

The Lessons of the *Feng*

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Application and Interpretation: A Hypothesis

Throughout the imperial period, from the Han until early in this century, the Poems were read as a Confucian Classic. Despite profound differences of interpretation by period, school, and individual, they were presented to a reader as the embodiment of moral truth and, from the Mao Poems on, of the moral history of the Zhou Dynasty, articulated through the real voices of people of the period and mediated by the editorial intent of Confucius in selecting and arranging them. In modern times Confucius' editorship of the Classic, the assumption of individual authorship, and the Poems' paradigmatic value as evidence of a moral history have all been seriously challenged, if not entirely rejected. But the Poems are still "read"; this is the only thing we know how to do with such texts.

During the formative evolution of the corpus in the Spring and Autumn Annals period, when the latest Poems were being composed, modified, and then circulated as a more or less fixed repertoire, the Poems were probably never "read" in any sense we might mean by that term now. By "reading" here I do not mean an individual's encounter with a written text. To assume "reading" in that sense is clearly anachronistic. There is no hint of evidence that the Poems were ever written down as a whole until the late Warring States, when we presume there must have been written versions for Qin Shihuang to burn.¹ No doubt there were written texts somewhere. But the Poems were essentially oral texts that came to be "written down" rather than "written," and they passed through centuries of oral transmission. Given the archaic usages in the language, it is highly improbable that anyone could have "read" such hypothetical written texts unless they already knew the Poems by heart.² Even when there were written texts of the Poems in the late Warring States and Western Han, their primary

¹ Obviously individual poems and passages *could* be written down, as we find throughout the prose of the Warring States. The fact that only one complete poem, a very short piece from the Zhou Song, was indeed written down in citation deserves reflection.

² By "reading" here I mean facing a previously unknown text, voicing it, and understanding it.

mode of circulation was certainly still oral, as is witnessed by the numerous homophonic variants, as scribes chose characters they thought appropriate to the sounds.

When I suggest that the poems were not “read” in Spring and Autumn Annals period, I mean something more basic. I mean reflection on the meaning and significance of the authoritative text as such, to isolate it as an object. The earliest evidence for “reading” in this familiar sense is found in the *Mencius* in the late fourth century B.C., where Mencius rejects the literal application of a passage, poses the question of what a particular poem meant and urges the potential reader to reflect on what the author’s mind was on in the act of composition (*Mencius* VA.4.2). In the *Mozi* and also in the *Mencius* we also sometimes find summary statements of the “meaning” or import of a passage.

Earlier, during the evolution of the Poems and their first institution as a repertoire, roughly from the eighth to sixth centuries B.C., the Poems seem to have either been performed by ensembles or recited by individuals. Our evidence is admittedly from later texts and therefore imperfect, but it is remarkably consistent. Every time the words of a Poem were reproduced, those words were implicitly or explicitly being *applied* to the current circumstance.³

In order to be reproduced, the Poems obviously had to be learned as a repertoire and reproduced neutrally (that is, the content of the Poem recited or performed was not taken as a comment on the pedagogic situation). This is a reasonable assumption even though such a learning process is never represented in early texts. We may assume also that those who learned the Poems learned a general “sense” of the particular Poem and proprieties of using the text. But in existing texts whenever a Poem is recited or performed or later cited, it is always taken in relation to the occasion of its use, whether that is a general moral point or the narrative situation.

This is a relation to received texts that is profoundly different from “reading” or even listening to a performance of Homer. In such performances and later in reading there is an enclosure of the event, a suspension of its potential application to current circumstances (though, of course, in Greek and Latin antiquity people also applied passages to current circumstances). In early

³ The closest thing to an exception is the famous passage in *Zuo zhuan* Xiang 29 when Prince Zha of Wu goes to visit Lu and asks to hear the “music of Zhou,” and is given a comprehensive performance of the *Airs*, to which he responds appropriately.

reproductions of the Poems, however, a relation to current circumstances is almost always assumed. Sometimes the use of the Poems was ceremonial; certain Poems were associated with particular occasions, and there was a propriety in their use that made misuse possible. We have anecdotes in historical works of the wrong Poems being performed for a particular occasion. In other cases the Poem was reproduced as applied to an argument or political situation, and the meaning of the Poem itself was a function of its putative significance in *that* situation. It was just such a use of a passage from the Poems that prompted Mencius to raise the issue of the meaning of that passage in the context of the Poem as a whole.

When Confucius comments on “Fishhawk” (關雎 1) or when Prince Zha reponds to the Airs, we see that there was a general sense of “quality” that might be attached to a particular Poem or group of Poems. And certainly had anyone been called upon to explain a Poem apart from application to a situation, he could have done so in such a general sense. But the meaning of Poems seems to have existed on a level of relative indeterminacy. We have no indication that such analogical operations of application to a situation were conditioned by a stable, preexistent interpretation of the Poem in question. What was later known in Chinese as “taking the meaning out of context,” *duanzhang quyì* 斷章取義, is not the exception in early use of the *Poems*; it is the norm.⁴ *Duanzhang quyì* is always a circumstantial application. The common sense meaning of the words in the *Poem* may have restricted the range of potential applications and determinations, but the process was remarkably open and fluid.⁵

⁴ This first appears in the “Chapter and Verse” 章句 chapter of *Wenxin diaolong*.

⁵ There is one significant passage, singled out by Van Zoeren, in which a willful Qi noble, Lupu Gui, responds to the criticism that he has taken a wife of his own surname with the statement: “In reciting a poem and breaking off a stanza, I take what I seek from it” 賦詩斷章，余取所求焉 (ZZ 1145). Van Zoeren comments: “This passage is significant because it implies that the people of the Spring and Autumn clearly understood that the stanzas from the Odes recited in the *fushi* context were taken out of a larger context to which they properly belonged...” (VZ 42-43). One first would ask whether such a single statement can be said to represent the practice of the Spring and Autumn Annals period or the early Warring States. The second and more serious question is whether this describes *fushi* practice (reciting the Poems) in general or Lupu Gui’s practice in particular. Van Zoeren translates the crucial passage, “In reciting the Odes, one breaks off a stanza,” thus putting stress on the decontextuali-

The way in which application to a particular context stabilized meaning probably worked on the most basic linguistic level, in many cases involving determinations of gender, tense, grammar, and lexical usage. Anyone who has looked at the variety of ways in which a Poem can be construed, depending on the contextual scenario offered by a commentator, knows how open the words of the Poems are to multiple and mutually exclusive determination. One of the most famous questions surrounding the early interpretation of the Poems is Confucius' citation of the line *si wu xie* 思無邪 from "Mighty" 駟 297. Did Confucius mean "no deviation," taking *si* as a particle (a common usage in the *Poems*), or did he mean "no deviation in thoughts," taking *si* in its most common sense elsewhere (*Analects* II.2; cf. VZ 37-38). I believe, with many commentators, that Confucius meant *si* as "thoughts." Yet this interpretation has radical implications. I would suggest that the words of the Poem were just sounds, and that when quoted the sounds took on meaning in the context. If the line was set in a full description of chariot driving, as it was in "Mighty," it *was* a particle; when the line was cited by Confucius, *si* meant "thoughts." This is not to say the words of a Poem had no meaning until applied, but rather that the meaning was relatively undetermined and open to radical revision by context.

Given the nature of our sources, we can only offer a hypothetical picture of the early circulation of the Poems. I would suggest that in the Spring and Autumn Annals period and into the early Warring States the Poems were memorized texts, sometimes with associated qualities or a general sense of their import, accompanied by a more or less "common sense" understanding of the words. Some of the Odes and Hymns were associated with particular ceremonies. These texts were accompanied by conventional processes of extending and determining those common sense meanings by context and analogy in a particular situation of use. Those who heard such applications of the Poems also had conventional processes of divining the user's intentions in reciting the Poem. The precise meaning of the words would always be readjusted to the current circumstances of use.

During the Warring States the Poems left the world of public life and became part of the body of learning of the Traditionalists, *Ru*. They were still applied in arguments, but they also gradually be-

zation of the stanza. Van Zoeren is, however, correct that this shows the possibility of willful misuse of the Poems, just as there is the more common anecdote about ignorant misuse.

came objects of reflection. In this period we can begin to talk about “reading” and interpretation. Not surprisingly reading and interpretation retained many of the formal characteristics of application. Eventually the conventional processes of analogical application and divining the user’s intentions were transferred to an account of the Poem’s composition. The traces of the period of application can be found throughout the interpretations of Mao and the Three Schools of the Han. For example, “Duke Liu” 公劉 was not taken simply as an account of Duke Liu; in Mao’s explanation:

“Duke Liu” is Duke Kang of Shao cautioning King Cheng. King Cheng was about to take over the reins of government, so he [Duke Kang] cautioned him about serving the folk, praising Duke Liu’s generosity to the folk, and presented this poem.

We can imagine a time when “Duke Liu” was about Duke Liu. By the time the poem appears in history, however, the representation of Duke Liu’s migration was not adequate in itself; to “explain” the poem required a circumstantial scenario for its composition along with the intentions of the person who composed it. In the same way “Overbearing” 蕩 is not simply King Wen’s denunciation of the Shang; it was supposedly composed by Duke Mu of Shao figuratively referring to the misrule of King Li. As is well known, in Han interpretation even “Fishhawk,” “Guanju,” was taken satirically. In these and many other cases, the meaning of the Poem and the particular interpretation of the words are derived from the application of the poem to circumstances other than those represented directly in the poems. In “Overbearing,” for example, Heaven’s “overbearing,” *dang* 蕩, behavior is not the archaic ruthlessness of Heaven that we might assume; Heaven is rather taken as referring to King Li, requiring an ingenious reconfiguration of the argument in the first stanza.

Such interpretations from the late Warring States and Han do assign individual *Poems* determinate meanings, but the particular mode of meaning embeds the memory of an earlier period of use, when meaning was always a function of the significance derived from application to current circumstances. The role of the interpreter is to produce a scenario in which the relatively indeterminate words make sense. During the period of application such relative indeterminacy had been functional, permitting a wide scope of reuse; in the period of interpretation such indeterminacy became a problem to be solved.

Here we must use some caution and acknowledge the real variety of the *Poems*. Some of the *Poems* were indeed composed in reference to some historical situation, and they seem to survive more or less intact; they may have had a history of “use,” applied to other later situations, but the original referent remains clear. Other *Poems*, particularly in the Great Odes and Zhou Hymns, seem to have had a strict propriety of use: if one played an Ode proper for welcoming a feudal lord to welcome an ambassador, it would be recognized as a “misuse,” whether intentional or from ignorance. But of many of the *Poems*, particularly in the *Airs* and *Lesser Odes*, I think it can be legitimately said that their sense was radically contingent on their occasions of use. Such poems, including many of the finest and most famous of the *Poems*, literally did not mean anything in isolation; they acquired meaning either by application to present circumstances in the early period or by being tied to a narrative or putative situation of origin in the late Warring States and Han interpretations.

Although the texts of some of the *Airs* and *Lesser Odes* represent a moment of compositional origin, others probably evolved with use before the texts became fixed. Many of these texts seem to be sedimentary histories of their use, with segments combined from different sources, stanzas tacked on, and perhaps with words and lines altered to reinforce their application to some particular situation that is no longer within our reach. Insofar as “meaning” in one sense has to do with compositional origins, these poems have no meaning; all has been changed in the process of serial application. Like the great Chinese commentators of the past, we can always offer a scenario and create a context to make such a Poem make sense. The Chinese commentators of the imperial period preferred historically determinate stories, that is, occasions; Western interpreters and many modern Chinese interpreters prefer general stories (a girl longing for her boyfriend); but both styles of interpretation are no more than ossified applications, creating plausible scenarios of use for texts that exist on a higher level of indeterminacy.

The degree of indeterminacy varies. In some *Airs* we can say, with justification from the text, that the speaker is a woman who has been cast off by her husband. In other cases we know the speaker is unhappy about something, but there are no clues as to who or why.

The wisest course in studying the *Airs* and many of the *Lesser Odes* is to bracket the question of original reference, whether that

is general or historically specific. When a historically specific reference is knowable with a reasonable degree of certainty, that fact deserves to be acknowledged; but it is a vain enterprise to seek such certainty of reference where it cannot be found. The same needs to be said for styles of Western interpretation of the Poems, seeking a satisfying determinacy of general reference: we often do not and cannot know whether it is a woman longing for a man or a man expressing his affection for a woman, a friend, or his prince. Perhaps through the vested interest of preserving a wide range of potential application, such determinations are often not in the words as we have them. As with historically determinate reference, we should acknowledge them when they are present; but there remains a profound difference between a plausible scenario for the poem and a scenario that is determined by the words. English, with its gendered pronouns, forces the translator to make determinations that are not warranted by the text, and I will do so and carry them through in the discussions. But I will try to be clear about the level of determinacy justified by the poem.

What we *can* know in reading the *Airs* and *Lesser Odes* are the procedures of application and the formation of meaning. Here we do not need to rely on later texts that give accounts of the application of particular Poems. Internally within the Poems themselves we find exactly those processes of meaning-formation that governed their application to external situations and their subsequent interpretation. As they were formed in a period of use and application, those processes are represented within the texts.

The Formation of Meaning in the *Airs*

The situations behind many of the *Airs* are relatively indeterminate; that is, the words of the Poem often do not in themselves give enough information to decide many of the basic determinations in a minimal representation— the person, position, gender, or status of the speaker, the presence or absence of dialogue, the circumstances, the tense, the mode, etc.⁶ Philological difficulties in the Poems may compound this indeterminacy, but it is a feature that is clearly integral to the poetic texts themselves and certainly contributed to the flexibility of their application. When a Poem or a passage was applied to a situation, that situation would have provided the determinations to govern the understanding of the Poem or the passage.

The degree of situational indeterminacy varies greatly. Some of the Poems represent clearly defined situations, such as the lament of soldiers on a campaign against Xianyun raiders or the complaint of an abandoned wife. The interpretation of individual words may still pose problems, but the situation described is clear. But what are we to make of the following:

旄丘之葛兮，何誕之節兮。叔兮伯兮，何多日兮。
 何其處也，必有與也。何其久也，必有以也。
 狐裘蒙戎，匪車不東。叔兮伯兮，靡所與同。
 瑣兮尾兮，流離之子。叔兮伯兮，褻如充耳。

“Mao Hill” 37

The dolichoos on Mao Hill,
 how long they stretch from joint to joint!
 Oh uncles,
 how many are the days!

Why does he stay?—
 he must be with someone.
 Why is it so long?—
 he must have someone along.

⁶ In later classical poetry such determinations were supplied by the use of titles and by the conventionalization of poetic situations.

The fox cloak is bushy,
 no wagon that goes not east.
 Oh uncles!
 There is no one I'm with.

Tiny and charming!—
 the liuli bird's child.
 O uncles!
 splendid are your ear-plugs.

I have tried to keep the translation as “literal” as possible, but the very nature of translation demands that decisions be made where the original is indeterminate. According to the Mao interpretation: “Mao Hill takes the Earl of Wei to task. The Di peoples had driven out the Count of Li, and the Count of Li had taken up temporary residence in Wei. But Wei could not carry out his office of leading the earls around in an alliance. By this an officer of Li takes Wei to task.” That is, Wei’s responsibility, as the leader of the smaller feudal domains, was to raise an expedition, punish the Di, and put the Count of Li back on his throne. The Qi school, however, takes it altogether differently—as an altercation between Lady Zhuang of Li (the daughter of the Count of Wei) and her husband (WXQ 180-82).⁷

My purpose here is not to ridicule the much-maligned Mao interpretation, but to show the mystery of the text and the way in which a scenario is produced to stabilize the words. Waley, taking his cue from Mao but characteristically generalizing Mao’s historically specific interpretation, takes the poem as a complaint against the “uncles” for failing to help men on a campaign.

One way to attempt to solve such a problem is to look at the way words and phrases are used in other Poems. But often these give us only fragmentary hints of norms of usage. The passage seized on and made central by Waley is “no wagon (/chariot) that goes not east,” thus possibly suggesting a campaign. But the expression “Oh uncles” is used in Poem 85, in which a singer is apparently addressing his audience,” and in Poem 88, where a woman (?)

⁷ Here and elsewhere I use Wang Xianqian’s reconstruction of the interpretations of the Three Schools in the usual loose way, though we should understand that in most cases we do not know if such an interpretation was indeed the one that was taught (and, indeed, if only one interpretation was taught) in one of the Three Schools. In most cases the proper formulation would be: an interpretation given or referred to by a scholar who was aligned with a given School.

addresses the “uncles” and states her intention to go with a man she admires. The conjunction of “being with” (*yu* 與) someone and “having someone along” (*yi* 以, as a servant?) occurs in Poem 22, where women (maids?) seem to complain that their mistress did not take them along when she left to be married. Do the ear-plugs suggest their fine attire, as is usually the case, or the fact that they won’t listen to the complaint? And what are we to do with the fox cloak and the child of the liuli bird?

One could, I believe, invent a dozen scenarios for the words of this poem, allowing that some scenarios would force us to redo the translation—within the legitimate constraints of the language. If I change the gender or the person of the pronouns in the translation above, I can hint at quite different scenarios.

Apart from the true philological problems—the words, customs, and associations consequent to our distance from the language of the poem—the primary difficulty of this poem is the absence of a clear situational context. The situational context would help us understand individual lines, to know who is saying what about whom and why. This primary difficulty of interpretation is addressed by the Mao “Lesser Preface,” translated above, which guides or is guided by the Mao explanations of particular words.

If we think of the *Airs* as not having meaning but acquiring meaning in contextual application, then such relative indeterminacy can become an advantage. If recited by an “officer of Li” in the situation Mao describes, it would mean one thing; if a woman recited it about a husband away, it would mean something else. But what might be an advantage in an age of application becomes a problem in an age of interpretation. The “Lesser Preface” supplies precisely what is missing when the Poem is no longer applied in use.

To apply and later to interpret a Poem like “Mao Hill” there were a group of procedures or kinds of questions available to the user and later to the interpreter. Such procedures were a way of linking the relatively indeterminate representations in a Poem to an external context. Those same procedures, however, were often demanded within the Poem as well, even on the level of relative indeterminacy that we are given. In many poems these procedures or questions are raised to the level of theme within the Poem.

There are two basic procedures that we commonly find. First, there is the need to make inferences regarding the motives and state of mind of a subject, usually the speaker in the poem. Second, there is the need to explore analogies, particularly how a secondary

level of representation in an image from nature relates to the primary level of representation in the human situation. Beyond these two primary procedures, there are some others, including the ability to recognize significant pattern variation or seeing significance in repetition. It should be stressed that these are only procedures of forming meaning; they do not guarantee any particular outcome or any outcome at all.

In many ways we can understand the Poems as hermeneutic lessons for their users, for the audience on their occasions of use, and later for their interpreters. Their role as culture-bearing texts in ancient China was not simply in the ethical content they were supposed to embody but in teaching ways of understanding by which ethical judgment could be reached.

To give an example, let us take a simple, two stanza Air of Chen:

東門之楊，其葉牂牂。昏以為期，明星煌煌。

東門之楊，其葉沛沛。昏以為期，明星晢晢。

“Willows by the Eastern Gate” 140

Willows by the Eastern Gate,
their leaves so thick and close.
Dusk had been the time set,
the morning star glows bright.

Willows by the Eastern Gate,
their leaves so dense and full.
Dusk had been the time set,
the morning star is gleaming.

Even Mao does not try to interpret the context here as referring to a historically particular person: “It is an attack on the times: marriages did not occur at their proper time, and men and women often strayed; men met their women personally, but in this case the girl did not come.” Quite apart from the ethical question, Mao’s interpretation contextualizes the poem in a larger frame of social history and general behavior, an interpretive move we will discuss later. But at the core of his interpretation Mao has made the interpretive move demanded by the poem. To read this poem, we must infer a speaker who has waited all night for someone to come. The text is phrased in such a way that it does *not* say explicitly that the speaker waited for the other person all night (the translator has

loaded the English version by the handling of tenses); the text asks that the reader draw that inference.⁸

Like Mao, we may be inclined to see this as a romantic assignation—a man waiting for a woman, or perhaps a woman waiting for a man. It should be stressed, however, that neither of those interpretations is determined by the text. The inference that the speaker waited all night (or into the night) is demanded by the Poem, which raises the question of why the speaker waited, setting us on the course of finding a scenario.

From the initial inference the reader is directed to others: the fact that they were supposed to meet at dusk and he/she is still there at dawn may imply the strength of desire, his/her continuing hope that the other will come. Again this is something not said explicitly in the text, but an inference to be drawn.

Any reader of the *Airs* knows to pay attention to the interplay between images of nature and the human situation.⁹ This is the ground of analogy formation. On the one hand, the thickness of the leaves of the willow suggests their pragmatic capacity to hide people (lovers, if we presume the other who did not come was a lover). Since the willows are part of the scene, in the poetics of the “Great Preface” they would be *fu* 賦, exposition. At the same time the concealing density of the leaves is analogically associated with the speaker’s failure to catch sight of the other.

The Subject

In the foundation Odes members of the royal house of Zhou possessed hearts whose measure could be taken (*duo* 度) by the examining deity; from this the deity could tell that they had the capacity to rule.¹⁰ Nevertheless this was not full interiority. The house of Zhou glowed with positive De, which brought them adherents, just as the bad last ruler of the Shang possessed a negative De that repelled.¹¹ What was inside was transparent on the outside. In the *Airs*, however, what is inside is often concealed; the interiority of the speaking subject becomes a theme, and the

⁸ Even if we do not take *mingxing* 明星 as the “morning star” and simply as “bright stars,” an interval from dusk to night is implied. If it is the “evening star,” then there is no interval.

⁹ From this point on I will use the term “reader” as a term of convenience, including both those who applied Poems to situations and those who understood how such application worked.

¹⁰ Poem 241: 維此王季，帝度其心。

¹¹ Pems 255: 斂怨以爲德。

speaker may explicitly raise the issue of understanding his/her real feelings or intentions, which may differ from outward appearances.

彼黍離離，彼稷之苗。行邁靡靡，中心搖搖。
 知我者，謂我心憂。不知我者，謂我何求。
 悠悠蒼天，此何人哉。

彼黍離離，彼稷之穗。行邁靡靡，中心如醉。
 知我者，謂我心憂。不知我者，謂我何求。
 悠悠蒼天，此何人哉。

彼黍離離，彼稷之實。行邁靡靡，中心如噎。
 知我者，謂我心憂。不知我者，謂我何求。
 悠悠蒼天，此何人哉。

“Millet Lush” 65

There the millet is lush,
 There the grain is sprouting.
 I walk with slow, slow steps,
 My heart is shaken within.
 Those who know me
 Would say my heart is grieved;
 Those who know me not
 Would ask what I seek here.
 Gray and everlasting Heaven—
 What sort of man is this?

There the millet is lush,
 There the grain comes to ear.
 I walk with slow, slow steps,
 My heart as if drunk within.
 Those who know me
 Would say my heart is grieved;
 Those who know me not
 Would ask what I seek here.
 Gray and everlasting Heaven—
 What sort of man is this?

There the millet is lush,
 There grain forms its seed.
 I walk with slow, slow steps,
 My heart as if choked within.

Those who know me
 Would say my heart is grieved;
 Those who know me not
 Would ask what I seek here.
 Gray and everlasting Heaven—
 What sort of man is this?

Mao takes this as having been written by an officer of the Eastern Zhou, who passes the site of the ruined western Zhou capital and laments, stirred by the sight of grain growing everywhere. This is a purely speculative scenario for the poem's composition. The Han 韓 School offered a different scenario in which the Poem was composed by one Bofeng, seeking his virtuous brother Boqi, who had been killed by their father at the malicious instigation of his second wife (WXQ 315). Mao's scenario takes the millet as part of the scene, covering the ruins just as the true reason for his grief is hidden within. In doing so he ignores the variable element in the description of the grain, which passes from sprouts to bearing seed, thus placing the image from nature in a less obvious relation to the speaker.

The speaker places himself (or herself) in the scene, then imagines how he appears from the outside. Those who would interpret his behavior are divided between those who know and those who do not know. The good interpreters, those who know or understand the speaker, understand what is inside the heart. Those who do not know respond with a question, unsuccessfully trying to find out the intentions behind the surface. They are suspicious of this apparent loitering.

In the final lines of each stanza we are placed in the role of the challenged interpreter. Applying the words to his scenario, the tradition following Mao takes the line as referring to the person responsible for the fall of the Western Zhou: "what kind of man was responsible for this?" We might take the lines as the speaker addressing Heaven and asking who is responsible for his grief (or her grief), or what sort of people those are who do not understand him. It would be just as plausible to take the lines as being put in the mouths of those who do not understand him and wonder what he seeks; it would be quite reasonable for them to ask "what sort of man is this?"

"Millet Lush" raises the problem of interpretation, at first through its words pretending to give us access to the truth of what lies within; but then, through the indeterminacy of the last lines of the stanzas, placing us in the position of uncertainty and doubt. By

creating a scenario in which these words were uttered or by applying the utterance to a situation, the indeterminacy of the final lines becomes determinate and interpretable.

In some cases an Air will correct a possible misinterpretation and in doing so dramatize the relation between words and the motives for their use.

將仲子兮，無踰我里，無折我樹杞。豈敢愛之，
 畏我父母，仲可懷也。父母之言，亦可畏也。
 將仲子兮，無踰我牆，無折我樹桑。豈敢愛之，
 畏我諸兄，仲可懷也。諸兄之言，亦可畏也。
 將仲子兮，無踰我園，無折我樹檀。豈敢愛之，
 畏人之多言，仲可懷也。人之多言，亦可畏也。

Zhongzi, Please" 76

Zhongzi, please
 don't cross my village wall,
 don't break the willows planted there.
 It's not that I care so much for them,
 but I dread my father and mother;
 Zhongzi may be in my thoughts,
 but what my father and mother said—
 that too may be held in dread.

Zhongzi, please
 don't cross my fence,
 don't break the mulberries planted there.
 It's not that I care so much for them,
 but I dread my brothers;
 Zhongzi may be in my thoughts,
 but what my brothers said—
 that too may be held in dread.

Zhongzi, please
 don't cross into my garden,
 don't break the sandalwood planted there.
 It's not that I care so much for them,
 but I dread others will talk much;
 Zhongzi may be in my thoughts,
 but when people talk too much—
 that too may be held in dread.

In this poem we are on relatively secure ground in taking the speaker as a woman and Zhongzi (middle son) as her lover (Mao accepts this as the primary level, then adduces as political scenario of composition to which the primary level is figuratively applied). The woman forbids Zhongzi to cross some barrier that surrounds her, then follows her first prohibition with a second that seems to explain the reason: do not break the willows, etc. Then she denies that she really cares about the trees, that she does love Zhongzi but is worried what others will say.

Like “Millet Lush” this Air is a lesson in interpretation, dramatizing a subject behind the words. When the speaker says that she does not care for the trees in themselves (the word used is *ai* 愛, both “love” and “begrudge”), the line makes sense only if we assume that she is aware of a possible misinterpretation of her words and that she worries what the other might infer from such a misinterpretation. The speaker has to explicitly cancel such a potential misinterpretation and explain herself. Likewise, in the line that follows, her correct explanation of why she does not want him to break the trees requires that we infer that the broken trees would be public evidence of Zhongzi’s having come to her. Finally each stanza comes to a transparent statement of feeling that explains why she says what she says: she longs for Zhongzi but is afraid of reproach and gossip.

Like Zhongzi’s potential passage closer, invisible but leaving legible traces from which a secret could be inferred, so too the word is the lasting trace of a subject’s motives, and in this case the process of bringing those motives to light is dramatized. Desire for Zhongzi is weighed against the disapproval of the community, and the conflict is resolved in the words of the song that communicate both desire and the inhibitions placed upon it.

Such stasis, in which Zhongzi is both invited and held back, must be understood in relation to the sequence inferred from the variables in the stanza: the increasing proximity of Zhongzi’s approach and the ever widening circle of family and community “words”—words of reproach and disapproving gossip. Words in the poem, words that require clarification, are used to prevent other words; and the poem itself is a public utterance of the private, confirming the speaker’s acceptance of the power of the community’s judgment. Yet in each stanza the line that Zhongzi must not cross is drawn ever closer to her person.

If we learn to draw from words inferences regarding a subject’s motives in using them, then we have the possibility of unreliable

claims that can be recognized without being explicitly refuted. The following poem is far from clear, especially in the final stanza. It requires the creation of a scenario, a dialogue.

雞既鳴矣，朝既盈矣。匪雞則鳴，蒼蠅之聲。
 東方明矣，朝既昌矣。匪東方則明，月出之光。
 蟲飛薨薨，甘與子同夢。會且歸矣，無庶予子憎。

Rooster Crows 96

“The rooster has crowed,
 the court is filled!”
 “That wasn’t the rooster crowing,
 just the blueflies’ buzz.”

“It’s daybreak in the east,
 the court is in its glory!”
 “That’s not daybreak in the east,
 just the moonlight coming out.

The flies go bzzzz,
 and I would gladly dream with you.”
 “The gathering will disperse,
 don’t make me hate you.”

It is very tempting to follow Waley and read *chao* 朝, “court,” as *zhao*, “dawn,” thus “the dawn is full” and “the dawn is in its glory.” The scene of a responsible wife urging an officer or ruler to attend court would thus be replaced by a classless alba (the interpretation of the problematic penultimate line would also be changed). In archaic Chinese the two readings may have been virtual homophones; and, if separate, they were separated only by an initial consonant. In application it would have required only the slightest shift of sound to change one scenario to another.

In the first two stanzas we have a statement followed by a denial. Usually in the *Airs* subsequent statements serve to correct prior statements, as in “Zhongzi, Please.” Yet in this case we understand the claim that it is only the flies buzzing and only the moonlight as unreliable, as excuses on the part of the speaker not to get up. Since the first couplet in the third stanza seems to reaffirm the claim of the flies linked to a desire to stay in bed, we take that as belonging to the voice speaking in the second half of the first two stanzas.

Without presuming subjects here and inventing a plausible scenario, we cannot make sense of the words. Contradiction is resolved by creating two speaking subjects and having one of those subjects unreliable. Once a traditional scenario is established (a wife urging her husband to go to court in the morning), it shapes the interpretation of the words and accompanies them through history. There is disagreement on the figural application (Mao's "longing for a virtuous consort" or the Three Schools' "anxiety about slander"), and there is considerable disagreement on the details of interpretation; but the core scenario is remarkably stable. Modern Chinese critics have proposed new and very different scenarios for many of the *Airs*, but in "Rooster Crows" they are in basic agreement. A Western interpreter like Waley, preferring the European alba to the Chinese political context, can radically change the scenario, but he still needs two speaking subjects, one of whom is unreliable.

The contradictions force us to invent scenarios for speakers with motives to be inferred. The text invites this process, but no scenario, however plausible or attractive, is fully justified by the words themselves. The traditional Chinese scenario probably goes back no further than the Warring States, and is merely a possible solution to the problems that arise when the Poems are no longer applied and the interpreter must ask what the Poem "means."

Tokens

The question of the subject's intentions and the meaning of "things" meet in the token, which is both object and sign. Tokens are part of a system of gifts and exchanges. When the king gives one of his feudal lords chariots and their trappings, what is given is not purely a commodity, but a sign of meaning. Such royal gifts, however, belong to a public system of signs that require no explanation. The more interesting case is the private gift, which in both giving and receiving may require explanation to translate the commodity (and the instability of gift-giving à la Marcel Mauss) into a token. Although gifts are frequently given as tokens of love in the *Airs*, the following is a poem that plays on the identity of a token.

靜女其姝，俟我於城隅。愛而不見，搔首踟躕。
 靜女其變，貽我彤管。彤管有煒，說懌女美。
 字牧歸荑，洵美且異。匪女之爲美，美人之貽。

Gentle Girl" 42

A gentle girl and fair
 awaits by the crook of the wall;
 in shadows I don't see her;
 I pace and scratch my hair.

A gentle girl and comely
 gave me a scarlet pipe;
 scarlet pipe that gleams—
 in your beauty I find delight.

Then she brought me a reed from the pastures,
 it was truly beautiful and rare.
 Reed—the beauty is not yours—
 you are but beauty's gift.

Our immediate impulse is to take this as a male speaking of the “gentle girl” as his beloved, and a line of Chinese commentators since Ouyang Xiu has indeed read it this way. Mao takes it as “an attack on the times: the Lord of Wei lacked the Way, and his Lady wanted De/Virtue.” As explained by Zheng Xuan, the poem is a satire in showing a proper relationship, with the gentle girl as one fit to be the mate of a lord. But the Qi school of the Han has a complex scenario of a very different sort, demonstrating the flexibility of the Airs. In this version the chief wife of the Lord of Wei is waiting to greet the bridal train of her younger sister, who is coming as a secondary wife (WXQ 204).

However fantastic we may find the Qi school scenario, the words of the Air do not give us any determination of the gender of the speaker, much less of a precise occasion in which the words might be situated. But the essential work of the poem is successfully carried out on the level of relative indeterminacy. Here we are concerned with tokens and absence (though to talk about these questions we too will have to play the game of scenario-making and assign a gender to the speaker).

The poem opens with the speaker confidently asserting that the girl is waiting for him at the corner of the wall. Since the meeting does not seem to occur, the translator might want to render the line: “was to await me”; but the words do not say that. But even though he is sure that she is waiting, *ai er bu jian*, she is hidden and he does not see her. That *ai* 愛 is a problematic word; it is the common word for “love,” and Mao takes it in that sense: “I love her yet do not see her,” or “she loves me yet does not see me.” It is the same word translated as “care for” in “Zhongzi, Please.” *Ai* also means to be obscured from view, which is clearly the case in the

opening lines of “Gentle Girl,” no less than the love. It is clearly a play on words. Loving one who is hidden from view, he pauses and paces about, not knowing what to do.

In the space left open between the expectation of meeting and the failure to meet, her gifts appear. In any narrative scenario we might construct, the giving of the gifts must occur either before or after the failed meeting. The poem does not give us such narrative information. In the poem’s own logic of pure sequence the giving of the gifts takes the place of meeting and represents an exchange between the lovers and a communication. The objects cross that space of concealment when the people cannot. In the second stanza she gives him the enigmatic scarlet pipe, and the speaker finds the delight in its beauty that he would have found in the girl herself, had they met.¹²

“In your beauty I find delight” 說憚女美: “your,” *ru* 汝, was commonly written 女, which is also *nü*, the “girl.”¹³ In archaic Chinese the two words *ru* and *nü* were probably distinguished by a very slight difference in the initial consonant clusters. Here we have fair evidence of how close the sounds were, because the speaker’s personification of the gift is clearly a play on words, displacing “in the girl’s beauty I find delight”—she is, after all, hidden from him—to finding delight in the beauty of the personified gift. The scarlet pipe is a musical instrument, thus the gift leads back to music and the Airs themselves.

The third stanza addresses the potential collapse of the distinction between the gift and its giver. This time the gift is a reed shoot, *ti* 莢. Again he admires the gift, but this time he distinguishes the giver from the gift. He says “reed—the beauty is not yours” 匪女之爲美, or “it is not your being taken as beautiful.” Or, of course, it could be “it is not the beauty of the girl.” Thus the phonological distinction of the initial consonants must be stressed. He explicitly withdraws the transferred attribute from the personified reed and returns it to the person, making the gift valuable only because of the person.

¹² In Mao and the surviving fragments of the Three Schools, the “scarlet pipe” is a stylus, indicating the “female scribe,” *nushi* 女士, who records the dates and significant information of the ruler’s chief wife and concubines, when they serve in the ruler’s bedchamber, when they give birth, etc. This is clearly not the case: elsewhere in the Poems *guan* is a “pipe,” a musical instrument.

¹³ I defer the issue when *ru* 汝 became a second-person pronoun.

This is an essentially exegetical move. In the second stanza we understood implicitly that the red pipe was not admired entirely in its own right; but the poem cannot let it rest there. It requires the second gift (indeed one that has less commodity value than the first) so that the speaker can explicitly assert that the value and meaning of the thing lies in its status as token and not in the thing itself. And that distinction between the object in its own right and its meaning is sustained by the word play that joins and then separates person and personification.

In all its apparent simplicity “Quince” is one of the finest examples of the exegesis of a thing, differentiating commodity from meaning.

投我以木瓜，報之以瓊琚。匪報也，永以為好也。
 投我以木桃，報之以瓊瑤。匪報也，永以為好也。
 投我以木李，報之以瓊玖。匪報也，永以為好也。

“Quince” 64

She cast a quince to me,
 a costly garnet I returned;
 it was no equal return,
 but by this love will last.

She cast a peach to me,
 costly opal I returned;
 it was no equal return,
 but by this love will last.

She cast a plum to me,
 a costly agate I returned;
 it was no equal return,
 but by this love will last.

The giving of a gift is always on the verge of entering an exchange system. In “Gentle Girl” the woman’s gifts are tokens of affection, and the speaker’s appreciation of both gifts and giver return the message that is the poem. In “Quince” we have a more substantial exchange of things, which aims to be an exchange of meanings. The other gives me a *mugua*, a quince; in return I give a *qiongju* gem, translated freely as “garnet.” This is usually explained as one of the pieces in the ornamental jade and gemstone array strung from the waist, the *pei* 佩. The term *bao* 報, translated as “return,” is used, suggesting balanced reciprocity and equivalence

(hence the translation “equal return” in the second use in the stanzas).

In an exchange of commodities, of things with socially quantifiable value, this exchange is out of proportion. He has repaid more than he was given, created a surplus balance. Still he used the word *bao* for such an unequal exchange, trying by words to declare the exchange equal. There is potentially another inequality in the encounter—a difference in status. Even a peasant could offer the quince, but only someone of higher social status could offer the *qiongju* gem. As is often the case in the *Airs*, the erotic encounter between the woman and the man is often presented as if (but only “as if”) it were an encounter between commoner woman and gentry man—fruit versus carved gemstone.

The speaker says *bao*, “I returned”; then he unsays it, *fei bao ye*, “it was no equal return.” The representation of the act of giving has created inequality by invoking a system of exchange, and the courtship implied in the exchange is also shadowed by a similar inequality, his status being greater than hers. The balanced interests of lovers are in danger of becoming something else. By negating the *bao* he tries to declare another system whereby the exchange can be equal (and the class difference between lovers can be overcome). There is no longer underpayment or overpayment, but something not quantifiable. He has raised the issue of inequality and imbalance to get beyond it, to negate it.

The alternative to quantitative exchange is embodied in the phrase *yong yi wei hao ye* 永以為好也: “by this love will last.” The exchange becomes one of meanings, and the gem is explained as only a token of meaning. Even here there is difference that verges on inequivalence. The gift of fruit comes at a moment of ripeness; insofar as it is an invitation, it is an invitation for only the present moment. If, in giving the *qiongju* gem, he accepted a conventional exchange system, then the transaction figured here would be complete, a thing only of the present moment. He not only declares the *qiongju* gem a token of meaning, the meaning that he assigns to it is a pledge of permanence and lasting affection. Of course, such permanence is also a property of the gem itself, a hard and lasting thing.

The pattern is repeated three times with fruit and jewels as variables. As we will see, such forms of repetition and variation are another operation of meaning, following from context. Here no pattern or sequence can be discerned in the variable terms; each term in a set could be equally exchanged for another, restricted

only by rhyme. Each fruit is functionally the same as the other fruits; each gem is functionally the same as another gem. The last stanza could be the first stanza. Such perfect fungibility of objects among the stanzas reinforces the internal claim of the stanzas, that these are not particular fruits or gems but pure tokens in an exchange of meanings.

Although the speaker tries to create stability and permanence, there is an inherent imbalance of power here. Power is above all the power to explain or assign meanings. First he creates an inequivalence, an unequal exchange; then by explanation he brings the unequal system to balance. This is precisely the process of using the Poems: an image from nature and a human situation (like fruit and artifactual gem) are counterposed in a stanza; the one who understands the Poems, who has the power of interpretation, shows their equivalence. On a different level the words of the Poem are applied to a current situation, and the one who truly understands the Poems sees their aptness, sees the analogy.

Zigong said, “What do you think of those who are poor yet do not toady and those who are rich yet do not lord it over others.”

The Master said, “That is all right. But it would be better to be poor yet still happy or rich yet still loving proper behavior.”

Zigong said, “A Poem has it:
‘As if cut, as if scraped,
as if polished, as if ground.’

Is that what you are referring to in saying this?”

The Master said, “Now I can indeed discuss the Poems with you. When I tell you something, you can see what follows from it.”

Analects I.15

Analogy

When the man explains his gift of the *qiongju* gem in “Quince” as the durability of his affection, he is appealing to the hard and lasting qualities of the stone as a natural sign of his feelings. If the recipient of the gift had been a skilled interpreter like Zigong, he

would not have needed to explain the meaning of such a gift, or, more properly, he would have celebrated the fact that he did not need to explain the meaning. The capacity to understand is foregrounded, and the Poems pose challenges that distinguish the hermeneutically capable from the inept.

From our modern perspective we may legitimately describe this as the power to assign meaning and make analogies. Within the world from which the Poems come, however, such power is understood as a capacity to understand what was natural and inherent. Object and meaning are supposed to have a natural equivalence (durable gem = durable love).

Many of the *Airs* and *Lesser Odes* begin with stanzas that juxtapose an image from nature with a human situation. In the most common and elementary form this same pattern is repeated in subsequent stanzas with variables that change with rhyme. The opening image from nature may have originally been a compositional technique used to set the rhyme. In many cases it is hard to discern any connection between it and the human situation; such poems inspire heroic feats of hermeneutic ingenuity on the part of scholastic commentators. It seems likely that at least on one compositional stratum the opening image had no more connection to the human situation than the pleasing juxtaposition of rhyme words in nursery rhymes.

The Poems, however, may represent many compositional strata and a history of modification and new composition. If some opening images seem to bear little relation to the human situations appended to them, others seem to be consciously chosen for a clear analogy between the natural world and the human.

The juxtaposition of images of nature and the human situation invite the attempt at analogy-formation; and it is this process, embedded in the form of the Poems themselves, rather than the determination of particular analogies, that was the “lesson” of the Poems. Analogies that came too easily or were too difficult were less interesting than liminal juxtapositions, which challenged interpretive skills and differentiated those who understood from those who did not. Here I am using “interpretive” in the broad, rather than the narrow sense, including aptness in application and understanding the purport of an application, such as *Zigong* demonstrated in the passage quoted above.

“*Dead Roe Deer*” offers just such a problematic juxtaposition of opening image and the human situation. Mao and the scholastic tradition that followed him tried to resolve the problem by turning

the dead deer from an image into venison. In the Song Dynasty Zhu Xi took it as *xing*, an “affective image.” And when soon thereafter Wang Bo 王柏 sought to purge the *Classic of Poetry* of the “sexually corrupting Poems,” *yinshi* 淫詩, “Dead Roe Deer” headed the list. Chinese critics have, for centuries, debated the virtue of the man and maid, and the intent of the author. Did the gentleman truly “lead her astray” or merely propose marriage? Is the deer a *xing*, “affective image” or meat? In the last stanza is she inviting him or virtuously resisting him? “Dead Roe Deer” in itself tells us none of these things; rather, it is constructed to produce interpretations.

野有死麋，白茅包之。有女懷春，吉士誘之。
 林有樸櫨，野有死鹿。白茅純束，有女如玉。
 舒而脫脫兮，無感我帨兮，無使尫也吠。

Dead Roe Deer” 23

A roe deer dead on the moor,
 all wrapped in white rushes.
 The maiden’s heart was filled with spring;
 a gentleman led her astray.

Undergrowth in forest,
 dead deer on the moor,
 all wound with white rushes,
 a maiden white as marble.

Softly now, and gently, gently,
 do not touch my apron, sir,
 don’t set the cur to barking.

We might first note that this is a complex form rather than an elementary stanzaic repetition with variables. Like “Fishhawk,” *Guanju* 關雎 (1), it is unusual in redeploying repeated elements in different positions in the second stanza. Like a larger minority of the *Airs*, it breaks an established pattern in the final stanza. This is not to say that “Dead Roe Deer” is necessarily later than *Airs* in more elementary forms, but it is a secondary form and shows sophistication behind its surface of apparent simplicity.

“Dead Roe Deer” is not only formally sophisticated, it is almost self-conscious in its invitation to draw an analogy between the deer and the woman. The mode of juxtaposition foregrounded: no other of the *Poems* uses “there is,” *you* 有, so often in such a short space. The poem is ostensive: it says “there is this thing,” “there is that thing.” In declaring these presences it begs the question of why

these things are pointed out. The scholastic “venison solution” opens multiple possibilities to elaborate a fragmentary narrative of seduction or attempted seduction: the man is a hunter, wrapping his cut of the venison in white rushes would show ceremony; the folk are hungry and the offering of venison is to lure her; the venison is to be a betrothal gift, etc. All such narrative solutions are ways to resolve the problematic juxtaposition.

The poem does indeed formally invite an analogy between the dead deer and the woman. But despite our modern willingness to accept the comparison between the dead deer and lost virginity, the proposed analogy is not really all that inviting (hence the “venison solution”). In English “innocence” is made into a thing that can be “lost” and the “death” of which can be lamented, like the death of a deer. But innocence and virginity per se were not an issue in early Chinese texts; and Mao’s initial comment, that the poem “shows hatred for a want of ceremony” 惡無禮, would be closer to the case. “Want of ceremony” is perfectly appropriate for the illicit sexual encounter suggested, but it is not easy to transfer to the dead deer.

Once we give up any easy equation between the dead deer and the woman, we find many shared terms that suggest analogy: the deer lying down, the whiteness of the reeds that is also the woman’s whiteness of marble (jade), the “wrapping,” *bao* 包, which is also the embrace that is never represented in the human situation. There is the dead creature abandoned and strangely hidden, as if evidence of an act of poaching. Abandonment of a woman belongs very much to the culture of the Airs, as does the motif of keeping sexual encounters hidden. In the conventional narrative of love and abandonment these two events, hiding and leaving in isolation, are separate; in the image of the deer, these motifs are simultaneous. No complete analogy can be drawn between the dead deer and the seduction of a young woman, but there are many fragmentary indices of analogy through shared terms. What we are describing here is not an analogy that exists, that awaits discovery, but analogy as an operation.

Insofar as an analogy, however imperfect, is indicated between the dead deer and the seduction of the woman, the first couplet represents an aftermath, what is left after the act, while the second couplet represents what led up to the sexual act. Thus an evidentiary sequence is established, a move from a consequence to a source event (as the broken trees would lead the interpreters of the community to realize that Zhongzi had secretly visited the young

woman). In the same way we move from the secondary level of representation, the natural image, to the primary level, the human situation. Such a move from the figural evidence or consequence to the non-figural human origin is the paradigm of later interpretation of the Poems, as in the *Mencius*, moving from the figurative text back to “what was on the person’s mind,” *zhi* 志.

The first line of the second stanza can be easily explained by the formal habits of song, the “undergrowth,” *pusu*, setting a new rhyme which will permit the singer to use the *lu* deer (and since we have changed from the species, *jun* 麋, the “roe deer,” to the family, *lu* 鹿, we may legitimately wonder if this is the same deer). The undergrowth may conceal, but this momentary shift in setting to the forest is hard to integrate into the intensely binary relation between the deer and the woman, the two terms that are supposed to be equivalent but are not.

In the third stanza instead of the ostensive and existential *you*, affirming presences and appearances as if from the outside, we move to the immediacy of direct address and prohibition, another move backward and inward to the event. Here the other interpretive mode of inferring a subject’s state of mind is unavoidable. We might take this as a movement from resistance to acquiescence, or we might take this simply as an expression of caution; but when she tells him not to make the dog bark, we must interpret her intentions in order for the line to make sense. We presume that her anxiety here, as for the speaker in “Zongzi, Please,” is not to let others know, echoing the earlier motif of concealment. But of course the poem does make things known. As before we moved from the figural consequence (dead deer) to the source event (the gentleman seduced her), here we move from utterance to its source, to the state of mind that is the ground for unifying disparate utterances.

This is only a poem, only words. And they were once the words of a song. What we ask of the words and get from them depends on the situation in which we use them. We imagine a banquet hall in the early Spring and Autumn Annals period; everyone is drunk; the people take turns singing, and the lord’s uncle rises and sings this; in the last stanza he imitates a woman’s voice and winks; everyone laughs; no one even noticed the dead deer.

From our imaginary bawdy use of the Air, we might turn to a recorded (though certainly invented) use. It is summer, the fourth month, in the first year of the reign of Duke Zhao of Lu, 541 BC.

Zhao Meng, Shusun Bao and the Grand Master of Cao entered into Zheng. The Earl of Zheng feasted them all. Zipi [a minister of Zheng] forewarned Zhao Meng regarding the time set, and when their courtesies were completed Zhao Meng recited “Gourd Leaves” (231). Zipi then forewarned Mu Shu [a minister of Lu] and informed him [that Zhao Meng had recited “Bitter Leaves”]. Mu Shu said, “Zhao Meng wishes that there be only one official toast; you should do as he says.” Zipi replied, “Dare I?” Mu Shu said, “If that is what the man wants, why shouldn’t you dare?” When it came time for the feast, the vessels for five toasts had been prepared under the tent. Zhao Meng then took his leave and said privately to Zichan [a minister of Zheng], “I made a special plea to the minister [that there be only one toast].” At that a single toast was arranged. Zhao Meng was the principal guest. When the ceremonies were completed, they feasted.

Then Mu Shu recited “Magpies Nest” (12). Zhao Meng responded, “I am not worthy.” Then again he [Mu Shu] recited, “Picking Southernwood” (13) and said, “We small domains are the southernwood, and if your great domain cultivates it less, we will surely respond to your charges.” Zipi recited the last stanza of “Dead Roe Deer”; then Zhao Meng recited “Pyrus” (169) and said, “If we brothers are secure in standing close together [re. “Pyrus”], then we can keep the cur from barking.” (ZZ 1208-1210)

We see here the great officers of the domains conducting their business by citing the Poems. Zhao Meng is the minister of the powerful state of Jin, and the alliances with smaller domains like Zheng are the heart of its power. They are not equally adept in using the Poems: Zipi must find out from Mu Shu (appropriately from Lu, the home of learning) what Zhao Meng meant by reciting “Gourd Leaves.” Zipi’s use of the final stanza of “Dead Roe Deer” is taken out of context (unless we assume he is suggesting that Zheng is being raped by Jin). Zhao Meng takes the line, and applies it to his purposes, which is cementing the solidarity of Jin’s alliances—the cur here apparently used as an analogy for their enemies. The process of analogy-formation within the poem is reproduced in its use.

When we enter the age of interpretation, we are forced to take the words of the Air seriously. To “read” the Poem and read the Poem as a whole forces interpretation on us. We cannot simply

overlook the opening lines or take it as only a pretty image. We are invited to draw a cryptic analogy, to see the hidden connections, especially between the natural and human world, with the natural world as the secondary level, legible only when we see its meaning for the human world. This is, of course, the structural message of *xing* 興 in Mao's figural system and of the Images of the Changes, *Yi* 易: they assert covert correspondences that require interpretation.

Priority in reference is hierarchical. As the natural image is used to refer to the human situation, so in application low status figures and situations are made to refer to high status figures and situations, as Zipi and Zhao Meng use the closing lines of "Dead Roe Deer" to refer to the domains. The lesson is not simply one of analogy-formation, but of axes of movement: from origin to consequence or consequence to origin, from inside to outside or knowing what is inside from the outside, and hierarchical movement from lower orders to higher orders.

"Dead Roe Deer" is a problematic text. The *Airs* also contain elementary analogies that seem to work easily and offer a ground of expectation for more complex processes of analogy formation.

桃之夭夭，灼灼其華。之子于歸，宜其室家。

桃之夭夭，有蕢其實。之子于歸，宜其家室。

桃之夭夭，其葉蓁蓁。之子于歸，宜其家人。

"Peach Tree Soft and Tender" 6

Peach tree soft and tender,
how your blossoms glow!
The bride is going to her home,
she well befits this house.

Peach tree soft and tender,
plump, the ripening fruit.
The bride is going to her home,
she well befits this house.

Peach tree soft and tender,
its leaves spread thick and full.
The bride is going to her home,
she well befits these folk.

The changing phases of the peach tree, passing from flower to fruit to leafy shade, clearly evokes the present and future promise of the bride in her new home. She is the outsider coming in, and her integration into the household is in question. The image of the

tree naturalizes her, “roots” her as it were in the new household, and proclaims her suitability.

But what does the opening image say to the new bride in a very similar epithalamium, a poem that has the same third stanza line as the poem above?

維鵲有巢，維鳩居之。之子于歸，百兩御之。

維鵲有巢，維鳩方之。之子于歸，百兩將之。

維鵲有巢，維鳩盈之。之子于歸，百兩成之。

“Magpie’s Nest” 12

O the magpie has its nest,
but the cuckoo takes it as her own.
The bride is going to her home,
a hundred coaches greet her.

O the magpie has its nest,
but ‘tis the cuckoo holds it.
The bride is going to her home,
the hundred coaches join her.

O the magpie has its nest,
but ‘tis the cuckoo fills it.
The bride is going to her home,
a hundred coaches in her train.

The peach tree in the preceding poem offered the possibility of easy equivalence between the image from nature and the human situation; but just as often there is some apparent inequivalence of the natural image and the human situation, a disparity that is later addressed by interpretation. This case is particularly interesting in that the secondary level of representation, that of the birds, involves replacement or exchange. As the bride in “Peach Tree Soft and Tender” was “suited to her home,” so the magpie should be suited to its own nest or the cuckoo to its nest. But a replacement has occurred.

The primary level of representation, welcoming the bride, is perfectly straightforward. The problem is that it must be understood in terms of the secondary level of representation, that of the birds, also involving nests and marriages. The “cuckoo,” [*shíjiū* 鳩 (or whatever bird is meant by a *jiū* 鳩 here) is linked by close sound similarity in archaic Chinese to *ju* 居, “occupy”; and it will inevitably be associated with the bride coming to her new home. But who or what corresponds to the magpie, the *que* 鵲, who has

the nest that the cuckoo now uses or occupies? The human counterpart of the magpie has been erased, thrown out of its nest and the poem.

The commentators set about their work, trying to patch up the troubling implications raised. Most, following Mao, suggest that the man has established the home for the woman now to come and occupy. But this does not quite work. The phrasing of the first two lines of the stanza calls attention not to the complementarity of the birds but to a replacement, even a usurpation. The two pieces of bird-lore about the cuckoo are contradictory, but both offer less normative analogies for the new bride. One story is that the magpie leaves its nest in autumn and the cuckoo comes and takes it over. This leads to the quite reasonable interpretation offered by the modern commentator Gao Heng that the lord of a domain has divorced one wife and is marrying another. Why this would be the focus of a poem welcoming a bride is not altogether clear. The second version of lore about the cuckoo is that it leaves its eggs in the nest of another bird to raise as its own—here the potential analogy for the new bride is even more troubling.

The opening two lines strongly suggest proper ownership and usurpation. That same relation occurs in the relation between the two couplets that make up a stanza; the human situation tries to fit analogically, to occupy the pattern established in the opening couplet, but it doesn't belong there. The commentators try to fix the bad fit, to pretend that no improper substitution has taken place. They go to great lengths to declare that when the cuckoo occupies the magpies nest, it is following its "nature," *Tianxing* 天性—they don't usually have to offer such justifications (WXQ 65).

The *fang* 方 of the second couplet, translated as "holds," is the subject of diverse interpretations; but one of its most common semantic areas is to be "side by side," as in its meaning "compare" or "resemble," or the related *fang* 舫, a "double hulled boat" (see WXQ 69). Perhaps the magpie has not left the nest after all; perhaps the cuckoo will occupy it "side by side" with the other bird. This suits well those who would have the magpie as the man, but it could also be another wife. But in that case we must wonder about the variable bird in the third stanza that promises that the cuckoo will "fill," *ying* 盈, the nest.

"Then Mu Shu recited 'Magpie's Nest.' Zhao Meng responded, 'I am not worthy.'" In the passage from the *Zuo Tradition* cited above, we have a minister of Lu, Mu Shu, reciting this Air for Zhao Meng, a representative of the powerful state of Jin, who demurs at such

excessive praise. The commentator on the *Zuo Tradition* Du Yu explains this (in parallel with the phrasing of the Air): “The Lord of Jin has a domain, Zhao Meng governs it” 喻晉君有國趙孟治之. Du Yu’s interpretation of the application is clearly modeled on Mao’s explanation of “Magpie’s Nest” with the magpie as husband, here further figured by analogy as the ruler. But without the brief explanation, such as Mu Shu gives for the next Air he recites, “Picking Southernwood,” we cannot be sure what application of “Magpie’s Nest” Mu Shu intended (Zhao Meng has, after all, just been ceremoniously welcomed to Zheng). The role of this passage in the *Zuo Tradition*, in conjunction with Zipi’s failure to understand Zhao Meng’s message in reciting “Bitter Leaves,” is precisely to foreground the special understanding and communication of those who truly understand the Poems. And not wishing to have our ignorance exposed, as Zipi’s is, we are drawn into the process of understanding the application.

These questions of analogy formation, metaphor, and equivalence are set in play with remarkable sophistication in one of the finest of all the Airs, “Boat of Cypress.”

汎彼柏舟，亦汎其流。耿耿不寐，如有隱憂。
 微我無酒，以敖以遊。
 我心匪鑿，不可以茹。亦有兄弟，不可以據。
 薄言往愬，逢彼之怒。
 我心匪石，不可轉也。我心匪席，不可卷也。
 威儀棣棣，不可選也。
 憂心悄悄，愠于群小。覲閱既多，受侮不少。
 靜言思之，寤辟有標。
 日居月諸，胡迭而微。心之憂矣，如匪澣衣。
 靜言思之，不能奮飛。

Boat of Cypress” 26

That boat of cypress drifts along,
 it drifts upon the stream.
 Restless am I, I cannot sleep,
 as though in torment and troubled.
 Nor am I lacking wine
 to ease my mind and let me roam.

This heart of mine is no mirror,
 it cannot take in all.

Yes, I do have brothers,
 but brothers will not be my stay.
 I went and told them of my grief
 and met only with their rage.

This heart of mine is no stone;
 you cannot turn it where you will.
 This heart of mine is no mat;
 I cannot roll it up within.
 I have behaved with dignity,
 in this no man can fault me.

My heart is uneasy and restless,
 I am reproached by little men.
 Many are the woes I've met,
 and taken slights more than a few.
 I think on it in the quiet
 and waking pound my breast.

Oh Sun! and you Moon!
 why do you each grow dim in turn?
 These troubles of the heart
 are like unwashed clothes.
 I think on it in the quiet,
 I cannot spread wings to fly away.

As in “Peach Tree Soft and Tender” and “Magpie’s Nest,” Mao identifies the opening image here as a *xing* 興, an “affective image.” Although the analogical relation is susceptible to reflective explanation, *xing* is supposed to operate prereflectively, and thus the association between the opening image and the human mood or situation is understood as being in some way natural. Comparison with the other “Boat of Cypress” (45), which uses the same opening image for a very different Poem, suggests that the function of the opening image must be renegotiated in each particular Poem (the same is true of other *xing* used in several poems). This tells us that these opening images do not possess in themselves a fully determinate set of associations, but that such associations are formed in the process of reading or applying the Poem and then seem to inhere in the image.¹⁴

¹⁴ Here we could cite Lupu Gui’s “In reciting a poem and breaking off a stanza, I take what I seek from it” as applicable to the compositional use of images. The composer draws from a repertoire applied to different, even contradictory situations, to “take what he seeks from it.”

In the case of this “Boat of Cypress” we easily form an analogy between the floating boat and the speaker’s restlessness and helplessness. Mao is quite correct in observing the excluded alternative: “one does not cross over in it” 不以濟度也. “Crossing” was a common figure of successfully carrying through a course of action. Like most *xing* the cypress boat is not explicitly related to the speaker; it is not in the scene, or in this case the speaker’s complaint. The *xing* usually exists at a different level of the poem; it is an image adrift.

This is a poem in which acts of figuration play a central role in speaking for oneself and declaring one’s unchanging identity, apparently against a demand to conform to a social role. In the two preceding *Airs* the bride was welcomed with a natural image for her integration into the household (though the process is complicated in “Magpie’s Nest”); she is defined as a role within a community of roles. This speaker is clearly alienated and she (he?) is remarkably careful about the images by which she will permit herself to be figured.

Full metaphors declare “X is Y”; when the primary term is the heart or mind (*xin* 心), a metaphor literally declares oneself to be other. The speaker here uses a series of negated metaphors for the heart or mind, each of which in itself suggests a loss of identity and autonomy. There are, however, alternative kinds of figuration to metaphorical equations. First there is the *xing*, the “boat of cypress,” both formally detached from the speaker’s declaration and in this particular case, a figure of being detached. In the final stanza there is the simile of unwashed clothes; and a simile differs from a metaphor precisely in not declaring the identity of the things compared. At the end there is the impossible image of flying away; the self is not precisely figured as a bird; rather the self would speculatively assume the bird’s powers.

Against the cypress boat afloat we read of the speaker’s restlessness and sleeplessness, driven by some grief within. We do not know the gender of the speaker or the reason for his or her sorrow—those belong to scenarios to be invented by commentators. The speaker has wine to produce an outward appearance of gaiety, but that does not change the constancy of the heart’s troubles.

The first negated metaphor is that of the mirror, whose nature is precisely in being other, showing back what is shown to it. The topic here is *xin*, the heart, that which is interior, set against the mirror, which has no inside, whose identity as mirror is pure surface. This is an explicit declaration of a self, defined as an in-

terior, that cannot be other than what it is. The mirror offered a model, to be reproduced or avoided; here such a process of reproduction is negated. Brothers raise the possibility of corporate action, but here, when asked to share the speaker's outrage, they respond with anger, further isolating the speaker.

In the third stanza two more metaphors are offered to be negated. The heart is not a stone, again something that does not have interior identity, something in which outside and inside are the same. But the qualification of the stone within the poem is as something that can be turned. The heart is where it is, feels what it feels; it can be made to suffer but cannot be moved by outside forces. The next negated metaphor, the mat, is less clear, but it seems to suggest concealment; if the heart were a mat to be rolled up, what it shows on the surface could be kept hidden within. True feelings, unchangeable, could at least be hidden. But this heart will appear, show and declare itself. This poem is perhaps the most metapoetic of all the *Airs*, offering no hint of the causes and circumstances of feeling, coming back always to the subject that has feelings and declares itself. The third couplet of this stanza perfectly complements the stubborn heart: "behavior," *weiyi* 威儀, is an external thing, a social presence distinct from the heart. The speaker declares that all external proprieties have been correct, but the heart is what it is.

In this most militantly interior of the *Airs* the outside world is the enemy, trying to impose its will on the speaker: the outside world rages, pushes, and offers insult. The self suffers, but it does not merely suffer. Rather it broods on these things in quiet times and declares its resistance.

In the final stanza the speaker offers his/her own figure, a simile rather than a metaphor. Unlike the metaphor, which expresses identity (the heart *is* a mirror), the simile declares similarity in difference. Such distinction or separation is perfectly represented in this particular simile, where the troubles are separated from the heart itself; they may cling to it like unwashed clothes, but they are not part of it. The heart, the seat of the self, is what it is; its sorrows hang around it on the outside. At last the poem resolves into a figure of bird flight, declared impossible but invoked nevertheless. The closing solves poetically what cannot be otherwise solved, moving imaginatively from stasis to self-willed motion.

The situation here is wonderfully indeterminate, an indeterminacy that plays counterpoint to the speaker's intensity. Once it

enters the age of interpretation, such a poem will need a scenario. Mao is strangely weak in his historical story-telling here, speaking of “a kindly man not meeting appreciation” in the bad days of Duke Qing of Wei. Mao’s bland version is in competition with “The Accounts of Virtuous Women,” *Lienü zhuan* 烈女傳, representing the Lu school of interpretation of the Poems. Here we have the daughter of the Count of Qi setting off to be the wife of Duke Xuan of Wei. The duke dies as she arrives; and rather than returning, she enters the palace to observe the formal three years of mourning. Duke Xuan’s brother takes the throne, and telling her that Wei is too small a domain to maintain two separate ducal establishments, asks her to marry him. She staunchly refuses; the new duke then sends word to her brothers in Qi to persuade her to change her mind, but still she refuses. The Air is worked into the story. (WXQ 126-27)

This is a lovely piece of historical romance, with the detail of the widow-duchess’ brothers added no doubt to support the words of the poem.¹⁵ But it belongs to a different age.

Patterns

Some of the poems quoted earlier represent one of the most common forms of the Airs, a pattern repeated in two or three stanzas in which the rhyme words are the only variables. Such repetition with rhyme variables was probably purely formal, the consequence of a particular kind of music and song tradition within which the Airs were produced. Such formal features have no inherent meaning, but they can be used purposefully or acquire significance in context. In “Peach Tree Soft and Tender,” the three aspects of the tree—flower, fruit, and leaves—may have, in composition, been only free variation, but the user and reader of the Poems would recognize here a determinate sequence that parallels the new bride’s future. In “Quince” the variable terms cannot be recognized as a sequence; the order of the stanzas could be altered. But the very fact that each member of a category—fruit and gem—could be exchanged for another supported the internal claim made in the poem that the object was not the thing in itself but rather a message.

¹⁵ This reminds us that individual Poems are not simply attached to existing frame narratives, but often seem to lead to changes in the details of known narratives in order to explain the words of the Poem.

Stanzaic repetition with variable can, however, be meaningful in its own right, even when no necessary pattern can be discerned in the variables. Consider, for example the following boasting poem, in which the speaker claims to have had assignations with the eldest daughters of various noble families.

爰采唐矣，沫之鄉矣。云誰之思，美孟姜矣。
 期我乎桑中，要我乎上宮，送我乎淇之上矣。
 爰采麥矣，沫之北矣。云誰之思，美孟弋矣。
 期我乎桑中，要我乎上宮，送我乎淇之上矣。
 爰采葑矣，沫之東矣。云誰之思，美孟庸矣。
 期我乎桑中，要我乎上宮，送我乎淇之上矣。

In the Mulberries” 桑中 48

Where did I pick the sweet pear?—
 it was right across the Mei.
 Who was the woman I longed for?—
 the noble Jiang’s daughter fair.
 In the mulberries she promised to meet,
 she called me to her high bower,
 and went off with me on the river Ji.

And where did I pick the wheat?
 it was there, north the Mei.
 Who was the woman I longed for?—
 fair daughter of the noble Yi.
 In the mulberries she promised to meet,
 she called me to her high bower,
 and went off with me on the river Ji.

And where did I pick the radish?—
 it was there, east of the Mei.
 Who was the woman I longed for?—
 the noble Yong’s fair daughter.
 In the mulberries she promised to meet,
 she called me to her high bower,
 and went off with me on the river Ji.

Repetition with variables here clearly signifies promiscuity, that the speaker has been sought by and had assignations with many women. If we had only one stanza of “Quince,” it would not change

the sense of the poem significantly; in “In the Mulberries,” one stanza or even two would give us a very different poem. The common three stanza poem becomes the minimal number of variations to encode the message in form: one stanza would signify his attachment to one woman; were there only two stanzas, we might think that the object of his affections changed or he was torn between the two women; with three stanzas we might as well have a dozen. A basic competence to interpret repetition was needed to make “In the Mulberries” what was to become became, the Poem title synonymous with illicit promiscuity.

This same pattern can create problems of interpretation if the speaker seems to be a woman.

丘中有麻，彼留子嗟。彼留子嗟，將其來施施。
 丘中有麥，彼留子國。彼留子國，將其來食。
 丘中有李，彼留之子。彼留之子，貽我佩玖。

In the Hills there is Hemp” 丘中有麻 74

In the hills there is hemp,
 O that Liu boy, Zijie.
 O that Liu boy, Zijie,
 may he come and give me something.

In the hills there is wheat,
 O that Liu boy, Ziguo.
 O that Liu boy, Ziguo,
 may he come and feed me.

In the hills there are plums,
 O those Liu boys.
 O those Liu boys,
 they give me jewels to wear.

The translator is forced to make a decision in the third stanza; it could well be singular—though which of the Liu boys we could not tell. The absence of a linguistic marker to designate one of the Liu boys has led virtually all interpreters to assume a plural. The Mao commentary would take this as a figurative “longing for virtuous men,” which nicely solves the problem of their plurality. Ever since Zhu Xi, however, the consensus among commentators is that this is a woman talking about her lover(s)—the more prudish suggest her fiancée. Gao Heng differs, taking the poem as an aristocrat down on his luck, seeking help from the Liu’s. Gao Heng was

perhaps unconvinced by attempts to make Zijie and Ziguo the same person, thus preserving the young lady's reputation. The situation is, of course, identical to "In the Mulberries," but in this case the plurality of the [apparently] female speaker's affections violates a taboo against a woman having more than one lover, thus requiring a figurative interpretation. Whether one or two boys are involved, the final stanza drops the optative *qiang* 將: in the sequence of stanzas wish becomes fact.

The sets that fill variable positions are of different kinds: some are sequences, some vary members of a particular class of things (the fruit and gems in "Quince"), some give more determinate taxonomies (for example, members of the speaker's family hierarchically named). In this they resemble the naming of actions or kinds of grain in the Great Odes and Hymns, and they anticipate, on a small scale, the extensive catalogues of poetic expositions (*fu* 賦) and encyclopedias.

In some cases, such as "Peach Tree Soft and Tender," we may reasonably suspect that the linear sequence of variation is purposeful (rather than plurality itself being significant, as in "In the Mulberries"). We may then be inclined to discover meaningful pattern in less obvious cases.

肅肅兔置，椽之丁丁。赳赳武夫，公侯干城。
 肅肅兔置，施于中逵。赳赳武夫，公侯好仇。
 肅肅兔置，施于中林。赳赳武夫，公侯腹心。

Rabbit Snare" 7

Pound down the rabbit snare,
 whack it with a thud.
 The man at arms in fine array,
 his lord's wall and shield.

Pound down the rabbit snare,
 set it where the roads meet.
 The man at arms in fine array,
 fit match for his lord.

Pound down the rabbit snare,
 set it in the woods.
 The man at arms in fine array,
 the heart and belly of his lord.

The obvious disjunction between setting the rabbit snares and the description of the warrior invited exegetical ingenuity and the creation of a scenario by which the two could be linked (see WXQ 43). More to the point, however, is the way in which the variables here invite the interpreter to take them as a meaningful sequence rather than as equivalent and interchangeable. The movement from the crossroads to the woods is a movement from open space to enclosed space, and we note in parallel that the qualification of the man at arms progresses from external bastion, to match, to being the “heart and belly of his lord.” When this air is applied in a speech in the *Zuo Tradition*, the role of being the lord’s “heart and belly” is set in contrast with being his “wall and shield.” While the particular use in this case may seem forced (the man at arms is “wall and shield” during a time of good government and “heart and belly” when government degenerates into misrule), the application is predicated in reading variation as sequence.

The Procedures of Interpretation and the Lesson of the Poems

China’s lack of an epic has been the subject of much fruitless discussion. The Poems stand in the position that epics often occupy in other early cultures: they constitute the authoritative poetic text that stands at the beginning of textual civilization. As such a “foundational” text the Poems are unique. In contrast to epic unity they are diverse in the variety of interests they represent. But even more than the diversity in their representation of the Zhou world, they are unique in the interest they build in interpretation. In the later Warring States and the Han, they are combined with stories and transformed into something like voices from moments within a historical epic, in their aggregate representing a long historical process rather than a single action.

關關雎鳩，在河之洲。窈窕淑女，君子好逑。
 參差荇菜，左右流之。窈窕淑女，寤寐求之。
 求之不得，寤寐思服。悠哉悠哉，輾轉反側。
 參差荇菜，左右采之。窈窕淑女，琴瑟友之。
 參差荇菜，左右芼之。窈窕淑女，鐘鼓樂之。

Fishhawk” 1

The fishhawks sing *guan guan*
 on sandbars of the stream.

Gentle maiden, pure and fair,
fit pair for a prince.

Watercress grows here and there,
right and left we gather it.
Gentle maiden, pure and fair,
wanted waking and asleep.

Wanting, sought her, had her not,
waking, sleeping, thought of her,
on and on he thought of her,
he tossed from one side to another.

Watercress grows here and there,
right and left we pull it.
Gentle maiden, pure and fair,
with harps we bring her company.

Watercress grows here and there,
right and left we pick it out.
Gentle maiden, pure and fair,
with bells and drums do her delight.

This is the first of the *Poems*, much praised and taken by Confucian scholars as the paradigm and foundation of the Zhou cultural project. If we try to look at it afresh, we can see the forces embodied in the *Poems*.

There are three levels represented in the poem: the level of nature represented by the birds; the level of the elite, represented by the prince and his prospective mate; and an ambiguous level of social status, potentially that of commoners, who pick the watercress. These three distinct levels play off against one another throughout the *Airs*.

The “ambiguous level of social status” deserves some comment. Activities not usually associated with the ruling class appear throughout the *Airs*—picking vegetables, pounding rabbit snares, chopping firewood, feeding horses, gathering mulberries. Commentators will often take a woman out gathering wild vegetables as the wife of an absent officer, and we do not know the scope of activity undertaken by members of the elite, particularly its women. At the very least we can say that whatever the social status of the agent, activities on this level are those that are shared with commoners and belong primarily to them. Often in application and later in interpretation, such general occupations are taken figurally as referring to the restricted domain of the elite. And

sometimes, within the Airs themselves, such class difference is thematized:

衡門之下，可以棲遲。泌之洋洋，可以樂飢。
 豈其食魚，必河之魴。豈其取妻，必齊之姜。
 豈其食魚，必河之鯉。豈其取妻，必宋之子。

“Barred Gate” 138

Behind barred gates
 a man may find peace.
 And where a spring gushes
 hunger may be healed.

When eating fish, who needs
 bream of the river?
 When taking wife, who needs
 a Jiang woman of Qi?

Eating fish who needs
 carp from the river.
 Taking wife who needs
 the daughter of Song?

The rare cases like this one, in which class is clearly distinguished (in this case marking a commoner’s voice), remind us how often distinction of class is *not* an issue in the Airs. Such mingling of classes in the Airs is probably the result of bringing popular song into the ducal courts. But once in the courts, both commoners’ voices and probably fragments of existing songs were integrated into court composition.

“Fishhawk” begins with birdsong and ends with music. Whether the commentators are precisely correct in identifying the singing of the fishhawks with harmony, we do associate such birdsong with courtship and mating. We move immediately to the human situation elsewhere—a beautiful woman who would be a good match for the prince. Next we come to the watercress pickers, presumably women, since gathering was woman’s work (let “watercress” here stand for *nymphoides pelatum*, translated as “water poppy” or, more colorfully, but no less incomprehensibly as “yellow heart vegetable”). They are also located in the river scene. Their watercress picking should be a parallel to the nobleman picking his mate: reach down and pick it up, as easily as birds find their mates. But we see immediately that there is a difference in the elite version of courtship. The nobleman continues to seek for the woman, waking

and sleeping, and cannot get her. There is a deferment of desire and attainment, out of which comes a tossing back and forth that echoes the gathering on either side.

There was an implicit attempt to model human courtship on gathering and birds mating; the model failed. In the last two stanzas music, the human counterpart of birdsong, is introduced as the intermediary means to “get” 得 her, to “bring her delight,” 樂之 (or, since we do not know which sound was written down, “to bring her music”). Thus, in the first of the *Poems*, treating the desire for a woman, we have the necessity of music as the human counterpart of the singing of the birds. And, of course, music is also linked to ritual and song, song like this one. As the “Record of Music” says, “music unites” 樂同.

There is indeed an ideology of poetry and society in Fishhawk”: to assert a natural order within a human order. This may be true even in the way such lyrics were put together, with snatches of popular song combined with court lyrics, making an almost seamless whole.

We come back to the earliest statement of what the Poems are: they “speak intent” 言志. We must take this not as simply descriptive, but rather as a claim that challenges hearers/readers to understand just *how* the Poems “speak intent.” Initially, at least, the intent is not imputed to those who composed the poems, but rather to those who used the poems, either in whole or in part. If we understand the corpus of the Poems at some stage not as fixed but evolving, both in the texts included and in their particular phrasing, there was an “interest” in those poems that in themselves demonstrated just how intent could be spoken and the procedures by which the receiver, hearer or reader, could understand from the words what was in the mind of the speaker, in cases when that was not entirely transparent. The hypothesis, which cannot be decisively proven but is worth holding up for consideration, is that this interpretive problem was not simply part of the later learning of the Poems, but was an active force in both the evolving text and in the constitution of the corpus.

When the behavior of the gods in the Homeric epics was embarrassing, ingenious exegesis tried to heal the rift and reconcile received texts with new moral sensibilities. The same may have been the case in the exegetical tradition around the “Song of Songs” (*Shir ha-shirim*). The Chinese case is unique. However dif-

ferent the exegetes of the late Warring States and Han were, the kinds of questions they posed were built into the texts themselves on the most basic level. The “lesson” of the Poems was to teach how human beings use language and to find what the speaker meant behind what the speaker said. That lesson remained with Chinese poetry for a long time.