," he is all the while undergoing pelting with the "fire" of "Poetry."

In our following poem, "Italian Sonnet 29," it is difficult not to see in the imagery a foreshadowing of Zhu Xiang's suicide, in which he jumped from "the deck," leaving a "satchel" behind, perhaps indeed in an obscure last act of loyalty to the "dragon chant" of Du Fu:

Italian Sonnet 29

Coats patched by the hundred, satchels in position,
 arranged on the deck like scales, ants in rows —
 how many heads adrift as the water goes,
 as a single leaf — fleeing from what affliction?

Why did they have to be born in such profusion?
 To be amusing to their better-off fellows,
 and let them frown at the "poor" till their own years close.
 None but in thrall to sordidness, attrition.

Many the waves the ship of life must breast...
trust in steel, not in the planks' decay,
the gleaming. If life's to harbor at end of day,

don't drop like an ant — raise your dragon chant,
carp! and the flag for a thousand-mile quest,
as a whale that is storm's, ice's confidant!

這許多百衲衣，草簍，長扁擔，
鱗比在甲板之上，有如螞蟻，
不知有多少頭，漂泊於水際
一片葉，逃著不知甚麼災難。
當時何必生育得如此的繁，
生下來供給寬裕人以歡喜，
替「貧困」揚眉；始終數十年裏，
免不了奴事著齷齪與艱難。
有的是風浪來與生命之舟
作對……要靠純鋼，憑不了朽木，
光耀的，生命如欲達到歸宿。
不能螞蟻落水；要鯉發龍吟，
要豎起旗杆來作萬里之游，
與風濤，冰雪為儔侶的大鯨。

The life of ordinary people (the "coats patched by the hundred") is short and "in thrall to sordidness, attrition." "They" need never have been born in such "profusion." The only thing of value is to follow the heroic life, being not an "ant" but a "carp" struggling to raise the "dragon chant," even if it means the lonely poet will only be "storm's, ice's confidant."

Formally, the sestet rhymes

c
d
d

e
c
e

In this poem, punctuation works together effectively with the aural elements identifiable as the poem is read aloud. Each of the first three lines can be read as three *dun* followed by a period. The same structure occurs in lines 7 and 12. Three other lines (4, 11 and 14) begin with a 3-syllable subgroup. While these recognizable elements do not form a strict pattern, they occur with sufficient frequency to give color and variety to the poem's lines. The underlying regularity is isosyllabic, with 11-syllable lines.

We next consider a poem with anomalously short lines, "Italian Sonnet 34:"

Italian Sonnet 34

He shouldn't have been born, the writer of verse.
I've duly undergone my share of shame,
swallowed the bitters of the human game –
compared to certain others, I'm the worse:

the Muse's retinue. I'm not averse
to falling short of an Average Man's name.
Whatever this heaven-given tongue exclaim,
it's never of my own. The words are Hers.

Far be it from me to hope for more
as long as *why* one here endures this span
– that it was all for Her – the Muse infers.

Nor shall I be disturbed if man curse,
call me a beggar. For a goddess one can
never force; one only can implore.

作詩的原不該生下，
應分的我受盡羞辱，
又吃世間各種的苦——
比起有些人來，還差。
詩神的侍從，我不怕
遠離了作一個凡夫；
這天賜的舌頭說出，
並非我的，是她的話。
旁的我並不敢希望，
只要這番堅忍，詩神

能以知道，是爲了她。
 我也不理會人唾罵
 爲一個乞丐：向神聖
 只好去求，不能勉強。

This is as clear a statement as we could wish of the poet's heroic posture of willingness to sacrifice all for poetry.

The sestet is rhymed on the concentric pattern. The isosyllabic 8-syllable lines are often subdivided by punctuation. Particularly effective are the three instances (in lines 8, 11, and 14), symmetrically separated in each case by two intervening lines, of division into 4 + 4 syllables. These lines echo each other not only by these identically long "lines within the lines," but lexically as well. Lines 8 and 11 (in addition, incidentally, to sharing the same end rhyme) both contain a reference to *ta* ("Her"); lines 11 and 14 both involve the verb *neng* ("be able to").

As our last example in this chapter, we will consider "Italian Sonnet 52," with the subscript "Homer":

Italian Sonnet 52, "Homer"

Blind prophet! You who saw the light
 in darkness — inseparable: two and one;
 seeing the two-faced god: and seeing the prone
 worshippers' toning sound and shadowed sight

born of a single sound, a sound so slight.
 You sang the riddle revealed by the god of the sun,
 told of the expedition's exultation
 and how bitter returning wisdom's plight,

told how life begins in a beautiful grapple —
 and another kind of beauty when it's done.
 Between are storms and slaughters, mire and rest.
 So it is, at the honored gods' behest.
 And when it's finished?...Blind man, I mean their fun.
 You've no idea. That's another apple.

啊，盲目的先知者，看見光明
 在黑暗之中，分不開，二而一；
 又看見那一身兩面的神祇，

與頂禮膜拜者的聲調，形影。
 一個聲音生的，便只是聲音——
 你歌唱出日神所宣示的謎：
 說遠征的「熱烈」是如何快意。
 「智慧」的歸家又是多麼艱辛；
 說人生開始於美麗的攘奪，
 說人生終結在另一種美麗，
 中間是風浪，屠宰，潤濁，鬆弛……
 如此，遵照了神祇們的意旨，
 它完了……至於他們的那遊戲，
 盲人，你並不知道怎樣結果。

This remarkably sophisticated, wry poem brings together a number of the themes we have noted in this chapter: the inherent duality perceived by greater wisdom, life as a difficult "expedition" which will be disappointing in the end, and the idea of the poet as a "blind" instrument disseminating what is received from a "god."

Formally, the poem shows concentric rhyme in the sestet, but in addition, the sestet borrows a rhyme from the "b" lines in the octave. The rhymes are normal by Thirteen Tracks practice; the exact syllables are:

ming
 yi
 qi
 ying
 yin
 mi
 yi
 xin

duo
 li
 shi
 zhi
 xi
 guo

(In lines 10 through 13, the Thirteen Tracks would allow reading *shi* and *zhi* as rhyming with *li* and *xi*; alternatively, a more strict reading could construe the sestet

as c-b-d d-b-c. We will encounter other examples of such ambivalent cases in our detailed analyses of the Shakespeare sonnets in the following chapter.)

In this chapter we have seen Zhu Xiang, in his ingenious employment of both "English" and "Italian" sonnet forms, maintaining the isosyllabic framework on the one hand while subtly varying it on the other. His variations, involving the use of enjambement and punctuation to suggest that the typographically equal lines are of unequal rhythmic valence, often create a sense of more than one line length being operative within the poem. In later chapters we will see slightly different but comparable techniques being used by Feng Zhi and by poets of the Nine Leaves group including Zheng Min. But first we must look much more systematically into the subject of rhyme as an element in the Chinese sonnet.

CHAPTER 3

FOURTEEN LINES, THIRTEEN RHYMES: RHYME STRUCTURES IN SOME CHINESE TRANSLATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

Whatever else Shakespeare and Hans Christian Andersen have in common, they are among the very few Western writers whose complete works were translated into Chinese in the first half of the twentieth century.¹ Shakespeare early attracted the attention of Chinese readers, and even in the subsequent Marxist period, though much of traditional Western culture came under fire for being supposedly "idealist" or "bourgeois," Shakespeare could often be salvaged by claiming that he was, by the standards of his own day, a progressive element whose realistic descriptions of social contradictions contributed to intellectual ferment and change.²

In the course of his long career, Bian Zhilin has produced, among many other translations, a full verse version of *Hamlet*;³ it enjoyed nationwide success in cinema and television versions and was for many years used as a university textbook. Bian's translations of seven sonnets by Shakespeare were published in book form in 1983.⁴ They afford us an opportunity to compare his handling of Shakespeare's form with the practice of various other Chinese translators who have also attempted the *Sonnets*. According to Qian Guangpei (1988, 45), the first to do a full translation of Shakespeare's entire sequence of sonnets was Liang Zongdai. Liang produced individual translations in the 1940s, but his integral translation is best known via its book-form publication as part of the ten-volume set of Shakespeare's works published in 1978.⁵ Another translator who has done the whole series is Tu An, whom we have already mentioned in the Introduction as one of the exponents of the present-day sonnet boom in China.

In this chapter we will examine a number of Shakespeare's sonnets in the Chinese versions by Liang Zongdai, Bian Zhilin and Tu An. We will not attempt to say much about the semantic or "content" level of these translations, as we will have our hands full with the problems involved in one particular formal dimension:

¹ For background, see Ge Baoquan, "Shashibiyade zuopin zai Zhongguo" (Shakespeare's works in China). *Shijie wenxue* 1964:5, 136-143. This and other useful sources are listed in the very useful Fung 1994.

² For a Blake parallel, see the explanation which Bian Zhilin wrote to accompany his translation of William Blake's "The Tyger," published in 1957. According to Bian, in such lines as "What immortal hand or eye/ Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" Blake was "singing praises of the soul-stirring process of labor by which the tiger was created," and of "labor creating the world." See Bian Zhilin 1957, 93.

³ Bian Zhilin 1956.

⁴ Bian Zhilin 1983a. Notwithstanding its title (Selected English poems), the book also contains quite a selection of French poems by authors including Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry (including *Le cimetière marin*).

⁵ See Fung 1994, 130. Fung gives a very good comparative discussion of various Chinese translations of the *Sonnets*. For another comparative article in Chinese, see Peng Jingxi 1984.

rhyme. In our previous chapter, we saw that at the same time that Zhu Xiang wrote sonnets in the "English" (i.e. Shakespearean) form, his rhyming practice often deviated from the schoolbook model of that form. In this chapter we will consider in more detail why the specific features of the Chinese language, and of the native Chinese rhyming tradition, make it virtually inevitable for Chinese poets to overstep the bounds of the strict English form. Daring to wade into a stupendous area of uncertainty – the whole subject of rhyme in modern Chinese poetry – we will show that the study of Chinese sonnetteers gives us the key to a useful new approach to this area. The insights we develop in this chapter will be applied in the next, when we go on from translations to read "native" sonnets by Feng Zhi, as well as in later chapters.

In addition to being of great importance for the study of modern Chinese poetry in general, our material in this chapter has a contribution to make to the study of poetry translation as a problem in comparative literature. For centuries, debates have raged as to whether, and if so how, poetry can be translated. In the case of poetry in languages so different that their respective formal traditions have little or no common linguistic basis, these debates are of course exacerbated. Whatever the stance one takes on this issue, within the camp of those who do think it meaningful to attempt to translate poetry, there is an equally fierce debate as to whether it is necessary or advisable to try to translate in such a way that the translation embodies the formal features present in the original.

My own feeling is that these discussions are often simplistic in the sense that people apparently assume it is easy to decide whether the "form" of the original has or has not been "respected." True enough, it is not difficult to count lines and see whether they add up to fourteen, to see whether line two rhymes with line four and so on. But my own contention is that even if supposedly the same form is detectable in two versions, because formal features exhibit a differing *statistical frequency of occurrence* in different languages, the *expressive effect* of the original form is not in fact duplicated in the translation. It follows that a supposedly faithful formal translation, to the extent that it dislodges the formal features of the original from their original statistical valence, in this sense distorting the form in the very act of imitating it, cannot help imparting a new expressive sense to the form itself. For example, owing to the great number and variety of final consonants and consonant clusters in English, it is vastly more difficult to write rhyming poems in English than in a language like modern Mandarin Chinese, in which every syllable must end in a vowel or semi-vowel, a nasal, or -r. Accordingly, the English translator of rhymed Chinese verse who succeeds in rhyming by means of an arcane choice of words is giving the impression that the Chinese original is far more *recherché* than it is.

This is the point made by Arthur Cooper, an English translator of classical Chinese poetry, in the long introduction to his *Li Po and Tu Fu*.⁶ Referring to the differing "specific gravity" of the same formal element in different languages, Cooper tries to maintain himself between the devil and the deep blue sea by translating in a form which is derived from the original by a mathematical formula and in that sense a faithful mapping or derivative of the original, yet which does not exist as a recognized poetic form in the target language! (He adds specified numbers of syllables to the number of syllables in each line of the Chinese, and adheres in English to the resulting syllabic matrix.) The undeniable eccentricity of Cooper's method has laid him open to a great deal of rather facile criticism; I personally admire some of his poems though I would not choose to use his method: but this is not the place to evaluate his translations in detail. I mention him here merely as an example of a translator who has thought through the question of formal translation sufficiently to realize that the widespread notion of flat-out formal transposition leads in fact to an illusory kind of "faithfulness."⁷

In this chapter, we will be looking into the phenomenon of modern Chinese rhyme from the viewpoint of its "specific gravity." Our material will be seven of Shakespeare's sonnets in the Chinese versions by three eminent translators. Aside from the intrinsic interest of the translations, the advantages for our present purposes of using Chinese versions of these Shakespeare sonnets are: (1) that the rhyme scheme of the originals is unambiguous and universally regarded as one of the most central features of their form, (2) that all three of our translators have great familiarity with other forms of Western poetry, and (3) that all three translators have, in addition to their original modern Chinese sonnets, written poems in the old classical Chinese forms, so that they have at least some experience of traditional Chinese rhyming practice.⁸

⁶ Cooper 1973.

⁷ I agree with Cooper that Arthur Waley's often-praised method of representing the syllables in the Chinese original by stressed syllables in the English line is in fact less workable than is often thought, since upon serious examination it is actually very difficult to get a consensus as to which syllables in a line of English are stressed, and to what degree.

In 1994, I published a brief and rather polemical paper in which I applied the notion of "specific gravity" to the problem of translating present-day Chinese poetry for a non-scholarly readership. I still support most of what I there contended, though I already very much regret having come down so hard against rhymed translations. See Haft 1994.

⁸ Bian Zhilin (1990, 30) relates how during World War II, Liang Zongdai experimented with writing *ci* poems in frankly traditional form. Bian himself wrote, among other things, traditional poems after the death of Zhou Enlai. Tu An's collection of poems in classical forms, which he has kindly made available to me, is *Xuanyin ge shichao* (Verse jottings from the Pavilion of Maternal Shade): Tu An 1985.

We will first consider Shakespeare's Sonnet 32 in the Chinese version by Liang Zongdai.

If thou survive my well-contented day
 When that churl Death my bones with dust shall cover,
 And shalt by fortune once more re-survey
 These poor rude lines of thy deceased lover,
 Compare them with the bettering of the time,
 And though they be outstripp'd by every pen,
 Reserve them for my love, not for their rhyme
 Exceeded by the height of happier men.
 O, then vouchsafe me but this loving thought:
 'Had my friend's Muse grown with this growing age,
 A dearer birth than this his love had brought,
 To march in ranks of better equipage:
 But since he died, and poets better prove,
 Theirs for their style I'll read, his for his love.'

倘你活過我躊躇滿志的大限，
 當鄙夫“死神”用黃土把我掩埋，
 偶然重翻這拙劣可憐的詩卷，
 你情人生前寫來獻給你的愛，
 把它和當代俊逸的新詩相比，
 發覺它的詞筆處處都不如人，
 請保留它專為我的愛，而不是
 為那被幸運的天才凌駕的韻。
 哦，那時候就請賜給我這愛思：
 “要是我朋友的詩神與時同長，
 他的愛就會帶來更美的產兒，
 可和這世紀任何傑作同俯仰：
 但他既死去，詩人們又都邁進，
 我讀他們的文采，卻讀他的心。”

For clarity, let us first set out the rhyming syllables in order of occurrence, in *pinyin* transcription:

xian
 mai

juan
ai

bi
ren
shi
yun

si
zhang
er
yang

jin
xin

The first strophe is a straightforward a-b-a-b structure. But in the second and third we immediately encounter problems which take us to the heart of this chapter's matter. In lines 5 and 7, though the *pinyin* transcription masks the difference in sound between *bi* and *shi*, the actual sounds are so different that in most other systems of transcription their vowel sounds are written with differing letters; indeed, the "vowel" of *shi* is sometimes described as no vowel at all, but a vocalized prolongation of the consonantal *sh* sound. As for *ren* and *yun* in lines 6 and 8, they are very distinct to the ear and written with distinct vowel spellings in all transcription systems. Most spectacular of all is the pair *si* and *er* in lines 9 and 11.

Tackling this most glaring problem first, we can see that there is obviously no solution in terms of present-day Chinese pronunciation. Remembering that Wang Li in his authoritative *Chinese Prosody*⁹ specifically mentions Liang Zongdai as one of the modern poets in whose works "certain seemingly strange rhymes" can only be explained as holdovers from classical Chinese rhyming practice, we indeed confirm that this *si* and *er* both belong to a Classical rhyme group having the head-word *zhi* "branch." We can then go on to determine that in lines 5 and 7, our *bi* and *shi* belong to the Classical group headed by *zhi* "paper."

These facts are not esoteric. They can be determined simply by looking up the words in question in a good 20th-century dictionary, like the *Cihai*,¹⁰ which still indicates the rhyme-group to which each word is traditionally assigned. But now a problem arises: what is the meaning, in this context, of "traditionally"? Wang Li,

⁹ Wang Li 1979, 878-9.

¹⁰ The edition I have consulted is the October, 1948 one-volume Zhonghua Shuju reprint.

in the passage we have just mentioned, refers non-specifically to the continuing relevance of "old rhyme categories." The trouble is that there is more than one "old" system.

The system followed by the *Cihai* dictionary is very conservative and, from the poet's point of view, limiting. It assigns each word to one of 106 distinct classes. This classification, which dates from the late Yuan, represents a tidied-up reformulation of actual rhyming practice going back much further in history and deriving from an original system of 206 classes, with rules for allowable overlapping, given in the early handbooks *Qieyun* or *Guangyun*. The system of 106 rhymes was current in the Ming and Qing dynasties under the name *shiyun*: rhymes for *shi*. (Another name is *pingshui yun*.)

But the *shi* is only one of the classical Chinese poetic genres. Another is the *ci* or "lyric," originally a musical song form, which flourished most famously in the Song dynasty but continued to be written thereafter. The *ci* has its own tradition of rhyme, and it is far more pliant than that of the *shi*. There have been various codifications of *ci* rhymes, but one of the most influential, the *Ciyun* by the Qing-dynasty writer Zhong Heng, needs only nineteen broad groups to accommodate all possible rhymes.¹¹ What this means is that many rhymes that would not be acceptable in "old" *shi* are perfectly correct in "old" *ci*.

In our present Shakespeare sonnet, for example, in lines 6 and 8 of Liang Zongdai's version, *ren* is supposed to rhyme with *yun*. According to the strict *shiyun* system of 106 rhymes, *ren* is in a class headed by *zhen* "real" and *yun* in a different class headed by *wen* "ask." Both, however, fall under Group 6 of the *Ciyun*. So, the link between *ren* and *yun* (corresponding in meaning but not in placement to "men" and "rhyme" in the original), though it verges on the obscure in both modern standard pronunciation and pinyin transcription, is an attested "old" rhyme in Chinese.

Can we conclude, then, that Shakespeare rhymes in Chinese like a Song-dynasty songwriter? Unfortunately, this will not do, though we are getting closer to an answer. For one thing, we must not forget that our reason for delving into "old" rhymes in the first place was that we needed to explain "certain seemingly strange rhymes" in a *modern* translation. We remain primarily interested in what happens to modern words as rhymed by modern poets. "Old" Chinese rhyme tables whether of the *shi* or *ci* variety are based on a much earlier stage of the language; the intervening changes in pronunciation have been so far-reaching that the distribution

¹¹ From a certain mathematical point of view, this statement requires qualification inasmuch as in the prescribed rhyme positions in the *ci* forms, various degrees of tonal restriction can also apply. In this sense, the number of distinct classes is effectively somewhat larger. It remains true, however, that the *ci* system allows much more latitude.

of words among the categories often seems incomprehensible from the viewpoint of modern pronunciation.

There are, however, still other "old" systems based on somewhat later stages of the language, and one of them in particular, which has continued to be used and adapted right into the twentieth century, will turn out to give us a remarkably versatile framework of rhyme analysis, contemporary enough to account well for the great majority of obviously "modern" rhymes we will encounter, yet maintaining enough "old" features to justify, for example, all three of the "seemingly strange" rhymes we have just met with in our poem. This is the system of the *shisan zhe*, the so-called Thirteen Tracks, which govern the rhyming practice of the perennially popular Peking Opera.

The Thirteen-Track system has its origin in an earlier codification of rhymes for stage lyrics. During the Yuan dynasty, the age in which the traditional Chinese theater truly came into its own, Zhou Deqing compiled his *Zhongyuan yinyun*. Originally descriptive in intent, it soon became in practice normative, especially as slightly refined by later authors. The *Zhongyuan yinyun* divides rhymes into 19 categories, but they are not exactly the same as those in the *Ciyun* which we have already discussed. One reason is that a contemporary standard of pronunciation was applied; the other reasons, of a detailed linguistic nature, need not concern us here.

In the Qing, several authors interested in Northern Drama re-evaluated the *Zhongyuan yinyun* from their perspective in time. Jia Fuxi devised a sort of simplified practical distillate with fewer categories; after subsequent editing and revision by others, the new 13-group system became known as the Thirteen Tracks.

Throughout the rest of this section, we will attempt to use the Thirteen Tracks as our standard by which to identify the rhyme pairs in the Chinese versions as belonging to recurrent classes. We will see that the system, being admittedly not very fine-grained, contains slack enough to accommodate sound pairs in a wide continuum between perfectly identical and widely dissimilar. It is for this reason that the occasional "old" rhyme can fit in without, in most cases, going outside the system. On the other hand, we need not be troubled by the conceivable objection that the Thirteen Tracks make too coarse a filter: that their categories are so capacious that we are generalizing too easily, seeing too many relationships too soon. The fact is – and it will emerge clearly in the course of our analysis – that either this system or something very much like it is needed for our classification, exactly because in our material there is such constant interplay between fine- and coarse-grained rhyme. Because we know the rhyme scheme of the Shakespeare originals, and know that our translators are keeping to it, in principle we can always see what syllables are supposed to rhyme in Chinese. It will be evident from the start that many of those pairs of sounds lie phonetically so far apart that their

acceptability as rhymes depends not on acoustic likeness but on *conceptual correctness*. Our conclusion will be that the Thirteen Tracks system very closely *approximates the concept of correctness being applied*.

It is true that not every single one of the rhymes we will encounter fits into the system. But it is also true that the overwhelming majority of them do. What is more, we will find that the system applies with remarkable consistency to the practice of all three of our translators despite their differences in dialect background, academic orientation, and so on. We will *not* claim that any of the three have *consciously* used this system; on that score we have no evidence. It seems likeliest to assume that the Thirteen Tracks, having long had wide cultural dissemination through the theater arts with which all educated Chinese are familiar, have functioned as a sort of implicit expectational set.

In saying the traditional Thirteen Tracks are relevant to the practice of modern poets, we are not saying anything new. As long ago as the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945, there was quite some interest in a book in which the prominent linguist and scholar Luo Changpei described the system and its relevance to popular song.¹² Luo's manuscript dated from 1938; after several years of turbulence and delay he revised it in 1941, and in the same year the famous novelist Lao She, head of the All-China Anti-Japanese Writers' Federation, wrote an approving preface in which he described "the replacement of Rhymes by Tracks" (*yi zhe dai yun*) as already a trend of long standing. At the end of the year parts of the book were serialized in the Hong Kong *Xingdao ribao*'s weekly supplement on popular literature, of which Dai Wangshu was editor. The book was published in 1942 in Chongqing, but in a sadly flawed edition containing numerous misprints.¹³ It was reprinted in Beijing in 1950 in a re-set and partly revised edition, about a year after the proclamation of the People's Republic of China.

During the war years, Luo Changpei's book had been well suited to the new emphasis given in that period to "popular" art forms in the context of the war effort. For similar reasons, it was equally well fitted to the cultural climate of the People's Republic. On the very first page of his treatise, Luo emphasized the "popular" character of the Thirteen Tracks, saying that in their Chinese name, *shisan zhe*, the word *zhe* or "track" referred to the ruts or tracks that arose naturally in the course of wagon traffic, rather than being laid down in advance in the manner of railroad tracks.

In subsequent years, in the PRC at various times the Thirteen Tracks were suggested as a rhyming system for modern Chinese poets. The 1970s, in particular,

¹² Luo Changpei 1950.

¹³ According to the author's preface, the publisher was Guomin Tushu Chubanshe. Other information on the publishing history is from "Chubanzhe de hua" (A word from the publisher).

seem to have been a period in which the Thirteen Tracks enjoyed a certain vogue. In those supremely anti-intellectual years, when the Maoist cultural policies of the late Cultural Revolution period were still in effect, a number of rhyme handbooks based on the Thirteen Tracks were published. In 1975, for example, the Guangxi People's Press published a rhyming manual called *Modern Rhyme*.¹⁴ Its compiler, Qin Si, described it as "an experiment in compiling a concise book of rhymes according to the system of rhyme categories of the Thirteen Tracks." Probably to defend himself against possible charges of anti-Marxist elitism, he said (p. 20) the Tracks were actually "of popular origin" and had "long been in general use among the masses." "Popular" was not here to be taken as "uneducated," however. The Tracks required study; even the carefully chosen quote from Chairman Mao with which the book began was to the effect that "this thing called language" needed to be not only studied, but assiduously studied. And in assigning words to the various rhyme categories, Qin Si frankly preserved some very traditional features.

For example, in what we will shortly be calling Track 4, he continued to include not only the words ending in *-i* and *-ü*, but also the handful of words, some of them very frequent in use, pronounced *er*. Though admitting that "from the viewpoint of modern pronunciation, *er* is auditorily very close to *-e*; accordingly, it is entirely permissible to rhyme words like '*er*' with those of the *-e* class; it is actually more harmonious than rhyming them with the *-i* and *-ü* class," he continued: "but as it is not the present book's intention to modify the system of the Thirteen Tracks, they are still grouped under the *-i* class."¹⁵

Let us now see what the Thirteen Tracks look like, and how they are to be applied to our sonnets. In the traditional Chinese nomenclature, each Track is designated by a two-syllable combination whose sound is a mnemonic device suggesting the contents of the given tracks. For example, syllables ending in *-ou* and *-iu* fall under a single track named *youqiu*, etcetera. But the names of some of the Tracks vary, and they are not always mentioned in the same order. For our purposes, it will be far more convenient simply to number the Tracks from 1 to 13. Quite arbitrarily, we shall give them in the order in which Wang Li tabulates them in his *The Sounds and Rhymes of Chinese*.¹⁶ The following table gives, in *pinyin* transcription, the syllable endings which fall under each Track.

Track 1: -a, -ia, -ua

Track 2: -ie, -ue

¹⁴ Qin Si 1975. Another manual I have consulted is Lu Yunzhong 1978.

¹⁵ Qin Si 1975, 27.

¹⁶ Wang Li 1972, 30.

Track 3: -e, -(u)o

Track 4: -er, -i, -ü¹⁷

Track 5: -u

Track 6: -ai, -uai

Track 7: -ei, -ui

Track 8: -ao, -iao

Track 9: -ou, -iu

Track 10: -an, -ian, -uan, -üan

Track 11: -en, -in, -un, -ün

Track 12: -ang, -iang, -uang

Track 13: -eng, -ing, -ong, -iong¹⁸

Now let us turn back to Liang Zongdai's version of Shakespeare's Sonnet 32 and assign to each rhyming syllable its Track number:

xian (10)

mai (6)

juan (10)

ai (6)

bi (4)

ren (11)

shi (4)

yun (11)

si (4)

zhang (12)

er (4)

yang (12)

jin (11)

xin (11)

¹⁷ In terms of modern pronunciation, Track 4 comes closest to being a grab-bag. In addition to lumping together the rounded and unrounded sounds -ü and -i as in *lǔ* and *lǐ*, it includes words spelled in *pinyin* with a final -i whether the actual sound is as in *lǐ*, *mǐ*, *nǐ* or the very different sound as in *shǐ*, *chǐ*, *sǐ* and *cǐ*.

¹⁸ According to Wang Li, in Peking Opera practice, the -eng and -ing elements in this group regularly assimilate to the -en and -in of Track 11. We will soon find examples in our translations.

The first thing that strikes us is that unlike the original, the translation repeats certain rhymes more than once in the course of the poem. In fact, comparing schematically, we obtain:

<i>Shakespeare</i>	<i>Liang Zongdai (by Track membership)</i>
a	a
b	b
a	a
b	b
c	c
d	d
c	c
d	d
e	c
f	e
e	c
f	e
g	d
g	d

At first sight it may seem excessively bold to claim, on the basis of such apparently different rhyming sounds as *bi/shi/si/er* and *ren/yun/jin*, that Liang Zongdai is repeating his rhymes here. But it is not. As we have suggested above, the rhyming is based not only on *phonetic* similarity, but first and foremost on *conceptual* correctness. The traditional concept stipulates that *er* rhymes with *bi*. Our taking *ren/yun* and *jin/xin* as the same rhyme will find confirmation below in Liang Zongdai's version of Sonnet 73, in which he rhymes *jin* and *hun*, showing that at least something very like Track 11 is operative. But aside from all this, in considering another of Liang's sonnet versions, we will now immediately discover that even in cases where the similarity of class membership is far more obvious to both the ear and the eye, Liang Zongdai clearly makes no attempt to *avoid* the phenomenon we are describing, which we will henceforth call *rhyme reduplication*. Indeed, it will be one of the most important conclusions of this chapter that such rhyme reduplication is ubiquitous in the Chinese translations, and is one of the main features distinguishing the translations from the originals. For instance, in the poem we have just been considering, Liang Zongdai gives the impression that the "c" rhyme occurs four times on alternate lines, forming a sort of rhyming link

between the second and third strophes that is not there in the original. The implication of that fact for a more general theory of modern Chinese prosody will occupy us in the last section of this chapter.

Let us go on now to Sonnet 65:

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
 But sad mortality o'er-sways their power,
 How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea
 Whose action is no stronger than a flower?
 O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out
 Against the wreckful siege of battering days,
 When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
 Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?
 O fearful meditation! where, alack,
 Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?
 Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
 Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
 O, none, unless this miracle have might,
 That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

Liang Zongdai's version is as follows:

既然銅、石、或大地、或無邊的海，
 沒有不屈服於那陰慘的無常，
 美，她的活力比一朵花還柔脆，
 怎能和他那肅殺的嚴威抵抗？
 哦，夏天溫馨的呼息怎能支持
 殘暴的日子刻刻猛烈的轟炸，
 當岩石，無論多麼險固，或鋼扉，
 無論多堅強，都要被時光熔化？
 哦，駭人的思想！時光的珍飾，唉，
 怎能夠不被收進時光的寶箱？
 甚麼勁手能挽他的捷足回來，
 或者誰能禁止他把美麗奪搶？
 哦，沒有誰，除非這奇跡有力量：
 我的愛在翰墨裏永久放光芒。

The rhymes, with their Track numbers, are:

hai (*6)
 chang (12)
 cui (*7)
 kang (12)

chi (*4)
 zha (1)
 fei (*7)
 hua (1)

ai (6)
 xiang (12)
 lai (6)
 qiang (12)

liang (12)
 mang (12)

The starred positions are exceptional in that they do not rhyme according to our Thirteen Tracks. They do, however, all end in sounds transcribed by the letter -i. Are we to conclude that Liang Zongdai here is taking a bit of individual license to assimilate all four to Track 4? This seems unlikely, as the final sounds of *cui* and *fei* in lines 3 and 7 are compellingly similar; in modern standard pronunciation these are the two which seem most obviously to rhyme (though they occupy positions which do not rhyme in the original!), so that a common root in Track 4 (properly represented here only by *chi*) is dubious.¹⁹ Remembering, however, that it is always a *conceptual* root we are after, we can investigate whether in this case, exceptionally, some other "old" system of grouping is in effect.

Such turns out to be the case. According to the 106-group system of *shiyun*, our four words belong to rhyme classes headed respectively by *hui*, *ji*, *zhi* and *wei*. These four rhymes come together in Group 3 of the *Ciyun*. In other words, these four lines do not all rhyme according to the Thirteen Tracks. But in terms of the concept of a slightly different "old" system, their degree of overlapping is *just as great as if they did!* (In the Liang Zongdai versions to be studied in this chapter, this is the only case but one in which we shall need to go beyond the Thirteen Tracks.)

We can now set out the rhyme scheme of this translation as follows:

a
 b

¹⁹ Another indication is that in Sonnet 73, Liang Zongdai does rhyme *tui* and *lei*.

a
b

a
c
a
c

d
b
d
b

b
b

However we conceptualize it, there is no getting around the dramatic rhyme reduplication here. Even if the argument we have just employed to identify the "a" positions were rejected (in which case it would not be easy to say regular rhyme still existed at all in the first half of the poem), the identity of the "b" positions is unassailable whether on modern or "old" grounds. If we had thought, up till the final couplet, that a distinction were being made between *-ang* and *-iang* as finals, the last two lines show this not to be the case. In other words, Track 12 holds. And even by the far stricter 106-rhyme "old" system, words of the rhyme-class *yang* "male principle" occur in all three pairs of "b" rhymes, showing that there is not some subtle scholarly distinction keeping them apart in a way that does not meet the eye. (The same applies, as a little inspection will show, to the old classical distinction between "level" and "oblique" tones: it is obviously not being applied in a patterned way with any consistency.)

The reduplication is especially salient in this translation because here the final couplet, the formal distinctiveness of which is one of the defining features of the Shakespearean sonnet, rhymes with the immediately preceding sound. Why did the translator not find this objectionable? One would almost wonder whether the intention was to build into the translation a formal parallel to the presence in the original of the letter "i," albeit differently pronounced, in the last four of the positions we have designated "b." In that case, however, there is nothing in the original corresponding to the "b" rhyme in lines two and four of the Chinese.

We will do better simply to accept that rhyme reduplication is practically omnipresent in these translations and that our translators clearly are not concerned to avoid it. Let us now see how another of our translators, Bian Zhilin, has handled

the rhymes in the two sonnets we have been studying. In Number 32 ("If thou survive my well-contented day"), Bian's translation, followed by a list of the rhyming words, is as follows:

如果我活過了心滿意足的一生，
 任死亡無情，把枯骨用糞土掩藏，
 如果你還在，你偶爾翻出來重溫
 亡友的這些粗鄙可憐的詩行，
 拿它們比較受於時代的進益，
 雖然誰的筆都早已勝過一籌，
 不爲了它們相形見絀的詩藝，
 就爲了我的愛而仍然把它們保留。
 但願多承你愛惜，把事情這樣看：
 “如果朋友的詩才隨時代長下去，
 他的愛定會有更爲可貴的出產，
 足夠和裝備較優的並駕齊驅—
 他死了，後人居上了；爲了文采
 我讀他們的，讀他的就爲了他的愛。”

sheng (11)

cang (12)

wen (11)

hang (12)

yi (4)

chou (9)

yi (4)

liu (9)

kan (10)

qu (4)

chan (10)

qu (4)

cai (6)

ai (6)

In assigning Track numbers to these sounds, we have made two moves which perhaps require explanation. First, in lines 1 and 3, we have treated *-eng* as

assimilating to *-en* in Track 11. This Peking Opera practice is so common that Wang Li includes it in his summary description of the Thirteen Tracks.²⁰ An alternative possibility would be to ascribe Bian's rhyming of *-eng* and *-en* to his own Southeastern dialect background.²¹ In this case that position could indeed be taken; but to explain the psychological mechanism by which the translator originally thought of a given rhyme is not yet to explain why he felt justified in letting the rhyme stand in a translation intended for a nationwide readership. I think a case could be made for the hypothesis that a Chinese poet-translator might well find it more legitimate to use obvious dialect rhymes in an original poem than in a translation. In any event, in the system of analysis we are applying, it is valid to assimilate *-eng* to Track 11 whether or not we know that the author of the *-eng* was born in Southeast China, and in the interest of obtaining greater generalizability and comparability with the work of other translators, we shall do so.²²

Further down in this poem we have assigned lines 5 and 7, and also lines 10 and 12, to Track 4. Though the sounds *-i* and *-ü* occur here in clearly separate pairs and in distinct strophes, we are counting them both as Track 4. Our justification for doing so is that although in Bian's translations of the sonnets we are studying no examples can be found of *-i* rhyming with *-ü* in the same pair, such examples do occur elsewhere in his translations of older English poems by Ben Jonson and Andrew Marvell.²³ Admittedly, if we were examining this poem in isolation it might seem strange to introduce such external evidence in order to make a point (namely, that even in this poem there is rhyme reduplication). But we are placing this sonnet in the context of a larger pool of examples by the same and other translators; in that perspective, generalization on the basis of some of Bian's other translations seems a reasonable procedure.

Lest it be thought we are misusing the Thirteen Tracks and crowding too many things into too few categories, thus imputing to our translator more rhyme redundancy than is in fact his, in considering the next of his translations we shall interpret the Thirteen Tracks in such a way as deliberately not to see redundancy. The case is Sonnet 65, "Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea..."

既然是鐵石、大地、無邊的海洋，
 盡管堅強，也不抵無常一霸，

²⁰ Wang Li 1972, 31.

²¹ Wang Li 1979, 873-877. Tu An in correspondence has been kind enough to remind me of dialect features in Bian's rhyming.

²² Recourse to explanation by dialect, if we need it at all, can be reserved for the more difficult case of *-mo* in Sonnet 79 below.

²³ See Bian Zhilin 1983a, 35, 46.

美貌又怎能控訴他這種猖狂，
 論力量，自己還只抵一朵嬌花？
 啊，夏天的芬芳怎能抵得了
 猛沖的光陰摧枯拉朽的圍攻，
 既然是盡管頑強的石壁有多牢，
 鐵門有多硬，也會給時間爛通？
 可怕的想法啊！時間的瑰寶，唉，
 要藏到哪裏才免進時間的無底櫃？
 哪隻手才能拖住他飛毛腿跑不來？
 誰能攔阻他把美貌一下子摧毀？
 誰也不能，除非有法寶通靈：
 我的愛能在墨痕裏永放光明。

yang (12)
 ba (1)
 kuang (12)
 hua (1)

liao (8)
 gong (13)
 lao (8)
 tong (13)

ai (6)
 gui (7)
 lai (6)
 hui (7)

ling (11)
 ming (11)

Here, though the *-ng* sounds in the final couplet might have led us to count *ling* and *ming* as redundant with the Track 13 rhymes *gong* and *tong* in lines 6 and 8, we again make use of the possibility of reading *-ing* as assimilable to the *-in/-en* group of Track 11. By doing so, we obtain a conceptual system of seven distinct rhymes, as in the original.

Now that we have examined two sonnets in versions by Liang Zongdai and Bian Zhilin, we can go on to apply the same procedure of analysis to the versions of the same sonnets by Tu An. Sonnet 32 ("If thou survive...") in his version, with its rhyme words in transcription, is as follows:

如果我活夠了年歲，讓粗鄙的死
把黃土蓋上我骨頭，而你還健康，
並且，你偶爾又重新翻閱我的詩——
你已故愛友的粗糙潦草的詩行，
請拿你當代更好的詩句來比較；
盡管每一句都勝過我的作品，
保存我的吧，為我的愛，論技巧——
我不如更加幸福的人們高明。
呵，還望你多賜厚愛，這樣想：
“如果我朋友的詩才隨時代發展，
他的愛一定會產生更好的詩章，
和更有詩才的行列同步向前：
但自從他一死、詩人們進步了以來，
我讀別人的文筆，卻讀他的愛。”

si (4)
kang (12)
shi (4)
hang (12)

jiao (8)
pin (11)
qiao (8)
ming (11)

xiang (12)
zhan (10)
zhang (12)
qian (10)

lai (6)
ai (6)

Here we again regard *ming* in line 8, assimilating to the *-in* sound in line 6, as equivalent to a Track 11 rhyme. The other rhymes require little comment, save perhaps that in both rhyme pairs of the third strophe we see a syllable with medial *-i-* rhyming with a syllable without it. This is perfectly normal Thirteen Tracks practice; we mention it only because it confirms the validity of our treating lines 2 and 4 as rhyme-reduplicative with lines 9 and 11.

The reduplication in this poem is slight, giving the translation only one rhyme fewer than the original. In the next example, however, the reduplication of Track 12 rhymes is nothing short of massive. This is Tu An's version of "Since brass, nor stone...":

就連金石，土地，無崖的海洋，
最後都得消滅在無常的威力下，
那麼美，又怎能向死的暴力對抗—
看她的活力還不過是一朵嬌花？
呵，夏天的香氣怎麼能抵擋
多少個日子前來猛烈地圍攻？
要知道，算巉岩鞏固，頑石堅強，
銅門結實，都得被時間磨空！
可怕的想法呵，唉！時間的好寶貝，
哪兒能避免進入時間的萬寶箱？
哪隻巨手能拖住時間這飛毛腿？
誰能禁止他把美容麗質一搶光？
沒人能夠呵，除非有神通顯威靈，
我愛人能在墨跡裏永遠放光明。

yang (12)
xia (1)
kang (12)
hua (1)

dang (12)
gong (13)
qiang (12)
kong (13)

bei (7)

xiang (12)
tui (7)
guang (12)

ling (11)
ming (11)

Here, the rhyme structure of the octave is unquestionably a-b-a-b a-c-a-c. If we had chosen to read the *-ing* rhymes of the final couplet as Track 13, the sestet would have been d-a-d-a c-c and the whole poem would have had four rhymes. But we prefer to read *ling* and *ming* as Track 11 equivalents. Tu An himself, in the long afterword to his Shakespeare sonnets, explains that he often treats *-eng* and *-ing* as rhyming with *-en*, *-in*, *-un* and *-ün* – in other words, with all the possible endings of Track 11.²⁴ We obtain, then, for the whole poem, a five-rhyme structure:

a
b
a
b

a
c
a
c

d
a
d
a

e
e

Though we have so far studied only two examples from each translator, we have already covered enough ground to begin evaluating our analytical tools. Is it true that the Thirteen Tracks can account fully for the rhyming practice of all three of our translators? The answer as it is emerging seems to be: no, but almost. It is also clear that at certain points the applicability of the system, or the manner of its application, depends on our own theoretical preferences – as when, in the last

²⁴ Tu An 1991, 352.

poem, we chose to regard *ling* and *ming* as Track 11 rhymes rather than the Track 13 they could theoretically just as well have been, or when, in a case which we will admit remains disputable, we leaned on some external evidence to class Bian Zhilin's *-i* and *-ü* both as Track 4. One case, that of Liang Zongdai's handling of the *-ui* and *-ei* rhymes, we were frankly unable to resolve within the limits of our system.

What can we do in such a case, other than to throw up our hands? In the particular example of Liang's Sonnet 65, what we actually did was to invoke the authority of an alternative "old" rhyming system only slightly more fine-grained than the one we are using. We did so in order to avoid what seemed to us an unjustifiably wide interpretation of Track 4, and to avoid putting ourselves in the sellout position of crying "individual license" as soon as things do not seem to fit.

It is, of course, perfectly possible to relax one's standards and start interpreting the Thirteen Tracks more broadly. Authority for that kind of thing, if indeed it be authority, could be found for example in another Cultural Revolution handbook than the one we have already discussed. Lu Yunzhong's *Basics of Rhymes and Tracks* (Yunzhe changshi), published in 1978 but dated 1975, includes in its table of the Thirteen Tracks the notation that what we are calling Track 7 (*-ei* and *-ui*) can in practice overlap with the *-i* sounds of our Track 4.²⁵ In that case we could have saved ourselves the trouble of checking up the *Ciyun* to reconcile *fei* and *chi*. But one of the main points of this chapter is exactly that the Thirteen Tracks *such as they are* are in remarkably close fit with what actually happens in the poems. Surely nothing is to be gained by manoeuvring ourselves into a stance from which more or less anything rhymes with more or less anything.

Let us now go back to Liang Zongdai, this time with a different example. Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 reads as follows:

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
 Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
 In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
 As after sunset fadeth in the west;
 Which by and by black night doth take away,
 Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
 In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
 As the death-bed whereon it must expire,

²⁵ Lu Yunzhong 1978, 11.

Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.
 This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
 To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

Liang's version:

在我身上你或許會看見秋天，
 當黃葉，或盡脫，或只三三兩兩
 掛在瑟縮的枯枝上索索抖顫—
 荒廢的歌壇，那裏百鳥曾合唱。
 在我身上你或許會看見暮靄，
 它在日落後向西方徐徐消退：
 黑夜，死的化身，漸漸把它趕開，
 嚴靜的安息籠住紛紜的萬類。
 在我身上你或許會看見餘燼，
 它在青春的寒灰裏奄奄一息，
 在慘淡靈床上早晚總要斷魂，
 給那滋養過它的烈焰所銷毀。
 看見了這些，你的愛就會加強，
 因為他轉瞬要辭你瀟然長往。

The rhymes:

tian (10)
 liang (12)
 chan (10)
 chang (12)

ai (6)
 tui (7)
 kai (6)
 lei (7)

jin (11)
 xi (4)
 hun (11)
 hui (7)

qiang (12)

wang (12)

Here, on the one hand, the rhyme on *hun* and *jin* confirms the validity, in Sonnet 32 above, of treating *ren*, *yun*, *jin* and *xin* as all belonging to the same rhyme group: Track 11. On the other hand, our problem sound *-ui* is again troublesomely in evidence. In Sonnet 65, *-ui* rhymed with *-ai* by virtue of traditional *ci* categories; on the other hand, in the present poem those two sounds are clearly in contrast, occurring at the end of successive lines of the same strophe (lines 5 and 6). What exactly is the relationship of *xi* and *hui* in lines 10 and 12, and are they to be taken as rhyming with *tui* and *lei* in lines 6 and 8? Taken as traditional *ci* rhymes, *tui*, *lei*, *xi* and *hui* all fall under Group 3 of the venerable source *Cilin zhengyun*.²⁶ We are faced here with a choice: whether to take all four sounds as rhyming in the Shakespeare translation, or to assume that *tui* and *lei* follow regular modern rhyming practice (say, Track 7) while *xi* and *hui* derive their legitimacy instead from an "old" *ci* table. In the interest of maintaining on principle as many distinct rhymes as possible within each poem, we would be inclined to the latter course. A bit of supporting evidence could be drawn from Liang Zongdai's translation of Shakespeare's Sonnet 1 (not in our sample), in which there is another case of a syllable in *-i* rhyming with one in *-ui* as attested by *Cilin zhengyun*.²⁷

All things considered, let us guess that *xi* and *hui* are not intended to rhyme with *tui* and *lei* (even though from the viewpoint of modern standard pronunciation it is truly unclear why *tui* and *hui* should not rhyme!). We can then construe the rhyme scheme to be:

a

b

a

b

c

d

c

d

e

f

²⁶ This was a manual popular in the Qing dynasty, compiled by Shun Qing. The edition I have consulted was published in Shanghai: Saoye Shanfang, 1915.

²⁷ The syllables there are *zhui* (as in *dianzhui* "embellish, adorn") and *li* (as in *liwai* "inside and outside").

e

f

b

b

Bian Zhilin's version of the same poem is as follows:

你在我身上會看見這種景致：
 黃葉全無，或者是三三兩兩
 牽係著那些迎風顫抖的枯枝—
 唱詩廊廢墟，再不見好鳥歌唱。
 你在我身上會看見這樣的黃昏：
 夕陽在西天消褪到不留痕跡，
 黑夜逐漸來把暮色收拾乾淨—
 死亡的影子把一切封進了安息
 你在我身上會看見爐火微紅，
 半明不滅的枕著它青春的死灰，
 像躺在垂死的榻上，就只待送終，
 滋養了它的也就在把它銷毀。
 你看出這一點，也就使你的愛更堅強，
 好好的愛你不久要離開的對象。

zhi (4)

liang (12)

zhi (4)

chang (12)

hun (11)

ji (4)

jing (11)

xi (4)

hong (13)

hui (7)

zhong (13)

hui (7)

qiang (12)

xiang (12)

With the same slight inner reservations as when we applied a similar procedure to Bian's version of Sonnet 32, we here invoke external evidence to class *zhi* and *zhi*, and *ji* and *xi* (lines 1, 3, 6 and 8) together as Track 4. Though in our seven sonnets Bian nowhere rhymes the *-i* sound in *zhi* with that in *ji* and *xi*, he does do so in his translation of W. H. Auden's sonnet "Who's Who."²⁸

By this time we are accustomed, in Bian's versions, to assimilating *-ing* to the Track 11 group. Accordingly, we take *jing* here as rhyming with *hun* but not with *hong* and *zhong*. The rhyme structure of the poem is then

a

b

a

b

c

a

c

a

d

e

d

e

b

b

Remarking that Liang's and Bian's versions both show the striking repetition of the "b" rhyme in the final couplet, one is tempted to wonder whether it is coincidence that in the original, the corresponding positions in the final couplet echo the *-ng* sound of the "b" rhymes in the first strophe. As we have agreed, however, not to expect rhyme reduplication to be meaningful with reference to the original, we will pass over this lightly and go on to Tu An's version of the same poem:

你從我身上能看到這個時令：

²⁸ Bian Zhilin 1983a, 158-159. As Tu An has been kind enough to point out in correspondence, Bian's original poetry also affords examples of this rhyme.

黃葉落光了，或者還剩下幾片
 沒脫離那亂打冷顫的一簇簇枝梗——
 不再有好鳥歌唱的荒涼唱詩壇。
 你從我身上能看到這樣的傍晚：
 夕陽的回光沉入了西方的天際，
 死神的化身——黑夜，慢慢地出現，
 擠走黃昏，把一切封進了安息。
 你從我身上能看到這種火焰：
 它躺在自己青春的灰燼上繚繞，
 像躺在臨終的床上，一息奄奄，
 跟供它養料的燃料一同毀滅掉。
 看出了這個，你的愛會更加堅貞，
 好好地愛著你快要失去的愛人！

The rhymes, in our customary tabulation, are:

ling (11)
 pian (10)
 geng (11)
 tan (10)

wan (10)
 ji (4)
 xian (10)
 xi (4)

yan (10)
 rao (8)
 yan (10)
 diao (8)

zhen (11)
 ren (11)

As we have already mentioned in connection with the previous poem, Tu An has explicitly stated (1991, 352) that he occasionally rhymes *-ing* and *-eng* with *-en*; we accordingly assign lines 1 and 3 to Track 11. As for taking *ji* and *xi* (in lines 6 and 8) as Track 4, we are on somewhat shakier ground. Tu An's afterword seems to

imply that he does not group together all the sounds that we have been calling Track 4. He admits the possibility of rhyming the *-i* sound in *zi/ci/si* with that in *zhi/chi/shi* and with words in an *-er* final, but does not mention the *-i* sound in *ji/qi/xi* as belonging to the same group. A few lines later he definitely rejects the rhyme of *-i* and *-ü* (which we have seen to be a borderline case in Bian Zhilin's practice).²⁹ The external evidence in this case is ambiguous. In his version of Sonnet 9, for example, in the first strophe Tu An rhymes *shi* with *shi* in the "a" positions and *ji* with *qi* as "b": a clear contrast. On the other hand, in Sonnet 2 (lines 5 and 7) he does rhyme *zhi* with *li* (identical in final vowel to the *ji/qi/xi* group); and in Sonnet 31 (lines 5 and 7), *li* and *shi*. It seems that his overall tendency is to subdivide our Track 4 into somewhat narrower categories, but that he does not always do so.³⁰

In the context of the present poem, all this is really rather academic, as in any case there is clearly no other rhyming pair that could possibly be linked with *ji* and *xi*. It will do no harm to call this sound Track 4 here; but in looking at another example by Tu An below (Sonnet 104), we will have to return to this question of whether that Track has validity for him.

For the present poem we obtain, then, the following rhyme scheme:

a
b
a
b

b
c
b
c

b
d
b
d

a
a

²⁹ In his book of original sonnets, however, Tu An does rhyme *-i* and *-ü* in at least one instance: "At St. Patrick's Cathedral," Tu An 1986, 84.

³⁰ In Tu An's book of original sonnets, I have also found an example of *xi* rhyming with *shi* – lines 1 and 3 of "Melancholy," Tu An 1986, 23.

Once again we see here a high degree of rhyme reduplication. But if we consider this compact four-rhyme scheme not as a curious deviation from the original but as an esthetic structure in its own right, we see that it has a charm of its own. The "b" rhymes running in pairs through all the first three strophes make the poem close-knit in a dimension which the original lacks, and the repetition of the poem's first rhyme in its closing couplet – a device which, as we shall see in the next chapter, is sometimes used to great effect by the modern poet Feng Zhi in his original sonnets – imparts a distinct feeling of closure to the whole.

Yet it cannot be said that the rhyme scheme of the original has not been observed! True, the manner of observance leads to overlapping that can give rise, as in this case, to a contrapuntal structure which Shakespeare could not have foreseen. But it is exactly the Chinese translator's concern for fidelity to the original, together with the objective paucity of distinct syllable types in Chinese, that makes inevitable the production of these variations, overtones, or whatever we want to call them.

Just how heavily the original rhyme scheme can weigh upon the translator can be seen – if we may be excused a slight diversion at this point – in Tu An's treatment of the first four lines of a sonnet that falls outside the scope of our sample. In the original, the first four lines of Sonnet 130 read as follows:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red:
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hair be wires, black wires grow on her head.

Tu An translates the passage thus:

我的情人的眼睛絕不像太陽；
紅珊瑚遠遠勝過她嘴唇的紅色；
如果髮是絲，鐵絲就生在她頭上；
如果雪算白，她胸膛就一味暗褐。

The interesting thing here is that he reverses the order of lines 3 and 4 in the original. Evidently, having ended his first line on *taiyang* "sun," he found it easier to place *ta toudang* "on her head" in the corresponding rhyming position in line 3. True, in the original, logically speaking there is no difference in importance between lines 3 and 4, and reversing them makes little or no difference to the thought. Still, this is a clear case of loyalty to the rhyme scheme taking precedence over loyalty to the text.

Having finished one diversion, we can now return to our matter by way of another one. Let us read Shakespeare's Sonnet 79, paying especial attention to the vowel sounds of the rhyming words:

Whilst I alone did call upon thy aid,
 My verse alone had all thy gentle grace;
 But now my gracious numbers are decay'd,
 And my sick Muse doth give another place.
 I grant, sweet love, thy lovely argument
 Deserves the travail of a worthier pen;
 Yet what of thee thy poet doth invent
 He robs thee of, and pays it thee again.
 He lends thee virtue, and he stole that word
 For thy behaviour; beauty doth he give,
 And found it in thy cheek: he can afford
 No praise to thee but what in thee doth live.
 Then thank him not for that which he doth say,
 Since what he owes thee thou thyself dost pay.

Just for the sake of argument, let us pretend the rhyme scheme were based not on the commonly accepted rules for rhyme, but only on those vowel sounds. We would then obtain:

a
 a
 a
 a

 b
 b
 b
 b

 c
 d
 c
 d

 a
 a

In other words, the seven rhymes would have been reduced to four, and a first-strophe rhyme would recur at the end of the poem. This setup would not be out of place alongside the Chinese Shakespearean sonnets we have been examining. In fact, later in this chapter we are going to claim, and demonstrate by tabulations, that at the level of *assonance* (that is, roughly speaking, disregarding the final consonants of the rhyme words), Shakespeare's originals fall into a "track" system of their own, and that the number of such "tracks" is just about...thirteen!

But to the translations. Liang Zongdai's version:

當初我獨自一個懇求你協助，
 只有我的詩佔有你一切嫵媚；
 但現在我清新的韻律既陳腐，
 我的病詩神只好給別人讓位。
 我承認，愛呵，你這美妙的題材
 值得更高明的筆的精寫細描；
 可是你的詩人不過向你還債，
 他把奪自你的當作他的創造。
 他賜你美德，美德這詞他只從
 你的行為偷取；他加給你秀妍，
 其實從你頰上得來；他的歌頌
 沒有一句不是從你身上發見。

那麼，請別感激他對你的稱贊，
 既然他只把欠你的向你償還。

This yields a list of rhyme words that re-opens the issue of the *-ei* rhyme:

zhu (5)
 mei (7)
 fu (5)
 wei (7)

cai (6)
 miao (8)
 zhai (6)
 zao (8)

cong (13)
 yan (10)
 song (13)
 jian (10)

zan (10)
 huan (10)

We have here, for the first time with this sound, perfectly unambiguous rhyme based on the modern standard pronunciation: Track 7. As another example will occur below in Sonnet 104, the question of whether this is a "standard" from which the previous examples "deviate" must remain unanswered.

The other rhymes require no comment. The scheme is:

a
 b
 a
 b

 c
 d
 c
 d

 e
 f
 e
 f

 f
 f

It might have been tempting, on the basis of the slightly dissimilar vowel sounds involved, to differentiate the final couplet by saying *yan* and *jian*, in which the *-an* sound is preceded by an *i*-glide and is in phonetic terms somewhat higher and more frontal, do not quite rhyme with *zan* and *huan*. But in Liang's version of Sonnet 73, as we have seen, *tian* clearly rhymes with *chan*. In other words, we feel justified here in maintaining our diagnosis of Track 10.

In our remaining analyses we will occasionally be using such cross-references to other sonnets in our series by the same translator to show that a given type of rhyme-pair is attested.

Now Bian Zhilin's version:

當初只有我一個人請求你幫助，
也只有我的詩有你的全部風韻；
現在我清新的詩句已經是陳腐，
我的病詩神把交椅讓給了別人。
我承認，心愛的，你這個可愛的題目
值得更好的大手筆苦費心機；
可是詩人給你創造了甚麼
都是他從你搶去的，他是償還你。
他給你美德，本是從你的品行
偷去了這個名詞；他給你美麗，
本是從你的臉上找到的：他只能
對你贊美活在你身上的東西。
那麼用不著感謝他說了甚麼話，
他歸之於你的，確就是你給了他。

We will need to look closely at its rhymes:

zhu (5)
yun (11)
fu (5)
ren (11)

mu (5)
ji (4)
mo (5?)
ni (4)

xing (11)
li (4)
neng (11)
xi (4)

hua (1)
ta (1)

There are moments in our analysis when the obvious move, even when it does not support the position we are trying to take, is still the best. Such a moment is the occurrence of *mu* and *mo* in this poem. Little as we are disposed to admit "individual license" or "dialect background," it is truly difficult to see what else we could do here. In itself, *mo*, whether read at full syllabic value or weakened to the colloquial *me*, would normally have been Track 3. But nothing can be done about the fact that *mu* in line 5 indisputably rhymes with *zhu* and *fu* in lines 1 and 3. All this considered, we will list *mu* and *mo* as an idiosyncratically broad Track 5 rhyme.

Another problem concerns *xing* and *neng*. They could conceivably be taken as either Track 11 (by assimilation to *-in* and *-en*) or Track 13. It is difficult to decide, but in the light of the other examples in Bian's versions, we feel slightly better about calling them Track 11. The scheme is then

a
b
a
b

a
c
a
c

b
c
b
c

d
d

In Tu An's version:

從前只有我一個人向你求助，
我的詩篇獨得了你全部優美；
如今我清新的詩句已變得陳腐，
我的繆斯病倒了，讓出了地位。
我承認，甜愛，你這個可愛的主题
值得讓更好的文筆來精雕細刻；

但你的詩人描寫你怎樣了不起，
 那文句是他搶了你又還給你的。
 他給你美德，而這個詞兒是他從
 你的品行上偷來的；他從你面頰上
 拿到了美又還給你：他只能利用
 你本來就有的東西來把你頌揚。

他給與你的，原是你給他的東西，
 你就別爲了他的話就對他表謝意。

three of the first four lines end with the same rhyme words we have already seen in Liang Zongdai's version. The full list of rhyme words:

zhu (5)
 mei (7)
 fu (5)
 wei (7)

ti (4)
 ke (3)
 qi (4)
 de (3)

cong (13)
 shang (12)
 yong (13)
 yang (12)

xi (4)
 yi (4)

From the point of view of Thirteen Tracks analysis, there is nothing here that requires comment.

We have now studied four of our seven Shakespeare sonnets in some detail. By now we have seen examples of the kinds of theoretical problems that can arise in our application of the Thirteen Tracks to the rhyme schemes, and of the strategies we can adopt in finding at least provisional solutions. Concretely speaking, we have already dealt with all the really difficult cases which our sample presents. As most of our versions of the remaining three sonnets merely substantiate the points already

made, we will not analyze them in detail. Rather, we will give the full texts of the sonnets and their translations in the Appendix to this chapter, systematically presenting here only the rhyme schemes as we construe them, in each case followed in parentheses by the relevant Track numbers.

For Sonnet 82 ("I grant thou wert not married to my muse"), we obtain the following schemes:

<i>Liang Zongdai</i>	<i>Bian Zhilin</i>	<i>Tu An</i>
a (11)	a (10)	a (11)
b (4)	b (5)	b (4)
a (11)	a (10)	a (11)
b (4)	b (5)	b (4)
c (13)	c (11) ³¹	c (9)
d (8)	d (4)	b (4)
c (13)	c (11)	c (9)
d (8)	d (4)	b (4)
b (4)	a (10)	d (13)
e (1)	d (4)	e (1)
b (4)	a (10)	d (13)
e (1)	d (4)	e (1)
c (13)	e (13)	f (12)
c (13)	e (13)	f (12)

For Sonnet 104 ("To me, fair friend, you never can be old"), the first two solutions, in our accustomed order, are:

<i>Liang Zongdai</i>	<i>Bian Zhilin</i>
a (8)	a (10)
b (10)	b (8)
a (8)	a (10)
b (10)	b (8)
c (12)	c (12)
d (7)	d (11)
c (12)	c (12)

³¹ again treating *ming* and *ying* as Track 11.

d (7)	d (11)
e (5)	d (11) ³²
f (13)	e (13)
e (5)	d (11)
f (13)	e (13)
g (4)	f (4)
g (4)	f (4)

It will be worthwhile to examine the specific rhymes of Tu An's version:

bai (6)
 jian (10)
 lai (6)
 tian (10)

yao-guangle (8)
 ji (4)
 shao-guangle (8)
 li (4)

kai (6)
 ma (1)
 zai (6)
 hua (1)

shi (4)
 shi (4)

In lines 5 and 7, we are here taking *yao* and *shao* to be the rhyming elements. Tu An's afterword disallows rhyming on a repeated word (as here *-guang*) unless it is one syllable of a rhyming compound. (The unstressed particle *le*, according to the afterword, is disqualified from rhyme.)³³ We thus obtain for the first three strophes

a
 b
 a
 b

³² treating *zhen* and *ding* as 11 rather than 13.

³³ Tu An 1991, 353.

c
d
c
d

a
e
a
e

The final couplet confronts us once again with the problem we found more or less insoluble above, in the case of Sonnet 73, of whether Tu An's rhyming practice allows us to take *ji* and *li*, *shi* and *shi* as all rhyming. Admitting that a decision must depend on our overall concept of rhyme, and appealing to the inconsistent external evidence we have already cited in connection with Sonnet 73 above, we choose to generalize these sounds as Track 4.

For the last sonnet in our selection, Sonnet 106 ("When in the chronicle of wasted time"), we obtain the following schemes:

<i>Liang Zongdai</i>	<i>Bian Zhilin</i>	<i>Tu An</i>
a (10)	a (8)	a (6)
b (11)	b (4)	b (4)
a (10)	a (8)	a (6)
b (11)	b (4)	b (4)
c (1)	b (4)	c (9)
d (3)	c (7)	d (8)
c (1)	b (4)	c (9)
d (3)	c (7)	d (8)
a (10)	d (10)	e (10)
e (4)	e (1)	a (6)
a (10)	d (10)	e (10)
e (4)	e (1)	a (6)
a (10)	f (12)	f (12)
a (10)	f (12)	f (12)

Now that we have studied the rhymes in a total of twenty-one Chinese translations of these sonnets by Shakespeare and found them, with very few exceptions, immediately definable by the system of the Thirteen Tracks, it will be instructive as

well as amusing to turn for a moment to the rhymes in the original. Below, we list all the rhyme words that occur in our sample of seven sonnets. We group them, in the pairs in which they occur, under the vowel-sound categories by which they are arranged in a modern English rhyming dictionary, Frances Stillman's *The Poet's Manual and Rhyming Dictionary*.³⁴ (In a few of the 49 cases, one member of the pair rhymes, at least from the modern reader's point of view, by the venerable English means of "sight-rime," i.e., by spelling rather than sound, and has accordingly had to be placed in a category other than the one Stillman assigns it to.) For ease of overview, we will prefix each group with a roman numeral.

I. a (ay): day/survey, day/away, say/pay, age/equipage, aid/decay'd, praise/days, days/praise, days/decays, grace/place

II. a (cab): alack/back, hang/sang, hand/stand

III. e (bee): sea/plea, seen/green, perceived/deceived

IV. e (heh): pen/men, pen/again, best/express'd, west/rest, unbred/dead, argument/invent, lend/friend

V. i (eye): time/rhyme (2x), wights/knights, might/bright, eyes/prophecies, fire/expire, lie/by, devised/sympathized, eyed/pride

VI. i (bib): hid/forbid, give/live, prefiguring/sing

VII. o (awe): thought/brought

VIII. ou (how): power/flower, brow/now, out/stout

IX. o (bob): strong/long

X. o (oh): behold/cold, old/cold, word/afford

XI. oo (good): o'erlook/book

XII. u (you): prove/love, Muse/use, used/abused, hue/anew

XIII. u (tub): cover/lover, turned/burned

³⁴ Stillman 1975.

Stillman's dictionary, at the level on which it arranges words by the main vowel sounds we are using here, actually contains not thirteen but fifteen groups; that we have needed no more than thirteen may be no more than pleasingly coincidental to the fact that we have been applying Thirteen Tracks in Chinese. (As far as that goes, in our analysis of the Chinese versions we were occasionally on the verge of introducing a 14th or 15th Track!) But whatever the exact numerical facts, Stillman's index categories are actually *assonance* groups. The fact that Stillman needs about as many of them in English as there are Tracks in Chinese confirms the point we have been developing: that mathematically or statistically speaking, *rhyme* in Chinese is about as distinctive or non-distinctive as *near-rhyme* in English. English *rhyme* is far more distinctive owing to the vast number of different consonants and consonant clusters with which syllables can end. Our contention is that much of the esthetic and emotional charm of the traditional Shakespearean Sonnet derives exactly from the sense of relative rarity associated with the particular rhyme words used, and from the impression of variety-within-unity conveyed by fitting seven distinct rhymes into a tight 14-line frame.

As we have seen, in the Chinese translations of Shakespeare's sonnets, more often than not there are fewer than seven distinct rhymes. The effect is inevitably to suggest a different type or degree of interrelationship between lines than in the original. The very means that the Chinese translators employ in adhering to the form of the original, ironically, condemn them to distorting the form in a subtler dimension. We conclude that in practice, rhyme in modern Chinese is too non-distinctive to be a rigidly applicable defining factor of the Shakespearean Sonnet in the same sense that it is in English.

But is there really no way in which Chinese rhyme could be made more fine-grained even though the standard syllable structure lacks consonantal endings other than *-r*, *-n* and *-ng*? Certainly there is. Bian Zhilin, in the foreword to his *Selected English Poems*,³⁵ compares the freedom implied in English near-rhyme to the increased freedom gained in modern Chinese rhyming by ignoring the traditional distinctions between syllables pronounced in different *tones*. In classical Chinese genres such as the *shi* and *ci*, such distinctions were observed, so that a syllable did not necessarily rhyme with another syllable of the same phonemic shape (that is, of which the *pinyin* spelling, without the tone mark, would have been the same).

Since the advent of Chinese so-called "New Poetry," (i.e., non-classical verse based on modern pronunciation and grammar) at about the time of the First World War, writers of New Poetry have mostly ignored these traditional tonal

³⁵ Bian Zhilin 1983a.

distinctions. That is not to say, however, that sophisticated readers no longer have an ear for such things. Bian Zhilin, for example, has even gone so far as to criticize certain modern *book titles* for comprising aurally unattractive tonal sequences.³⁶ Tu An, in his afterword to the Shakespeare translations, still finds it necessary to state explicitly (p. 352) that tonal distinctions are not observed in his rhyming practice. Xi Mi (1992, p. 56) quotes Liang Zongdai criticizing a sonnet of Sun Dayu's for using too many "oblique" tones. Qian Guangpei (1987, pp. 199-200) discusses a poem by Zhu Xiang (not a sonnet) in which extended use is made of alternating "level" and "oblique" rhymes.

It is probably fair to say that the applicability, if any, of tonal distinctions to modern Chinese poetic form remains a debatable issue. In a general way, if tone contrasts are to play a role, they will more plausibly do so where levels of diction are relatively elevated and archaic, and (especially) where the style of intended reading is declamatory, dramatic and the like. One could imagine all sorts of borderline situations in which the significance of tonal contrasts was perceptible to part but not all of an audience, to the writer but not to all readers, and so on.³⁷

Though it remains theoretically possible to maintain that Chinese rhyme could be made more distinctive by stipulating that words in different tones do not rhyme, it is doubtful whether this could be convincingly applied over the whole spectrum of poetry. In other words, except perhaps for rather specialized contexts, the relative indistinctness of modern Chinese rhyme as compared with, say, the Germanic languages, is here to stay.

But...so what? The fact that Chinese rhyme is less *distinctive* does not mean it has to be less *expressive*. If it is less workable from the viewpoint of separating the lines of a poem into unique pairs, it may be all the more effective as a means of suggesting subtle internal links as one part of a poem echoes the rhyming sound of another.

In the Shakespeare translations, with their long lines and rather involved thought, these aural effects may seem so subtle as to go almost unnoticed. But as we shall see in the next chapter, in the case of poems with shorter lines, the frank repetition of rhyme sounds can work as a powerful contrapuntal factor continually evoking parallels and contrasts with other formal elements.

³⁶ Bian Zhilin 1992, 135-136.

³⁷ This would apply especially if, for example, a poet, as part of a system for ordering his or her mind during composition, regarded as a distinct class words traditionally belonging to the old "entering" tone, which are no longer an auditorily recognizable group in modern standard Chinese.

Appendix: Originals and translations of Sonnets 82, 104 and 106.

Sonnet 82:

I grant thou wert not married to my Muse,
 And therefore mayst without attaint o'erlook
 The dedicated words which writers use
 Of their fair subject, blessing every book.
 Thou art as fair in knowledge as in hue,
 Finding thy worth a limit past my praise;
 And therefore art enforced to seek anew
 Some fresher stamp of the time-bettering days,
 And do so, love; yet when they have devised
 What strained touches rhetoric can lend,
 Thou truly fair wert truly sympathized
 In true plain words by thy true-telling friend;
 And their gross painting might be better used
 Where cheeks need blood; in thee it is abused.

Liang Zongdai:

我承認你並沒有和我的詩神
 結同心，因而可以絲毫無愧惡
 去俯覽那些把你作主題的詩人
 對你的贊美，褒獎著每本詩集。
 你的智慧和姿色都一樣出眾，
 又發覺你的價值比我的贊美高，
 因而你不得不到別處去追蹤
 這邁進時代的更生動的寫照。
 就這麼辦，愛呵，但當他們既已
 使盡了浮夸的辭藻把你刻劃，
 真美的你只能由真誠的知己
 用真朴的話把你真實地表達；
 他們的濃脂粉只配拿去染紅
 貧血的臉頰；對於你卻是濫用。

Bian Zhilin:

我承認你並不跟我的詩神有緣，
 你可以並不見怪，泰然閱讀
 作家的獻詞，聽他們怎樣夸贊
 他們的美人，嘉許每一本新書。
 你不但容光美好，眼光也高明，
 看出了自己超出我贊美的能力；
 因此不得已另求新鮮的反映，
 青出於藍的時代打下的印記，
 就這麼辦吧，愛；可是徒然
 他們在修辭裏窮盡了鋪排的能事
 只講真話的老朋友才真能表現
 你的真美，就憑他句真字實；
 他們的濃抹最好是拿去涂紅
 缺少血色的臉龐，對你是誤用。

Tu An:

我承認你沒有跟我的繆斯結親，
 所以作家們把你當美好主題
 寫出來奉獻給你的每一卷詩文，
 你可以加恩察閱而無所顧忌。
 你才學優秀，正如你容貌俊秀，
 卻發覺我把你稱贊得低於實際；
 於是你就不得不重新去尋求
 進步的時尚刻下的新鮮印記。
 可以的，愛；不過他們盡管用
 修辭學技巧來經營浮夸的筆法，
 你朋友卻愛說真話，他在真話中
 真實地反映了你的真美實價；
 他們濃艷的脂粉還是去化妝
 貧血的臉吧，不要濫用在你身上。

Sonnet 104:

To me, fair friend, you never can be old,
 For as you were when first your eye I eyed,
 Such seems your beauty still. Three winters cold
 Have from the forests shook three summers' pride,
 Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turn'd
 In process of the seasons have I seen,
 Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burn'd,
 Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green.
 Ah, yet doth beauty, like a dial-hand,
 Steal from his figure, and no pace perceived;
 So your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand,
 Hath motion, and mine eye may be deceived:
 For fear of which, hear this, thou age unbred;
 Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead.

Liang Zongdai:

對於我，俊友，你永遠不會衰老，
因為自從我的眼碰見你的眼，
你還是一樣美。三個嚴冬搖掉
三個蒼翠的夏天的樹葉和光艷，
三個陽春三度化作秋天的枯黃。
時序使我三度看見四月的芳菲
三度被六月的炎炎烈火燒光。
但你，還是和初見時一樣明媚；
唉，可是美，像時針，它躡著腳步
移過鐘面，你看不見它的蹤影；
同樣，你的姣顏，我以爲是常駐，
其實在移動，迷惑的是我的眼睛。

顫栗吧，未來的時代，聽我呼籲： 生怕如此，我告訴在來的後世，
你還沒有生，美的夏天已死去。 你們還沒有生，美的夏天已經死。

Bian Zhilin:

我看你永遠不會老，美貌不會變，
第一次見面，我看見你是那樣好，
現在仍然是不走樣。三個冷冬天
從樹林搖落了三個夏天的驕傲，
三度陽春煙景轉成了秋黃，
我看了季節在運轉裏沒有停頓，
三番四月季在三度六月天燒光，
我初次看見你新鮮，現在還嬌嫩。
啊，可是美，就像表面的指針
會偷偷離開了記號，看不出移動，
你的容顏我以爲永遠駐定，
卻也會變動，也許是我看得朦朧：

Tu An:

我看，美友呵，你永遠不會衰敗，
你現在還是那樣美，跟最初我看見
你眼睛那一刻一樣。從見你以來，
我見過四季的周行：三個冷冬天
把三個炎夏從林子裏吹落、搖光了；
三度陽春，都成了萎黃的秋季；
六月的驕陽，也已經三次燒光了
四月的花香：而你卻始終鮮麗。
啊！不過，美也會偷偷地溜開，
像指針在鐘面瞞著人離開字碼，
你的美，雖然我相信它永遠存在，
也會瞞著我眼睛，慢慢地變化。

生怕這樣，後代呵，請聽這首詩：
你還沒出世，美的夏天早謝世。

Sonnet 106:

When in the chronicle of wasted time
 I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
 And beauty making beautiful old rhyme
 In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,
 Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
 Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
 I see their antique pen would have express'd
 Even such a beauty as you master now.
 So all their praises are but prophecies
 Of this our time, all you prefiguring;
 And, for they look'd but with divining eyes,
 They had not skill enough your worth to sing:
 For we, which now behold these present days,
 Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

Liang Zongdai:

當我從那湮遠的古代的紀年
 發見那絕代風流人物的寫真，
 艷色使得古老的歌詠也香艷，
 頌贊著多情騎士和絕命佳人，
 於是，從那些國色天姿的描畫，
 無論手腳、嘴唇、或眼睛或眉額，
 我發覺那些古拙的筆所表達
 恰好是你現在所佔領的姿色。
 所以他們的贊美無非是預言
 我們這時代，一切都預告著你；
 不過他們觀察只用想像的眼，
 還不夠才華把你歌頌得盡致：
 而我們，幸而得親眼看見今天，
 只有眼驚羨，卻沒有舌頭詠嘆。

Bian Zhilin:

過往世代的記載裏常常見到
 前人把最後俏人物描摹盡致，
 美貌如何使古老的詩句也美妙，
 配得上歌頌美女和風流騎士，
 看人家夸贊美貌是怎樣的無比，
 甚麼手，甚麼腳，甚麼嘴，甚麼眼，甚麼眉，
 我總是看出來他們古雅的手筆
 差不多恰好表現了你的秀美。
 所以他們的贊辭都無非是預言
 我們這時代，都把你預先描畫；
 他們卻只用猜度的眼睛來觀看，
 還不夠有本領歌唱你的真價：
 我們呢，親眼看到了今天的風光，
 眼睛會驚訝，舌頭卻不會頌揚。

Tu An:

我翻閱荒古時代的歷史記載，
見到最美的人物被描摹盡致，
美使得古代的詩歌也美麗多彩，
歌頌著已往的貴婦，可愛的騎士；
見到古人夸獎說最美的美人有
怎樣的手足，嘴唇，眼睛和眉毛，
於是我發現古代的文筆早就
表達出來了你今天具有的美貌。
那麼，古人的贊辭都只是預言——
預言了我們這時代：你的儀態；
但古人只能用理想的眼睛測看，
還不能充分歌唱出你的價值來：
至於我們呢，看見了今天的景象，
有眼睛驚訝，卻沒有舌頭會頌揚。

CHAPTER 4

SOME RHYTHMIC STRUCTURES IN FENG ZHI'S SONNETS¹

In the course of the preceding chapters, it has become evident that the traditional Western framework of sonnet analysis cannot do justice to all aspects of the formal beauty of certain outstanding Chinese sonnets. Neither, for that matter, can the customary Chinese approach to the formal description of modern verse, which typically does not go much farther than counting the number of syllables or *dun* per line, acknowledging in a general way the presence of rhyme or assonance, and pointing out comparable structures in the work of other poets. This is unfortunate, since the specific features of the Chinese language, at the same time that they make it impossible for Chinese poets to duplicate exactly the formal features of the Western sonnet, actually make possible new dimensions of subtle formal beauty that are not revealed by traditional analysis.

In this chapter we will see in more detail what some of those dimensions are, and how they apply in some of the sonnets in Feng Zhi's 1942 collection *Shisihang ji* (Sonnets). Specifically, we will discover that in these poems there is interaction of a contrapuntal or mutually highlighting kind between rhyme reduplication, as we have identified it in the Shakespeare translations, and another feature which I do not believe has yet been described and applied in quite this form, which I propose to call *line assonance*.

In this chapter our criterion for *rhyme* shall again be whether or not the syllables in question rhyme according to the Thirteen Tracks. As in our Shakespeare chapter, we do not mean to imply that Feng Zhi consciously employed exactly this system, but only that as a tool of classification and analysis the system can be shown to be plausibly applicable far more often than not.

Line assonance is a rhythmic phenomenon. It has to do with the interplay between the typographic *line* and the grammatical *sentence*. On the one hand there is the overall intonation of the full sentence; on the other hand there is the tendency for individual typographic lines to be read as rhythmically distinct whether or not they constitute full sentences in themselves. The identification of line assonance is based on the contention that there is a subtle but perceptible difference in rhythmic value between a line that is perceived as a complete sentence in itself and one that is not, and also between lines that read straight through and those which contain an internal pause as indicated by punctuation. It is possible for lines of the same rhythmic type, in this rather broad sense, to interact in a patterned and meaningful way. Further discussion might seem a bit too abstract at this point; the validity of the concept will emerge as we examine some concrete examples from Feng Zhi's

¹ An earlier version of this chapter was published as Haft 1996.

sonnets. But it will be well to have these concepts – rhyme, rhyme reduplication, line assonance, and the possibility of their contrapuntal combination and interaction – in mind from the start.

The name of Feng Zhi has long been practically synonymous with "famous Chinese sonneteer of the first half of the twentieth century." The reason is not that Feng Zhi was the most prolific sonnet writer – Zhu Xiang, for example, wrote far more – nor that all of his sonnets were necessarily better than some of those by other writers like Bian Zhilin, Dai Wangshu and Zheng Min. But unlike these other outstanding authors, Feng Zhi published, at a critical time in his nation's history when literary works of high quality were hard to come by, an impressive volume consisting entirely of sonnets. Though this volume – *Shisihang ji* or *Sonnets*, published in Guilin by Mingri She in 1942 – was not strictly a cycle, its twenty-seven poems showed a great deal of thematic interrelationship. Their contemplative quality led Kai-yu Hsu, whose 1963 anthology *Twentieth Century Chinese Poetry* remains an admired classic, to characterize Feng Zhi as a "metaphysical" poet.

Though Feng Zhi is most famous as the author of *Sonnets*, he did not write exclusively in that form. He established his name in the 1920s with the volumes *Zuori zhi ge* (Songs of yesterday) and *Beiyou ji qita* (Northern journey and other poems), in both of which narrative verse featured prominently. Meanwhile he had majored in German at Peking University, graduating in 1927. In the early 1930s he spent several years studying in Germany. According to an essay Feng Zhi published in 1936, it must have been during these years that he studied with great interest the *Sonnets to Orpheus* by Rainer Maria Rilke.² After his return to China he taught courses on Goethe and Rilke at, among other places, the Southwestern Associated University in wartime Kunming.

Feng Zhi wrote his sonnets in 1941. In a prose statement composed afterward, he seemed at pains to play down the influence of Rilke. The first of his own *Sonnets*, he said, had come to him rather casually one day while he was walking in the countryside near Kunming; he did not even realize till he got home and wrote it down that it was a "modified sonnet." Though he found the form suitable for his material and continued to write in it, it was not, he said, ever his intention to "transplant" the Western form into China.³

² Feng Zhi 1985, vol. 2, 156. See also Gálík 1986. For a biography of Feng Zhi including a full English translation of the *Sonnets*, see Cheung 1979.

³ Feng Zhi, "Xu," in *Shisihang ji* (Sonnets), pp. i-iv. The edition I have used, for both the preface and the text of all poems quoted, is an undated Hong Kong reprint: Wen Xin Shudian, n.d. As it includes the preface dated 1948, I take it to be a photo reprint of the 1949 Shanghai (Wenhua Shenghuo) reissue.

Whatever the veracity of this account, let us proceed to read one of the *Sonnets to Orpheus* in which Feng Zhi had been so interested in the 1930s:

Nur wer die Leier schon hob
auch unter Schatten,
darf das unendliche Lob
ahnend erstatten.

Nur wer mit Toten vom Mohn
ass, von dem ihren,
wird nicht den leisesten Ton
wieder verlieren.

Mag auch die Spiegung im Teich
oft uns verschwimmen:
Wisse das Bild.

Erst in dem Doppelbereich
werden die Stimmen
ewig und mild.⁴

In translation:

Only who's raised the lyre
even among Shades
may return the unending
praise he surmises.

Only who's eaten of poppy
with the Dead, of their own,
will never again lose
even the faintest tone.

Though the reflection in the pond
often blurs to elude us:
Be sure of the image.

Only in the Double Realm
do voices become
eternal and gentle.⁵

⁴ *Sonette an Orpheus*, I.9. Text from Rilke 1966, vol. 1, 492.

Examining this poem of Rilke's by contrast with Shakespeare's sonnets, we are immediately struck by three dimensions of formal difference. Rilke's lines are (1) much shorter, (2) not iambic, and (3) never, but for the meaningful exception of line 11, so constituted that a single line can be read as a full grammatical sentence. The first two of these features are obvious; since the third lies at the heart of what we will have to say about Feng Zhi's sonnets in this chapter, it will be worthwhile to consider it here in a bit of detail.

Lines 1 through 4 constitute a single sentence, as do lines 5 through 8. Starting with the ninth line – that is, after the traditional volta between the octave and the sestet – though the use of enjambement continues, the *length of the sentences* is shorter. Lines 9 through 11 are clearly intended as a single three-line sentence, as confirmed by the non-final punctuation (a colon) after line 10, though line 11 begins with a capital and is set in italics as if to emphasize that it is, uniquely among the lines of the poem, potentially a self-contained sentence. (A further unique feature is that it is in the imperative mood.)

Lines 12 through 14, again, must be read straight through: a three-line structure, paralleling the other such structure in the other strophe which shares with this one the feature of coming after, not before the volta.

What we see happening here is a sort of movement compensatory to the dramatic shortening of the traditional sonnet line: at the same time that the *lines* are shortened to no more than couplings of two or three quasi-classical Greek feet, the *sentences* are as it were lengthened by contrast, and their extra length is consciously appreciated exactly because they are spread out over an identifiable number of typographic lines. The result is contrapuntal interaction between line and sentence: between the metrical or reading rhythm of lines and the intonational rhythm of the full sentence. This interaction is not accounted for by the traditional defining elements of the sonnet – feet, rhyme schemes, and stanza structures.

Before proceeding to look for these line-sentence structures in Feng Zhi's sonnets, we will note one additional dimension of the Rilke example that is perhaps not so obvious. In the previous chapter we have seen that the inevitably frequent reduplication of rhyme in Chinese makes it more akin to near-rhyme or assonance than to strict rhyme in English. On the assumption that Rilke's German, having a syllable structure far more like that of English than that of Chinese, may be expected to behave similarly to English in this regard, we will now inspect the rhymes of his poem. Counting according to strict rhyme, we obtain the structure

a
b

⁵ Translation mine. Like my translations of Feng Zhi's sonnets in this chapter, it is intended only as a crib on the original and makes no claim to literary merit.

a
b

c
d
c
d

e
f
g

e
f
g

If, however, we ignore final consonants and listen only to the vowel quality of the rhyming words, we obtain for the lines before the volta

a
b
a
b

a
c
a
c

As for the sestet, though matters are complicated by the contrast between masculine and feminine rhyme in lines 10-11 and 13-14, if we consider only the vowel quality of the final accented syllables, we obtain

d
e
e

d
e
e

Without denying that native German speakers are perfectly well aware of the great difference in final sound between for example "Stimmen" and "mild," we can plausibly assert that the similarity in the vowel sounds, at the same time as it arguably detracts from the distinctive complexity of the rhyme scheme, acts in another dimension to bind successive lines of the poem closer together. We have here a perceptible structuring device which does not conform to the old schoolroom definitions of the sonnet.

Turning now from this German sonnet with which Feng Zhi was familiar to a number of his own sonnets, it will be practical to begin with Number 7 of *Sonnets*:

In gentle sunlight
we arrived at the outskirts
the way different rivers
flow to make a sea.

The same apprehension
lay on our hearts,
the same fate
lay on our shoulders.

We had a god in common;
he was concerned for us:
when the danger was over

the divergent roads
drew us back again,
sea parted into rivers.

和暖的陽光內
我們來到郊外，
像不同的河水
融成一片大海。

有同樣的驚醒
在我們的心頭，
是同樣的運命
在我們的肩頭。

共同有一個神
 他爲我們擔心：
 等到危險過去，

那分歧的街衢
 又把我們吸回，
 海水分成河水。

Let us look first at the rhyme scheme:

nei
 wai
 shui
 hai

xing
 xintou
 xing
 jiantou

shen
 xin
 qu

qu
 hui
 shui

The rhyming of *-en* and *-in* in lines 9 and 10, like that of *-ei* and *-ui* in lines 1 and 3, is perfectly normal within the Thirteen Tracks system. As for *xintou* and *jiantou* in lines 6 and 8, the syllable *-tou*, unstressed and written with the same character in both cases, can hardly be in itself the locus of rhyme. The penultimate syllables *xin* and *jian*, however, would certainly be an odd rhyme in anything like standard pronunciation. We will probably be justified in regarding this as a slightly anomalous case of near-rhyme, or near-feminine rhyme, in which the identical second syllable helps to accentuate the moderate resemblance between the stressed syllables. Alternatively, we might consider whether *jian-* is to be taken as rhyming with *xin-*, in which case, by applying the coalescence of Tracks 11 and 13, one might actually take all four lines of this strophe as *grosso modo* rhyming, not only

with each other but with the *-en* and *-in* in the following two lines! One would then have reduced all rhymes in the poem to four classes; the suspicion would then arise whether even the *-ai* in the first strophe were to be read as in assonance with the *-ei* and *-ui*, so that the first four lines would form an auditorily coherent "block" in the same sense as the second four.

In any event, surely the conclusion to be drawn from all this is that Feng Zhi, rather than striving for maximum differentiation of rhyme sounds, is in a sense doing the opposite. He is consciously exploiting their relative undifferentiation in Chinese by making patterned use of the recurrences. Most obviously, the rhyme class that was used at the end of the poem's first line recurs in the last line. This device occurs in a number of the *Sonnets*.

If we momentarily pursue the most extreme consequences of the possible (near-) rhyme group relationships conjectured above, we obtain as a very broad rhyme scheme for Sonnet 7:

a
a
a
a

b
b
b
b

b
b
c

c
a
a

Examining this structure for possible correlation with the semantic dimension, we see that the introduction of the "c" element corresponds to the point in the poem at which narration shifts from "before" to "after" the moment of danger – which is also the point at which the direction of "flow" is reversed from the gathering "sea" back to the individual "rivers."

That moment is marked in another dimension as well. Keeping in mind our Rilke example, let us now examine Sonnet 7 from the viewpoint of the relationships

between lines and sentences.⁶ Reading first the octave, we see that there are various reasons for regarding it as composed of *successive groups of two lines*. The reasons for this are (1) the striking parallelism of sense thus obtained, (2) the commas placed after lines 2 and 6, as if intended to impose a parallel reading rhythm upon the first two strophes, and (3) the necessity of grouping together lines 1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6, and 7 and 8 in order to account for the complete grammatical sentences involved. Admittedly, opinions might differ as to whether line 3 should be regarded as the beginning of a new sentence or as the first line of a clause continuing the previous one. In any case, however, it remains clear that lines 3 and 4 form a continuous grammatical unit.

Crossing the volta to lines 9 and 10, we suddenly find ourselves rhythmically in a very different landscape. These two lines can best be read as each a separate sentence. In other words, the individual lines have here a different rhythmic and semantic weight. That weight is here as it were established and poised in preparation for the poem's last line, in which it will recur. Before it does, however, it is kept in suspension while a surprising new rhythmic unit makes its one and only appearance: the three-line sentence occupying lines 11 through 13. The beginning of that unit coincides with the onset of the deviant rhyme-group "c" which we have noted above, and of the attendant semantic turning point.

We obtain, then, an overall line-*assonance* structure as follows:

2 lines
2 "
2 "
2 "

(volta)

1 line
1 "
3 lines
1 line

The same 1-1-3-1 sestet structure, though rather differently realized, occurs also in Sonnet 4:

⁶ In this and all other cases to be discussed, the formal analysis refers only to the Chinese original and may not seem correct from the viewpoint of the translation. It would hardly have been workable to build all these formal features into the translations.

*Edelweiss*⁷

Often, when I think of man's life
 I can't help praying to you.
 Little clump of white down,
 you haven't forgotten your name.

Yet avoiding all name
 you lead a tiny life;
 without forgetting nobility and purity
 you silently fulfill your life and death.

Whatever words, whatever tumults –
 placed beside you, they either fade
 or melt into your quiet.

That is your great pride,
 though realized in your denial.
 I pray to you, for the life of man.

我常常想到人的一生，
 便不由得要向你祈禱。
 你一叢白茸茸的小草
 不曾孤負了一個名稱；

但你躲避著一切名稱，
 過一個渺小的生活，
 不孤負高貴和潔白，
 默默地成就你的死生。

一切的形容，一切喧囂
 到你身邊，有的就凋落，
 有的化成了你的靜默：

這是你偉大的驕傲

⁷ The *Sonnets* were originally untitled. In this case, I am adding the title which appeared in later reprintings, as it seems indispensable for clarity.

卻在你的否認裏完成。
我向你祈禱，爲了人生。

In terms of the Thirteen Tracks, the rhyme scheme is

a
b
b
a

a
c
c
a

b
c
c

b
a
a

with no irregularities.⁸ Once again, the poem ends on the same rhyme with which it begins. Here the patterning is especially obvious as even the rhyming word is identical.

The line-assonance structure of the sestet is implemented by the use of commas *within* lines 9, 10 and 14. These, representing the only *mid-line breaks* in the poem, impose a different reading rhythm on the lines after the volta. In the octave, whatever the exact status the reader assigns to lines 7 and 8 (i.e., whether they are parallel clauses filling out a sentence, or new simple sentences in themselves), it is clear that the lines themselves are to be read straight through. But after the volta, the quick succession of two lines with internal commas has almost the effect of doubling the time value of the line, so that the passage reads as if four lines were compressed into two. The following three lines then revert to the straight-through rhythm, after which the final line, again internally divided by a comma, closes the "frame" of the sestet and reveals its structure as 1-1-3-1. Without wishing to claim

⁸ The truly intrepid searcher for near-rhymes will not fail to wonder here whether the *-ao* in lines 2 and 3 could be taken as assonant with the *-(u)o* final sounds of lines 6 and 7 (reading them as *huo* and *bo* respectively), in which case this whole poem could be said to rhyme ultimately on two sounds!

truly dramatic prominence for the patterning in this case, we will maintain that as one element among others, it certainly does contribute to the poem's formal elegance. And hereafter we shall feel justified in classifying lines not only according to whether they coincide with complete or incomplete grammatical sentences, but also according to whether or not they are internally subdivided by punctuation – a procedure akin to what we have already done in some of our analyses of Zhu Xiang's sonnets in Chapter 2.

We next consider Sonnet 22:

Deep in the mountains:
listen to the night rain pound.
The village ten miles further,
the market twenty –

do they still exist?
Mountains and rivers of ten years past,
dreams and visions of twenty,
are sunken beneath the rain.

Such narrow surroundings
like being back in the womb.
God, deep in the night, I pray

like a man out of ancient ages:
"Give my narrow heart
a big universe!"

深夜又是深山
聽著夜雨沉沉。
十里外的山村
念里外的市廛

牠們可還存在？
十年前的山川
念年前的夢幻
都在雨裏沉埋。

四圍這樣狹窄

好像回到母胎；
神，我深夜祈求

像個古代的人：
「給我狹窄的心
一個大的宇宙！」

Taking the Thirteen Tracks as our guide, we construe the rhyme scheme to be

a
b
b
a

c
a
a
c

c
c
d

b
b
d

There are no irregularities.

Rhythmically, in this poem we notice that there are exactly two three-line sentences – lines 3 to 5 and 6 to 8, respectively. They are in parallel not only rhythmically but in other ways as well. The first deals with the situation in space; the second, in time. Both are structured around the successive numbers "ten" and "twenty." Together, they fill out the octave, after which the sestet will revert to the paired-line structure with which the poem began.

Having pointed out the rhythmic structuring which these two sentences contribute to Sonnet 22, we may now ask whether the rhythmic values we have been attributing to certain types of lines must always be fruitfully applicable to every poem. A further implication of this last question is the issue of the hierarchical

priority, if any, obtaining between various types of lines. In this poem, for example, we have found it meaningful to examine the three-line sentences, since they occurred in a pair that we found structurally significant. We have not, on the other hand, given attention to line 11, which contains internal punctuation of the kind that we found highly significant in the previous poem. Are some types of line inherently so prominent that they must always be considered key formal axes of the poem, while others may be omitted from discussion at will?

This question of hierarchic value is a complex one. In general, the answer must be that we can consider a given feature significant as it appears in parallel or contrast to other features. We shall be looking for correlations, composites and tandems of whatever kind. We shall be alert for pairs or groups of features which can be seen to mark, set off, or underpin each other. But our concept of correlation will be applicable to elements in the same *or different* dimensions, as long as the correlation seems to us reasonably demonstrable. And – very importantly – the elements thus found meaningful in correlation *need not be the same in every poem, or even in all parts of the same poem.*

For example, in Sonnet 4, we found that the lines containing internal commas were structurally significant because they imparted to the sestet the same architecture that we had identified, albeit on a different basis, in Sonnet 7. In the present poem, however, we do not find that type of line functioning at the same level. We can, perhaps, see it here in a different role. Line 11, the only line of this type, also coincides with the only use of an appellative form in this poem. So, the correlation here is not between line and line, but between a type of line we may call "internally subdivided" and the mode of address. In our analysis, we did not at the beginning mention this particular correlation because we found it less striking, and less immediately necessary for an understanding of the poem's overall structure, than the correlation between the two threefold groups of lines.

And yet...now that we have paused to identify line 11 as the initiation of a vocative element, is it really so insignificant after all? Looking back to the rhyme scheme of this poem, we see that line 11 also initiates a previously unused rhyme ("d"), which as it happens will recur only once: three lines later, exactly at the close of the vocative element! In other words, line 11 turns out to introduce a distinct four-line block; it does this simultaneously in the three dimensions of (1) line type, (2) grammatical mood, and (3) rhyme.

As to the question of which of these dimensions are more important than others, surely the answer is that it is unnecessary to choose. Any and all dimensions are potentially significant: all can be potentially expressive at the same time. They can highlight each other in ways that we can call "contrapuntal." The 20th-century Chinese sonnet, like its Western counterpart, tends away from structures

unambiguously definable in terms of a fixed hierarchy of parameters, and toward more fluid structures that can be described validly from various points of view simultaneously.

Keeping these implications of our emerging analytical apparatus in mind, let us now look at Sonnet 19:

We wave for a moment, part,
and our world splits into two,
we feel a cold beside us, vastness before us,
like two babies just born.

Ah, a parting, a birth,
we take up the hardship of work,
changing cold into warm, raw into cooked,
each tilling our separate world

for the sake of a future reunion. So, at a first encounter
we remember the past with gratitude;
so, at a first meeting, we suddenly sense previous lifetimes.

How many springs, how many winters in a lifetime?
We feel only the ordered change of seasons,
not our allotted span in each other's world.

我們招一招手，隨著別離
我們的世界便分成兩個，
身邊感到冷，眼前忽然遼闊，
像剛剛降生的兩個嬰兒。

啊，一次別離，一次降生，
我們擔負著工作的辛苦，
把冷的變成暖，生的變成熟，
各自把個人的世界耘耕，

爲了再見，好像初次相逢，
懷著感謝的情懷想過去
像初晤面時忽然感到前生。

一生裏有幾回春幾回冬，
我們只感受時序的輪替，
感受不到人間規定的年齡。

If there remained any lingering doubts as to the suitability of the Thirteen Tracks for our rhyme analysis, this poem would dispel them. If the operative principle were not rhyme but near-rhyme, we would not find, as we do here, *-i* set up to rhyme with *er*. In lines 12 and 14, the aurally rather dubious rhyme between *dong* and *ling* falls into place by virtue of Track 13, which finds room to accommodate within itself all the final *-ng* sounds save those with a preceding *a*.

Turning to the line-assonance structure, we find that the entire octave is built on a regular alternation of lines with internal commas and lines without them. After the volta, the same rhythmic unit is repeated but modified by the addition of a second unbroken line. Then, in the last strophe, we get a succession of three unbroken lines that could each stand alone. This last strophe forms a distinctive block not only in its rhythmic structure; its tone, too, represents a perceptibly new element in the poem. After the long preceding sequence of observations, these last three lines give a sort of final reflection and evaluation. Attempting to generalize on the facts and experiences that have been presented, the lyrical subject here frames a rhetorical question and then answers it by way of summing up.

Till now we have been exploring various kinds of patterning that can be identified in the dimensions of rhyme scheme and line assonance, and in their interplay. Our key principle has been that elements may be significant if they enter into various types of identifiable combination with other elements. We will now consider what might be called the zero or null case – that is, when an element takes part of its expressivity exactly from the fact that it has no formal counterpart throughout the rest of the poem.

Our case in point will be Sonnet 26:

We travel on a familiar road every day
To return to the place where we live,
But in this forest, there are hidden
Many narrow paths, secluded and strange.

When we walk on one of these strange paths we panic,
Afraid of getting farther and farther, getting lost;
Yet, without knowing, through a clearing in the woods

Suddenly we see the place where we live,

Displayed on the horizon, like a new island.
So many things around us demand that we
Make new discoveries.

Think not that everything is already familiar.
When you lie dying and touch your own hair and skin,
You will wonder: Whose body is this?⁹

我們天天走著一條熟路
回到我們居住的地方；
但是在這林裏面還隱藏
許多小路，又深邃，又生疏。

走一條生的，便有些心慌，
怕越走越遠，走入迷途，
但不知不覺從樹疏處
忽然望見我們住的地方

像座新的島嶼呈在天邊。
我們的身邊有多少事物
向我們要求新的發現：

不要覺得一切都已熟悉，
到死時撫摸自己的髮膚
生了疑問：這是誰的身體？

The rhyme scheme is elegant but technically unremarkable:

a
b
b
a

b

⁹ Trans. by Kai-yu Hsu, in Hsu 1970, 154.

a
a
b

c
a
c

d
a
d

What we might possibly note is that line 12, introducing a new rhyme, is also the first line of a sort of summing-up reminiscent of the one we saw at the end of our previous poem. (The summing-up ends, again, with the only recurrence of that new rhyme.)

Going on to the line-assonance structure, we see that the first three lines are all without internal punctuation, the next three all have it, and the next three are all again without it. The full stop with which this 3a-3b-3a structure ends is followed by a two-line sentence: "So many things around us demand that we/ Make new discoveries." Then comes line 12, which is the only unambiguous case in the poem of an unbroken single line which forms a self-contained grammatical sentence. That sentence is also the only occurrence in the poem of the imperative mood. It is followed by a two-line sentence, giving as the poem's overall line groupings

3
3
3
2
1
2

If we now refer to the semantic level, it becomes clear that line 12 not only introduces a new strophe and a new rhyme in which the poem's philosophical clincher is to be framed, and not only stands out as the poem's only imperative and its only one-line sentence: it also constitutes virtually a one-line thematic précis of the entire poem! It is as if this single line, deeply embedded in the handsomely grouped structures of the rest of the poem, has its own kind of unique prominence as if to say: the *moral* of this story is...

While in this vein, let us make a brief excursion back to Shakespeare. This time we will be looking at Tu An's version of Sonnet 116:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove:
 O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
 It is the star to every wandering bark,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
 If this be error and upon me proved,
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

讓我承認，兩顆真心的結合
 是阻止不了的。愛算不得愛，
 要是人家變心了，它也變得，
 或者人家改道了，它也快改：
 不呵！愛是永遠固定的標誌，
 它正視風暴，決不被風暴震撼；
 愛是一顆星，它引導迷途的船隻，
 其高度可測，其價值卻無可計算。
 愛不是時間的玩偶，雖然紅顏
 到頭來總不被時間的鐮刀遺漏；
 愛決不跟隨短促的韶光改變，
 就到滅亡的邊緣，也不低頭。

 假如我這話真錯了，真不可信賴，
 算我沒寫過，算愛從來不存在！

In the Chinese version, most of whose lines have internal pauses marked by punctuation, line 11 is the only one which both reads straight through and forms a complete grammatical sentence. It stands out as a sort of *précis* of the kind we have just identified in Feng Zhi's poem ("Love shall not be altered along with springtime's hurried glory.").

We will now consider a poem which has a complex but identifiable structure of a kind that we have not yet encountered. Its analysis will give us an occasion to start systematically taking stock of the recurring elements in our enquiry, and to start creating a terminology that will enable us to discuss our material with efficiency and precision. The poem is Sonnet 25:

Items laid out on a desk,
books arranged on shelves –
all day amidst a few silent things
we're thinking incessantly.

There's no song in the words,
no dance in the motions.
At a loss we ask why birds outside the window
flap their wings and soar aloft.

Only the sleeping body
in the still of night falls into rhythm,
air playing in the body,

sea salt playing in the blood –
and can we hear in dreams
heaven and sea calling us?

案頭擺設著用具
架上陳列著書籍，
終日在些靜物裏
我們不住地思慮；

言語裏沒有歌聲
舉動裏沒有舞蹈，
空空間窗外飛鳥
為什麼振翼凌空。

只有睡著的身體
夜靜時起了韻律，
空氣在身內遊戲

海鹽在血裏遊戲
 夢裏可能聽得到
 天和海向我們呼叫？

It is not quite clear what our poet intended to be the rhyme scheme of this sonnet. It would seem that he is departing somewhat from his usual practice for expressive reasons which we will attempt to guess below. The sounds in transcription are as follows:

jū
 jì
 lì
 lǔ

sheng
 dao
 niao
 kong

tí
 lǔ
 xī

xī
 dao
 jiao

Initially, it seems obvious that the first strophe should be taken to rhyme a-b-b-a. But if -i and -ü contrast sufficiently to be two different rhyme sounds here, why were they so obviously intended to rhyme in Sonnet 19? And going down past the volta into lines 9 through 12, why do we find an apparent b-a-b unit followed by a single repeat of "b" in the form of the identical word, but then followed in turn by two lines in a new rhyme, thus leaving the "a" in line 10 in an odd unpaired position?

If we are dissatisfied with this apparent asymmetrical solution, we can try applying, once again, the Thirteen Tracks even at the cost of immediately losing the neat "framed" structure of strophe 1. The new scheme would then be:

a
 a

a

a

b

c

c

b

a

a

a

a

c

c

Bizarre though this seems at first sight, it would justify better the repeated *-i* sound in line 12. The "a" elements, occurring in two blocks of four separated by one non-"a" block also of four, could be said to form a symmetry, and it would then be the case that the "c" at the exact center of that symmetry recurred as the rhyme sound of the poem's final couplet.

Let us take the position that it is after all most plausible that in this case Feng Zhi is splitting up Track 4 so as to make distinct rhymes of *-ü* and *-i*. We must then account for the odd structure of the sestet with its isolated *-ü* and odd-numbered occurrences of *-i*. Let us imagine that in line 12 the repetition of the word *youxi* with its final *-i* sound is intended to create the initial *expectation* that the last strophe will repeat the symmetrical rhyme structure (*i-ü-i*) of the preceding one. We can then see that that expectation is strikingly overthrown by the sudden abandonment of all *-i*'s and *-ü*'s in favor of a couplet rhyming on *-(i)ao*. The special foregrounding which the final couplet thus gains is further underlined by the fact that it suddenly introduces a new grammatical mode: the interrogative. The repeated rhyme in line 12 can then be seen to be one of a cluster of features used here to set off the final couplet from the rest of the sestet. In anticipation of our analysis of the line assonance, we can observe here that lines 11 and 12 share not only an identical rhyme word but also the status of being complete one-line sentences, thereby forming a neat rhythmic contrast with the two-line sentences coming immediately before and after. They are also, of course, exactly parallel as regards syntactic structure.

Let us now look more closely at the line assonance. Starting with the octave, we will read both the first two strophes as consisting of two one-line sentences

followed by a single two-line sentence. We note, further, that in each case, the first line of the two-line sentence (i.e., lines 3 and 7) initially, or apart from context, *could have been construed* as in itself an independent sentence, but that on reading what follows, it becomes far more plausible to interpret it as the first line of a longer sentence. For the time being, we will refer to this type of line as an Initiating Sentence. The lines immediately following these (i.e., lines 4 and 8), though it so happens that they could also have been potentially read as each a full sentence, owe their primary rhythmic weight to the fact that where they *end*, a multi-line sentence also *ends*. In other words, they represent the occurrence of a full stop after a continuous sentence that spans more than a single line. We will refer to this type as Concluding Sentence. As for lines 1 and 2, and 5 and 6, we can now refer to each as an Independent Sentence.

To recapitulate at this point, we can tabulate the first eight lines of the poem as constituting the following succession of Sentences:

Independent
Independent
Initiating
Concluding

Independent
Independent
Initiating
Concluding

Applying this same terminology to the sestet, we obtain as its structure

Initiating
Concluding
Independent

Independent
Initiating
Concluding

In other words, the sestet is an exact replication of the last six lines of the octave. Subtle though this rhythmic structure may seem as compared with the more obvious factors of rhyme and strophe divisions, we will contend that the rhythm of line assonance does effectively act in counterpoint with them, so that upon the typographical structure of 4-4-3-3 given by the lineation, there is superimposed a contrasting 2-6-6 rhythm. We now have grounds to reconsider the first two lines of

the poem: as both an imagistic *mise-en-scène* and a rhythmic upbeat that will be followed by two meditations of identical six-line length, the first dealing with the daylight side of man's condition and the second with the night side. This poem is an outstanding example of the way in which patterned line assonance can provide a subtle rhythmic underpinning of what is happening in other dimensions.

Analysis of the next poem, the last one we shall discuss, will involve the line-type designations we have just been using, as well as a couple of additional designations. The poem is Sonnet 8:

It is a dream from of old –
the world of men before us now is too disorderly –
wanting to soar, attached to a roc,
and talk to the tranquil stars.

A dream of a thousand years, like an old man,
looks forward to the best possible progeny –
today there are men who fly toward the stars,
but they cannot forget the confusions of the world of men.

Often, to learn how to orbit and how to fall
– the better to place that stellar orderliness
within the world of man –

like a flash, they cast themselves into the void.
The old dream has now been transmuted
into a meteor on barren mountains, over distant waters.¹⁰

是一個舊日的夢想，
眼前的人世太紛雜，
想依附著鵬鳥飛翔
去和甯靜的星辰談話。

千年的夢像個老人
期待著最好的兒孫—
如今有人飛向星辰，
卻忘不了人世的紛紜。

¹⁰ Translation mine, in Haft 1983, 72.

他們常常爲了學習
怎樣運行，怎樣隕落，
好把星秩序排在人間，

便光一般投身空際。
如今那舊夢卻化作
遠水荒山的隕石一片。

As regards the rhyme scheme, it seems clear that this poem, like Sonnet 25, is one of the rare examples in which Feng Zhi subdivides one of the Thirteen Tracks.¹¹ In the second strophe, *-en* and *-un*, normally both Track 11 rhymes, are clearly contrasted. The scheme as a whole is:

a
b
a
b

c
d
c
d

e
f
g

e
f
g

This scheme presents nothing remarkable, though we will keep the rhyme structure of the sestet in mind as a background to the line-assonance analysis of the same passage.

Turning now to the line types, we see that the octave is made up of the same elements which we have just recognized, and named, in the context of Sonnet 25. In the terminology we have established, its structure is

¹¹ The only other case would seem to be Sonnet 24, in which *-ong* and *-eng* are in contrast. These two sounds, on the other hand, do rhyme in various other *Sonnets*.

Independent
Independent
Initiating
Concluding

Initiating
Concluding
Independent
Independent

The last two lines might also be designated Initiating and Concluding, respectively.¹² The important thing, with a view to what will happen after the volta, is that the ends of lines 2, 4, 6 and 8 all seem to be clear stopping points, and would surely be observed as such in reading aloud.

After the volta, we suddenly get a grammatical sentence which needs four full lines for its completion; none of its first three lines suggests a grammatical full stop. In other words, even at a first reading, it is clear that after each of these lines, we are suspended in the middle of a sentence the end of which is still to come.

There is, however, a clear grammatical and rhythmic pause, indicated by the comma in the middle of line 10. Recalling that lines with internal punctuation were one of the first types we identified, we will now give this type the name Internally Marked Line.

We will give the name Incomplete Line to the element represented by line 9 or line 11 of this poem, which is obviously disqualified as a potential sentence in its own right and must be read as part of a sentence still to be completed.

Applying our terms to the line types which we have established in Sonnet 8, we may now tabulate the fourteen lines of the poem as follows:

Independent
Independent
Initiating
Concluding

Initiating
Concluding

¹² There are various words in Chinese that can be translated "but," and it is often difficult to decide whether lines that begin with them should be treated as the beginnings of new sentences or as continuations of the old. In analyzing Zheng Min's 1990 sonnet cycle *Shiren yu si*, I have found it convincing to treat *ran'er* as initiating a new sentence. I here do the same with *que*, realizing that opinions might differ.

Independent
Independent

Incomplete
Internally Marked
Incomplete

Concluding
Incomplete
Concluding

We see at a glance the very clear contrast in line assonance between the octave, with its symmetrical pattern of Independent, Initiating and Concluding types, and the sestet, in which the four-line group running from line 9 through line 12 – which incidentally coincides with a self-contained rhyme frame, beginning and ending with the only lines rhyming on *-i* – is followed by a sort of rhythmic refrain or coda consisting of a replication of the second half of itself!

In this chapter, in the course of examining seven of Feng Zhi's *Sonnets*, we have seen the truly subtle kinds of counterpoint that can be brought to light by the analysis of line assonance patterns. We have not claimed that the analytical instrument we have thus developed is applicable to all of Feng Zhi's sonnets, nor even that in the cases in which we do apply it, the results it gives are so important as to supersede other modes of analysis. Certainly it remains necessary to do the traditional things: count the lines, see whether they are metrically built, tabulate the rhymes, investigate how the thought is divided over octave and sestet, and so on.

What we have shown is that *in conjunction with other features*, the analysis of line assonance can show up significant rhythms, patterns and correlations of a kind that are left untouched by more traditional methods. Our system is by no means applicable to all modern Chinese sonnets. In particular, in the case of poems with very long lines, rhythmic distinctions between lines become more difficult to categorize. But with short-lined sonnets, in which the lines have an intrinsic tendency to be read in quicker succession, it is often surprisingly revealing.

In our previous chapter we suggested that because of the relatively small number of distinct syllable types in Chinese, rhyme has a far different "weight" in Chinese poetry than in English. We saw that even when Chinese poets are explicitly trying to produce a long-lined Western-style poem (a formal copy of a Shakespearean sonnet), they can hardly escape the very different internal grouping among their lines that is imposed by that different weight of rhyme.

Pursuing the practical consequences of that idea in conjunction with the notion of line assonance, we have now seen how a leading Chinese poet exploits that very difference by patterned repetition of the same rhymes in the same poem. And we have seen that Feng Zhi, in some of his sonnets, compensates the *less* distinction among types of rhyme by *more* distinction among types of line. These distinct line types imply distinct reading rhythms, hence the possibility of rhythmic patterning with no longer the syllable or the foot but the full line as the rhythmic unit. Exactly because such rhythmic structures, like Zhu Xiang's punctuated rhythmic subgroups, fall outside the traditional *general* defining frame of the sonnet, they may be more decisively appreciable as regards the *unique* form of the *individual* poem. A new contrapuntal possibility, unknown to the traditional prosody of the sonnet, becomes available to the Chinese poet.

CHAPTER 5

RHYMES AND OTHER ECHOES: SOME SONNETS BY THE NINE LEAVES GROUP

In the years immediately following their appearance in 1942, Feng Zhi's sonnets were widely admired and influential in Chinese poetic circles. In the present chapter we shall examine a number of sonnets by younger poets of the 1940s, who had come to their poetic maturity in a climate which included both Feng Zhi and at least a certain awareness of such modern Western poets as Eliot, Rilke and Auden.

In the previous chapter, we have seen how in the early 1940s Feng Zhi, partly inspired by Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, made very effective use of short-lined sonnets in which contrapuntal effects were achieved by playing off the intonational weight of the full sentence against other rhythmically marked elements, notably rhyme, the line boundary and the points at which punctuation within the line indicated a pause in sound and sense. The poets we will now proceed to read continue, in various ways, to make expressive use of the contrast or parallel between elements occurring at the end of lines and those falling somewhere within a line. In some of their poems they use line-internal rhyme, and in particular a kind of assonance based on the association of words which, though not strictly rhyming, end in a nasal (-n or -ng), to build subtle vertical connections between lines in a way that is often reminiscent of the multiple-line groupings we have discovered in Feng Zhi's sonnets. At times, the simultaneous presence of line-final and line-internal rhymes or assonance goes so far as almost to create the effect of two different line-lengths working in superimposition in one and the same poem – an effect which we have already seen in Zhu Xiang's sonnets, where it was achieved not by rhyme but by punctuation.

We will be looking at poems by writers of the so-called Nine Leaves group, which takes its name from a justly famous anthology published in 1981. This book, *Jiuye ji* (Nine leaves)¹ includes substantial selections by poets who had written and published memorable poetry in the 1940s, but in the intervening decades of the Mao regime, with its cultural repression, had been unable to use their poetic gifts to the full. The nine "leaves" or poets are Zheng Min, Xin Di, Hang Yuehe, Tang Shi, Chen Jingrong, Yuan Kejia, Du Yunxie, Tang Qi and Mu Dan. In this chapter we will read poems by Zheng Min, Tang Shi, Chen Jingrong and Yuan Kejia, all of whom in more recent years have once again won a wide following.

¹ *Jiuye ji: Sishi niandai jiu ren shixuan* (Nine Leaves: An anthology of nine poets of the 1940s), ed. by Ding Mang and Chen Yonghua. Foreword by Yuan Kejia. Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin Chubanshe, 1981.

For a recent Chinese collection of articles on the Nine Leaves poets, see Wang Shengsi 1996.

Our first poem (taken, like all the others in this chapter, from the Nine Leaves volume) is "Shanghai" by Yuan Kejia (1921-):

Shanghai

Never mind how many have prophesied collapse,
saying it sinks whole inches every year:
new buildings still rise like palms out of hell
grabbing light and water that are the earth's,

casting hell's shadows. Greed walks the skies:
telephones jangling in desperate strife,
shop-window prices steep as nerves on a skewer
– what's strewn on the earth are the hungry's wider eyes.

Nothing's level here. But the days go smoothly:
a single track from the office to the bar,
ten hours for earning, ten for ruin.

The big-bellied gentleman strolls into his office
met by the red-faced yawn of the typing girl.
Open your daily: hide your face: wait for a rumor from Nanjing.²

不問多少人預言它的陸沉，
說它每年都要下陷幾寸，
新的建築仍如魔掌般上伸，
攫取屬於地面的陽光、水分

而撒落魔影。貪婪在高空進行；
一場絕望的戰爭扯響了電話鈴，
陳列窗的數字如一串錯亂的神經，
散布地面的是飢饉群真空的眼睛。

到處是不平。日子可過得輕盈，
從辦公房到酒吧間鋪一條單軌線，
人們花十小時賺錢，花十小時荒淫。

² Translation mine. Original from *Jiuye ji*, 235.

紳士們捧著大肚子走進寫字間，
 迎面是打字小姐紅色的呵欠，
 拿張報，遮住臉：等待南京的謠言。

In terms of the Thirteen Tracks, the rhyme scheme (with the rhyming syllables added in parentheses) is

a (chen)
 a (cun)
 a (shen)
 a (fen)

a (xing)
 a (ling)
 a (jing)
 a (jing)

a (ying)
 b (xian)
 a (yin)

b (jian)
 b (qian)
 b (yan)

Once again we are reading syllables in *-ing* as assimilable to Track 11. Intuitively, we might rather have been inclined to group together all syllables in either *-ing* or *-in*, thereby obtaining an overall a-a-a-a, b-b-b-b, b-c-b, c-c-c structure. But in either case, the truly striking factor is that all the line-final syllables end in either *-n* or *-ng*. This makes them all eligible for membership in a broad category of sounds which in Chinese has sometimes been designated as "yang-sound rhymes" (*yangsheng yun*), in contradistinction to syllables with "open" endings, the so-called "yin-sound rhymes" (*yinsheng yun*).³

³ The terminology of "yang-sound" and "yin-sound" rhymes, as applied by scholars to the Middle Chinese rhyme classes, is associated with the name of the Qing-dynasty phonologist Kong Guangsen (1752-1786), who first formulated its workings in detail and seems to have invented the terms. (Similar distinctions had actually been known since the Song dynasty.) Kong belonged to the *kaogupai* or "antiquity-investigating school" of Qing phonologists. A later exponent of the same school, Zhang Binglin (1867-1936), worked out the terminology of "yang" and "yin" as phonetic terms applying in general to words with (yang) and without (yin) a nasal ending.

My very special thanks are due to my colleague at Frankfurt University, Wolfgang Behr, for generously sharing with me his knowledge of these matters and of the relevant bibliography.

Having established that although this is clearly a rhyming as opposed to a "free" sonnet, that there are at most two or three distinct rhyming sounds, and that there is by virtue of the "yang sounds" a sort of overall blanket of near-rhyme extending over the whole poem, we can go on to examine some specific lines in detail. Lines 5, 9, 11 and 14 read in transcription as follows:

- (5) er saluo mo ying. Tanlan zai gaokong jinxing;
 (9) dao chu shi bu ping. Rizi ke guode qingying,

- (11) renmen hua shi xiaoshi zhuanqian, hua shi xiaoshi huangyin.
 (14) na zhang bao, zhezhu lian: dengdai Nanjing de yaoyan.

We note that lines 5 and 9 both have internal periods (these are the only ones in the poem), and that in both cases, the syllable immediately preceding the period rhymes with the end of the line. In lines 11 and 14, though the punctuation is slightly different, a similar structure obtains. In line 11, the mid-line punctuation mark, here a comma, is immediately preceded by the word *zhuanqian*, which is echoed at the end of the same line not only by virtue of the "yang sounds" of *qian* and *yin*, but also obviously by the close resemblances in the vowel sounds of *zhuanqian* and *huangyin*. In line 14, the mid-line colon is preceded by *lian*, which rhymes exactly with *-yan* at the end of the line.

An additional common factor is that in each of these four lines, after the mid-line punctuation mark, the remainder of the line can be construed rhythmically as three *dun*. This is yet another way in which each of these four lines serves as a point of rhythmic recognizability and stability. They are the points at which, despite the otherwise rather variable flow of the poem, a sort of overall cyclic structure becomes apparent. (We will encounter a similar feature again in Chapter 7 below, on the *zushi*.) These lines thereby stand in a sort of "vertical" interrelationship that transcends individual lines to bind the whole poem into a whole.

This last factor is underscored by the strikingly identical final sounds of the mid-line rhyming words: *ying* in line 5 and *ping* in line 9, *qian* in line 11 and *lian* in line 14. These exact rhymes, tying together the beginning of the second strophe with the beginning of the third, and the end of the third with the end of the fourth, clinch the vertical structure in neatly symmetrical fashion. At the same time, of course, they chime in with the uniformity of "yang sounds" in all fourteen line-final syllables.

Many thanks also to my student, Hu Yunxiao, for calling my attention to the frequent relevance of this distinction, in an interesting paper she wrote on Chinese translations of Verlaine's verse.

This poem, combining easily recognizable and partly topical subject matter with seemingly effortless technical sophistication, is a good example of the degree to which, by the 1940s, the sonnet form had been adapted to the things Chinese poets had to say and the ways in which their native language enabled them to say those things. Somewhat similar technical features are joined to more introspective subject matter in our next poem, Zheng Min's "Dipping My Feet in Water: A Painting."

From its bosom the dense forest offers a narrow trail,
The trail leads toward, ah – here the ancient trees circle the pond, and the pond
Reflects a face, with a smile flowing all over it,
Like immobile flowers offering life to a myriad of mobile things.

Look over there, green oozes from the tender leaves
And blends back into the filtered sunlight. Dipping your feet in water
You have merged yourself with the cool of the woods; and in the blurred light and
lines
You, young lady, are happily awaiting the other half of yourself.

He has come, a squirrel leaps over fallen leaves,
He is whistling. Two birds chatter intimately.
And fatigue dispels the light mist in the forest.

You dream of your transformation into a squirrel, into a tall tree,
And again into a blade of grass, into a water pond.
Your pale feet lie asleep in water.⁴

濯足（一幅畫）

深林自她的胸中捧出小徑
小徑引向，呵—這裏古樹繞著池潭，
池潭映著面影，面影流著微笑—
像不動的花給出萬動的生命。

向那裏望去，綠色自嫩葉裏泛出
又溶入淡綠的日光，浸著雙足
你化入樹林的幽冷與寧靜，朦朧裏

⁴ Trans. by Kai-yu Hsu, in Hsu 1970, 240-241. Original in *Jiuye ji*, 136.

呵，少女你在快樂地等待那另一半的自己。

他來了，一隻松鼠跳過落葉，
他在吹哨，兩隻鳥兒在竊竊私語
終於疲倦將林中的輕霧吹散

你夢見化成松鼠，化成高樹，
又化成小草，又化成水潭，
你的蒼白的足睡在水裏。

In terms only of the line-final syllables, this poem does not rhyme fully. On the other hand, there is a rich texture of line-internal rhyme sounds working in conjunction with punctuation. To facilitate discussion of this truly subtle structure, let us first set out the entire poem in transcription:

shenlin zi ta de xiong zhong pengchu xiao jing
xiao jing yin xiang, a - zheli gushu raozhe chitan,
chitan yingzhe mianying, mianying liuzhe weixiao -
xiang budong de hua geichu wandong de shengming.

xiang nali wang qu, lüse zi nen yeli fanchu
you rongru danlü de riguang, jinzhe shuangzu
ni hua ru shulin de youleng yu ningjing, menglong li
a, shaonü ni zai kuaile de dengdai na ling yiban de ziji.

ta lai le, yizhi songshu tiaoguo luoye,
ta zai chuishao, liangzhi niaor zai qieqie siyu
zhongyu pijuan jiang linzhong de qingwu chuisan

ni mengjian huacheng songshu, huacheng gaoshu,
you huacheng xiaocao, you huacheng shuitan,
ni de cangbai de zu shui zai shui li.

In the first strophe, though only lines 1 and 4 rhyme by end rhyme, the final *-ing* sound of those two lines is echoed in line 3, just before the comma, by *ying*. By the "yang sound" assonance we have noted in the previous sonnet by Yuan Kejia, the same *ying* also ties up with the *xiang* just before the comma in line 2. In other words, the middle lines of the first strophe both show "yang sound" assonance

before an internal comma; the order of their sounds is *-(i)ang* in line 2 followed by *-ing* in line 3.

In the following strophe, this identical structure turns out to be repeated: *guang* in line 6 before the comma is followed in line 7 by *jing*, also before the comma. But in addition to their relationship with each other, these sounds in the corresponding positions of lines 2 and 3, 6 and 7 also relate to much more. On closer examination we see that the first two strophes as a whole are unusually filled with "yang sounds." Of the eleven syllables in line 1, six are "yang": *sen*, *lin*, *xiong*, *zhong*, *peng* and *jing*. Line 2 contributes *jing*, *yin*, *xiang* and *tan*. "Yang sounds" account again for half of line 3's syllables: *tan*, *ying*, *mian*, *ying*, *mian*, and *ying*. Line 4 is again half "yang": *xiang*, *dong*, *wan*, *dong*, *sheng* and *ming*.

In the second strophe, beginning again with the internal lines, we see that in line 6, the *-ang* ending of *guang* is part of a rich texture of "yang sound" syllables in this line: *rong*, *dan*, *guang*, *jin*, and *shuang*. In line 7, *jing* forms part of a similar series: *lin*, *leng*, *ning*, *jing*, *meng* and *long* all in the space of a single line! Extending consideration to lines 5 (*xiang*, *wang*, *nen*, *fan*) and 8 (*deng*, *ling*, and *ban*), we see a formidable concentration of these sounds in a single strophe.

The *guang* in line 6 also echoes the *wang* and *fan* in the previous line, both of which are, though not final, relatively prominent in sound as they occur immediately before a directional verb suffix. In other words, in lines 5 and 6, *wang(qu)*, *fan(chu)* and *guang* form a sort of triangle of near-rhyming points, additionally strengthened at the end of line 6 by *shuangzu* with its vowel echoing of *fanchu*.

In the rest of the poem, aside from line 11 with its 7 "yang" syllables out of 12 and line 12 with 6 out of 11, the "yang sounds" are less massively prominent. But in these last two strophes, too, the central line of each is connected with the central line of the other by the presence of an *-ao* sound just before a line-internal comma.

These "vertical" relationships between mid-line elements are so numerous and prominent that they give the combined impression that in addition to the regular overall scheme of 14 lines, the poem has a less obvious stratum of shorter or "half" lines whose final elements enter into important sound relationships not only with each other but with the final elements of "full" lines. It is as if the relatively long lines of the poem (long that is, relative to the poems by Feng Zhi which we analyzed in the previous chapter) tend to be re-divided into shorter elements between which it is easier to establish "vertical" cross-relationships.

Some of these same formal features are present in the next poem we will consider, "To a Friend in a Foggy City" by Chen Jingrong (1917-):

The human world is no landscape painting, nor a sketch.
 Ay! you, my friend in the foggy city,
 Daily watching the thick fog and the great stream,
 Are you, toilsome friend, still worried about growing?

Learn, as you like, to swim like fishes or fly like birds;
 Yet within this universe you shall stay.
 A single star reminds me of myriads of others
 And by chance, on foggy days, the sun may shine.

The desolation of frontier land and the loneliness of bustling cities
 Are equally heavy, while you pant and shrink;
 But one day you shall expand again,

Like the sky after rain, high, open and vast.
 Filtered water from the springs carries hardly any sand.
 When surging waves subside, daffodils on the bank bloom in grace overflowing.⁵

寄霧城友人

人世並非風景，也不像寫生，
 哎，你霧城中的友人，
 每天看濃霧看大江，
 辛苦的靈魂，可還有憂患生長？

盡管學飛鳥學游魚，
 總還在這個宇宙裏。
 但一顆星就叫人想起千萬顆星，
 霧季裏，也有偶然的清明。

荒塞的淒涼和鬧市的寂寞
 同樣沉重，而你就喘息地縮小，
 有一天終又會膨脹開來，

⁵ Trans. by Shiu-Pang Almborg, in Almborg 1988, 125. Original from *Jiuye ji*, 50. This poem had appeared earlier in Chen Jingrong's collection *Jiaoxiang ji* (Symphony, Shanghai: Xingqun Chubanshe, 1948). For an informative introduction to *Jiaoxiang ji*, see the brief descriptive article by Shiu-Pang Almborg in Haft 1989, 76-81.

像雨後的天空，高朗而遼闊；
 濾過的泉水中泥沙絕少，
 奔濤靜息，水仙在岸上盈盈地開。

The original in transcription:

renshi bing fei fengjing, ye bu xiang xiesheng,
 ai, ni wucheng zhong de youren,
 meitian kan nong wu kan da jiang,
 xinku de linghun, ke hai you youhuan shengzhang?

jinguan xue feiniao xue youyu,
 zong hai zai zheige yuzhou li.
 dan yike xing jiu jiao ren xiangqi qianwan ke xing,
 wu ji li, ye you ouran de qingming.

huangsai de qiliang he naoshi de jimo
 tongyang chenzhong, er ni jiu chuanxi de suoxiao,
 you yitian zong you hui pengzhang kailai,

xiang yuhou de tiankong, gaolang er liaokuo;
 lüguo de quanshui zhong nisha jueshao,
 bentao jingxi, shuixian zai anshang yingying de kai.

The rhyme accords with the Thirteen Tracks. If we admit *-eng* and *-en* to rhyme here, the overall scheme is a-a-b-b, c-c-d-d, e-f-g, e-f-g. But there is internal rhyme as well, supported by mid-line punctuation. In line 1, the *jing* before the comma rhymes (or very nearly rhymes, depending on the assimilation allowed) not only with *-eng* at the end of the same line, but with *hun* in a similar pre-comma position in line 4. All these sounds also connect with *-en* at the end of line 2, lending to the entire first strophe a close-knit structure. The line-internal rhymes of lines 1 and 4 serve to frame the entire strophe, echoing at the same time that they contrast with the asymmetric a-a-b-b end-rhyme structure.

In the second strophe, like the first, the end-rhyme of the first two lines is echoed in the last line by the syllable before a line-internal comma: *li* in line 8. This particular internal rhyme is repeated in the poem's last line by *xi* in the pre-comma position. In other words, in this respect the last line of the sestet echoes the last line of the octave.

The last two strophes are connected, besides their sharing of the e-f-g e-f-g end-rhyme pattern, by the echoing *-ong* sounds in pre-comma position in lines 10

and 12. This effect is strengthened by the rather similar syntax with which lines 12 and 13 begin (each having a *de* followed by a mid-line nominal expression), such that *zhong* in line 13 is as it were drawn into a closer relationship with *kong* in the preceding line.

In this poem, like the one by Zheng Min that we have just read, the effect of the mid-line rhymes is to convey the sense of a sub-system of shorter "lines" co-existing with the ostensible line structure of the whole sonnet. The special function of these "short lines" seems to be to add additional "vertical" underpinning, which is sometimes effective over strikingly large distances, as here between lines 8 and 14. (Formal features somewhat similar to these, which do not belong to the regularity structure of the poem as a whole but nevertheless have a convincing integrating function wherever and to the extent that they do occur, will occupy us in the following chapter.)

Turning now to another poem by another poet, "Poetry" by Tang Shi (1920-), we see how in a poem of somewhat freer form, these elements can actually take over the function of being the main obvious regularities:

Poetry

Only when the turbulent tide recedes
can the beach yield its rows of bright shells.
If poetry could extend its roots in the soil of life
it would come out in a victory of life.

The fruit exists for the sake of the flower's fall.
Only after the glimmer of day comes evening's finesse.
If man could live on the boundary of day and night
in the pale radiance there would be a new mingling.

Look at the calm sky: how it hangs to the end of the flatlands.
Gray flutes of doves gradually nearing, nearing.
Ah – in anguish I pray for thunder's fire
to raze this I, and raze that I

till the circumferences coincide, a triangle be inscribed
– till I welcome, beyond myself, another self.⁶

詩

— 《交錯》之二十四

⁶ Translation mine. Original from *Jiuye ji*, 210.

當洶涌的潮水退去
沙灘才能呈獻光耀的排貝
詩如果可以在生活的土壤裏伸根
它應該出現在生活的勝利裏

果實是爲了花的落去
閃爍的白日之後才能有夜晚的含蓄
如果人能生活在日夜的邊際
薄光裏將有一個新的和凝

看一天晴和，平野垂地而盡
灰色的鴿笛漸近、漸近
呵，苦難裏我祈求一片雷火
燒焦這一個我，又燒焦那一個我

圓周重合，三角楔入
在自己之外又歡迎另一個自己

In transcription:

dang xiongyong de chaoshui tuiqu
shatan cai neng chengxian guangyao de paibei
shi ruguo keyi zai shenghuo de turangli shengen
ta yinggai chuxian zai shenghuo de shenglili

guoshi shi weile hua de luoqu
shanshuo de bairi zhi hou cai neng you yewan de hanxu
ruguo ren neng shenghuo zai riye de bianji
boguangli jiang you yige xin de hening

kan yitian de he, pingye chuidi er jin
huise de gedi jian jin, jian jin
a, kunanli wo qiqiu yipian leihuo
shaojiao zhe yige wo, you shaojiao na yige wo

yuanzhou chonghe, sanjiao xieru
zai ziji zhi wai you huanying ling yige ziji

It is difficult to discern much of a rhyme pattern in the line-final syllables, though there are irregularly spaced pairs of rhyme words: the various *qu*, *li*, and *ji* elements, for example, and *-in* echoing *-ing*. But from the beginning of the third strophe, the rhyming texture suddenly becomes obviously much tighter. The *jin* at the end of the first line is echoed by both a final and a pre-comma *jin* in the following line. The pre-comma *he* in the first line rhymes with the *wo* that appears in the fourth line both finally and before the medial comma, as well as with the *huo* at the end of the third line: and this rhyming sound carries over to the *he* before the comma at the middle of the first line of the final couplet. The third strophe has a neatly symmetrical structure of combined line-final and line-internal rhyming words: the sound at the end of its first line is repeated in both these positions of the second line, just as the sound at the end of the third line recurs in both positions in the fourth.

In this chapter, analyzing intensely a few poems by members of the Nine Leaves group, we have seen how these poets exploit not only the sonnet's traditional parameters of lineation and end rhyme, but also the subtler expressive possibilities afforded by *patterned* use of sound relationships at other points in the poem as well. We have seen these subtler elements working to strengthen the "vertical" structuring of the poem. In our Chapter 8, when we discuss the significance of formal factors in general, we will return in more detail to this notion of "verticality." We will also take another look at another concept which has been important in our discussion of the Nine Leaves – that of the formal importance of locally occurring or sporadic features which, though not continuous throughout the poem, are significant wherever they do occur.

CHAPTER 6

CHINESE SONNETS FOR THE 1990s: ZHENG MIN'S *THE POET AND DEATH*

In the preceding chapters we have more than once had occasion to refer to Zheng Min's 19-sonnet cycle *The Poet and Death*. As we have seen in our chapter on the Nine Leaves group, Zheng was already a leading practitioner of the sonnet form in the 1940s. As a student in Kunming she had attended Feng Zhi's lectures on Rilke,¹ so that from an early stage she was acquainted with the short-lined meditative sonnet as written by both Rilke and Feng Zhi. Half a century later, despite many apparent detours and periods of poetic silence, these early studies combined with Zheng's lifetime of experience to produce this remarkable cycle written in 1990. In our next chapter, we will see that the cycle is relevant to the modern Chinese genre of *zushi* or "suite" which goes beyond the limits of the sonnet form as such, as well as showing notable parallels with the most ancient classical Chinese poetry. In this chapter, presenting the cycle in an original translation which seeks to convey something of the rhythmic feeling of the original without attempting to represent all its formal features, we shall examine each of its nineteen poems as an individual sonnet.

Thematically, the cycle is built on the constant interweaving of two strands which echo the two substantives in its title. Corresponding to "poet" is the theme of the fate of the Chinese poet, or the Chinese intellectual in the PRC, in our times. "Death" stands for death in a more existential sense independent of cultural setting.

The two themes are of course related. Aside from the fact that in the latter half of the twentieth century many Chinese writers have been literally driven into death – only one of the most famous examples is that of the eminent novelist Lao She (1899-1966), who committed suicide after intense persecution by Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution – many of those who escaped physical death have suffered the "death" of political ostracization which has made them effectively nonpersons. A significant chapter of recent PRC history has been the issue of the so-called "reversal of verdicts" – that is, the struggle for official rehabilitation (often posthumous) of persons who had been unjustly condemned during the various political campaigns. In many cases the public restitution of a person's good name, though it be too late for the person concerned, has been at least some consolation for surviving relatives and friends in that it secures at least the restoration of social recognition and, in that sense, survival.

¹ Zheng Min's remarks during a forum held in June 1995 in Beijing, quoted in Xu Lisong 1996, 70. I would like to thank Maghiel van Crevel for sending me this important article.

For a brief introduction to Zheng Min's earlier career and her poetry of the 1940s, see my entry on her *Zheng Min shiji* in Haft 1989, 267-272.

The second theme, death, poses par excellence that same question of survival. Do the efforts of the individual come to an end at death, or is there some larger frame of relationships in which they continue to have value? The allusions in Zheng Min's cycle to Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" suggest art as a realm of beauty and value in which a reconciling transposition into a dimension of timelessness can occur: an ultimate "reversal of verdicts."

In the background of this cycle, though it is nowhere stated explicitly, is the case of the Nine Leaves poet Tang Qi (1920-1990). Tang Qi was a victim of political persecution. Condemned as a "rightist element," he was sent to a labor camp in Heilongjiang. After more than twenty years' confinement, he re-emerged in the early 1980s and taught for a while at Lanzhou University. He continued to suffer discrimination, and his promotion to a professorship was obstructed by political enemies. After his death, his family tried to obtain an official statement of redress (*pingfan*); this the bureaucrats refused to grant on the grounds of being "too busy."²

The cycle is, then, a prolonged meditation on the related themes of (1) whether there can be a reversal of verdicts in the case of an individual poet, as an exemplar of the more general case of the modern Chinese intellectual, and (2) whether the verdict of death itself, as the lot of man, can be somehow "reversed." One of the main structuring elements in the meditation is the myth of Orpheus, the mortal who obtained unique permission to visit the Underworld in an attempt, ultimately unsuccessful, to bring someone back to the world of the living. The relevance of the Orpheus myth to Zheng's cycle is attested not only by explicit reference to Orpheus but also by the numerous allusions to Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*.

This myth is especially appropriate because of its relevance to the question, with all its implications for art and consciousness, of the nature of the relation if any between the contrasted realms of the living and the dead. In a book which has centrally influenced my approach to this material, the American psychologist James Hillman, summarizing and interpreting much classical and scholarly literature on the subject, points out that from the perspective of the conscious (i.e. "living") mind, the Underworld, in which traditionally the deceased persist in a transformed state, may often appear to be a realm of reversal. Up becomes down, light becomes dark, and so on.³ In our content analyses of Zheng's sonnets below, we will often encounter this motif of the mirror image, the light-dark contrast, and in general, the

² Sources of my information on Tang Qi are Zheng Min's own remarks in Xu Lisong 1996 and in personal correspondence.

³ James Hillman. *The Dream and the Underworld*. New York, etc.: Harper and Row, 1979. On the "reversal" motif see, among numerous relevant passages, especially pp. 178-179.

all-important principle of reversal in which political and metaphysical associations find simultaneous expression.

In our presentation of the cycle, the translation and original text of each poem will be followed by interpretative notes on the content. In many cases, we will add, in brackets, remarks on pertinent formal features. To avoid excessive complexity of presentation, these on the whole will be limited to the most clearly relevant cases of line assonance along the lines of our analyses of Feng Zhi's poems in Chapter 4. Rather than to tabulate all rhyme schemes in detail, we will occasionally incorporate remarks on rhyme in our discussion.

I.

Who...who...
 whose mighty fingers
 broke away this winter's narcissus,
 made the white sap to flow

from stalk halcyon-green, shallot-blue?
 Who...who...
 whose mighty fist
 smashed the vase's ancient elegance,

made the sap of life to flow
 in gushes from its heart?
 A narcissus withers,

a bride fades away –
 the hand that made the life takes
 the song back unfinished.

是誰，是誰
 是誰的有力手指
 折斷這冬日的水仙
 讓白色的汁液溢出

翠綠的，蔥白的莖條？
 是誰，是誰
 是誰的有力拳頭

把這典雅的古瓶砸碎

讓生命的汁液

噴出他的胸膛

水仙枯萎

新娘幻滅

是那創造生命的手掌

又將沒有唱完的歌索回。

Taking our cue from the "vase's ancient elegance" in line 8, let us begin by reviewing the first two stanzas of Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn":

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
 Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
 What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
 Of deities or mortals, or of both,
 In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
 What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
 What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
 What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
 Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
 Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
 Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
 Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal – yet, do not grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Though *The Poet and Death* is not in many ways explicitly related to "Ode on a Grecian Urn," these first stanzas provide a sort of tonal parallel to our cycle. For Keats as for Zheng Min, the "urn" or "vase" is the starting point of a long meditation on the contrasting realms of the seen and the unseen. Keats' "What men

or gods are these" is reminiscent of Zheng Min's "Whose mighty fingers...Whose mighty fist..." In both, the poet inquires as to an additional factor, presently invisible, which could complete or explain a situation sensed as interrupted or unfinished in the present moment of perception.

As we shall see, throughout the cycle Zheng Min will continue to relate the tangible to the intangible. One of her recurrent ways of doing so will be to treat the visible present as one of a pair of realms, to which its invisible counterpart stands in a relationship of complementarity, mirroring, or reversal. As a first example of this process, let us pay special attention, in line 8 of the Chinese, to the word *dianya*, here translated as "elegance." It is a mirror image, written with the same characters, of *yadian*, meaning "Athens." Whether or not this anagrammatic reference to a "Grecian" urn was consciously intended, it is thoroughly appropriate to what will follow in this and Zheng Min's following poems. The process of reversal, of turnabout, lies close to the heart of what these poems have to say. It refers to, or is analogous to, the transformation by which a formerly living person is transposed to the realm of the unseen: the world of the dead: the Underworld. (In Poem 15, the one whose "ideals" and "still-outstanding wishes" could not be realized on earth is urged to "leave behind the square," i.e. the worldly-societal realm, "with its altars, Athenian walls...") When the characters *ya* and *dian* stand in one of their two possible spatial alignments, they designate the City of Man. Reversed (cf. the dialectic of the very word "reverse" in Poem 12 below), they refer to the realm of timeless beauty, lasting image. This is Keats' "not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd." And it is also, as we shall see during the further unfolding of Zheng Min's cycle, the Underworld.

Superficially, Zheng Min's treatment seems less serene: unlike Keats' "still unravished bride" who "cannot fade," her bride does "fade away." Unlike Keats' trees that will never be bare, her narcissus does "wither." But later in the cycle, she will present her own version of "yet, do not grieve," as she experiences with certainty that an "odd unwilting flower will remain."

[The first ten lines of the poem fall into two parallel groups of five, each consisting of four non-Concluding Lines followed by a Concluding Line. Lines 2 through 5 can be read as a continuous sentence following the fragmentary repeated *shi shei* in line 1; similarly, after the repeated *shi shei* in line 6, the sentence reads continuously through to its conclusion in line 10. The following two lines (11 and 12) form a dramatic break in the rhythm thus established: they are marked not only by being extremely short and undivided, but also by their "classical" sound: they are grammatically and semantically parallel, as well as in classical Chinese syntactic style. They are followed by a final couplet of which the first word, *shi*, echoes the first word of each of the preceding five-line structures. The strong sense of

reversion after an intermezzo is strengthened by the content: this final couplet gives the answer to the "whose" question that was raised in those first two five-line groups.

Rhyme is sparse at the beginning, but in the last line of the octave, the last word (*sui*) recalls the prominent *shei* sounds preceding. The same sound ends both strophes of the tightly rhymed sestet.

Though lines 5 and 7 do not strictly rhyme, their final disyllabic words, respectively *jingtiao* and *quantou*, form a kind of near-rhyme reminiscent of the *xintoul/jiantou* pair that we encountered in the second strophe of Feng Zhi's Sonnet 7.]

2.

A song not sung to the full,
a dream not seen to the finish
looks down at me from cloud-peaks,
sees me and drifts on, a migrant bird.

The great flood here is just beginning.
But lacking the dash of the dinosaurs,
history walks away, lost in the crush.
And spring will not come lightly.

Take them along, the notes you never sang.
Take them along, the dreams you never painted.
There, on the edge of heaven, the face of earth,

a long, long file is already nearing:
bearers carrying feeling washed in truth,
ready to write a sequel to our story.

沒有唱出的歌
沒有做完的夢
在雲端向我俯窺
候鳥樣飛向迷茫

這裏洪荒正在開始
卻沒有恐龍的氣概
歷史在紛忙中走失
春天不會輕易到來

帶走吧你沒有唱出的音符
 帶走吧你沒有畫完的夢境
 天的那邊，地的那面

已經有長長的隊伍
 帶著早已洗淨的真情
 把我們的故事續編。

In Poem 2, the difference between the seen and unseen realms is further elaborated. The "song not sung to the full," which had been named at the end of the previous poem, now turns out to be not just an impersonal fact but something in the nature of a "dream" in which the poet is personally concerned. It watches her from "cloud-peaks" – that is, not from the earth, where developments do not augur well.

Here, for the first time in the cycle, it is hinted that the loss of the "song" or "dream" will be made good ultimately. The "bearers" approaching in the distance will write a "sequel to our story," and it will be characterized by "truth." This is also the first appearance of the motif of a later redress or annulment after an initial negative judgment or condemnation by the agencies of the visible world. It will occur later in references to "weighing" and a "court." Not the visible world but the Underworld, conceived as the realm of beauty and timelessness and image, is to be the final authority.

One of the most relevant Western parallels to this cycle in its Underworld aspects is Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*. In Poems 12 and 13 below Zheng Min will make explicit reference to Orpheus; one could see this second poem as an early foreshadowing of the transformed value that things acquire as they move from this world to the Underworld. In Rilke's words:⁴

Erst in dem Doppelbereich
 Werden die Stimmen
 Ewig und mild.

[Only in the Double Realm
 do voices become
 eternal and gentle.]

⁴ *Sonette an Orpheus* I: 9. All passages from Rilke will be quoted from Rilke 1966. The English translations are my own; they make no pretension to poetic value but are intended as cribs only.

3.

Hard winter sneers, howls at our grief.
 Rotten with stench of blood, wind eats hope.
 Who's dead will long be dead. The living's heels
 test, taste the length of the road.

Icaruses ride away on wind,
 mothers smile weeping in memory:
 solid tears condensed in layered clouds
 from virgin cradle down to the cry in a dream.

Never is honey without the sting: your fading
 like lamplight in the wee small hours,
 your loneliness, your doddering down at last...

Your pen never got to the end of the word,
 the bitter one: what came was a desert twister
 burying all the open gates of spring.

嚴冬在嘲笑我們的悲痛
 血腥的風要吞食我們的希望
 死者長已矣，生者的腳踵
 試探著道路的漫長

伊卡拉斯們乘風離去
 母親們回憶中的苦笑
 是固體的淚水在雲層中凝聚
 從搖籃的無邪到夢中驚叫

沒有蜜糖離得開蜂刺
 你衰老、孤獨、飄搖
 正像你那夜半的燈光

你的筆沒有寫完苦澀的字
 伴著你的是沙漠的狂飈
 黃沙淹沒了早春的門窗。

Poem 3 echoes the remarks on "spring" in the previous poem: it could not come, its "gates" were "buried."

The worlds of the living and the dead are contrasted dimensionally: for the dead, "long" refers to *time*, whereas the living must laboriously "test the length" of their *spatial*, physical road on earth. In Poem 10 that "road" will turn out to be largely a matter of "treading all our life on red flames,/ threading through the hells."

Meanwhile, the earth realm offers no help. The very elements batten on, take joy in man's grief, blood, and betrayed hope.

In line 9, we find a possible subtle reference to Keats' "Ode on Melancholy":

...
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
Turning to Poison while the bee-mouth sips...

(Another apparent reference to the same "Ode" will be featured in Poem 17 below.)

[A subtle semantic echoing is present in all three of the poem's Internally Marked lines (lines 3, 5, and 10): all three involve some mention of dying, leaving something behind, or fading away.]

4.

Those worried eyes
seeing the evening sun behind the clouds
full of fantasy and innocence
did not accept death's blindfold willingly.

Those worried eyes
never would have recognized the darkness
even after crossing death's shadow,
keeping a friend in pain's corpse company –

somehow never willing
to come down from the cloud-peaks
and recognize the cruelty of living,

somehow never willing
to recognize the falsity of fantasy,
the unforgivability of living.

那雙疑慮的眼睛
 看著雲團後面的夕陽
 滿懷著幻想和天真
 不情願地被死亡蒙上

那雙疑慮的眼睛
 總不願承認黑暗
 即使曾穿過死亡的黑影
 把懷中難友的屍體陪伴

不知為甚麼總不肯
 從雲端走下
 承認生活的殘酷

不知為甚麼總不肯
 承認幻想的虛假
 生活的無法寬恕

Here is another reference to the "cloud-peaks" as the new locus of what the poet has lost. Unequivocally it is a human presence, a human relationship, that can no longer be found on the visible earth.

From the viewpoint of the poet, the dubious value of the visible realm is clear. It is less clear whether the deceased fully realized while alive, or does now, the "cruelty" and "unforgivability."

[After the successive four-, two- and two-line sentences with which the poem begins, the sestet has a distinct rhythm of its own. It consists of two three-line sentences closely interrelated by parallel grammar and vocabulary.]

5.

When humankind are keening and weeping
 I'd rather have a roaring thunderstorm
 roll these leaves up, tear them into night
 than all this cold neglect -

a green leaf, still packed with living,

plucked without a thought, dropped
into the weedy water by the road.
It disappeared. Not a heron twitched.

Fate's unrhymed dabbling
picked a leaf of passion
to paint its cruel wit.

Winter tree – a black net in snow,
bewilderment, neglect, silence –
believes in spring devoutly. Blindly.

我寧願那是一陣暴雨和雷鳴
在世人都驚呼哭泣時
將這片葉子捲走、撕裂、飛揚入冥冥
而不是這冷漠的誤會和過失

讓一片仍裝滿生意的綠葉
被無意中順手摘下丟進
路邊的亂草水溝而消滅
無蹤，甚至連水鳥也沒有顫驚

命運的荒誕作弄
選中了這一片熱情
寫下它殘酷的幽默

冬樹的黑網在雨雪中
迷惘、冷漠、沈靜
對春天信仰，虔誠而盲目。

We see here emerging a systematic contrast between a hostile realm of this-worldly fact, represented by whatever is visible to ordinary sight, and a contrasting friendly and desired realm to which "blindness" gives access. We shall see that throughout the cycle, *natural light* (e.g. the sun and moon) is feared, representing as it does the closed factual cycle of life and death. The realm of desire, hope and faith, by contrast, is seen either in "blindness" or by *artificial light*. In Poem 3, the beloved person faded "like lamplight in the wee small hours." In Poem 15, the person being

urged to "leave behind the square with its altars" is to do so by a *night* journey lit by a *lamp*.

This fifth poem marks the first appearance of the "net" that will prove to be one of the most frequently recurrent, most many-dimensional, and most centrally integrating images in the cycle. Here, the "winter tree" stands quietly as a "black net" in the background, enduring "neglect" and "silence" while the unimpressive yet fatal "cold neglect" cuts away the "leaf of passion." The tree represents the realm alternative to the superficial turbulence and "dabbling" characteristic of the world of human fates. Like the lost and lamented person of the previous poem, it is "blind."

The "net" (in Chinese, *wang*), with its superbly effective ambivalence, serves to focus, almost literally to catch or "net," the realization breaking through into consciousness here: that loss in one dimension is eternity in another. A net is a trap, a device for killing; yet it also holds and lifts up. To be trapped from one point of view is, from another, to be saved.

Wang in Chinese also has the meaning of "network, system of relations." Perhaps it is the knotted structuring of relationship which brings both fate and eternity.⁵ The physical structure of a net is also relevant to the motif of "weaving," which we will encounter in Poem 15.

Also contributing to the depth of the "net" image is the fact that *wang* in Chinese is homophonous with *wang* meaning "the past," as in *wang shi* "bygone things, objects of memory." Again: what is past is, by that very reason, permanently past change.

[The whole octave comprises a single continuous sentence. The rhythmic pressure thus generated is suddenly slackened, after the full stop in line 8, by the much shorter lines which follow. The sestet consists of two three-line sentences.]

6.

Open your imagination, friend.
Endless as ocean, there it is. Pull off
your faded clothes, puckered flesh:
dip yourself in deep blue death.

Here's nothing to linger for. The big busy
hand coming your way is set to crush you.
The fury in your eyes will never flow here:

⁵ The single word *wang* constitutes the text of a much-discussed poem, entitled "Life," in the cycle *Notes from the City of the Sun* by the contemporary Chinese poet Bei Dao. See McDougall 1983.

lips tight, even spring forgets to sing.

Narrow, narrow are heaven and earth.
In the corridor of blinded eyes, up and down
we wander. And can never break the bars.

Birds of dusk return to forest perches.
The waiting spirit lowers wings, descends.
Lullabies shake death's moonlight down.

打開你的幻想吧，朋友
那邊如浩瀚的大海迷茫
你脫去褪色的衣服，變皺
的皮膚，浸入深藍色的死亡

這裏不值得你依戀，忙碌嘈雜
伸向你的手只想將你推搡
眼睛中的憤怒無法噴發
緊閉的嘴唇，春天也忘記歌唱

狹窄、狹窄的天地
我們在瞎眼的甬道裏
踱來踱去，打不開囚窗

黃昏的鳥兒飛回樹林去歇樓
等待著的心靈垂下雙翼
催眠從天空灑下死亡的月光

Again we have a strong statement of the contrast between the two realms: "imagination" and "here." "Flesh" comes off badly, as it always will in this cycle: "here's nothing to linger for."

In the original, "Open" in the first line is the same verb of which "can never break," in line 11, is a negative. The "bars" of the narrow, natural heaven-and-earth cannot be opened; the imagination can. In the midst of worldly actuality and pressures, the imaginative person experiences his or her eyes as "blinded."

Even in ancient Chinese Taoism, it was axiomatic that "Heaven-and-Earth" or *tian di*, i.e., the realm of natural fact, is ruthless from the point of view of man's wishes. The term for "heaven and earth" used here is identical with that in the traditional Chinese *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 5: "Heaven and Earth are without pity; to them the creatures are as straw dogs." In Richard Wilhelm's German translation of that work, "heaven and earth" emerge as "nature" in general: "Liebe noch Menschenart hat die Natur."⁶

[The first three strophes all begin and end with an Internally Marked Line, which gives them a sort of visual and rhythmic framing. The fourth strophe then goes over into an entirely new mode: three successive Independent Lines. This new rhythm block runs in parallel to a change in content, corresponding to the transition in imagery from imaginative to natural (i.e. death-bringing) light.]

7.

The right hand brushes the left –
a strange feeling, called loneliness.
Say there was a poet, struggling to keep an eye
on the spirit's garden as spring was rolled away.

Time rolls the scroll away, inching up and
up, leaving the right to brush the left –
and all is lost at once. A deathly peace.
Call as you will, life's ebb won't listen.

Turn like the wind, for the sake of sweeping
a couple of leaves, harvesting only winter's
snicker and smirk – the curse following close,

sticking even now, stuck to the corpse.
They say he had no rage, did not roar.
Let's just say: we have our work to do.

右手輕撫左手
異樣的感覺，叫做寂寞
有一位詩人掙扎地看守
他心靈的花園在春天的卷末。

⁶ Waley 1958, 147; Wilhelm 1921, 7.

時間捲去畫幅步步逼近
只剩下右手輕撫左手
一切都突然消失、死寂
生命的退潮不聽你的挽留

像風一樣旋轉爲了掃些落葉
卻被冬天嘲諷譏笑
那追在身後的咒罵

如今仍在屍體上緊貼
據說不是仇恨，沒有吼叫
漂亮的回答：只是工作太忙。

In this elegiac meditation, the poet turns her attention to the world's failure to understand the departed person, who evidently was a "poet." In a foreshadowing of the "weighing" and "trial" elements which we will encounter in later poems, we are reminded once again that "time" (the passage of spring) and the "spirit's garden" are two different realms. "They" (denizens of society's temporality) misunderstand the poet, thinking he accepted death easily because he "did not roar"; they fail to realize his apparent placidity was all because his focus was elsewhere. (And we remember that in Poem 4, he was "somehow never willing/ to come down.")

In the last line, "we have our work to do" (more literally, "we're too busy") could be read as a bitter parody on the attitude of a bureaucrat who makes no effort to help "reverse the verdict" on an unjustly condemned victim, lamely pleading that other tasks allow him no time to investigate the case.

8.

Winter is the season for enjoying
barren trees cutting the blue in patches.
Manyness beyond geometry!
- and all that blue for a little art.

Intricate fissures, numberless branchings -
you spent your life learning the tremors of life,
your shadow swaying among the piled corpses -
death of the singer broke off your lament.

After the final silence, one last crack
as out of your black boughs now brittle
the great blue came to hold you down.

Its surf: leaves of life, all of them falling,
following on your life, a following tide.
In blue's embrace you roll on into nothing.

冬天是欣賞枯樹的季節
它們用墨筆將蔚藍切成塊塊
再多的幾何圖也不能肢解
那偉大的藍色只爲了藝術的歡快

美妙的碎裂，無數的枝梢
你畢生在體會生命的震撼
你的身影曾在屍堆中晃搖
歌手的死亡擰斷你的哀歎

最終的沉默又一次的斷裂
從你的脆了的黑枝梢
那偉大的藍色將你壓倒

它的浪花是生命紛紛的落葉
在你消失的生命身後只有海潮
你在藍色的擁抱中向虛無奔跑

Here the "net" motif returns, not verbally but visually. The "barren trees," reminding us of the "winter tree" in Poem 5 that was a "black net," here "cut the blue in patches." The twigs seen against the blue sky appear, with their "numberless branchings," to be brush strokes parcelling the canvas of the sky into "manyness beyond geometry."

Mention of the "fissures" and "branchings" soon turns to direct address of the deceased. In the last six lines, the "blue," identified in Poem 6 with death, falls like a dried limb breaking off a tree to "hold down" the addressed. In an ironical quasi-sexual embrace, he is rushed on into nothing while a "following tide" of leaves piles in after.

9.

What wells up under our feet's no yellow earth
but green, billowing fields. Diligent,
the sea: she washes even coral clean,
those snow-white bones beyond concern.

Your sixty-ninth winter is behind you.
You're patient: soon the fire will be switched on,
will burn that verse, the one you spent a lifetime
looking for, into your spotless bones.

No matter if dark, rolling clouds appear
again at the edge of heaven. They can't hurt you.
You've carried off all weakness of the flesh.

Flames bursting in brilliance will dance you
into them – and on the porcelain of beauty
that odd unwilting flower will remain.

從我們腳下湧起的不是黃土
是萬頃激灑的碧綠
海水殷勤地洗淨珊瑚
它那雪白的骸骨無憂無慮

你的第六十九個冬天已經過去
你在耐心地等待一場電火
來把你畢生思考著的最終詩句
在你的潔白的骸骨上銘刻

不管天邊再出現甚麼翻滾的烏雲
它們也無能傷害你
你已經帶走所有肉體的脆弱

盛開的火焰將用舞蹈把你吸吮
一切美麗的瓷器
因此留下那不謝的奇異花朵

The first stanza subtly echoes a difficult but famous love poem written by Bian Zhilin in the 1930s:

...

I realize sea water can wash away all human entanglements.
A white handkerchief could at least enwrap a bit of coral
But you'd rather see it waving beside the tracks, with green flags.⁷

The nuance here seems to be: now all solid ground has been pulled out from under us by death; in the face of the new billowing, just as in Bian's poem the "white handkerchief" waved empty as a sign of complete farewell, so in our case even "coral" will not escape the "washing."

What the poet is waiting for now is not new daylight but "the fire," which will impress, into the bones washed "spotless," the verse that could not be found while the "human entanglements," in Bian's sense, were still present. Earthly storms can no longer touch her. She is waiting to be taken into the "dance" of the "flames," after which, in a seeming throwback to Poem 1 and to Keats, in the realm of beauty – represented in this world by the "porcelain" of vases and urns – the true value of experience will remain like the image of a flower "odd" because "unwilting."

[Both octave and sestet begin with a sequence of self-contained lines but end with a longer sentence suggesting a sort of end-cadence. This cadential effect is strengthened by the parallel in subject matter; both 'cadences' are concerned with the after-death state as one in which something beautiful will have been burned or fixed into or onto something else (bone, porcelain).]

10.

We were all fire birds –
treading all our life on red flames,
threading through the hells. When bridges burned
over our heads we never made a murmur.

And still we admire fire birds –
finding clear water in the thickets,
seeing heavens far above the thickets,
suddenly rising, red feet behind them.

Once, in dream, a hope-crazed
bear suddenly flew,

⁷ For the original, see Bian Zhilin 1979, 51.

turned around

- and like a would-be acrobat
fell again
in silence.

我們都是火烈鳥
終生踩著赤色的火焰
穿過地獄，燒斷了天橋
沒有發出失去身分的呻吟

然而我們羨慕火烈鳥
在草叢中找到甘甜的清水
在草叢上有無邊的天空遶遶
牠們會突然起飛，鮮紅的細腳後垂

狂想的懶熊也曾在夢中
起飛
翻身

卻像一個蹩腳的雜技英雄
殞墜
無聲

It now turns out that the "fire" or "flames," as mentioned in the preceding poem, will not actually be an altogether new element. The poet, and the one she addresses, belong to a certain group for whom living in this world was never less than a hell, for whom "red flames," rather than the natural light of day, determined the quality of existence.

Yet the poet has no regrets. She continues to admire those for whom it is possible to find "clear water" or "heavens" in the midst of apparent obstructions, and who at any moment may imaginatively "rise," trailing their "red feet behind them."

In the original, the "fire birds" - *huolie niao* - are literally "flamingos." In Rilke's poem "Die Flamingos," these are the birds which "schreiten einzeln ins

Imaginäre" (stride, each alone, into the imaginary).⁸ The contrast with the image of the "bear" in the last six lines would seem to be: it is only as imaginative beings that we can "fly." To the extent that we are "fire birds" or "flamingos," we are able to "rise" out of the "thickets." Our bodily existence can be compared with the "bear" which, though it dreams of flying, remains a "would-be acrobat" doomed to fall back to earth.

[The sestet is very clearly set off in various ways. Not only is the whole sestet one continuous sentence, but each of its strophes has an a-b-b structure, where b is a line of but two syllables. The eye-catching and (at least to this reader's mind) perhaps rather humorous effect of this suddenly jagged rhythm is to underline the content: a bear's unexpected and abortive attempt to fly.]

11.

Winter's over – and happiness far behind?
Your death concludes your sixty-ninth winter.
Mad Shelley looked for the West Wind
to blow the cruel real far away.

Winter over, it is winter still
and still a winter endlessly winter.
How you made me believe, this morning, Creditor
never relenting, daily at my door.

We burned what here was left of you
and how could that suffice?
In debt to the centuries – break down

house, strew fortune, one could still
perhaps burn your bundle, your sheaf,
your poems to feed the crematorium.

冬天已經過去，幸福真的不遠嗎
你的死結束了你的第六十九個冬天
瘋狂的雪萊曾妄想西風把
殘酷的現實趕走，吹遠。

⁸ Rilke 1966, Vol. 1, 385.

在冬天之後仍然是冬天，仍然
 是冬天，無窮盡的冬天
 今早你這樣使我相信，糾纏
 不清的索債人，每天在我的門前

我們焚燒了你的殘餘
 然而那還遠遠不足
 幾千年的債務

傾家蕩產，也許
 還要燒去你的詩束
 填滿貪婪的焚屍爐

The first line of this poem is a wry variation on the famous last line of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind": "if Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" In the following line the poet, addressing herself, embarks on some somber stock-taking. Though she obviously has not physically died, someone else has; and this death affects her so powerfully as to be called her own. Whereas "Mad Shelley" could call upon the West Wind to bring renewal, the facts here are that "winter over, it is winter still." The sixth line recalls Rilke's "Denn unter Winterm ist einer so endlos Winter,/ dass, überwintert, dein Herz überhaupt übersteht" (for underneath winters, there is a Winter so endless/ that your heart, hibernating, does survive).⁹ In the seventh and eighth lines, the unchanging monotony of the "winter" mood is made still more poignant by a sudden transition to genuine second-person address. Evidently, on this particular morning, the poet (in the aftermath of a dream in which a reunion occurred?) had been expecting a change, a relief. But as daylight continues, she realizes there is no change in the offing: the debt is on the scale of "centuries," and in the long run everything, even the most precious remnants of all – the "sheaf" of poems – will perhaps be given over to the "crematorium."

12.

There isn't going to be an Orpheus
 taking his lyre to look for you down there.
 He expects the strength of your own lyric
 to bring you here again to find him.

⁹ *Sonnets to Orpheus* II.13, lines 3-4.

What's day for you is night here.
 There, your pain is lost without a shadow –
 tree leaves whispering in gladness,
 nightingale needing no shelter.

Never again to open your eyes
 you see what you had never seen before:
 that scene of wonder.

Love wasn't found in the lover's pocket –
 someone stole the judge's gavel – reasons
 enough to adjourn this court indefinitely.

沒有奧菲亞斯拿著他的絃琴
 去那裏尋找你
 他以為應當是你用你的詩情
 來這裏找他呢

你的白天是這裏的黑夜
 你的痛苦在那裏消失得
 無影無蹤，樹葉
 幸福地輕語，夜鶯不需要藏躲

你不再睜開眼睛
 卻看到從來不曾看到
 的神奇光景

情人的口袋不裝愛情
 法官的小槌被盜
 因此無限期延遲開庭。

In this and the following poem, we meet the figure of Orpheus, who got special permission to enter the Underworld and bring back his deceased wife Eurydice on stern condition that he should not look at her directly till they had returned to the

Upperworld.¹⁰ (He did so: and lost her.) It was because of Orpheus' lyric skill that he, of all mortals, was granted the right of transit between the two worlds.

In this poem, lacking Orpheus as an intermediary, the poet directly addresses the deceased, poignantly building praise for "the strength of your own lyric" into her explanation of the fact that there can be no real communication.

The second strophe is structured on the crucial element of reversal, which we have already hinted at in the discussion of Poem 1. Values are not the same in the Underworld: the *quality of light* is different. What was a burden of pain during life can be "lost without a shadow" from this new point of view. Once the eyes are "never again to open," it becomes at last possible to see the "scene of wonder."

In the last three lines, consequences are apparently drawn with respect to the deceased's reputation in the Upperworld. Whatever the exact allusions – and they seem to be private here – the gist seems to be that someone has absconded with something essential, perhaps taken it into the Underworld, so that survivors in the Upperworld are not competent to judge.

[Both strophes of the sestet are distinctively structured. After the octave with its frequent stops and end-stops, the first strophe of the sestet is a single three-line sentence. The second is a unique succession of three Independent Lines; its rhythmic distinctiveness is appropriate to its reference to different subject matter (and, hence, its insoluble obscurity in the context of this poem). After the first three strophes, which in one way or another describe aspects of the after-death state in which the addressed person now finds himself, this last strophe makes oblique allusion to the circumstances of the worldly aftermath.]

13.

In this, the tunnel walked by Orpheus,
please receive this thirteenth poem. And hurt:
and be indignant: hating this ill
portent of passage, unpropitious track.

But this is a safe-conduct's negative.
Hold it to the sun:
the blackness is your face,
your hair transparent in a mass of light.

Endlessly you wonder whether here
everything's reversal of the world,

¹⁰ I have borrowed the term "Upperworld" from Hillman's usage, though he does not spell it with a capital.

whether to weigh your travel bag once more.

But the shades will tell you: don't be fooled,
what you're reversing was itself reverse,
the world never weighed you truly.

在這奧菲亞斯走過的地道
你拿到這第十三首詩，你
痛苦而憤怒，憎恨這朕兆
意味著通行的不祥痕跡

然而這實在是通行證的底片
若將它對準陽光
黑的是你的臉龐
你的頭髮透明通亮

你茫然考慮是不是這裏的一切
和世間顛倒
你的行囊要重新過秤

然而鬼們告訴你不要自欺
現在你正將顛倒的再顛倒
世間從未曾認真給你過秤

The poet presents "this thirteenth poem" as her own communication in the Underworld, her own Orpheus-like gesture of reaching. Evidently she at first thinks the addressed is liable to mistrust and resist her communication. Whatever the (private?) reasons for this, she proceeds to remind him that in this case, *reversal* must be applied. That which from the erstwhile worldly or Upperworld point of view would have appeared as tragic or inauspicious is, once it is reversed and interpreted in the manner of a photographic "negative," seen to be that which will bring "safety" (reconciliation? resolution?). She is communicating assurance (to herself as well as to him), saying: where you are now, and from the Underworld perspective in which I am trying to address you, loss is gain. Absence is presence.

Once again, in the last six lines, the application to the worldly-wise perspective is spelled out in detail. Don't worry about their judgment of you, she says: even if

you reversed their image of you it would not help. "Their" image of you was false from the beginning.

[This is one of the poems in which a particular line type is associated with a distinct mode or message within the text (see also Poems 3 and 15). All the lines of the Independent type are in a special reassuring voice, telling the addressed person, who is in a sort of post-decease trance or shadow state, what his *true* position is. This consistent special function of the type is underscored by the use of the word *ran'er* "but" at the beginning of line 5 (the first line of this type) and again at the beginning of line 12 (the line introducing the definitive resumption of this type after the two intervening three-line sentences).]

45 37

14.

Your path on the mountain's shadow side
suddenly led through trees. The world
changed in a flash to a grain of sand
swallowed down in a black hole.

The goddess that administers the scales
of heaven set a new chart before you.
Words shaped to an astronomic scale
made you, amazed, cast away all smaller.

Human hubbub's one long stretch
of bent sweltering stinking chicken gut
stopped with clods and stolen undigesteds.

Only when you're expelled from the whole hatchery
will the lake of oblivion wash away pollution:
you enter the heavenly body's blinding light.

你走過那山陰小道
忽然來到一片林地
世界立即成了被黑洞
吸收的一顆砂礫

掌管天秤的女神曾
向你出示新的圖表
天文數的計量詞

令你驚愕地拋棄狹小

人間原來只是一條雞腸

繞繞曲曲臭臭烘烘

塞滿泥沙和掠來的不消化

只有在你被完全逐出雞廠

來到洗淨污染的遺忘湖

才能走近天體的耀眼光華

We are back in the mode of self-address. It is as if in Poems 12 and 13 some sort of meeting in the Underworld really did occur, and now the poet's consciousness is adjusting to the widened perspective it has gained. The first four lines seem to recapitulate the experience of the Underworld (the "shadow" side; the path "suddenly" entering a shaded zone; a cave-like "black hole"). The result of that experience seems to have been that the "goddess that administers the scales/ of heaven" – who is of course Venus, the astrological ruler of Libra – initiated the poet into a new scale of values. The "judgment" or "weighing" motif of the previous poems now finds blunter expression as the whole ordinary Upperworld run is relegated to the status of "one long stinking chicken gut." Bitter as Venus' message may be, however, it is hopeful: after death, in the "heavenly body," there will be a new kind of light, even if it be "blinding" from the worldly point of view.

15.

Those who weep for you would do better
to weep for themselves: let whom your death enrages
not blame God. For death follows
closely the body: its renegade and shadow.

If you could weave your still-outstanding wishes,
so many silk threads, into clear sky...
But dark clouds won't let you wish in quiet.
Thunder gallops down, pounds on target.

All your ideals are spider webs waving
with no one in a thousand years to weave them
into a dream to last a thousand years.

Nothing to do but leave behind the square
with its altars, Athenian walls, Egyptian –
and don't forget your lamp, night rider!

那爲你哭泣的人們應當
哭泣他們自己，那爲你的死
憤怒的人們不能責怪上帝
死亡跟在身後，一個鬼祟的影子

你有許多未了的心願像露絲
如果能織成一片晴空……
但黑雲不會放過你的默想
雷爆從天空馳下擊中

你的理想只是飄搖的蛛網
幾千年沒有人織成
幾千年的一場美夢

只有走出祭壇的廣場
離開雅典和埃及的古城
別忘記帶著你的夜行時的馬燈。

Continuing her reflections on the difference in scale or perspective between the everyday world and the one of which she is now also aware, the poet here confronts nostalgias that remain. The wish to make a successful "weaving" out of unsatisfied wishes, she realizes, is foredoomed: there is "no one" to weave them. The sphere of the this-worldly, even in its perennially praised high points, has nothing more to offer. Only by escaping as a "night rider," one who carries one's own "lamp," can one possibly go on to better.

In Chinese, the "spider webs" are *zhu wang*, literally "spider nets" – another use of the word *wang* "net" that we have already discussed. Her "wishes," her "ideals," all have to do with the net of relationship that is now making itself felt as the net of fatality.

[Here we again see a distinct line type associated with distinct content. The two Internally Marked Lines in the poem (lines 2 and 4) are the only ones in which "death" (*si* or *siwang*) is mentioned.

After the second strophe, which constitutes a solid block of Independent Lines, the sestet has a new, symmetrically interwoven rhythmic structure: it is framed at beginning and end by an Independent Line, and the intervening two-line blocks are in typological parallel.]

16.

May. The flesh informs me the sun exists.
He's still considerate, not brutal yet – I shut
my eyes, pretend I don't know who's in charge.
Postponement tactics, common to all brains.

Just now, bones are feeling the damp of life.
They left the crematorium two months ago.
The air is too polluted to release
those particles it picked up from the oven.

Maybe they need washing upon washing
in flame,
in fire.

Here, there are no pyres of sandalwood
nor splashed with blaze of rose, beauty of orchid –
only a silent mourner laying on pain like mist.

五月，肌膚告訴我太陽的存在
很溫存，還沒有開始暴虐
我閉上眼睛，假裝不知道誰在主宰
拖延，是所有這兒的大腦的策略

屍骨正在感覺生的潮氣
離開火葬場已經兩個月
污染的大氣甚至不放棄
那從爐中拾回的殘缺

也許應當一次又一次地洗滌

用火焰，
用焚燒

這裏沒有檀木建成的葬堆
也沒有灑上玫瑰、月季、蘭花的嬌艷
只有沈默的送葬者灑上烏雲般的困惱。

The poet goes on detailing the unsatisfactoriness of the physical human world. If not for the discomfort of the "flesh," even the "sun's" existence would not matter to her; she expects nothing more from its merely natural light. After the seemingly clear, cold analysis of the behavior of her "flesh" and "brain," in lines 5 and 6 it suddenly becomes unclear whose the "bones" are. Does the phrase "left the crematorium two months ago" refer to the time elapsed since she herself attended the deceased's cremation or, on the other hand, to the deceased's bones? In the latter case, apparently the "bones," now in the form of "particles" which continue to hover in the air, are still in some sort of feeling contact with the world of the living.

Maybe the "bones" can be read both ways. In that case, the import of the passage is that her bones and his coincide. From whosever perspective, they "left the crematorium two months ago." The objective return of sunnier weather, which feels "damp" by contrast to the dryness of bone, causes pain. The suggestion is that the only cure is "flame" or "fire" – another reference to the other-than-natural "light" which we have already met with repeatedly. In the last lines the poet admits it will not be easy, "here," to attain that fire associated with lasting beauty and truth. In this world, "there are no pyres of sandalwood."

[After the rather stately rhythms of the octet (all four of the first lines with internal pauses, three sentence-endings in the following four lines), the third strophe suddenly surprises with its unevenly structured run-on three-line sentence. This rhythmically distinct interlude corresponds to the more emotionally intense reflection on "flame, fire" – here the speaker seems almost to be addressing herself in a brief passionate aside. Immediately thereafter, the more elegiac rhythm returns in the last strophe, of which the last two lines, being unusually long, stand in neat contrast to the unusually short last two lines of strophe 3.]

17.

The eyes are frozen lotus ponds; the water
dried; my sixty-ninth winter. Standing

at death's checkpoint, seeing off a death. At the edge
of heaven a caravan, bound for no human land.

Joy's grape will not inquire of fate;
the strongest of wines forgets its origin.
It takes the single notes to make the song,
whether of anger or of tenderness.

The texture is a weaving of the patches.
Weave them anew, you'll get a different texture.
It's a short-sighted weaver who sees an end.

Eyes closed, limbs arranged on earth,
a caterpillar, a butterfly in turn,
splashed like rain on a mountainside: the self.

眼睛是凍冰的荷塘
流水已經枯乾，我的第69個冬天
站在死亡的邊卡送走死亡
天邊有駝隊向無人熟悉的國度遷移

歡樂的葡萄不會急著追問下場
香醇的紅酒也忘記了根由
一個個音符才聯成歌唱
也許是憤怒，也許是溫柔

整體不過是碎片的組成
碎片改組，又產生新的整體
短視的匠人以爲到了終極

瞋上眼睛，任肢體在大地橫陳
蠶與蛹，毛蟲和蝴蝶的交替
灑在湖山上，像雨的是這個「自己」

Apparently continuing her reminiscences of "two months ago" from the previous poem, here the poet examines herself in her role of "mourner." Her eyes are now dried up - immobilized by long grief. Accompanying "a death" as far as the border

"checkpoint," she has been in the strange position of going along *with* death, but not *in* it. In the rest of the poem, she finds some degree of comfort in the contemplation of relativity, as well as in echoes of old poetry. The "grape of pleasure" reminds us of Keats' "Ode on Melancholy," in which

...in the very temple of Delight
 Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
 Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
 Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
 His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
 And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

As to wine forgetting its origin, one possible association is with the sixth of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*:

...What I do
 And what I dream include thee, as the wine
 Must taste of its own grapes...

Her advice to herself seems to be: go ahead and leave the "grapes" behind you; move ahead into full melancholy. This transformation, like all others, is part of a vast whole which cannot be surveyed from the limited viewpoint of human grief. Your own self moves from one form to another.

The position is reminiscent of that in Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, I.16:

...
 Sieh, nun heisst es zusammen ertragen
 Stückwerk und Teile, als sei es das Ganze.

...
 [See: now it's a matter of bearing, together,
 Bits and pieces as if they were the whole]

Obviously also relevant here is another of the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, II.12:

Wolle die Wandlung. O sei für die Flamme begeistert

...
 [Be keen for transformation. O be eager for the flame]

– much as the caterpillar is eager to die to itself in order to become a butterfly.

18.

Using the laser blade of time
they carve around on our bodies. The brain's white
convolutions: tapes that can't be erased.
Our cassette smashed to bits,

the piercing song escapes. A maddened poet
holds his heart in his hands - extravasated
blood and all - and goes to his audience
with God or the devil. Both of them are stars.

A heart. Kick it to midfield,
shoot for the goal -
score that fatal point.

Applause like wind from the open country
finds its way through flying drops of blood.
The poet's heart enters the net, the grave.

他們用時間的激光刀
在我們的身體上切割
白色的腦紋是抹不掉
的錄像帶，我們的錄音盒

被擊碎，逃出刺耳的歌
瘋狂的詩人捧著瘀血的心
去見上帝或者魔鬼
反正他們都是球星

將一顆心踢給中鋒
用它來射門
好記上那致命的一分

歡呼像野外的風
穿過血滴飛奔
詩人的心入網，那是墳。

If any doubt remained as to the treatment the poet can expect in a hostile world, this poem will remove it. The consolation, grim though it sounds, once again turns out to be the assurance of persistence in another dimension. The "bodies" may indeed be subject to "carving," but what has gone into the "brain's white convolutions" is indelible. Smashing the "cassette" (the body) facilitates the song's "escape." The "maddened poet's" body must have been "smashed" before he could "hold his heart in his hands" – and now that his blood is "extravasated" (i.e., beyond its normal physical bounds), he will go on to an audience with a "star."

In the arena of worldly life, the heart may be not much better than a football – a dumb physical object to be kicked around. Yet at the end the poet's heart enters the "net" – the lasting frame of relatedness. It is at this point that he receives "applause," not from the social-political city but like wind from a far-off "open country."

19.

When the ancient dresses up as rebirth
it covers up the sky,
lingering over its ugly skin – layer on
layer afraid of the pain of rebirth.

Today: a balloon with the air gone out of it,
whose skin still sticks around my body.
Its life of the past has already stolen away.
Its endurance is my pain and death.

Cast these eyes of mine, that are not yet closed,
far out into the distance. There, Northern
Lights blaze in singular splendor.

Poet, your final stillness
like that of the Northern Lights
is play, play freer than ours by far.

當古老化裝成新生
遮蓋著頭上的天空
依戀著醜惡的老皮層層
畏懼新生的痛苦

今天，抽去空氣的汽球

老皮緊緊貼在我的身上
 它昔日的生命已經偷偷逃走
 永生的它是我的痛苦的死亡

將我尚未閉上的眼睛
 投射向遠方
 那裏有北極光的瑰麗

詩人，你的最後沈寂
 像無聲的極光
 比我們更自由地嬉戲。

In the last six lines, it is implied that once the "eyes" depart from the physical body and are cast into the distance, they will enjoy a new and "singular splendor." Far from being a condition of death and limitation, that will be a realm of "play," possible exactly because it is, from the worldly point of view, "stillness."

Once again, aurora borealis is a different "light" from that of normal "day." If the eyes could be "cast" out of the realm circumscribed by the still-sticking "skin" of the "ancient dressed up as rebirth," they would see the "splendor."

CHAPTER 7

ZHANG CUO'S *SONNETS OF ERROR*, THE *ZUSHI*, AND THE *NINETEEN ANCIENT POEMS*: TOWARD A POETIC OF EMANATION

Zheng Min's sonnet sequence *The Poet and Death* has a subtitle which in Chinese reads *zushi shijiu shou*. This means "nineteen-poem suite," but the syntax of the original could just as well suggest "nineteen serial poems." It is characteristic, not only of Zheng Min's suite but of various other modern Chinese poem-suites designated as *zushi* ("grouped poem"), that the component poems of which they are made up can be read either independently or as parts of the whole. In Chapter 6, we have given detailed attention to Zheng Min's suite at the level of the individual poems, but we have not yet considered what emerges when the focus of attention shifts to the suite as a whole. In this chapter we will so to speak reverse the direction of our telescope: instead of analyzing the form of the component sonnets as self-contained cells, we will see whether formal elements occurring within the individual poems may turn out to be linked with related elements in other parts of the suite. In other words, we will be looking beyond the boundary of the individual sonnet – and in the process, we will be interested in the question of whether that boundary itself, specifically in its identifiable status as "fourteenth line of a sonnet," has a role to play in structuring the suite that could not have been played equally well by a more random element.

The subtitle of Zheng Min's suite, however exactly we translate it, is *zushi shijiu shou*. As pronounced in standard Chinese, that subtitle differs only in its initial consonant from *Gushi shijiu shou*, the title of the *Nineteen Ancient Poems*, one of the best-known sequences of early classical Chinese poetry. The *Nineteen Ancient Poems*, of unknown authorship, probably date from the first and second centuries a.d.; they are among the very earliest examples of Chinese poetry in the *shi* form which in subsequent centuries became the bread-and-butter form of classical Chinese verse.¹ These nineteen poems are often regarded as virtually the *fons et origo* of mainstream classical Chinese poetry in both form and content. Their themes are not for the lighthearted reader: loneliness, separation, impermanence and death are the staples.

Assuming that Zheng Min's near-pun on the title of the *Nineteen Ancient Poems* is meaningful, let us first consider the possibility of very general relationships between Zheng's suite and these very early Chinese precursors. Aside from the immediately obvious fact that both groups have the same number of component poems, there is the almost equally obvious thematic affinity. Both suites are concerned with the inexorability of death, transitoriness and separation. In both,

¹ On the classical Chinese poetic forms and their historical development, see Idema and Haft 1997.

the decor includes images of journeying and the road, of desolate nature at year's end, of chill winds and distant birds, of the moon seen on a winter night.

Let us see whether these features are underlined by technical parallels. In Chinese, the first of the "Nineteen Ancient Poems" begins with the lines

xing xing chong xing xing
yu jun sheng bie li

行行重行行
與君生別離

which were translated by Arthur Waley as:

On and on, always on and on
Away from you, parted by a life-parting.²

This opening, besides providing a nutshell summary of much of the thematic content of the following poems, immediately establishes one of the stock technical devices of the suite: reduplication. Confined in this first poem to the first line, in the second poem the device dominates the typographic and auditory shape of the first six of the poem's ten lines:

qing qing he pan cao
yu yu yuan zhong liu
ying ying lou shang nü
jiao jiao dang chuang yu
e e hong fen zhuang
xian xian chu su shou
xi wei chang jia nü
jin wei dang zi fu
dang zi xing bu gui
kong chuang nan du shou

青青河畔草
鬱鬱園中柳
盈盈樓上女

² For the text of the original, I have used Sui Shusen 1958, which also includes traditional commentaries. Waley's translation is quoted from Waley 1969, 23. For a complete French translation with interpretation and commentary, see Diény 1963.

皎皎當牕牖
 娥娥紅粉粧
 纖纖出素手
 昔爲倡家女
 今爲蕩子婦
 蕩子行不歸
 空牀難獨守

In translation:

Green, green, the grass by the river.
 Lush, lush, the willows in the garden.
 Fair, fair, the woman in the tower.
 White, white, she faces the window.
 Beautiful, beautiful her vermilion make-up.
 Slender, slender, she reveals a pale hand.
 Of old she was a sing-song girl.
 Now she is wife to a wanderer.
 The wanderer's gone, does not return.
 The empty bed: hard to keep watch alone.³

In Zheng Min's suite, the first poem reads

shi shei, shi shei
 shi shei de youli de shouzhi
 zheduan zhe dongri de shuixian
 rang baise de zhiye yichu

cuilü de, congbai de jingtiao?
 shi shei, shi shei
 shi shei de youli de quantou
 ba zhe dianya de guping shuaisui

rang shengming de zhiye
 penchu ta de xiongtang
 shuixian kuwei

xinnianguanmie

³ Translation mine. This is one of the two poems Waley omits from his translation on grounds of what he calls (p. 23) their "marked inferiority."

shi na chuangzao shengming de shouzhang
you jiang meiyong changwan de ge suohui.

Like the massively repeated *xing* in the first line of the *Nineteen Ancient Poems*, the phrase *shi shei* (literally "who is it") here functions both as a semantic leitmotif and as a rhythmic and sonic module.

The second of Zheng Min's poems begins:

meiyong changchu de ge
meiyong zuowan de meng
zai yunduan xiang wo fukui
houniao yang fei xiang mimang

The first two lines, with their combination of anaphora and grammatical parallelism, seem to be following technically in the footsteps established by the first poem. Though here the reduplication is not exact, it is sufficiently strong to evoke the way the first poem began. In addition, it directly echoes the rhythmic and grammatical structure *meiyong AA de B*, where *AA* is a two-syllable verb containing a resultative element and negated by *meiyong*, and *B* is a noun, from the last line of the first poem. This echoing is especially strong in the first line, in which even the noun, *ge* "song," is a direct carryover from Poem 1. Subsequently, the semantic continuity turns out to be strong in this second poem as a whole, which like Poem 1 is concerned with something's being taken away.

We see, then, within the narrow frame of these first two poems, the emergence of two techniques reminiscent of technical procedures in the *Nineteen Ancient Poems*: (1) near or perfect reduplication as a way of beginning a poem and (2) semantic overlapping between one poem and the next. We can conceive both these techniques as having to do with a "modular" structuring of the text, in which a rhythmic, grammatical or semantic module, once established, may cross the boundaries of the individual poem to recur recognizably in another poem or poems of the same series.

We will go on now to consider another *zushi* made up of sonnets: Zhang Cuo's *Cuowu shisihang* or *Sonnets of Error*. Zhang Cuo (pseudonym of Zhang Zhen'ao, 1943-), born in Macao, studied in Taiwan and the United States, was a participant in the University of Iowa International Writing Program, and has taught Chinese and comparative literature for many years. His scholarly publications, in which he writes as Dominic Cheung, include a biography of Feng Zhi and an anthology of Chinese poetry from Taiwan in English translation. His earlier poetry was published under the pseudonym "Ao Ao." In 1981 his first book as Zhang Cuo was published in Taiwan by *Shibao*; it included the cycle *Sonnets of Error*, which was

actually written in 1979. Zhang Cuo has won general recognition as one of the most significant contemporary Chinese poets, and *Sonnets of Error* is one of his most noted works.

Though this cycle does not observe rhyme, we will be justified in classing it as a cycle of "sonnets" on the basis of the overall fourteen-line envelope of each poem – as well as, needless to say, its title. The fact that the poems as it were hover near the borderline of the "sonnet" identity is perhaps reflected in the first line of Poem 7: "Is *sonnet* one word or three?" – the implication seeming to be that it is open to question whether we have to do here with "sonnet" (*shisihang*) or with "four-teen lines" (*shi si hang*).

As we will be discussing the semantic aspects in some detail, it will be appropriate to begin with the full text followed by Michelle Yeh's translation:⁴

錯誤十四行

1

苦就苦在開始了第一行
就知道只剩下十三行
從第一到第十四
中間是不三不四
亂七八糟的倒敘。

像一幅設計好的山水
從主峰到飛瀑，
白雲甚麼時候飄來，
秋天甚麼時候落葉；
我們的戀歌

已寫到最後第四行
是否還要押一個險韻
或者按平仄的規矩行事，唉，
反正是錯誤十四行。

⁴ Yeh 1992, 158-161. I have taken the text of the original from Zhang Cuo's *Cuowu shisihang*: Taipei, Huangguan, 1994, which is not a reprint of the original volume of the same title but also incorporates his prize-winning 1984 volume *Shuang yuhuan yuan* (Grievance of the twin jade rings).

2

我們底相戀
就是一首十四行
而且十分莎士比亞
開始了頭四行的押韻—
離合離合。
我也知道
中間四行底押韻也是固定的一
聚散聚散。

難道你說這就算了，
我就這般的算了？

所以我堅持不能「算了」，
天長地久
日昇月落
我們彼此用同音的「愛」來押最後的兩行。

3

開始時一點也沒有
十四行的跡象，而且
更沒有平仄的打算，
那時的格局
只不過是一首簡短的俳句吧。

可是短短十七音
是多漫長的鏗鏘
雖然音節仍然急促短快
心的節奏
仍是五七五。

最後我倆的抗拒
就是段落之間的「切詞」，

你曾這般問我：春天的殘雨
甚麼時候落在鴨子的啼聲？

4

所有錯誤的歷史都自正確的事實開始
一直等到被置放在錯誤的時空
才成為歷史底錯誤。

譬如，羅密歐與茱麗葉是快樂的，
因為他們終於在錯誤的時空，
去犯另一種相愛的錯誤，
於是兩種錯誤放在一起

就做成了正確的死亡
把生命交付給過去
而讓將來永恆地痛惜——

那種淒然的擁抱
絕望的凝視——
淚和血一行行的流下來
一直流完十四行。

5

即使這樣愛了一生還是錯誤的，
我們永不反悔
來世同樣的錯誤——

反正前生是錯定了。
最後的一次
也是最初的一次

在黑暗的擁抱
和觸及那個

紙的秋天紙的楓葉
及無數紙的蝴蝶。

所以不要詢問最後的一個吻
因為唇是冰涼的，
舌是生硬的，
哭泣是無聲的。

6

就在我們並肩的石階上，
你幽幽的哭後，
一夜之間，
青苔就長出來了，
並且伸爬向我鐵掌
曾擊裂的地面
哀怨地沿著裂痕
繡出一條綠邊，
像一條冰冷的青蛇
無言地把一個異鄉的晚上
蜿蜒成一條
曲折的線索，
讓來生的我倆猜量
好一大片野生的蘚苔。

7

十四行是一個字還是三個字？
一行還是十四行？
十四行是一行字？
還是十四個字一行？

錯誤是甚麼時候開始的？
在十四行的前面？
還是錯誤是名詞

十四行是動詞？

錯誤十四行是一句話

或是十四句話？

還是十四句胡言亂語

放在一個錯誤的主題？

其實打從最初的一撇一點開始

便從第一個字錯落去第十四行。

1.

The trouble is, once I write the first line
I know there are thirteen left;
Between the first and the fourteenth
Are those topsy-turvy lines in the middle
All at sixes and sevens.

In a well-designed landscape painting –
From the main peaks to the swirling cascades –
When will white clouds come drifting by,
When will the leaves fall in autumn?
Our love song

Has now come to the last quatrain:
Should I use an oblique rhyme,
Or should I follow the regular scheme?
Anyway, it is a sonnet of error.

2.

Our falling in love
Is a sonnet,
Quite Shakespearean,
With rhymes in the first quatrain:
Together, apart, together, apart.

I know
The rhymes in the second quatrain are fixed, too:
To have, to have not, to have, to have not.

Are you really saying, Let's forget it?
And I, should I just forget it, too?

We cannot just forget it.
So long as heaven and earth endure
And sun and moon shine on,
We'll use the assonant *love* to rhyme our concluding couplet.

3.

In the beginning there was no
Hint of a sonnet, let alone
Any intention of rhyming.
At that time it was
No more than a short and simple haiku.

But a mere seventeen syllables
Seemed such a protracted sonority,
Even though the notes were still,
And the rhythm of the heart was
Still five-seven-five.

In the end our resistance
Was no more than the space between stanzas,
A question you once asked me: When does it rain
On the quacking duck in spring?

4.

All erroneous history begins with veritable facts;
They turn into historical errors
Only when they happen at the wrong time and place.
For example, Romeo and Juliet were happy
But in the wrong place and time.
They made the further mistake of falling in love:
Two errors put together,

Adding up to their correct deaths
When they handed their lives to the past,
Leaving the future to grieve forever.

That wretched embrace,
The despairing gaze –

Tears and blood fell line after line
Until they ran through all fourteen lines.

5.

Although still wrong even after a lifetime of love,
We will never regret it
And will make the same mistake in the next life.

Anyway, it was preordained in our previous one –
The last embrace,
Also the first
In the dark
Touching the paper autumn,
Paper maple leaves,
And myriad paper butterflies.

So don't ask me about the last kiss,
Because the lips are cold,
The tongue stiff,
The weeping stilled.

6.

On the stone steps where we sat together
After you wept,
Moss appeared
In the span of one night
And spread to the spot
Where my iron fist struck.
Sorrowfully it spread along the crack,
Tracing it in green
Like an ice-cold green snake.
Wordlessly turning a certain night
Into a foreign land,
Into a zigzagging clue
For us in our next life when we
Wonder at a field of overgrown moss.

7.

Is *sonnet* one word or three?
One line or fourteen lines?

Are there fourteen lines of one word each
Or fourteen words to every line?

When did the error begin?
Was it before the sonnet?
Or is *error* a noun,
Sonnet a verb?

Is the erroneous sonnet one sentence,
Or is it fourteen?
Or are there fourteen random sentences
On an erroneous topic?

The fact is: beginning with the very first stroke,
The error ran right through the last and fourteenth line.

In the original, the first poem begins:

ku jiu ku zai kaishi le di yi hang
jiu zhidao shengxia shisan hang
cong di yi dao di shi si
zhongjian shi bu san bu si
luan qi ba zao de dao xu

...

...

yi xie dao zui hou di si hang
shi fou hai yao ya yige xian yun
huozhe an ping ze de gui ju xing shi, ai,
fanzheng shi cuowu shi si hang

Here we are struck once again by the near-reduplication of the first word, *ku* "painful, bitter," as well as by the frequently repeated element *hang* "line." Though the fact is not evident in transcription, in Chinese characters *hang* is actually written with the same character as *xing*, the same word with which the *Nineteen Ancient Poems* begin. Without wishing to attach any superstitious degree of importance to the prominent repetition in this poem of this potentially ambivalent character, we can certainly agree with Michelle Yeh that its very ambiguousness adds to the expressive power of Zhang Cuo's lines: "...the character for 'line' (*hang*) also means 'to walk' when pronounced differently (i.e., *xing* – L. H.). Thus the error (*cuowu* – L. H.) lasts as long as the fourteen lines dictated by the predetermined form. Love lasts only as long as external limitations permit; it cannot transcend them and, indeed, in retrospect, ironically exists only to fulfill

them..."⁵ In the same way that *xing* in the sense of "journey" or "passage" opens the *Nineteen Ancient Poems* with what is in effect a thematic preview or précis of the whole cycle with its fundamental themes of transitoriness and separation, in *Sonnets of Error*, *xing/hang*, early established as an insistently repeated word, is a compact preview of the way in which the "lines" of what is being described as a "sonnet" are also "walks" or "passages" or "acts" in a love affair.

The reading "acts" is justified by yet another frequent meaning of *xing*: "do, perform." (In the original, in line 13 of Poem 1, the phrase we have quoted in translation as "follow the regular scheme" is very literally more like "do it according to the rules for alternation of level and oblique.") Cosmopolitan readers of modern Chinese poetry might well recall this erotically tinged association in connection with a famous poem by the Taiwan poet Zhou Mengdie:⁶

Coming (*xing*) to where the flow ends,
seeing no end, seeing no flow,
only a secret fragrant space
in the cool of eye and ear and blouse...⁷

Looking at successive poems of Zhang Cuo's cycle, we see the constant repetition of the various senses of *hang/xing*. The various discussions ostensibly of technical and prosodic aspects of the sonnet, apply as well to the love affair. In this sense the periodic recurrence of *hang* or *shi si hang* is one of the most obvious structuring devices which transcend the boundaries of the individual poems to lend semantic coherence to the whole suite.

But those recurrences are, of course, also recurrences on the sonic level. There are not many other syllables in Chinese that are homophonous with *hang*, so that this syllable stands out aurally each time it recurs. As for the repeats of *shi si hang*, they serve as high points of aural recognizability: modules or nodes of rhythmic familiarity which, wherever they recur, give the sensation of at least a momentary return to a previously established base. In other words, like the outstandingly frequent use of reduplication in the *Nineteen Ancient Poems*, the strikingly frequent repetition of *shi si hang* creates an impression of stylistic continuity despite what are in fact hugely various intervening portions of text.

⁵ Yeh 1991, 73.

⁶ Zhou Mengdie: pseudonym of Zhou Qishu, 1920-. The poem is included in his (then) collected poems: Zhou Mengdie 1981, 68. Translation mine.

⁷ A seeming confirmation of the "erotic" reading here is the translation by Wai-lim Yip, who renders the first line as "At the end of the watercourse..." "Watercourse" is far more specific than the mere *shui* "water" in the original, and would seem to have been selected for its rather tenuous recalling of "intercourse." See Yip 1970, 113.

What have we found thus far in this chapter? Examining the two *zushi* by Zheng Min and Zhang Cuo, in both cases we have identified devices which occur very early and serve thereafter as what we might call mild or attenuated formal indicators. They do not impose obvious or substantial formal features on the following poems, but they do create overtones of formal continuity, not at the level of strophes or lines but at a level of subtlety which only becomes visible when longer stretches of text, going beyond the single poem, are considered.

These elements, as we have seen them so far, include:

- (1) reduplicated syllables or repeated lexemes;
- (2) obvious semantic continuity between one poem and the next, as when a subject presented in one poem is commented on in a following one;
- (3) "modules" which recur, albeit at irregular intervals, so as to create the temporary impression or illusion of return to a rhythmic impulse characteristic of the earliest lines of the suite.

To these we may add a feature which we have not yet explicitly remarked: the poem boundary, that is, the very fact that the individual poems are separate, as indicated by their being numbered and held apart by typographic space. This boundary does not in itself convey anything at the content level, but it does give extra highlighting, and thereby identity, to the other factors. In other words, an item which is repeated across the poem boundary somehow seems to be a higher-level repetition, and hence a more significant factor in the overall structure of the suite, than one which only occurs within the boundaries of a single poem. It must be admitted that in Zheng Min's cycle, these factors really apply in their full force only to the first couple of poems, after which their function is taken over by thematic/semantic coherence and recurrent clusters of *similar* rather than identical words and images. But whether these repetitions are exact or approximate, they represent a still-recognizable attenuation or modulation of what in a more traditional day would have had to be an explicit structure maintained throughout – such that in the modern poem the *suggestion of recurrence, hence of an overall operative form*, can function as what formerly would have *been* form. The local implication, the allusive partial mimicry of form, suffices.

If the factor we are now discussing, the poem boundary, is as important as we are provisionally taking it to be, a question that immediately arises is whether it makes a difference what *kind* of boundary is in effect. Specifically, is the function of the poem boundary the same regardless whether the individual poems are *all of equal length*?

To get some light on this question, it will be useful to look now at another modern Chinese *zushi* that is *not* made up either of sonnets or of any other kind of regular verse. Our example will be the *Sutra Leaves* suite by another poet famous in Taiwan, Yang Lingye.⁸ The suite is composed of thirteen poems or "Leaves." The first three, in the original followed by a translation, read as follows:

貝葉

第一葉

鎖住

我的大千世界之中，有
你，有我。在貝葉之上，

我們是如來的見證。
兩顆舍利，植我瞳中之瞳，
映我心中之心，綴於菩提樹頂。
一燈。如朝暮星辰隨我而往。

隨我而往：
三千大千世界載於一葉，
藏於我掌，遂如舍利流轉於
你的瞳。

今夜，七級浮屠更玲瓏了。
築飾以髮髻之姿，在雲中，罄韻
漸杳。惟有耳畔風鈴，搖醒
萬年戰鼓，搖醒赤壁火把。遂
檠檠而鳴，熊熊而燃，夜不再鏽。

⁸ Yang Lingye, pseudonym of Huang Zhongcong, 1923-1994. For a thematic interpretation of the *Sutra Leaves* suite, see Haft 1995. Many thanks go to Lucia Hau-Yoon, William Tay, T. I. Ong-Oey, and Warren K. J. Sung for their help with this very difficult text.

The text of the original here is taken from Zhang Mo et al. 1977, 60-78. For a full translation, see my English version in Findeisen and Gassmann 1998, 387-399, or my Dutch version in *Het trage vuur* 4 (1998), 57-77.

在你瞳中，夜不再鏽。
夜不再鏽，在我心中。

一浮屠之玉立。
一貝葉之覆載。
一舍利之圓明。

鎖住。我心。
鎖住。我瞳。
夜很美。夜不再鏽。

第二葉

雞啼五點時刻上，
讀窗額一角星圖，
瞳遂在十字座醒駐。

沒有風。
髮梢蝴蝶想飛，
踩在腳底的太陽想飛。
而窗裏。窗外。
雞聲鎖住五點時刻。

飲我第一杯曙色，復妝飾
你額。你瞳。你唇。以及振動的
蝴蝶翅羽之上。而雞聲鎖住五點時刻，夜不再鏽。

欲望的神秘洩漏於樹葉每一齒緣，
而星子們不再渴想星座的睡眠。
仰視我的神，夜在唇際。這瞬間
光輝，遂有化石的輕柔。
建築。不鏽。
夜。不鏽。

我手觸覺我自己，這時刻
 一種饑餓壓迫我吃一本書的故事。
 而我的神，顫慄於時鐘五點上。
 髮梢無語。
 床第無夢。
 不銹夜，折疊於貝葉之上。

第三葉

我觀我自在。
 貝葉之第三葉，
 無色之姿。
 我即色。
 我即空。
 即第三葉。

葉中我即如來
 花中我即世界
 我孕於第三葉。
 我祭於第三葉。
 無花果核中之核，無夢。無礙。

核中無我。我心有核。
 我心無核。核中有我。
 我來。我去。

我聞。我思。
 如是。如是。我在其中。

First Leaf

Locked within my galaxy
 are you and I. Upon a Sutra Leaf
 we are witnesses to the Buddha.
 Two holy relics, planted

in the eyes within my eyes,
 illuminate the heart within my heart,
 festoon the top of the Bodhi Tree.
 A lamp. Goes with me
 like the stars of morning and evening.

Goes with me:
 the cosmos is carried on a single Leaf,
 hidden in my palm. And like a relic
 it flashes in your eyes.

Tonight the Seven-Story Pagoda is more elegant than ever,
 adorned with the charm of a coiffure.
 Bell tones fade within the clouds.
 There is only the wind chime beside your ear
 to awaken with its swaying
 the war drums, the fire of the centuries.
 And in that rolling sound,
 that roaring blaze,
 the night will rust no longer.

Within your eyes
 the night will rust no longer.
 The night will rust no longer in my heart.

The ravishing posture of a pagoda.
 The boundless content of a leaf.
 The round brightness of a relic.

Locked within. My heart.
 Locked within. My eyes.

The night is very beautiful.
 The night will rust no longer.

Second Leaf

At the moment of cock's cry, five o'clock,
 I am reading a patch of constellations
 in the corner of the window.
 My eyes awaken, fixed on the Cross.

No wind.

The butterfly on your hair-tips wants to fly,
 the sun your feet hold down wants to fly.
 But inside the window. Outside the window.
 The cock's cry locks the time
 at five o'clock.

I swallow the first cupful of daylight
 which adorns once again
 your brow, eyes, lips.
 The vibrating wings of a butterfly.
 And the cock's cry locks the time
 at five o'clock,
 the night will rust no longer.

The mystery of desire leaks forth
 from the edge of every leaf
 and the stars no longer thirst
 for the sleep of constellations.
 I look up at my Lady,
 my Self. Night upon those lips.
 The momentary radiance
 has the soft smoothness of a fossil.
 The structure. Does not rust.
 The night. Does not rust.
 My hand feels myself, and at that moment
 a hunger compels me
 to swallow the story in a book.
 But my Lady is trembling
 at five o'clock.
 The hair-tips: no words.
 The bed: no dream.
 The night which will not rust
 lies folded on a Sutra Leaf.

Third Leaf

I behold myself unencumbered.
 The third of the Sutra Leaves:
 the Posture of Formlessness.
 Ego is Form.
 Ego is the Void.
 It is the Third Leaf.
 The ego in a leaf is the Buddha.

The ego in a flower is the world.
 I am conceived in the Third Leaf.
 I am constructed in the Third Leaf.

The kernel within the kernel of a fig
 has no dreams,
 knows no obstruction.

When there is no ego in the kernel
 there is a kernel in my mind.
 When there is no kernel in my mind
 there is ego in the kernel.
 Ego comes. Ego goes.
 Ego hears. Ego thinks.
 Thus. Thus. Ego is in the midst of it.

Even in translation, in *First Leaf* it is easy to see the way in which key words and phrases are repeated, sometimes in immediate succession and sometimes separated by longish portions of text. What is not quite so obvious in the translation but stands out emphatically in the original is that these key words or phrases are also associated with clear rhythmic groupings or modules, which are set off typographically by line boundaries, periods and commas. For example, in the original the very first line consists of the two characters *suo zhu* ("locked within"). Not only is this phrase repeated literally several times later in the poem, but by initiating the poem formally and then recurring, it serves to set up the feeling of an independent two-syllable module as a recurrent rhythmic element. It is rhythmically echoed by other two-syllable modules: *wo xin* "my heart" and *wo tong* "my eyes." These in turn are soon echoed, once the poem boundary is crossed, by the *ni e, ni tong, ni chun* ("your brow, your eyes, your lips") of *Second Leaf*. Later in *Second Leaf*, *bu xiu* "do not rust" picks up this rhythm again, shortly before it will carry over into *Third Leaf* in the extended block of two-syllable modules

wo lai. wo qu.
 wo wen. wo si.
 ru shi. ru shi...

("Ego comes. Ego goes./ Ego hears. Ego thinks./ Thus. Thus...") This latter group is immediately followed by a four-syllable phrase: *wo zai qi zhong* ("Ego is in the midst of it"). This element in turn rhythmically echoes quite a number of other four-syllable groups, set off by punctuation and/or lineation, that have occurred at

irregular intervals since the *liang ke she li* ("two holy relics") and *sui wo er wang* ("goes with me") in lines 7 and 8 of *First Leaf*.

Some of the two-syllable groups are like condensed recapitulations of longer phrases that have previously occurred. (In this sense, they are reminiscent of the *hang* in Zhang Cuo's suite, which calls to mind not only its own previous appearances but also those of the phrase *shi si hang* in which it also frequently figures.) For example, in the last three lines of *First Leaf*, the *wo xin* and *wo tong* are like summary flashbacks to the longer phrases *wo tong zhong zhi tong* ("the eyes within my eyes") and *wo xin zhong zhi xin* ("the heart within my heart"). The element *bu xiu* ("does not rust") in *Second Leaf* suggests a recapitulation of the four occurrences of *ye bu zai xiu* ("the night will rust no longer") in *First Leaf*. It is as if these periodic returns to the two-syllable module, both rhythmically and semantically, bring the reader back to the sensation of an underlying "home base" unit underpinning the otherwise irregular text. (The frequent four-character elements, of course, inasmuch as they are redoublings of the two-character unit, actually serve to re-confirm it at the same time that they vary it.)

What we see happening here is reminiscent of similar processes in the opening passages of Zheng Min's and Zhang Cuo's suites and of the *Nineteen Ancient Poems*. Very early on, a small number of core elements (rhythmic, lexical, grammatical and/or semantic) are given prominence by repetition in identical or near-identical form. They then as it were emanate through the following text, resurfacing at irregular intervals as what we may call "recurrent recognizables," and recalling their origins wherever they do so. These core emanations convey an impression of unity and continuity which is undeniably present despite the fact that it is *not based on regularity*. In our next chapter we will return to this very important notion: a formal unity which is not specifiable in terms of a single numerically or otherwise *predictable* factor. To anticipate very briefly that discussion, we can suggest here that whereas in traditional poetry the formal underpinnings are effective exactly because they are specifiable (hence expectable) in advance, in certain forms of modern verse, apparently including the *zushi*, factors radiating out in a fashion so loose as to seem random may take on unexpected effectiveness as markers of emphasis, coherence, and overall direction.

Since the emanations take on their identity, indeed are meaningfully in existence, only over the course of a context longer than the individual poems, they can operate without obstructing other formal elements which may be present in the latter. That is, at the immediate local level, the emanations may be obscured or largely replaced by more obvious formal factors. It is this quality which makes it so easily possible to read the *zushi* both as a full suite and as a group of independent poems.

Going back for a moment to compare the suites by Zheng Min and Zhang Cuo, we note that of these two, it is exactly Zheng Min's, in which we have seen the emanational elements to be more limited, which makes very prominent use of rhyme and line assonance as binding factors at the level of the original poems. Zhang Cuo's suite is virtually without rhyme or obvious regularities at the line level, but it is an outstanding example of intensive repetition of lexical, sonic and thematic keynotes which operate at both intra-poem and supra-poem levels. Recalling our analyses of Feng Zhi's poems in Chapter 4, once again we conclude that formal integrity can be of widely varying kinds, that the various kinds can all be valid, and that one kind can cede prominence to another in the course of a single work.

In this chapter, looking at three modern and one ancient *zushi*, we have seen that the emanation of local elements occurring early in the suite can be identified in one form or another in all of them, and that in all of them there is a sense of formal significance attaching to the repetition of the emanating elements across poem boundaries. We are left with the question we have already posed above, as to whether the *nature* of the poem boundary is important: is a *zushi* that is made up of sonnets *significantly* different in a formal sense than a *zushi* that is not?

Probably not. There is no doubt that the existence of poem boundaries indispensably contributes to the effectiveness of the elements in what we have been calling "emanation." But it is not easy to see why sonnet form should be inherently more effective than any other form as a means of setting off one poem from another, as long as the internal unity of each individual poem is as strongly felt as, say, in *Sutra Leaves* or the *Nineteen Ancient Poems*. In both these suites, the length of the individual poems varies, but their distinctiveness in thematics and imagery is sufficient to make one different from another. What seems paramount here is that there should be some clearly sensed closure at the end of each poem, however exactly it is achieved. Of course, the use of the sonnet form lends special foregrounding to the end of each poem by setting up the expectation of a regularly recurrent boundary. But one would hardly want to claim that Yang Lingye's *Sutra Leaves* do not in their own way generate an equally effective sense of satisfying rhythm, fullness of statement, and appropriateness of image sequence toward the end of each poem. Perhaps the best conclusion we may draw here is that the sonnet, both by its regular periodic form and by its strong traditional premise of coherent treatment of an identifiable theme within one and the same poem, tends inherently to create closure whereas the free-verse poet may have to work extra hard to build it by means of other parameters.

CHAPTER 8

THREE WORLDS IN ONE: ON THE SONNET AS A NATURAL FORM OF MODERN CHINESE POETRY

The sonnet has often been compared to the *lǔshi*, which from the Tang Dynasty (618-907) till well into the 20th century was the most prestigious classical Chinese poetic form.¹ It is no exaggeration to say that in traditional China any well-educated person was expected to be able to compose at least technically correct *lǔshi*. Writers of any prominence typically knew hundreds of *lǔshi* by heart, and their own oeuvres often included hundreds if not thousands of poems in this form. This broad basis of currency and standing in society is one feature which the *lǔshi* shares with the sonnet in traditional European times, but there are formal elements, as well, which are comparable. Like the sonnet, the *lǔshi* is a short, compact form which can be read, and in principle also written, at a single sitting.² Again like the sonnet (at least in traditional times), the *lǔshi* is a strict form which obeys rules that are not dependent on the vagaries of inspiration or of the author's personality: it is, in other words, a recognized part of the established cultural apparatus of society. Distinct from this feature but akin to it is a third quality of agreement between the two forms: both sonnet and *lǔshi* are supposed to embody a rational and at least reasonably accessible train of thought. As we shall shortly see, a characteristic progression of thought during the course of the poem has sometimes been taken to be at least as distinctive of the sonnet as the form's more obvious technical traits.³ It is this quality, making the poem at least in principle susceptible of interpretation by well-educated readers in general rather than only by an initiated circle of devotees applying special and little-accepted aesthetic standards, which drastically sets off both sonnet and *lǔshi* from much 20th-century poetry, whether Western or Chinese, that has in its own day been regarded as avant-garde.

¹ The comparison is almost proverbial in educated circles in China and perhaps cannot be traced to a single source. Worthwhile reading in which the comparison is made would include David Hawkes' very informative and useful article "Chinese Poetry and the English Reader" (Hawkes 1971), and Achilles Fang, "From Imagism to Whitmanism in Recent Chinese Poetry: A Search for Poetics that Failed" (Fang 1950).

Very recently, the contemporary poet Zhang Zao, who besides writing sonnets is poetry editor of the influential journal *Jintian* (Today), has reaffirmed the parallel, in present-day Chinese poets' eyes, between the sonnet and "the Tang-Dynasty *lǔshi*." (Quoted from personal correspondence, December 1996).

² A leading contemporary Dutch practitioner of the form, Jan Kuijper, has said he cannot imagine why anyone should need more than an hour to write a sonnet. His book *Wendingen, sonnetten 1970-1990* (Amsterdam: Querido 1992), representing his collected works in the genre during twenty years, contains no more than 120 pages of text: an average of one minute of writing per day!

³ See Michael R. G. Spiller's excellent study of the origins and development of the Renaissance sonnet (Spiller 1992). In his initial chapter, "The Sonnet and Its Space," Spiller points out that in the

In the 1920s Wen Yiduo wrote that "fourteen lines and a rhyme scheme" were "necessary but unimportant" conditions for an acceptable sonnet; more important was the formal divide between the octave and the sestet. He went on to say that "the strictest sonnet" was divided into four successive strophes comprising respectively four lines, four, and then either three plus three or four plus two. The successive strophes all had their own function in the buildup of the thought, and Wen Yiduo used the same terms for them that traditional Chinese poetics assigned to the successive four couplets of the *lǔshi*. The four, in order, were *qi* (beginning), *cheng* (continuation), *zhuan* (turning, which could just as well be a literal translation of the Italian *volta*!), and *he* (closing or conclusion).⁴

A sonnet we have already studied in this book – Shakespeare's Sonnet 65 – will serve as a clear example of Wen Yiduo's four stages, and we will repeat it here with the strophes typographically separated for clarity:

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'er-sways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?

O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out
Against the wreckful siege of battering days,
When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?

O fearful meditation! where, alack,
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?

O, none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

Here the first strophe initiates the theme (Wen Yiduo's *qi*); the second takes up and continues (*cheng*) the discussion with a neat contrast by pointing out that not only soft but also seemingly "impregnable" things are helpless against mortality; the third gives the turning (*zhuan*) by which the poet recognizes that all this applies not only to things in the external world but also to his own "meditating" mind and all

traditional sonnet, very occasionally one of the formal parameters may allow of deviation as long as a more essential overall unity of characteristic presentation is preserved.

⁴ Wen Yiduo 1988.

that it most loves and values; and in the fourth the poet concludes (*he*) that if there is any answer at all, it lies in writing the poem which he is now writing.

If the unfolding of this sonnet is clear at the level of thought or content, it is no less clearly underpinned by formal elements. As we are now examining not the individual lines but the poem as a whole as it develops from beginning to end, we will find here most relevant those formal factors which transcend the individual line, binding two or more lines. As these factors become successively evident only as we examine the printed page from top to bottom, we can refer to this group of elements as Vertical Binding Elements. In the case of Shakespeare's sonnet, they are:

- (1) the overall number of lines (what we have previously called the "sonnet envelope"), confirming that this poem is a sonnet and that the usual formal and non-formal sonnet features may be expected to apply;
- (2) the rhyme scheme, confirming that the sonnet is of the "Shakespearean" or "English" type, at the same time suggesting the probable strophic divisions;⁵ and
- (3) the strophic scheme itself.

To recall just how closely the sonnet can resemble the *lǔshǐ*, we will now examine a famous exemplar of the latter. Our example will be *Chun wang* "Spring prospect" by Du Fu (712-770), whom most Chinese at least ritually agree to have been their nation's greatest poet of all time. The poem is one of the standard favorites among this famous poet's works; included in such proverbial anthologies as the mid-18th-century *Tangshi sanbai shou* (Three hundred Tang poems in *shi* form), it has been one of the most widely memorized Chinese poems. Our translation, which is intended to do no more than to make visible the main features of the poem's form and content for purposes of discussion, has five stresses per line as an analog to the five syllables, all more or less stressed, in the original.⁶ The translation employs short, potentially independent sentences or sentence-like phrases to indicate the presence of such elements in the original. At the end of lines 2, 4, 6 and 8, the assonance on the short vowel sound -i- is a reminder that these words rhyme in the original. To give visual foregrounding to the strophic scheme, we will divide the poem typographically into couplets.

⁵ Spiller points out (p. 159) that although Shakespeare's practice is not invariable in this regard, "almost all his octaves fall into two distinct sense units, 4 and 4, which are also distinct syntactical units; there is almost always a sense break between octave and sestet..."

⁶ This translation is based more or less on the literal character-by-character version given by David Hawkes in Hawkes 1967, 47-48. I have adapted it in the direction of making the grammar somewhat more fluent while keeping the parallelism and caesurae of the original as visible as possible; the assonance at the end of the even lines is also my own.

Spring prospect

The state ruined; hills and streams remain.
City in spring: grass and trees thick.

Moved by the times, flowers sprinkle tears.
Hating separation, birds startle with chagrin.

Signal fires: throughout three months.
A letter from home: worth a thousand *jin*.

A white-haired head: scratch it, it's even shorter.
It's sure to leave: no hold for the hairpin.

國破山河在
城春草木深
感時花濺淚
恨別鳥驚心
烽火連三月
家書抵萬金
白頭搔更短
渾欲不勝簪

Looking first at the features which in our Shakespeare example we called Vertical Binding Elements, we can easily identify:

- (1) the overall number of lines: eight, as is standard for the *lǚshī* form;
- (2) the rhyme scheme, such that all the even-numbered lines rhyme with each other; and
- (3) the strophic scheme. This element is underlined by the rhyme positions at the end of every second line but also, and very importantly, by the clear thematic division of labor among the couplets. The first two lines (the *qi* or opening) set the scene: the "state" is described as "ruined" because the poem was written in 757 during the occupation of the capital city of the Empire by rebel troops under An Lushan; yet the world of nature lives on, apparently unaffected by the ups and downs of civilization. In the second couplet (the *cheng* or continuation), nature turns out on closer

examination not really to be so unaffected: the "flowers" are "moved by the times," and like the "birds" who feel "chagrin," they evince human-like feelings in their "tears." This second couplet "continues" the first in another way: "spring" in the first couplet is semantically akin to "times" in the second. In the third couplet (the *zhuan* or turning), what has so far been public or impersonal suddenly emerges in its full import for the poet as a person: the continuing months-long military "signal fires" make this a period of isolation in which normal human relations are impossible, and a "letter from home" would be "worth a thousand" *jin* or taels. Line 5 makes more personally relevant the quality of "time" in line 3, just as line 6 with its "letter from home" echoes in another dimension the "separation" of line 4.⁷ In the final couplet (the *he* or conclusion), the poet brings together all these reflections by placing himself in time as an aging man whose hair will soon no longer even support a hairpin.

Up to this point in our analysis, we have been able to use the same categories of Vertical Binding Elements that we applied to the Shakespeare sonnet. But the Chinese poem has others as well:

- (4) grammatical parallelism, the device by which within one and the same couplet, the word occupying a given position within the first line shows both syntactic and semantic affinity with the word that occupies the same position in the following line. For example, in lines 3 and 4, "moved by the times" is parallel to "hating separation," while "flowers sprinkle tears" is parallel to "birds startle with chagrin." In the following couplet, "signal fires" and "a letter from home" are both nominal elements conveying a sense of distance, while "throughout three months" and "worth a thousand *jin*" are parallel phrases involving a specified quantity. In the *lǔshi* form, this feature of parallelism is obligatory in the two inner couplets, that is, lines 3 and 4 and lines 5 and 6. In our example poem, Du Fu goes beyond strict formal requirements by applying this device in the initial couplet as well: his "hills and streams remain" where the "grass and trees" are "thick."
- (5) Linked to this fourth feature, similarly applying to the couplets, is the device of tone contrast, which is so specific to the Chinese language that we cannot even suggest it in our translation. Briefly, the four possible traditional tones of Chinese words are divided into two overall classes called "level" and "oblique;" in the *lǔshi*, within a couplet, at least the

⁷ For a good bread-and-butter explication of this poem's internal structure in Chinese, see Qiu Xieyou 1981, 192-193.

words in the corresponding even-numbered positions of each line are supposed to belong to opposite classes.⁸

- (6) Still further accentuating the Vertical Binding of the internal couplets is the subtle contrast supplied by the simultaneous operation of features (4) and (5), such that the two lines of certain couplets, at the same time that they are in grammatical and semantic *parallel*, are in tonal *contrast*. In other words, in our example, in lines 3 and 4 *jian* and *jing* ("sprinkle" and "startle") are semantically parallel in the sense of both being verbs, but in terms of the traditional tonal classification, *jian* is "oblique" whereas *jing* is "level." This subtle double contrast, by which the lines of the inner couplets are played off against each other in two different dimensions by different features of the same words involved, gives to the *lüshi* an expressive density, we might say a formal thickness of perceptible echoing, which is frankly beyond the reach of the English translator.

What clearly emerges from all this is that the *lüshi* on the one hand resembles the sonnet quite closely in its more generalizeable features, while on the other hand it is still more technically complex, having a number of obligatory formal parameters which have no equivalent in the Western sonnet. We can now go on to examine the modern Chinese sonnet in a similar formal framework. The modern Chinese sonnets we have studied in this book have as Vertical Binding Elements:

- (1) the overall fixed number of lines: 14;
- (2) rhyme of one sort or another; and
- (3) identifiable strophic groupings, again of one sort or another.

Coming to the classical Chinese *lüshi*'s element (4), parallelism, in a general way it can be said that parallelism, whether or not applied with strict formal consistency, does often occur in the modern Chinese sonnet. We have seen numerous examples, especially, in our analyses of the sonnets by Feng Zhi and Zheng Min. The great difference with respect to the *lüshi* is that in the modern poem, the use of this feature is optional.

As for element (5) of the *lüshi*, tone contrast, matters are complex, but there seems no alternative to the overall conclusion that tone contrast is nowadays no longer a plausible structuring element in Chinese poetry. Though we saw in our

⁸ For a succinct presentation of the formal requirements by G. B. Downer and A. C. Graham, see the superb anthology *Poems of the Late T'ang* (Graham 1968), 26.

discussion of this factor in Chapter 3 that individual Chinese poets do still occasionally reveal an awareness of tones as one aesthetic parameter among many, on the whole the trend in modern Chinese poetry has been for tones to be eclipsed by other linguistic factors having more contrastive value.

Modern Chinese poets have, however, sometimes consciously wondered whether the loss of classical tone contrast could be compensated by some other factor in modern Chinese. One of the same poets whom in Chapter 3 we mentioned as sensitive to tones, Bian Zhilin, has suggested that in successive lines of a modern poem, the relative length or shortness (in terms of number of syllables) of the *dun* occupying identical positions in the lines, should be varied, somewhat similarly to the way in which tone categories were contrasted in classical Chinese verse.⁹

If variations in *dun* patterning are one possible element binding successive lines through parallel or contrast, another is the line-internal rhyme which in Chapter 5 we saw the Nine Leaves poets using to great effect. This in turn reminds us of the line assonance present in some of the poems by Feng Zhi and Zheng Min that we have studied, as well as what we called Mu Mutian's "rhythmic suspensions" and the "lines within lines" in the sonnets of Zhu Xiang. All of these factors can serve to go beyond the minimal technical requirements of the sonnet, linking specific parts of the poem along a line of formal relationship that is *not necessarily present in the rest of the poem*. Just as in the classical *lǔshī* the feature of grammatical parallelism is obligatory only in the middle couplets and often present only in them, in a modern sonnet there can be pairs or groups of lines which share some marked formal feature *which only applies to them*.

Thinking on along these lines, we recall that in our analysis of several *zushi* in Chapter 7, this notion of a formal device which is only sporadically or locally present was especially useful. In the *zushi* composed of sonnets, in addition to the sonnet envelope and whatever other features of the individual sonnet form the author chooses to apply, there is potentially present in each poem something of the emanational elements laid down toward the beginning of the suite. As the *zushi* is pre-eminently a long form, in which Vertical Binding Elements are both especially important and especially difficult to maintain, it is only natural that we find use being made in it of non-rigid formal factors whose application can be adjusted to the local situation.

The last few factors we have mentioned as potentially relevant to the vertical structuring of the modern Chinese sonnet – *dun* patterning, line assonance, internal rhyme, rhythmic suspensions and "lines within lines" – all share one outstanding feature of difference from the first three features we identified in both the *lǔshī* and

⁹ Bian Zhilin 1992, 138. See also Bian Zhilin 1983b, especially pages 210-211.

the traditional European sonnet, in that *their use is optional*. For clarity, we may set out the features we have so far discussed in the form of a chart comparing the traditional English sonnet, the modern Chinese sonnet, and the *lǔshi*:

<i>English sonnet</i>	<i>Chinese sonnet</i>	<i>lǔshi</i>
14-line “envelope”	14-line “envelope”	8-line “envelope”
rhyme scheme	*rhyme scheme, rhyme reduplication	rhyme scheme
strophic scheme	*strophic scheme	strophic scheme
*grammatical parallelism	*grammatical parallelism	grammatical parallelism
*enjambement	*relative placement of <i>dun</i> in lines	tone contrast
	*line assonance	effect of simultaneous parallelism and tone contrast
	*patterned internal rhyme or rhythmic or punctuation groups; “yin” and “yang” rhymes	

Vertical Binding Elements (asterisked elements are optional)

Now that we have the Vertical Binding Elements in view, it is logical to go on to investigate which Horizontal Binding Elements are present in our three types of poetry. In other words, we can now inquire as to the factors which make for formal coherence *within each individual line*. Once again we can begin with Shakespeare's sonnet 65. The first four lines in the original read

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'er-sways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?

Traditional schoolroom analysis calls the meter of this passage “iambic pentameter” and breaks down the lines into regularly alternating prominent and non-prominent syllables as follows:

since BRASS/ nor STONE/ nor EARTH/ nor BOUND/ less SEA
but SAD/ mor TAL/ i TY/ oe'r SWAYS/ their POW [er]
HOW with/ this RAGE/ shall BEAU/ ty HOLD/ a PLEA

whose AC/ tion IS/ no STRON/ ger THAN/ a FLOW [er]

Each of the elements here bracketed is said to be a "foot." The first foot of the third line is said to be an "inversion" by which the prominent syllable is not the second but the first of the foot.¹⁰ In the English iambic pentameter line, the horizontal binding is entirely a matter of whether the line can be construed as containing five feet, and whether the feet are all either clearly iambic or allowable variants (as in inversion, or in the occasional "substitution" of a three-syllable foot). As long as those conditions are fulfilled, the line is at least formally acceptable. It need not necessarily be isosyllabic (having always ten syllables) as long as supernumerary or deleted syllables can be justified. Enjambement is allowed: in other words, the line does not have to constitute a complete syntactic unit. Though a caesura is allowed, it is not required, and if it occurs there is no required place for it to occur. These last features are worth mentioning at this point because they will turn out to be important differences between the English sonnet and the classical Chinese *lǔshi*.

Liang Zongdai's translation of this passage from Shakespeare reads in transcription:

Jiran tong, shi, huo dadi, huo wubian de hai,
meiyou bu qufu yu na yincande wuchang,
mei, tade huoli bi yiduo hua hai roucui,
zen neng he ta na sushade yanwei dikang?

既然銅、石、或大地、或無邊的海，
沒有不屈服於那陰慘的無常，
美，她的活力比一朵花還柔脆，

¹⁰ I here deliberately use the term "traditional schoolroom analysis" to justify passing very lightly over the desperate problems which arise as soon as one attempts truly detailed analysis of meter. Once one goes beyond the level of the sort of vaguely generalizing treatment I am calling "schoolroom," which deliberately exaggerates and distorts the elements of the line so as to cram them into superficial alignment with an oversimplified preconception which at least succeeds in temporarily imposing some weak sort of dubious regularity upon phenomena which are in fact dizzyingly disparate – one is forced to wade into an area of discussion and polemic which, notwithstanding the centuries-long accumulation of supposedly relevant literature on the subject, remains obviously a free-for-all. Scholarly discussions as to what does or does not constitute "stress," "accent," "prominence," or "ictus"; whether the basis of meter is abstract or concrete; whether isochrony is the cause or the effect of meter; whether meter was historically built up from lower-level syntactic building-blocks or whether, on the contrary, the syntax of poems became ingrown along the lines of pre-existent meter; and the like – appear to me clearly to proceed from such incompatible premises and attitudes as to be quite beyond resolution. The influence upon Chinese writers of George Saintsbury, author of *Historical Manual of English Prosody* and other works, who is quoted as an authority by both Zhu Xiang and Liang Zongdai, could be in itself the subject of an interesting article.

怎能和他那肅殺的嚴威抵抗？

The most obvious formal feature here is that each line contains exactly twelve syllables. This formal characteristic holds throughout all Liang's translations of all 154 of Shakespeare's sonnets save for two lines in Sonnet 87.¹¹ It also holds true for five of the six original sonnets which he wrote between 1933 and 1939 and published in 1943 as part of a book of his poems called *Hudi feng* (Gourd flute airs).¹² Wang Li, discussing Liang Zongdai in the chapter on modern verse in his *Chinese Prosody*, emphasizes the parallel between Liang's twelve-syllable line and the French alexandrine with which Liang had become thoroughly familiar.¹³

The recurrent twelve-syllable line is undoubtedly Liang Zongdai's trademark as a writer or translator of sonnets; yet it is known that he considered not only isosyllabicity but also the *pai* or "beat" as an important prosodic factor. In "On Rhythm," one of the short prose pieces Liang published in 1935 and 1936 in the literary section of the *Da Gong Bao*, he claimed that the sonnets he was then writing were intended to have twelve syllables and five *pai* per line.¹⁴

In our Shakespeare example, it is not quite clear whether the five-*pai* premise is also intended to apply. The four lines of Chinese we have transcribed above could conceivably be construed as

jiran/ tong shi/ huo dadi/ huo wubiande/ hai
mei you bu/ qufu/ yu na/ yincande/ wuchang
mei tade/ huoli/ bi yiduo/ hua hai/ roucui
zen neng/ he ta na/ sushade/ yanwei/ dikang

But the next line of the original (the fifth):

O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out

emerges in Liang's translation as

o, xiatian wenxinde huxi zen neng zhichi

哦，夏天溫馨的呼息怎能支持

¹¹ Fung 1994, 152. It is truly intriguing that such a technically fastidious poet and translator as Liang Zongdai should have built exactly two deviant lines into his monumental sequence of translations. One wonders whether this particular passage had for him some private significance which impelled him to set it apart. On the other hand, in our zeal to discover a deep meaning in everything we find in a poem, we must not overlook the possibility that the poet simply made a mistake.

¹² Qian Guangpei 1988, 45-52. Qian cites the publisher of *Hudi feng* as Hua Xu She, 1943.

¹³ Wang Li 1979, 948.

¹⁴ Liang Zongdai, "Guanyu yinjie." In Liang Zongdai 1984, 175-178. Quote from page 176.

The initial particle *o* seems to demand a *pai* or *dun* for itself, so that the line becomes

o/ xiatian/ wenxinde/ huxi/ zen neng/ zhichi

or six "beats." The same phenomenon is even clearer four lines later, where Liang uses a particle at both the beginning and the end of the line:

o, hairende sixiang! shiguangde zhenshi, ai

哦，駭人的思想！時光的珍飾，唉，

It is truly difficult here to see how this line can be read other than

o/ hairende/ sixiang/ shiguangde/ zhenshi/ ai

– again, clearly six "beats," *pai*, *dun*, or however we choose to call them.

The conclusion would seem to be that in his Shakespeare versions at any rate, Liang Zongdai's most indisputable formal anchorage is his isosyllabicity. In this respect he shows affinity both with Zhu Xiang's sonnets and with the classical *lǔshi*. These affinities will find a place below in our chart of Horizontal Binding Elements; for the moment we will note that in the modern Chinese sonnet, isosyllabicity is one possible, and very well attested, Horizontal Binding Element.

As we saw in Chapter 1, from the 1920s on, isosyllabicity has been associated in many Chinese poets' minds with another form of regularity, based not on syllables but on *dun*. To see how this works in a translation from Shakespeare, we can now look at Bian Zhilin's version of Sonnet 65. The prosodic principles of the translation resemble those which Bian explained in the preface to his translation of *Hamlet*, published in 1956 but actually prepared in 1954.¹⁵ Where the English original shows five iambic feet to the line, Bian Zhilin's translation consistently employs five *dun* to the line. The *dun* or syllable group shows no fixed structure as regards placement of light or heavy stress or accents within it. The number of syllables per line varies from ten to fifteen. Most *dun* are composed of two or three characters (just as was the case in Wen Yiduo's "Dead Water"). When a single syllable which could potentially be a *dun* in itself occurs between two two-syllable *dun*, it commonly is assimilated to either the preceding or the following *dun*; in the

¹⁵ Bian Zhilin 1956. For a detailed discussion of this translation and its technical relevance to Bian's original poetry, see Haft 1983, 87-88, 118-122.

transcription below, we will indicate these syllables by placing them in square brackets.

The first lines of Bian's version of sonnet 65 are as follows:

jiran [shi] tieshi, dadi, wubiande haiyang,
 jinguan jianqiang, ye budi wuchang yiba,
 meimao you zen neng kongzhi [ta] zheizhong changkuang,
 lun liliang, ziji [hai] zhi di yiduo jiaohua

既然是鐵石、大地、無邊的海洋，
 盡管堅強，也不抵無常一霸，
 美貌又怎能控訴他這種猖狂，
 論力量，自己還只抵一朵嬌花？

The *dun* structure can be construed as follows:

jiran shi/ tieshi/ dadi/ wubiande/ haiyang
 jinguan/ jianqiang/ ye budi/ wuchang/ yiba
 meimao/ you zen neng/ kongzhi ta/ zheizhong/ changkuang
 lun liliang/ ziji/ hai zhi di/ yiduo/ jiaohua

As for the fifth line, which we saw Liang Zongdai apparently making somewhat longer through the use of two particles set off by punctuation, Bian manages to sustain the five-*dun* structure:

a, xiatian de fenfang zen neng dideliao

啊，夏天的芬芳怎能抵得了

which we can read as

a/ xiatian de/ fenfang/ zen neng/ dideliao

In much of Bian Zhilin's poetic oeuvre, the main Horizontal Binding Element is the number of *dun* per line. Occasionally this outstanding modern poet has produced a line structure in which not only the number of *dun* but their composition is regular, that is, the *dun* in corresponding positions in successive lines are of equal length. For our purposes an excellent example is "Air Force Fighters," a short-lined sonnet originally published in Bian's collection *Weilao xinji*

(Letters of comfort) during the anti-Japanese war of 1937-1945.¹⁶ As this poem forms a natural bridge to our discussion of Horizontal Binding Elements in the classical Chinese *lǔshi*, it will be worth our while to examine it in full. The poem in translation:

Air Force Fighters

It's up to your thunder and lightning
to protect the blue skies
to protect the white clouds
from suffering smudges –

condors of freedom,
linked up with the wide earth,
who want the country kept clean –
you have sharp eyes.

Lighter than a goose feather,
heavier than Mount T'ai,
wandering free and easy within your responsibility:

toiling immortals of men
who live or die in five minutes
and in a million concerned hearts!¹⁷

空軍戰士

要保衛藍天，
要保衛白雲，
不讓打污印，
靠你們雷電。

與大地相連，
自由的驚鷹，
要山河乾淨，

¹⁶ Kunming - Hong Kong: Mingri She, 1940. The contents of this collection have been reprinted in various later collections of Bian's poetry; see for instance Bian Zhilin 1979.

¹⁷ Translation and discussion in Haft 1983, 72-73. For original see Bian Zhilin 1979, 80.

你們有敏眼。

也輕於鴻毛，
也重於泰山，
責任內逍遙，

勞苦的人仙！
五分鐘死生，
千萬顆慢心！

The original in transcription, with *dun* boundaries indicated, reads

yao baowei/ lantian
yao baowei/ baiyun
bu rang da/ wuyin
kao nimen/ leidian

yu dadi/ xianglian
ziyoude/ jiuying
yao shanhe/ ganjing
nimen you/ mingyan
ye qing yu/ hongmao
ye zhong yu/ Taishan
zeren nei/ xiaoyao

laokude/ renxian
wufenzhong/ sisheng
qianwanke/ youxin¹⁸

Each line contains two *dun*; the first is always of three syllables and the second of two. As Wang Li points out in the chapter on modern verse in his *Chinese Prosody* (p. 868), the interesting thing about this structure is that it is a mirror image of the *dun* patterning of the classical *lǔshi*. Referring back to our example, Du Fu's "Spring Prospect," in each of the five-syllable lines there is a caesura after the first

¹⁸ I here quote the poem from Bian Zhilin 1979, 80. Zhang Manyi (1989, 75-76) quotes a different version with a variant last line. Admirable as her discussion of this poem (and her ferreting out of the early text version) is, I do not at all agree with her analysis of its rhyme structure. I think the structure of the octet is a-b-b-a a-b-b-a, and in the sestet, it defies my imagination why *shan* and *xian* should not be taken to rhyme with the very similar sounds in the "a" rhyme group of the octave.

two syllables. In our translation, this feature is visually indicated by a comma, colon, or semicolon after the first two stresses of each line.

The classical five-syllable *lǔshi*, then, shares with this poem by Bian Zhilin the Horizontal Binding Elements of (1) isosyllabicity and (2) an equal number of *dun* per line, albeit the latter are not of an identical number of syllables in corresponding positions in the two forms. But the classical poem has an additional feature as well: prescribed tone sequence. Full discussion of line-internal tone sequences in classical Chinese verse would go beyond the scope of this book, but here we can summarize by saying that in the five-syllable *lǔshi*, all but the first syllable of each line must theoretically belong to prescribed tone classes.¹⁹ We might say that in the *lǔshi*, there is a sort of counterpoint between the sub-rhythm set up by the caesurae within the lines and, superimposed upon it, a different formal regularity, perhaps auditorily less fundamental but still consciously perceptible, given by the recurrent tones of obligatory type in the standard positions. This last feature has no exact equivalent in modern Chinese verse in which tones play no prosodic role. Counterpoint of a different sort is, of course, present in Wen Yiduo's "Dead Water" meter, in which constantly recurring *numbers* of both syllables and *dun* are varied against alternating *composition* of the *dun*. Bian Zhilin has discussed on various occasions the possibility of using relatively longer and shorter *dun* to give an alternating effect somewhat comparable to that of the old tone sequences.²⁰ A parallel to this feature in Western verse might be seen in the interplay of metrical feet on the one hand and word boundaries or full stops occurring within the line on the other. Mentioning this "counterpoint" as a theoretical entity, however, does not mean it is easy to identify or apply in practice, as here again, scholarly opinions differ as to whether or not word boundaries affect meter.²¹ In any case, the counterpoint between the *lǔshi*'s tone sequences and the caesura positions is part and parcel of the form, whereas the counterpoints afforded by English word and phrase boundaries within the line can be applied ad libitum. As for the modern Chinese *dun*, various figures are possible: in Wen Yiduo's "Dead Water" the three-syllable *dun* was obligatorily present but could appear in any desired position in the line; in Bian Zhilin's "Air Force Fighters" it occupies the first position in the line throughout the sonnet.

¹⁹ Again a good starting reference would be Downer and Graham's succinct chart of the form and its variants, in Graham 1968, 26.

²⁰ See note 9 above.

²¹ For example, Seymour Chatman describes one long-standing tradition in which the foot is purely abstract in that an intense sound- or sense-pause may occur within it: "...two words separated by even the strongest juncture (say the one represented by a period) may occur within the same foot." In Chatman 1965, 117. On the other hand, John Lotz (1975, 139), working at a high level of generalization, says "*Sentence* and *word*...seem to be always relevant metrically."

Let us now set out the Horizontal Binding Elements we have identified in the *lǜshi*, the modern Chinese sonnet, and the English sonnet:

<i>English sonnet</i>	<i>Chinese sonnet</i>	<i>lǜshi</i>
5 feet per line	*isosyllabic line	isosyllabic line
each foot iambic or an allowable variant	*number of <i>dun</i> per line	number and placement of <i>dun</i> per line
	*placement of <i>dun</i> per line	interaction of <i>dun</i> and tone sequence
*contrapuntal use of word or phrase boundaries	*sub-line rhythm or punctuation groups	prescribed tone sequence

Horizontal Binding Elements (asterisked elements are optional)

Where Line Was, There Shall Stanza Be: Modern Poetry and the Verticalization of Verse Form

So far we have been discussing the Vertical and Horizontal Binding Elements separately, and for the purpose of getting the concepts clearly identified, that is undoubtedly a useful way to proceed. But as Clive Scott has shown in his important studies of French free verse,²² there is in practice a profound interaction between horizontal and vertical elements, such that they may even contribute to each other's definition. (In our analyses of the Chinese sonnets by Feng Zhi and Zheng Min, it was the cumulative effect of horizontal lines in succession that suggested the vertical concept of line assonance). As part of a sophisticated attack on any overly rigid concept of the French alexandrine ("...a line like this is an array of other effects before it is an alexandrine..."),²³ Scott shows that one and the same meter performs very differently when embedded in different vertical contexts; this can even go so far that, in Scott's view, a number of alexandrines in sequence can actually generate the effect of free verse.²⁴ Seeking for comparable elements in traditional and free verse, Scott sees in free verse, rather than an unworkable entity somehow less considerable than traditional verse, an element that can actually

²² Scott 1990, 1993.

²³ Scott 1993, 8. On the same page Scott quotes a French theorist, Benoit du Cornulier, to the effect that "an alexandrine needs a context of other alexandrines to achieve its metrical identity as an alexandrine" – in other words, the "vertical" context is necessary to confirm the "horizontal" definition of the line.

²⁴ Scott 1993, 12-24.

"reinforce the view...that the real locus of French rhythmic organization" is "not the line, but the stanza. With this difference, that the free-verse stanza affirms a rhythmic inimitability, which supersedes the line..."²⁵

This last phrase, "supersedes the line," of course fits in exactly with our own analyses of the short-lined sonnets by Feng Zhi and Zheng Min, in which we found it possible more or less to by-pass any internal analysis of the "horizontal" individual line, preoccupied as we were with the numerous and intricate relationships we saw evolving in the "vertical" relations at strophe and other extralinear levels. In other words, the lines were so short (by comparison with the five or even six feet of the traditional European sonnet), and so clearly dependent upon other lines for adequate definition of their formal function, that the lines as it were functioned *no longer as lines, but as the "feet" of a longer "line" built up of several of them!*

This concept – of formal units in modern poetry as it were taking over the function of what in traditional poetry were smaller-scale units, *so that the modern line corresponds proportionally to the traditional foot and the modern strophe to the traditional line* – implies that there has been a shift in the division of labor between horizontal and vertical elements. Another way to phrase it is that in the modern short-lined sonnet as we have seen Feng Zhi and Zheng Min employing it, *vertical factors become by far predominant, potentially even eclipsing the horizontal altogether, thus becoming virtually the only defining elements of the form.*

It will be our contention, though within the scope of this book we cannot attempt an overview of the evidence, that something very like this analysis is meaningfully applicable *not only to the modern Chinese sonnet, but to much modern Chinese free verse as well.* This notion is so important that we will devote much of the rest of this chapter to it, proceeding by way of a modern American poet whose attempt to reconstruct meter in a modern sense is not without resemblance to the efforts of 20th-century Chinese poets to build a new verse form allowing fluid numbers of syllables to fit into a new form of regularity.

William Carlos Williams and the "Variable Foot." *Freer Sonnets and Free Verse* Zheng Min has compared²⁶ – approvingly – the *dun* as used in modern Chinese verse to the "variable foot" proposed by the American poet William Carlos Williams (1883-1963). One of the great proponents of 20th-century American free verse, Williams was so outspoken, and at times so erratic in his shotgun-blast denunciations of what at least he thought of as "traditional" verse, that the

²⁵ Scott 1993, 22.

²⁶ Personal communication, June 1994.

American poet and critic Reed Whittemore, who later wrote a full-length biography of Williams, in 1957 called him "the most exuberant living despiser of the sonnet."²⁷ In his search for a modern element comparable in value if not in form to the traditional foot, Williams came up with the idea of the "variable foot," that is, a foot which had no fixed definition.

It must be admitted at the outset that in the minds of many who heard of it, the inherent paradoxality or implausibility of such a notion was certainly not made more acceptable by Williams' own written explanations of it, which were at least as vague as the concept itself. The poet Kenneth Rexroth, a friend of Williams', apparently found the whole idea so preposterous that in his own book about modern American poetry, he dismissed it as obviously a deliberate hoax, labelling Williams "the master of the put-on."²⁸ The poet and critic John Hollander has said (1975, 235): "As important a poet and visionary he was, his metrical remarks are those of a cranky autodidact who has never had anyone serious to talk to." Perhaps these remarks in turn mean no more than that for a certain category of reader, Williams' metrical (or non-metrical?) practice needed no theoretical justification in terms of any concept of "meter," fixed or variable.

For another category of (admiring) critic, Williams seemed successful exactly because, unbeknown to himself, he was merely presenting traditional verse in a fluid new guise. To examine this concept more closely, we can begin with a passage that has become a classic in the literature about Williams: an excerpt from a 1954 letter to Richard Eberhart in which Williams gave an example of the concrete application of the "variable foot":

"(1) The smell of the heat is boxwood
 (2) when rousing us
 (3) a movement of the air
 (4) stirs our thoughts
 (5) that had no life in them
 (6) to a life, a life in which

...
 ...

Count a single beat to each numeral. You may not agree with my ear, but that is the way I count the line. Over the whole poem it gives a pattern to

²⁷ Whittemore 1957, 305-306.

²⁸ Rexroth 1973, 79.

the meter that can be felt as a new measure. It gives resources to the ear which result in a language which we hear spoken about us every day..."²⁹

The "triadic" presentation, in which lines appeared upon the page in strophe-like groups of three with or without indentation, became one of the trademarks of Williams' later verse. Many readers undoubtedly took this to be no more than a typographical device unrelated to specifiable metrics. A few, however, could not resist trying to relate Williams' "variable" foot to its predecessors. John Ciardi, for example, claimed (not specifically in reference to this passage): "he (Williams) has stored himself so richly with the great measures of iambic pentameter that their march-and-go asserts itself just under his own best cadences."³⁰ A more concrete relation to pentameter was seen by Paul Goodman in the following passage from "The Sparrows":

Once
 at El Paso
 toward evening,
 I saw – and heard! –
 ten thousand sparrows
 who had come in from
 the desert³¹

According to Goodman:

These are the three beats of meaning to a line of normal English blank verse. (As in blank verse, Williams occasionally has two beats and occasionally four.) Quite often Williams's triplets are perfect pentameters: 'cannot surpass/ the insistence/ of his cheep'; 'more than a natural one./ His voice,/ his movements'; 'keen eyes,/ serviceable beak/ and general truculence'; 'does it portend?/ A war/ will not erase it.' There is, I choose quite at random, a pervasive blank verse with the usual variations. And within the poetic program of achieving the actual common speech unaltered, the most direct way of writing blank verses is to keep the triplets of meaning but to give up the pentameter..., rather filling each beat with whatever is required ametrically...³²

²⁹ William Carlos Williams, letter to Richard Eberhart, May 23, 1954. Quoted from Doyle 1980, 278.

³⁰ Ciardi 1954, quoted from Doyle 1980, 278-279.

³¹ Williams 1962, 130.

³² Goodman 1956, quoted in Doyle 1980, 297.

To my mind at least, the other examples Goodman quotes are incomparably more supportive of his thesis than the passage from "The Sparrow," in which I cannot find support at all. But that is not now at issue. From our point of view in this chapter, it is important that Williams himself, in the explanatory passage we have quoted above, stresses that the "pattern to the meter" is something that has validity "over the whole poem." That is, the individual line may be too short a unit with which to discern the presence of a "pattern." Goodman, in relating the triads of Williams' lineation to "the three beats of meaning to a line of normal English blank verse," is saying something very similar. He is taking the position, common in the literature on blank verse, that the five feet of the form's meter are underlain by a smaller number of actually perceived or performed stresses in reading or recitation.³³ By saying essentially that Williams gives us the underlying stratum of pentameter by presenting only the actually vital "three beats of meaning" rather than the five feet of the traditionally specified line, and presenting these three beats as spread over three typographic lines, he is saying that *when seen in a "vertical" context, Williams' meter can be construed as a modern rewriting of what was traditionally "horizontal."*

But this is not the only thing which, in the passage we have quoted, Goodman has to say about Williams' verse form. It is irresistible at this point to go on to quote what Goodman says a few lines later:

If, however, we consider the blank verse

throws back his head

³³ Goodman aligns himself with the school that takes the number of these underlying positions to be most often three. Northrop Frye, on the other hand, has described the pentameter line as subsuming the older four-stress line of Anglo-Saxon verse (*Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. New York: Atheneum, 1968, p. 251. Cited in Hartman 1980, 36). In a similar discussion of Dutch pentameter verse in its historical context, G. S. Overdiep traces the success of the pentameter line to the fact that it could be easily grafted upon the pre-existing stratum of Germanic accentual verse (*Hebungsverse* in German, *heffingsverzen* in Dutch) in which, as in Old English poetry, the structuring principle was a four-stress line with a variable number of less prominent syllables. See Overdiep 1928. A few of the most famous Dutch sonnet writers, notably Herman Gorter (1864-1927), attempted a conscious throwback to the older Germanic accentual rhythm within the context of their pentameter lines, achieving strikingly memorable lines which G. Stuijveling (1945) has analyzed as "bimmetrical."

This material may seem to be rather far afield from what we set out to study in this chapter, but the connection is actually quite close in that some of the most eminent Chinese sonnet writers, among them Bian Zhilin and Zheng Min, have seen the *dun* as a factor forming a bridge between classical and modern Chinese verse. Bian, for example, has stated that the really essential basis even of classical Chinese versification was not the number of syllables but the composition and disposition of the *dun* (see discussion and references in Haft 1983, Chapter 5, especially pp. 108-110). Zheng Min has stated (personal communication, June 1994) that in her opinion both classical and modern Chinese verse show an inherent tendency toward lines comprising three *dun*.

and simply –
yells! The din

we see at once the other genealogy of this versification: each beat of meaning is to be if possible taken also in isolation, as an image. Such brief bursts are the direct heir of the imagist poetry of the beginning of the century, and especially of the Chinese influence. Compare, e.g., Florence Ayscough's translation of Tu Fu (i.e., Du Fu - L. H.), where the attempt is made to keep the ideograms intact (so that the couplets of ideograms can be read both vertically and horizontally).³⁴

Now in this case Goodman was apparently falling into the early twentieth-century Western trap of seeing all sorts of things in Chinese poetry that the Chinese never do, and that are there, if at all, chiefly in Western translations specially constructed to make them be there.³⁵ There is truth, however, in the idea that in classical Chinese poetry the extreme terseness of formulation, together with the phenomenon of the caesura which breaks the line into two sense-groups which can perfectly well be translated separately in English, makes it often possible to read each *dun* as a "line" in itself. In our example from Du Fu, for example, the first two lines

The state ruined; hills and streams remain.
City in spring: grass and trees thick.
could perfectly well be rewritten

The state ruined;
hills and streams remain.
City in spring:
grass and trees thick.

This amounts to analyzing the classical five-character line as a two-character *dun* followed by a three-character *dun*, subsequently writing each *dun* as a separate line.³⁶ If we are prepared to see in these lines an analog to Goodman's manner of reading Williams' "variable feet," which appear on the page as separate lines, we have here a transposition of the *lǔshi* into 20th-century free verse. The transposition involves the phenomenon we have already described above, of verticalization

³⁴ Goodman, *ibid.* Quoted from Doyle 1980, 297-298.

³⁵ From the professional sinological point of view, of course, the great sin is to think any of this has anything to do with "ideograms." Perhaps our rigid guild taboo against taking written characters into account in translation is in itself a *déformation professionnelle*.

³⁶ The matter of whether the three-character element should in turn be broken up into two plus one is too complex to discuss here, the more so as once again the authorities do not agree, and the matter is strongly dependent on individual conceptions of the correct manner of declamation.

whereby the original horizontal structure of the (long) line becomes less important than the sequential or cumulative relations among the new, shorter lines. The original value or weight of the line is obscured as the auditory qualities that once held it together horizontally become less important than qualities involving the way in which the new *dun*-line is read relative to the preceding and following lines. Once again Clive Scott's discussion of French free verse is relevant; insisting that rhythm is not just a "principle of repetition," he affirms that "in the end, context alone bestows identity..."³⁷

Various theorists of modern Western verse have tried to identify a new formal criterion by which free verse can be analyzed without reliance on the traditional concepts of foot, accentual regularity, and the like. Charles O. Hartman, examining English verse, and Hartwig Schultz in a study of modern German poetry, both see supreme importance in the *line boundary* as it interacts with the ongoing *syntax*.³⁸ Hartman (pp. 12-13), taking the position that a poem "is the language of an act of attention," says the prosody of a poem is "the poet's method of controlling the reader's temporal experience of the poem, especially his attention to that experience." Analyzing an example from Milton, he sees the heart of its prosody (p. 72) as "...counterpoint. It is by manipulating syntax and line and forcing the two into confrontation..." In the same passage, he proposes for free verse "...a minimal prosody, controlling rhythm by the counterpoint of lineation and syntax alone." Such a prosody, though "nonmetrical," can "create and focus attention, and thus contribute intricately to the meaning of a poem (p.81)."

In emphasizing the "manipulation" of "syntax," Hartman is continuing a venerable line of theory. Roman Jakobson has repeatedly quoted with approval the writings of the English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) to the effect that a "grammatical figure" is a valid and distinctive poetic device; in the section on "imageless poetry" in his "Poesie der Grammatik und Grammatik der Poesie," Jakobson describes "unusual grammatical figures" as perfectly capable of taking over the role otherwise played by "images."³⁹ Harvey Gross, writing on late 19th- and early 20th-century French free verse,⁴⁰ refers to the importance in the work of Apollinaire and others of "figures of grammar," that is, a "rhythm" given by "the effects of parallel and repeated syntax." Citing the early French poet-theorists Georges Duhamel and Charles Vildrac, Gross says free verse "does not rest on a

³⁷ Scott 1993, 22 et seq., 28.

³⁸ Hartman 1980; Schultz 1970.

³⁹ In Jakobson 1979, 244-248. On Hopkins, see Jakobson 1979, 108 and 237.

⁴⁰ Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965, 102-104.

controlling metric of syllabic count...but is formed on syntax, on the forms of grammar, and on *les repos de la voix*..." [enunciatory pauses - L. H.]⁴¹

In this context, Hartman's stress on the line boundary would seem to be his way of giving additional visual support to the foregrounded contrast between "syntax" and "forms of grammar" on the one hand, and "*repos de la voix*" on the other. Schultz also, analyzing numerous examples, repeatedly identifies the importance of the interaction or clash between the line boundary and syntax, producing a syntax perceived as "*gestaut*" (dammed up, pressurized by impedance). What theorists like Hartman and Schultz are saying is, for our purposes, that in free verse, although the traditional "line" has lost its identity, a new concept of "line" is still relevant: a line based on *no definite Horizontal Binding Elements whatsoever*. For Hartman and Schultz, the line boundary is as it were imposed from without; it does not depend for its definition on any particular accumulation of features within the line, as number of feet, *dun*, syllables, or whatever.

In other words: the *line boundary*, as these theorists see it, *does exactly what the old boundary between feet or dun used to do*. It causes the poetic line to be read not only in the light of its obvious meaning as language, but also in the cross-light of a superimposed formal element extrinsic to its semantic content. This amounts to no more than a restatement of our own principle of "verticalization": the modern "line" marks off a unit that functions analogously to the traditional "foot." But there are serious objections to raising this new "line" to the status of being in itself the main, or even the only, defining feature of verse form.

First of all, these theorists' "line" concept seems often in danger of being a sort of default category that takes its identity not from its really *being* anything at all, but from its in any case *not being* anything else. In Hartman's presentation, indeed, there is a tendency to overestimate and over-generalize the usefulness of the line concept, as most glaringly when he says (p. 11): "*Verse is language in lines* [*italics his*]. This distinguishes it from prose." Of the many questionable features of this idea, perhaps the one we need to note here is that it is so broad as to include too many things that cannot seriously be called verse. "Language in lines" would include itemized cash-register receipts, columns in a telephone book, and the entire content of a ticker tape. I am aware that in certain quarters such things are not automatically thrown out of the house as contenders for status as "poetry," but let us defer discussion of them.

A more subtle danger in enthroning a catch-all "line" notion, *if it is not part of a hierarchy of recognized formal elements that includes "vertical" concepts*, is that in the case of quite short lines (containing, say, no more than five or six syllables),

⁴¹ Gross 1965, 104.

the lines, in default of any other principle of definition, may appear deceptively to have been built on traditional accentual-syllabic principles. That is to say, readers, especially those who are inclined to believe "free verse" does not really exist but is nothing but a disguised and less successful form of traditional meter, will go on seeing traditional "feet" wherever the local stress pattern happens to allow. For example, in the example from Williams that we have quoted above on page 222, "when rousing us" would be read as two iambic feet, "a movement of the air" as three, and so on, whereas a "vertical" reading, assuming the accentuation of the lines to be dependent on the overall group of lines they belong to, would probably place only one stress on "rousing," followed by two on all the following lines of the passage.

Another reason why such a line concept has little definitional value is that if its only real function is said to be to "impede" or "impound" or "pressurize" syntax, there are so many other possible formal elements which do so just as well. In our sonnets by Mu Mutian and Zhu Xiang, for example, we have seen how lines can differ from one another exactly by virtue of the "impedance" or "pressurization" of syntax achieved *within* them, by Mu Mutian's rhythmic suspensions and Zhu Xiang's starkly patterned punctuation. In some of the sonnets by the Nine Leaves poets, we saw line-internal rhymes assuming an aural prominence which surely adds local gravity to syntax at least as much as would a mere line boundary at the end of a short enjambed line.

I would also take exception to the idea that it is exclusively or even primarily "syntax" that is impeded, made heavier, made more salient, or whatever. A sentence, as a unit of linguistic utterance, comprises not only one of a possible list of syntactic structures defined by a given language as acceptable "sentences," but also and in my view primarily an *intonation* structure.⁴² Indeed, since the absolute sequence (hence also the syntax in the abstract) of printed words on the page is not affected by the presence of a line boundary, there would seem little reason to think a line boundary in fact "impedes" anything at all, were it not for the empirical fact that in reading or subvocalization, the presence of this break does importantly affect the manner in which the *intonation* of the text is construed. If we take not syntax but intonation to be the factor which is somehow affected or "worried" by the presence of line boundaries, it becomes clear why in our chapters on Feng Zhi and Zheng Min, in working with the concept of line assonance, we defined *different types of line*, and defined them according to whether or not they could be read as sentences. In a sense, just as traditional prosody defines different types of "horizontal" *feet*, we used different types of "vertical" *lines*. And we defined them

⁴² See Lieberman 1984, especially Chapter 5. Lieberman gives other relevant references.

in such a way that the typographical identity of the line was but one factor; at least equally important was the intonational status of the line. The very powerful advantage of *defining the line in terms of the sentence, rather than the other way around*, is that whereas the line (by the only definition that can accommodate any and all types of verse) is primarily a unit of typography, the sentence is simultaneously a unit *of typography, of sound, and of sense*. Lines defined in this manner have exactly the multivalent potential that enables them to interact simultaneously with various other lines within the same poem *according to various criteria*.

One of the concepts we found most useful in our analyses of poems by Feng Zhi, by Zheng Min, and by other members of the Nine Leaves group, was that formal criteria can be valid and powerful even though they do not apply throughout a given poem. A line can be bound to one other line by rhyme at the same time that it is bound to another line by being or not being a complete sentence. This factor of multivalent relationship or contrast to adjacent lines, of course, reminds us of the classical *lǚshi*, in which a line may be grammatically parallel to another line at the same time that it is tonally opposed to it. An example of a modern Chinese sonnet in which somewhat similar processes operate is Feng Zhi's Sonnet 21:

Listening to the pounding rain in a storm
beneath the lamplight, we're so alone;
within this little shelter,
even between us and our utensils

an endless distance has been created.
The copper bowl longs for the ore in the mountains;
the porcelain pan longs for the clay by the river.
Like so many birds in a storm, they fly

each its own way. We hold tight,
as if even our bodies were not our own.
The storm blows all into the air;

the rain soaks all into the mud.
All that remains is this faint dot of lampglow
to attest that our life stayed here for a moment.⁴³

我們聽著狂風裏的暴雨
我們在燈光下這樣孤單，

⁴³ Translation mine.

我們在這小小的茅屋裏
就是和我們用具的中間

也生了千里萬里的距離：
銅鑪在向往深山的礦苗
瓷壺在向往江邊的陶泥，
牠們都像風雨中的飛鳥

各自東西。我們緊緊抱住，
好像自身也都不能自主。
狂風把一切都吹入高空

暴雨把一切又淋入泥土，
只剩下這點微弱的燈紅
在證實我們生命的暫住。

Lines 6 and 7, and 11 and 12, are pairs of lines which are syntactically parallel at the same time that they differ in rhyme. We see here the modern poet, in the very act of ostensibly imitating a Western poetic form, vividly upholding the textural qualities of the *lǔshi*. But where the classical Chinese poem was a sort of fixed arithmetical sum of qualities, the modern poem becomes more like an algebraic formula in which the concrete values (that is, the formal parameters being used) can be filled now by one, now by another element. Again taking Feng Zhi as an example, in our successive analyses of his Sonnets 7 and 4 on pages 114-120, we saw that in each case the sestet could be construed as a 1-1-3-1 structure, though it was realized in the first case by the overall length of successive sentences and in the second case by the presence or absence of line-internal commas.

True, our concept of line assonance, and many of our analyses of Feng Zhi's and Zheng Min's poems, are of a kind that is probably applicable only to short-lined poems. But one of the supreme advantages of the sonnet form is exactly that as long as the overall form is maintained, *no hard-and-fast choice need be made between "traditional" and "modern" formal principles*. For longer-lined sonnets, the whole traditional formal apparatus continues to be available, and to be just as valid as it ever was. If a poet wishes to write lines with a high degree of "horizontal" structuring, they can continue to be written, whether the structuring is by isosyllabicity, *dun* regularity and/or patterning, or whatever: and they can be

combined wherever desired with "vertical" structuring of either the older kinds or the newer types we have been developing in this book.

Even in the case of longer-lined poems, alertness to the possibilities of "vertical binding" which we have been developing may turn out to have surprising uses. In this chapter we have already mentioned the relevance of Bian Zhilin's translation of *Hamlet* to his Chinese metrical transposition of the pentameter line. The publication of Bian's translation in 1956 does not seem to have discouraged later comers from trying their own hand at a translation; one of them at least, Lin Tongji, produced a version based on an unusual and sophisticated formal concept of his own. Maintaining his own version of the five-*dun* "horizontal" line, Lin sought additionally to build into his translation some sort of formally perceptible "vertical" binding which would correspond to the longer rhythmic periods, paragraphs, or "waves" which, in his view, were an indispensable feature of the rhythm of the original. The striking novelty of Lin Tongji's method is the use of recurrent *line-internal rhyme* to mark certain prominent words within each "wave," changing the rhyme as a new wave begins. As the rhyme words do not occur at the end of the lines, they are relatively unobtrusive, as befits the original which is, of course, for the most part in blank verse and accordingly *unrhymed*.⁴⁴ To see how this works, we may examine the first few lines of the famous passage "To be or not to be..." in Lin's version. We will indicate *dun*-boundaries, in addition writing in capitals the syllables involved in the internal rhyme relationships which are supposed to hold a given "wave" together:

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them: to die to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end

cunzai/ haishi/ huimie/ jiu zhe/ wentile.
daodi/ nayang/ suan gaogui/ renzai/ xinzhong
rongshou/ na qiren/ mingyun/ de jianshang/ qiangTIAO
haishi ba/ qi DAO/ xiang na dao/ hai lai de/ monan
bodou qu/ yiliao/ baiLIAO/. si qu/ shui QU
zai ye mei SHI le. shui QU na ye jiushi shuo

⁴⁴ My explication of Lin Tongji's translation, and his text as I quote it, are based on personal conversation with him in Shanghai in 1979. His translation was published as *Danmai Wangzi Hamulei de beiju*. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1982. For an evaluative comparison of Lin's with Bian's translation, see Fung 1989, 139-141.

存在/，還是/毀滅/，就連/問題了/。
 到底/哪樣/算高貴/—忍在/心中/，
 容受/那欺人/命運/的箭傷/槍挑，
 還是拔/起刀/，向那倒/海來的/磨難
 搏斗去/，一了/百了/。死去/，睡去/—
 再也沒事了。睡去，那也就是說，

In the course of the fifth line, the operant rhyme changes from the *-ao/-iao* group of Track 8 to the *-i/-ü* group which in our chapter on Shakespeare we identified as Track 4; the purpose of the change of rhyme is to underline the subtle changeover to a new sub-section of speech that is beginning. In other words, rhyme in the Chinese runs parallel to an unmarked intonational factor in the original. The result is what we could call a polyphonic form in which the *dun*, the line, multi-line intonational elements, and rhyme all play specified roles. The rhyme, occurring irregularly but having a subtle marking function where it does, is reminiscent of the "recurrent recognizables" of our chapter on the *zushi*. At the same time, its function is similar to that of our notion of rhyme reduplication in that it binds lines together formally in a way that the English prototype does not. A classical Chinese parallel might be the traditional poetic genre of *fu*, in which a change of subject within one and the same poem was often signaled by a change of rhyme.

One point on which my view of the modern Chinese sonnet does very well articulate with Hartman's and Schultz' concepts of modern prosody is the overriding importance which I attach to *lineation per se*. A few paragraphs ago I deliberately used the rather flexible term "the overall form," but in view of everything we have studied in this book, it is clear that whether or not that most general sonnet "form" is required to have some rhyme structure however vestigial, and some strophic marking again however vestigial, the great sine qua non remains the envelope of fourteen *lines* which we first identified in Chapter 1. However trivial that notion may at times appear, it is obviously justified by its results in use. Over the length of the entire poem, the background consciousness of the envelope of fixed length exerts its own kind of "impounding" or *Stauung* upon *all* the lines of the poem. The advantage of an envelope of fourteen lines as opposed to one of, say, 263, is that the former is short enough to remain psychologically quite palpably in place during the full reading of the poem. Indeed, the experienced reader of sonnets often feels, nearing the end of a poem, a sense of heightened excitement comparable to that nearing the finish of a neck-and-neck race: against the background of the inexorably narrowing gap between the present moment and

the quickly approaching end of the poem, how will the rhymes be resolved? how will the complexity of thought be reconciled? and so on.⁴⁵

It is in keeping with my conviction of the "verticalization" of modern verse form that I see this latter kind of *Stauung* – that exerted by the overall formal envelope on the entire poem – as more definitionally valuable than the notion of the line boundary as confining the individual line. In our discussion in Chapter 7 of *zushi* composed of sonnets, we suggested that although *zushi* composed of sonnets did not inherently show more closure in their individual poems than those otherwise composed, the sonnet form could be a powerful factor helping to build closure. In such cases, the emanational elements we saw proceeding *forward* from the beginning of the poem are contrapuntally opposed by an opposite pressure working *backward* upon them: that is, the resilient 14-line rhythm which compels each poem to end in a way which is plausible not only semantically but simultaneously in other ways.

To conclude this discussion of the modern Chinese sonnet in the context of modern verse in general, it seems clear that while the modern Chinese sonnet fully participates in the processes of verticalization we have suggested as applicable to a much wider range of poetry in the process of modernization, the sonnet has the additional advantage of its overall "envelope" formal premise, which lends to the individual lines perceptibly more definitional validity than they would have had if they were no more than one instrument among many for the "manipulation of syntax." The persistence of an indisputable "line" concept, in however subtle and streamlined a form, supplies the modern Chinese sonnet with a precious element of *formal continuity* not only with the Western poetry of an earlier period, but with classical Chinese poetry as well. The line, *qua* line-of-a-sonnet, provides a common denominator by which elements of the modern poem can be not only vaguely but concretely and meaningfully compared with other poems in both Chinese and Western traditions.

⁴⁵ The question of whether, and if so why, fourteen lines are more effective than, say, fifteen, is truly difficult. There may be something in the idea that the traditional strophic divisions of the sonnet, and particularly the premise of an eight-line followed by a six-line group with a particular division of labor between them, somehow inherently evoke esthetic pleasure. Any notion that beauty or truth is inherently conveyed by structures containing multiples of the number four, or three, or their combination, of course very quickly finds itself beyond the pale of what is nowadays considered sane adult conversation, though personally I would not want to say I regard such ideas as inherently absurd. In the context of this book, I think we are entirely justified in dodging all such discussions, emphasizing instead that for *whatever* reasons, the 14-line sonnet form has managed to get itself established as one of the world's most venerable and universal art forms in a way that no 13- or 15-line form has, and that the sheer weight of that cultural establishment gives the sonnet form a self-evident expectational preponderance that is not dependent on numerology, archetypes, squaring the circle, and the like for its justification.

On the Chineseness of the Sonnet. Advantages for the modern Chinese poet of the sonnet form.

In the previous section, we have seen that the Western sonnet form as such can be very closely compared with the most esteemed form of classical Chinese poetry. On a broad level, the bases of comparison include brevity and compactness, the very fixity of the form, and the expectation of a rationally accessible progression of thought involving a "turning" of some sort. On a more fine-grained level, obvious points of comparison include:

- (1) formally marked parallels or contrasts in the vertical dimension – between rhymed and unrhymed lines in the *lǔshi*, between different rhymes in the Western form; in the *lǔshi* the additional features of obligatory tone contrast and of grammatical parallel applying to certain lines, in the older Western sonnet the marked rhetorical difference between octave and sestet;
- (2) a traditional horizontal line structure involving both *numerical* and *alternational* factors: in the *lǔshi* the number of characters, the number and disposition of *dun*, and the rule-governed alternation of "level" and "oblique" tones; in the Western sonnet the number of "feet" and, subordinate thereto, the disposition of "prominent" or "non-prominent" syllables within those feet.

Against this background, the Chinese sonnet could be said psychologically to have begun with one foot in both worlds. While the modern Western sonnet has shared in some of the processes of formal streamlining that are also characteristic of non-sonnet poetry in the 20th century, we are now in a position to see that the specifically Chinese sonnet, unlike most Western verse, has hardly *lost* attributes as a cost of that development. On the contrary, it has *gained* certain features which in my view amply offset the traditional elements which seem to have been eclipsed.

Specifically, as compared with the classical *lǔshi*, though on the one hand the Chinese sonnet has shared in the process of verticalization by which 20th-century verse has tended to erode the old clear distinction between vertical and horizontal defining elements, this process has not led to any lessening of the *explicit diversity of formal possibilities*. On the contrary, the factors lost (tone contrast, obligatory grammatical parallelism, and the contrapuntal interaction between the two) have been compensated by the coming of new factors: line assonance, rhyme reduplication, and the permissible supersession, within one and the same poem, of one set of operant formal parameters by another (as, say, where line assonance

dominates the sestet while the octave is held together by a tight rhyme-reduplication scheme).

The presence of the sonnet envelope, too, means that although verticalization undoubtedly occurs, there do still remain vestiges of the kind of distinction that used to obtain between horizontal and vertical factors. If it is true, as I contend, that the tendency has been for the line to assume the function of the old foot, so that several lines must be read together to get the effect of combined numerical and alternational factors, it nevertheless is also true that the overall envelope, in many or most cases together with strophic groupings, maintains the fact of more than one level of *Stauung* being applied at the same time. The strophes, the contrasted octave and sestet, the groupings suggested by line assonance, or whatever, become a new sort of super-"line," but they are still contained within and contrasted with a superordinate level: the super-"strophe" that the *whole poem* now is.

Another way in which the old combination of numerical and alternational factors can be reasserted is by the use of dense rhyme reduplication, so that the whole poem falls into a small number of groupings whose contrast remains eminently in mind. As far as that goes, the old *lǔshi* element of a fixed number of characters per line remains just as available as it ever was, and as we have seen, since the time of Wen Yiduo has often been combined with the *dun* based on Western "feet" to produce a form that is regular in two ways at once.

As for the old *lǔshi*'s vertical factors of tone contrast and syntactic parallelism, we have already mentioned them as often superseded or revamped by line assonance and rhyme reduplication: but syntactic parallelism does remain perfectly well possible and is in fact very widely used. Simultaneous parallels and contrasts between lines sharing some or all of these features are just as feasible as those in the *lǔshi*. And by the very complexity of the Chinese sonnet's course of development, the presence of syntactic parallels evokes an exquisite formal richness in two opposite directions: on the one hand it is a straight continuation of one of the most ubiquitous features of classical Chinese verse, while on the other hand, as we have seen in the preceding section, it is one of the features often pointed to as a hallmark of *modern Western free verse*!

Our conclusion is obvious and inevitable. The sonnet form offers Chinese poets a unique way of continuing the classical Chinese poetic tradition, not just vaguely but in concrete ways which demonstrably keep alive many parameters of the old tradition, at the same time incorporating many of the most useful advances of 20th-century Western poetry. The modern Chinese sonnet is freer than the classical *lǔshi* but can be every bit as formally sophisticated, and owing to some of the linguistic features of Chinese – potentially extreme syntactic compression and extreme ease of

rhyming – it provides at least some expressive possibilities hard to match in a Western language.

The sonnet affords Chinese poets the possibility of going back to not only the spirit but the actual essentials of their native poetic tradition without identifying themselves with anachronistic and maudlin efforts to revive it directly. Though the sonnet originated as a Western form, I hope this book has shown that its specifically Chinese development has been so rich and many-sided that it can now be said to be a fully and validly Chinese form. The modern Chinese sonnet seems to me personally, for example, far more "Chinese" than many of the so-called "Chinese folk songs," with electronic rhythmic accompaniment and all, which visitors to the Far East are called upon to endure nowadays.

Though in general I doubt the usefulness of discussing the "Chineseness" or otherwise of Chinese poems, I stress this point here because it pertains directly to yet another way in which the Chinese sonnet offers unusual and specific advantages to the Chinese poet. During many periods in the history of the People's Republic of China, cultural politics have been such that classical Chinese and "foreign" poetic forms were suppressed and both were condemned in the same breath. Now that conditions again allow the "fourteen-line poem," by a strange logic that is nevertheless perfectly clear to those concerned, the poet who writes in an originally "European" form is also subtly showing loyalty to the older Chinese tradition, the tradition that was universally esteemed before the strange and tragic suppressions of the second half of this century set in. The Chinese sonnet's days of exoticism, its years of growing pains, are over. The Chinese sonnet stands for tradition, continuity, pride and civilization.

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Since the early years of this century, when Chinese poets began to search beyond the time-honored forms of their native tradition for new poetic possibilities, sonnets have been written, read, and studied in China. Many of the most famous Chinese poets have written sonnets, and they have showed great creativity in adapting this form to the sounds and other features of the Chinese language.

Existing studies of modern Chinese poetry have tended to address the Chinese sonnet marginally if at all. In this book, Lloyd Haft shows that the sonnet, far from being a mere curiosity of cultural borrowing, has actually been one of the most perennially vital forms of modern Chinese verse. Discussing more than 50 poems spanning the period from the 1920s to the present, Haft develops analytic strategies which bring out the expressive dimensions of the Chinese sonnet as well as its legitimate claim to 'Chineseness.'

The reading procedures applied in this book shed light not only on sonnets but on modern Chinese poetry in general. Subjects treated include the rhythms and sounds of Chinese as elements of the verse line, rhyme in modern Chinese verse and in Chinese translations of Shakespeare's sonnets, similarities in form and technique between modern and classical Chinese poetry, and the parallels between Chinese poetry and modern Western free verse.

All poems are discussed in English translation as well as in the original Chinese; they include works by Zhu Xiang, Feng Zhi, Bian Zhilin, Zhang Cuo and Zheng Min. Some thirty of these translations have never been published before.

This book will be of interest to readers of poetry in general as well as to students of 20th-century Chinese literature or comparative literature and poetics.

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