

# Fugue and Flight in Old Chinese Verse

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## ABSTRACT

Music and poetry have always been sisters, and classical literati so regarded them. But recent thinking has somehow divorced the two, so we now rarely listen to poetry with musical ears. When James J.Y. Liu conceived the interplay of a poem's sounds and senses, images and forms as "polyphonic," he got attacked on the grounds that poetic polyphony "is a pretty metaphor but fairly useless." This article aims to redress such unnatural divorce and to demonstrate that notions of polyphony, in particular, can provide fruitful and, indeed, uniquely rewarding interpretations of old Chinese poetry.

"Fugue and Flight" employs a surprising interpretive analogy that likens the interplay of complex meanings and different voices within a distinctive set of poems to the chase of themes within a fugue. Its examinations of these "evasive words" discovers fresh and compelling ways to read several verses from the *Book of Songs*, early ballads, and classics from Six Dynasties poetry. It thereby seeks to rejoin Chinese verse with the concerns of comparative literature and with a universe of aesthetic discourse from which it has remained all too often excluded.

## KEY WORDS

music and poetry  
evasive words  
polysemy

fugue  
comparative poetics



## 94. 野有蔓草

野有蔓草。零露漙兮。有美一人。清揚婉兮。邂逅相遇。  
 適我願兮。野有蔓草。零露瀼瀼。有美一人。宛如清揚。  
 邂逅相遇。與子皆臧。

*Book of Songs #94*

In the wilds twine creepers,  
 Fallen dews so round.  
 So fair, this person . . .  
 Clear browed and lovely.  
 Met by happy chance,  
 Fulfilling my prayer.

In the wilds twine creepers,  
 Fallen dews a-brim.  
 So fair, this person . . .  
 Lovely and clear-browed.  
 Met by happy chance,  
 Together let's behave/ **hide away.**

This simple ode to secret trysting conceals seductive depths. The dews and creepers evoke multiple symbolic possibilities, and the poem's coy reserve about the sex of its singer—or singers—has attracted critical interest.<sup>1</sup> The ending, in particular, tropes in a way that invites speculation. Early commentators insisted on glossing *zang* as

“good, well-behaved.”<sup>2</sup> But the twin words “good” and “stash away,” written the same in early texts and stemming from a single sense of “hoardable goods/hoard/hoard away,” afford polysemously perverse alternatives. How this poem celebrates fugitive desires with a thickening of verbal texture provides our path of inquiry.

In his influential study on Du Fu’s verse, Kurokawa Yoichi once wrote that only with Du Fu’s late *Autumn Arousal*s do we find the deliberate exploitation of polysemy in verse.<sup>3</sup> This article will take issue with that remark, but it nicely characterizes traditional attitudes toward textual meanings. Almost every commentator and annotator would seek to fix verbal meaning, to limit textual play, to make poems “well-behaved.” Chinese thinkers in general favored strict commitment over evasion. Confucius exclaimed that, when you carefully inspect a man’s character, “Where could he hide from view!”<sup>4</sup> Mencius described “knowing [a speaker’s] words” as “understanding from one-sided words where he’s blind . . . and understanding from *evasive* words where he’s reached a dead-end.” Even *Zhuangzi*, so famous for “dragging his tail in the mud,” concurred with *Mencius*’ demand for an “unmoved heart.”<sup>5</sup> In his key chapter “In the Human Realm,” *Zhuangzi* praises involuntary service in which “you know there’s no choice and dwell at peace with it as your command” as “the ultimate moral potency.”<sup>6</sup> In the next chapter, *Zhuangzi* borrows Confucius to praise ataraxic courage as “what verifies holding to origins, what proves fearlessness.” A “Greater Court Ode” in the *Book of Songs* itself conceives no greater calamity than “Everyone dispersed and fled.”<sup>7</sup> Yet some poems express undercurrents and deviant voices within their tradition. In particular, one filiated series of early songs—often in “folk” style and sometimes sung in women’s voices—married themes of flight and escape with thickened textures of “evasive words” that produce polysemous and polyvocal effects meriting a description as “fuguelike,” or *alla fugato*.

Such a description immediately arouses the objection: “Why export a Western notion to account for ancient Chinese texts?” What guarantees against misappropriation of the Western model and Orientalist misapprehension of Chinese songs? No modern Western Sinolo-

gist can plead innocent to the latter charge; readers will have to judge for themselves the extent of Orientalist distortion, my degree of culpability, and make allowances as they see fit. But my possible misappropriation of musical models has antecedents—theorists who have appropriated “polyphony” to describe literary texts.<sup>8</sup> Roman Ingarden theorized that *any* literary work emerges only because “both the individual strata and the whole which arises from them show themselves—given, of course, an appropriate attitude on the part of the reader—in manifold aesthetic qualities which, in unison of themselves, produces a polyphonic harmony.”<sup>9</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin restricted polyphony to novels, whose dialogism he contrasted with the “monophony” of lyric verse.<sup>10</sup> More recently, James J.Y. Liu conceived the interplay of a poem’s sounds and senses, images and forms as “polyphonic.”<sup>11</sup> Liu got attacked by Franz Schneider, who argued that when we apply literary theory, “calling ‘polyphonic’ the simultaneous development of the patterns of sound, meanings, and imagery in poetry is a pretty metaphor but fairly useless.”<sup>12</sup> Schneider makes the inescapable point that we judge theoretical notions by their efficacy, their interpretive productivity. This article aims to demonstrate one application of Prof. Liu’s analogy.

We must begin with a clear definition. By “fugue” we mean a set of musical procedures that join imitative voices polyphonically to express tonality, and that grant each voice a measure of independence, while retaining a consonant sonorous texture and building momentum through continuous development. A fugue begins with a thematic *exposition*, a “chase” wherein each voice echoes the main *subject*, while earlier voices may introduce a *countersubject* in invertible counterpoint. The fugue may include one or more *episodes* featuring strict *canon*, imitative sequences, or freer counterpoint. When its development and modulations reach completion, a final exposition may intensify sonic effects with overlapping subject statements called *stretti*, before reaching a tonic cadence.<sup>13</sup> One special feature of later fugues deserves special attention: “polyphonic melody.” An instrument playing usually only one note at a time can create the impression of two or three distinct musical parts by shifting from one implied voice to

another.<sup>14</sup>

We find the earliest fugitive verse, of course, in the *Book of Songs*. A group of unhappy women's laments protest their lot and seek escape with songs that multiply resonances and imply other voices. For example, at the end of #26, a miserable bride adrift in her "Cypress Boat" concludes:

26. 柏舟

日居月諸。胡迭而微。心之憂矣。如匪澣衣。靜言思之。  
不能奮飛。

Ah, you Sun; Oh, you Moon!  
Why d'you take turns fading?  
Sorrows wrap around my heart  
Heaped like unwashed clothes.  
Silently I brood on these—  
I can't rise and fly away.<sup>15</sup>

Her concluding stanza features apostrophe, simile, and a frustrated metaphor that caps a poem filled with no less than 13 negative constructions. Moreover, Sun and Moon conventionally emblemize father and mother;<sup>16</sup> the joyful "bride's homecoming song" #2 rang with singing orioles, as its speaker washed her clothes and prepared to "take wing" back home. The intertextual—or "intercantal"—contrast stresses how sullied "Cypress Boat's" speaker feels at her inability to flee a bad marriage.

An even stronger cadence occurs in #58, whose speaker claims a right to recross the marriage river and divorce her worthless husband. Her *envoi* argues:

58. 氓

及爾偕老。老使我怨。淇則有岸。隰則有泮。總角之宴，  
言笑晏晏。信誓旦旦。不思其反。反是不思。亦已焉哉。

We swore to be Lifelong Mates:

Lifelong—it makes me rankle!  
 At least the Qi has its bank;  
 Even this swamp has its shore.  
 How happy—our pigtail days!  
 We laughed and chatted gaily.  
 You swore oaths so sincerely,  
 I never thought you'd *turn back*.                    *betray*  
 You'd turn back? I never thought . . .  
 Then let's make an end to it!

Her concluding stanza recapitulates the song's chief themes with a devastating rhetorical barrage moving from oath to epizeuxis to (riparian) metaphor to flashback (with more ironical oaths) to an antimetabole that generates her final resolution. Her "turn back" antimetabole vigorously inverts her "sentence," exposes his inconstancy, and charts her river-crossing course, releasing her from a Great Dismal Swamp of a marriage. Such powerful polyphony exerted a tremendous influence on later songs of love and desire. We might trace in detail how such verses inspired later votive cadences:

愿為雙鴻鵠，奮翅起高空

We wish to be a pair of flying swans,  
 Churning wings to take off & fly high.<sup>17</sup>

愿為雙飛燕，銜泥巢君屋

My wish—to be a pair of flying swallows,  
 Carrying mud to nest on milord's rafters.<sup>18</sup>

亮無晨風翼，焉能凌風飛

Truly, without a dawn falcon's wings,  
 How can I soar on the wind in flight?<sup>19</sup>

or the sad strains of parting friends, like the songs attributed to Li Ling:

憂因晨風發，送子以賤軀

My woes arise with the *Dawn Falcon*,  
Send you off with my worthless body.<sup>20</sup>

Or the legendary response of his friend, Su Wu:

願為雙黃鵠，送子俱遠飛

My wish—to be a pair of dark swans,  
Escorting you together in faraway flight.<sup>21</sup>

The fugitive impulse had wider ramifications, partly due to the ways allegories of spousal love underpinned religious and political dramas. Shamans sang about eroticized union with deities and about enlightenment with similarly thickened verbal textures. When *Zhuangzi*'s Hunchback Hag teaches her protegee Daoist cultivation, she culminates with a dizzy rhapsody about putting life and death outside, then blurs all distinctions with paradoxes:

Nothing he won't send off,  
Nothing he won't greet.  
Nothing undestroyed, and  
Nothing incomplete.  
Call it *wrangling peace*.<sup>22</sup>            *yingning*

The filiation continued with *itineraria* and goddess quests of early Chu verse, like the “Xiang Princess” (湘君) whose shaman speaker reaches a climax in line 14:

橫大江兮揚靈。  
揚靈兮未極。  
女嬋媛兮余為太息。

橫流涕兮潺湲

Spanning Great Jiang, I waft my magic.  
 Waft my magic, still unreaching...  
 You—*heartskeins entangled*—sigh for me.  
 Cheeks spanned by flowing *tearskeins entangled*, *chanyuan*  
 Painfully I yearn for you, and pine.

Exactly midway through the poem's 28-line core, his plea for union ends one stanza. And just as he realizes union won't take place, anadiplosis ("waft my magic"), repeated "spanning," and a shared sense of tearfully entangled emotions (*chanyuan* applies to both shaman and goddess) attempt to bind the two with word-charms, to suture the interstanzaic gulf.<sup>23</sup> We might trace such tropes through the "Distant Wandering" to Guo Pu's "Wandering Sylphs," with its wish: "To hide my evading tracks among hills and woods;" and its votive conclusion:

山林隱遯跡，高蹈風塵外

To tread on high beyond all windswept dust.<sup>24</sup>

This path of inquiry could then lead to an examination of Daoist and other devotional verse and religious withdrawal.

Or, we might follow the political allegories already present within the *Songs* and observe how these fugitive muses engendered a long line of discontented public servants. *Song* #204 climaxes with the lament:

非鶡非鳶，翰飛戾天，非鱸非鮪，潛逃于淵

I am not eagle or falcon  
 To soar into the skies.  
 I am not sturgeon or bream  
 To hide among the depths.

Fugitive desires for flight in the *Songs* would inform the tonal imitations in Ruan Ji's odes to great migrant birds, who seem sometimes admirably (Ruan #81) and sometimes pathetically (Ruan #11) noble. We might trace filiation to Tao Qian's "Homing Bird":

翼翼歸鳥，晨去于林，遠之八表，近息零岑

Winging, winging homing bird  
At dawn departing its woods.  
Gone far-off past the eight Pillars  
Resting nearby on a cloudy peak.<sup>25</sup>

While Tao's birds more often fly home to roost than to soar into the "blue skies' clouds" of service, he also sometimes "Cannot bear yet to roost alone"; his birds in flight, too, make:

Ambiguous undulations as they sink  
Downward to darkness, on extended wings.

Or we might recall Xie Lingyun's restless recluse, fleeing political disappointments through tortured landscapes. His opus "Climbing Pondsides Pavilion" opens with a seductive evocation of #204's reclusive yearnings:

潛龍媚幽資，飛鴻響遠音

Sunken dragons entice with hidden charms,  
Flying birds resound with distant notes.

But though Xie ends his farrago of mixed emotions with the resolution that the Hidden Dragon's

無悶徵在今

Lack of depression finds proof right now!<sup>26</sup>

Few readers have remained convinced his resolution could last long.

However, we need not elaborate such a catalog of tonal imitations; in a short article, it makes more sense to explore a few songs carefully, listening to tease out resonances between escapism and evasive words. This also facilitates providing a “continuo” of reader’s interpretive responses, adding the indispensable voice without which all poetic polyphony remains only virtual, “unheard melodies.”

The first two “fugues” confirm the *Songs*’ matriarchal position as genetrix of all fugitive laments. Readers might well see harmonies with recent feminist criticism, which often observes how female subjects and poets resort to duplicity, doubletalk, mixed discourse, hybrid voice, and other rhetorical evasions.<sup>27</sup>

*Song #54:*

載馳

載馳載驅。歸唁衛侯。驅馬悠悠。言至于漕。大夫跋涉。  
我心則憂。既不我嘉。不能旋反。視爾不臧。我思不遠。  
既不我嘉。不能旋濟。視爾不臧。我思不遠。陟彼阿丘。  
言采其嬴。女子善懷。亦各有行。許人尤之。眾穉且狂。  
我行其野。芄芃其麥。控于大邦。誰因誰極。大夫君子。  
無我有尤。百爾所思。不如我所之。

Then gallop, then *tear free* (used for fugitive animals or elopement)

To mourn my Lord in Wei.  
Spur my horse on and on  
In my haste to reach Cao.  
Officers tailed & crossed  
And now my heart is sore.

Now you aren’t good to me;  
I can’t turn and go back.  
Seeing you’re misguided,  
I can’t distance my cares.

Now you aren't good to me;  
 I can't turn and ford cross.  
 Seeing your misconduct,  
 I can't confine my cares.

Climbing up a steep slope, "embittered wife" topos  
 Plucking the crown lily. tonic for depression  
*Full well* my woman's heart, *fully well & good; full* (of  
 feeling)

My own paths of conduct.  
 Men of Xu fault my course:  
 All are childish, all mad!

Travelling on the moor—  
 Thick & lush grows barley.  
 I'd *plea* to a great state, *flee/rein in/appeal*  
 But go where? Where rely?

Officers . . . Gentlemen:  
 Do not find fault with me!  
 All hundred of your schemes  
 Cannot match my *thoughts'* course.  
 [home]

*Zuo's Tales* identifies our speaker as a Wei native unhappily married to the ruler of Xu who, when aliens overran Wei, refused to allow her a customary homecoming visit. This plausible but anachronistic identification raises interesting interpretive problems: when Zuo claims Lady Xu "sang" this, did she *compose* or simply *chant* a traditional "Let Me Go Home" song; how did Zuo learn of this historical tidbit 300 years later, if he did not invent or transmit a legend that embellishes his narrative with the cachet of ancient canon? Whatever the answer, we confront here the first identified Chinese poetess, and we find her vividly and self-consciously defending herself against restricting canons of patriarchal authority.

What strikes us as specifically “polyphonic” here? First, every point the speaker raises evokes and reacts against some unspoken objection from her wardens; her every declaration forms an oblique or contrasting movement to an implicit pedal point of in-law abuse. Second, our “countersubject’s” theme—flight, motion—recurs continually, in different modes and modulations: “gallop” foiled by “tailed” (I), “turn and . . . go back/cross” frustrated by inability to “distance” (II-II), aimless wandering that insists on its own “course” (IV) and yearns for flight abroad (V), and da capo recapitulation of going “home” (VI). This chase of related thematic material in different registers thickens the poetic texture and gives particular voices freer play. Third, her words often resonate with simultaneous counterpoint, with strains resulting from polysemous wordplays that express her dramatic predicament. The Chinese for “paths” refers to conduct as well as movement; “full of feeling” also connotes “fully well”; *kong* (行控): “flee, rein in, appeal” conveys the full tonal range of her fugitive wishes; and *suozhi* (所之), though usually glossed as “thoughts’ course,” surely means above all “where I head.” These equivocations highlight precisely those moments that most express her main theme—self-justified flight. Particularly in the last 8 lines—whose intensifying rhetorical devices of *xing* (興) arousal, votive mode, repetition (chiasmus in translation), apostrophic injunction with hyperbole, and final parabolic pun build a walloping cadence—“Lady Xu” has bequeathed us a model of polyphonic song.

### 棄婦篇

石榴植前庭，綠葉搖縹青。丹華灼烈烈，璀璨有光榮。  
 光榮曄流離，可以處淑靈。翠鳥飛來集，拊翼以悲鳴。  
 悲鳴夫何為？丹華實不成。拊心長歎息，無子當歸寧。  
 有子月經天，無子若流星；天月相終始，流星沒無精。  
 棲遲失所宜，下與瓦石并。憂懷從中來，歎息通雞鳴。  
 反側不能寐，逍遙於前庭。踟躕還入房，肅肅帷幕聲。  
 牽帷更攝帶，撫絃調鳴箏。慷慨有餘音，要妙悲且清。  
 收淚長歎息，何以負神靈？招搖待霜露，何必春夏成。  
 晚穫為良實，願君安且寧。

Cao Zhi, “The Deserted Wife”

A pomegranate grows in the forecourt.  
Green leaves fluttering celadon-cyan.  
Cinnabar blooms blaze in fiery flare,  
Curtains coloured with radiant glory.

Radiant glory shimmers lapis lazuli,  
A dwelling to divert refined spirits.  
Alcedine birds fly to her and gather,  
Beat their wings & call out in grief.

Calling in grief—now whatever for?  
Cinnabar blooms have borne no fruit.  
She beats her breast, sighs at length;  
Without a son, she must be sent home.

With a son—a Moon passing the Sky;  
Without a son—like a falling Star.  
Sky & Moon jointly end and engender,  
Fallen Star dies without a *Soulseed*. Gleam/sperm/germ/essence

Who roost at rest & lose proper place,  
Must descend to join rubble and rock.  
Despair & yearning emerge from within;  
Longing sighs continue till cock-crow.

I toss & turn, but cannot fall asleep;  
Pace on & anon through the forecourt.  
I dawdle doubting, go back to my room;  
Soughing rustles stir the bed-curtain.

I tug the curtains and tighten my sash,  
Strike the beat pluck silk-strung Koto.  
Ardent aroused, with lingering tones—  
Far-fluttering, saddened, and so clear.

I put by these tears, & sigh at length:  
 How could I offend the divine spirits?  
 Farflown *Cinnama* waits for frosty dew: 1) baleful 2) cinnamon  
 Why wait for Spring and Summer to bear? star tree  
 Picking late, we can put by fine fruit:  
 I wish Milord would stay safe at home!<sup>28</sup>

It bespeaks the course of Chinese literary women that #54 argued feistily for the freedom to flee, while in this transfigured boudoir lament a male poet speaks through the neglected wife, fuguing elaborately on the theme: to resist flight and remain within her lord's walls. Our female subject has gone from protest to self-flagellation, from assertion to humble appeal.

"The Deserted Wife" begins with 4 stanzas that compose a complete exposition of traditional boudoir themes. It opens in hopeful tone with a pomegranate "arousal" [*xing*] image, seemingly the loveliest and aptest correlative for a young wife. After all, what fruit contains more blood-red pips or "kids" [*zi*, in Chinese] or could better attract auspicious "spirits" in avian form? But Cao's poem quickly modulates into a dolefully dominant countersubject; the Chinese for pomegranate, *siak livu* (石榴), puns unkindly on "stone maid/barren maid" *siak niwo* (石女), a wordplay that resounds with the "rocks and rubble" in stanza V. Stanza III reminds us that a barren wife must, by patriarchal canon, suffer expulsion. Stanza IV then conceives her fall in celestial terms that multiply cruel wordplays, culminating with the multiple "sans Soulseed" that connotes both her infertility and the extinguishing of her light as star within her husband's domestic pantheon. Ironically, the words "moon passing" *yuejing* (月經) read together mean "menstruation," and "like a falling" *tsivk livu* (若流) pun on pomegranate *siak livu* (石女); catastrophically plummeted from the ranks of motherhood, she has metamorphosized into a sort of "pomegranate star." These cruelly contrapuntal multiple resonances between celestial, botanical, and anatomical realms interweave the first four stanzas' voyeuristic treatment of pathos.

But their cadence proves false; its judgment echoes in the

emerging sighs of our first-person speaker's personal lament. Faced with a crisis of "flowing out"—by sound or connotation *livu* associates with Chinese words for the pomegranate, barrenness, expulsion, futile menstrual blood, the falling star, and descent to earth—our deserted wife refashions her home. She accomplishes a remarkable ritornello, repeating or modifying at least 5 endrhymes and 9 key images from Part One (ll. 1-16) back to home tonality. By recapitulating the "forecourt," "curtains," and tree from stanza I she redepicts her site of confinement. The birds' lament from stanza II finds refrain in her sad song, while her "far-fluttering . . . clear" *yaomiao . . . qing* (要妙·清) deftly echoes line 2's "fluttering celadon-cyan" *yao biaoqing* (搖縹青). The deserted wife's beats, sighs, and tears all recapitulate motives from Part One. But somehow all recurrent material transposes into opening mode. She rejects the barren pomegranate and inverts it into a "cinnamon." This witty close makes a contrapuntal retort to earlier puns; Chinese *zhaoyao* (招搖) can refer to the "Troubled Star," herald of Autumn and symbol of turmoil, but it also names a literary substitution for the autumn-fruiting cinnamon tree. This "cinnamon" *gui* (桂), an evergreen with noble blossoms whose name itself puns on "honored" *gui* (貴) and which, as lone mountaintop dweller or, mythologically, the lunar tree of perpetual light, became associated with China's Undying Ones *xian* (仙), conveys our heroine's new hopes for fruitful reproduction. Thus, she restores her fallen star to its rightful place in the family firmament; with retrograde motion, she recasts "be sent home" as "stay safe at home" *anning* (安寧). Her accelerating recapitulation of all thematic material and crescendo of soundplay creates the strettis and sonic densities to wreak a triumphal cadence, her return in major mode, concluding with graphs that depict Woman under Roof *an* and Heart in Place *ning*.<sup>29</sup>

Her "counterexposition" with its inversion of all thematic motifs astonishingly subverts convention. An ordinary lament could have ended after stanza IV or V. Even Cao Zhi himself ended his *fu* on the "Wife Expulsed" with her bitter words:

恨無愆而見棄，悼君施之不終。

Rancorous that, without fault, I am cast away;  
Mourn that you turn away & won't keep constant.<sup>30</sup>

The “Deserted Wife’s” burden does not resemble modern feminist manifestos for independence and freedom, but her strong subjective voice provides an ingenious counterpoint against boudoir monotony, even as it argues for continued refuge within boudoir constraints, negotiating for a last try to bind her husband with the ligatures of uterine power.

Bao Zhao: Hard Road to Travel—Imitation (#4/18)

瀉水置平地，各自東西南北流。人生亦有命，安能行歎  
復坐愁！酌酒以自寬，舉杯斷絕歌路難。心非木石豈無  
感？吞聲躑躅不敢言！

Pour out waters onto level ground;  
They'll flow east west north or south.  
Man's life, after all, has a Fate;  
Why must we walk sighing & sit in grief?  
Pour out a brew to ease yourself,  
Raise your cup, stop singing Hard Roads . . .  
Hearts aren't wood or stone & can't but feel,  
I swallow a cry, pace about & dare not speak.<sup>31</sup>

Bao Zhao, an unsuccessful itinerant minor officer, did not need to yearn for flight, either. Instead, his predicament and this crisis-poem in particular recall that of Yang Zhu, a legendary thinker who wept at the crossroads because he could not foresee his way/*dao* among the forking bypaths. Itself an allusive variation on earlier “Hard Travellin’ Blues,” Bao’s tonal imitation sounds like an internal monologue in which an anguished voice confronts some magisterial, would-be consoling voice of tradition. Voice A sounds Bao’s main theme of futile movements, or random flows without a fixed direction, without a *dao*. Voice B seems to rejoin with a soothing demurral: some fate *does* shape our journeys and ends, so stop wandering and whining! The

voice continues to admonish: “Carpe diem!” “Don’t pour out water—pour a drink, and raise your cup!” “Stop singing the blues!” But of course this *is* a blues song, and though Voice A denies its own anguish and swallows its own words, the paradox only intensifies its jumbled feelings and sense of being lost.

The way this song presents its movement theme—answering “random” with “directed,” then “ease” and “stop” with “pace about”—does not reduce to antiphony. Each voice itself, by a sort of “invertible counterpoint,” suggests its own counterpart. Bao’s opening metaphor, though referring to Liu Tan’s bon mot about bad characters drowning out good, got used by Mencius precisely to reassure us that men turn to the good as water inevitably flows *downward*.<sup>32</sup> In enjoining against restlessness, Voice B’s rhetorical question raises the very anguish it sought to place *sous rature*. When B then rephrases A’s metaphors and abjures: “stop” singing “Hard Roads,” it demands the one act that this song could not possibly perform. Even A’s concluding gnarled double-negatives contain his own contrapuntal interlocutor. So Bao’s “tonic” theme A constantly modulates to “dominant” theme B, which then suggests a return to tonic. This chase of voices and the layering of equivocations within each—like the poem’s formal oscillations between pentasyllable and heptasyllable—resonate with intertextual echoes against philosophers’ prescriptions and past ballads of the wanderer, producing a full fugal exposition of Yang Zhu’s crisis, the classic *cantus firmus* of the wanderer who has lost his way.

Yu Xin (513-581), “Confronting Snow Outside The City”

風雲俱慘慘，原野共茫茫  
 雪花開六出，冰珠映九光  
 還如驅玉馬，暫似獵銀獐  
 陳雲全不動，寒山無物香  
 薛君一狐白，唐侯兩驢驢  
 寒關日欲暮，披雪渡河梁。

Windswept clouds clumped somber, leaden;  
 The wild moors merged empty, blurred.

Snow petals blossom hexagonally;  
 Ice pearls glitter nontuply.  
 Almost as if spurring a jade charger;  
 And then, like chasing a silver stag.  
 Tight-ranked clouds—the whole lot unmoving;  
 Cold, wintry hills—not one thing's scent.  
 Lord Snowe's entirely white fox stole;  
 Marquis Tang's paired frostwither steeds.  
 Close to the frigid *pass*, Sun about to set; *barrier/pass*  
 Draped in snow, I cross the river's bridge.<sup>33</sup>

1-2: Yu's setting works an allusive variation on a gloomy section from exiled Wang Can's *fu* on "Climbing the Tower."

9-10: Lord Snowe (Xue) presented a white fox-fur to the King of Qin, but was detained as a hostage. Lord Snowe then bribed his way out with the same fur, which he burgled from his captor. The Marquis of Tang got imprisoned for refusing to present his unique matched "frostwither steeds" to a Chu official. The marquis won release when his retainers stole and then presented the white steeds.

12: When two exiled friends parted, the one left behind (Li Ling) said:

We join hands and climb the river's bridge,  
 But where can the homeless go as Sun sets?

Yu Xin, a prominent Southern court poet sent as ambassador to alien-occupied Chang-an and then detained after his homeland's demise, faced a problem opposite to Bao Zhao's. Bao faced a bewildering plethora of forking paths; Yu, confined up north, could not find any escape route. Having endured many a winter of discontent, Yu makes his frozen northern prison the theme of this snow-poem. But against this grim backdrop, lines 3-4 offer an unexpected answer; Yu's mode changes to esthetic appreciation, as *yin* surroundings modulate to *yang* lightplay on icicle-gems and unseasonable "flowers." Then ensues a fantastic countersubject—an imaginary hunt. Snow and ice transmute to precious vehicles of chase and release—a fleeting accelerando. But

Yu's initial prison-theme returns to bang the door shut, with a ritornello that intensifies imprisonment; all possibilities of movement and life get denied. Yet Yu overlaps answer and countersubject to revive themes of light, animal motion, and escape with perhaps the most exquisitely crafted parallel allusions in early Chinese poetry. The couplet interweaves half a dozen motives of escape from Qin, stealing away, ransom, white beasts, and wintry mode, etc.; its ironic intertextual resonances multiply and accelerate the chase of variant voices to create climactic stretti.

When Yu recapitulates his initial theme, his last couplet appears to bang the door shut again. The exile, snowdraped because he has stood motionless all day with nowhere to go, finally steps onto a bridge whose transitional significance gets defeated because the river has frozen and Yu has no exit. Yet in one sense Yu's closure does not figure merely defeat and resignation to imprisonment. He does not offer the subjective response we expected—too cold for tears, perhaps. Instead, he offers a kind of “open closure” that identifies with earlier poets, exiles, and officials like Wang Can, Su Wu, and Li Ling. Yu's symbolic (though futile) concluding transgressive gesture—his song's only “real” action—exploits the dual significance of “barrier-pass” *guan* (關), continuing the word-magic of his imaginary fugue to provide counterpoint against despair. Yu fulfills *Zhuangzi*'s ideal that the mind of someone trapped in political service might “rove free within its cage”;<sup>34</sup> he provides one last proof that a flight of literary imagination afforded the Chinese fugitive's surest escape.

We might continue to trace these fugitive paths—through Tang recluse poetry, past Li Bai's imaginative escapes and Du Fu's polyphonic consolations, to Li He's fantastic flights—but we have gone far enough. Before concluding, we might consider *just what* we have found “fugal” about these verses. After all, they do not have 3 simultaneous parts stating and restating, imitating and contrapuntally contrasting; we do not sing them as rounds. But we do find *tonal imitations*; poem after poem works allusive variations to earlier songs and texts, achieving complex modal and associative effects while asserting its independence. We find in their thematic *expositions countersubjects*,

moments at which voice seems to chase voice and point to counter point. Rather as fugal subjects usually modulate to dominant and return with a *tonal answer*, all four evasive poets counter a dominant mode of discourse with their own “tonal answer.”<sup>35</sup> We find tropes that play on words to pack in different or even opposite meanings within one expression. We find complex symbols—like Cao Zhi’s cassia and Yu Xin’s snow—that reverberate with different registers of meaning and echo throughout a poem. And we find meanings implied beyond the words—from #54’s rebuttal of confining discourse to Yu Xin’s “open closure”—that add density and sonority to these *polyphonic melodies*.<sup>36</sup> And while we could catalogue puns, doubly-directed diction, symbols, allusions, intertextuality, and open closure separately, how could we then account for the complex synergies that help these songs take flight? Even “heteroglossia” cannot sufficiently explain how poets concinnously arrange and interweave implied voices to enchant our ears, rather like Milton’s Great Fuguer

Who moved

Their stops and chords was seen: his volant touch  
Instinct through all proportions high and low  
Fled and pursued transverse the resonant fugue.<sup>37</sup>

Naturally, old Chinese poems could not fugue like Bach did. Appropriated from musical design to examine literary design, our terms change meaning. Their intersections no longer compose a stable system of analysis. Most of all, our Chinese “fugues” do not relate to their cultural matrix with the same significance as pieces by Palestrina and Sweelinck, Handel, and Bach. As Europe progressed through Renaissance and Reformation, most contrapuntal art continued to glorify sacred texts, but its independent lines somehow expressed both Renaissance ideals of imitating the sensuous world and the growing importance of individual liberty.<sup>38</sup> Of course, melodic freedom (with political, religious, and philosophical symbolic application) got strictly held in check by hierarchical canons of modal consonance and harmonic progression. But viewed in the light of such vast cultural differ-

ences, it strikes us how Chinese poets, too—when contemplating escape or flight—could find their own melodic ways within strict hierarchical constraints of Good Form and regulate socio-cultural harmony. They, too, could fugue their way to free expression.<sup>39</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> James J.Y. Liu, *Essentials of Chinese Literary Art* (Duxbury MA, 1979), 16, to whom my translation owes a debt.

<sup>2</sup> See *Maoshi Zhengyi* (Vol.2 in *Shisanjing zhushu*: Taibei 1957), II: 59, 7.19a. Later commentators sometimes abandoned strictly moralist understandings; Zhu Xi, for example, glossed *zang* by saying: each got what s/he desired”; Zhu Xi, *Shi jizhuan* (2V: Taibei, 1955), I:227, 4.27b.

<sup>3</sup> Kurokawa Yoichi, *To Ho kenkyu* (Tokyo, 1977) 87ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Concordance to Lunyu* (Taibei, 1966) 2.10.

<sup>5</sup> *Concordance to Mencius* (Taibei, 1966) 2A2/22.

<sup>6</sup> *Concordance to Zhuangzi* (Taibei, 1966) 4/43. “Unmoved heart” also refers to Mencius 2A2.

<sup>7</sup> *Concordance to Shijing* (Taibei, 1966) #265.1.

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, recent research indicates that polyphony likely arose when composers setting texts imitated literary allegory by combining melodies contrapuntally—see James Winn, *Unsuspected Eloquence* (Yale UP, 1981) 75ff.

<sup>9</sup> Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art* (Indiana UP, 1973) 370.

<sup>10</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination* (Texas UP, 1981) Chapter II.

<sup>11</sup> James J.Y. Liu, *The Poetry of Li Shang-Yin* (Chicago UP, 1969) 202-3.

<sup>12</sup> Franz Schneider, review of *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin*, *Western Humanities Review* 23.4 (Fall, 1969) 355.

<sup>13</sup> See esp. Imogene Horsley, *Fugue, History and Practice* (New York, 1965); Alfred Mann, *The Study of Fugue* (New York, 1965); P.T. Barford, “The Idea of Fugue,” *Music Review* 15 (1954) 173; and War-

ren Kirkendale, *Fugue and Fugato in Rococo and Classical Chamber Music* (Duke UP, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> I first encountered the concept in Robin Stowell, “Liner Notes” to Itzhak Perlman, *Bach’s Sonatas and Partitas* (Angel 1988:749483), 5; for an excellent example of “single-line implied polyphony” in a Bach Flute Partita, see Winn 1981, 215.

<sup>15</sup> For translations and different readings of the songs discussed in this article, see David Mc Craw, *Women and Old Chinese Poetry* (U. Hawaii, 1966 at <http://www2.111.hawaii.edu/web/faculty/mccraw>) 9-15.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., *Song* #29.

<sup>17</sup> *Liang Han wenxueshi cankaoziliao* (Beijing, 1977) 579, #5/19.

<sup>18</sup> *Liang Han*, 588, #12/19.

<sup>19</sup> *Liang Han*, 592, #16/19.

<sup>20</sup> Ding Fubao, ed., *Liang Han Sanguo Weijin Nanbeichao shi* (2V:Beijing, 1961) I, 28, #1/3. Dawn Wind makes an opening symbol for a wife’s lament.

<sup>21</sup> Ding I, 27, #3/4.

<sup>22</sup> *Zhuangzi* 6/42; for an examination of *Zhuangzian* verse, see David Mc Craw, *Pursuing Zhuangzi as Rhymester (Sino-Platonist Papers, Vol. 54: 1994)* 1-42.

<sup>23</sup> *Chuci buzhu* (Beijing, 1983) 61-2.

<sup>24</sup> Ding I, 428, #1/14.

<sup>25</sup> Ding I, 458.

<sup>26</sup> Ding I, 638.

<sup>27</sup> See Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic* (Yale UP, 1979), Chapter II; Judith Gardiner, “On Female Identity and Writing by Women,” in Elizabeth Abel, ed., *Writing and Sexual Difference* (Chicago UP, 1982), esp. 187-8.

<sup>28</sup> Cao Zhi, *Cao Zijian shi zhu* (Hong Kong, 1973) 57-8.

<sup>29</sup> For a translation and somewhat different discussion of the Cao Zhi poem, see Mc Craw 1996, 33-4.

<sup>30</sup> Cao Zhi, *Cao Zijianji zhu* (Beijing, 1984) 35.

<sup>31</sup> *Wei Jin Nanbeichao wenxueshi cankao ziliao* (Hong Kong, 1976) 500.

<sup>32</sup> See Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu* (Shanghai, 1982) 4.46; cf. Richard Mather, transl., *Shishuo xinyu* (Minnesota UP, 1976) 116.

<sup>33</sup> Ni Fan, annot., *Yu Kaifu quanji* (SBCK ed.: Shanghai, 1936) 4.7a.

<sup>34</sup> *Zhuangzi* 4/29.

<sup>35</sup> Here we might pause to consider that, rather as Nineteenth Century musicologists could not comprehend Bach's melodic polyphony and insisted on "filling out" his solo violin sonatas and partitas with bass continuo, traditional Chinese commentators have rarely discussed the play of different voices within "one lyric subject." Their silence very likely suggests the different conceptions of self Chinese held: of self as nexus of a field of other people, rather than a nuclear self. Thanks to Roger Ames for trenchantly raising this issue in conference.

<sup>36</sup> In associating polyphony with fruitful ambiguity, I recall the treatment in Yuan Xingpei, *Zhongguo shige yishu yanjiu* (Beijing UP, 1987) 7-26. Critics of Western poetry have made similar comparisons, notably Winn 1981, 332-6 regarding Ezra Pound, Winn, 149-65 regarding Shakespeare's sonnets, and Diane McColley, *Poetry and Music in 17th Century England* (Cambridge UP, 1977) 2-3 and CH. 1, passim, regarding Seventeenth Century English verse in general. For less sanguine views about such comparisons, see Jean-Pierre Barricelli, *Melopoeisis*, (New York UP, 1988) 4-5; Calvin Brown, *Music and Literature* (Georgia UP, 1948), esp. 111, 165.

<sup>37</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Norton: NY, 1993) 274.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, McColley 1997: 12-3.

<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, we might note that Western polyphony's model for Pythagorean notions of universal harmony (see John Hollander, *The Untuning of the Sky* [Princeton UP, 1961], 182; S.K. Heniger, *Touches of Sweet Harmony* [San Marino, CA, 1974], 387-8) contrasts with these Chinese poets' use of polyphony to express *dissidence*.

