ABSTRACT

A detailed study of the poetry (shi 詩) of Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072). Though Ouyang Xiu was one of the major cultural figures of the northern Song period (960-1126), later generations have rather neglected his poetry. After a brief introduction explaining this neglect, my study begins with a biographical sketch, outlining Ouyang's public career and concentrating on events that may have shaped his development as a poet.

Chapter two deals with Ouyang's poems on mountains, one of his most favoured topics. I describe three kinds of mountain poems: dynamic, forceful works; tranquil works; and those which compare different kinds of mountains in an intellectual manner.

Frequently domestic or cultural objects — stone screens, calligraphic rubbings, music — provide the inspiration for Ouyang's mountain poetry. Chapters three and four turn from the "cosmic" level of mountains to the "domestic" world, to discover whether other everyday objects exert a similar effect on his imagination. Chapter three deals with activities: poems on tea and wine drinking; eating; sleeping; music and calligraphy. These works tend to jump back and forth between the mundane and the transcendent, as Ouyang traces each subject to its source in the natural world. Chapter four treats the buildings, gardens, pets and plants in Ouyang's immediate environment. Techniques of caricature and witty argumentation increasingly appear in his mature verse.

Water is a central figure in Ouyang's mountain poems. Chapter five reverts to the "cosmic" level to discuss Ouyang's poetry on water in its many transformations: storms, snow, reflected moonlight, rivers and the ocean. In his mature works, Ouyang increasingly
mixes levels of discourse — prosaic and lyrical, pure and crude — to indicate the complexity of human reaction to outside events.

The concluding chapter summarizes the evolution of Ouyang's poetic style. I define wit, noting its centrality in the English poetic tradition. I carefully analyse Ouyang's recorded comments on poetry: he constantly advocates breadth and variety of mood and subject matter, including even laughter and joking, crudity and baseness. I suggest possible influences on his style, especially Mid-Tang poets like Han Yu and Bai Juyi, and his own contemporary, Mei Yaochen. Finally, I yoke together the concept of wit and Ouyang's phrase "competing with Creative Transformation": like the English witty poets, Ouyang transforms harsh realities into ingenious artistic structures, and finds vitality in the midst of suffering and destruction.
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I would like to express my gratitude to all the members of my dissertation committee. Prof. J.D. Schmidt, my supervisor, first encouraged me to concentrate on the poetry of the Song dynasty; his stimulating seminars and research on wit in southern Song poetry have greatly influenced the ideas in this dissertation, and he has suggested many corrections to my translations. Prof. Dan Overmyer also offered much encouragement, guiding my reading in the area of Tang-Song thought and providing a living example of a conscientious scholar. Prof. Michael Duke was helpful beyond the call of duty, giving excellent suggestions on English style, format and translation, and guiding me in the study of traditional Chinese poetics. Without his assistance, my dissertation would look a great deal more ragged than it does. I would also like to acknowledge the encouragement of the other members of my examining committee, Prof. Graham Good (English) and Prof. George McWhirter (Creative Writing).

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Introduction

The neglect of Ouyang Xiu's poetry began early. Even by the 13th century, the well-known Jin dynasty poet and literary critic, Yuan Haowen (1190-1257) was lamenting: “All the figures of the Yuanyou period come to the fore in succession. . . . But for what crime are Ou[yang Xiu] and Mei [Yaochen] discarded?”¹ The Yuanyou period (1086-1093) had seen the rise to prominence of the group of literati around Su Shi (1037-1101), after most had experienced several years of disgrace and exile.² Su was exiled again during the 1090s, and after his death was placed on a “black list,” along with many former colleagues and supporters. Their writings were banned for several years.³ Yet, as Yuan Haowen notes, only a century or so later their reputations were already firmly established as literary masters.

Though his writings were never actually banned, Ouyang Xiu’s reputation as a shi 詩 poet went into decline almost as soon as Su Shi matured, and has still not revived.

¹Quoted in J.T. Wixted, Poems on Poetry: Literary Criticism by Yuan Haowen (1190-1257) (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982) 203, with discussion on 203-207. I have slightly changed Wixted's translation. Mei Yaochen (1002-1060) was Ouyang's close friend and well-known poet.
²For the background to the exiles of this period and the 1090s, see Ronald Egan, Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi (Harvard 1994) 46-53; 86-105. Hereafter referred to as Egan, Su Shi.
³Though, as Egan notes, this ban was probably not enforceable in Su's case, due to the popularity of his writing. Egan, Su Shi 105-106.
Ouyang is known variously as a prose writer, classical scholar, historian and epigrapher, even as a statesman, but rarely as a poet. The Qing dynasty (1644-1911) revival of interest in Song dynasty poetry did see the publication of excellent anthologies, including generous selections of Ouyang's most interesting works, but no commentary survives on his poetry and more recent studies are few and far between. I have come across just one annotated anthology that includes more than a handful of his poems — Chen Xin and Du Weimo's excellent *Ouyang Xiu xuanji* (Shanghai: 1986) — and in English there are only brief chapters in Egan, James T.C. Liu, and Yoshikawa.

There are several possible reasons for this neglect, including the following:

(1) Ouyang's very success in so many other areas, coupled with his frequent denigration of his own poetic talents, led to the traditional view of him as a prose writer, in contrast to the poets Mei Yaochen and Su Shunqin (1008-1048), upon whom he constantly showered praise.

(2) Traditionally, scholars have treated Ouyang as a forerunner to the so-called neo-Confucians, whose followers considered poetry a frivolous exercise, distracting

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6 Certainly Mei has fared better in recent years, with a book-length study on his poetry by Jonathan Chaves, *Mei Yao-ch'ên and the Development of Early Sung Poetry* (Columbia, 1976), and a number of modern annotated anthologies, for instance, Zhu Dongrun, *Mei Yaochen shixuan* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1980). Su Shunqin is still rather neglected, especially in the West; though see my chapter 4, n.5 for an excellent annotated Chinese edition of his complete works.
people from moral self-cultivation. Many of Ouyang’s general comments about writing emphasize the centrality of the Way (dao 道) as promulgated in the Confucian Classics; and since his poetry is seldom openly moralistic, the assumption has been that it contradicts his more “serious” writings — memorials, histories and classical scholarship. I will show that poetry, because of its very tendency to dwell on “trivial” subjects and moods neglected by other genres, fulfilled a crucial function in Ouyang’s life, and helps to round out our picture of his brilliant and humane personality.

(3) Perhaps the general character of the poetry by Ouyang and some of his contemporaries has prevented its widespread acceptance: the plain, even prosaic, style; the serious consideration of oddity and ugliness alongside beauty; and even the wit and intellectual humour of many of his poems seem at first to remove them from the realm of lyrical intensity usually associated with, for example, Tang dynasty poetry. However, I would prefer to regard Ouyang’s style as different rather than inferior. The fact that Yoshikawa sees Ouyang as the major initiator of a distinctive Song dynasty style and mood, and that apart from Mei Yaochen, he was the most prolific of the poets in his generation, hint that further study is necessary; a reading of his poems proves that there is a wealth of material on which to base that study.

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7 Both Liu and Egan seem influenced by this view to a certain degree.
8 See Egan's translation of one such comment on writing by Ouyang. Egan 22.
9 Probably the reason that Ouyang's “lyrics” (ci 词) have been studied much more frequently is connected with their use of more traditional imagery and more “poetic” themes of separation, love, and natural and female beauty. See studies by James J.Y. Liu, *Major Lyricists of the Northern Sung* (Princeton 1974) 17-53; and Egan, chapter 5, in English; also the complete modern annotated collection of Ouyang’s lyrics in Chinese with introduction: Li Xi, *Ouyang Xiu ci yanjiu jiqijiaozhu* (Taipei, 1982). For this reason I do not deal with Ouyang’s lyrics in this dissertation.
The basic purpose of this dissertation is therefore to make available to the English reader a significant number of Ouyang Xiu’s poems, the great majority never translated previously, and to analyse in a sympathetic light the various techniques that he developed to express his distinctive vision.

I begin with a biographical sketch, which will place Ouyang’s life within the context of northern Song society, and describe the effects of the people he met, and the various stages in his very public career, on his literary development.

Following this biography, the four central chapters will turn to translation and analysis of his major poems. Reading these poems, one is struck by Ouyang’s breadth of interest and curiosity with the manifold aspects of the universe. My aim is to suggest this “encyclopedic” variety through division into broadly related topics rather than chronological periods.

Another feature common to Ouyang’s poems is their carefully organized complexity of structure, including antitheses, incongruous juxtapositions, and mixed levels of discourse within single overarching patterns. I have attempted to emulate this feature by arranging my study according to two juxtapositions of my own. First, there is the very ancient complementary relation on the “cosmic” level between mountains and waters. Since these are two of Ouyang’s favourite poetic topics, I have devoted a chapter to each (chapters 2 and 5). However, it is clear that even when dealing with enormous and powerful natural phenomena, Ouyang rarely loses sight of everyday human concerns. Indeed, a great number of his poems specifically treat the objects, creatures and activities
of his ordinary life, providing a notable contrast to the elemental world of the landscape poetry. Hence, I have arranged a second juxtaposition between my two inner chapters (3 and 4), dealing with the activities and environment surrounding Ouyang’s “domestic” existence, and the outer chapters (2 and 5) dealing with “cosmic” concerns.

Yet rather than treating these separate categories as static entities, I would prefer to see them as stages on a constantly altering cycle. Ouyang’s mountain poems, for instance, are frequently inspired by an evocatively formed inkstone, calligraphic inscription, screen, or some other domestic accoutrement. Likewise, his works on tea, clams or other mundane objects tend to draw the reader away to an enormous imaginative landscape or swelling ocean environment, where the particular object supposedly originated.

A third juxtaposition, which is not exactly a separate topic but pervades the great majority of Ouyang’s mature poems, is that between Ouyang himself, as poet-narrator or autobiographical persona, and the content of each specific poem. As I will demonstrate particularly in chapter 4, and again in the concluding chapter, Ouyang developed the art of self-caricature to a high degree. Thus, especially after middle age, he tends to place himself within his poems as a comical character or intrusive narrator commenting on the events he describes, or arguing in an obviously parodic manner. Though he often depicts himself in exaggerated form, suffering all the pain and inconvenience that accompany old age, we are always aware of his ability to find laughter and reasons for joy in the midst of these difficulties. And in the end it is the strength and determination that Ouyang as implied author displays, standing against the destructive powers of nature and drawing
inspiration from the creative side of nature, which impress us more than the ridiculous
caricatures that he hides behind.

In my concluding chapter, I draw out some of the general characteristics of
Ouyang’s style and suggest some of the precursors to his various techniques. The
recurrence of ingenious juxtapositions, incongruous mixing of levels, and clever,
humorous arguments and caricature add up to what one might term a “witty” approach. I
offer an extended definition of wit as exemplified by two English poets, John Donne and
Alexander Pope. Next I consider Ouyang’s own comments on poetry. Though he prefers
not to subsume his various techniques under a single term, his idea of “competing with the
ingenuity of Creative Transformation” shows parallels with the concept of wit in the
English tradition. Likewise, in his other comments on poetry, he stresses the importance of
breadth of interest, even including laughter and humour as valid concerns, and places
himself within a “witty” tradition stretching back to Han Yu (768-824) and other Mid-
Tang poets, and ultimately to the Classic of Poetry (Shijing 詩經).

Hence I conclude that characterizing Ouyang Xiu as a poet whose wit helps to
overcome the pain and restrictions of existence, and reading his works in that light, should
aid in restoring his reputation as one of the masters of Song dynasty, and Chinese, poetry.

Regarding the details of translation, I have not attempted to retain Ouyang’s
rhyme-schemes, though I point out several times his skill in the use of rhyme. Wherever
possible I have retained the original sentence order; and have endeavoured to give one
English stress for each syllable in the Chinese, in order to suggest the flavour of Ouyang’s
poetic metres. All proper names are transliterated using *pinyin*, except those in titles of books by other Western scholars and quotations from those books. All translations from Chinese texts are my own except where otherwise indicated in the notes.

For dates, I give the year according to the equivalent in the modern Western calendar, but retain the month and day in the Chinese original. There is usually about one month discrepancy between the Chinese and Western months: for instance, "third month" (*sanyue* 三月) would be approximately April according to the Western calendar.

I provide information about Ouyang's collected works and the edition that I use on page 8, note 1 below, and page 52, main text and notes.
Chapter 1: Biographical Sketch of Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072)

With several works already published on Ouyang Xiu’s public life and writings,¹ I will avoid repetition by concentrating on events which noticeably affected the form and content of his literary oeuvre, particularly his shi 詩 poetry.

Ouyang Xiu (style name Yongshu 永叔) was born in 1007 at Mianzhou 綿州 (around present Mianyang County, Sichuan Province), where his father Ouyang Guan 歐陽觀 held a minor military administrative post. Three years later, Ouyang Guan died at Taizhou 泰州 (present Tai County, Jiangsu Province) and his wife, Madame Zheng 鄭氏.

¹ There are several biographies available for Ouyang Xiu, including primary sources, such as the “Record of Events” by Ouyang’s son Fa 蕃, and other Northern Song sources, including biographies in the Veritable Records (shilu 実録) of Emperor Shenzong (r.1068-1085), all conveniently appended to Ouyang Xiu’s collected works, the Ouyang Yongshu ji 歐陽永叔集 (Shanghai: Guoxuejiben congshu edition 1958) vol.3, 18.1-18.72, where 18 refers to the ce 册 (“part”) and the number after the decimal to the page; also the “Chronological List” (nianpu 年譜) by Hu Ke 胡柯, dated 1196, in ibid., after contents pages; and the biography in the Official Song History by Tuo Tuo, Song shi (Beijing: Zhonghua 1977) chapter 319, 10375-10382. Much useful material can also be found in Ouyang’s own prose and poetic writings, especially regarding his personal life.

Many modern scholars have written on his life too, for instance, Lin Yi in Song Ouyang Wenzhong gong Xiu nianpu (Taiwan: Shangwu 1980), and Liu Ruoyu in Ouyang Xiu yanjiu (Taiwan: Shangwu 1989). Also very useful is the brief chronology in Ouyang Xiu xuanji, ed. Du Weimo and Chen Xin (Shanghai 1986) 425-448, and their notes to several hundred poems and prose works by Ouyang (this work will hereafter be referred to as Xuanji). Finally, there are two English studies of Ouyang Xiu containing some biographical material, those of Egan, op.cit. and James T.C. Liu, op.cit. Though their concerns are more general than mine, concentrating on Ouyang’s whole literary corpus and his political-philosophical aspects respectively, they help to provide a framework for my investigation of Ouyang’s poetry.
氏, took Ouyang Xiu to Suizhou 隨州 (present Sui County, Hubei Province) where they stayed with his paternal uncle Ouyang Ye 歐陽暘.

The most obvious effect of this bereavement was poverty — one story relates that Madame Zheng taught Ouyang Chinese characters by writing on the ground with a piece of firewood.\(^2\) Much later, in the “Preface to Paintings of the Seven Worthies,”\(^3\) written in 1053, Ouyang recalled their difficult situation, which was in large part the result of his father’s irresponsible behaviour. The work is worth quoting in full for its candid account of family life, and the obvious respect Ouyang has for his mother’s great fortitude and capability:\(^4\)

I was unfortunate enough to be orphaned when young. I was born when my late father was assistant of military affairs at Mianzhou, but when I was just four years old, my father passed away. When I was a child, my late mother once said to me: “When I married into your family, we were extremely poor. As an official, your father was very correct and wasn’t attracted by material things. His only delight was in inviting guests, and he would lavish wine and food upon them without considering whether we could afford it. In three years at Mianzhou, other people without exception

\(^2\) Ouyang’s son Fa implies that by this method and through rote memorization, Ouyang learned many works by ancient prose writers and was soon able to compose poems too! See the “Record of Events” by Ouyang Fa, at the back of *Ouyang Yongshuji*, vol.3, 18.57 (this collection will be referred to as *Ji*).

\(^3\) In *Ji* vol.2, 8.36. Also translated in Egan 218-219.

\(^4\) I interpret this passage as a rather critical portrait by Ouyang Xiu of his father. My evaluation is mainly based on Ouyang’s use of the phrase “even poorer” to describe his family’s situation when he was ten years old — implying that they were poor before that time, and that the cause was his father’s tendency to spend money on entertaining guests rather than accumulating property which could be sold at a later date. However, it is also feasible to treat Ouyang’s comments as neutral reflections on the family’s unlucky plight, with no moral judgment directed against his father.
purchased many products of Shu⁵ to take back home, but your father
didn’t collect a single thing; instead, he spent his income on receiving
guests, so that there was nothing to spare. Upon resigning his post, he had
a single bolt of silk painted with six illustrations of the Seven Worthies.⁶ I
have great affection for these seven gentlemen.⁷ Apart from that, we have
no other objects from Shu.”

Afterwards, my late father was transferred to become Magistrate of
Military Affairs in Taizhou, where he died at his post. By the time I reached
ten years or so, our family was even poorer. Every New Year, when we
arranged the seats for the offering [to our ancestors], we would open up
these illustrations on the wall. My late mother would be sure to point them
out to me, saying: “They are our family heirlooms!”

Over thirty years later, the illustrations were even older and dingier.
When I had the honour of serving at Court, I was afraid that after such a
long time they would become increasingly decayed and damaged, so I took
the “Seven Worthies” and told an artisan to mount them on scrolls, so that
they could be passed down for another century or more. I felt that such an
old possession of the Ouyang Clan would also encourage my children and
grandchildren not to forget the “pure breeze” of earlier generations, and
would demonstrate what my respected father considered important. At the
same time, it would show how my mother, widowed young with a small

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⁵ Shu 蜀 was the name of the region (around present Sichuan Province) to which
Mianzhou belonged.
⁶ Probably the Seven Worthies (or Sages) of the Bamboo Grove (zhulin qixian 竹林七
賢), a group of literati friends who lived during the Jin dynasty (265-420), and would
gather occasionally for refined conversation and wine drinking.
⁷ It is possible that in this sentence Ouyang’s mother is recalling her husband’s words,
otherwise it sounds a little odd for her to display such affection for these “gentlemen,”
even if they are painted representations.
child, was yet able successfully to raise her family, without losing this old possession.

About twenty years after my respected father passed away, I was first successful in the civil service examination; and since then another twenty three years have gone by. The events happened in this way, but only now have I managed to compose a eulogy and preface about them.

Later in his childhood, Ouyang Xiu would often visit a certain Mr. Li south of Suizhou town, to read books his family could not afford. In 1016 he discovered a battered collection of the Tang statesman Han Yu’s writings there, and begged (successfully) to keep it.\(^8\) As Egan and others have shown, Han Yu, who was not a popular model for earlier Song writers, exerted a formative stylistic influence on both Ouyang’s prose and poetry.\(^9\) Less tangible, perhaps, was the effect of poverty which made every book, even every poem or prose passage, seem extremely precious.\(^10\) In fact, Ouyang’s son suggests that his father’s remarkable memory and scholarly habits developed very early, as a result of having to return most books that he borrowed. He would copy down passages from these books, “forgetting to sleep and eat,” and before he had finished copying each passage, he would already be able to recite it.\(^11\)


\(^9\) Egan 14, 20; and regarding poetry, 95-97, 104-6. Egan also points out in these pages that Ouyang’s attitude towards Han Yu was not an uncritical one, particularly with regard to Han’s strangeness and pessimism. Cf. Yoshikawa 64.

\(^10\) After all, Han Yu’s works, though great, are not the normal reading fare one would associate with young boys, even scholarly ones. And Ouyang himself admitted that at this early stage he didn’t understand much of what Han was discussing, but was simply convinced that his style was “expansive and boundless” (浩然無涯 haoran wuya). See Ji vol.2, 9.17.

\(^11\) See Ji vol.3, 18.57.
Ouyang was doubtless aware of the opportunities open to those who studied conscientiously. As one of his late poems from 1061 expresses it:12

I think of the past, when I first followed a teacher;
Studying hard, I hoped for official appointment;
I did not dare pursue fame and reputation,
All I expected was to escape poverty and baseness;
“Forgetting to eat,” day would approach evening,
“Burning firewood,” night encroached on the dawn;13
I claimed that after attaining my ambition,
I’d be able to burn my brushes and inkstone;
And to make up a little for my times of hardship,
I would only concentrate on sleeping and eating!

After several years of such study, Ouyang attempted the prefectural examination in Suizhou in 1023, failing due to incorrect use of rhyme in the rhyme-prose (赋 fu) portion of the exam.14 Ouyang Xiu later enjoyed composing poems with ingenious rhyme schemes, along with irregular metres and unusual content,15 and this examination is

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12 From “Book-reading,” 讀書 in Ji vol.1, 2.62-63; also in Xuanji 197-8.
13 The sayings in these two lines both refer to conscientious study.
14 See the “Chronological List” by Hu Ke, in Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.3. Hereafter referred to as nianpu. Incidentally the contents pages of Ouyang’s collection are numbered from 1.1; they are followed by the nianpu also numbered from 1.1. Following this is the original preface (Jushi ji xu 居士集序) by Su Shi (1037-1101), again numbered from 1.1. Finally, the collection itself begins from 1.1 as explained above. To distinguish these identically numbered sections, I will add mulu for the contents section, nianpu for the chronological record, and Jushi ji xu for Su’s preface.
15 See for instance the “Song on a Stone Screen of Scholar Wu” (Wu Xueshi shiping ge 吳學士石屏歌) whose rhyme alters dramatically with the shifts of subject matter within the poem, and whose lines vary from 7 to 15 syllables. Original text in Ji vol.1, 2.24-25. I translate and discuss this work in the following chapter.
probably the first record of his lifelong attempt to break down the barriers of literary
convention.

For the moment, however, he toed the line, passing the prefectural examination in
1026, and subsequently the examination of the Ministry of Rites (禮 部 libu) in the capital
Kaifeng at the second attempt in 1030, having become a protege of the scholar Xu Yan 胥
偃 two years earlier.\textsuperscript{16} In fact, from 1029 to 1030 Ouyang sat three examinations related
to the central civil service, and placed first in all of them.\textsuperscript{17}

As a result of his success, in the fifth month of 1030, a great change occurred in
his life when the central government posted him to Luoyang (present Henan province),
then called the Western Capital, to become a judge under the metropolitan governor Qian
Weiyan (錢 慎 演 977-1034).

There are at least three major developments which stem from Ouyang's time in
Luoyang. Firstly, he began to write in earnest, and along with several colleagues such as
Yin Shu (尹 洙 1001-1047) and Xie Jiang (謝 綦 995-1039), cultivated an unadorned
prose style which later became a standard model for the majority of prose writers in pre-
modern China.\textsuperscript{18}

From the beginning, his poetry also embodied many characteristics of his mature
style, such as philosophical depth and an everyday, "rough" diction. For example, his

\textsuperscript{16} Xu Yan was from Hanyang (present Hubei Province). Ouyang had failed the Ministry of
Rites examination in 1027; the following year, he visited Xu and showed the scholar some
of his writings. Xu considered them outstanding, inviting him to become a live-in student
at Hanyang. Hence his dramatic improvement to become the top-ranked scholar in 1030
was probably the result of Xu Yan's guidance. Those who passed the exam. were called
Presented Scholars (jinshi 進 士). For these events, see Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.3.
\textsuperscript{17} These were in the Directorate of Education, the National University and the afore-
mentioned Ministry of Rites (ibid.).
\textsuperscript{18} For the influence of Yin Shu on Ouyang, see Ouyang Fa's comments in Ji vol.3, 18.57-
58. For Xie Jiang, see Egan 25, and Jonathan Chaves, op.cit. 4. Ouyang Fa claims that the
prose style developed by these men became the standard style within 40 years (op.cit.
18.58).
poem entitled “Answering Yang Pi’s Seven-Syllable Composition ‘Praying for Rain’”\(^{19}\) contains the following plain philosophical analysis of the rhythms of nature: “I’ve heard that the forces of \textit{yin} and \textit{yang} in Heaven and on the Earth, rise and fall, above and below, never ceasing their motion. In their cycle they cannot avoid experiencing lacks and losses. As a result, at the year’s end, the harvests are not always good.”\(^{20}\) Another member of Qian’s entourage, the poet Mei Yaochen (梅堯臣 1002-1060), was extremely influential with regard to poetry, and became one of Ouyang’s closest friends.\(^{21}\)

Secondly, in Luoyang Ouyang and his large circle of like-minded friends, all talented literati, were able to indulge in many stimulating cultural and social activities. One of Ouyang’s earliest sets of poems describes six of his literati friends at Luoyang, giving an impression of their broad interests, and concludes with an “Autobiographical Sketch.”\(^{22}\)

\begin{quote}
By nature I am dissolute and unrestrained,  
And thus, as an official I am also dissolute.  
Don’t I resemble a leather sack,  
4 Laid on a cart, and led by the cart’s wheels?  
The fashionable gents didn’t cast a glance towards me,  
Left in solitude, I had no-one to talk to.  
But thankfully there are some young blades of Luoyang.
\end{quote}

\(^{19}\) In \textit{Ji} vol.1, 6.41-42. For a full translation of the poem and explanation of the title, see chapter 5 below.  
\(^{20}\) \textit{Yin 陰} and \textit{yang 陽} were considered since ancient times in China to represent opposing forces in the cosmos whose continuous interaction produced all phenomena in the universe. For further use of these terms by Ouyang, see especially chapter 4, section on birds and animals, below.  
\(^{21}\) A very detailed study of Mei Yaochen is Chaves, op.cit. Yoshikawa Kōjirō also has a section on Mei, in Yoshikawa 72-79. Mei will reappear often during my discussion of Ouyang’s poetry.  
\(^{22}\) For the series, see \textit{Ji} vol.1, 6.50-51. \textit{Xuanji} 3-4 also has the “Autobiographical Sketch.” Chaves, op.cit. 4-5, gives details on the six friends, who included Mei Yaochen, Yin Shu, Zhang Rushi, Yang Zicong, Zhang Taisu and Wang Yuan.
8 Who allow me daily to climb to their height.

I drink in their virtues, and am “intoxicated by fine wine,”

Wafting fragrance, they “adorn me with spring orchids.”

Frequently, when finished with military missives,

12 We compose and drink wine, enjoying ourselves together.

Apart from wine and good conversation, Ouyang’s various other pastimes and interests were no doubt encouraged by this refined environment. For example, references to zither-playing, peony cultivation and tea-drinking occur in his writings of the early 1030s, to be joined later by other pursuits like antique and stone connoisseurship, calligraphy and collecting of ancient inscriptions. Ouyang’s many poems on these themes, composed throughout his career, provide us with a unique glimpse into the

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23 According to Xuanji 4, n.3, both the phrases in this couplet imply receiving blessings by one’s association with those of great moral worth.

24 “Zither” refers to the qin, a long, rectangular seven-stringed instrument which was placed horizontally on a table, and the strings plucked with a plectrum. For a poem describing zither music from c.1033, see “On the River, Playing the Zither” (Jiangshang tan qin) in Ji vol.1, 6.47. For peonies, see Ouyang’s prose piece of 1034, “Record of Luoyang Peonies” (Luoyang mudan ji) in Ji vol.2, 9.2-9, and my discussion of this work and several peony poems in chapter 4 below. For tea, see a poem from 1031, “Wisdom of the Moon Adept Travels to the Southern Peak” in Ji vol.1, 2.61, translated in chapter 3 below.

25 Ouyang composed two poems in c.1037 on an ancient tile crafted into an inkstone (Ji vol.1, 6.57-58), one of which is translated in chapter 3 below, perhaps his first treatment of the antique theme. For stones, see especially chapter 2 below. Calligraphy seems to have been a later hobby, and not his forte, as he relates in a letter to Mei Yaochen of 1053: “[My technique] is like a boat sailing against the wind: having used up all my strength and spirit, I’m still in the same place as before! . . .” (Ji vol.3, 17.44). In the same letter, Ouyang also notes that he took up archery for a while, but made little progress in it (ibid.). His collected works contain a volume of “Calligraphy Exercises” (Shi bi), Ji vol.3, 14.127-135, though only the content of the pieces, not his calligraphic style, survives there. He also wrote two poems entitled “Practicing Calligraphy” (Xue shu) probably in the late 1050s (Ji vol.1, 6.79); the second is translated by Burton Watson, in Yoshikawa 71. As for ancient inscriptions, see note 117 below.
profound way of thinking which lay behind such pursuits, a point which I will develop further in later chapters.

Finally, with regard to this Luoyang period, biographies of Ouyang Xiu almost unanimously draw special attention to the two excursions he took to nearby Mount Song in 1032. Whether or not he had formulated his ideas about mountains before these trips, it is from this time that Ouyang begins to treat the mountain, in all its “ecological” complexity, as a powerful poetic symbol. Though it is difficult to echo Ouyang’s own pronouncement, in a late poem of 1069, that “not one of my poems does not speak of mountains,” many of those that do are remarkable, and I would suggest that his poems on other themes often bear traces of inspiration received from the mountain environment. I will treat this theme in more detail in the following chapter, only mentioning here Ouyang’s series of compositions from 1032, “Twelve Poems on Mount Song.”

Continuing for now with the chronology of Ouyang Xiu’s life, at the end of 1033 Qian Weiyan was replaced by Wang Shu (王曙 963-1034) as governor of Luoyang, and in the third month of 1034, Ouyang completed his own term of office there and, on the recommendation of the new governor, was given a post in the capital Kaifeng. For the next two years he was one of those responsible for editing the catalogue of the Imperial Archives, called the Chongwen zongmu 崇文總目.  

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26 These were in the second and ninth months of this year, the first trip with Mei Yaochen, Yang Zicong, Zhang Yingzhi and Chen Jiang; the second with Xie Jiang, Yin Shu, Wang Jidan and Yang again. See Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.4, and vol.3, 18.72-76, which appends two letters by Xie Jiang, and one poem by Mei Yaochen describing these excursions.
27 From the first poem of “Left on the Wall at Southern Tower, Two Quatrains,” written in Qingzhou. See Ji vol.1, 2.119; also in Xuanji 212.
28 In Ji vol.1, 6.42-44.
29 See Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.4. Xuanji 429-430.
30 The catalogue project was first directed by Wang Yaochen (王堯臣) and was named after the Chongwen Academy (崇文院) where the Imperial book collection was stored. Ouyang’s introductions to various sections of the catalogue are included in his collected works: Ji vol.3, 14.57-67. The final catalogue, recording over thirty thousand titles, was not completed until 1039, after Ouyang’s first exile. See below for more details.
Though during this period he was rising rapidly through the official hierarchy, his family life was struck by repeated tragedies, beginning even before his move from Luoyang with the death of his first wife, Madame Xu in 1033.\(^\text{31}\) She was the daughter of Ouyang’s first teacher Xu Yan, and he had married her in 1031 following his success in the civil service examinations. She had borne him a son less than a month before her death.\(^\text{32}\) Ouyang composed a poem in her memory, entitled “Drinking Alone at Green Bamboo Hall,”\(^\text{33}\) and an excellent rhyme-prose, “Relating Dreams,”\(^\text{34}\) which contains the vivid lines:

... I can see you only in my dreams —
So why do I sleep so little and wake so often?
Sleeping ten times, perhaps I see you only once —
And you seem there, yet not there,
Seem to leave, then seem to come back,
Suddenly you seem close, and then far away,
So distant — so sudden —
Yet still better than not seeing you at all —
I long for those momentary dreams!

\(^{31}\) Traditionally in China, married women have kept their father’s surname (their maiden name).
\(^{32}\) Ji vol.1, niangpu 1.4. Hence, her death was possibly a result of complications after giving birth, a very common cause of mortality at this time. The son died in 1038 (ibid. 1.6).
\(^{33}\) In Ji vol. 1, 6.45-46; also in Xuanji 17-18.
\(^{34}\) Ji vol.2, 7.41, and in Xuanji 267-268. In my translation, I use a dash for the Chinese character xi \(\frac{x}{x}\), which functions as a pause. This character is used frequently in the rhyme-prose (赋 fu) genre.
Having remarried, in 1034, the daughter of one Yang Daya 楊大雅 in Kaifeng, Ouyang was bereaved again just the following year. Also in 1035, his younger sister lost her husband, and she moved in to Ouyang’s house to live with their mother. As we shall see, this event had serious repercussions on Ouyang many years later. For the present, Ouyang was left in a distraught and sick state, as his poem bidding farewell to a friend visiting from Luoyang makes clear:

[Line 9] Since arriving at the capital, I’ve twice mourned the spring,

Haggard and worn, I exhaust my sadness in the dust of the Nine Streets.

Red bulbs and violet buds are emerging all over the place,

12 But I lack friends to accompany me riding out to find them.

The Yellow River in the third month flows into the River Sui,

And when the river waters rise, my gloomy desires rise too.

And all because I cherish the place from which these waters come:

16 They bear within them the flowing Yi, and the ripples of the Luo.

Suddenly, I discover that you have come from the Western Capital,

Wiping my tears, I look at you: my eyes grow bright for a moment.

My heart is weakened, my face aged: I fear that you will ask why,

20 Startled at my emaciated bones, as clear as jagged ice.

This year, in the seventh month, my sister lost her husband,

The little children and the widowed woman wept with mourning sobs.

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35 Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.5.
36 Ibid. for the brother-in-law’s death; and for his sister’s move, see Ouyang’s memorial of 1045, “At Chuzhou, Thanking the Emperor,” in Ji vol.2, 10.102-103.
37 The poem’s title translates as “A Song to See Off Zhang Duntian, on His Return to Luoyang,” found in Ji vol.1, 6.53.
38 The capital (line 9) was Kaifeng, and the Nine Streets were its main thoroughfares.
39 I.e. tributaries of the Yellow River which flowed through Luoyang, the Western Capital of the next line.
Fall came, and in the ninth month, I lost my [second] wife,
24 By the tenth month, weak in spirit, sickness overtook my frame.
Living alone, I moved my sick body beneath the new city wall,
The whole day I stay in the house, and no-one bothers to visit.
Passing the time all by myself, I feel the urge to sing loudly,
28 But even before the melody ends, two lines of tears splash down . . .

Though clearly very disturbed by these deaths, Ouyang did not dwell on them as much in his poetry as Mei Yaochen who, having lost his first wife in 1044 after seventeen years of marriage, poured out his grief in page after page of poems, going over his feelings to an almost obsessive degree.40

During the same period 1034-1036, the great reforming statesman Fan Zhongyan (范仲淹 989-1052) had been steadily rising through the ranks, reaching the post of Kaifeng governor in 1035. He was keen to reform the civil service examination system and to reduce corruption among government officials, and took every opportunity to criticize abuses of the system.41 However, his advice was not taken graciously by the establishment, especially the Chief Councillor Lü Yijian (呂夷簡 978-1043), and Fan was exiled in 1036 to Raozhou 饒州 (present Boyang County, Jiangxi Province), for overstepping his official position.

Several of Ouyang’s friends, including Yin Shu and Yu Jing (余靖 1000-1064), supported Fan, and were similarly banished to the provinces. Ouyang, having openly

40 For a detailed discussion of Mei’s poems on his wife, see Chaves, op.cit. 146-160. Yoshikawa, discussing a later poem of Ouyang’s on the death of his daughter Shi, notes too the very orderly way in which Ouyang describes his grief spreading from one part of his body to another (Yoshikawa 66-67; Chinese text of poem in J/ vol.1, 1.21-22, dated 1045). This tendency to favour ingenious poetic structures, which emerges in many of Ouyang’s poems, does not mean that he is belittling the pain of bereavement, but as I will show later, seems eventually to help him find a sense of order in an otherwise ruthless environment — an environment which in 1035 had overcome him with sickness.
41 See James T.C. Liu, op.cit. 29-31.
criticized a censor named Gao Ruona (高若訥) for supporting these injustices, was himself sent off to the county of Yiling 夷陵 in Xiazhou 峽州 (present Yichang County, Hubei Province, near the lower reaches of the Yangtze River Gorges). Arriving in the tenth month of 1036, he had remained at Yiling for only a year and a half when the court transferred him to become magistrate of Qiande County 乾德縣 (present Guanghua County, Hubei Province) which he reached in late spring of 1038.

Though during this first exile Ouyang composed several poems complaining at the backwardness of the Yiling region, he also showed fascination at the everyday life of its inhabitants and awe at the dramatic mountain scenery. In a poem sent to his friend Su Shunqin (蘇舜欽 1008-1048), he declares:

The Three Gorges tower sheer beside me,
I'm sent off to the south, to a land of utter remoteness.
The best time of year is certainly delightful,
But thoughts of home leave me lonely and at a loss.
The River waters flow past verdant cliffs,
Gibbon howls emerge from emerald clouds.
Summer shoots of wild bamboo burst through,
Clumps of oranges extend spring branches.
Before midwinter, apricots are first to bloom,

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42 Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.5. And for Yu Jing and Yin Shu, see Liu, op.cit. 32-34, and Xuanji 430.
43 Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.5-6.
44 Title translates: “On First Arriving at Yiling: Answering Su Zimei’s Kind Letter.” Zimei 子美 was Su Shunqin’s style name. Original text in Ji vol.1, 2.71, dated 1036. For translations of similar poems from Ouyang’s Yiling exile, see my chapter 2 below; also Yoshikawa 66, and a partially translated poem in Egan 113.
45 I use the variant “south,” instead of “together” (tong 同) which makes little sense here. Su Shunqin was not exiled until the mid-1040s.
And through the frost, the foliage never withers.\textsuperscript{46}
River clouds gloomily obscure the sun,
12 Mountain mists bring darkness, morning after morning.
Chopping in the valleys, they struggle to harvest lacquer,
Scaling up to the forests, they battle to pick peppers.
From Ba and Cong the boating merchants gather,
16 In Man markets, wineshop banners beckon.\textsuperscript{47}
The seasons and festivals are the same as Jing customs,
But popular airs add the rhymes of Chu.\textsuperscript{48}
Their slang ditties are cause for teasing and merriment,
20 And “wiping away ghosts,” they gather in noise and clamour.\textsuperscript{49}
Accused of a crime, it’s right that I flee abroad,
Full of shame, I deserve to bow down.
But passing time urges on the years of my prime,
24 Fallen and captive, I’m ashamed that the wind startles me.
My white hair appears along with the New Year,
My ruddy face pales in an alien region.
From County Halls in the morning I face tigers,
\textsuperscript{46} The preceding 4 lines follow the year through almost a complete cycle.
\textsuperscript{47} Ba and Cong were regions west of Xiazhou, in present Sichuan Province. Man 蠻 refers to the Man people, indigenous inhabitants of the central Yangtze valley, regarded as barbarians by the ruling Han race of the Song.
\textsuperscript{48} Jing[zhou] was the region beside Xiazhou, on the southern banks of the Yangtze River. Chu 楚 was an ancient kingdom whose domain included much of south central China before the Qin dynasty unification (221 BC). Ouyang uses the term to refer to the indigenous people of Xiazhou and their customs, which differ from those Han people in Jingzhou.
\textsuperscript{49} In a note to this line, Ouyang explains that wiping away ghosts (ca gui 擦 鬼) was one of many “wild” customs of Yiling locals; whenever they celebrated one of their numerous offerings to gods, they would prepare enormous amounts of food, and gather in the hundreds for an offering feast to “wipe away the ghosts.”
28 In the Official Lodge at night I hear owls.
   There are no autumn geese to dispatch a letter,
   Longing to return home, I gaze at the Dipper Handle.⁵⁰
   If you must know my dreams of a thousand miles,
32 They constantly circle over the Luo River bridge!

Also during this exile period, Ouyang was married for the third time in 1037 to the daughter of one Xue Kui (薛 奎 967-1034), and this wife actually outlived Ouyang, bearing him eight sons and three daughters. Ouyang’s third wife was eleven years his junior, literate, composed poems, and was a devout Buddhist, despite her husband’s occasional published criticisms of the religion. She also played the se 瑟, a kind of plucked stringed instrument similar to the zither.⁵¹

In spring of 1040, after a leave period during the winter visiting Mei Yaochen in his new posting at Xiangcheng, and seeing Xie Jiang there just before his death, Ouyang received a further transfer to Huazhou 滑州 (present Hua County, Henan Province).⁵² However, the political climate was changing: Fan Zhongyan was sent to Shaanxi to deal with an invasion by the north-western Xixia 西夏 kingdom in late 1039, and in spring of 1040 he invited Ouyang to act as chief secretary in his entourage.⁵³ Ouyang declined,

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⁵⁰ Name of a constellation including the northern Pole Star, used to indicate Ouyang’s wish to return north to Luoyang. Geese, in the previous line, were used in ancient times to carry messages on their migratory flights north and south.
⁵¹ For Ouyang’s third wife, see her grave inscription by Su Zhe in Gao Xiufang and Chen Hongtian, ed., Luancheng ji (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990) vol.2, juan 25, 418-420. According to this account, she died in 1089, seventeen years after Ouyang. Four of their eight sons died as children, and all three daughters died before getting married. Her father, Xue Kui, had been premier under Emperor Renzong, but died before his daughter’s marriage, leaving his wife to arrange the match (ibid. 418). See also Liu Ruoyu, op.cit. 17-18.
⁵² Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.6. Ouyang had visited Xie the previous summer too at Dengzhou 鄭州, when Mei was also present (ibid.).
⁵³ Fan Zhongyan was particularly strident in opposing the Song policy of rapprochement with the neighbouring “barbarian” kingdoms, most notably the Xixia people in the north-
apparently hoping to avoid charges of opportunism, since opponents already accused him of taking part in Fan’s clique.54 His scruples were soon rewarded when he was recalled to Kaifeng that summer, and finally resumed work on the Imperial Archives catalogue.55

Emperor Renzong was by now eager to test the efficacy of Fan Zhongyan’s reform approach. In mid-1042 he decreed that officials should offer up advice on government policies. Ouyang Xiu composed a memorial dealing with “three abuses” and “five matters” — basically attacking corruption in the Fan Zhongyan manner.56 When his advice was ignored, Ouyang requested a provincial post, and once again received the magistracy of Huazhou in the ninth month.57 However, his stay there was very short. Though in 1042 the Song court had staved off the threat from the Qidan in the north by means of another peace treaty and increased indemnity, continued attacks by the Xixia further west, coupled with popular riots to the east and west of Kaifeng, destabilized the political situation. As a result, Grand Councillor Lù Yìjiān resigned in early summer of 1043, and Emperor Renzong gave the reformers a chance to act. Not only did he employ in the central government more censors of a reforming inclination, including Ouyang Xiu, he also invited Fan Zhongyan to become Vice Grand Councillor.58 With the support of Fu Bi (富弼),

west. Since 1004 the Song government had paid a considerable indemnity of silk and silver to another group, the northern Qidan (契丹, sometimes transliterated as Khitan), in order to guarantee peaceful relations. Now that the Xixia were beginning to encroach on Song territory, Fan was anxious that the government adopt a firmer stance towards them. In 1040, he gained his opportunity.

54 Ibid. See also James T.C. Liu, op.cit. 35-36, who deals with this episode in detail. According to Liu, Ouyang declined the position because he did not wish to be merely a secretary! Ouyang’s letter to Fan Zhongyan declining the post explains that he dislikes writing in parallel prose, which was the main function of a secretary (Ji vol.1, 6.1-2); but in a letter to Mei Yaochen he declares that the position was beneath him (Ji vol.3, 17.38).

55 Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.6. The catalogue, the Chongwen zongmu, was completed that same year, and Ouyang was promoted again.

56 This was the “Memorial Discussing Matters Offered in Response to a Decree,” Ji vol.1, 5.87-95.

57 Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.7.

58 Or more literally, “participant in determining government affairs” (canzhi zhengshi 参知政事), one of the highest government positions.
1004-1083) and Han Qi (韩琦 1008-1075), two more “veteran” reformers, Fan set in motion the famous Qingli Reforms with a ten-point plan to refine the examination system and clean up the political environment.\footnote{For the Qingli Reforms, see James T.C. Liu’s analysis in op.cit. 40-51. He claims that negotiations for peace with the Xixia, averting the crisis on the border, along with the arrogance and inflexibility of the reformers towards dissenting voices, hastened their decline.}

However, after little more than a year, the movement lost its momentum, amid accusations of cliquism and lack of any tangible change among official hierarchies. First, a group of Fan’s supporters were exiled in late 1044 for improper behaviour at a party, including Ouyang’s close friend and fellow-poet Su Shunqin;\footnote{See ibid. 49-50; also Su Shunqin’s prose account, “Green Waves Pavilion,” for description of his banishment to Suzhou, and Ouyang’s answering poem of the same title (both translated below, chapter 4).} then, in spring of 1045, Fan Zhongyan and all the other reform leaders resigned and were likewise exiled.

The previous summer, Ouyang had already been sent on two fact-finding tours: to Hedong, then under threat from the Qidan, and to Hebei. At the time of Fan’s resignation, he had just replaced one Tian Kuang as stand-in governor of Zhending subprefecture.\footnote{Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.8-9. James T.C. Liu sees these various postings outside the capital as signs that Emperor Renzong was uneasy with the reform movement. Fan and Fu Bi were also dispatched on border missions during 1044 (op.cit. 47).} Ouyang’s reaction to the situation is clear in a poem he sent to his third wife, which gives a candid account of the effects of these political troubles on his family, and incidentally reveals his deep affection for his wife:

\begin{verbatim}
Dappled, Dappled, Turtledoves in the Forest: Sent to My Wife [1045].\footnote{Ji vol.1, 1.17-18. Also in Xuanji 93-96. Zhending subprefecture 真定府 (present Hebei Province, around Zhengding County 正定縣) was also known as Zhenyang 鎮陽, as in line 33 of this poem. Ouyang’s other poems written in Zhending display a similar sense of frustration with political life, and inner conflict about whether to retire or fight his opponents. See Ji vol.1, 1.17, 18, 19-20}
\end{verbatim}
Dappled, dappled, turtledoves in the forest,
‘Gu, gu,’ one calls to its mate:
“I’m making the most of the dry weather
To avoid being parted from you.”63

The spring plain, washed by rain, brightens,
Green leaves, in early morning sun, cast shadows.
The sounds of their calls echo in harmony,
Responding and answering like the tuning of pipes.

They perch deep in the soft mulberry’s warmth,
Then descend to peck at the fruits of high fields.

People all laugh that you are so clumsy,
Lacking a nest in which to make your home.
But your easy contentment stems from few desires,
And I envy the freedom that your clumsiness brings!

Though I do possess a house and home,
I once scuttled off to the Man of Jing, exiled,64
They forced me to flee as if lashing a whip.

Among mountains and streams, miasmal fog was dense,
In rivers and seas, the gales blew the waves.
Constantly beside me, you shared it all,

63 Traditionally, the turtledove (jiu 喜) was supposed to drive away its mate in rainy weather, and call her back in clear weather; hence the bird is often used as a symbol for marital tension. See two interesting poems by Ouyang on this topic, using the turtledove, in Ji vol.1, 2.37-38, dated 1059. Later in the present poem, we find that Ouyang is away from his wife, due to his provincial posting, hence he envies the turtledove, which at least comes together with its mate in dry weather. The turtledove was also known for not building a nest: Ouyang turns this fault into a virtue as well in lines 11-16.
64 See notes 47 and 48 above.
Through demotion and loss, we disappeared together. Yet escaping with our lives, we were out of peoples’ sight,  

24 Already exiled, who could envy us now?  

Amidst alpine flowers and wild grasses,  

I grew drunk, and you sounded your zither.  

We knew only contentment in poverty and baseness,  

28 And paid no heed to the racing months and years.  

Returning to the court these last few years,  

My official income was showered upon children and nephews.  

With exalted position came greater responsibility,  

32 Such a small vessel, I’m afraid, often overflows!

Now this year I have come to Zhenyang,  

I am forced to stay here and see the spring plants.  

The Northern Pool overflows with fresh water,  

36 Fish and birds make a tumultuous sound.  

But my mind cannot fix itself on the spring,  

And vainly I sigh to myself about my worries.  

A single official post is really quick to finish,  

40 And when can I finally repay the country?  

In the high hall, my mother is aging now,  

Her remaining hair is too sparse to bother combing.  

And yesterday, you sent a letter to say:  

44 With the coming of spring her old sickness returned.  

Though you work hard to give her food and medicine,

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65 Actually, Ouyang was already in Yiling when he married this wife (noted in Xuanji 94-95, note 3).  
66 Ouyang suggests that his talents are not up to the job.  
67 It seems that Ouyang’s family were unable to join him in Zhenyang.
How can it compare with having me by her side?

You also write that you too are sick,

And can’t even manage to fix your messy hair.

When a letter comes, it's supposed to console,

Instead it just agitates my worry and gloom . . .

..............

In recent days, I read the official appointments:

The Imperial Court has replaced the Grand Councillor.\(^{68}\)

His Gracious Lordship is concerned for great ministers,

Advancing and retiring them according to proper procedure;

But petty people recklessly follow suit,

With edicts and memorials, they compete to wield their brushes.

I also hear that they’re speaking of “cliques and parties,”

And in succession, they propose their lists of names.\(^{69}\)

But as for me, would I dare to flee,

Much better be the first to accuse myself!

Above, I rely on the Son of Heaven’s sageliness,

That he won’t have to treat me as a capital offender.

I only need to be sent into exile,

For hordes of mouths to cease their endless chatter . . .

..............

. . . I’ll regain my nature as a wild bird,

And escape the cage with its shock and terror.

\(^{68}\) Referring to Fan Zhongyan's demotion.

\(^{69}\) Fan Zhongyan had been accused of organizing a clique, or faction (dang 黨) in an attempt to wrest control from the Emperor. Ouyang wrote an essay defending Fan against the charge. See James T.C. Liu, op.cit. 48-49, 52-64, for an excellent discussion of the problem of factionalism in the 1040s.
I don’t care what intention you have in mind,
My plans are already firmly fixed!
You can appreciate ferns and vetch,
84 I’ll be happy to remove hatpin and sash.70

The thirty six peaks of Mount Song,
Grey and azure, will rise up loftily.71
How can we get to leave hand in hand,
88 To plough fields, and grow old in a mean thatched hut?

As Chen Xin and Du Weimo point out, despite Ouyang’s claims that he would voluntarily retire from office, he could not resist speaking out against the demotions of Fan Zhongyan and his colleagues, an action which certainly increased the wrath of his opponents.72 Having thus expressed his indignation in a memorial, Ouyang was accused of sexual impropriety with the daughter of his widowed sister. Though the courts cleared him of the charge, they still recommended his exile to Chuzhou 滁州 (present Chu County, Anhui Province), and Ouyang took up the position of governor there in the tenth month of 1045.73

70 “Ferns and vetch” refers to a poor person’s diet; removing “hatpin and sash” indicates retirement from office.
71 Mount Song, near Luoyang, like many of China’s great mountains, was often used as a place for living in reclusion. On his trip there in 1032, Ouyang encountered a recluse living in a cave high among the peaks. See description by Xie Jiang, included at the back of Ouyang’s collection (Ji vol.3, 18.72-74). Ouyang composed a poem to this recluse late in his life: see chapter 2 below for translation.
72 See Xuanji 96, n.10.
73 Details in Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.9. His “Memorial Discussing the Matter of Du Yan and Fan Zhongyan Being Removed from Office” is in Ji vol.2, 12.102-106; also annotated in Xuanji 381-387.
Before continuing with the account of Ouyang's life, I will examine these charges of sexual misconduct in a little more detail, since later in his career he was to face similar accusations. Was there any basis for such slurs on his personal conduct?

Certainly while a young official in Luoyang, Ouyang gained a reputation for enjoying life to the hilt, and apparently engaged in a rather public affair with a well-known courtesan. He himself admitted that before he reached thirty he "enjoyed and considered highly luxury and culture, loved wine and singing songs; [he] knew to consider them pleasurable, but didn't know what was wrong with them." By traditional Chinese reckoning, Ouyang would have reached thirty soon after he left Luoyang, and it is possible that the premature deaths of his first two wives, coupled with the less congenial, faction-ridden environment of Kaifeng, forced on him a more responsible attitude to life. As he notes in the same letter just quoted, written in 1039: "Afterwards [i.e. after reaching thirty] when I became a little more familiar with the Way of the Sages, and regretted my past errors, they were already spread about and I could not pursue them . . . I can only make an effort to do good in order to compensate for the past."

Unfortunately, the notoriety of his earlier amorous adventures counted against him in the 1040s. I mentioned before that Ouyang's younger sister, after being widowed in 1035, moved back to live with their mother in Ouyang's house. Ouyang relates what then transpired in a memorial defending his character, written in Chuzhou:

[My younger sister] lost her husband and had no means of support, so bringing her orphaned daughter, she came back home. At that time,

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74 As noted by James T.C. Liu, op.cit. 29.
75 Ji vol.2, 8.67.
76 He left Luoyang in 1034. Born in 1007, his thirtieth Chinese year would have been 1036.
77 Ibid. It is significant that Ouyang wrote this letter long before he was charged with sexual misconduct, so it cannot be interpreted as a reaction to those charges.
78 Ji vol.2, 10.102-103.
Miss Zhang [the daughter] was only seven years old. I’m ashamed that I don’t have any understanding of divination or predicting the future, and I could not foresee what she would do when she grew older. But since it would have been inhumane to abandon her by the wayside, my sister therefore raised her in her own apartments.

After explaining how Miss Zhang seemed impatient to be married off, but hadn’t yet reached marrying age, Ouyang continues: “Soon I allowed her to be given in marriage, but five or six years after her wedding, when we were separated by several thousand li, her character unfortunately became rotten!” 79 Another account by one Wang Zhi fills in the details: 80

[Miss Zhang] married [Ouyang’s] nephew Sheng. When Sheng finished his posting at Qianzhou, they travelled together with a servant Chen Jian, and Zhang had a sexual liaison with Jian. 81 When the affair was discovered, they were detained at the constabulary of the Right Military Barracks in Kaifeng. Zhang was terrified at her crime, and hoping to exonerate herself, everything she said implicated [Ouyang Xiu]. And in

79 Ibid. A li 里 is a distance measurement equivalent to about a third of a mile.
81 Another source is even more lurid: one day, the husband Sheng attended a banquet along the route, and returning, “he couldn’t find their boat. When he reached the capital he captured them. The matter was investigated by the Kaifeng government: the oarsman [possibly the same Chen Jian?] had engaged in a sexual liaison with Sheng’s concubine, and when Sheng’s wife [Zhang] discovered it, she was about to whip them. Instead, she was led astray by the concubine, and they both had sexual intercourse with the oarsman together!” From Zhao Kui, Xingying zalu, quoted in Songren yishi huibian, op.cit. 346, textual note.
describing what had occurred before she was married, she said many ugly and astounding things.

When the matter was investigated further, the niece’s accusations were found to be completely groundless. Ouyang’s reputation was severely damaged, however, and his enemies were able to have him exiled on a charge of illegally appropriating his niece’s dowry to pay for some land. 82

Though it was Ouyang’s support for Fan Zhongyan’s reform program that caused his downfall, and the rather dissolute lifestyle of his Luoyang days which made his enemies’ accusations plausible, there is a further crucial factor that explains the extremely violent and personal nature of their attacks on Ouyang in particular. His son’s biographical record notes several times that Ouyang’s character was very direct and straightforward: “If he knew something [was wrong], he would never remain silent.”83 As a censor, responsible for reporting official incompetence and misbehaviour, Ouyang wrote a series of extremely critical memorials, including some directed at the most powerful government ministers. For example, after Premier Lü Yijian resigned in 1043, Ouyang sent up a memorial requesting not only that the Emperor refuse to employ Lü in such a prestigious post again, but also that none of Lii’s family be given positions in the central government. 84 He declares that when Lü was in power, he “acted as a tyrant both within the Court and outside; everyone feared him, but no-one dared censure him. So when he became ill, the whole Empire rejoiced together that a treacherous and evil person, so difficult to remove, had for now been deposed by Heaven.”85 After suggesting ways in which the Emperor can ensure that Lii is not reappointed, Ouyang continues: “I also

82 Ibid. 347. Also in James T.C. Liu, op.cit. 66.
83 This quotation occurs twice, in Ji vol.3, 18.61, line 8; and 18.66, line 4. Other similar remarks on Ouyang’s directness appear on 18.56; 18.64 and 18.69.
84 Ji vol.2, 12.37, composed in 1043.
85 Ibid.
worry that he will still seek your gracious favours for his sons and younger brothers . . .
And since now in our border regions we face so many problems, and those officials who
worked so hard outside have never been granted accelerated promotion, how can such a
treacheryous, evil and hugely venomous family, with its block-headed sons and younger
brothers greedy for bribes, be granted endless favours?"  

Although by this time Lü had already retired — and as James T.C. Liu notes,
Ouyang was successful in preventing Lü from gaining the Emperor’s ear after retiring —
Ouyang’s caustic and personal attacks on him and several other government officials
doubtless provoked their enmity. They would surely have reacted with barely disguised
glee when his niece implicated Ouyang in her sordid affairs.

Of course, another side of Ouyang’s character not represented fairly in his
memorials about corrupt government officials, but very clear in those describing unrest
around the capital, is his compassion for the suffering of ordinary people. Sent on
inspection trips through Hedong and Hebei in the early 1040s, he saw firsthand the results
of official corruption and incompetence, namely, people dying of starvation or forced into
banditry in order to survive. A representative example of his concern is the pair of
memorials from the winter of 1043-44 written after heavy snow, in which he requests the

86 Ibid. 12.38.
87 The sources do not make it clear whether niece Zhang’s charges were spontaneous, or
were perhaps suggested as a kind of “plea bargain” by her investigators. Other victims of
Ouyang’s censures included one of the top military officials, Wang Juzheng: Ouyang calls
for his replacement by Fan Zhongyan, declaring: “Wang Juzheng is the epitome of
incompetence. He has been in a key post for such a long time, but he is weak and timid
and doesn’t understand his business. Since he keeps his mouth closed and makes no
constructive suggestions, it would be best to discharge him . . .” (Ji vol.2, 12.14-15).
Another memorial accuses two lesser officials of corruption and wickedness,
recommending their exile (ibid. 12.17-18). Further examples are given by Wang Zhi in his
Mo ji, op.cit. 39. Ouyang himself was aware of the fury that he had provoked: see the
beginning of his defence in Ji vol.2, 11.6.
Court to distribute food and supplies of firewood and charcoal to the poor around Kaifeng, since already many people have frozen to death.\textsuperscript{88}

Ouyang’s anger with greedy and corrupt officials, so evident during the first half of his career, thus had a definite and justified cause. Yet his sharp and direct approach proved counter-productive, resulting in his disgrace and exile to Chuzhou, a place where he had little chance to criticize those with greatest influence.\textsuperscript{89}

From this point on, the second half of Ouyang’s life followed a similar pattern to the first — rising from provincial beginnings to central government posts — though this time reaching a rather higher level. He completed his term at Chuzhou in 1048, following which he was given briefer postings as governor of Yangzhou 揚州, Yingzhou (潁州 1049)\textsuperscript{90} and Yingtianfu (應天府 1050-1052), the latter encompassing the city of Nanjing (present Shangqiu, Henan Province).\textsuperscript{91} He spent much time visiting the various mountains, lakes and historical sites around these places, and was responsible for constructing several pavilions at scenic viewpoints, for instance the Drunken Old Man Pavilion (醉翁亭 Zuiweng ting) in the Langya Mountains of Chuzhou, whose name echoed the sobriquet (Zuiweng 醉翁) which he adopted there, and the Hall of Plains and Mountains (平山堂 Pingshan tang) in Yangzhou, among others.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{88} Ji vol.2, 12.64-65. Another example calls for aid to the Jianghuai region following a serious drought (ibid. 12.70-71).
\textsuperscript{89} James T.C. Liu also remarks that some other members of Fan Zhongyan’s reform faction acted as corruptly as those they criticized, thereby tarnishing the reputation of the whole group (op.cit. 48).
\textsuperscript{90} Yangzhou was a famous cultural and trading metropolis in present Jiangsu Province; Yingzhou had its provincial capital in present Quyang County, Anhui.
\textsuperscript{91} Ji vol. 1, niánpu 1.9-11.
\textsuperscript{92} He adopted the sobriquet in 1046, his fortieth year by traditional Chinese reckoning (ibid. 1.9). See his prose records on the Drunken Old Man Pavilion, and another building constructed in Chuzhou, the Pavilion of Abundant Joys, in Ji vol.1, 5.35-37. His son notes that the former record, along with a “Record on the Eastern Garden of Zhenzhou,” dated 1051 (original text in ibid. 5.40-41), were especially praised for their style, which was “unprecedented” (ibid. vol.3, 18.58). Cf. English translations of the former two pieces in
The prose and poetic commemorations that Ouyang composed during his exile and subsequent provincial postings reveal a more relaxed, accomplished and witty style than that of the previous two decades. It appears that now he not only recognized the patience and determination necessary to achieve any lasting change in the society around him, but also began to discover greater satisfaction in his personal interests — appreciating natural beauty, drinking wine with friends, and reading and writing as means of spiritual sustenance. Two poems comparing West Lake, a well-known scenic spot in Yangzhou, with its namesake in Yingzhou, with its namesake in Yingzhou give a taste of his life of relative leisure in the provinces:

*Answering Grand Tutor Magistrate Lǐ* [1049].

A thousand acres of lotus stems cover the water evenly.

The Governor of Yangzhou in past days viewed them with much affection.

Patterned pots were placed all around; their glowing blossoms mingled,

4 Red sleeves passed them about, and the drinking game proceeded.95

Dancing before the setting sun, I urged drunken guests to linger,

When music lagged, the sandalwood clappers took up a fresh rhythm.96

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93 Ji vol.1, 2.81. Also in Xuanji 124-125. According to a note under the title of this poem in the contents pages of Ji, Magistrate Lǐ, interestingly enough, was Lǐ Gongzhu, the son of former Premier Lǐ Yijian, whose whole family Ouyang had roundly criticized a few years earlier (Ji, vol.1, mulu 1.13). During this period, Ouyang exchanged several apparently very cordial poems with Lǐ junior, who was his colleague at Yangzhou!

94 An original note to this line states: "On Shaobo [Lake] the lotuses extend in all directions as far as the eye can see." Shaobo Lake was North-East of present Jiangdu County, Jiangsu Province, near Yangzhou.

95 Original note: "I once picked a thousand stems of lotuses, and planted them in patterned pots, arranging them around the seats. I also told the seated guests to pass round the flowers, each plucking one petal; the one who plucked the last petal had to drink wine. This we used as a drinking game."

34
But now, left in loneliness on [Yangzhou’s] West Lake,
8 After the rain, no-one remains to see your fallen blossoms.

This poem remembers the hedonistic delights of a party on Yangzhou’s West Lake, now that Ouyang has moved away to Yingzhou, personifying the abandoned, lonely lotuses in the final couplet. In the following work, of the same year, he celebrates the fact that he has discovered an equally fine haunt at Yingzhou’s West Lake:

*On West Lake, Written in Jest, Shown to Fellow Excursionists [1049].*

The fragrance of lotus blossoms is pure; the painted pleasure-boat drifts,
Surely the Governor cannot still have Yangzhou on his mind?
He’s merely taken the “moonlight shining over the Twenty Four Bridges,”
4 And in return received “West Lake’s ten acres of autumn!”

As the second of these poems makes clear, Ouyang was much taken with the surroundings of Yingzhou, and in 1050 he revealed to Mei Yaochen his plans to buy land there as a suitable place for retirement. In fact, in early summer of 1052, during his term at Nanjing, Ouyang’s mother Madame Zheng died, and he spent most of the three-year

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96 “Sandalwood clappers”: a kind of rhythm instrument.
97 *Ji* vol.1, 2.84. Also in *Xuanji* 125-126. An original note to the title states: “One version has ‘First Floating Out on West Lake.’”
98 Yangzhou was famous for twenty four scenic bridges around the city. Ouyang cleverly implies that he has replaced a typical scene of Yangzhou celebrated by literati with an equally fine scene from Yingzhou.
99 *Ji* vol.1, *nianpu* 1.11. Many other poems sing the praises of Yingzhou’s serene natural beauty. There are thirteen lyrics (*ci* 詞) entitled *Cai Sangzi* 采桑子 with a preface explaining that they describe Yingzhou’s West Lake, in *Ji* vol.3, 15.4-7. See also another regulated verse, “Floating On a Boat at West Lake . . .” in *Ji* vol.2, 7.23; also in *Xuanji* 126-127.
mourning period back in Yingzhou, apart from a trip to the family grave at Longgang in Jizhou (present Ji’an County, Jiangsu Province) to bury his mother beside his two former wives.100

As I suggested earlier, Ouyang highly respected his mother, and her decline and death seem to have shocked him greatly, jarring him into a realization of his own aging and inevitable mortality. Such a personal motive may explain the rather sombre tone of several of his poems from the early 1050s. At this time, his poetry often expresses resentment at the renewal of nature in spring, which contrasts so cruelly with his own frequent illnesses and graying hair. For instance, his poem “Rhapsody: Moved by the Spring,”101 of 1050, contains the lines:

The turtledove calls — on the roof top,
The sparrows twitter noisily — in among the eaves.
The hundred birds are moved by Spring warmth,
4 As if something stirs in their inner mechanism.
Male and female echo each other in harmony,
All day their cacophony allows me no rest!
As for the two trees beneath the terrace,
8 Who would select their withered branches?
But the Spring breeze arrives in the course of one night,
And their blossoms and leaves become oh so dappled.
Thus do I know that Heaven’s cunning steals our human strength,
12 And is able to cause withered trees to grow young rosy faces!
Why is it that people, the most vital of ten thousand creatures,

100 Ibid. 1.12.
101 In Ji vol.1, 2.15-16. An original note to the title adds: “Matching Lü Gongzhu” (see also note 93 above).
Cannot compare with plants and trees, or birds that soar on the wing?

Ever since the Spring arrived, what have I been feeling?

16 Only wonder that, fast asleep, I’m unaware of the white sun rising high over Southern Mountains,

And meeting the hundred flowers as I walk, my eyes are not attracted! . . .

In fact, between 1052 and 1054, Ouyang apparently composed no poems at all. During these years, he did complete a *New History of the Five Dynasties*, which must have taken up much of his time and energy. Yet there is some evidence that he underwent a creative block with regard to poetry. In 1049, he had taken on two private students, Jiao Qianzhi and Xu Wudang, and in a couple of poems of that year he showered praise on their talents, claiming that they could now take over from an aging fellow like himself. When he finally resumed his poetic writing in 1054, one of his first works was to Xu Wudang, and concludes with the lines: “Alas! My brush and inkstone have been blocked for such a long time: I’m grateful that you inspired me to set

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102 The majority of poems in the *Jushi ji* section of Ouyang’s collection (i.e. those available to him at the end of his life, which he chose to retain for posterity) are dated. However, none date from 1052 or 1053. Likewise with the *Wai ji* (those poems collected after Ouyang’s death), though fewer of these works are dated. As far as I can see, no other year after 1031, when Ouyang’s first serious poetry was written, lacks dated poems.


104 These poems are very vivid portraits of the teacher-student relationship. See *Ji* vol.1, 2.8 and 2.8-9. According to James T.C. Liu, Ouyang attributed the commentaries in the *New History of the Five Dynasties* to Xu Wudang, proving his high opinion of this student (Liu, op.cit. 110). Yet it is probable that Ouyang actually wrote them himself (ibid.) For the suggestion that Xu had been Ouyang’s informal student since the early 1040s, cf. my chapter 3 below, n.55.

105 In *Ji*, vol.1, 2.16-17.
In later chapters, I will suggest the way in which Ouyang overcame this creative block and produced some of his most imaginative poems in the second half of the 1050s.

In 1054, the mourning period completed, Ouyang returned to the capital. After an interview with Emperor Renzong, who was shocked at his white hair after nine years away from the capital, he received a central government post, helping to compile a revised version of the official history of the Tang Dynasty — begun by Song Qi (998-1061) in 1049, and now known as the *New Tang History* (新 唐 書 Xin Tangshu).

Thus began a period of almost twenty years in which Ouyang steadily rose through the hierarchy, this time weathering virtually all the intrigues and machinations which his political opponents could muster. His first test came in the winter of the following year (1055-1056) when he was sent on a mission north to the Qidan kingdom. Though his discomfort at the physically taxing journey is clear in his writings of the time, the mission did at least inspire another side of Ouyang’s poetic muse. He recorded his often dreamlike impressions in several works, including the following two:

**Crossing the Border: Second of Two Poems [1055]**

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106 *Jie wu bi yan jiu yi ge, gan ji zhang ju yin zi xing* 噫 吾 筆 研 久 已 格, 感 激 章 句 因 子 興. I use the variant reading *zhang ju* ("stanzas and phrases") for *duan zhang* 短 章 ("short phrases"): see ibid., final line of poem.

107 For the Emperor’s shock, see Fa’s account in *Ji* vol.3, 18.65; also in James T.C. Liu, *op.cit.* 68. Ouyang’s opponents even attempted to block this central government appointment: see *Ji* vol.1, *nianpu* 1.12.


109 In *Ji* vol.2, 7.24. This poem is given the date 1054 in the contents pages of *Ji*. However, a note under the title of the poem on p.7.24 (in the *Wai ji*) states: “One of these [two] poems has already appeared in *Jushi ji* [i.e. the other part of Ouyang’s collection, whose dating is much more consistent].” The text of this other poem is not given in the *Wai ji*. Examining the poems on Ouyang’s mission in the *Jushi ji*, we find a quatrain entitled “On a Mission to the Qidan, First Reaching Xiongzhou.” A note to this title states: “One version has ‘Crossing the Border.’” This must be the other poem referred to above.
Though I am driving Han horses, they tread on foreign frost,
I constantly sigh that this troublesome life is giving me nothing but pain.
As the weather becomes still colder, I journey still further north,
I'm not as wise as migrating geese, who know to head for the south!¹¹⁰

The second poem is a longer work recording Ouyang's meeting with his friend Liu Chang 刘敞 (1019-1068, style name Yuanfu 原父), who was just returning from a slightly earlier mission:

_On the Road During My Mission to the Qidan, I Answer the Composition ‘Sanggan River’ Given to Me by Liu Yuanfu [1055].¹¹¹_

I recall before, when we first received our orders,
Together we came down from the Violet Imperial Court.
I asked you where you were about to go,
Laughing, you pointed to the Handle of the Dipper!
We both assumed that after a short stay there,
In spring breezes we'd meet for the journey home.

It is dated 1055, which fits the year of Ouyang's mission as recorded in his chronology (see Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.13 which states that Ouyang started his mission in the 8th. month of the 2nd year of the Zhihe reign period [i.e. around September 1055], and returned to the Song capital in the 2nd month of the 1st year of the Jiayou reign period [i.e. around March 1056]). Hence, I feel the dating of “Crossing the Border” should be amended to 1055.

¹¹⁰ Literally “know to follow the yang force,” yang being the cosmic force producing warmth, as opposed to yin which produces cold. For more on the yin-yang cycles as related with the seasons, see the poems on snow translated in chapter 5 below. In this poem, Ouyang suggests that he is going against the natural tendency of all living creatures by venturing north in the winter.

¹¹¹ Ji vol.1, 2.20-21.
But since we were responsible for different business,

8 The times of our departures were suddenly separated.

The days and months then seemed to disappear,
Across mountains and rivers, I soon realized the distance.
Turning to look back, it was over three thousand li,

12 The fortified gates stood amid violet clouds.\textsuperscript{112}
I am old, and tired of saddles and horses,
So how can I manage to chant any poems?
Your talents are truly expansive and overflowing,

16 Your new lines float even better than before!
Yesterday we met at the walls of Liū,
Unstrapping our saddles, we rested on alpine foothills.
Our servant boys were delighted to chat with each other,

20 And even the horses neighed with soulful tones.
You took out your poem on Sanggan River,
And gave it to me to console my loneliness.
I also rejoiced that when I saw you before,

24 We arranged to meet and halt our travelling carriages.
And although I know we cannot stay very long,
Our smiles of joy will do for the present.
On your return route, you’ll tread on ice and snow,

28 But arriving back home, you can remove your fox furs.\textsuperscript{113}
Where you have been, I will presently go,
I’ll expect you to greet me with wine in the spring!

\textsuperscript{112} Ouyang seems to be imagining the gates of the Song capital in the distance. Violet was an auspicious colour often associated with the Imperial Court.
\textsuperscript{113} Literally, “marten and fox,” whose pelts were used to make heavy winter coats.
A brief meeting with a friend becomes a particularly moving event when it occurs during a journey through the terribly barren, wintry northern wilderness.

After Ouyang’s return from the North, he soon provoked controversy once more, this time due to his treatment of candidates in the 1057 Ministry of Rites examination to select Presented Scholar (進士 jinshi) degree holders, for which he acted as chief examiner. He failed all those candidates who used an ornate parallel prose style (骈體文 pian ti wen) — the highly stylized traditional literary style required for virtually all previous examinations, sometimes known in the Song as Current Prose (時文 shi wen) — as well as those who preferred the contrived and opaque eccentricity of the so-called Unorthodox Style (變體 bian ti), which developed during the 1030s and 1040s.114 Among those who, by virtue of their “simple, flowing sentences,” passed the examinations, were the brothers Su Shi (蘇軾 1037-1101) and Su Zhe (蘇辙 1039-1112), and also Zeng Gong (曾巩 1019-1083), all of whom later joined Ouyang among the ranks of the Eight Prose Masters of the Tang and Song.115

Through the events surrounding this examination, we can see in particularly clear relief several aspects of Ouyang’s character which prove relevant to his approach to poetry.

114 For a clear explanation of these stylistic terms and their development during early Song, see Egan 12-26; and for the 1057 examination ibid. 27-8. For Ouyang Fa’s comments on the exams, see Ji vol.3, 18.67, paragraph 4. Fa notes only that Ouyang failed those who used a “strange and eccentric” style. Xuanji 168, in the notes to a poem written by Ouyang during the exam. period, mentions the controversy following Ouyang’s summary failure of several candidates expected to excel. Since Ouyang included a metaphor comparing the sound of brushes of students writing the exam. to “spring silkworms eating leaves,” opponents accused him of despising the candidates by treating them like “silkworms and ants!”

Firstly, there is the whole question of writing style. As I have mentioned, since the early 1030s in Luoyang, Ouyang had turned his back on the obscurity and studied ornamentation of most early Song writers, embracing a clear and concise style known as Ancient Prose (古 文 gu wen). The 1057 examination was his opportunity to promulgate more widely his approach to prose writing. His poetry, no less than his prose, was affected by this ideal, emphasizing a simple prose-like diction, and a broad approach to mood and subject matter inspired by the variety of experience which his life offered up. Previous scholars have remarked upon these features.\textsuperscript{116} Later, I will demonstrate the many techniques Ouyang perfected, involving especially wit and caricature, to compensate for the relative lack of compression and allusive density in his poetry.

Secondly, Ouyang’s refusal to stick to traditional parameters of examination grading, in which the whole exercise becomes a mechanical following of rules for both student and teacher alike, reveals indirectly his overwhelming enthusiasm for the joys and inspirations of reading and writing. Obviously, Ouyang’s ability to distinguish such enthusiasm in others guided his selection of successful 1057 degree holders; and throughout his poetic oeuvre, he continually expresses the inspiration which he receives from books, and other writings like calligraphic inscriptions — especially those considered classic, or those of great antiquity.\textsuperscript{117} In his reading he sought the spark of life, the vitality at the centre of each work. Often, too, he ignored or refuted the distracting asides of the commentarial traditions when they obscured a clearer interpretation.\textsuperscript{118} To give just one

\textsuperscript{116} Especially Yoshikawa Kōjirō in op.cit. 69-70. Also Egan 83-84.
\textsuperscript{117} By the end of his life, he had amassed a collection of some 10,000 volumes of books, and 1000 ancient bronze and stone inscriptions; for the latter he produced a catalogue, the Jigu lu 集 古 録 ("Notes on Collecting Ancient [Artifacts]"") to record their characteristics, included in Ji vol.3, 15.49-16.73. The information about his books first appears in Ouyang’s mini-autobiography “Biography of Six Ones Recluse” (Liu-Yi Jushi zhuan 六 一 居 士 傳) of 1070, in Ji vol.1, 5.78-79. Translated in Egan 223-224.
\textsuperscript{118} See James T.C. Liu, op.cit. 90, for Ouyang’s method of reading the ancient canonical texts, and his disparaging comments on post-Han annotators. Liu’s whole chapter on
example from his poetry, the composition “Book-Reading,” partially quoted earlier, contains a vivid description of his approach to the Classics.\textsuperscript{119}

All my life, I have been a cold scholar,
Old now, I still grasp books and scrolls.
And though my sight has already worsened,
4 My will has not weakened in the slightest degree.
The orthodox Classics began with “Tang and Yu,”
But false theories rose up in Qin and Han.\textsuperscript{120}
Their essays and chapters made strange readings of phrases,
8 They explained in footnotes and glossed in commentaries.
Right and wrong then attacked each other,
To accept or discard required brave decision.
From the first they resembled two armies clashing,
12 Seeking the advantage, they battled with all their might.
With banners and drums urging them forward,
They lost all awareness of sweating bodies and horses!
How perfect, among all the joys under Heaven,
16 To spend the whole day beside one’s study desk! . . .

Whether or not one shares Ouyang’s enthusiasm for the highly elliptical style of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chunqiu 春秋) and the like,\textsuperscript{121} his search for the living

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Ouyang’s classical studies (ibid. 85-99) gives an interesting account of his new interpretations.
\textsuperscript{119} Ji vol.1, 2.52-33. Also Xuanji 197.
\textsuperscript{120} Tang 唐 and Yu 虞, more commonly known as Yu-Shun 廣舜, were mythical ancient sage rulers mentioned as ideal Emperors in several of the ancient Chinese canonical texts.
The Qin and Han dynasties lasted from 221-206 BC and 206 BC-220 AD respectively. Many commentaries on the canon were produced during this period.

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heart of every work, and by extension, of every situation, is one which surely has relevance even today, and deeply affects his own attempts at writing.\textsuperscript{122}

Finally, there is the more general idea of change, of recognizing that each age has its unique character to which we must adapt if we are to avoid stagnation. As regards Ouyang’s poetic style and formal invention, it is difficult to predict quite how he will deal with any subject: his poems often express widely varying moods in quick succession, or treat traditional emotive images in a novel way, using irregular metres and ingenious rhyme-schemes. Likewise, content is rarely fixed to a single theme, but tends to jump suddenly between the natural and human worlds, and is frequently spiced with unusual and witty metaphors. The period Ouyang spent locked within the Ministry of Rites, grading the examinations with several colleagues including Mei Yaochen, not only proved to have tremendous influence on subsequent prose style, but also resulted in a poetry collection consisting of works composed by these officials to entertain themselves, during the long evenings away from home. Ouyang’s contributions to this collection constitute several of his most innovative and brilliantly entertaining poems. I deal with a number of them in detail below, especially in chapter 4. He also composed an important preface to the collection which justifies the kinds of poems he was writing during this period, to which I will return in my conclusion. Here I will simply note the broad correlation between Ouyang’s behaviour as an official and his literary ideals.

\textsuperscript{121} Liu calls this Classic Ouyang’s “favourite” (ibid. 93). I return to Ouyang’s views on the ancient Classics and their possible relation to his poetic style in my conclusion (chapter 6 below).

\textsuperscript{122} Though as I mentioned earlier, Ouyang had at first studied only to “escape poverty,” later in his life, and especially “after his middle years,” he began to see the true pleasures of reading and writing. For instance, the poem “Book-reading” continues: “Now I understand that despite the effort of book-reading,/Its joys certainly cannot be measured;/... I realize that what lasts long is valuable,/And the highest treasures are refined a hundred times.” Ji vol.1, 2.52-53.
Returning to Ouyang’s progression through the central government, the 250-volume (卷 juan) *New Tang History*, which he had been editing and completing since 1054 based on the work of Song Qi, was finally offered up to the throne in mid-1060.\(^{123}\) True to his ideals, Ouyang had utilised a concise, but still free-flowing, “ancient prose” style, rather than the customary parallel prose, even altering the Tang documents and sources from which he quoted to fit his own aesthetic tastes.\(^{124}\) Though the Emperor wished to give him all the credit for the work, Ouyang insisted that Song Qi’s substantial contribution be acknowledged, only allowing his own name to be attached to the annals, treatises, and chronological tables.\(^{125}\) Ouyang’s son, Fa, in the biographical record of his father quotes Councillor Song Xiang (宋 庆) saying: “Ever since ancient times, scholars have liked to attack and undermine each other. Such an occurrence as this is completely unprecedented!”\(^{126}\)

Ouyang’s behaviour here was representative of his generous character, revealing his readiness to acknowledge the talents of others. Another well known example was his continual praise for the poetry of Su Shunqin and Mei Yaochen, neither of whom achieved such success as himself in their public careers, along with deprecating remarks about his own poetic skills. Yet, as his son declares, with perhaps some traces of bias: “Those who really understand [poetry] would doubtless say [Ouyang] surpasses [Mei].”\(^{127}\)

\(^{123}\) *Ji* vol.1, *nianpu* 1.16.

\(^{124}\) James T.C. Liu notes the controversy among succeeding historians as to the value of Ouyang’s work, due especially to his alteration of the original documents. See op.cit. 100-113.

\(^{125}\) i.e. the *Ji* 纪, *Zhi* 志, and *Biao* 表. Song Qi’s name was attached to the biographies (*Lie zhuang* 列 傳), by far the greater portion of the work. See Fa’s comments in *Ji* vol.3, 18.59-60.

\(^{126}\) Ibid. 18.60. Song Xiang was the brother of Song Qi.

\(^{127}\) Ibid. 18.59. For praise of Su, see Ouyang’s poem “Green Waves Pavilion,” translated in chapter 4 below; and for both Mei and Su, cf. numerous remarks in my conclusion.
The year 1060 also saw Ouyang promoted to Vice Commissioner in the Bureau of Military Affairs, one of the highest military positions in the realm.\textsuperscript{128} However, public success was accompanied by personal tragedy when Mei Yaochen died that same year. Ouyang composed a poem, “Weeping for Shengyu,” in his memory, and edited Mei’s collected poems.\textsuperscript{129} Yet a work which Ouyang wrote before Mei’s death is perhaps the most moving tribute to their friendship:

\textit{Offered in Return for the Composition Twenty Fifth Elder Brother Shengyu Presented to Me, Matching His Rhymes [1059]}\textsuperscript{130}

In becoming your friend and associating with you,
I was the first among numerous people.
When I was young, I endured much suffering,
And your family always put up with great poverty.
Now we’ve become two decrepit old men,
Our hair has grown white, and our faces are lined.
I am concerned that the true jade in your heart,
Cannot compete with the false jade at the market.\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{128} Ji vol. 1, \textit{nianpu} 1.17.
\textsuperscript{129} For the poem, see Ji vol. 1, 2.48. Ouyang’s preface to his collection of Mei’s poetry is included in Ji vol. 1, 5.63-64. Though the date of this preface in the contents of Ouyang’s collected works is 1046, he mentions that Mei has already died. The confusion seems to be in the fact that Ouyang produced his original preface for a collection of Mei’s poetry in 1046; hence, he first states that Mei is “almost 50 years old” (ibid. 5.63, penultimate line; Mei was born in 1002, so would have been 45 by Chinese reckoning). However, after Mei’s death, Ouyang added a final paragraph to this preface (around 1061, since he notes that it is 15 years since the first collection), lamenting Mei’s passing, and describing his further efforts to edit Mei’s later poems (ibid. 5.64, lines 7-9). The editors of Ouyang’s collection perhaps considered these later comments to be a postface, and didn’t alter the date of the preface.
\textsuperscript{130} Ji vol. 1, 2.44. Shengyu was Mei Yaochen’s style name.

\textsuperscript{131}
False jade, though base, is easily sold,
But true jade is abandoned, long buried in the dust.
All it can do is produce fine designs:\textsuperscript{132}

12 White rainbows shooting across starry constellations!
Luckily we both reside within the capital,
No sturdy walls force a distance between us.
Finishing the morning audience, two or three fellows
16 Follow behind me, close as scales on a fish.
As soon as you hear that we’ve come, you’re delighted,
Setting out wine, you keep us for a while.
Without awaiting our host’s invitation,
20 We’ve already removed the scarves on our heads:\textsuperscript{133}
Though feelings of happiness are few and far between,
Old now, our minds become even more intimate.
What need to speak of success or poverty?
24 This pattern has stayed constant since ancient times:\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{131} Ouyang seems to indicate himself when he mentions false jade, since he had attained great success in his career, whereas Mei, the true jade, lay “buried in the dust” (line 10).
\textsuperscript{132} “Designs,” or “patterns” (\textit{wenzhang} 文章) of course also means “writings.” The jade has a beautiful rainbow-like pattern (see the next line) comparable to the beauty of Mei’s writings.
\textsuperscript{133} The guests don’t bother with the usual polite formalities, since they are such close friends.
\textsuperscript{134} The “pattern” (\textit{li} 理) here refers to the reality that some remain poor throughout their lives, while others attain great success. The following year, in “Weeping for Shengyu,” Ouyang declares that “fate” (\textit{ming} 命) is perhaps a better word than “pattern.” “As for fate, it’s incomprehensible, so do not look for a pattern/Though your fame and reputation are glorious, you were restricted to a backwater” (ibid. vol.1, 2.48). Here, however, he celebrates his friendship with Mei which has lasted and become even closer in spite of their contrasting fates.
The following year (1061), Han Qi, the current Grand Councillor, worried at Renzong’s failing health and the possibility of disorder after his death, urged the Emperor to select his heir. After much persuasion, in 1062 Renzong chose Zhao Zongshi, the future Emperor Yingzong, as his successor. In the third month of 1063, Renzong died, having reigned for 41 years.\(^{135}\)

Yingzong was not a healthy man: at the start of his brief four-year reign he even suffered a stroke which left him with a speech defect and too weak to take sole charge of government. Renzong’s widow Empress Cao sat in court with him to assist his decision-making, and went as far as privately questioning Han Qi and Ouyang Xiu on the possibility of Yingzong’s abdication. Both ministers strongly discouraged the idea, as it happens fortunately, since the summer of 1064 saw Yingzong’s health improve, enabling him to take full responsibility in government affairs.\(^{136}\)

Ouyang did not enjoy his own extra responsibilities: several years earlier (1054), he had vowed with his friends Han Jiang, Wu Kui and Wang Gui that he would retire at the age of 58 to his beloved Yingzhou.\(^{137}\) This would have been in 1064 by traditional Chinese reckoning. The weakness of the present Emperor no doubt exacerbated the petty struggles and intrigues among ministers at court, and Ouyang was tired of continually defending his actions and reputation in the face of jealous opponents. He thus took every opportunity to request a provincial post. For instance, in late-1064 the Xixia again invaded, causing an urgent situation in the North-West: in the first month of 1065 Ouyang three times sought a transfer to the provinces, taking the blame for the invasion on himself, but he was refused.\(^{138}\) Likewise, in mid-1065, a controversy arose about the title to be

\(^{135}\) See *Xuanji* 442-443.
\(^{136}\) For detailed quotations of Han and Ouyang’s answers to the Empress, see *Xuanji* 443; and Tuo Tuo, *Song Shi* 宋史, op.cit. vol.30, 10379.
\(^{137}\) See preface of Ouyang’s poem to Han in *Ji* vol.2, 7.38. Mentioned in *Xuanji* 215.
\(^{138}\) See *Ji* vol.1, *nianpu* 1.20; and for Ouyang’s memorials requesting a transfer, ibid. vol.2, 10.131-134.
awarded Emperor Yingzong's natural father: whether he was truly an “Emperor” or just
“Father of the Emperor.” The former would seem disrespectful to Renzong, the
deceased Emperor; the latter to the present Emperor! Such an argument provided plenty
of fuel for political backbiters, since the loyalty of those on both sides could be mercilessly
questioned. Using the excuse of prolonged autumn rains causing flood disasters in many
parts of the country, Ouyang again begged three times to resign, but was again refused.
Clearly the Imperial family appreciated his talents more than he himself! In fact, just a
month earlier the statesman Wen Yanbo had been recalled to the capital as Military Affairs
Commissioner (an even higher position than that of Ouyang) after Ouyang had twice
declined promotion.

Ouyang’s poetry of this period dwells almost exclusively on the burdens of office,
and his desire to retire and edit his writings for posterity. For instance, “Book-Reading,”
of 1061, concludes its autobiographical survey by asking:

When will I be granted my weary bones —
Assuming I manage to avoid all accusations?
I’ll buy books and load them on a boat into retirement,
I’ll build a house on the banks of Ying waters.
I’ll take all the essays and writings of my lifetime,
Punctuating and editing them in orderly fashion.
They may even last until later generations,
And I won’t die silently like cattle or pigs!

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139 Former Emperor Renzong had been Yingzong’s uncle.
140 Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.20, and ibid. vol.2, 10.134-135. For analysis of this controversy, cf.
James T.C. Liu, op.cit. 77-79.
141 The position was that of Canzhi zhengshi 参知 政事. Ouyang’s two memorials
declining the offer are in Ji vol.2, 10.124.
142 Ji vol.1, 2.53.
Finally, in early 1066 Empress Cao proposed a decree that Yingzong’s father should be called “Emperor,” and Yingzong reversed the judgement, decreeing that his father need not adopt this title, instead remaining “Father of the Emperor.” Though this decision settled the matter according to the law, with Empress Cao paying lip-service to Yingzong’s father, but Renzong politely declining to insult the former Emperor, the opponents of Han Qi and Ouyang Xiu refused to let the matter rest. They criticized Han Qi for overstepping the bounds of his position, suspecting that he had arranged the outcome, and they revived attacks on Ouyang’s personal behaviour, this time accusing him of sexual impropriety with his eldest daughter-in-law.\textsuperscript{143}

Ouyang persistently requested a provincial posting, but not until the third month of 1067, two months after Yingzong had succumbed to illness and died, was he finally permitted by the new Emperor Shenzong to leave the capital, still surrounded by slanderous attacks on his personal life.\textsuperscript{144}

Granted the governorship of Bozhou (present Bo County, on the border between Anhui and Henan Provinces), Ouyang arrived there in the sixth month of 1067, having passed through Yingzhou on the way. Until his death in 1072, he did not return to the central government, despite invitations in 1070 by the reforming group then in power under Wang Anshi. In fact, although moving to two further provincial postings in Qingzhou (1068) and Caizhou (1070),\textsuperscript{145} and attempting to alleviate the hardship of

\textsuperscript{143} See James T.C. Liu, op.cit. 79-82, for the events leading up to this slander. Also Ji vol.1, \textit{nianpu} 1.21. Ouyang composed many memorials defending himself against the accusations: see those directed to his main accuser, Jiang Zhiqi, in Ji vol.2, 11.1-7.

\textsuperscript{144} Ji vol.1, \textit{nianpu} 1.21-22.

\textsuperscript{145} Present Yidu County, Shandong Province, and Runan County, Henan Province respectively.
peasants caused by abuses of the reformers' new Green Sprouts Law of 1069 and other major policy changes, Ouyang's heart was set on retirement.146

His poems now turn more and more towards recluse figures, whom he admires for spending their lives away from ordinary society in remote mountain caves and the like.147 In 1068 he took a major step in becoming a "recluse" himself, having a house built in Ruyin County, Yingzhou, and from that year again persistently sent up memorials begging to retire from office altogether.148

Ouyang's mini-autobiography of 1070, written to explain his newly adopted sobriquet, Six Ones Recluse (六一居士 Liu-Yi Jushi) well expresses his realization that what gives him true satisfaction is ultimately his private existence: his books and zither; his collection of ancient inscriptions; his chess set; a pot of wine; and, unifying all these, his self.149 One can easily imagine him spending these last few years enjoying his many pastimes, collecting and editing his writings, and reflecting on his eventful career.

In the sixth month of 1071, the court finally allowed Ouyang Xiu to retire, granting him the honorary title of Guanwen Palace Lesser Tutor of the Crown Prince, Retired Official.150 He returned to Yingzhou the next month and died there almost exactly a year later, on the twenty third day of the intercalary seventh month of 1072.151

146 For Wang Anshi's reform program, see a convenient summary in James T.C. Liu, Reform in Sung China: Wang An-shih (1021-1086) and his New Policies (Cambridge, Mass. 1959). For Ouyang's response to these reforms, see the same author's Ou-yang Hsiu, op.cit. 82-83.
147 I translate some of these poems in chapter 2 on mountains, and chapter 3, section on tea-drinking, below.
148 See Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.22; and memorials in ibid. vol.2, 11.16-23
149 Ji vol.1, 5.78-79; and Xuanji 421-2. Translated by Egan 223-224. The five kinds of objects mentioned here, plus Ouyang himself, make "six ones."
150 Ji vol.1, nianpu 1.23.
151 Ibid. 1.24. An intercalary month was an extra month inserted every few years to readjust the calendar, since the traditional Chinese year only had 360 days.
Over the next forty years, the court awarded him several posthumous titles, all of which were received on his behalf by his son Fei.152 His collection of writings, the *Jushi ji*, appeared in 1072. Ouyang edited this collection himself in the last years of his life, and it was revised in 1072 by his son Fa.153 A preface was added by Su Shi, Ouyang’s most famous protege, in 1091,154 and the collection was expanded a century later into the *Ouyang Wenzhong gong ji*, including his lyrics (*ci* 詞) and many more prose and poetic pieces discarded by Ouyang or unavailable to him for the earlier edition.155

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152 Ibid. and Liu Ruoyu, op.cit. 30.
153 For Ouyang’s editing work, see Ji vol.1, *nianpu* postface, 1.25; see also Fa’s dating at the end of each *juan*, for instance, Ji vol.1, 1.11.
154 Ji vol.1, *Jushi ji xu* (after *nianpu*) 1.1-2, with date on 1.2.
155 The later edition was edited by Sun Qianyi (孫 謙 益) in 1191. See his dating at the end of each *juan*, e.g. Ji vol.1, 1.11. This collection is now often called *Ouyang Yongshuji*, as in the edition I use.
Chapter 2: Dynamic, Tranquil, Intellectual — Poems on Mountains

Ouyang Xiu’s experience of mountain scenery, as reflected in his poetry, began in Luoyang while serving in his first official post. Surrounded by talented colleagues in the entourage of Qian Weiyan (977-1034), Ouyang spent many sociable hours on excursions around the “Western Capital.” He made records of two such trips in his poem series “Travelling to Longmen, Dividing Topics Into Fifteen Poems” and “Twelve Poems on Mount Song,” both from 1032. All these poems are brief, vivid impressions of particular scenes, for instance, the following.

Stone Bamboo Shoot

Huge rock, you rise so sheer,
Growing alone on the edge of this summit,
In white clouds and azure mist
4 Who can see your jade-like hue?
Perhaps only the mountain bird flying,
Circling constantly, sometimes comes to perch.

Ouyang has consciously adopted this six-line stanza: of the twenty seven poems in these two series, twenty one use the same form. To readers familiar with the innumerable

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1 See these poem series in Ji vol.1, 1.2-4 and 6.42-44. Ouyang’s poetry is collected in vol.1, ce 1, 2 and 6, and vol.2, ce 7.
2 Ji vol.1, 1.3. The “stone bamboo” is a thin, protruding rock formation resembling a bamboo shoot. They occur at most of the famous mountain ranges in China; I encountered some on a visit to Huangshan (Yellow Mountains) in Anhui Province, in 1992.
eight- and four-line regulated verses of the Tang period, Ouyang’s experiments must have
given a curiously open-ended feeling. The content of the final couplet is similarly open-
ended: the mountain bird, “constantly circling, sometimes comes to perch” — doubtless
only for a moment before soaring off again. The last character of the poem is “perch” (xi
息): the reader can imagine it about to launch into another line. As we shall see, Ouyang
Xiu enjoys creating new formal features, particularly in his mountain poems, in order
better to encompass the power the subject exerts on his imagination.

Though only a short work, “Stone Bamboo Shoot” also contains two other
features typical of Ouyang’s poetry. First, the poem exemplifies Ouyang’s preference for
extraordinary objects — here the rock masquerading as bamboo shoot. A quick glance
through the titles of his collected poems will prove Ouyang’s lifelong fascination with
unusual natural occurrences, strange animals, ancient artifacts and the like.3 Secondly,
there is a sense of mystery about this object: it is constantly obscured by mists; only a
careful observer, or an eagle, would become aware of its presence and “jade-like hue.”
Ouyang also continually returns to this theme of the discovery of hidden treasure, or
hidden precious objects, as I will demonstrate below.

Later, in 1036, Ouyang Xiu was exiled to Yiling in Xiazhou (near present Yichang
City, Hubei Province). There he encountered much more impressive mountain scenery,
now famous as the Three Gorges of the Yangtze River. In fact, mountains were perhaps
the only redeeming feature of this provincial backwater, as the following poem suggests:

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3 This feature is noted by Ronald Egan. See Egan 99-112.
Green mountains everywhere I look, chaotic and endless,
Chickens and dogs, thin and scraggly, in several hundred homes.
By Chu customs, New Year involves many ghost exorcisms,
4 The Man locality dialect is foreign to Northern Chinese.
Circling the town the river flows fast, boats have trouble mooring,
Facing the county, mountains rise high, the sun readily slants down.
Banging drums and stamping out songs, they set up the evening market,
8 Appealing to turtle[-shells], divining for rain, they hurry to burn the stubble.
Through clumps of forest, in broad daylight, inauspicious birds fly,
On hall terraces, out of season, unusual flowers appear
Only the mountains and streams here are absolutely magnificent,
12 If sent off to someone, they’d certainly manage to boast of being a painting!

After a brief period in the capital Kaifeng (1040-1045), Ouyang again fell foul of
his superiors, and was exiled to Chuzhou (present Anhui Province). There, as I mentioned
earlier, he received much poetic inspiration from the Langye Mountains, building his
famous Drunken Old Man Pavilion on their slopes.

Here, I will examine in greater detail some of Ouyang Xiu’s major poems on the
theme of mountains, written both in these periods of exile, and later in his career. It seems
that, on the one hand, he valued the extraordinary, even freakish, climatic conditions, the

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4 Ji vol.1, 2.73-74. Dating for many of Ouyang’s poems is given in the contents of Ji
vol.1, Mulu 目錄, 1.1-136.
5 For Man and Chu, see biographical sketch, nn.47 and 48, p.21 above.
6 I have referred to Ouyang’s prose account describing this pavilion, “Record of the
Drunken Old Man Pavilion,” and Egan’s English translation, above pp.33-34, n.92.
weird-shaped cliffs and gullies, the massive waterfalls and unusual flora and fauna of the mountain environment. These aspects triggered his imagination and tested the limits of his expressive talents, resulting in poems as unusual as their subjects. I would term this a "dynamic" mountain influence, producing a visionary, transcendent experience. On the other hand, Ouyang also appreciated the tranquil depth of mountains — the soothing sounds of trickling streams; cool, fragrant forest air; escape from the struggles and worries of official life. This we might term the "calming," or "tranquil" influence. Finally, I will mention Ouyang's tendency to compare the different kinds of mountains he has visited, noting their relative merits and demerits: what I would call an "intellectual" influence of mountains.

Dynamic Mountains

The poem which follows exemplifies dynamism to an almost unbelievable degree.

It must rank among the most energetic farewell poems ever written:

Lu Mountain High! Given to Fellow Student Liu Zhongyun on his Retirement to Nankang [1051].

Lu Mountain, oh so high! Several million feet —
Its base twists for several hundred miles,
It towers up, rising sheer and prominent, beside the Yangtze River.
4 The Yangtze River, flowing from the west, rushes past its foot,
Here it has formed Zuoli Lake, lifting its waves —
Flooding waves, huge breakers, night and day clashing and pounding together.
When clouds disperse, and wind ceases, the mirror of water is clear,
8 Mooring my boat I climb the bank and gaze at it from a distance —

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7 Ji vol.1, 2.16. See also helpful notes in Xuanji 144-146. According to Xuanji, Liu Zhongyun, of the title, was the style-name of one Liu Huan.
Above, it scrapes the blue sky with its dark misty clouds,
Below it crushes the huge vastness of the Deity of Earth.
I will venture closer, entering into its midst —

12 Climbing up to a rocky ledge, I glimpse the empty abyss:
A thousand peaks, ten thousand valleys, echo with pine and juniper.
From huge rocks overhanging the cliff a flying torrent gushes,
The sound of water, crashing and dashing, brings chaos to my ears:

16 Flying snow in the middle of summer, splashing the stony bridge.
And constantly I encounter immortal elders and sons of Sakyamuni8 —
Once I despised them, following illusion and speaking words of nonsense;
Yet now I see crimson clouds and azure cliffs, far and near,

reflecting the halls and pavilions,

20 Morning bells and evening drums, deep and distant,

with strings of flags and banners.

Secluded flowers and wild grasses: I do not know their names —
Blown in the wind, moistened by dew, their fragrance fills the canyon,
And sometimes pairs of white cranes arrive here on the wing.

24 Though secluded searching takes me far, I cannot reach the end,
Thus I intend to break from the world, and leave its confusion behind.

8 I.e. Daoists, or recluses seeking immortality, and Buddhist monks.
I envy you, purchasing land and building a home to grow old at its foot,
Transplanting rice shoots to fill the fields—
Fermenting wine to fill the vats.
You wished to make drifting alpine mists, and the warm azure of ten million forms
Constantly face your terrace and windows, while you sit or recline.
In your heart, many-faceted, there lies a priceless treasure,
32 But the vulgar world cannot distinguish jade from coloured stones.
Your name was listed as an officer for a period of twenty years,
In dark robes, hair growing white, you were still confined to an outpost.
You couldn’t use base and servile means for favour and glory, fame and profit —
And if it weren’t that dark clouds and white rocks held such a profound attraction,
What reason could your towering spirit find to descend [to this world]?
How few men of strength and virtue there are to compare with you:
Alas, I would like to express myself, but how can I find a mighty brush
standing as high as a flagpole!

Doubtless it is works such as this which prompted Su Shi (1037-1101), Ouyang’s illustrious protege, to compare his poetry to that of Li Bai (701-762). Certainly the first line is reminiscent of the opening of Li’s “The Road to Shu is Hard.” However, the elemental power of the mountain is a cause not of suffering here, but of visionary elation.

9 “Many-faceted,” or “with many joints,” means one whose character has numerous talents, though literally refers to a tree having many knots in the trunk. See Xuanji 146, n.8.
10 “Dark robes” (qingshan 青衫) were worn by low-ranking officials.
11 See Su’s preface to Ouyang’s collection: Ji vol.1, Jushiji xu 1.2.
At the same time, Ouyang's vision refuses to lose touch completely with reality, which distinguishes this work from Li Bai's other masterpiece "Climbing Tianmu in a Dream, Chanting to Keep you from Leaving,"13 with its ranks of immortals, zither-strumming tigers and carriage-pulling phoenixes. The nearest we come to immortals in Ouyang's poem are the "immortal old men" (Daoists?) and Buddhist monks (line 17), whom he is quick to dismiss as bearers of "words of nonsense."

Examining the structure more closely, there is a logical progression behind the profusion of images and impressions; likewise, analysing the metre, we discover a basic seven syllable-per-line pulse around which the more extravagantly irregular lines dance. This reference to a poetic metre distinguishes "Lu Mountain High" from the rhyme-prose (fu) of later-Han and Wei-Jin writers,14 in spite of Ouyang's use of the archaic pause word 兮, and some unusual forms of characters. Moreover, the irregular metrical episodes have a close relation with the content expressed, as will emerge during my analysis.

Ouyang begins by viewing from a distance the enormous mass of the mountain, a million feet high, thirty miles across. It looms over the wild Yangtze River: immediately we notice the polarity of water and mountain beloved of early landscape poets like Xie Lingyun (385-433), here involving the longest river pounding against one of the most enormous ranges, a truly cosmic opposition of forces.

13 Chinese in QTS 5.1779-1780 (juan 174). English version in Lo and Liu, op.cit. 106-108. Of course, Li Bai claims to see these visions in a dream, from which he wakes at the end in a cold sweat.

14 For instance, the Jiang fu 江賦 ("Rhyme-prose on the River") of Guo Pu (276-324), from which Ouyang seems to borrow some of his diction. See Li Shan, Pingzhu Zhaoming Wenxuan (Saoye Fangshan Press 1931) juan 3, 1-6. It is the shorter fu, often on natural objects, of later-Han and the Wei-Jin period to which I refer, rather than the enormous works by Sima Xiangru (c.179-118 BC) and his followers. At the same time, the unusual characters that Ouyang uses as rhyme-words are mainly borrowed from Han Yu (768-824): see detailed discussion of this point in my concluding chapter below.
In a sudden change of weather, the waves subside — the metre also relaxes from irregularity to a more or less constant seven beats — allowing the poet to come closer (lines 7-11); he surveys the mountain from this position, scraping the sky above and crushing the Earth God below, then seeks to “enter its midst.” It is surprising at first that Ouyang uses this expression — he is not aiming for the mountain summit but for its heart, its depth. The next nine lines (12-20) graphically describe this journey: in line 12 he climbs onto a rocky outcrop, and line 13 is his pause there to view the panorama and listen to the wind: “A thousand peaks, ten thousand valleys, echo with pine and juniper.” Continuing, he sees a waterfall descending from a precipice, probably overhanging the path since in line 15 he passes right beside it: “The sound of water crashing and dashing brings chaos to my ears.” The cold, white spray, “flying snow in the middle of summer,” adds to the confusion; time begins to lose its reference in the mountains as this mix of seasons indicates; and the poem’s metre correspondingly loses its consistency again. Monks and Daoists appear, their bannered temples mingled with the clouds and cliffs, their bells and drums — perhaps morning, perhaps evening — sound in the distance. Finally, going beyond all the noise and crowds of the mountain’s “surface,” Ouyang discovers a tranquil scene of unknown wild flowers in a fragrant, dew-covered valley; the metre returns to seven-syllable regularity; cranes, those typically reclusive birds, feel at home here. Though deep within the mountain, Ouyang has still not “reached the end” — only cutting himself off from the world would achieve that. Hence his admiration for Liu Huan, to whom the poem is addressed, and who has purchased land and built a home to retire at the foot of Lu Mountain!

From line 26, where Liu appears, until the conclusion, Ouyang’s hyperbolic description of the mountain overflows into a similar portrait of his friend. Once again, as in the first poem above, we meet the hidden treasure motif: this time a person, Liu, becomes

15 Lines 17-20 range from 9 to 11 syllables.
a valuable “jade” unnoticed by the world. The comparison with jade in this context suggests that Liu is a precious vein of jade in the mountain, an implication which is strengthened by the witty progression of lines 33 and 35: Liu has languished for twenty years in a minor position, wearing the “dark shirt” of a low-ranking official until he is “white-haired” (qingshan baishou 青衫白首). He would not bend himself for worldly privileges; only the profound attraction of “dark clouds” and “white rocks” (qingyun baishi 青雲白石) will provide a resting place for his spirit. The man has figuratively been transformed into the mountain, therefore the same adjectives and an equally expansive metre apply to both.

Though obviously complimentary in intent, the poem avoids descending into mere fulsome flattery through its remarkably vivid landscape evocation — the journey into the mountain — and touches of humour. The final couplet supports this impression as Ouyang searches for a brush large enough to express his admiration: probably an old joke even in the Song dynasty.

Mei Yaochen (1002-1060), Ouyang’s lifelong friend, recorded his impressions of this work in a poem “Matching the Rhymes of Secretary Guo Xiangzheng’s ‘Moved When Spending the Night at Brightness Pavilion After Meeting Rain’,” which contains the lines: “Reciting ‘Lu Mountain High,’/Ten thousand scenes cannot conceal themselves.”16 An anecdote provides some context for Mei’s comments. Gongfu was Guo Xiangzheng’s style name:17

When Guo Gongfu was young, he liked to recite Duke Wenzhong’s [Ouyang Xiu’s] poems. One day he visited Mei Shengyu, who said:

“Recently I got a letter from Yongshu [Ouyang Xiu]; he has just written ‘Lu

16 For Mei’s poem, dated to 1054, see Zhu Dongrun, ed., Mei Yaochen ji biannian jiaozhu (Shanghai 1980) vol.3, 756-757.
17 Attached to ibid. Also quoted in Xuanji 145.
Mountain High’ and he is quite satisfied with it. I regret that I haven’t seen this poem. Gongfu recited it for him. Shengyu beat the rhythm, sighing in appreciation, and said: “Even if I were to write poems for another thirty years, I couldn’t manage to compose a single line like this.” Gongfu recited it again, and couldn’t help becoming elated, so they laid out wine and recited it again. The wine went round several times, they both recited it several dozen times, then concluded the meeting without further conversation. The next day, Shengyu presented a poem to Gongfu . . .

Notwithstanding Mei’s excitement, Ouyang Xiu rarely composed poems with such shocking metrical irregularity and archaic diction.18 “Lu Mountain High” is an extreme, though brilliant, example of his dynamic approach to mountains. The extended comparison between a person and a mountain, for moral purposes, is also quite rare in his poetry. I have only found one other work, referring to the uncompromising Classics scholar Shi Jie (1005-1045) which briefly compares him to Mount Culai (present Shandong Province) where he taught.19

What is extremely common in Ouyang’s other mountain poems is firstly the use of imagination to imbue the scene with an almost spiritual depth.20 I have noted this feature

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18 Though he often uses irregular metres to a lesser degree, as in several of the poems below.
19 In the poem “Reading Culai’s Collection” (Li vol. 1, 1.25) whose first four lines are: “Culai is the Eastern Mountain of Lu,/Master Shi lives on the mountain slopes./What the people of Lu observe/Is the master and the mountain loftily raised high.” Lu was the ancient name for the region around present Shandong Province. Shi Jie’s nickname was also Master Culai.
20 Just how powerful is Ouyang’s imaginative urge we can make out by his comments about Lu Mountain in another poem of 1041, “Seeing Off Tan Ying Retiring to Lu Mountain”:

... Anchoring the boat I gazed at Incense Burner Peak [on Lu Mountain],
The Incense Burner amidst cloud and mist:
Vague in the distance, as if there, yet not there.
above when discussing the mountain climb as an inward journey to a tranquil heart, and it is interesting that even such a boisterous poem reaches for stillness at its centre. Later I will provide further examples of the depth and soothing power of mountains. Secondly, there is the ability to discern and express the extraordinary in subjects which most observers would overlook. If, for instance, we consider the above poem from the perspective of a tribute to Liu — rather than as a landscape poem — we witness a minor official, albeit one of great integrity, being transformed into a character of earth-shaking significance.

The majority of Ouyang’s more dynamic treatments of the mountain theme fall into this second category, of discovery. A fine example is the following poem, beginning with a stone screen, then setting off on an imaginary journey to trace the prehistoric, mythical origins of the stone.

_Song of the Stone Screen of Scholar Wu [1056]._21

Morning light enters the forest, all the birds are startled, 
Beating their wings they fly in flocks, the crows cawing in disorder, 
Through the forest, they scatter everywhere, darting into the sky, 
In their nests, fledgling chicks hungrily wait for the feed.

Suddenly we met a clear autumn day, 
An azure kaleidoscope floating in emptiness. 
Truly, it was rare and exquisite: 
In a different class from Qian and Huo [two mountains near Lu Mountain]. 
I happened to be ill and could not go that time, 
I could only linger awhile in mid-current.

In other words, it appears that Ouyang Xiu never climbed the mountain! Add to this the fact that “Lu Mountain High” was not composed until 1051, ten years later, and Ouyang’s tendency to embellish his actual experience with imaginative flourishes becomes clear. See full text of poem in Ji vol.1, 1.10. Also in Xuanji 66-68.

21 Ji vol.1, 2.24-25. Also in Xuanji 159.
Female birds swoop down to peck, male birds hover up high,
Male and female call to each other, flying away then returning.
Nobody comes to the empty forest; the birds’ sounds are joyful,
8 Ancient trees touch the sky, their branches bent and coiled.
Below, there is a strange stone, lying between the trunks,
Buried in mist, covered by grass, and spotted with moss and lichen.
You might inquire, “Who was the one that illustrated this scene?”
12 In point of fact, it is on a stone screen which belongs to the house of Wu!
Craftsmen of Guo drilled the Mountain, taking the rocky bones,
From morning to night they pierced and chopped; it took them many a day,
Tens of thousands of forms appeared, all from within the stone.
16 I sigh at peoples’ ignorance: they cannot see the primordial suffering of Heaven and Earth’s creation,
Thus they say, “The ten thousand things were born of natural causes.”
How would they know that in scoring, chiselling and carving the ugly and beautiful,
A thousand forms, ten thousand aspects, could not be exhausted,
20 And gods grieved, ghosts wept, night and day unable to take their rest.
Otherwise, how did they get what cunning craftsmen and skilful hands — wearying their spirits, exhausting their thoughts — could not attain:
Visible, yet almost invisible, faintly rising, clouds of mist?
The work of ghosts and gods completed, Heaven and Earth protected it,
24 They hid it within the deepest rocks beneath the mountains of Guo.
Yet if only people have the will there’s nothing they cannot obtain:
Even though Heaven and Earth are divine, they could not manage to hide it.

22 Guo Mountain was in Guozhou, present Lüshi County, Henan Province, then considered western China.
I also suspect that ghosts and gods, eager for victory, hated our kind,

28 They wished to exhaust the grotesque and rare, making our talents seem poor,

Thus they dispatched one Master Zhang to travel here from the West.23

Scholar of the house of Wu, you saw it and were delighted,

With drunken dots of your violet-haired brush, you soaked it in charcoal-black ink.

32 With such talent, you’re certainly able to battle with ghosts and gods,

Woe is me! For I am old, and cannot compare with you.

If “Lu Mountain High” gave a picture of a dynamic mountain environment with a tranquil heart, “Song of the Stone Screen” provides only, and almost incessantly, movement. This movement is not that of the dance either, but of pick and chisel excavating beauty from formlessness.

The subject of the poem is a stone from Guo which bears a beautiful, subtly-coloured grain that resembles a misty landscape. Presumably there are also forest-like patches of green on the stone, inspiring the pastoral description in the first ten lines. As for the birds, male and female flying back and forth, and fledglings waiting in the nest, I would assume these to be Ouyang’s imaginative extension, a practice which several other northern Song poets indulged in when writing about paintings.24 Such a lively scene, noisy with birdsong, gives Ouyang’s surprize question and answer more bite (lines 11-15); we are shocked to find, first, that the scene is on an artifact belonging to the Wu family and, second, that the myriad forms on the stone occurred naturally, before it had been dug

23 An alternative title to the poem was “Matching Master Zhang’s Crow and Tree Screen,” hence the references to Zhang in this line and to crows above. For “the West,” see the previous note.

24 Though see above, note 23, for suggestion that crow-like marks may also be on the stone. Ouyang gives another animated description of a painting in “Picture of a Climbing Cart,” discussed below.
out of the “bones” of Guo Mountain by workers! The reader is brought down with a bump from the soothing pastoral scene; the poem’s diction likewise becomes abruptly more prosaic — for example, with the line “in point of fact, it’s on a stone screen which belongs to the house of Wu.” Now, harsh words such as “excavate,” “pierce” and “chop” seem to slice up the lines into sharp-edged pieces. And to increase the sense of roughness in these five lines, the poem’s original rhyme-scheme has apparently been put on hold.

The former rhyme returns with a vengeance in lines 16-22 — all but one of these lines bears the same rhyme — and this factor prevents the reader becoming completely disoriented by the sudden emergence of a wildly irregular metre. Up to now, Ouyang has managed a constant seven syllables per line; the next few lines range from seven to fifteen syllables! Why this further jolt to our expectations?

Anticipating a stock reaction to the poem so far — “Oh, it’s a natural stone, not a painting!” — Ouyang overturns it with the blunt comment that people are ignorant, so “they say ‘the ten thousand things were born of natural causes’” (line 17). In answer to this claim, Ouyang provides another ingenious example of wit: since beautiful artifacts require for their production the strenuous efforts of human craftsmen, the execution of such an “exquisitely finished” natural stone must, by inference, have demanded enormous exertions from ghosts and gods. Such spurious intellectual reasoning, used as a means of entertainment or humorous persuasion, is a common feature of Ouyang’s poetry, and as I shall show in later chapters, resurfaces in many and varying guises. It is one of the ways in which he sustains interest over his numerous long poems with their relatively plain diction.

Yet it is not only the content of lines 16-22 that demonstrates Ouyang’s wit; the irregularity of the metre fits exactly with the events being described. Ghosts and gods are creating ten thousand forms, carving the beautiful and ugly out of primeval chaos: surely such a difficult process justifies the chaotic line length, especially since the metre immediately subsides into regularity at the words “the work of ghosts and gods completed . . .” Further justification for the two longest lines (16 and 21) is provided by their
respective content: the former deals with the problems of creation — “I sigh at peoples’
ignorance: they cannot see the primordial suffering of Heaven and Earth’s creation” — a
long process given a suitably long line; the latter portrays the great physical and
intellectual efforts of humans attempting to equal the standards of “natural” creation —
“Otherwise, how did they get what cunning craftsmen and skilful hands — wearying their
spirits, exhausting their thoughts — could not attain?” — the line stretches out, imitating
the extended struggle. A final instance of the graphic use of line construction comes in line
22: [Literally] “As if not there, as if there, indistinctly rising, clouds and mist.” The first
phrase ruowu ruoyou 若 無 若 有 would be sufficiently vague for most descriptions, but
Ouyang draws out the line further with a rhyming binome piaomiao 繽 繡 (“indistinct,
faint”), extending like a real tendril of mist.

The rest of the poem proceeds with a more balanced, though still tongue-in-cheek,
reasoning. Ouyang posits: either heaven and earth hid the stone within Guo Mountain, but
peoples’ curiosity was too strong to conceal it from them — the hidden treasure motif
reappears here (lines 23-26); or, alternatively, in an age like the Northern Song when,
Ouyang implies, strangeness is a prized attribute in the cultural sphere, the ghosts and
gods wish to demonstrate how incomparably peculiar nature can be, thus proving the
imaginative poverty of human beings (lines 27-28). Finally, Ouyang concludes once more
with a protestation of his lack of energy and ability — “I am old, and cannot compare with
you” — having completed another poetic tour-de-force.

This poem is not a mountain poem as such; it takes an object encountered in a
civilized setting (in a friend’s house) and traces back to its mythical, primeval source at the
heart of a mountain. With the poet, we take an imaginative journey to a world of dynamic
power similar to that of “Lu Mountain High.” Here, however, Ouyang gives a clear, if
playful, treatment of the distinction between or fusion of nature and artifice. A “natural”
woodland scene turns out to be an imaginative extension of the grain in a naturally
colourful stone; the stone is, however, painstakingly carved by supernatural beings as a
test for Ouyang’s generation of artificers to imitate; Scholar Wu has imitated the stone perfectly in his poem — “You are certainly able to battle with ghosts and gods” — whereas Ouyang claims not to have managed it, after a remarkable attempt to do so.

Clearly Ouyang is amazed by creative processes. Frequently we see him returning to the source of objects, seeking the original conjunction of forces which produced their creative spark. In another poem on a stone screen, this time a “violet, moon-coloured stone,” he spins a yarn about the stone gaining its translucent sheen from moonlight reflected on the sea; his friend tries to sell it to him for a thousand cash, claiming that when the moon is full, the stone will light up a dark room right to the eaves! Though metrically this is a more restrained, regular work than that above, it includes Ouyang’s explanation of a relevant tendency in his character:26

. . . How great are Heaven and Earth and all in between!

Their ten thousand wonders cannot be fully expressed.

Alas! I cannot help going too far,

Longing to probe the depths of every matter.

I wish to take all that my two eyes and ears can perceive,

And compete with Creative Transformation for every single hairtip! . . .

In this case, Ouyang once again feels his talents are inadequate for the task, and passes the stone to his friend Su Shunqin (1008-1048) whose unbridled character can face the challenge undaunted.

Thus we find Ouyang constantly struggling to find words for the spirit, vitality and sheer variety of the world; its creativity inspires his own creative urge and he is impelled to

25 “Song of the Violet Stone Screen,” composed in 1047, with the alternative title “Song of the Moonstone Inkstone Screen, Sent to Su Zimei [Shunqin].” In Ji vol.1, 2.3-4. This poem is translated in full in chapter 5 below, section on the Moon.

26 Ibid. 2.3, lines 23-28.
set his immense feelings into words. It is no surprize that he must often stretch ordinary forms of poetry to breaking-point in order to hint at such grandeur.

With regard to mountains, although Ouyang certainly appreciates their enormous power and dynamism in itself, he tends to use the sentiments inspired by mountain imagery to indicate the hidden “vastness” of people (i.e. Liu Huan in “Lu Mountain High”), or more often objects (the stone screen). Rather than concluding that this method belittles the mountains, making them somewhat awkward guests in the studies of civilized scholars, I feel we should instead reverse the perspective. As a result, a minor official, or a single small object, even a stone, becomes a window into the enormity of the universe. The care with which Ouyang depicts mountain scenery also rebels against the idea that he is only using it as a stock image. Moreover, the witty manner with which he treats his subjects indicates that this is a universe to be enjoyed wherever possible.

To illustrate further Ouyang’s use of the associations of mountains with dynamism and creative cosmic forces, as a means to open up an object and fill it with imaginative resonance, I will refer to a few more poems. First, there is the “Sealscript on Stone Poem” of 1045, in which Ouyang highly praises a stele atop the Langye Mountains (then part of Chuzhou, his second place of exile) for its ancient-style calligraphic inscription.27 The calligraphy which formed the basis for the stele was that of a famous Mid-Tang calligrapher Li Yangbing (fl. late-750s), who in turn based his style on that of Qin statesman Li Si (d.208 BC). In fact, Ouyang only saw a rubbing of the stele brought to him by his monk friend Hui Jue, hence the mountain imagery again presumably emerges

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27 Chinese text in Ji vol.1, 6.69-70. Also in Xuanji 97. Chaves gives an English translation of this work, along with translations of the matching poems by Mei Yaochen and Su Shunqin. See Chaves, op.cit. 205-209. Another facet of Ouyang’s character was his love of ancient inscriptions on bronze and stone. As I mentioned, his collection contains a famous annotated catalogue of such inscriptions, the Jigu lu (“Record of Collecting Antiquities”). See Ji vol. 3, 15.49-176 and 16.1-75. It is in poems like “Seal-Script on Stone” that we can begin to comprehend the inspiration Ouyang received from such inscriptions, and his motivation for collecting them.
from his imagination or memory, rather than from direct observation of the site. He considers that the writing cannot be human; it must be that

... In the beginning, when Heaven and Earth divided from embryonic pulp,
Primal spirit solidified in this towering, craggy place;
At that time wild birds walked all over the mountain rocks,
And left their traces upon the grey cliffs, of a prehistoric age ....

(lines 11-14)

Here we have another supernatural creation, this time posited for a person’s calligraphic work. The poem continues with a familiar theme, of concealment and discovery, airily expressed:

... The Mountain Deity was not willing that people would see them often,
And constantly disgorged cloud and fog, deeply screening and burying them;
Crowds of immortals, flying through the air, wished to descend and read:
Often they’d borrow the pure light of the ocean moon and come here ...

(lines 15-18)

Finally there is a surprizing admission: “Alas I cannot comprehend the method in the calligraphy;/Yet seeing it I feel the eyes of my mind opening wide” (lines 19-20). Then in the last couplet, he sends rubbings and his poem to Mei Yaochen and Su Shunqin to see whether they can produce a better tribute. Though Ouyang sees no clear method in the calligraphy, merely its age and the vitality it emits are enough to “open wide the eyes of his mind.” This is a succinct way to describe the effect many of Ouyang’s poems involving mountains exert on the reader, opening our mind’s eye to an awareness of hidden depth and power in objects.
Mention of calligraphy brings us to the subject of fine art. I have touched upon painting briefly with the “natural” woodland scene on the stone screen above. Another poem which deals with painting, this time by a human artist, is the “Picture of a Climbing Cart” of 1056. The work begins with an imaginative recreation of the scene, a horse and cart struggling up a steep mountain road, then proceeds quite abruptly to a discussion of Yang Bao, the painting’s owner, and a poem that Mei Yaochen composed about it. The meandering continues through a theoretical distinction between poetry and painting, finally concluding with a return to Yang Bao, who now possesses both the original “Picture of a Climbing Cart” and two poems about the painting!

Pale mountains, crag on crag,
Jumbled stones piled up high,
Mountain rocks are sharp and jagged; the cart goes bumpety bump.

4 Mountain contours twist and slope, following the creek in the gully,
With hubs askew and axles tipping [the cart] seems about to topple.
Emerging from the narrow opening between a pair of cliffs,
Suddenly one sees a flat plain stretching for a hundred li.

8 With the long slopes and steep inlines the ox has used all its strength,
As day turns cold and evening comes, the driver’s heart quickens.
Yang Bao endured hunger as an official in the State University,
With hard-earned cash he bought this painting which only just fills the scroll.

12 He loved its old trees, hard rocks,
Mountains twisting, road turning,
High and low, crooked and straight,
Level and sloping, hidden and visible,

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28 Ji vol.1, 2.25-26. Also in Xuanji 162-164.
29 One li 里 was a distance of approx. a third of a mile.
16 Beauty and ugliness, front and rear views: each with its own character,
   Near and far, the tiny details all clearly distinguishable.
   He himself said that once it bore the hands of several masters,
   The painting was ancient, passed about frequently: all their names were lost,
20 Afterwards, when one who saw it found out the name [of the artist],
   He begged for a poem from Elder Mei to clear up the situation.
   The ancient painting painted the meaning, it didn’t paint the form,
   Mei’s poem describes the objects, and doesn’t conceal the emotions.
24 To forget the form and attain the meaning is understood by few,
   It’s better then to view the poem as if you are viewing the painting!
   Now I know that Master Yang truly loves the rare,
   Such a painting and such a poem, and he possesses them both!
28 When joys are able to make you content, then you are truly wealthy;
   Why must we demand gold and jade to be called rich and noble?
   Viewing the painting in the morning,
   Reading the poem in the evening,
32 Possessing these, Master Yang will never suffer hunger!

   One edition of this poem adds “Matching the Rhymes of Shengyu” to the title, and
gives the note “presented to Lecturer Yang” [i.e. Yang Bao]. In fact, although
doubtless inspired by Mei’s poem “Observing Yang Zhimei’s [Bao’s] Picture of a
Climbing Cart,” both the rhyme and the metre of Ouyang’s version are quite different.
The latter, with its four-syllable interpolations into a basic seven-syllable pulse (see lines 1-2 and 12-15), is particularly effective in suggesting the bumpy and twisting road in the
painting. Yet in spite of these distinctions, the reference to Mei’s poem proves very

30 In Ji, ibid.
31 See Mei’s poem in Zhu Dongrun, op.cit. vol.3, 901.
instructive in other ways: firstly, it can serve as a foil, bringing into sharp relief Ouyang Xiu’s unique approach to writing a poem (I shall discuss this point below); secondly, and crucial for interpreting Ouyang’s work, Mei informs us in his poem that he actually wrote it down on the painting scroll itself: “I write it for you at the end of the scroll,/Hoping that you will pass it from generation to generation.”\(^\text{32}\) With these words, suddenly Ouyang’s poem gains a much tighter structural consistency: we are not merely dealing with two different objects which Yang Bao possesses, but with a single, complex painting-poem object; hence, Ouyang’s comparison of the peculiarities of the two genres here is entirely fitting.

Moreover, I have noted in discussions of poems above that Ouyang almost invariably juxtaposes his descriptions of mountains with other subjects. I suggested that the effect of such juxtaposition is often a remarkably expanded perception of an apparently minor theme, which draws the reader into a powerful, dynamic world. As if goaded by the very complexity of his topic here, Ouyang is not content with the simple juxtaposition of two subjects; instead he portrays, first, the mountainous world of the painting (inanimate object), another imaginative reconstruction of a static scene;\(^\text{33}\) next, Yang Bao (human subject) appears as a poor, starving official who used his hard-earned money to buy the painting, rather than filling his belly, presumably. Third, there is Yang Bao’s more abstract description of the painting, quite distinct from Ouyang’s “own” attempt (lines 12-17). The mountain-like breadth of Yang Bao’s character is implied both by the inspiration he clearly receives from such a painting, and by his choice of Mei Yaochen to compose a complementary poem on the scroll. Hence, fourthly, there is Mei’s poem — another inanimate object which, Ouyang claims, opens up the deeper, fulfilling mountainous world of the painting. Ouyang encompasses all these various subjects within the structure of his own poem.

\(^{32}\) Ibid, lines 23-24.

\(^{33}\) Similar to the activity of the crows in “Song of the Stone Screen of Scholar Wu” above.
If such an analysis seems rather too complex, some justification is provided by the description of the painting which Ouyang attributes to Yang:

He loved its old trees, hard rocks,
Mountains twisting, road turning,
High and low, crooked and straight,
Level and sloping, hidden and visible,
Beauty and ugliness, front and rear views: each with its own character,
Near and far, the tiny details all clearly distinguishable (lines 12-17).

It is a similar intellectual abundance and fertile imagination that Ouyang’s poems involving mountain themes portray.

Before leaving this poem, I will draw a comparison with the work by Mei Yaochen on the same subject. Apart from the obvious fact that, unlike Ouyang, Mei does not refer to another poem in his work, hence one level of Ouyang’s complex structure is missing, there are several other differences of style and content. There is no tribute to Yang Bao in Mei’s poem, no attempt to show Yang’s appreciation of the painting, or to draw a connection between him and the mountain scene. Mei’s work consists simply of 12 lines describing the content of the painting, then 12 more lines discussing its attribution. For that, Mei chooses the Liang dynasty (502-557) painter Zhan Ziqian, yet notes the opinion of another observer that it is a much later work by Wei Xian of the Southern Tang (923-936). Since both are “wonderful artists” (line 17), the painting is worth keeping, whoever created it and despite its rather worn appearance. Mei concludes by expressing the hope (mentioned above) that his poem on the painting will also be kept and passed down through the generations.

34 Reference at note 31 above.
Mei's poem therefore adopts the tone of a connoisseur, first bringing observers' attention to certain details which show the painter's skill — for instance the "old, thin needles" of tall pines at the entrance to the valley, in contrast to the "withered, high" trunks of the ancient trees on the stream banks (lines 1-2) — and then risking a scholarly opinion on its attribution. Both these stages are carried out with great care, avoiding any recourse, if possible, to the poet's emotions. This is perhaps what Ouyang means by the comment: "Mei's poem describes the objects, and doesn't conceal the emotions" (line 23).

Ouyang, by contrast, spends the first six lines emphasizing the extreme jaggedness and steepness of the mountain road, and the consequent rough passage of the carts. Apart from the opening irregular metre which I noted, the profusion of onomatopoeic and rhyming binomes gives the impression of piled up mountains — linlin 嶙嶙 ("jagged and cragged"), diedie 叠叠 ("pile on pile") and even perhaps qiao'ao 撰撰 ("up and down") — and of the consequent bumping cart: lulu 碌碌 ("bumpety bump"). These binomes all occur in the first fifteen characters (three lines). Likewise the repetition of mountain three times, and rocks four times, in the first four lines adds to the sense of the landscape crowding in on all sides. Mei Yaochen, on the other hand, repeats only one adjective in all his twelve lines of description — the earthy hills pale into the "distance and further distance" — and the only noun which occurs more than once, "cart" (ju 車), does so because there is more than one cart in the picture! Ouyang is so concentrated on the tortuous landscape that he neglects to specify how many carts there are, and conspicuously avoids any distinction between carts at different stages of the route. Interestingly, he seems literally to be "animating" the journey as he opens the scroll — mountains and rocks roll by, then the cart bumps along; continuing to open up the scroll, more mountains and a creek appear; next the cart proceeds with hubs and axles tilted as if toppling over; then, emerging from between the cliffs, the scroll fully open, one sees the flat plain stretching ahead; now, though the ox is tired and evening is coming — bringing a corresponding drop in temperature "in the painting" (see line 9) — the traveller's heart
quicken with excitement. The many different carts at various stages in Mei’s description thus become for Ouyang Xiu a single cart caught in several “freeze frames” as it moves through the crowding-in landscape and onto the plain. In contrast to Mei’s static depiction, Ouyang observes the painting dynamically, as if it is a visual poem occurring in temporal succession. For Ouyang, too, we could adopt his own maxim: “Better to view the poem as if you are viewing the painting” (line 25). His method of “viewing” just happens to differ from that of Mei Yaochen.

In “Picture of a Climbing Cart,” through its juxtaposition of poem with painting and its “quotation” of Yang Bao’s reasons for the painting’s attractiveness, Ouyang also takes the opportunity to clarify his own manner of appreciating cultural objects as related to the landscape and the natural world. “The ancient painting,” he writes, “painted the meaning; it didn’t paint the form” (line 22). This comment suggests that painters before the Song were not aiming for realistic representation — as Song literati might have understood the term — but for the meaning implied by outward forms; Ouyang’s term “meaning” here is perhaps best defined by referring to the list of polar attributes which Yang Bao loved in the painting above. Only such a combination of opposites, including even beauty and ugliness, can indicate the manifold variety of the world. As for Mei’s

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35 This section discusses lines 22-25 of the poem. It is very possible that these lines are put into Yang Bao’s mouth, continuing his account of the painting’s attribution. Yet Ouyang clearly approves of the sentiments, hence his conclusion in line 26: “So I know that Master Yang truly likes the rare!” Egan also discusses these lines and lines 26-31 in his conclusion. He feels that Ouyang is generally more interested in the “meaning” of artworks than their “appearance” (xing 形, which I have translated “form”). See Egan 196-7, 199. Rather than concluding with Egan that Ouyang is here espousing an ideal of “amateurism,” and “valuing . . . yi [意 meaning] over technical competence” in his literary as well as other cultural pursuits (ibid. 198-199), I would instead point, first, to the great care which he takes in structuring his longer poems, even down to fine details of metre and word-play; and second, to the close relation between these formal features and the content which they express. It is true that he does not describe objects as precisely as Mei Yaochen, but that is because he prefers to emphasize other poetic techniques, and certainly not because he devalues poetic craftsmanship, or “technical competence,” in general.
poem, it "describes objects, and doesn't conceal the emotions" (line 23). As I have claimed, Mei is much more careful than Ouyang to give an exact description of the painting's contents. However, "to forget the form and attain the meaning is understood by few" (line 24). This phrase probably has two referents: first, ancient paintings, which are neglected for their lack of realism — except by connoisseurs like Yang Bao — and second, Mei's poems which, due to their remarkable objectivity, careless readers assume to have no inner "meaning," or profundity. Therefore, the conclusion in line 25 — "It is better then to view the poem as if you are viewing the painting" — in this context implies that although Mei's poem is a surface description of the painting's contents and possible attribution, we see, through its attention to detail, many meaningful features which we might otherwise overlook: he acts as a guide on what to notice in the painting. His poem is perfect for its context, written beside the painting.

Ouyang Xiu, on the other hand, seems to place less faith in observers' ability to catch the painting's meaning. His description, aided by imaginative touches, attempts to show the emotional and structural power of the painting; he even gives two possible ways of looking, one concrete, the other abstract, to demonstrate the different levels of meaning in the work. His poem, even down to its formal aspect, attempts to reproduce the strong effect which the painting exerted on him, thus bringing it alive. Without the painting to examine, Mei Yaochen's poem would seem rather dry; whereas Ouyang's poem stands admirably by itself.36

Finally, in this section on Ouyang Xiu's dynamic mountain poems, the work entitled "Large Stone of Ling Creek" (from 1046)37 well exemplifies his interest in objects

36 Though certainly Mei Yaochen's admission that his poem is written "at the end of the scroll" is essential for understanding the structural ingenuity of Ouyang's work.
37 In Ji vol.1, 1.30. Also translated, but only very briefly discussed, by Egan 101-102. See also Egan's rendition of the prose account on two such rocks (ibid. 217-218). From this account we learn that originally there were six Ling Creek rocks, arranged in the garden of
which will bring alive the power of a mountain landscape through sympathetic imaginative effort. The poem runs as follows.

New frost falls at night; autumn waters are shallow,
There, a stone reveals itself at the edge of the cold creek.
Covered with moss, soiled by earth, and pecked away by wildfowl,
It appears every autumn out of the creek, and in spring is submerged once more.
By the creekside an aged fellow has known of it since his youth,
He's puzzled why I come to gaze, so warm and enthusiastic.
I love it, and move it far away, towards Secluded Valley,
Dragging it out with three young bullocks, and loading it on two carts.
We pass right through the centre of town: they stop their market to watch,
They are simply amazed and consider it strange that someone would treasure it again.
Wilderness mists and wild grasses have buried it such a long time,
I wash it clean at the pure, chill spring within the stony cave.

a certain General Liu Jin (fl. late-ninth century). During the Five Dynasties period (907-960) Liu's family was ruined, and the garden abandoned. Four of the rocks were removed by anonymous collectors, and the fifth Ouyang has seen in “the home of a local resident.” The final rock, subject of this poem, was too large to move, hence its neglect (Chinese text in Ji vol.1, 5.37-38). This explanation is quite surprising if one reads it alongside the poem. As Egan notes, the prose and poetic accounts have very different concerns (ibid. 102). In fact, apart from the vague reference to “a hundred battles changing hill to valley” in line 19 of the poem, which we find indicates the Five Dynasties, I feel the poem reads better when divorced from the specific context. Thus, Ouyang purposely avoids mentioning the other five rocks in the poem, since he wishes to set up the contrast between a strange, stone-loving official like himself, and ordinary people who consider the rock useless. Reference to the other five rocks, all previously removed by collectors due to their relative portability, would dampen somewhat our impression of Ouyang as discoverer of hidden treasure.

38 Secluded Valley: the place in Chuzhou where Ouyang built his Drunken Old Man Pavilion, and Pavilion of Abundance and Joy.
Red columns and green bamboo will cover it with their reflections,
I've chosen to give it the place of honour, facing the southern terrace.
Lined up beside the southern terrace are tens of thousands of peaks!

16 Never before has such a wonderful craggy mass existed.

Now I know that rare objects are neglected by the world:
We struggle to buy them, spending a fortune, but how long can we retain them? 39

Over mountains and rivers, a hundred battles have transformed hill into valley,

20 What was the reason that made you fall on the bank of that barren creek?
Since mountain classics and local gazeteers cannot discover the source,
Many different theories appear, struggling in chaos and confusion.
All agree that Nügua, when she first began her refining,

24 Dissolved and condensed the unified spirit to form the essential purity.
She gazed above at the blue sky and, filling in all its cracks,
Dyed this carmine and emerald [stone] which dazzles and gives out warmth.
Some suspect that, among the ancients, Fire-Producing Master

28 Revolved it, giving off sparks of fire for frying and for baking.
It must have been such a divine sage who marked it with his own hands,
Otherwise no-one could carve such holes, and excavate such caverns.
Another declares that the Han ambassador, bearing the seal of the Han,

32 Travelled north-west for ten thousand li, reaching the edge of Kunlun.
His route passing through Yutian, he obtained a precious jade, 40
It floated into the Middle Kingdom from the source of the Yellow River.
Sand ground it, waters gushed over it, thus the caves were pierced,

36 And so it was that the carving and drilling left no spot or blemish.

39 Literally, "how many people do we pass them down to?"
40 Yutian is in the west part of present Xinjiang Autonomous Region; Egan suggests that the Han ambassador is Zhang Qian, who explored to the west from 139-126 B.C. (op.cit. 102).
Alas for me! I have a mouth but lack the gifts for debating,
Heaving a sigh, all I can do is stroke it with my two hands.
Lu Tong and Han Yu are no longer in this world,
40 No more are there heroic writings to suppress the hundred oddities.
Struggling for rarity, battling to be different, all seek to gain the advantage,
Thus do they reach the point of absurdity, without any basis or cause.
Heaven is high, and Earth is broad: there is nothing which might not exist,
44 Ugly and good, the ten thousand forms: how can we fully explain them?
All we should do is brush away the snow and sit down by its side,
And day after day invite worthy guests to line up their clear wine goblets.

This poem at first seems quite remote from the mountain theme, but Ouyang makes the connection explicit in lines 15-16: “Lined up beside the southern terrace are tens of thousands of peaks; Never before has such a wonderful craggy mass existed!” Like the “Song of the Stone Screen of Scholar Wu” above, Ouyang takes a strange stone and creates from it another imaginative, primal atmosphere inspired by its colour and form alone. In this case the witty juxtaposition — the pretence that these are full-scale mountains viewed from the terrace — demonstrates the encroachment of wild enormity on a civilized, carefully-planned setting.

In order to reach this stage of the poem, Ouyang has taken us back to where he found the rock during the most unpromising time of the year: “at the edge of the cold creek,” mud- and moss-covered, emerging and sinking year after year. The local people treat it as unexceptional; only Ouyang realizes the worth of his discovery. He brings it on a slow, difficult journey through the town, back to his pavilion at Secluded Valley. Though everyone stops their business to look, it is only because they cannot believe anyone would want such a strange, worthless object. This is the first, ignominious, journey of the stone, on bullock carts, past puzzled and contemptuous observers.
Ouyang caricatures himself as an enthusiastic magistrate, washing the stone reverentially in the “pure, chill spring within the stony cave.” This contrast between himself and the townspeople sets the tone of humorous incongruity, which continues throughout the poem. Thus, having set up the stone in its place of honour, where it assumes the aspect of an immense, craggy mountain range, Ouyang and his guests must now establish a more attractive and inspiring origin that will do justice to its new-found grandeur. To replace the first humble journey, Ouyang invents an enormous mythical journey beginning when the universe was still in chaos: the goddess Nügua, using it to repair the heavens, dyed it “carmine and emerald,” hence its colour. Next we come to another crucial moment in the history of the world: the discovery of fire-making. The Ling Creek stone was the base on which the mythical figure “Fire-Producing Master” drilled in order to create sparks for the first time, which apart from being very useful to human development, also pierced the holes and caverns in the stone. Finally, entering the historical period, the stone becomes a symbol of the glorious expansion of the Han dynasty: the Han ambassador discovers the Kunlun Mountains, site of the mythical pillar holding up the heavens, centre of the world. He obtains the “precious jade,” and it floats down the Yellow River from the river’s supposed source in the Kunlun range. Above we saw the polar opposition of the Yangtze River and Mount Lu; here we encounter an even mightier water-mountain polarity. As the rock floats down into China (the Middle Kingdom), sand and water smooth out the ruts made by Fire-Producing Master’s drilling.

Though Ouyang attributes the mythical explanations of the stone’s three characteristics — colour, holes and smoothness of execution — to different speakers, they clearly emerge from his own fertile imagination and scholarly knowledge. His purpose is to set up these desperately ingenious disputers as foils for his own tongue-tied, but stone-loving, persona in the poem, who reappears in lines 37-38: “Alas for me! I have a mouth but lack the gifts for debating; / Heaving a sigh, all I can do is stroke it with my two hands.” It is good enough to appreciate a rare object, Ouyang’s silence implies. Instead of
inventing tales that “have no basis,” why not discover the profound meaning in the stone’s true journey from mossy, frosty riverbank to polished garden splendour; from neglect to appreciation. This is a quieter and less dignified, but perhaps deeper, source of meaning in life.

Before moving to a contrasting series of poems, it may be instructive to treat this work as Ouyang treated the “Picture of a Climbing Cart,” namely, after the imaginative description of its contents, to step up to a more abstract level and view it once more. For the painting, Ouyang gave a series of polar oppositions — “high and low, crooked and straight,/Level and sloped, hidden and visible,/Beautiful and ugly,” and so on.41 Seen from this viewpoint, the painting thus becomes a kind of middle stage between the infinite, chaotic variety of the world and the simplifying, classifying tendencies of human beings: although it depicts objects recognizable from our experience of the real world, the painting does not hide its conceptual nature, its ordering of that world. Hence Ouyang’s phrase “the ancient painting painted the meaning; it didn’t paint the form.”42 At the same time, the order is a complex one — nothing exists without its corresponding opposite — hinting at the complexity inherent in nature.

“The Great Stone of Ling Creek” also displays many of these kinds of oppositions. There is, most obviously, the major contrast between everyday and mythical worlds exemplified by the two journeys, the mundane and the fantastic, taken by the stone. Although Ouyang’s persona implies in this poem that the pursuit of the fantastic is ultimately absurd, his many other works in this vein show that it exists in a polar, complementary opposition to the everyday. Other oppositions in the poem include that of size: the stone seen as a huge mountain range; of values: the local peoples’ contempt for the stone versus Ouyang’s love for it; also, there are several “battles” or “struggles” of opposing forces in the work: struggles of people to buy rare objects (line 18); a hundred

41 See above, lines 12-17 of the poem “Picture of a Climbing Cart.”
42 Ibid. line 22.
battles reducing mountains to valleys, and transforming the stone from prized possession to neglected, muddy occupant of the riverbank (lines 19-20); “chaotic” struggles (line 22) among Ouyang’s guests to give the most heterodox theory on the stone’s origins; and there are the “heroic” battles of Han Yu (768-824) and Lu Tong (d.835) in the Mid-Tang, attempting to suppress with words the hundred oddities (lines 39-40). In the end, Ouyang claims, faced with the infinite variety of forms, our struggles are pointless (lines 42-44): perhaps the final opposition in the poem, therefore, is one between energetic activity and silent acceptance.

It is the possibility of all these divergent aspects existing together in the world and in art which inspires Ouyang Xiu. So much so that, especially in these more dynamic poems, he goes out of his way to include apparently unrelated topics within a single structure. In this way, he is able to involve the power and breadth of mountains in subjects as diverse as those above: stone screens, a calligraphic rubbing, a painting, a tribute to a retiring friend, and a colourful rock. Faced with oppositions, his mind is inspired to create a structure binding them together.

Tranquil Mountains

Talk of polar oppositions provides a suitable opportunity to turn now from these dynamic mountain poems to another group of works which display a more tranquil, deeper image of mountain scenery. I am not claiming that these are necessarily more profound, meaningful creations, but only that in them Ouyang emphasizes the depth, rather than the awesome size or force of the mountain. Of particular importance is Ouyang’s preoccupation with pure springwater emerging from within the rocks. This preoccupation is evident even in some of the poems above, such as “The Great Stone of Ling Creek,”

43 A figurative phrase originating in the Shijing 詩 經 (“Book of Songs”), referring to reversals in the social hierarchy.
where Ouyang carefully washes the stone in the "pure, chill spring of the stony cavern." The sheer frequency with which this image recurs suggests a symbolic, even spiritual, significance which I will discuss after providing some examples.

First, "Cave of the Three Travellers," a relatively early work written in 1037 during Ouyang’s first exile in Yiling. The three travellers of the title were the Tang poets Bai Juyi (772-846) and Yuan Zhen (779-831), along with Bai’s younger brother Xingjian. Bai Juyi wrote a prose account of their trip to this cave which provides a useful background for understanding Ouyang’s poem, and runs in part as follows:45

On the tenth day of the third month, we met up at Yiling. The next day we rowed back, and saw each other off as far as Xialao Fort. The following day we were about to part but couldn’t bear to, so we guided the boat up and down for a long time. Rapt with wine, we heard the sound of a spring between the rocks, so we left the boat and entered the thicket, stepping onto the broken bank. At first we saw rocks, as if piled up and sliced; their strangeness was like arms stretched out or like drooping flags. Next we saw the spring, as if gushing and splashing; its wonder was like suspended white silk or a thread not yet cut off. So we linked up the boats at the foot of the rocks, and led the servants in cutting the weeds and slashing the undergrowth, scaling the heights and using ropes to cross the slippery [sections]; we rested, then continued the ascent, altogether four or five times. Glancing above and peering below, there were absolutely no traces of people; only water and stone close by us, clear and solid, leaping pearls and splashing jade, startling and

44 Ji vol. 1, 1.4. Also in Xuanji 47-48.
stimulating our eyes and ears. Since it hadn’t reached the twilight hour, we loved it and could not leave. In a short while the mountains in the gorge darkened, the clouds broke up and the moon emerged: the vital essence of light was contained, then emitted, shining and extinguishing simultaneously, dazzling and glittering, so that forms were born in its midst. Though one had an agile tongue, one could not name the forms.

Ouyang’s poem depicts his own trip to the same place near Yiling:

Oars splash against the clear river current,  
Leaving my boat, I climb the azure peaks.  
Seeking the marvellous I brave layered crags,  
Thus I reach the end of the human realm.  
Guiding my boat throughout the day, I love the cloudy mountains,  
But all I see are blues and greys between the far-off mists.  
Who’d have known there could be a cave within the rosy clouds  
With milky ducts and cloudy balm congealing the essence of stone  
Grey cliffs; a single pathway crosses a log bridge,  
Azure walls a thousand feet high rise up before the entrance.  
Past people have left appreciations: who did they write them for?  
The people have gone from the mountain slopes; their traces seem yet more secluded.

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46 “Twilight hour” is a paraphrase for xushi 戬時, which refers to the period between around seven and nine o’clock in the evening.  
47 For reference, see n.44 above.  
48 This line probably refers to stalactites and stalagmites, whose mineral-rich drips resembled milk.
Dark creepers and green osmanthus are so serene and peaceful,
Mountain birds cry "chuck chuck," not startled by their guest.
Pines sing at the base of the gully, where wind rises by itself,
16 The moon emerges amidst the forest, coming to shine where I sit.
An immortal realm is hard to discover, but easy enough to lose,
With mountains twisting and roads turning, few people will find it,
Except, perhaps, when blossoms in spring fall at the mouth of the cave,
20 And flow along the Thousand Foot Creek, emerging from the mountains.

Though this poem seems less fluent than those discussed above, perhaps due to its early date of composition, it is interesting for at least two reasons. First, like "Lu Mountain High," Ouyang brings out the contrast between seeing the vague forms of cloudy mountains from a distance and then entering their heart to discover a marvellous new environment: "Who'd have known there could be a cave within the rosy clouds?" (line 7). Secondly, and more unique to this poem, the cave within the clouds, containing milky stalactites and stalagmites, immediately suggests to Ouyang a "realm of immortals" (line 17).

Ouyang's emphasis is on the peaceful seclusion of the cave and its environs, hence he avoids any mention of the tremendous roar of gushing water and the exertion of the climb in Bai Juyi's prose account. Yet he is clearly influenced by the former writer's description, for instance line 12, referring to Bai and company: "The people (ren 人) have left the mountain slopes; their traces (ji 迹) seem yet more secluded," which comments on Bai's: "Gazing above and peering below, there were absolutely no traces of people (renji 人迹)." Ouyang thus claims that in a place where people have obviously been before and left traces, the sense of seclusion is greater than in a totally undiscovered place.49

49 Certainly this observation seems to hold, for instance, in a public place such as a market, which seems oddly empty on non-trading days, or a university campus on a Sunday.
The other borrowing from Bai’s piece is the appearance of the moon, which spreads an unearthly light over the scene. In Ouyang’s lines the moon is just one of several natural objects that appear to welcome him: the creepers and osmanthus are “serene and clear,” mountain birds are “not startled” by him; the pines “sing,” and finally the moon “comes to shine” where he sits (lines 13-16). Judging by Ouyang’s use of allusion in the poem, the influence of the hidden worlds of Tao Qian (c.365-c.427) and Wang Wei (700-759) is even stronger than that of Bai Juyi. Lines 11-15 contain almost a patchwork of words from Wang’s quatrains, and the process of discovering a hidden opening between the cliffs — a “realm of immortals” — and then losing it immediately, added to the fallen “blossoms in spring” emerging from a creek at the cave mouth, bear unmistakable traces of Tao’s “Source of the Peach Blossom Spring.” One could also call these allusions hidden worlds within a superficially simple poem. Thus, it is not only quietness and serenity that Ouyang conveys, but the sense of a newly-discovered environment, with a depth that comes upon us when we least expect it.

To demonstrate that Ouyang’s zest for discovering hidden mountain retreats, with obligatory spring waters, was not merely a youthful characteristic, here is an example, probably written between 1055 and 1060, from later in his life:

Incidentally, the “past people” who left these traces (lines 11-12) were probably Bai Juyi and his fellow travellers (see Xuanji 48, n.3, for this interpretation).

I cannot imagine that Ouyang overlooked the verbal similarity between the following quatrain by Wang, and lines 13-16: “People at ease, the osmanthus blossom falls,/Night is silent, spring mountains empty./The moon emerges, startling mountain birds/Occasionally they cry in the spring gully.” See QTS 4.1302 (“Birds Calling in the Valley,” from “Five Miscellaneous Titles on the Clouds and Creeks of Huangfu Peak”). Ouyang’s lines contain “osmanthus,” “moon emerges,” “birds” which are “not startled”(!), and “singing” in the “gully” — which here refers to the sound of pines rather than birds. As for the moon “coming to shine” on Ouyang’s seat, we must examine the second couplet of another quatrain by Wang: “In the deep forest, people don’t know,/The bright moon comes and shines on me.” See QTS 4.1301 (“Pavilion Within the Bamboo,” from the “Wang Stream Series”).

See Tao’s prose preface and poem in Wang Yao, ed., Tao Yuanming ji (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe 1956) 92-95. The allusion to Tao is noted in Xuanji 48, n.5.
Converging Peaks Pavilion.\textsuperscript{52}

The mountain contours are clear for a hundred \textit{li},
A new pavilion presses down on their summits.
Crowds of peaks gradually descend downwards,
4 From high to low they link themselves together.
Peering down, I suspect there's no ground,
In the distance, there is only blue-grey mist.
At this time, new rain is abundant,
8 In massed valleys vernal springs resound.
Forest whispers echo louder in the silence,
Mountain light becomes more fresh at evening.
The flowers on the precipice: who do they open for?
12 When spring departs, their beauty lasts through summer.
Wild birds peer as I become inebriated,
Clouds over the creek invite me to stay and sleep.
Day reaches evening and a mountain breeze comes,
16 It blows me back to a sober state of mind.
Drunk or sober, I rely on things outside,
So clouds and birds, it is vain for you to linger.

Several motifs from the earlier poem are recognizable here. Ouyang is once more
away from the world, this time too high to see the ground — he “suspects there’s no
ground:/In the distance there’s only blue-grey mist.” Note the similarity with “Cave of the

\textsuperscript{52} Ji vol.1, 6.78. Many of the poems in this section of Ouyang’s collection, including this
one, are not dated, unlike those in \textit{ce} 1 and 2. This one is placed between dated works of
1055 and 1060.
Three Travellers,” line 6: “But all I see are blues and greys between the far-off mists,” describing looking up from below. There is also the sound of the trees, and a freshening of the wind at evening — in the earlier poem the wind rises by itself, and the emerging moon indicates nightfall. Finally, natural objects again welcome this appreciative visitor: “birds peer” at his drunkenness; clouds urge him to stay and sleep. In this case, however, the evening wind is cool enough to sober him up and acts as a voice of reason, calling him back to reality.

There are two main distinctions between this work and the “Cave of the Three Travellers” which make it more representative of Ouyang’s mature, tranquil mountain verse. Although he is definitely removed from the everyday world, there is no mention of immortal realms, or of the difficulty of rediscovering such an unearthly scene after he leaves it. Even in the earlier poem, this theme was quite muted, but here Ouyang is satisfied with natural mountain wonders, avoiding hints of the supernatural. The other development in this later work is the presence of the drunken persona, a common figure in much of Ouyang’s quieter mountain verse after his Chuzhou exile. Drunkenness seems to increase the sense of detachment from the world below — without having to resort to immortal realms — and explains the exaggerated and humorous personification of birds, clouds and wind. One can easily imagine the inebriated official — habitually accustomed to obeying superiors — assuming that the cool breeze is consciously warning him to return home before dark.

At the same time, becoming drunk seems to cause a state of contented passivity in Ouyang in which time loses its urgency, and he is free to appreciate the natural order without the need to overpower it. This is perhaps the sense of the line: “Drunk or sober, I rely on things outside.” Blown sober by the wind, returning to his senses is also a return to the normal world of effort and initiative.

53 As he attempts to do in some of his more dynamic poems.
Similar motifs recur in many of Ouyang’s works in this vein, and it is instructive to compare passages from several different poems. It appears that rather than attempting to describe outside scenery as faithfully as possible, Ouyang instead rediscovers a corresponding atmosphere in widely different places. Chuzhou provides the most famous examples. The poem “Written on the Wall at Chuzhou’s Pavilion of the Drunken Old Man”\(^{54}\) of 1046 contains these lines:

\[
\ldots \text{All I love is the water below the pavilion,} \\
\text{It comes from between the chaotic mountain peaks,} \\
\text{Sounding as if it has fallen from the sky,} \\
\text{It gushes past, right before the eaves,} \\
\text{And streams down to the creek beneath the crags,} \\
\text{Where Secluded Spring adds to its stately flow} \ldots
\]

\[
\ldots \text{Therefore, many a time I take some wine,} \\
\text{Walking a long way to approach its babbling.} \\
\text*Wild birds peer as I become inebriated,*} \\
\text*Clouds at the creek invite me to stay and sleep.*} \\
\text{Mountain flowers are only able to laugh,} \\
\text{They don’t understand how to converse with me.} \\
\text*Only the breeze that comes from the mountain summit,*} \\
\text*Blows me back to a sober state of mind.*}
\]

This poem is almost certainly earlier than “Converging Peaks Pavilion,” hence the virtually identical lines which I italicize have their source here. Though more detail is provided on the springwater, “coming from between the chaotic mountain peaks,” the

\(^{54}\text{Ji vol.1, 6.70. Also in Xuanji 105, and translated by Egan 89.}\)
atmosphere in both poems is remarkably similar. To prove that this kind of echoing is not just a coincidence, another poem from Chuzhou, "Drinking in the Evening at Secluded Valley,"\(^5\) (c. 1046-1049) includes the following lines:

... One path; I enter the dense foliage,
I already hear the sounds of flowing water,
I walk on through; the green bamboo disperses,
Suddenly I notice the azure mountainside.
The mountain contours embrace a secluded valley,
The valley spring harbours rocks in its depths.
On its banks grows a wood of healthy trees,
And fine birds call from above.
The birds chatter in the silence of the valley,
Trees grow cool, their reflections clear in the spring...

... My thirsty heart needn't wait to drink [wine],
My drunken ears, poured over, become sober...

... *At this time the new rain is abundant*,\(^5\)
The sun goes down; the mountains grow distinct...

Music is frequently part of these poems, especially that of the *qin* \(^5\)"zither") which Ouyang himself enjoyed playing. Sometimes the springwater produces a "music" superior to man-made instruments: "Its purity is not that of pipes and strings./It isn't that silk[-string] and bamboo [flute] are not beautiful./But strings and bamboo cannot compete

\(^{55}\) *Ji* vol.1, 6.71.
\(^{56}\) This line is the same as line 7 of "Converging Peaks Pavilion" above. The "fine birds" (*hao niao* 好鳥) a few lines above in this poem recur in "Presented to Shen Zun," partially translated below, which also repeats many phrases from the other works I have quoted.
with its abundance.”

Alternatively, the spring inspires Ouyang to write a piece which will last even when he must leave: “I cannot listen to the sounds of springwaters for long./So how can I get a white jade zither./And pour them out on crimson strings of silk?”

A similar example is: “Holding my zither I pour out ‘Secluded Springwaters,’/I love it and am about to stay there for ever;/I am only frustrated that the world’s vulgarity has a hold on me.”

Again: “Gurgling and babbling both winter and spring,/Night and day the mountain melody resounds.”

Ouyang was moved when a certain Shen Zun composed a zither melody for him entitled “Chant of the Drunken Old Man.” Hearing it in 1056, he composed a group of poems which demonstrate that music could also evoke a similar series of impressions. One of these works, “Presented to Shen Zun,” encapsulates the scene once more:

. . . . First I listened to it, and felt delighted but also rather startled . . . .

. . . . It was like gentle breezes in the warm sun, with chatter of fine birds,

In night’s silence, mountains echoing, and vernal springs singing.

57 From “Written on the Wall at Chuzhou’s Pavilion of the Drunken Old Man.” See note 54 above.
58 From “Drinking in the Evening at Secluded Pavilion,” in Ji vol.1, 6.71. The word translated “pour . . . out” (xie xie) has the meaning “express, compose” as well. Ouyang uses it many times in these works, aware of its double appropriateness for music and water.
59 From “Excursion to Langye Mountains,” in Ji vol.1, 1.24-25. Also in Xuanji 101.
60 From “Secluded Valley Spring,” in Ji vol.1, 1.26. Also in Xuanji 106, and fully translated in Egan 119, where he gives another possible interpretation of the last three words xiang shan qu 響 山 曲 as “echoes in the bend of the hills.” I feel that the musical interpretation of qu as melody or tune fits better with the context here and with Ouyang’s other poems on similar themes.
61 For details on this dedication, see the preface to the following poem in Ji vol.1, 2.23.
62 Ji vol.1, 2.23-24. For other poems in this group, note also “Zeng Shen Boshi ge” (Song Presented to Scholar Shen) in Ji vol.1, 2.30, and the so-called miscellaneous writing “Zuiweng yin” (Chant of the Drunken Old Man) in Ji vol.1, 3.5-6, with its final lines: “How virtuous you are, Master Shen!/You can pour out my heart and console its longings.”
Sitting, I longed for a thousand crags, ten thousand valleys,
the place for drunken sleeping,
All were poured out on “three feet” lying across your knees . . . 63

. . . The Old Man’s joy did not have to wait for strings and bamboo pipes,
Holding wine, the whole day he listened to the sound of the spring.
On occasion he’d fall down drunk and take a creek stone as his pillow,
Blue mountains and white clouds provided a pillow screen.
Among the flowers, a hundred birds were unable to call him awake,
The sun went down, a mountain breeze blew, and then he woke up sober . . .

What Shen Zun has managed with music is what Ouyang achieves with his poems,
namely, an imaginative recreation of a calm mountain scene centred on the pure
springwaters flowing over stones. Ouyang’s poem on Shen Zun’s music provides a double
refraction, through music and words, of the original scene, yet all the main elements are
still clearly present. In fact, the recurrence of such similar sets of images suggests a
distillation of the essentials of the quiet mountain, a return to simplicity. This spirit is quite
distinct from Ouyang’s more dynamic works, where a simple object becomes imbued with
powerful complexities and oppositions. Nevertheless, the basic impetus appears to be the
same, namely, an attempt to transcend the painful, difficult world of everyday experience.
To bring out this aspect more clearly, here are two poems addressed to “practitioners of
the Way” (daoshi 道士), the first from 1047 — the Chuzhou period — and the second
from Ouyang’s final years awaiting retirement to Yingzhou.

63 “Three feet” being a common appellation for the zither, approximating its length.
First of Two Poems Presented to “Army of Spontaneous Action” Li, Practitioner of the Way

The three-foot zither of Spontaneous Action, Practitioner of the Way,
Encompasses all the endless tones surviving from ancient times.
The tones resemble pouring water running over stones,
4 He pours it out unceasingly, drawing from deep sources.
Although the plucking’s in the fingers, the sound is in the mind,
I do not use my ears to listen: instead I use my heart.
Since heart and mind are both engaged, I forget my bodily form,
8 I’m unaware of miserable clouds overshadowing the sun of Heaven and Earth.

Presented to Xu, Practitioner of the Way [1068].

Luo City in the third month, chaotic orioles fly,
In the Yingyang mountains, at flower blossoming time.
Coming and going are horses and carriages, people on trips to the mountains,
4 Greedy to look at mountain flowers and tread on mountain rocks.
The cave of Violet Clouds Immortal is locked deep in the clouds,
Inside the cave, there is a man about whom people know nothing.

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64 In Ji vol. 1, 2.1. Also in Xuanjī 110-111. The term daoshi may refer to a Daoist monk, or perhaps just one who sought longevity and led the life of a recluse, hence my translation.
65 Ji vol. 1, 2.56.
Master Xu, floating about, you may be descended from Jingyang. With bones of the Way and immortal bearing, you’re really a sire of immortals.

For many years you have washed your ears, avoiding the worldly clamour,

Alone you lie on a cold crag, listening to mountain streams.

Supreme people have no mind and do not calculate in their minds,

12 Lacking a mind is the true way to attain everlasting longevity.

You came suddenly to gaze at me, full of warmth and affection,

Laughing at me, with white hair, growing old in the dusty world.

When you return, build for me a hut before the crags,

16 Wait for me, and next year I will plead for my retirement!

In works addressed to practitioners of the Way, it is no surprise to discover Ouyang utilizing some of their own terminology: phrases such as “no mind” and “forgetting the bodily form” are unusual in Ouyang’s poetry in other contexts. Yet Ouyang feels that the source of these peoples’ spirituality, longevity and creativity is the same as in his more “secular” poems: mountain waters flowing over rocks. No superficial contact with these waters is sufficient to partake of their creative powers, hence one must go beyond the typical haunts of day-trippers, “greedy” for flowers and picturesque scenery. Ideally, one should live in a cave, not only “locked deep in the clouds” but also within the mountain, where its milky essence drips down to form stalactites. More practically, one can “lie alone on a cold crag, listening to mountain streams.” That is Ouyang’s plan for retirement.

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66 Jingyang 旌阳 was a small town in Jingde County (present S.E. Anhui Province). I can’t find any connection with immortal lore. Perhaps Ouyang means that though he knows Xu’s actual place of birth, the recluse seems to belong to another world altogether (cf. line 8).

67 Literally, “beg for my body,” a stock phrase meaning to request and obtain retirement from official service.

68 See the poem “Cave of the Three Travellers” above.
Those who receive their creative inspiration from flowing waters can then recreate the experience in art. From the small, hollow centre of Li Daoshi's three-foot zither — another cave-like hole — emerge “endless tones . . . like pouring water, running over stones; He pours it out unceasingly, drawing from deep sources.” In this first poem, the lines themselves seem to flow like water: “tones” (yin 音) of line 2 overflows into “tones” of line 3; “pouring” (xie 漏) of line 3 then recurs in line 4. The deep source in the mountain produces endlessly flowing water; just as one’s deep mind is the source inspiring flowing fingers on the strings; whose sounds run on through the listeners’ ears to their heart. Carried to such depth, one can forget one’s outer form and the “overshadowing clouds” of sadness.

Moving back to the poems on similar themes above, Ouyang returns again and again to the flowing spring waters because they are the most potent natural symbol of his own approach to the manifold experiences of the world. He is constantly searching out the source and origin of things he encounters, even the most unpromising, striving to discover their depth and significance, activating their potential as windows into a hidden world, and connecting them with the endless flow of events: in the end, animating the inanimate. Thus he can enrich his life and forget his cares.

The two aspects of Ouyang’s mountain poetry therefore bear a complementary relation. The water welling up unceasingly from the quiet depths of mountains, nourishing the plants and trees around it, acts as his constant inspiration. This inspiration he can recreate in poetry or music, or transform into a creative, dynamic encounter with the world; hence it is a source of his more powerful verse. At the same time, the immense elemental forces of the mountain environment, occasionally terrifying in their intensity and sudden in their changes, yet overarched by a massive, solid structure, approximate most nearly to Ouyang’s idea of greatness, openness and complexity. Hence the frequent
encroachment of such mountain imagery in the poems on diverse subjects above, and the
often elemental style of poems in which mountains play no visible role.69

Mountain Comparisons: Influence of the Intellect

A final group of poems on mountain themes combines features of both the
categories above, as if displaying this complementary relation. Ouyang here compares one
kind of mountain or range with another. Once again, we see the influence of intellectual
reasoning on these poems, a quality that informs much of Ouyang’s other verse, and which
often prevented Ouyang and later Song dynasty poets from succumbing to the despair of a
single moment.70 I would add that the very act of creating these poems works as a
diversion from present sadness and worries, and aids Ouyang’s mind in discovering order
and balance in life.

The first poem, written when Ouyang was back in the “dusty” capital Kaifeng, in
1041, recalls the mountains on either side of Yiling, his former place of exile. As we shall
see, the mention of Mei Yaochen (Shengyu) in the title is as significant as the mention of
mountains.

69 For more details on Ouyang’s interest in the zither, see my biographical sketch above,
Gulik, *The Lore of the Chinese Lute* (Tokyo: Sophia University 1940); Kenneth
DeWoskin, *A Song for One or Two* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan 1982); and for its
transmission to Japan, Stephen Addiss, *Tall Mountains and Flowing Waters—The Arts of
Uragami Gyokudo* (University of Hawaii 1987). I am indebted to Jonathan Chaves for
these references. For poems by Ouyang Xiu involving other musical instruments, see the
following chapter.

70 As Yoshikawa notes, in op.cit. 64, contrasting Ouyang’s work with that of Tang poets.
Yet see my chapter 4, section on plants and trees below, for further discussion of this
assertion.
Remembering the Mountains, Shown to Shengyu.\textsuperscript{71}

I long for the Yiling mountains,
Mountains wild and unfathomable.
Two or three miles from the eastern city wall,
High and low flow into ridges and hills.
Massed peaks, twisting, link up to meet them,
Looking all round, there's no advance or retreat.
I remember once, entrusted with official inspections,
I saw for myself both the huge and the tiny.
At this time, autumn foliage was red,
Alpine valleys piled up patterned silk.
Forests withered, the pines' scales chapped,
Mountains aged, their stone spines thin;
Along a broken path, I trod on crumbling cliffs,
I heard the clear flow of a solitary spring.
Venturing deeper, I found a river plain,
Ancient customs survived in the ploughing and hoeing.
The gully was wild; a startled river-deer bolted,
The sun emerged; a flying grouse cried.
On great rocks I often lay and dozed,
The green peaks were a suitable place for retirement.\textsuperscript{72}
In secluded searching I sighed at walking alone,
My clear inspiration longed for someone to answer.

\textsuperscript{71} Ji vol.1, 1.8. Also in Xuanji 62-65. I have separated the three main sections of the poem.
\textsuperscript{72} Literally "for untying the girdle (of an official seal)" a figurative phrase meaning to retire from office, according to Xuanji 63, n.2.
To the West of here, one finds the Three Gorges,

24 Their threatening strangeness still more rare and abundant.

The River pours down, as if from heaven,

Banks stand erect, opposing cliffs battling.

Qian and Wu are the domains to the West,

28 Yue and Ling join up towards the south.73

Time and again, facing the county halls,

Clouds and fog make broad daylight gloomy.

Through wild mists, at Xialao fortification,

32 A cold creek washes down from two thousand feet,

The Toad spurts out forming a curtain of water,

Whose sweet liquid is better than twice-fermented wine.

Once, I went as far as the Brown Ox [Gorge],

36 Moored the boat and listened to apes and monkeys.

How precipitous, the sheer wall to the West!

Its azure grey was not the work of carvers.

The cloudy summits dived down into the thicket,

40 A mountain cave suddenly opened to the skies,

The distant peak emerged, standing solitary,

It enchanted me, and I joyfully sought to approach.

I only longed to receive some of your poems,

44 Ancient and strong, pouring out rare beauties.

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73 Explained in ibid. 64, n.3, as Qianzhou and Wujun in the present Sichuan region, i.e. west of Yiling, and Yuezhou and Wuling around present Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces, i.e. to the south.
In recent times, we've met up in the capital,
Where carriage and horse pursue dust and confusion.
Removing our hats, we've both become white-haired,
48 Raising the wine, we have no red-sleeved [companions].
Bustle and dazzle we cannot aspire to,
And secluded pastimes are few and far between.
I can only compose “Remembering the Mountains,”
52 And with reddening earlobes add to the joking!

The structure of the poem is hinted at by the triple recurrence of the word translated “longing for” (思). It occurs in the first line, Ouyang longing for the Yiling mountains; then in line 22, after the description of the mountains to the east of Yiling, Ouyang “longs for” someone to respond to the inspiration he feels there; finally in line 43, having attempted to portray the even stranger scenery west of Yiling, all he “longs for” is to receive Mei Yaochen’s poems, which he knows will succeed better than his own.

Hence, not only does Ouyang claim that Mei is the person to do justice to the “rare beauties” of the mountainous environment, but that Mei’s poetry will exert the same uplifting effect now as mountains did on Ouyang’s imagination in the past.

It is tempting to describe this work as a catalogue of unfulfilled desire: when Ouyang has the mountains, he lacks someone with whom to share their appreciation; when he meets Mei in the capital, he is then far from the landscape of Yiling. The conclusion of the poem appears to support this view, detailing the aged visages of the two writers, and their inability either to attract women or to escape the dust of the capital. Yet the final couplet gives two reasons for optimism in spite of everything. First, they are together and

74 I.e. singing girls. Ouyang’s claim to be white-haired may be exaggerated, since he was only in his mid-thirties at time of writing!
able to "joke" or "tease" each other over wine; secondly, they can revive the mountains in their poetry — possibly Mei also composed an answer to Ouyang's work here, as he did to so many others. In other words, Ouyang's earlier "longings" for a companion and for Mei's poetry are both satisfied now, and his present "longing" for the Yiling mountains is overcome at least through an imaginative recreation, if not in the most concrete, physical sense!

In order to demonstrate how Ouyang draws the reader (and presumably himself) back into the mountainous environment, I will compare the two sections of the poem dealing with the eastern and western mountains respectively. First, he gives a brief background sketch of the topography: to the east, the land begins to undulate, rising up to "massed peaks" which cut off the way forward and back (lines 3-6); to the west, in a more detailed outline befitting the stranger appearance of the landscape, the Yangtze River, the only connection with other parts of the country, pours through sheer cliffs so close that they seem to "battle" each other; cloud and fog cover everything; and the noteworthy sites of Xialao Fort and Toad Hump appear along the banks facing his offices (lines 23-34).

After these introductions, Ouyang then relates particular excursions he made in both directions: the first (lines 7-22) begins with the words "I remember once . . ."; the second (lines 35-44) with "I also once . . ." He describes two visionary experiences, one triggered by tranquility and springwaters; the other by the dynamism of marvellously-shaped crags. The first contains some particularly fine, evocative lines: the poet passes through alpine valleys piled with "patterned silk" of fallen red leaves; the pine bark is "chapped [fish-]scales" — a remarkable metaphor, as close examination of the nearest available pine tree will verify; the personified mountains are "aged," their rocks "thin spines/backbones." Both these lines (11-12) begin with two characters describing the larger scene: "forest withered . . . mountains aged," then follow with three characters on

75 Though it seems not to be extant.
the particular details of the objects within that scene: “pine scales [are] chapped . . . rock spines [are] thin.” We thus gain the impression of movement from a general, all-embracing glance to a focused perception as Ouyang ventures further into the wilds.

So far the landscape is quite desolate, a typical dreary autumn day, rather like that depicted in the “Picture of a Climbing Cart” above. The sense of decline and decay, evoked by such adjectives as “withered” (ku 枯), “chapped” (cun 皴) and “thin” or “emaciated” (shou 瘦) continues into line 13, with its “broken” (duan 斷) path and “crumbling” (tui 頽) cliffs. However, just as the scene pictured in “Climbing Cart” produced delight for its aesthetic appeal rather than despair, so here the sounds of “pure flowing” springwaters interrupt the decay with vitality (line 14), and guide Ouyang “deeper” into a pleasant place of rustic simplicity unaffected by the progress of the outside world: “The ancient customs survived in the ploughing and hoeing” (line 16). The clear allusions again to Tao Qian’s “Peach Blossom Spring Source”76 indicate the visionary quality of Ouyang’s experience here, a quality strengthened by the disorienting syntax of the following couplet (lines 17-18):

The gully is wild, a startled river-deer bolts,  
The sun emerges, a flying grouse cries.

Here, the two sections of each line do not have a logically expressed connection, but Ouyang seems to create one by juxtaposing them, as if the wildness of the gully causes the deer to become startled; and the sun causes the grouse to call. Actually, Ouyang is reflecting his own state of mind on having encountered such an unexpected, lost place: noticing the wildness of the countryside, he stops — at that moment the deer bolts, inadvertently startled by Ouyang himself. As he contemplates the scene for a while, the

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76 See *Tao Yuanming ji*, op.cit. 92-93, especially lines 15-16 of the poem: “Their offerings still used the ancient method,/None of their clothes were in new styles.”
sun emerges, and a grouse calls as if in response — but it is only Ouyang who draws the connection between them. These four images have somehow remained in Ouyang’s memory, and through the use of slightly asymmetrical parallelism in the poem, he mingles them to create an impression of “wild order.” Thus, the various parts of speech occur in equivalent positions in each line — the nouns “sun” and “grouse” echo “gully” and “deer” respectively; the verb “call” answers “bolt/flee;” yet the correspondence has unpredictable features: “the gully is wild,” expressing an unchanging state, corresponds with the dynamic phrase “the sun emerges;” likewise, “startled,” a subjective state, corresponds with the physical action “flying,” and the final verb of action “bolt” is placed with an audible, but invisible, activity “calling (of grouse).” It is surely not accidental that this couplet, the most carefully crafted of the poem, comes immediately after Ouyang has encountered the mysterious rustic world of ancient-style ploughing techniques. It is as if he pauses, and wishes the reader to pause, and recollects the series of impressions which had such a deep effect on him, unpredictable yet somehow linked within his consciousness. Then, he breaks the spell and continues the account: he lies down and dozes several times on rocks around that place, and feels tempted to retire there straightaway; the only shortcoming is the lack of a companion to respond to his verse.

A similar process occurs in the second episode (lines 35-43). Ouyang has spent more time setting the background for this second excursion. Unlike some of his dynamic poems above, he has not invented a complete mythical explanation for the strangeness of the scenery, but we are clearly in the mysterious, overpowering environment of those works. For instance, the diction is similar: the two riverbanks “battle” — a personified, opposition on a cosmic scale; clouds obscure the daylight (lines 26 and 30); the grey blue cliffs are “not the work of carvers,” though they presumably appear so (line 38); finally, referring to Toad Hump and later Brown Ox Gorge, Ouyang retains only the animal

77 One would have expected “startled deer bolts... calling birds fly” if pure symmetry was the aim.
names, omitting the fact that they are geographical features; hence he emphasizes the apparent transformation of the rocks into animals due to their shape. This feature is particularly effective in line 33: “The Toad spurts out forming a curtain of water, / Whose sweet liquid is better than twice-fermented wine.”

Having thus set the scene, Ouyang can more briefly relate his trip to the Brown Ox (Gorge). It seems he does not climb the steep banks on this occasion but, mooring his boat, observes the peaks from below. He hears apes and monkeys, those typical residents of “southern” Chinese landscape poetry, here however not associated with mournful emotions. As before, he begins with a wider view of the whole enormous cliffside, then follows it down to the vegetation line, “suddenly” noticing a particular detail: a cave opening to the sky. The opening perfectly frames a solitary peak, standing up in the distance; once more we see an unexpected discovery of order within wildness, inspiring Ouyang to approach closer.

On both these occasions, Ouyang attempts to re-enter the subjective state evoked by the landscapes around Yiling. Temporarily he can forget the dusty capital and recreate a purer world of elated discovery. As I noted earlier, the poem is addressed to Mei Yaochen. Ouyang longs for Mei to describe similar scenes in his poetry since Mei’s “ancient, strong” verse is the only worthy vehicle for them. That is perhaps because Mei’s poems generally evoke just those characteristics which the physical mountain landscape of Yiling evokes. In a sense, therefore, we can read Ouyang’s whole poem also as an impressionistic description of Mei Yaochen’s poetic style: the traveller/reader Ouyang Xiu enters a wild poetic landscape within Mei’s works and discovers unexpected and inspiring visions of order within it. As with the poem on Lu Mountain, where the mountain sets into relief a eulogy to a retiring friend, so here the concrete imagery of the Yiling mountains adds remarkable depth and variety to the bare adjectives, “ancient and strong,” used to sum up Mei’s poetry. We are left thinking that if Mei’s poems have the same uplifting
effect on us as the powerful environment which Ouyang describes, and if they display an even more compelling structure, then how truly great a poet he must be!

Although the above poem compares two kinds of mountain, it makes no attempt to rank them in order of superiority. A slightly later poem, from 1044, shares many characteristics with “Remembering the Mountains,” this time in a comparison of Mount Song near Luoyang — Ouyang’s first poetic mountain subject — and Mount Wu near the Yangtze River Gorges. The context differs slightly, since Ouyang is supposedly eulogizing a pavilion (or two pavilions?) built by Fu Bi (1004-1083), and named after these two mountains, rather than directly recollecting the places: thus the ease with which he recalls the atmosphere of the mountains acts as a tribute to Fu’s skill in landscaping an evocative garden. Moreover, Ouyang extends the comparison into an intellectual debate on the respective merits of the two places. By the end of the work, when he returns to the pavilions, the ostensible theme of the work, Ouyang has again indulged in an immense imaginative trek. The poem runs as follows:

*Climbing to Duke Fu’s Song-Wu Pavilion[s] at Jiangzhou, Shown to Fellow Travellers.*

Massed peaks crowd in on terrace railings,
And bamboo groves shade them, dense and thick.
Duke, you longed so much for the mountains,
4 You personally did the design and construction!
I, too, am a mountain lover,
My first post was at Luo capital,

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78*Ji* vol.1, 1.15-16. Also in *Xuanji* 81-83. Again I have separated the contrasting sections of the poem.
The thirty six peaks of Mount Song
8 Faced its high buildings throughout the day.
Gloom or sunshine could change at any time,
A violet spirit constantly floated and lingered.79
Majestic, it lay at the centre of Nine Regions,
12 A vital symbol, overpowering distant vastness.
Once, I climbed all the way to its summit,
And saw the Four Peaks: small earth mounds.80

Next, I scuttled away to the barbarians of Jing,81
16 And first became aware of the Gorge mountains’ gloom.
The Yangtze River came gushing from Heaven,
Enormous rocks were suddenly split apart.
At first, I imagined, when all was dark and void,
20 And Chaos died, due to piercing and drilling,82
The labour of the gods was urged on during the night,
Until it produced cliffs of a hundred thousand feet.
Especially I marvelled at the Twelve Peaks [of Mount Wu],

24 Hidden, then visible, entering distant darkness.

79 “Violet spirit” indicates an auspicious mountain mist.
80 Mount Song was the central peak of China’s Five Peaks. The other four, Mounts Tai and Hua, and two Mount Hengs, seem small as mounds of earth from the summit of Song.
81 As I mentioned earlier, Jing[zhou] was the region south of the Yangtze, in present western Hubei Province.
82 Chaos is a character in the Daoist work Zhuangzi who is inadvertently killed when the Lords of Northern and Southern Seas drill the seven apertures (mouth, nose, ears etc.) into its body. See Wang Xianqian, ed., Zhuangzi jijie (Taipei: Sanmin shuju 1974) 49; translated in Burton Watson, The Complete Works of Chuang-Tzu (Columbia 1968; repr. 1971) 97, from the chapter “Fit for Emperors and Kings” (Ying diwang 應皇帝). Here Ouyang seems to take Chaos’ dead body and continue working on it, until it becomes the sheer cliffside.
Peoples’ footsteps were cut off as they climbed,
A fitting [place] to imagine creatures of wonder.
Gazing and observing, I would wander back and forth,
28 My imagination meeting [her] beautiful bearing.83

Mount Song is near and attractive for that,
I’ve already made a pact with its springs and stones.
I hope in the end to befriend some recluses,
32 And, white-haired, grow old in its clouds and valleys.

Wu in Jing, I’m afraid, is distant and wild,
Its disturbing strangeness obscure and ineffable.
And recently, in the clarity of my nighttime thoughts,
36 “Soul dreams” have all flown startled away!84

I happen to come here and enjoy these pavilions,
My dusty eyes scrape off their skin of confusion.
Even more when clear skies follow autumn rains,
40 The dense azure hues are newly dyed and washed.

At the mountain summits, the clear moon rises,
And I can linger awhile, drinking in seclusion.

83 Since the Gao tang fu 高 唐 賦 (“Rhymeprose on High Tang”) by Song Yu (4th-3rd.
century BC), Mount Wu has been associated with the appearance of a goddess to King
Huai of Chu. See original text in Pingzhu zhaoming wenxuan, op.cit. juan 4, 23b-25a.
Ouyang’s references to “creatures of wonder” and “beautiful bearing” both indicate this
legend. One of the twelve peaks of Mount Wu had the form of a woman, according to the
Southern Song poet Lu You. See Xuanji 82, n.4. Remarkably, Chen Xin et al. also relate
in this note that Ouyang couldn’t have seen Mount Wu from Xiazhou, and his
“recollections” of visiting the place were all from his imagination!
84 King Huai of Chu’s vision of the Goddess of Mount Wu came in a dream. Ouyang is
perhaps also implying, as in “Remembering the Mountains” above, that he is too old to
think of attracting women.
As with the poems of Mei Yaochen, these pavilions can take Ouyang away from the worries and concerns of everyday official life, and into a succession of inspiring, enormous worlds. Notable here is the extremely balanced structure of the poem: the first 14 lines, after a brief introduction, deal with Mount Song, symbol of majestic centrality; the next 14 with Mount Wu, in the wild South, home of seductive goddesses; following this, 4 lines discuss the merits of Mount Song, and another 4 those of Wu. Ouyang concludes here that the distance and wildness of the latter is a disadvantage, and that he no longer dreams of meeting goddesses, so doesn’t need its mysterious powers! He therefore intends to retire to Mount Song. Finally, 6 lines conclude the poem with a return to the pavilions.

Despite the rational features of the poem’s structure and content, I feel it would be mistaken to take very seriously Ouyang’s statements and conclusions on the ranking of these two kinds of mountains. Ouyang continued to write many more poems in later years, if not on Mount Wu, then on similarly unusual mountains with their own supernatural cosmic and mythical associations.\(^{85}\) Though he was unable to revisit the Yangtze Gorge region later in his life, it exerts a clear influence, as imaginative symbol, on his later reaction to the objects he encounters. Instead, as I have suggested above, here and elsewhere in his poetry Ouyang uses the terms and categories of rational argument in situations where they do not really belong, to create an incongruous, witty effect. Here, the effect is quite muted: Ouyang takes the two pavilions in Fu Bi’s garden as if they are polemical subjects for debate; arguing from personal experience he draws a sensible conclusion, then sits back to enjoy the moon rising over the peak tips, glass of wine in hand.

\(^{85}\) Several of which I have already discussed.
Elsewhere, the tongue-in-cheek atmosphere is much stronger, for instance, when Ouyang juxtaposes his friend’s white hair and dark shirt with the white rocks and dark clouds of Lu Mountain; or, as in the following poem and that on the “Great Rock of Ling Creek,” when he compares “false mountains” (i.e. mountain-shaped stones, perhaps with miniature plants on them) with full-sized ones, as if they belong in the same league:

*Matching Master Xu’s ‘False Mountains.’*  

86

The wisdom of craftsmen lacks no skill,  
The heavenly form epitomizes secluded exploration.  
You address me as “one who appreciates mountains,”  
4 And line up mountains for me, beside the front eaves!  
The broken-down walls are but a few feet high,  
[Yet] ten thousand precipices surface from my heart.  
Some open, as if splitting apart,  
8 Some spew out, resembling deep crevices;  
Some are long, linking up in succession,  
Some are thin, revealing their delicacy.  
Shady caves squint out into the distance,  
12 High screens stand up, lofty and perilous.  
Behind emerges abruptly a lone peak,  
The crowds dash away, piling in layers.  
Dense, like vital spirit melted and condensed,  
16 Protruding, like chiselling and carving of ghosts.

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86 *Ji* vol.1, 6.73. It is not clear who this Master Xu is, but see next chapter, section on wine-drinking for a possible contender, Ouyang’s student Xu Wudang.
In past years, I was banished to Jing and Chu,
My single boat went to the extreme South-East.
Remote peaks, like horses, pressed on either side,
20 The two banks looked down on rivers and pools.
I often regretted that the river ran fiercely,
No gentle wind invited my sail to linger.
Peaks and crags, a thousand, ten thousand forms,
24 Their enchantment was beyond my power to describe.
All I desired was to borrow powdered paints,
To illustrate and mount them on the finest silk cloth.

But that can’t compare to this space between table and mat,
28 Where a hundred scenic views, dense and fine, are born:
   Evening clouds dot the fresh azure hue,
   A tendril of smoke rises through morning mist.
   Even more so, in this midwinter season,
32 When gloomy windstorms pile up thick severity.
   In Secluded Studio, a place of deepest joys,
   My eyes roam far, producing distant perspectives.
   I lie down at daytime, and needn’t move from my pillow,
36 When morning inspires me, then I draw back the curtains.

I’ve heard that with the residing of superior people,
   Emerging or retreating both depend on changing fortune.
   Some further the Way through lonely self-cultivation,
40 Dealing with objects, they are noble yet benevolent.
If they were unable to benefit the times,
Coveting their income would have caused the ancients shame.
Song Mountain, luckily, is not too far away,
44 Its vetch and ferns: are they not sweet?
Naturally I can find reclusive companions,
And, draped in clouds, grow old by creek and summit.
Why do I not go there straightaway,
48 To a single hut, so peaceful and serene?
I humbly receive your gift, and feel ashamed,
So I write this poem in order to censure myself!

The context for this poem is quite obscure, but it is possible to piece together a few useful facts. In Mei Yaochen’s collection is a poem dated by Zhu Dongrun to 1043, entitled “Sent to Inscribe on the False Mountains at Director of Criminal Administration Xu’s New Residence.”87 Ouyang’s poem is not dated, but is placed between dated poems of 1049 and 1050 in his collection. The reference to “false mountains” and to “Master Xu” in his title suggest that he is writing on the same subject; though he is “matching” a poem by Xu, his detailed description indicates that Ouyang has also seen the miniature mountain display, possibly even that Xu gave him the display later in the 1040s. A note to Mei Yaochen’s poem provides further assistance. With regard to Mei’s first line: “An ancient mountain bone from Lake Tai’s ten thousand caves,” one Chen Yan states: “It says to take a stone from Lake Tai and make a false mountain.”88 Without this second note, one would be easily misled into considering “False Mountain” as a geographical name, since Ouyang treats the miniature as if it is enormous! Such confusion of scales seems to be his intention. Although he provides some clues, such as line 5 — “the broken-down walls are

87 Zhu Dongrun, op.cit. vol.1, 219
88 See notes to the selected poems of Mei: Zhu Dongrun, ed., Mei Yaochen shixuan 57.
but a few feet high" — and line 27 — “between table and mat” — the description is otherwise identical to that of a real, “living” landscape.

The poem, like many of those above, seems to ramble from one subject to another, until we stand back and take stock of the whole ingenious structure. Thus Ouyang begins by praising the skill of craftsmen who can produce the exquisite “mountains” lined up at the front eaves, then proceeds to describe their effect on his imagination, out of all proportion to their meagre size. He emphasizes the fecundity of forms by briefly adopting the style of Han Yu’s massive “Poem on Southern Mountains” in lines 7-10. Yet of course Ouyang’s “miniature” imitation lacks the enormity of Han Yu’s original — its brevity seems to result in a parodic majesty to fit the false mountain subject. The portrayal of Xu’s mountains continues up to line 16, its diction echoing many of the dynamic mountain poems considered earlier.

A second section (lines 17-26) moves south, Ouyang once more recollecting the mountains overlooking the Yangtze River. During his travels, the fast current does not allow him to moor and examine them closely, and he wishes to encapsulate their grandeur in a painting. Compared to a painting, however, Xu’s “mountains” might as well be the real thing, with their “hundred views” even, apparently, producing clouds and mist (lines 27-30).

Here, from line 29 — “evening clouds dot the fresh azure hues” — there is a remarkable development. It appears that, having compared the false mountains with possible paintings of mountains, Ouyang finds the former so irresistibly realistic and inviting that he animates the landscape and becomes a (miniature) recluse upon it. He then

89 Compare lines 117-end of Han Yu’s work. I should add that Ouyang seems intent on adopting even more obscure diction than Han Yu in his “imitation”: words like xiahan and kongqian are the kind of expressions one associates only with the highly ornate Han dynasty fu. For Han Yu’s poem, see Qian Zhonglian, ed., Han Changli shi xinian jishi (Shanghai 1984) 432-462, incl. notes.
extols the joys of his life there, free from the need to rise early and carry out official duties. Such seems to be the implication particularly of lines 31-36:

Even more so, in this midwinter season,
When gloomy windstorms pile up thick severity.
In Secluded Studio, a place of deepest joys,
My eyes roam far, producing distant perspectives.
I lie down at daytime, and needn’t move from my pillow,
When morning inspires me, then I draw back the curtains.

Thus, rather than viewing the mountains from outside, Ouyang has once again entered within, and temporarily escaped into a carefree, secluded “place of deep joys.” In the final part of the poem, Ouyang’s sense of disillusionment with official life is again triggered by this experience. He argues that the ancients were ashamed to think of a salary when, like himself, they could be of no benefit to the times; instead they would retire from society. Though Ouyang cannot retire to the false mountains, Mount Song is close by; there, “draped with clouds,” he could “grow old by creek and summit.” He censures himself for not having made his departure already.

In this chapter, I have divided Ouyang’s poems on mountains into two major categories: dynamic, powerful works; and deep, tranquil works. Often Ouyang allows the categories to overlap, most explicitly in the last three poems above, making a kind of intellectual comparison of various aspects of this complex poetic symbol. Apart from these three basic types of mountain poems, various themes and techniques have emerged constantly from my close reading of individual works. These include the discovery of hidden worlds, or hidden treasure; the animation and imaginative expansion of inanimate objects; and the juxtaposition of people with objects, of large with small, and of art with
reality, thus enhancing and deepening the significance of each. Added to such features of
the poems' content is the use of irregular metres, complex but logical structures, wordplay
and wit to suit each particular topic — in other words, a poetic technique which perfectly
expresses Ouyang's intimations of order within wildness, and the extraordinary within the
ordinary.
Chapter 3: Everyday and Cultural Activities

Introduction

As I noted earlier, Ouyang Xiu’s discovery of mountains as a poetic subject came during his first post in Luoyang. There, mountain scenery was only one of many interesting experiences, and it was not until his first exile in Yiling in the mid to late 1030s that he began in earnest to express the spiritual consolation which spectacular mountainous landscapes gave him. No doubt this realization was motivated by the lack of other means of relaxation in such a cultural backwater.

Ouyang’s second period of exile in Chuzhou during the mid-1040s increased his appreciation of the mood-changing power of mountains, and even more so the deep tranquillity of their pure spring-waters.

Later, during the 1050s and 1060s, working in positions of great responsibility in the capital Kaifeng, Ouyang’s opportunities for mountain excursions lessened, and aging prevented too much physical exertion. Most of his poems concerning mountains from this period thus evoke the feelings of peaks and valleys, forests and streams by the imaginative contemplation of cultural and everyday objects. I have dealt with several such works, ostensibly on subjects like painted screens, unusual stones, or music, yet greatly expanded into powerful descriptions of the mountains Ouyang has encountered in the past.

Here, I would like to examine Ouyang’s poems on other aspects of everyday life, to ascertain what connection, if any, they show to the themes and concerns of his mountain poetry. In particular, I am interested in whether Ouyang uses ordinary objects or activities as points of entry into a deeper, spiritually exhilarating imaginative world —
whether, in fact, there are other powerful symbols which inspire him to the same degree as mountains.

In this chapter, I will progress from the most basic level of human existence, that of eating and drinking, through other everyday objects and activities, to conclude with two of Ouyang's favoured cultural activities, calligraphy and music. These divisions do not necessarily imply a rising hierarchy of importance, since, as I hope to show, Ouyang frequently treats mundane activities as profound cultural events, and on the other hand, is anxious not to lose sight of ordinary life even in his most esoteric cultural pursuits.

Following this chapter, a further chapter will deal with Ouyang's many poems on buildings and gardens — the immediate environment of his everyday life — and with the plants and animals which he encountered within them. Obviously there will be a certain overlapping of topics between the two chapters, particularly since Ouyang tends not to restrict himself to a single theme in each poem.

Drinking Tea and Wine

Yoshikawa Kōjirō has noted the growing popularity of tea-drinking during the Song dynasty, as compared to wine. Su Shi (1037-1101) and later Lu You (1125-1209), he claims, were the first poets to compose profusely on the subject of tea, and the delicate stimulation provided by tea serves as a suitable image for the more intellectual Northern Song poetic style, as opposed to the drunken intensity of wine-inspired Tang dynasty poets.¹

Judging by the content of his poetry, Ouyang Xiu does not yet belong to the generation of tea-drinkers. A very large proportion of his works include references to wine or drunkenness, and even granting the possibility that his use of such drinking imagery

¹ See Yoshikawa 37.
may often be used in a figurative sense,² it seems that he did spend the greater part of his leisure relaxing or forgetting his cares with the aid of wine. In this way, he resembles earlier poets, such as Li Bai (701-762) and Tao Qian (c.365-427).³

At the same time, Ouyang did leave a handful of remarkable poems on drinking tea, the earliest of which gives a fine impression of the mystical associations of the beverage. This work was written in 1031, and entitled “The Buddhist Monk Wisdom of the Moon Travels to the Southern Peak.”⁴

All your days you think of clouds and ravines,
Returning south, your heart is broad and expansive.
Blue mountains; entering the road to Chu,
4 White waters; gazing on the lakeside fields.
At rural crossings you have only a Buddhist alms bowl,
Mountain homes are short of money for offerings.
When you arrive it will still be early spring,
8 Accept some “delicate brew” before the green peaks.

This work is a fine example of Ouyang’s regulated verse, a form with which he is not usually associated.⁵ Here, the two middle couplets achieve the required parallelism,

² For instance his claim in “Record of the Drunken Old Man Pavilion” that “the Drunken Old Man’s intention does not lie in wine but among the mountains and waters. As for the joys of mountains and waters, he attains them in his heart and makes an analogy of them with wine.” See Ji vol.1, 5.36-37. For a full translation, cf. Egan 215-217.
³ See below for some comparisons with the poems of Tao Qian and Li Bai.
⁴ Ji, vol.1, 2.61. “Wisdom of the Moon” is my rendition of Zhichan (智蟾), literally “wisdom toad.” The toad is often used as a synecdoche for the moon, since such a creature supposedly dwelt there.
and lines 3-4 are particularly arresting, their disguised subject blending with the natural environment — “Blue mountains; entering the road to Chu./White waters; gazing on the lakeside fields.” Yet Ouyang also manages to give a sense of progression through the poem, so that the parallelism does not result in static observation. Hence, we move from Chu mountains (line 3) to, probably, Lake Dongting (line 4); then from rural crossings over water back up into the mountains around the Southern Peak. As a result, the final couplet, beginning “when you arrive,” seems the inevitable conclusion to the tiring journey, and the tea which the monk can enjoy becomes all the more refreshing after such immense exertions.

The association of Buddhist or Daoist adepts with tea-drinking is not a new one. In the Tang dynasty, a famous poem on tea by Lu Tong (?-c.798), one of a group of literati in the circle of Han Yu (768-824), described the cumulative effects of drinking seven bowls of tea in quick succession: “At the fifth bowl,” he concludes, “my muscles and bones are purified;/At the sixth bowl I communicate with immortal spirits;/At the seventh bowl I cannot drink any more,/Feeling only a pure whistling wind rising beneath my armpits!” Likewise, Buddhist writings make occasional references to tea-drinking. For example, the recorded sayings of the mid-Tang Chan master Mazu Daoyi 马祖道一 (709-788) contain the following encounter:

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7 In Julian F. Pas, trans., *The Recorded Sayings of Ma-Tsu* (New York: E. Mellen Press 1987) 95, section 10. I have changed the transliteration of names from Wade-Giles to *pinyin*. Cf. *Dainihon Zokuzōkyō* (Kyōto 1905-1912) vol. 24.5. Note also Case 48 from *the Blue Cliff Record* (*biyanlu* 碧岩錄), originally compiled by the early Song Chan master Xuedou Chongxian 雪竜重顯 (980-1052), which begins: “When Minister Wang entered Zhaoqing they were making tea. At the time Elder Lang was holding the tea kettle for Ming Zhao. Lang turned the kettle over...” Translation by Thomas and J.C. Cleary in *The Blue Cliff Record* (Boulder and London: Shambhala 1977) vol.2, 332. Again I have changed the spelling of names to *pinyin*. Here, it seems that a formal tea-making ceremony is taking place. Elder Lang overturns the kettle in typically iconoclastic Chan fashion. Cf. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (Tokyo 1922-1933) vol.48, 2003.183.
One day Chan master Letian Weijian sat in dhyana behind the dharma hall. Mazu noticed him and went to blow twice in his ear. Jian rose from his concentration, noticed it was Mazu and went back into concentration. Mazu went to his room and sent a servant with a cup of tea to Jian. Jian ignored it but returned to the hall.

Whether or not Ouyang knew of this collection, he certainly associated the Buddhist monk “Wisdom of the Moon” with tea-drinking. The following poem, about a Daoist practitioner, emphasises the mystical properties of the drink even more explicitly:

Giving Dragon Tea to Xu, Practitioner of the Way [1068]

The Daoist adept of Yingyang, a traveller of dark evening mists,
His coming is like a floating cloud; he departs without a trace.
At night he faces the Northern Dipper’s Platform of Supreme Purity,
4 He speaks not his real name; people know nothing about him.
I have a cake of Dragon Tea; an ancient pale jade disc,
The Spring of Nine Dragons runs at a depth of a hundred feet.9
I entreat you to draw from the well and endeavour to boil it up,
8 It has a fragrance, taste and colour transcending this mortal world.

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8 In Ji vol.1, 2.56-57. For Yingyang in line 1, see the following note.
9 Dragon tea (longcha 龍 茶) is probably Longfeng (龍 鳳 “dragon phoenix”) Tea, also known as tuan cha (團 茶 “round tea”). According to Ouyang’s “Notes on Returning to the Fields” (Guitian lu 歸 田 錄), the Governor of Jian’an, Cai Xiang, for whom see below, sent up to the capital small discs of Dragon Tea, called xiao tuan (小 團 “little rounds”) during the Qingli Reign period (1041-48). See Ji vol.3, 14.96-97. Cf. Ji vol.2, 8.36-37. However, since Ouyang is addressing Xu, an inhabitant of Yingyang Mountain, near Luoyang (present Henan Province) the Spring of Nine Dragons in line 6 is presumably situated there. Because of its similar association with dragons, the spring’s waters would blend harmoniously with the tea.
Xu has already appeared in the poem “Presented to Xu, Practitioner of the Way,” which precedes this work in Ouyang’s collection. Clearly he has little to do with the ordinary world of social discourse: if he visits at all, as he did in that poem, he is like a floating cloud, transitory and unattached — “he laughs at me, white-haired, growing old amidst red dust” — and then he leaves “without a trace.” Ouyang must somehow justify presenting a cake of expensive Dragon Tea to such an other-worldly person; he does so by claiming that the tea has similar transcendent attributes.

In the poem written to send off Wisdom of the Moon, we saw the monk returning to the mountains, the original environment of tea bushes. Here, thirty seven years later, Ouyang reasserts the connection between tea and mountains, this time emphasising the deep waters of the Spring of Nine Dragons, perfectly suited for bringing out the exquisite flavour of Dragon Tea. It is true that the reclusive subjects of these two poems both make their home in the mountains, hence perhaps it is inevitable that Ouyang would join his discussion of tea with their environment. Yet turning to a much longer poem on tea addressed to Mei Yaochen — certainly an urban dweller — there is a similar return to the original source of the leaves:

*Tasting New Tea, Presented to Shengyu* [1058].

From Jian’an, a distance of three thousand *li,* the capital in the third month tastes new tea.

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10 *Ji* vol.3, 2.56, translated in the preceding chapter.
11 This is line 14 of the above-mentioned poem “Presented to Xu, Practitioner of the Way.”
12 In *Ji* vol.1, 2.35-36. Also in *Xuanji.*
13 Jian’an was a commandery in what is now Fujian Province.
People naturally love to be first and set their minds on victory,
4 Among the massed things they value the early, and proudly boast to each other.
The year ends, and the coldest days pass; spring is about to stir,
Hibernating thunder hasn’t yet woken to drive forth dragons and snakes.
During the night one hears drums banging, filling the mountain valleys,
8 A thousand people assist with shouts, their voices sound and resound.
Ten thousand trees are cold and dull; unable to rouse from sleep,
This bush is the only one that has already sent out shoots.
Now I realize it is an object of supreme spiritual power,
12 Truly fitting that it alone should receive the beauties of Heaven and Earth!
All morning they select and pick, without filling a cupped hand,
Strung together, the pendants are small, round and slightly concave.
(How base in comparison the “spears” and “flags” of the coming rainy season:
16 So numerous they are not worth valuing, just like harvested hemp!)
The Imperial Governor of Jian’an urgently sent some to me,
With fragrant cattail leaves as wrapping, and a seal attached askew.
The spring is sweet, the porcelain clean, and even the weather is fine,
20 At our seats we make our selection; the guests are select too.

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14 “Things,” or “objects” (lines 11, 27), wu 物 can include plants, like tea, and even living creatures. It is an important term in Ouyang’s poetry, appearing in many of the works translated below. Unfortunately, no single English word can encompass its broad range of meanings.
15 Dragons and snakes symbolize the spirits of water, and here refer to spring monsoons, a climatic feature of South-East and Central China. Thunder is personified as a duke driving a rumbling chariot, here perhaps drawn by the dragons and snakes.
16 Pendants describe the tenderest new shoots of tea; spears and flags are the larger leaves whose flavour is more bitter. For the various grades of leaves in the Song Dynasty, see John Blofeld, op.cit., especially 17-20.
Its fresh fragrance and tender hue seem to be just created,
Appearing not to have come so far, from the distant reaches of the Empire.
Halting my spoon, I tip the bowl to test the path of the water,
24 Gazing at it, level with the sky, I watch the milky flowers.17
How pitiful those vulgar types who grasp the metal steamer,18
With a fierce flame they scorch its back to resemble a scaly toad.
It’s always been that True Objects inspire a true manner of enjoyment,
28 In vain I meet the Poet Elder; together we sigh and exclaim.19
But in no time they rise as one, looking for wine to drink,
It’s just the same as performing the Odes, but concluding with wild whooping!20

The first two lines of the poem juxtapose Jian’an, three thousand li distant, and the
capital, Kaifeng, where people can drink the newly-picked tea rushed from Jian’an. The

17 I.e. the ground up leaves floating on the surface of the boiling tea. Lu Yu 隆羽 (733-804), in his Tea Classic (Chajing 茶經) describes this bubbly mixture as: “Resembling chrysanthemum blossoms falling into the middle of a winecup.” See Chajing (Yiwen Yinshuguan, Shanghai) juan 3.3, column 7. There is a translation of this Tang work with introduction: Francis Ross Carpenter, trans., The Classic of Tea (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co. 1974).
18 Though Chen and Du (in Xuanji 175-176, n.5) give “yellow brick (of tea)” for jin ding 金錫, neither ding nor the variants in the textual note (Ji vol.1, 2.35) are defined as such in the Zhongwen dacidian (Taipei 1966). However, this dictionary does give an illustration of a ding 錫 (vol.34, 41408) adding that it is a pot with feet and a place for a flame underneath, often used to keep cooked foods hot (hence my translation “steamer”). Ouyang himself uses the word bing 鋳 (“brick” or “cake”) when describing this very tea (see the following poem below, line 7, and a prose description in Ji vol.2, 8.36-37), and it is unlikely that he would suddenly change his terminology here. The confusion seems to be that he adds jin 金 to both words: in this case, jin means metal; in the following poem, as he explains elsewhere, jin refers to the golden thread design used to emboss the cakes (bing) of tea.
19 Poet Elder (Shilao 詩老) was Mei Yaochen’s nickname.
20 “The Odes” translates more literally as “the Elegantiae” (ya 雅), i.e. one of the three sections of the Classic of Poetry (Shijing).
rest of the work moves back and forth between these two places, one moment focusing on the tea-drinking, the next returning to its source in the far-off mountains.

On the one hand, the work is a satire, attacking the empty pride of those in the capital, so determined to have the best of everything, yet completely unaware of the true depths of joy which fine tea offers. Though they “proudly boast to each other” about obtaining fresh leaves before everybody else, their vulgarity is manifested when, in their hurry to be first to boil the tea, they scorch the back of the tea-steamer so that it cracks like the skin of a toad. Finally, still in a hurry, such people gulp down their tea, and “in no time, they rise as one, looking for wine to drink” — just as incongruous as performing the Odes, most noble and refined of ancient ritual-musical compositions, then concluding with wild whooping.

On the other hand, Ouyang increases the effect of these satirical portions by emphasizing in inverse proportion his own worshipful attitude towards such a rare and mysterious brew, and stressing the sheer difficulty of procuring the tea leaves in the first place. Although a witty and humorous tone prevails throughout the poem, there is also a definite sense of awe at the deep creative powers of nature. Unlike the scheming efforts of people in the capital to gain precedence, tea bushes naturally and effortlessly produce shoots before all other trees. They appear even before the dragons and snakes — spirits of the waters — have driven forth thunder’s chariot to unleash spring rains on the world (line 6). Ouyang uses comic personification to contrast these early sprouting tea bushes with “the ten thousand trees.” The tea-pickers must rise while it is still night in order to select fresh dew-covered leaves before the sun’s rays dry and toughen them. The sound of their drum-banging and shouting fills the valley (lines 7-8) — apart from bolstering the pickers’ self-confidence as they venture onto a frightening, dark mountainside, all this commotion serves to drive away any wild animals, and particularly poisonous snakes, lurking around.
the picking area. Yet Ouyang decides to treat the noise as a wake-up call for the trees, dormant in winter. Other trees, he claims, are cold and dull, unable to rouse themselves from stupor; only the tea plant is already showing signs of activity (lines 9-10). Tea must therefore be an object of supreme spiritual power, and deserves to receive the beauties of Heaven and Earth. As if to stress this conclusion, Ouyang adds an extra two syllables to line 12, making it stand out from the regular rhythm of the poem.

Not only does the tea plant receive the beauties, or goodness, of Heaven and Earth, and their mysterious revitalizing powers, making tea an especially fine drink, but in the selection for the high-grade brands sent to the capital, only the most tender and delicate leaves of this excellent plant are considered. Thus, in line 13 Ouyang declares, with perhaps a little poetic licence: “all morning they select and pick, without filling a cupped hand.” Tea of this calibre surely deserves reverential care in its preparation and appreciation. In lines 17-24, Ouyang describes the process, from the dispatch of wrapped tea leaves post-haste to the capital, through selection of sweet springwater, clean vessels, fine guests and even a suitably clear day, onto appreciation of the fresh fragrance and tender hue of the leaves, as if “just created,” and finally, halting the stirring to contemplate the tea pouring out and the “milky flowers” of bubbles rising to the surface of the boiling liquid. All this activity, and still Ouyang hasn’t tasted the tea! Hence his frustration — here portrayed comically, but no doubt reflecting a true mood — with the “vulgar types,” who damage their tea steamers with the ferocity of their boiling, and then immediately rise en masse to look for further stimulation in wine.

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21 As noted by Blofeld, op.cit. 44.
22 The word translated “beauties” (yìnghuà 英華), apart from its basic meaning of beautiful appearance in grasses and trees, by extension also refers to goodness or excellence in people or things. Ouyang thus implies a moral as well as visual superiority in tea.
23 Ouyang’s description of the intricate tea-preparation process is very representative of the extant manuals such as Lu Yu’s Tang Dynasty Tea Classic — see above, note 17 for original text and translation — and the last Northern Song Emperor, Huizong’s (r. 1101-1125) Daguan chalun 大觀茶論 (Discussion of Tea in the Daguan Reign Period)
The poem is a cleverly-structured eulogy to the spiritual depth contained within an everyday social activity, and at the same time an attack on people who ignore that depth in favour of petty one-upmanship. However, I feel that the "vulgar types" who appear in this poem are not merely present as targets for Ouyang's merciless satire. If it were only tea which inspired his brush, he could easily have ignored these "fine guests" in favour of a much purer, undisturbed depiction of the drink alone. And yet, he seems fascinated by the challenge of portraying the oppositions and contrasts that he encounters in life. In this case, the presence of unappreciative people in "Tasting New Tea" adds to the depth of Ouyang's own appreciation and gives authenticity and universality to the situation he describes: vulgarity is just as much part of life as refinement, and neither exists separate from the other. As he summarizes: "People naturally love to be first and set their minds on victory" (line 3). Such a broadly inclusive attitude resurfaces even during Ouyang's most contemplative and other-worldly pursuits.

A second poem, matching the rhymes of the above work, supports this hypothesis, again in comic fashion; this time it is the over-stimulating effects of strong tea, and their resultant disruption of domestic order which Ouyang emphasises:

_Another Composition, Matching the Rhymes [1058]._  

I am old in years and all my worldly appetites have faded,  

Among my pastimes, only tea-drinking hasn't yet lost its appeal.

[i.e.1107-1110], partially translated in Blofeld, op.cit. 34-37. Blofeld also introduces the stages for preparing tea adopted in the Song: ibid. 32-33.  

24 The high quality of the tea and the clear ceremonial character of its preparation here suggest that tea-drinking should be classed as a cultural pursuit rather than a basic quenching of the thirst. Yet Ouyang deals with both the transcendent and quotidian sides of this activity. As I mentioned above, it is therefore difficult to draw a line between the everyday and the cultural in Ouyang's poetry. The reasons for this blurring of distinctions will become clearer as the chapter progresses.  

25 In Ji vol.1, 2.36. Alternative title is "Tea Song."
The valleys of Jian are extremely distant, and though I haven’t been there,
4 Since my youth I’ve often encountered people of Min26 who boast:
“Whenever we sip any of the ‘brewed grasses’ of Jiang and Zhe,27
We know they grow in messy clumps fit only for hiding snakes!
They cannot compare with our moist balms and pervasive scents, formed into
golden cakes,
8 With a pair of coiling dragons playfully added as a surprize.28
Along with these, the other grades are also rare and wonderful,
The smaller they are, the more exquisite, and all are dewy shoots.
Floating them, the “white flowers” are just like powdery milk,
12 You may catch a glimpse of the violet surface shining with radiant glow.
Holding [the cakes] in your hand you’ll love them; you won’t be willing to grind them,
They somewhat resemble printed seals with several complete indentations.

26 Min 閩 refers to the Jian’an area in South East China. The word is still used in the name of
the local dialect of Fujian and Taiwan, Minnan hua 閩南話 (“Southern Min dialect,”
often translated as “Hokkien”).
27 Jiang and Zhe was an administrative region corresponding to present eastern Jiangxi, all
of Zhejiang and Fujian, and parts of Jiangsu and Anhui Provinces south of the Yangtze
River. Elsewhere Ouyang describes the so-called “grass tea” (cao cha 草茶) of the Liang
Zhe region (i.e. present Zhejiang and parts of Eastern Jiangsu), the best of which was the
Rizhu 日 注 brand until the Jingyou Reign period (1034-1038), when the “white shoots of
Double Wells at Hongzhou [in present Jiangxi Province],” usually known as Double Wells
Tea (Shuangjing cha 雙井茶), became the superior blend. See Ouyang’s “Notes on
Returning to the Fields,” Ji vol.3, 14.85. As for the “snakes” of the following line, an
original note states: “It’s commonly said that today in the tea plantations of Jiang and Zhe
there are numerous snakes.”
28 Here, as in the previous poem, Ouyang, through his narrator, is doubtless describing the
Little Dragon brand, a particularly select Jian’an tea. Elsewhere Ouyang notes that cakes
of this tea “are prized to such an extent that people in the Palace usually line their tops
with a golden pattern” (Ji vol.3, 14.97). And: “People in the palace would cut gold [leaf
or thread?] to make flowery cursive-script patterns of dragons and phoenixes, and fix
them on [the cakes]. The eight families of [the ministers in] the two Secretariats [including
Ouyang’s family] were each allotted a portion to take home. We did not dare to grind [the
tea] and taste it, but stored it away, considering it a precious treasure” (Ji vol.2, 8.36-37).
It's said the powers of [this tea] are such, it can cure a hundred maladies,
16 And for losing weight, taken over time, it surely beats eating sesames!"

I must declare that claims like these are rather too extreme,
In reality, it's most effective at driving off symptoms of sleep.
The Tea Official, with a surplus from the tribute, happened to send me a portion,
20 The place is distant but the product still fresh: his generosity is fine.29

I boiled it myself and repeatedly poured: I just couldn't get enough,
As I said to myself: "Such joy is truly beyond all bounds!"
No-one mentioned that drinking too long would make my hands tremble,
24 Already I feel sick with hunger; my eyes are starting to blur.
My guests suffer "water problems" and weary of lifting their bowls,
Our mouths become no different from the toad that eats the moon!
The servants and maids watch from the side, puzzled yet also amused,
28 This hobby is strange and eccentric; it's really something to moan about.
And then, hearing poetic responses so strange as to be shocking,
All my children add to the din with cries of "Wah, wah, wah!"

If the first of the pair of poems concentrated on growing Jian’an tea, and then on
brewing and appreciating it, this second work focuses more on the craftsmanship required
to process the cakes of tea, and the physical and emotional effects of drinking it to excess.
Again there is a witty juxtaposition: here a committed advocate of the tea of Jian’an —
referred to as the region of Min in the poem (line 4) — spends the first half of the poem
expanding on the excellence of its leaves, far superior to the snake-infested — i.e. bitter?

29 As I suggested, the Tea Official is probably Cai Xiang (1012-1067), then Governor of
Jian’an — Ouyang refers to him as such in the first poem of this pair above. He was the
first to send Jian’an tea as an annual tribute to the Emperor, and composed a Record of
Tea explaining how to appreciate this variety. For this book, see below, note 30.
— brew produced further up the coast. Through this persona, Ouyang gives a quite detailed description of the appearance of the “golden cakes” of Jian’an tea (lines 7-8). Ouyang’s friend Cai Xiang (1012-1068) was the Governor of Jian’an who sent him this tea, leftover from the annual tribute offered to the Emperor. In his “Record of Tea,” Cai explains the references in line 7 to “moist balms and pervasive scents, formed into golden cakes” as follows: “As for the tea’s colour, white is valued, but for caked tea normally one oils its surface with precious balms, and consequently there are green, yellow, violet and black varieties . . . Tea has its original fragrance, but those who send in the tribute mix a little ‘dragon’s brain’ with the balm, intending to improve its scent.” Thus Ouyang seems to have such scented “white tea” and judging by lines 8 and 14 of the poem, there is an embossed golden double-dragon design imprinted on the cakes.

Continuing the eulogy in lines 11-12, the “person of Min” describes the appearance of the ground tea floating on the water — “white flowers like powdery milk” — and perhaps as the powder radiates to the edges of the bowl, it does resemble a “radiant glow” as he claims (line 12): this latter image seems a mixture of true appreciation of the beauty of “white tea” with the hyperbole of those who would promote the products of their home region. Moreover, not only does the tea look beautiful, it also has power to cure a hundred diseases, and helps people lose weight. How could one refuse such an endorsement?

In the second half of the poem, Ouyang corrects this over-favorable picture by giving an excellent portrayal of himself as a gullible consumer who learns from experience that nothing is as good as it seems. With the advantage of hindsight, he claims that the tea advocate goes too far; that the only real effect of this tea is to make one too excited to

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30 From Cai Xiang, Cha Lu 茶録 (Shanghai: Shangwu 1936) 1. “Dragon’s brain” is a kind of tree (Dryobalanops aromatica) with a natural aromatic scent similar to sandalwood.
31 See note 28, where Ouyang refers to dragons and phoenixes. There, the “gold” is the colour of the design, not that of the tea itself.
sleep. To prove his point, he paints a hilarious picture of a refined social evening gone
awry: "No-one mentioned that drinking too long would make my hands tremble . . . /My
guests suffer 'water problems' and weary of lifting their bowls./Our mouths become no
different from [that of] the toad that eats the moon!" (lines 23, 25-26). Though physically
they feel terrible, their minds are racing; their civilized poetry contest becomes an
uncontrolled exchange of strange and shocking phrases. The servants snigger, the children
wail with terror, and the whole evening dissolves into ugly and noisy pandemonium.32

The ending of this poem, with its reference to shocking one’s family through
strange phrases, is reminiscent of Han Yu’s work "Teeth Falling Out."33 As Egan has
pointed out, several of Ouyang’s more “extraordinary” poems display the influence of this
Tang poet.34 Yet Ouyang has extended Han Yu’s hyperbolic treatment of everyday
occurrences into a topic where one would not at first expect it. As the poem by Han Yu’s
friend Lu Tong, quoted above, illustrates, tea-drinking was previously associated more
with other-worldly, mystical imagery than with domestic concerns. Here, once again,

32 It is interesting to compare these conflicting reactions to tea with accounts of the
drink’s introduction into Europe from the 17th century onwards. Often such accounts are
similarly tinged with patriotism or pride for one’s homeland. For instance, in a poem
praising Catherine of Braganza, the wife of the English King Charles II, and “the first
English tea-drinking queen,” Edmund Waller (1606-1687) wrote: “The Muse’s friend, tea
doth our fancy aid,/Repress those vapours which the head invade,/And keep the palace of
the soul serene,/Fit on her birthday to salute the Queen.” The French were less
enthusiastic. One A. Saint Arroman commented in 1846: “The Englishman is naturally
lymphyatic; stuffed with beefsteaks and plum-pudding, he remains for two hours almost
annihilated by the painful elaboration of the stomach; one might call him a boa quasi-
asphyxiated by a gazelle that he has just swallowed. Tea alone can draw him from his
lethargic sleep; it gives him gaiety, energy, warmth and loquacity. The Frenchman, of a
nervous constitution, most usually experiences only fatal consequences from the use of
tea, which is most injurious to him. The French ladies, especially, should avoid this drink,
which occasions them painful spasms, whilst it merely shakes off moderately the indolence
of the London ladies.” Both quotations from Jamie Shalleck, Tea (New York: Viking
Press 1972) 60 and 51 respectively. Shalleck gives several other equally entertaining
examples.
33 See Qian Zhonglian, op.cit. vol.1, 171-174, esp. the last couplet: “Then I make a poem
from my singing./And take it to shock my wife and children!”
34 See Egan 104-105.
Ouyang manages to include both reverence and “low” comedy within a single structure, an incongruous opposition of levels which reminds us that reality must remain part of transcendence; that the sublime and the down-to-earth must exist within a single frame.

Secondly, Han Yu’s more unusual poems tend to balance on the border between comedy and terror, and draw their powerful effect from the premonition of a world collapsing just behind the comic facade. Ouyang Xiu, by contrast, seems to avoid dealing with such cosmic fears in his poetry. Instead, particularly in his old-style poems, he displays an almost instinctive desire to balance one extreme with another: in the latest case above, Ouyang balances a devout eulogy to Jian’an white tea with a shocking account of its effects on his family and guests. To concentrate only on the destructive side of events would seem to him a narrow-minded approach. As I hope will become clearer, overarching all these varying perspectives struggling for supremacy is Ouyang’s continual zest for discovery, for seeking out, or even creating, significance and structure in every aspect of his life, a venture which is, by definition, inclusive rather than one-sided.

Although Ouyang’s poetry uses wine imagery much more frequently than that of tea, it is remarkably difficult to find works specifically devoted to drinking wine, as

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35 Apart from “Teeth Falling Out” (see note 33) which is rather a disturbing portrait of physical decay due to aging, examples might include “Meng Dongye Loses a Son,” in which Han Yu dreams of asking Heaven what was the reason for such a bereavement — Heaven answers by saying that life is meaningless — or “First Eating Southern Food, Given to Eighteenth Yuan, Matching His Rhymes,” where Han Yu is so terrified by a sinister-looking snake bought from the market that he releases it back to its watery home. See Qian Zhonglian, op.cit. vol.1, 675-679 and vol.2, 1132-1136 respectively. This view of Han Yu’s disordered verse is influenced by J.D. Schmidt’s article, “Disorder and the Irrational in the Poetry of Han Yu,” in *Tang Studies* 7 (1989) 137-167. Schmidt translates the poems by Han referred to here, along with some even stranger examples.

36 For some other poems on tea by Ouyang, see “Double-Wells Tea” and “Matching Mei Gongyi’s ‘Tasting Tea’” in *Ji* vol.1, 2.93 and 2.97. For a contrast with earlier tea poems, see the selection provided in the Ming scholar Chen Jiru’s *Chadongbujuan* 2, 13-17, which gives several Tang compositions (appended to Cai Xiang, op.cit. See note 30 above).
opposed to those which mention the subject in passing. Most references to wine occur
toward the end of poems meditating on his checkered career, or on the aging process —
wine is one way to forget gloomy thoughts, and since life is short, we should take such
pleasure while we can. An example of this kind of wine poem is the following, from 1059:

_Composed in answer to Secretary Liu Yuanfu: after you came over, at midnight wine was
set out, and we went over our mixed records of past days' travels. Also sent to Mei
Shengyu._

A gentleman suddenly sought me out,
But what is left in my poor home?
An empty hall welcomes the clear breeze,
Fine fruits offer their unstrained wine.
Our letters and writings record former pleasures,
Debates and discussions mutually affirm and deny.
You want to know those of whom we wrote?
Their bones are mostly long decayed.
Since it is so for those who came before,
Coming after, how can we last long?
Thus it is that people of old declared:
"Pass the cup, and do not stay your hand."

This is a rather sombre poem, quite representative of Ouyang's more reflective
aspect. The theme is a common one throughout the Chinese poetic tradition: thinking of
those who have passed away, one realizes the inevitability of one's own end. The

37 Ji vol.1, 2.38-39. Liu Yuanfu was the stylename of Liu Chang (1019-1068); Mei
Shengyu, that of Mei Yaochen.
injunction to drink wine to drown such fatalistic thoughts, as Ouyang freely admits, originated with “people of old.”

However, there are two related points which add to the poem’s interest. First, there is the almost prose-like, argumentative diction utilized throughout the work, with some lines remarkable due to their conscious lack of elegance, for example lines 9-10: “Since it is so for those who came before,/Coming after, how can we last long?” (qianzhe ji yiran, hou lai ning de jiu 前者既已然，後來寧得久). Many of Ouyang’s mature works adopt this plain style to a certain degree. Second, Ouyang takes on the persona of a poverty-stricken, humble fellow visited by the “gentleman” Liu. His home is “poor” and his hall “empty;” he can offer only a “clear breeze” — presumably it is the hot season — and home-made wine. Here, surely, is a touch of Ouyang’s wit in an otherwise sober poem: at the time of writing, he was probably governor of the capital, Kaifeng, hence one can imagine how poor was his home!38 Both these characteristics suggest the influence of Tao Qian: were it not for the explanation in the lengthy title, Ouyang’s poem would fit comfortably alongside the earlier poet’s “In the Jiyou Year [409 AD], Ninth Day of the Ninth Month.”39

Passing, passing, the autumn is already ending;
Bleak, bleak, wind and dew combine.
The spreading grasses no longer flourish;
Garden trees, bare, wither away.

38 Ouyang held the post of Kaifeng Governor until the second month of the 4th year of the Jiayou Reign period [1059], then took a succession of central government positions, gradually rising to one of the highest posts, Assistant Councillor in Charge of State Affairs, by the eleventh month of the following year. See James T.C. Liu, Ou-yang Hsiu 70; and Ji vol. 1, nianpu 1.15-16.
Pure air is clear with leftover moisture,
In the vast distance, the horizon is high.
Sad cicadas cease their echoing,
8 Flocks of geese cry in cloud and mist.
Ten thousand transformations, changing in a moment,
As for human life: is it not hard?
From ancient times, all have passed away,
12 Dwelling on this, my inner heart burns.
What can I use to express my emotion?
Unstrained wine can give joy for now:
A thousand years are beyond my understanding,
16 I'll just use it to make this morning eternal.

Other poems by Ouyang involving wine also seem inspired by Tao Qian, and particularly by his spirit of calm acceptance of destiny. The pair of poems below echoes Tao's love for the chrysanthemum, a flower that manages to bloom in autumn, while most plants wither: 40

Answering Professor Li: two seven-syllable poems [1067] 41

(i) Ladling from the vat the unstrained wine, a fresh vintage is ready,
Feeling the frost, only now do cold chrysanthemums blossom.

40 For an example of Tao's chrysanthemum poems, see "Living at Leisure on the Ninth Day," in Wang, op.cit. 80, especially lines 9-10: "Wine can reduce the hundred worries, Chrysanthemums know how to stop receding years." Also translated in Hightower, op.cit. 47-48.
41 In Ji vol.1, 2.114-115.
Cultivating cinnabar, the Daoist adept’s face is smooth as jade,

4 Loving wine, the Mountain Duke is drunk as a muddy puddle.\(^4\)

Don’t be sad that sepals, following the bees, are plucked and gone,

There still remains a fragrance, with butterflies coming to alight.

And do not complain that school duties leave you idle and cold,

8 Here we can find a cup of fragrance to lift in toast together.

(ii) Sitting together beside the railing, the sun about to slant down,

Once more let us float golden sepals on flowing ‘roseate clouds.’

You wish to know a remedy to ward off lengthening years?

4 Just when the hundred plants wither, to see new blossoms emerge.

Here, Ouyang has transcended the gloom of losing old friends, and the premonitions of his own death. It is interesting that this pair of poems was completed eight years after the one addressed to Liu Chang above; Ouyang is that much closer to mortality, yet seems content now to immerse himself in the joys of new wine and natural beauty.\(^4\) Wine thus becomes not a means to drown sorrows, but a symbol of renewal in a season when life is being extinguished. In this regard, the wine is inextricably joined with the autumn-blooming chrysanthemum. As frost descends, the chrysanthemums are at their...
peak and the wine is just newly fermented (poem i, lines 1-2); as night comes — another portentous image — Ouyang and his friend again pluck some “golden sepals” from the flowers to float on the “flowing roseate clouds” of wine (poem ii, lines 1-2). They will drink the flower-wine mixture — the “cup of fragrance” — perhaps hoping to receive that same revitalizing power. Yet as Ouyang admits, the best kind of life-prolonging remedy is to see new blossoms emerge, just when the hundred plants wither (poem ii, line 4); in other words, to gain a spiritual inspiration from contemplating the rhythms of destruction and creation in nature.

The first poem in particular gives a series of contrasting pairs, possibly to show how nature, in the midst of destroying, still displays creative power. Lines 5-6, with their unusual syntax, beautifully contrast the chrysanthemum sepals, taken away by the bees, with the flowers’ fragrance remaining to attract butterflies — the colourful, flower-like butterfly doubtless covers over the bare patches on the real plants: “Don’t be sad that sepals, following the bees, are plucked and gone; There still remains a fragrance, with butterflies coming to alight.” The placement of the verbs at the end of each line emphasises the opposition — sepals plucked and gone; butterflies coming to alight — with the latter enduring. Similarly, in lines 7-8, Ouyang contrasts the cold and aimless school duties of Professor Li, spending an evening alone, with the warmth and conviviality of a shared drink of chrysanthemum wine. Thus the natural joys of life, wine, flower-appreciation and friendship, are enough to overcome approaching winter cold. Finally, there is an implicit contrast running through both poems between Professor Li, depicted as a practitioner of the Daoist art of prolonging life through imbibing alchemical potions, and Ouyang himself, a literatus seeking solace in drunkenness. In the end, the true method for prolonging life, he implies, lies neither in excessive alcohol consumption nor in mixing cinnabar-based elixirs, but rather in being open to the creative resources of the natural world.
There are two general themes emerging from this pair of wine poems which display affinities with Ouyang's poems on tea. Firstly, with regard to his late poetry — that composed from about 1067 onwards — Ouyang increasingly becomes fascinated with Daoist recluses, or any of that group of people who avoided ordinary society and preferred to live alone in mountain caves and other isolated places. Although the subject of these wine poems, Li, is referred to as "professor," he is clearly a Daoist practitioner too. Similarly, above Ouyang recorded making a gift of tea to another "Practitioner of the Way" called Xu, who even visited him in 1068. Among his later works are the names of several other recluse figures, usually also referred to as daoshi 道士, with whom Ouyang was in contact. By this stage, he finally seems to have realized that his career had brought him little but trouble, and that the true joys of life, if not consisting necessarily in esoteric alchemical practices, were at least best sought away from the ambition and dust of the capital. Hence, whether the topic of his poem is wine, tea, flowers or mountains, the reader will sense in most of these later compositions a turning away from public life and urban society towards simple rustic pleasures.

Nevertheless, I feel that such sentiments do not indicate a complete change of perspective on life. Ouyang continues to value the natural process over the forced methods of alchemy and the like; moreover, as I noted in the biographical sketch above, his attitude to official life has been ambivalent since at least the early 1050s. Perhaps it is rather the death of most of his close friends which explains the sheer predominance of this introverted poetry revolving around reclusive themes. Already in the first wine poem above, addressed to Liu Chang and Mei Yaochen and composed in 1059, Ouyang was mourning the loss of people mentioned in his earlier writings; since then, Mei had passed

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44 See for example the poems entitled "County Magistrate of Fugou, Zhou Zhifang, Recorded Showing Me the Poem Given by Talented Elder Su Zimei to the Daoist Huang . . ." (Ji vol.1, 2.115), "Training a Deer" (ibid. 2.57), and "Teasing the Recluse of Shitang Mountain" (ibid. 2.58), among others.
away in 1060, Cai Xiang, the "Tea Official," followed in 1067 and Liu Chang died the next year.

A second common feature displayed in these works on wine and tea drinking, which still emerges in spite of the dissolution of Ouyang's social circle, is a determination to seek out the creative power latent in the everyday world. Perhaps it is true that normally Ouyang was forced by his busy schedule to gulp down his tea and wine without much thought of their origins or deeper associations. Yet one feels that, whenever time permitted and friends were gathered together, he would strive to reveal a profound, even ritual, significance in ordinary social intercourse. Hence tea contains enormous resources for spiritual refreshment due to its early sprouting when other plants still slumber; similarly, autumn wine mixed with chrysanthemums symbolizes the strength to bloom and ripen when all else is withering; thirdly, even the social gathering within which these activities take place, no matter how vulgar or rowdy its participants become, can be elevated into a significant occurrence through the craft and structuring of poetry.45

It is unlikely that Ouyang really believed in a beneficial magical force unleashed after drinking certain natural substances. His "Another Composition, Matching the Rhymes" above mocks any such outlandish claims by giving a picture of what we might call caffeine-inspired disorder. Nevertheless, he acts as a strong advocate for the imaginative power of both poetic symbols and natural objects themselves to transform daily activities into profound events.

Having drawn some parallels between Ouyang's tea and wine poems, I will conclude this section with two longer works concerning wine. Both suggest that the unique characteristic of wine for Ouyang, as for innumerable poets before and since, was still its ability to console, or to numb the effects of sorrow, whether his own or that of others. At the same time, like the poems above, both works apparently display more belief

45 This last point about poetry is implied by the content of these works rather than directly stated. Below are several compositions which praise the transforming power of poetry.
in the creative, imaginative power of particular plants, and the sustaining, mood-
transforming possibilities of poetry, than they do in wine alone. The first work again treats
the chrysanthemum and should need little prior explanation, except to point out the
carefully delineated time progression from “recently” (line 1) to “this morning” (line 7) —
a technique similar to the comparison of successive mountains in several poems of the
previous chapter.

Composed on meeting for a drink at Shengyu’s house; also presented to Yuanfu, Jingren
and Shengcong [1059] 46

I remember recently when I visited you on the festival of the ninth, 47
We happened to see before the terrace two bushes of chrysanthemums.
I loved them, and wished to circle them at least a hundred times,
4 But beneath your hall there wasn’t even room to place my feet.
Plucking a flower I withdrew to my seat, sniffing it now and then,
Inebriated I returned home, my hands still sweetly scented.
This morning, once again, I pay a visit to your house,
8 The two chrysanthemums before the terrace still oppose their clumps.
But the withered stems and wilted leaves have suffered from wind and frost,
No longer are the bushes filled with gold interspersed with green.
In the capital, every family tries to cultivate blossoms,
12 Emerald terraces and crimson columns open on flowery rooms.

46 In Ji vol.1, 2.43-44. For Shengyu and Yuanfu, see n.37 above; Jingren was the
stylename of Fan Zhen 范鎮 (1008-1088) one of those who accompanied Ouyang grading
the civil service examinations of 1057. I have not yet discovered to whom Shengcong (聖
従) refers.
47 Though Ouyang simply writes “on the ninth day,” it is likely that he means the Double
Ninth Festival, i.e. the 9th day of the 9th month in the traditional Chinese calendar. Tao
Qian had earlier famously associated this festival with viewing chrysanthemums and
drinking wine: one of his poems uses the same term to refer to the festival (see n.40
above; and cf. the work referred to in n.39, where Tao adds the month).
So why on earth do we come here to face two withered stalks?
Together we sit beneath the eaves,\textsuperscript{48} extremely narrow and cramped.
The Poet Elder's compositions send out Heavenly flowers,
16 They can't be compared to the greens and reds of common plants and trees!
Common plants remain in bloom for only a matter of days,
Heavenly flowers need no roots; they're always before one's eyes.
So, every time I come to drink at your house, they make me
20 Lie down at the corner of the wall, unaware of the tall wine-bottles.
The other guests are youngsters, all of them worthy and free of care,
Don't think me unusual, now that I'm going bald at the temples.
You must know that rosy young faces will not last very long,
24 If there's wine, you ought to enjoy it,\textsuperscript{49} and urge each other on.

Although on one level Ouyang seems to paint a bleak portrait of himself — an old fellow giving unheeded warnings to the surrounding youngsters of the inexorable process of aging and decline — I feel that the poem contains too many humorous details and flashes of wit to be classed as fatalistic. Rather, he is adopting another self-caricaturing persona who, in his very ingenious exaggeration, reveals a mind still sharp, and a persevering spirit. For instance, in line 3, he borrows a trope from one of Han Yu's "Plum Blossoms, Two Poems": "I loved them, and wished to circle them at least a hundred times."\textsuperscript{50} However, Mei Yaochen being a rather lowly official, his terrace is diminutive,

\textsuperscript{48} "Beneath the eaves," or more literally "at the edge of the eaves" (qiong yan 窈窈). Since yan can also mean a kind of waterside terrace, this phrase could be translated "the edge of the terrace (by the water);" but Ouyang mentions no water in this poem, and uses another word for Mei's terrace (jie 戴) in lines 8 and 2, hence "eaves" seems more likely here.

\textsuperscript{49} A variant gives: "If there's wine, you ought to drink it..."

\textsuperscript{50} Han Yu’s couplet, in which the plum tree is hurt that he hasn’t visited sooner, goes: "I ask it [the plum tree] but it’s unwilling to say the reason/So alone I circle it a hundred times until the sun is setting." See Qian Zhonglian, op.cit. vol.2, 777-781, poem 1, ll. 5-6.
and Ouyang’s romantic impulse cannot be realized: “But beneath [his] hall, there wasn’t even room to place my feet!” He retreats to his seat, having to make do with plucking a flower and occasionally sniffing it; unexpectedly this contingency gives him more lasting pleasure since, on the way home, drunk, his hands still bear the sweet scent of chrysanthemum.

The next section (lines 7-14) begins very bleakly — today even the late-blooming chrysanthemums have withered — but the caricature is reasserted as Ouyang portrays himself ignoring all the luxurious and spacious indoor flower gardens of the rich, instead coming “to face two withered stalks,” and sitting together with Mei “beneath the eaves, extremely narrow and cramped!” (lines 13-14).

In the third section (lines 15-20) we discover that all this talk of Mei’s poverty, and the desolate bleakness of his early winter garden, though perhaps containing a kernel of truth, is in fact a hyperbolic foil to offset the brilliance of Mei’s writings: the works of Mei, the “Poet Elder,” are “Heavenly flowers”; unlike ordinary flowers, which wither in a matter of days, such Heavenly flowers “need no roots,” so are “always before one’s eyes.” Thus, though Ouyang comes ostensibly to have a drink at Mei’s place, he ends up “lying down at the corner of the wall,” oblivious to the wine-bottles — presumably lost in admiration at Mei’s poetic talents.51

The poem concludes with Ouyang’s persona urging the younger guests to drink up and enjoy themselves while they have their youth, since growing old, they’ll probably become as eccentric and ridiculous as himself. Thus, as in the long poems on tea above, so here comedy and caricature work to transform an ugly, or pathetic, situation into a bearable, and even meaningful, artwork.

51 In fact, he seems inebriated not by wine, but by poetry.
The final poem in this group concerned with wine deals with a different plant, meihua ("flowering apricot," usually translated as "flowering plum"). Varieties of this tree are native to central China, particularly the Yangtze River region, hence Ouyang encountered apricot blossom during his first exile in Yiling (once also known as Xiling) in the second half of the 1030s. The apricot is famous for flowering in late winter, even while snow still covers the ground. Many Song dynasty poets developed a strong attachment to the tree, and composed numerous eulogies to its mysterious, cold-enduring strength, and to the exquisite delicacy of the pink tinting on its blossoms, which barely distinguished them from the surrounding snow.

Here, Ouyang, probably now living in Huazhou (in present Henan Province, north of the capital Kaifeng), matches the rhymes of a poem by one "Master Xu." Ouyang, as

52 The Latin name of this plant is prunus mume, and the more correct English name should be "Japanese apricot." See H. L. Li, The Garden Flowers of China (New York: Ronald Press 1959) 48-56. However, it would be rather odd to call a plant rooted in the Chinese poetic tradition "Japanese." "Flowering apricot" seems a suitable compromise. Previous translators have all used "plum," as far as I am aware.

53 Yiling: present Yichang, Hubei Province. Judging by his memories in the poem below, Ouyang also saw the tree in the Luoyang area (present Henan Province) in the early 1030s.

54 For two sets of fine quatrains on the flowering apricot by Su Shi (1036-1101) see Wang Wengao et al, ed., Su Shi shiji (Beijing 1982) vol.6, 1735ff. ("Ten Poems Matching the Rhymes of Fengyi Yang Gongji’s Apricot Blossoms") and vol.6, 1746ff. ("Ten Quatrains Again Matching Yang Gongji’s Apricot Blossoms"). See also my unpublished paper “Su Shi and the Flowering Apricot”; cf. an article by Hans Frankel, “The Plum in Chinese Poetry,” in Asiatische Studien (Bern 1952) vol.6, 88-115.

55 The poem is undated, but placed between works dated 1042 and 1043 (see n.56 below for reference). There are at least two other undated works (Ji vol.1, 6.67 “Rejoicing at Snow, Shown to Master Xu;” and ibid. 6.64, “Seeing Off Master Xu to Become Judge at Xiuzhou”) in the same part of the collection which refer to Master Xu (Xu sheng 徐 生). Later, from around 1049, Ouyang consistently addresses one of his students, Xu Wudang 徐 無 黨 (fl.1040-1060) as Master Xu (e.g. in his prose farewell “Seeing Off Xu Wudang Returning South” of 1054 [Ji vol.1, 5.66-67] and his poem “During the Dog Days of Summer, Presented to Masters Xu and Jiao,” of 1049 [ibid. 2.8-9]). It is not clear how long Xu Wudang was a formal student of Ouyang, but there are two letters from Ouyang to Xu which probably both date from the early 1040s. The second is dated 1043. (Ji vol.2, 8.72-73). In these Ouyang mentions that he has recently returned to the capital — his posting to Huazhou lasted only a few months, from late 1042 to early 1043 — and regrets
is his wont, embraces two distinct topics. First, he revives his own memories of the apricot blossoms amidst snow, triggered by the “pure poem” Xu has given him, and enters an almost visionary state of clear tranquillity towards the centre of the work. Second, having reawoken to the harsh present reality of a northern winter, with sand and snow, but not a blossom in sight, he realizes just how powerful was the effect of Xu’s poem. In gratitude, he offers encouragement in return, also in the form of poetic lines, promising Xu that spring warmth will soon replace the cold, and until then, drinking wine is a good way to become oblivious to the weather outside.

Thus, once again wine remains in the background of a poem on endurance through difficult circumstances, and again it is combined with a blossoming flower and mood-changing poetry.

Matching “Facing the Snow, Recalling Plum Blossoms” [early 1043?].

Once I was posted to Xiling, amidst the River Gorges,

Wild flowers, in reds and violets, luxuriantly abounded.

Only a cold apricot tree remained among former acquaintances,

4 In that strange region, whenever I saw her I felt a lingering attachment.

Moved, I considered the blossoms to be natives of Central Luo,

But on these blossoms, birds of Shu cried in melancholy strains.

In those days I composed poems, but who was there to respond?

8 The powdery sepals plucked themselves, their pure fragrance dense.

that he and Xu cannot enjoy themselves together as in the previous year. He also comments on Xu’s writing style. Hence, I assume that Ouyang was with Xu Wudang in Huazhou, where they exchanged some poems including this one, and from that time Xu became Ouyang’s informal student, if only by correspondence at first. This information is important for deciding Ouyang’s location in the poem.

56 In Ji, vol.1, 6.67-68.
57 The region around Luoyang. Shu in the next line usually refers to the area around present Sichuan Province, but here seems to mean South-West China.
Nowadays, I clutch wine and face the remaining snow,
Yet still I recall, above the River, the tall towers and mountains.\(^{58}\)
With massed flowers in all four seasons — beauties in their throngs —
12 Why was it only this tree which made one want to select her?
In depths of winter, ten thousand trees stand erect, withered and dead,
Her jade beauty blossoms alone, enduring the clear cold.
Her fresh charm is dazzling white like a face seen in the mirror,
16 With graceful bearing she faces you: an immortal in the breeze.
What a shame that the northern lands lack such a tree,
Snow and hailstones drive across the level sands and streams.
Master Xu came with me as a sojourner in this prefecture,
20 Midst ice and frost, in a traveller's lodge, we welcomed in the New Year.
Remembering flowers, facing the snow, he rose early and seated himself:
His pure poem is a precious weapon to carve out stones of jade.
The scenery of the long River\(^{59}\) will soon be moved by warmth,
24 Before long you'll watch green willows, spring mist among them.
In a cold studio, solitary, what means of present consolation?
A morning drink will make you tipsy and you'll sleep content all afternoon!

There are two further details worth mentioning in this poem, both of which have appeared in Ouyang's other compositions. The personification of tea plants was a feature of the work “Tasting New Tea, Presented to Shengyu.” Here, an extended parallel is made between apricot blossoms and a beautiful female immortal, increasing the visionary implications of seeing flowers when all around is barren (lines 14-16). Secondly, as in

\(^{58}\) The “River” (\(jiang\)) in this line refers to the Yangtze, which flowed through Xiling (Yiling).
\(^{59}\) Here Ouyang uses the character \(he\), referring to the Yellow River running through the region of his present posting, Huazhou.
several of his other poems, Ouyang covers an extensive period of time during this poem: he includes his own past memories of Yiling and the flowering apricot; he then imagines Xu’s more recent feelings during the New Year festival, which inspired Xu’s poem (lines 21-22); interspersed with these past events are glimpses of Ouyang’s own present situation (lines 9, 17-18); and finally, he envisions the future arrival of spring in Huazhou (lines 23-24). Hence, through the use of imagination, Ouyang is able to include a wide range of events occurring through time along with their corresponding moods, thereby once again suggesting the variety and complexity of human experience. It is noteworthy that in this case, only three lines of a quite lengthy poem describe his present observations: the rest is all memory and imagination.

Ouyang’s poems on both tea and wine often lead the reader to a world of natural creative power occurring in the midst of destruction. Whether this world is the source of the drink, as in the case of tea-leaves, or merely combines the appreciation of particular plants with drinking, as with many wine poems, Ouyang manages in these works to transform a common activity into a spiritually significant and inspiring event. Also apparent in several of these poems is Ouyang’s talent for caricature and humour — another kind of transformative technique in which painful or difficult circumstances in real life become somehow meaningful when expressed in an artistic, witty manner. Finally, poetry writing itself features frequently in these works — poetry, it seems, is what will endure, like a “Heavenly flower,” even when the momentary pleasures of the activities recorded have long since passed from consciousness.

Food

Discussion of drinking would seem incomplete without an offering of food to accompany it. Next I will turn to the poems Ouyang composed after eating various novel dishes. As
with his poems on tea and wine, there are relatively few works specifically on this subject, but they include some of his most entertaining compositions.

I will begin with a humorous work which once again exemplifies Ouyang’s skill at opening up an enormous imaginary world from remarkably unpromising material. The subject is a so-called “bulgy-headed fish” (*datou yu* 達頭魚) which apparently enjoyed some popularity in Kaifeng dining rooms around the late 1050s:

*Offered in Answer to Shengyu’s Poem on the Bulgy-Headed Fish [1058].*

I’ve heard that, regarding the ocean’s greatness,

The species of creatures are truly innumerable.

Insects and shrimps stay among the shallows,

4 Sea-snails and shellfish pile up like mountains;

“Hairy fish” and “Deers’ Antlers”.

In one pint are hundreds of thousands.

As for harvesting, each has its season,

8 Consumption isn’t limited to north or south.

If the tiny creatures resemble those above,

The large ones include the utterly unfathomable.

Midst the vastness of breaker and wave,

12 An “island” rises for just a moment.

In an instant it sinks, seen no longer,

Now, you discover, it was a creature’s protruding spine!

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60 In Ji vol. 1, 2.44.

61 I cannot find “hairy fish” in any reference work, though there is a “hairy prawn” (*maoxia* 毛蝦) which Ouyang may refer to. As for the “deers’ antlers” (*ljiao* 鹿角), its locus classicus seems to be this poem! It is defined as “a small variety of fish” in the Zhongwen dacidian, op.cit., which then quotes this line. Yet the “antlers” suggest some kind of star-fish whose tentacles resemble a stag’s horns. Further research is necessary to clarify this point.
Sometimes it is beached, coming up with the tide,

16 Violently it dies, as if suffering exile.

Coastal dwellers call each other together,

With knives and saws, they struggle to hack and slice.

Shockingly, the segments of bones fill a cart,

20 The points of its whiskers are sharp as swords and halberds.62

The stink is perceptible for several tens of miles,

The lingering odour does not disperse for an age.

Now I know that where hundreds of rivers return,

24 There must be a power of latent capacity;

Sunken rarities and secret treasures:

Ten thousand forms not readily understood.63

Alas, the minuteness of your bulgy-headed [fish],

28 Who transported it to the nation’s capital?

Dry and withered, with hardly any flavour,

When prepared and washed, it’s a waste to fry it up!

From this I know there are extraordinary creatures,

32 But is it worthy to offer to fine guests?

Yet one morning we received your poem,

And from that time its false reputation was made!64

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62 The reference to sharp whiskers, or tusks, indicates a walrus rather than a whale, though it must be a particularly large one.

63 Or “not understandable in only one way” (bu yi shi 不 一 識).

64 An original note explains that people in the capital didn’t know of this fish until a provincial official sent some up from the coast, and Mei Yaochen managed to obtain a portion. See also Ouyang’s letter to Mei, dated 1057, in which it is clear that it was Ouyang who gave Mei the fish (Ji vol.3, 17.47). Mei must have responded with a poem, apparently no longer extant, which Ouyang answers here.
Although this poem does not purport to be more than a comic deflation of the undeserved popularity of the bulgy-headed fish, there is perhaps a more serious point lurking beneath the surface, namely that, like the fish, petty people also too easily gain a fine reputation in the capital, while those of infinitely greater talent and profundity are left in distant "oceans," unknown and unrecognized until they are washed up dead on the beach. In several of the poems treated above on tea and wine drinking, Ouyang juxtaposes high philosophical truths with everyday, even vulgar, concrete details, giving a deliberately incongruous effect. Here, he extends the technique into a full-blown parody of academic argumentation, venturing to "prove" that the bulgy-headed fish is hardly worth considering.

He begins from his own experience — what he has "heard" (line 1) — listing all the small sea creatures he can think of, and claiming that even a "pint" of sea-water contains hundreds of thousands of them (line 6). Then he progresses to the other extreme, the case of the walrus, so huge when it surfaces that it resembles an island — until it sinks down once more to the depths. To prove his claim that the bulgy-headed fish belongs to the masses of tiny, insignificant sea-creatures, he extends the hyperbolic description of the walrus over twelve lines (11-22) — more than the eight lines he grudgingly gives to the fish itself. Moreover, he drives his point home through the use of indirect illustration. Hence, when the walrus dies on the beach, he depicts a crowd of local people "hacking and slicing" with knives and saws (lines 17-18); even the sections of bone fill a cart, and the "whiskers," or tusks, are sharp as "swords and halberds" (lines 19-20). In these two lines, Ouyang adds to the incongruity by utilizing historical allusions, yet applying them in rather inappropriate ways: the first line has its source in the "Conversations of the States" (Guoyu 國 語): "Wu attacked Yue and caused Kuaiji [City] to fall; as for the bones they found there, the segments filled a cart."65 When such an image of the casualties of war is

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65 See Wolfgang Bauer, Guoyu yinde (Taipei 1973) 2.51, columns 2 and 5. This is in the "Conversations of Lu, part 2" section.
transferred to the description of a walrus carcass, one must surely treat it as educated black humour. Similarly with line 20 — “The points of its whiskers are sharp as swords and halberds” — which borrows a simile — “whiskers like halberds” — used, as in the “History of the Southern [Kingdoms]” (Nanshi 南史), to describe the appearance of a person with an aura of strength and authority. Here Ouyang takes advantage of the length of the walrus’ tusks to use the simile in its more literal sense.

Finally, in order to make the enormous creature lodge in the reader’s memory, Ouyang finishes this section with a grotesque image: “The stink is perceptible for several tens of miles;/The lingering odour does not disperse for an age” (lines 21-22). With this smell still lingering in our noses, Ouyang immediately jumps back to the high philosophical tone of the opening: “Now I know that where hundreds of rivers return,/There must be a power of latent capacity;/Sunken rarities and secret treasures:/Ten thousand forms not readily understood.”

Now turning grudgingly to the bulgy-headed fish, Ouyang bemoans the fact that not only does it lack flavour, but that after preparing and washing it, there’s virtually no meat left worth cooking. It would be embarrassing to offer so little to one’s guests. Coming on the heels of the shocking vision of the walrus carcass, with surrounding crowds of people “struggling to hack and chop,” and bones filling cartloads, Ouyang’s dismissal of the tiny fish is particularly biting. Hence his comment that only Mei Yaochen’s poetry could have made the fish’s reputation might be construed as a left-handed compliment. Yet, as I have noted above, Ouyang too takes great delight in choosing the most unpromising subject matter and creating from it fascinating poetry. Once again he has succeeded in removing the reader from a small, dead object to its source in the huge ocean environment, teeming with all manner of living creatures — from the miniscule to

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66 See Li Yanshou [Tang], Nanshi (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1975) 749, col.4, part of “Biography of Zhu Yanhui.”
the immeasurable — and once again he animates an inanimate object by utilizing his fertile imagination.67

There are at least two characteristics of Ouyang’s other poems about foods which are not represented in the “Bulgy-headed Fish” work, except in a very indirect way. Firstly, food usually brings to Ouyang’s mind the problem of correct government, and especially the effects of government on ordinary people. No doubt his time as an official in less prosperous, outlying mountain regions impressed on him the difficulties of merely harvesting sufficient food for the local inhabitants, let alone providing taxes in kind to the Imperial court and sending up delicacies for the tables of public officials in the capital. Secondly, and related to the first characteristic, Ouyang frequently reiterates his preference for simple, plainer foods — even those which at first taste bitter — consumed in beautiful natural surroundings with one’s close friends, over the most elegant, carefully prepared dishes gulped down with a crowd of ambitious colleagues in the over-decorated capital. The bulgy-headed fish is perhaps an example of such a “delicacy,” undeserving of its reputation, but eaten because it is the latest fashion. This second feature doubtless connects with the larger theme of longing for retirement from the worries and responsibilities of high office — a recurrent idea in Ouyang’s poetry from the 1050s onwards.

Yet allowing for these two characteristics, Ouyang manages to vary the style and specific content of each poem to suit its particular foodstuff, and he tempers the moralistic injunctions with wit and touches of humour, never losing sight of the need for aesthetic, as well as moral, appeal. For example, the following poem portrays a dish made from a kind of large clam, whose name translates literally as “cart pincers” (ju’ao 車螯).68 Perhaps

67 I am thinking especially of Ouyang’s poems on inkstones, stone screens and the like, some of which I translated in the previous chapter. His personification of plants, like tea and flowering apricot, involves a similar dynamic.
68 The incomprehensibility of this literal translation, and the fact that in line 25-26 Ouyang gives ao 蠻 or e 蛾 (“moth”) as its alternative names, suggest that this is a phonetic
only Ouyang Xiu would see this topic as the cue for a historical summary of the Five Dynasties period and the Song reunification! Yet it is true that without the relative stability of the Song court, and its elaborate system of transportation linking disparate parts of the Empire, Ouyang and his guests would be deprived of many of their favourite dishes. The wit of the poem, however, lies in his implication that all these immense historical developments, on this particular occasion, are merely preliminaries to the arrival of the main subject, a plate of clams, on his table. As if to emphasize the narrow-mindedness of such a perspective — which many Kaifeng dwellers probably held without reflection — Ouyang finishes with a characteristically satirical juxtaposition of the diners, so greedy for the tasty clams that “struggling to be first they often erupt into quarrels,” and “old men by the sea,/Painfully digging [for clams] in the mud and sand.”

Eating Ju’ao Clams for the First Time [1056].

Piled up high, clams on the plate,

They come from the furthest reaches of the sea.

The guests at first don’t recognize them at all,

4 But after a taste, at once they sigh “Aah!”

The Five Dynasties were once divided and separate,

The Nine Regions were chopped up like a melon.

The South-East was bounded by Huai [River] and ocean,

8 Distant and cut off from the nation’s capital.

transcription of a dialect word. The southern origin of the creature supports this hypothesis. Hence my phonetic rendering in the body of the poem.

69 In Ji vol.1, 2.25. Also in Xuanji 161-162. A variant title adds “in the capital.”

70 Nine Regions refers to China.

71 The Huai River ran through what is now south-east Henan and central Anhui Provinces, slightly north of the Yangtze River, i.e. dividing South-East China from the North. The “nation’s capital” is literally Yi-hua 夷華: Yimen (夷門 “the gate of Yi”) was another name for Kaifeng, the Northern Song capital; Hua usually designated those of the Han race inhabiting the North China Plain since ancient times.
At that time, people of northern regions,
Would eat and drink with unsurpassed crudeness.
Chicken and suckling pig tasted rare to them,
They lacked all standards of noble and base.
But since the time a Sage emerged,
All under Heaven have become one family.\(^\text{72}\)
Southern produce crosses Jiao and Guang,\(^\text{73}\)
Western delicacies enrich Qiong and Ba.
Transporting by water, boats crowd stern to prow,
The overland routes shake with carts loaded high:
Creatures from the creeks with fine furry coats,
And ocean monstrosities with hefty tusks and teeth.
Are they merely for the noble dukes and lords?
Even cramped alleyways are stuffed with fish and shrimps!
Now these clams have finally arrived,
Their coming is certainly rather tardy!
"Ao" or "E," one hears both names,\(^\text{74}\)
They've long been praised by people from the South.
Shiny and dazzling, their shells are like jade,
Ornately dotted, with vivid flowery patterns.
They hold their meat, unwilling to disgorge it,
But touched by the fire, suddenly open wide.

\(^{72}\) The Sage being Emperor Taizu (r.960-976), founder of the Song.
\(^{73}\) Ancient names for the southern region covered by Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces today, already an anachronism in Ouyang's time. Qiong and Ba, in line 16, covered mostly present Sichuan Province, South-West China.
\(^{74}\) A note adds: "For ju 'ao, another name is ju 'e."
Eating together, we only fear being left behind,

32 Struggling to be first, we often erupt in quarrels.

Our only delight is to praise them without ceasing,

No-one thinks twice about the distance they’ve come!

My heartfelt gratitude to the old men by the sea,

36 Painfully digging them from mud and sand.

Tacked onto the end of a long poem which basically praises the achievements of the Song government, the last couplet seems to express more Ouyang’s personal gratitude to the anonymous people who have made the effort to find these clams, rather than true social protest. Unlike Mei Yaochen, Ouyang’s poetic oeuvre contains very few such works; the poem entitled “Dregs Eaters” (Shizao min 食 槽 民) of 1050, is one of the rare direct attacks on social injustice which I can recall.75 Ouyang’s view of life in the countryside is generally a much more idyllic, pastoral one than Mei’s, and he consciously contrasts rural joys with the complex scheming and petty personal rivalries encountered daily in the capital. However, Ouyang does address more frequently the larger issues involved in government, such as the necessity to treat the people fairly, and the need for leaders to be open to constructive criticism. I will conclude with three more poems on food topics which illustrate Ouyang’s continual oscillation between deep concern for just government, and his longing to leave the capital and be freed from political responsibility.

The first work, entitled “Olives,”76 is an almost undisguised allegory, which were it not for the clever use of rhyme and metaphor, might lack literary interest. In English it is

75 Translated by Burton Watson in Yoshikawa 70-71. Original text in Ji vol.1, 2.8. Also in Xuanji 142.
76 In Ji vol.1, 2.7. Also in Xuanji p.141, from which the date is taken. The word “olive” is a translation of ganlan 橄 樗, whose botanical name is Canarium album, in contrast to the European and Middle Eastern olive, Olea europaea. For partial translation of another poem on olives by Wang Yucheng (954-1001), see Jonathan Chaves, op.cit. 126.
impossible to retain the harsh rhymes of the second half of the poem — most of which are expletives and interrogatives — but I will attempt to suggest their import in the translation. They transform the poem itself into a literary olive: harsh at first, but on reflection, artistically satisfying!

*Oives [1050]*

The five elements occupy the four seasons,
And it is fire which abounds towards the South.
Scorching heat passes over the spirit of wood,
4 And the olive receives it to the greatest degree.\(^{77}\)
The sour and the bitter do not readily mix,
First they struggle; at length reach harmony.
Their frosty buds enter the Central regions,
8 Come ten thousand miles on river waves.
With luck they’ll be elevated to a gentleman’s banquet,
Allowed to line up with the assembled fruits.
In Central regions, the assembled fruits are excellent:
12 Round pearls, and shining white jades.
What a shame, this slight, ugly substance,
Coming such a distance, doesn’t receive a “Huh!”\(^{78}\)

\(^{77}\) For a summary of the theory that certain directions, and the flora and fauna living there, are influenced by the dominant “element” in that region, see Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, vol.2 (Cambridge 1956) esp. 261-262. Needham’s Table 12 on these pages gives the following combinations: fire goes with summer, the south, and bitterness; wood goes with spring, the east and sourness. Hence, the olive combines the sourness of wood and the “bitterness” of the southern region in which it grows (line 5) to produce its unique flavour.

\(^{78}\) *He 阿*, an exclamation expressing censure: one of Ouyang’s harsh rhymes. In other words, the olive is completely ignored, since people don’t dare to taste a strange-looking object from so far away.
Syrup is sweet for boys and girls,
16 But at length its aftertaste: what about that?
Good medicine isn’t sweet in the mouth,
Yet its benefits are clear on a serious grippe.
Sincere words, though at first one detests them,
20 When the thing happens, what a regret!
The world now lacks a Poetry Collector,
So my poem complete, I’ll hum it for you.

The last four lines of the poem clearly have a political reference. “Sincere words” (line 19) are usually those of a minister to a ruler, for instance in the pre-Qin legalist work *Han Feizi* 韓非子: “Sincere words go against one’s ears, but the enlightened ruler, hearing them, knows they can be used to extend his achievements.”79 The Poetry Collector, of line 21, was a legendary official said to have been sent out by ancient rulers to record folksongs of ordinary people, thus discerning their attitude to the government. The *Classic of Poetry* (Shijing 詩經) was traditionally treated as a collection of such folksongs; the Master Mao commentaries on the collection were the first in a line of works interpreting all the poems as having political reference, even those which today are generally accepted as simple songs of love and agricultural life.80

79 From *Han Feizi: Waichu shuozuo shang* chapter: see Tang Jingzhao and Li Shi’an, eds., *Han Feizi jiaozhu* (Jiangsu renmin chubanshe 1982) 370. This same passage also mentions medicine: “Good medicine is bitter in the mouth, but one who is wise can be persuaded to drink it, knowing that once ingested, it will bring an end to his illness” (ibid.).
80 For a historical survey of these commentaries from pre-Qin to Song Dynasties, see Steven van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Stanford 1991). Van Zoeren notes that Ouyang Xiu was one of the first scholars to treat several of the poems simply as folksongs, rather than attempting, without any evidence, to tie them to weighty historical events (ibid. 159-189).
Nevertheless, these hints of political intent do not necessarily restrict the poem to a single interpretation — that, for instance, Ouyang Xiu himself is the bitter olive, returning from distant exile to the capital with harsh words of warning for his superiors. There are, in fact, at least two other possibilities. First, one could see the poem in a more literal sense, as a persuasion to others to try this exotic food. In this case the three analogies — “good medicine is not sweet in the mouth . . . sincere words, though at first one detests them . . . syrup is sweet . . . but at length its aftertaste: what about that?” — are generally accepted truths from various spheres which will encourage people to taste the olives. Secondly, inspired by Ouyang’s comparison of Mei Yaochen’s poetry with olives elsewhere, the work could be advocating an artistic aesthetic of plainness and harsh surface texture, with profound substance, as against the empty ornamentation of earlier Song poets. The above-mentioned rhyme scheme also supports such a “literary” reading of the olive image.

Surely the ingenuity of Ouyang’s art is to leave all such possibilities of interpretation open, adding depth and complexity to what could easily degenerate into sheer moralizing. And on top of these readings, we can once again discern the theme of tracing an object to its source, and imagining the mysterious natural forces that embued it with special character — a process which marks the poem as Ouyang’s creation, even while the work shares qualities with earlier allegorical, and contemporary stylistic, tendencies.

Another poem which juxtaposes food and government to a greater extent is that composed to see off a friend, one Marshal Liu, to a new post in Xiangyang. Ouyang

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81 This comparison is noted by Yoshikawa, op.cit. 36-37 and 73, citing Ouyang’s poem “Sent to Zimei and Shengyu from my Night Journey to Shuigu” [1044]. Original text in Ji vol.1, 1.16. Ouyang also quotes this poem in his “Remarks on Poetry,” Ji vol.3, 14.114-115. This text is discussed further in my concluding chapter.

82 As the title makes clear, Marshal Liu was Liu Congguang (n.d.), a minister active in Renzong’s (r.1023-1063) government. Xiangyang was a city in present northern Hubei
lists all the delicious foodstuffs of the region, apparently in order to entice Liu to look forward to life in a different environment. Apart from providing interesting geographical information, and complimenting Liu on his governing skills, the work thus shows Ouyang’s ability to console and encourage others at uncertain stages in their lives.

*How Joyful, the People of Xiangyang! Seeing Off Marshal Liu Congguang on his Way to Xiangyang* [1057]<sup>83</sup>

Oh, you are so joyful, you people of Xiangyang City!

Ten thousand homes link their roofs on the banks of the clear Han River,

Your dialect is light and pure with the slightest hint of Qin,<sup>84</sup>

4 To the south you join with Jiao and Guang; west are E and Min.<sup>85</sup>

Your gauze and silks are refined and beautiful; your medicines are precious,

Loquats and sweet oranges are presented with clear wine,

Piled up on golden platters, they dazzle with brightness of jade,

8 Their oar-shaped heads and shrivelled necks I heard about long ago,

And yellow tangerines with pounded ginger, fragrant yet also spicy.

Spring thunder shakes the earth; bamboo roots are running,<sup>86</sup>

With brocade buds and jade shoots, their flavour strives for freshness.

12 In phoenix forests flowers spread the spring to Southern Peak,

They cover the mouth of the shining valley and hide the mountain pass,

Terraces and halls rise, emerald and gold, their tiles shining like fish-scales,

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<sup>83</sup> In *Ji* vol. 1, 2.31-32.
<sup>84</sup> Qin 秦 usually refers to the area around present Gansu Province, North-West China, quite distant from Xiangyang. Here I assume Ouyang means a “western” accent or turn of phrase.
<sup>85</sup> E and Min were areas in Sichuan Province. For Jiao and Guang, see n.73 above.
<sup>86</sup> Bamboo grows extremely rapidly in the spring rainy season.
Mount Xian summit towers loftily, leaning on floating clouds.

16 The Han River, as if from Heaven, gushes pounding down,
Slanting sunlight reflects back; white birds form into flocks,
- On both banks the mulberries mingle with furrowed, ploughed fields.

King Wen’s transforming influence has long been overlooked,

20 For thousands of years, few have bothered to think of his benevolence.87
Yet Jingzhou, since Han and Wei, has always considered him highly,88
Here, from ancient times to the present, lived many famous ministers.89
Oh, you are so joyful, you people of Xiangyang City!

24 On the road, you support the grey-haired, and carry your young grandchildren,
You come so far to greet Duke Liu’s double-wheeled crimson carriage.

Duke Liu is still young, and his spirit extremely pure,
His knowledge of poetry and history is that of a “cold scholar,”90

28 Laughing and chatting over meat and wine, many are his excellent guests.

In days gone by, Xing on the Ming experienced kind government,91
Even now, the vestiges of affection remain in its people,
Who can take my poetic lines, and make the journey there,

32 To congratulate on my behalf the people of Xiangyang City!

87 King Wen, ancient sage ruler, was father of King Wu, founder of the Western Zhou
(c.1123 BC-722 BC).
88 The Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) and the succeeding Wei (220-265 AD), during
which time Jing was a large region comprising parts of present Hubei, Hunan, Guangxi,
Guangdong, Henan and Guizhou Provinces. Xiangyang was within its jurisdiction then.
89 More literally: “Viewed from the ancients to the present, there were numerous famous
ministers.”
90 I.e. a scholar so committed to study that he misses out on high office, hence remains
poor and cold in the winter.
91 Yet another name for the area around Xiangyang: the Ming River flowed through what
is now southern Hebei Province; Xing was the title of an ancient state in present south­west
Hebei Province, one of the feofs established at the founding of the Western Zhou. Its
first leader was a son of the sage ruler, the Duke of Zhou. A variant reading replaces Xing
[on the] Ming with Xingtai, the name of a county in present south-west Hebei Province.
It is particularly the structure of this poem that transforms it from a conventional farewell and expression of goodwill into a brilliantly crafted work of art. After a refrain declaring the happiness of the Xiangyang people, Ouyang describes the place as an earthly paradise especially rich in delicious fruits and vegetables. The first fourteen lines each bear the same rhyme — unlike the normal alternate-line rhyme of old-style verse. Thus, freed from the convention of changing the topic at the end of each rhyming couplet, Ouyang can create a sense of surprise and suspense by stretching descriptions of favoured objects over three lines, and compressing others to just one. For instance, line 5 introduces two Xiangyang products: “Your gauze and silk are refined and beautiful; your medicines are precious.” Line 6 follows with fruits and drinks of the region: “Loquats and sweet oranges are presented with clear wine.” But instead of moving on to another group of objects in the next two lines, Ouyang dwells on these fruits, particularly the curiously-shaped loquat, comically overwhelming the balance of the previous couplet: “Piled up on golden platters, they dazzle with brightness of jade;/Their oar-shaped heads and shrivelled necks I heard about long ago.” Then, almost as an afterthought, he adds another single line on a kind of fruit chutney: “Yellow tangerines with pounded ginger, fragrant yet also spicy.” The effect is to suggest a first-time visitor to Xiangyang — as Liu will be soon — walking around, describing what he encounters and lingering over the more unusual sights. A similar stretching occurs in lines 12-14, a riverside scene: “The Han River, as if from Heaven, gushes pounding down,/Slanting sunlight reflects back; white birds form into flocks,/On both banks the mulberries mingle with furrowed, ploughed fields.”

After thus setting the scene, in the second half (lines 19-32) Ouyang turns to more historical concerns: ever since King Wen, the Xiangyang region has had a succession of famous ministers, hence the fertile abundance of the area “today.” And now — the refrain returns — “you are so joyful, you people of Xiangyang,” because you have another fine leader arriving in the shape of Liu! Although Ouyang has relaxed into a more regular
alternate-line rhyme scheme, he concentrates the rhymes again to emphasize the excitement surrounding the arrival of the new governor: “On the road you support the grey-haired, and carry your young grandchildren (sun 孫)./You come so far to greet Duke Liu’s double-wheeled crimson carriage (lun 輪)./Duke Liu is still young and his spirit extremely pure (chun 淳)” (lines 24-26). Ouyang then concludes with the wish that someone will take his poem and use it as a eulogy to the continuing happiness of the people of Xiangyang.

Apart from the ingenious rhyme-scheme, the skill of the poem lies in Ouyang’s build-up to Liu’s entry: he carefully gives an outline of the language, geography and economy of the region, followed by its political history, which naturally leads right up to today as Liu, the new governor, arrives to perpetuate the glorious reputation of the place, and to continue bringing joy to its people. Yet with the varying focus achieved by irregular grouping of lines, the clever design of the poem is cloaked in the guise of a series of spontaneous impressions. Hence, one feels an underlying order, but without sacrificing the novelty and refreshing individuality of a newly discovered environment.92

As far as I am aware, Ouyang himself was never posted to Xiangyang, although he probably passed through the region on his various journeys south from Kaifeng. Yet as with several preceding poems, he shows a remarkable talent for creating vivid scenes by means of sheer imaginative effort alone.

However, his imaginative journeys through time and space, and elsewhere his yearning to escape petty struggles for power in the capital, never become an attempt to leave the world of human desires completely, or to transcend pleasure and pain through ascetic discipline. Even in his later poems revering recluse friends, his wish to emulate them only goes as far as the concluding lines of his poem “Moved when Eating ‘Chicken

92 Once again we might contrast Han Yu, who strives to express an underlying sense of frightening disorder. See note 35 above.
Heads' for the First Time.”

“Chicken heads” was a colloquial name for the edible seeds of the plant called *qian* 糜, perhaps inspired by their bulbous shape. As Ouyang makes clear in the first half of the poem, these seeds were a prized delicacy in Kaifeng dining rooms. Unfortunately, just when he has the chance to taste them, he is grotesquely reminded of his advancing years: “My whole mouth melts with anticipation, but alas for my aching teeth!” (line 12). His pain causes him, first, to long for the days of his youth in the provinces, when he could contentedly eat his fill of common water-chestnuts, and second, to long for retirement to similar pastoral tranquility: “When will I eventually buy fields to the east of Ying,/And retire to build a thatched hut overlooking the rustic waters?” (lines 19-20).

In this sense, Ouyang resembles Tao Qian, satisfied with the simple, yet profound, rhythms of human life amidst nature, rather than Li Bai, the untiring vision seeker. Yet surely one reason for his unique manner of celebrating worldly pleasures and everyday life in poetry is that they allow him to reach beyond his immediate circumstances — tracing objects to their distant sources; imagining himself visiting or retiring to a place of outstanding natural beauty; or simply treating individual plants and creatures as symbols of endurance and transcendence.

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93 In *Ji* vol.1, 2.53.
94 The English equivalent for *qian*, Gorgon euryale, has rather different associations. Euryale was one of three Gorgons in ancient Greek mythology, another being Medusa: creatures so ugly that looking at them face to face would turn men to stone.
95 Ying refers to Yingzhou (present Anhui Province), a place which Ouyang praised numerous times in his later works. The “rustic waters” could indicate either West Lake in Yingzhou, or the Ying River. For more details on this place, cf. my biographical sketch above.
Sleep

To demonstrate that this “quickening” activity extends to almost the whole sphere of Ouyang’s everyday life, I will conclude this chapter with a selection of poems on more diverse activities, yet still remaining as far as possible within the quotidian realm. Ouyang composed the first example to express gratitude for the gift of a stone pillow and a bamboo sleeping mat. The title clearly explains the context, and the poem dates from 1059.

*I received a gift of a Duanxi green stone pillow and a Qizhou bamboo mat; both are very fine objects. Since I am now able to sleep soundly, I cannot overcome my joy at obtaining these two objects. Presented to Secretary Yuanfu and Assistant Professor Shengyu.*

Carved out at Duanxi, a crescent moon form,

Woven together at Qizhou, a rippling water pattern.

I call my son to arrange the pillow and roll out the square mat,

4 The fiery sun is at its zenith; no clouds hang in the sky.

Yellow glass-like light, and green jade liquid,

Bright and clean, cool and smooth; without a speck of dust.

I recall recently in Kaifeng, temporarily wielding power,

8 Often I begged for my weary body to escape all the tiresome duties.

The Sage Ruler showed his concern; great ministers pitied me,

They realized that I was old and sick, and not just making excuses.

I even had the good fortune not to be sent away like a felon,

12 They granted me special permission to transfer back to my previous post.

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96 In *Jì* vol.1, 2.40. Traditionally in China, pillows were made of stone or clay.
97 Literally, “double water pattern,” or in a variant, “double brocade pattern.”
98 The mat is yellow (the colour of dried bamboo), and the pillow green.
99 I.e. requested retirement.
In selecting talent and facing problems I wasn’t of any use,
When profit beckoned, I wasn’t ashamed to seek it by fair means or foul.
But since I’ve taken rented lodgings and settled south of the city,
16 My office hosts no social meetings; few guests come to my door.\textsuperscript{101}
Surely it’s natural that only sleep now suits my inclinations,
To take a rest when I feel lazy gives me great satisfaction!
In the past I grew thin and haggard, extremely tired and exhausted,
20 Even more in this troubling humidity when the bright sun blazes.
Young and strong, my panting breath was audible to no-one,
Now middle-aged, my snoring makes a really nauseating sound.
My stupid boy covers his ears, claiming it’s crashing thunder,
24 The kitchen lady peeps in shocked, suspecting her pot is rattling.
Flies and midges dive around; I let them do as they wish,
Worm-eaten books lie strewn about; I’m just too lazy to shelve them.
With spirit dulled and circulation sluggish to such a degree,
28 My words and train of thought simply cannot maintain clarity.
One often hears about Li Bai, who loved drinking wine,
He wanted to live with clinking ladle, for better or worse, till he died.
As for my love of sleeping now, it even surpasses him:
32 My self and these two things makes three; that’s more than enough for me!\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{100} This couplet seems rather sardonic, considering Ouyang’s two previous exiles.
\textsuperscript{101} A variant gives “in leisure I have few guests.”
\textsuperscript{102} An allusion to Li Bai’s set of poems “Drinking Alone Beneath the Moon: Four Compositions,” especially the first, in which he drinks accompanied by the moon and his shadow. See Chinese text in QTS 6.1853 (juan 212). Ouyang has two object “companions” as well: the pillow and sleeping mat (line 32).
Permission to retire to Jiangxi will come in a matter of days,\textsuperscript{103} Then I'll begin gathering up my luggage to take back home. Finally, I will roll my mat, take up my pillow and leave, 36 To build a house and buy fields at the end of the limpid Ying.

This poem provides another classic episode of self-caricature. Ouyang claims that the worries of recent high office in Kaifeng have left him quite exhausted; now he has moved to a less demanding position, and as a result spends all his time sleeping; the pillow and sleeping mat have thus come at a most opportune moment. The poem is a well-crafted, humorous depiction of the joys of much-needed rest, and of course, gratitude for a considerate gift. The more serious tone of the first half, describing how unsuited he was to his previous job, only serves to offset more boldly the comical unconcern with polite standards of behaviour in the second half, now that he has some leisure time. Ouyang’s reference to Li Bai in lines 29-30 is instructive: the former poet loved wine and would gladly have spent the rest of his life drinking, with his shadow and the moon as companions; Ouyang also has two “companions” — the moon-shaped pillow and the watery-patterned bamboo mat — and declares that his love for sleep is even greater than Li Bai’s for wine. Of course, this is a comic poem, and Ouyang, as we have seen elsewhere, frequently praises wine-drinking too. Yet his willingness to embrace sleeping, not as the prelude to transcendent, visionary dreams, but for its simple, restful effects is surely another indication that he sees every aspect of life as worthy of celebration in poetry.

\textsuperscript{103} Until the Song, Jiangxi (literally “West of the River”) covered a much larger area than present Jiangxi Province, basically including most of Central China south of the Yangtze River. Hence, Yingzhou would have been part of Jiangxi (see note 95 above). Though Ouyang writes “a matter of days,” it was actually another 12 years before he was allowed to retire in 1071.
Secondly, the details of the poem again demonstrate his ability to transform an ugly scene into a memorable occasion, just as he did in his poem describing the adverse effects of strong tea. Not only does he snore, but does so with a "nauseating sound"; the servant boy and cook are given cameo roles in the poem: the former covers his ears and cheekily pretends the snoring is crashing thunder; the latter peers in, shocked, thinking the noise is her pot rattling on the stove. Flies and midges appear too, freely buzzing around his sleeping frame, and worm-eaten books are strewn about: both signs of Ouyang's present "laziness" and indifference (lines 21-26). Such little sketches, each contained within a single line, use the details of domestic life to add vividness and character to the larger situation, thereby recognizing their significance. And unlike some earlier poets, such as Du Fu (712-770) in his "Northern Journey," who include references to family and household in order to add poignancy to a tragic situation, Ouyang seems to enjoy such details in their own right: in his case, they form part of the humorous aspect of human life, worthy of recording for posterity.

Another expression of appreciation for an object which allows him to sleep occurs in a poem written during his mission north to the Qidan peoples in late-1055. The journey was undertaken in winter through very barren, desert-like territory. Yet Ouyang manages to find some consolation even in such unpromising circumstances:

Written on a Plain White Screen

In my journey of three thousand miles,
Which object stays closest to me?
This foot-wide white screen comes to mind,
4 It always remains right by my side.

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105 In *Ji* vol.1, 2.21.
In the vast wilds, yellow sands abound,
Even at midday the white sun is darkened.
The force of the wind is like a crossbow,
8 And flying grit comes shooting towards you.
At evening I shelter in a mountain lodge,
Resting from the trials of horse and carriage.
I open the screen and place it at the bed-head,
12 Then toss and turn all night till dawn.
I lie and listen: outside the mean hut,
The north wind drives the snow-laden clouds.
Don’t be sad about tomorrow’s snow:
16 For now, just embrace the warm fox-furs.\textsuperscript{106}
My lord’s orders are certainly severe,
The long journey is truly a hardship.
I will simply accept one night’s contentment,
20 As for the rest: I’ll keep silent.

The poem is quite straightforward and notably sombre. It seems that Ouyang much preferred imaginary journeys inspired by objects rather than the real discomforts of enforced travel — even more so as he grew older. However, the consoling power of the screen seems stronger in inverse proportion to the harshness of the surroundings, as does his determination to concentrate on the positive, meaningful side of his situation. In this way, a simple poem once more manifests the depth of his appreciation for the pleasures of ordinary life.

\textsuperscript{106} Literally, “the warmth of fox and marten,” referring to the furry pelts of these creatures made into a coat.
Musical performance

Cultural activities were another important part of Ouyang's life. I have already dealt with several works which relate cultural products — paintings, decorated screens, calligraphic inscriptions and music — to the power and depth of mountain scenery. Ouyang also composed a number of poems both on the tools used in cultural activities — brushes, paper and inkstones, musical instruments and the like — and the everyday context surrounding these activities. I will give examples of both these themes, commencing with two works illustrating how musical performances fit into the domestic scene. The first is an excellent portrayal of a rainy holiday, which somehow achieves a ragged transcendence towards the end. The lengthy title is as follows:

The day before Qingming, Han Zihua, quoting Jingjie [i.e. Tao Qian's] Xie Stream poem,\(^\text{107}\) invited me to visit Plum Gardens. After I returned, there followed three days of terrible wind and rain, and I couldn't go outside. I spent all the time sitting at home. My family decanted some leftover wine and took out several cups. The mud was deep, nobody was out and about, and we were far from the market, so they searched in baskets and boxes and found cured fish, dried prawns and the like. They urged me to drink and I

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\(^{107}\) This poem by Tao, “An Outing to Xie Stream,” is in Wang Yao, op.cit. 85-86. English translation in Hightower, op.cit. 57. It describes a sunny day spent drinking wine with friends by the beautiful stream, and begins with the lines: “With this one, fifty years have slipped away, My life proceeds apace to its final rest” (Hightower). Ouyang doubtless finds these words poignant, since he is also just over fifty now. Qingming Festival lasted for three days from the 4th of the 4th month according to the traditional Chinese calendar (around the beginning of May by the modern Western calendar). It was common for people to go and tidy the graves of their ancestors during the festival. The day preceding Qingming was called Cold Food Festival, a time when lighting cooking fires was prohibited. Ouyang went out with his friends on this day.
became extremely drunk, then in a daze went off to sleep. Since I feel bored, I now write what I saw, and present it to Shengyu [1059] 108

In my youth I was happy to go on the prowl,
Now that I’m old, I despise all the din.
I was embarrassed that two or three fellows
4 Invited me to go look at flowers.
Flowers blooming: can that be bad?
And as for the season, one could call it perfect.
But due to my illness I couldn’t take a drink,
8 The crowd celebrated while I alone sighed.
The flutes and strings were soon just a memory,
In wind and rain I sadly returned home.
For three days I could not venture outside,
12 In the piled up din I resembled a cold crow.
My wife and children urged me to drink,
Spreading out fruits and melons to eat.
For wine they poured out the leftover dregs,
16 And mixed cured fish with dried up prawns.
Then a young maid stood in front of me,
Barefoot, with hair in double bunches.
“Ya, ya!” sounded the paired strings,
20 Just like the creaking oar of a boat.
It caused my mind to dwell on rivers and lakes,
Swaying with thoughts of boundlessness.

108 In Ji vol.1, 2.42-43.
I don’t know how to repay my generous income,\textsuperscript{109}

24 The hair at my temples has already turned white.
25 I have fields around the limpid Ying [River],
26 I could still engage in agricultural work.
27 Where can I find a single brown bullock?
28 I’ll don a headscarf, and drive a rustic cart!

The girl in this poem is probably playing an erhu \(二\) 胡 (a kind of two-stringed fiddle), judging by Ouyang’s description of the “creaking” sound of the strings. Depressed by the signs of his aging, and the terrible weather, Ouyang — adopting another sardonic, stubborn old man persona — sits gloomily at home like a “cold crow.” His family members make efforts to cheer him up, and eventually the musical performance by a “barefoot maid,” jarring and substandard though it may be, allows him “thoughts of boundlessness.” He concludes with an imaginary sketch of himself wearing a peasant’s headscarf and driving a cart pulled by a bullock.\textsuperscript{110}

Rather than immediately analysing the above poem in depth, I will juxtapose it with another work written two years earlier, containing a slightly different mix of music and domestic life.

\textsuperscript{109} Ouyang frequently uses this phrase both as a declaration of modesty about his achievements while in office, and an indirect expression of his wish to retire: the Emperor continually rejected his requests to step down, thus implying that he hadn’t yet served the country enough.

\textsuperscript{110} In the poem, Ouyang does not explicitly state that the maid plays the music (see lines 17-20). It is possible that Ouyang sees her simple, barefoot appearance, then hears the “creaking” music, and the two perceptions together evoke a rustic mood. However, as the following poem demonstrates, it was quite common in the Song period for young girls to be “employed” as musicians in the houses of rich officials, hence it is likely that Ouyang’s maid was the string player of the poem.
At Administrator Liu's House I Saw Assistant Professor Yang (Bao's) Maid Play the Pipa. Written in Jest, Presented to Shengyu [1057]\(^{111}\)

The sound of the low strings lingers; the high strings hurry on,
Sweetness, only ten years old, performs the “Woodpecker” tune.
The woodpecker doesn’t try to peck at newly-sprouting twigs,
4 It only pecks the gnarled and jagged trunk of a withered tree.
The flowers are dense, shading the sun in a locked, empty garden.
The trees are old, stretching to the sky in the distant, deep ravines.
You don’t see the woodpecking bird,
8 You only hear the woodpecking sound.
The spring breeze is pleasantly warm, a hundred birds are chattering,
The mountain road undulates, and travelling people roam.
The woodpecker then comes flying along, no-one knows where from,
12 Between flowers and under leaves, repeating its sound: ding ding.
The woods are empty, the mountains quiet: its pecks echo all the more.
Travelling people raise their heads, and flying birds are startled.
The sweet child is still small but her fingers pluck quite firmly,
16 The administrator’s hall is cold, and the strings clearly resound.
The dense timbre and urgent pulse overwhelm all the guests,
As a toast to you I’ll drink dry a golden goblet of wine!
Master Yang loves elegance: his heart isn’t vulgar at all,
20 But his University post is low, and he sups on coarse husked grains.
Sweetness wears a skirt made from two widths of dark cloth,
On a wooden bed with only three legs, she sits and plays her tunes.

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111 In *Ji* vol.1, 2.32-33. The *pipa* 琵琶 is a kind of long-necked lute.
Yet as for rare books and ancient paintings, he buys them at any price,
24 He stores them in brocade bags, and mounts them on jade rollers.
Opening his pictures and closing his volumes, sometimes he feels weary,
He lies down and listens to the *pipa*, looking around his room.
When guests come he calls the girl quickly to comb and wash,
28 Her forehead is filled with flowery ornaments, stuck with yellow chrysanthemums.
Although her appearance is lovely, and her eyes and brows are graceful,
Can she hide the prolonged hunger that shrivels her head and neck?
And yet, Poet Elder of Wanling, you must not mock and tease them,
32 If people are satisfied with their own lives, that is really happiness,
And you, Old Sir, don't have this child or this tune in your home!

In the poem describing Ouyang's own household, the musician is portrayed as
"barefoot, with hair in double bunches." The emphasis seems to be on her youth and
simplicity rather than suggesting poverty. Here, however, the maid named Sweetness is
hungry-looking and emaciated; no amount of dressing up can hide the fact. Master Yang,
her employer, is the same Yang Bao to whom Ouyang addressed the "Picture of a
Climbing Cart" in the previous chapter. In that work, Ouyang praised him for appreciating
the joys of art, in spite of his relative poverty, and for his willingness to spend hard-earned
money on a painting to which he took a fancy. Yet seeing the maid so underfed on this
visit, a year later, Ouyang is surely voicing an indirect criticism of Yang's priorities in life.
Especially so, since Yang is willing to expend great amounts of cash on the purchase and
mounting of "rare books and ancient paintings" (lines 23-24) while apparently unaware of
the lack of basic necessities for those in his household. Despite the last three lines of the
poem, where he enjoins Mei Yaochen, the Poetry Elder, not to mock Yang for this
imbalance, I feel that Ouyang himself clearly implies a lack of humanity on Yang's part.
As we have seen above, Ouyang purposefully includes elements of everyday life in
his poetry, because he feels their deep significance and seeks to express it in an artistic
structure. Hence, he rarely composes a poem only on the effects of, for example, music or
painting, without describing the whole context in which the cultural objects take their
place. Often he cultivates a sense of incongruity, a mixing of high and low levels of taste,
in order to emphasize the complex order within human existence. Both these poems on
music contain such a juxtaposition. Yet where the first moves from a gloomy old man in a
noisy family scene, via the musical performance, into a kind of pastoral transcendence, the
second begins by transporting the audience into a similar rustic scene but concludes with a
jarring return to the cold hall and underfed figure of the pipa player. And unlike the earlier
tea poems, which involve the same kind of movement, there is no humour here to offset
the stark reality. Moreover, aware of the possibility that the work is a veiled criticism of
Yang Bao, and re-reading the impressionistic images inspired by the music at its opening,
the continuous knocking of the woodpecker (looking for food!) now suggests an unsettled
urgency. And there is surely bitter irony in the couplet: “The woodpecker doesn’t try to
peck at newly sprouting twigs/It only pecks the gnarled and jagged trunk of a withered
tree” (lines 3–4). Is Yang perhaps the withered tree?

It is possible to support this interpretation of Ouyang’s poem by referring to the
work Mei Yaochen composed in response to it. Of course, Mei’s reaction to the situation
is that of a different poet, and thus will express his own particular concerns. It provides
only indirect confirmation of my reading. Nevertheless, Mei is very clear in his
condemnation of Yang’s lack of compassion:

The servant girl is still young and stands out from the vulgar run,
But in the tenth month she wears a thin robe and only gets millet to eat.
She says that she waits on Yang the Broadly Cultured, of Guanxi,
Broadly Cultured, he empties her belly, greedy to teach her tunes . . .
She also laughs that collected drawings and paintings fill the house,
But he’s not willing to spend the money to buy her a pearl headdress,
She must endure being stuck with clumps of chrysanthemums from
the front terrace!\textsuperscript{112}

Likewise, the urgency of the woodpecker is again trenchantly expressed:

[The \textit{pipa}] imitates a starving bird pecking at a cold tree,
The woodworms and living insects are hidden deep within fine crevices.
It constantly pecks with a “knock, knock,” but never fills its belly . . .
. . . The upper strings rush urgently on; the lower strings are resonant,
Just like the sound of a preying mantis seizing hold of a cicada!\textsuperscript{113}

Assuming that my reading is accurate, it is clear that Ouyang requires a balance
between love of culture and compassion for one’s fellow human beings. I have already
suggested that his constant wish to escape from the burdens of office, even if only
temporarily or in imagination alone, is seldom, if at all, accompanied by the desire to
forget reality. His worries and stress come from the real world, but his deepest pleasures
and joys also have their source in that same world. Hence his willingness to include all
sides of existence in his poetry, and his attempt to discover their depth. Ultimately, I feel
that this all-embracing vision has its roots in Ouyang’s committed involvement in and
curiosity about life — what could be termed a sense of wonder — which almost inevitably
leads to indignation with those like Yang Bao who, through exaggerated detachment from
life, neglect the suffering of others.

\textsuperscript{112} See Mei’s poem “Matching the Rhymes of Yongshu’s ‘Written in Jest,’” lines 19-22,
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid. lines 2-4, 7-8.
Writing Tools and Equipment

Finally in this chapter, I will give three more translations of poems connected with another of Ouyang’s favoured cultural pursuits, calligraphy.\(^{114}\) These are works dealing with the tools used in calligraphy rather than the finished artistic product, and I will arrange them in ascending order of imaginative sweep, beginning with the most straightforward:

*Shengyu Gave Me a Brush from Xuanzhou: Written in Jest [1059].*\(^{115}\)

Shengyu is a native of Xuan City,
He’s competent with the violet-haired brush.\(^{116}\)
Zhuge Gao, a man of Xuan,
4 Maintains the trade without losing ground.
  He makes the hearts firm, and ties the long hairs,
  Wrapping three times: exquisite and dense.
  Their firmness and softness suit the human hand,
8 In one hundred brushes there isn’t a single dud.
  The assembled brushmakers in the capital,
  Set up boards advertizing themselves.
  Crowded together, east of Xiangguo [Temple],\(^{117}\)
12 Numerous as lice in the gaps in your clothes.


\(^{115}\) In Ji vol. 1, 6.78. Also in Xuanji 183, from which the dating of the work is taken. Xuanzhou (in present Anhui Province) produced excellent brushes.

\(^{116}\) Hard, pointed rabbit fur was called “violet hair” (zihao 紫毫), and was very suitable for calligraphy brushes.

\(^{117}\) A commercial district in Kaifeng.
Some are weak, lacking most of the point,
Some are stiff, and can’t be made to yield.
One can only store them in the metal brush-rack,
16 They appear distinguished but lack all substance.
The price may be high, but you still waste your money,
And can use them only a matter of days.
How can they compare with a Xuancheng brush,
20 Which endures long, yet can be had for free!

There are strong indications of a moralistic significance in this work — for
instance, lines 13-14: “Some are weak, lacking most of the point;/Some are stiff, and can’t
be made to yield,” and line 16: “They appear distinguished but lack all substance.” Still,
the poem succeeds artistically as a careful depiction of the brush and its maker, and its
moralism does not seem out of place or obtrusive. Perhaps the “written in jest” of the title
hints that the poem imitates Mei Yaochen’s penchant for minute description, utilizing the
plainest of diction. Certainly it does not aim for the imaginative breadth of many poems
above, although we do see once again the juxtaposition of a superior object from the
provinces with a crowd of expensive, but mediocre, pretenders in the capital. Also the last
four lines make a humorous comparison showing that price is not a reliable indicator of
quality, especially when one receives the brush as a gift!

The second of this “trilogy” on calligraphic tools concerns some fine paper shown
to Ouyang by Liu Chang (stylename Yuanfu). The poem dates from 1055.

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118 Chaves, op.cit. Chapter 5, translates several such poems by Mei, written in an
extremely objective descriptive style.
Matching Liu Yuanfu's "Clear-heart" Paper

Have you not seen — Manqing and Zimei, true rare talents,
Have long since dispersed and scattered, buried in brown dust.
Zimei, alive, was poor; in death is much more esteemed,
4 His remaining phrases and fragmented writings valuable as jade treasures.
Manqing's drunken compositions adorn red-painted walls:
But the wall-paint is already peeling, covered by smoke and coal.
The River pours down from Kunlun, with winding, bending power,
8 Snow presses down Mount Taihua, towering in its height.
Ever since these two masters followed each other into oblivion,
The climate of these rivers and mountains is thrown into utter chaos.
It is true that in your home you have a sheaf of "Clear-heart" paper,
12 But do you know whether anyone would dare to place their brush on it?
The Poet Elder of Xuanzhou is starving, about to die:
A snow goose with broken wings; the sound of his cry so mournful.
Sometimes, when he can fill his belly, he enjoys creating poems,
16 It's like hearing someone sing out loud, then draining a golden goblet.
Though two masters are dead and gone, this Elder still survives,
His old hands are yet skilled in the craft of "paper-cutting."

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119 In Ji vol.1, 2.19-20. Also in Xuanji 150. An alternative title is "Presented for Recitation, On the Paper of Clear-heart Hall." According to the editors of Xuanji, this paper was made in Chengxin ("Clear-heart") Hall under Li Yu (r.961-975), last ruler of the Southern Tang, one of the kingdoms of the Five Dynasties.
120 Manqing was the nickname of Shi Yannian (994-1041), a poet and calligrapher whose work was admired by Ouyang, for instance in his "Remarks on Poetry," Ji vol.3, 14.118. Zimei was the nickname of Su Shunqin (1008-1048), another poet friend of Ouyang. Cf. a poem praising Su at the beginning of the next chapter.
121 The Yellow River and the Kunlun Mountain range.
122 As the preceding poem relates, Mei Yaochen's ancestral home was Xuanzhou.
So why did you not send it to him, instead of showing me?

20 This is rejecting orthodox debate in favour of jokes and mockery!

Alas, I am decrepit now; I'm not the man I was,

And what’s the use of picking up volumes, opening and closing them?

A hundred years of fighting, and shedding of battlefield blood —

24 A whole kingdom’s songs and dances — are now just ruined terraces.

At that time the hundred things were all exquisite and fine,

But most of their remains have been abandoned to rampant weeds.

So where on earth did you manage to obtain such paper as this,

28 Pure, strong, glossy and smooth: a volume of one hundred leaves?

When work matters and official duties allow us the joy of leisure,

In towers and halls we'll sing and respond, matching each others’ heights.

The written word, since ancient times, has always managed to survive,\textsuperscript{124}

32 How do you know that what we produce will not last into the future?

The sheer ingenuity and power of this poem’s structure do not reveal themselves

fully until the second or third readings. At first glance the work appears as a lament: for

the loss of Ouyang’s talented friends Su Shunqin and Shi Yannian, only “fragments” of

whose writings remain; also for Ouyang’s own descent into barren old age, futilely

opening and shutting his volumes; and for the decay and destruction of the Southern Tang,

last of the kingdoms of the Five Dynasties, which had in its heyday produced numerous

objects equal in quality to this paper. Images of decay abound throughout the poem: Su

and Shi are “dispersed and scattered; buried in brown dust;” their works are only leftover

fragments, or inscriptions on peeling paint “covered by smoke and coal;” and their death

\textsuperscript{123} A figure for fine craftsmanship (in poetry), though here it is especially relevant since

the subject is paper.

\textsuperscript{124} Literally, “in the world has never been lacking.”
has disrupted the climate of mountains and rivers. As for Mei Yaochen, he is "starving, about to die . . . a snow goose with broken wings;" and Ouyang himself is "decrepit now, not the man I was." Finally, the glory of the Southern Tang court is transformed to "ruined terraces" and "rampant weeds."

Unexpectedly, from each of these destructive images Ouyang discovers a reason for continued hope and perseverance. Thus Su Shunqin was poor during his life, but "more esteemed" since his death; even fragments of his works are now prized like jade. Likewise, though Su and Shi have long since passed away, apparently leaving no great writer worthy of using such excellent paper, Ouyang suddenly remembers Mei Yaochen, who "still survives" and is "yet skilled in the craft of paper-cuts." Moreover, Mei is able to create such works despite his poverty and hunger (lines 13-16). Thirdly, the constant battles flaring up during the Five Dynasties, ultimately leading to their demise, would seem to have left nothing in an acceptable state. Nevertheless, Liu has discovered a hundred sheets of Clear-heart paper in pristine condition, somehow emerging from the ruins of the Southern Tang. Ouyang's surprize at this unexpected find is worth quoting again: "At that time the hundred things were all exquisite and fine,/But most of their remains have been abandoned to rampant weeds./So where on earth did you manage to obtain such paper as this,/Pure, strong, glossy and smooth: a volume of one hundred leaves?"

It is the possibility of such unexpected survival and rediscovery in the future that can make our efforts today worthwhile. The poem which began as a lament has surprizingly ended with its own discovery of hope, as Ouyang plans to spend sociable evenings with his friends, writing on this excellent paper: "When work matters and official duties allow us the joy of leisure,/In towers and halls we'll sing and respond, matching each others' heights./The written word, since ancient times, has always managed to survive./How do you know that what we produce will not last into the future?"

If this poem displays ingenuity of structure, the third work is an imaginative extravaganza. The poem describes an inkstone made from a tile which Ouyang claims was
originally on the roof of the "Bronze Sparrow" Tower, built by the great general Cao Cao (155-220 AD) at the end of the Han Dynasty. Ouyang, inspired by the tile, recreates the turbulent years preceding and following the Han collapse. His compact summary of events, though probably clear to his contemporaries, requires some amplification for modern readers. The "fire" of line 1 — "when fire numbers four hundred, the scorching spirit disperses" — refers to a theory based on the Five Elements which arbitrarily classified historical periods according to the element supposedly predominating at the time. Hence, the Qin (221-206 BC) was considered the dynasty of water, and the Han, after some controversy, settled on earth. Ouyang seems to ignore the short-lived Qin, and declares that the Han, "full of earth," overcame the fiery Zhou when its four hundred year cycle was complete: "Whoever seeks to replace it must be full of earth" (line 2). Wen and Jing, of line 4, are the posthumous titles of two early Han Emperors, reigning from 179-156 BC and 156-140 BC respectively. According to the Records of the Historian by Sima Qian (c.145 BC-90 BC), both were effective and responsible rulers. However, by the later Han, particularly during the 2nd century AD, a succession of local hegemons rose up, usurping central government power one after another — presumably this was due to the ending of another four hundred year cycle. Line 7 mentions four such figures:

“Dong, Lü, Jue and Fan died in quick succession.” Dong Zhuo (d.192 AD) overthrew

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125 For this classification system, see Joseph Needham, op.cit., vol.2, 253-265, esp. tables on 262-263. Needham notes that the Han settled on earth as its element from 165 BC, a fact which is corroborated in Sima Qian’s Shiji. See also Burton Watson, trans., Records of the Grand Historian (Columbia 1961; 1968 repr.) vol.1, 359: the part of Emperor Wen’s (r.179-156 BC) biography in which this decision is related. Cf. also Achilles Fang, trans. and annot., The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms (Harvard 1952) 45, quoting the Song historian Sima Guang (1019-1086): “After the Ch’ in 秦 had burned books and buried alive Confucian scholars, there arose the Han 漢, whose scholars began to propound the theory of mutual engendering and mutual destruction of the Five Elements. Arguing that Ch’ in had occupied an intercalated position ... between the elements of Wood [Chou 周] and of fire [Han], they considered it as the dynasty of a hegemon, and would not accredit it as that of a King” (Fang’s parentheses. And cf. ibid. 66, n.7.2).
126 Their annals are translated in Burton Watson, op.cit. 341-374. Original text in Ma Chiyung, ed., Shiji jinzhu (Taiwan: Shangwu 1979) chaps. 10 and 11, 367-402.
Emperor Shao in 189 AD and placed a puppet ruler, Emperor Xian (nominally reigned 190-220) on the throne. Cao Cao and one Yuan Shao (d.202) rebelled against Dong’s usurpation, forcing him to flee to Chang’an with the Emperor. Lü Bu (d.198), after working with Dong Zhuo, betrayed and murdered him in 192. He became known as the “Flying General.” The other two men mentioned in line 7, Li Jue and Guo Fan, formed a loose coalition and seized power in the new capital, Chang’an, after Dong Zhuo’s death in 192, holding the Emperor virtually hostage there. Through political misjudgment, probably the result of infighting within their clique, Li and Guo allowed the Emperor to return east to Luoyang, the former capital, in late-195, where Cao Cao managed to capture him the following year.

Turning to line 8 — “Shao and Shu, Quan and Bei struggled, ranting and roaring” — we have mentioned Yuan Shao above, a strong regional leader who had the greatest number of troops at his disposal among those vying for power. Cao Cao, having cooperated with him for many years, finally changed his allegiance and defeated Shao at Guandu in 200. Shao’s cousin, Yuan Shu (d.200), was actually a long-term enemy: the two cousins had struggled for supremacy on the eastern side of the Empire until Shu was seriously defeated by Cao Cao in 197.

Later, Liu Bei (161-223) and Sun Quan (182-252) allied together to defeat Cao Cao at Chibi (“Red Cliff”) in 208, destroying Cao’s ambition to unify the Empire under his control. The Han officially collapsed in 220, with Cao’s son Pi (187-226) establishing Wei Kingdom in that year, and Liu and Sun setting up the Kingdoms of Shu-Han (221) and Wu (222) respectively. Finally, Sun inflicted a massive defeat on Liu in 222, at Yiling; Liu died of illness the following year, leaving Sun Quan the only survivor among these original leaders.127

127For events leading to the collapse of the Han, see the detailed treatment in Carl Leban, Ts’ao Ts’ao and the Rise of Wei (diss., Columbia University 1971). For events after 220 AD, see Achilles Fang, op.cit.
However, the main subject of the poem is Cao Cao. Ouyang implies that Cao’s death proved he was afraid of Imperial authority: “But it seemed that reaching his hands, he did not dare to take it” (line 11). Then the arrogance and shamelessness of his son Pi caused him to lose most of their territory (line 12). Ouyang has Pi claiming that he equals the legendary sage emperors Shun and Yu, who successively received the imperial mandate from Emperor Yao (lines 13-14); however, Cao Pi’s successors were weak and soon lost control of all Cao Cao’s hard-won territory (line 20). Ouyang concludes the historical summary with a contrast between the glorious, heroic days of Cao Cao’s prime, and the sad, lonely surroundings of the abandoned Bronze Sparrow Tower which Cao had constructed, now a monument to the vicissitudes of political struggle (lines 21-26).

*Answering Xie Jingshan [Bochu’s] Song on a Gift of an Ancient Tile Inkstone*
[c.1037][129]

When fire numbers four hundred, the scorching spirit disperses,
Whoever seeks to replace it must be well-endowed with earth.
Extreme treachery and utmost cruelty are not easy to take on,
4 Only now he realized the strong foundation of Wen and Jing.[130]
In vain he brandished a long beak to peck at all under Heaven,
Brave and heroic opponents rose up just like the spines on a porcupine.
Dong, Lü, Jue and Fan died in quick succession,
8 Shao and Shu, Quan and Bei struggled ranting and roaring.

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[128] For this interpretation of line 20, see note 135 below.
[129] In *Ji* vol.1, 6.57-58. See also the completely contrasting work entitled “Ancient Tile Inkstone” (ibid. 6.58, and in *Xuanji* 46), which is stylistically similar to the poem on the Xuanzhou brush above. For Xie Bochu, cf. my concluding chapter below, and Ouyang’s “Remarks on Poetry,” *Ji* vol.3, 14.117-118. For dating of this poem, see Ouyang’s letter to Xie in ibid. vol.2, 8.65-66, dated 1037 in the contents to *Ji*, in which Ouyang praises what he calls Xie’s “Song on the Ancient Tile Inkstone.”
[130] I interpret the subject “he” to be Cao Cao.
Those with power gained victory; the timid were defeated,
How compare their talent and virtue, or fix their contribution?
Yet it seemed that, reaching his hands, he did not dare to take it,
12 Instead he caused full-grown locusts to breed their pestilent young.131
His son, Pi, from the beginning lacked all sense of shame,
He dared to claim that Shun and Yu had it passed to them by Yao.132
He received it in such a manner, but lost it just the same way,
16 Who'd have known that "three horses would eat from a single trough?"133
In the time of his ascendancy, he struggled with heart and soul,134
His curses and shouts were hail and thunder raising a typhoon wind.
When weapons of battle were finally stilled, and numerous attacks completed,
20 Zhou had died and Shao remained; Yao had no [burial] mound.135

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131 Locusts are clearly pests: it is possible that Ouyang is referring to Cao Cao’s enemies in the other two Kingdoms, Wu and Shu-Han, whose successors continued to plague Wei with raids and campaigns.
132 See Achilles Fang, op.cit. 37, n.35.1, for an explanation of the Yao-Shun succession parallel. Fang translates: “The Emperor (i.e. Xiandi, last Han Dynasty ruler) issued an edict, ‘... I shall now follow the precedent given in the Yao-tien 堯典 [of the Shu-ching 書經] and abdicate the throne in favour of the King of Wei [i.e. Cao Pi].’” Cao Pi thus treats the last Han Emperor as Yao, and combines the virtues of Shun and Yu in himself. As Fang notes, the Han Emperor also gave his two daughters to be Cao Pi’s wives, emulating Yao’s presentation of his two daughters to Shun. However, Cao was already married, unlike Shun, and had a notoriously large harem! See ibid. 37 and 40, n.38.
133 “Trough” (cao 槽) is pronounced identically to the Cao family surname (曹). The “three horses” (san ma 三馬) possibly refers to the Sima 司馬 family, who usurped the Wei Kingdom and set up the Jin Dynasty in 265 AD. Support for this interpretation comes from the passage in the Jinshu — “three horses eat together from one trough” — which Ouyang quotes almost verbatim in this line, and which was supposed to have been a dream vision about Sima Yi, posthumously known as Emperor Xuan of Jin, that Cao Cao had before his death. See Jinshu, op.cit. 1.20, Xuandiji 宣帝紀 (“Annals of Emperor Xuan”). Another possibility is that the single “trough” refers to the Empire, and “three horses” to the Three Kingdoms who had to share it in spite of Cao Cao’s previous efforts at unification.
134 Lines 13-16 referred to Cao Pi; here, the subject is once more Cao Cao in the days of his prime.
The heroes had raised toasts of wine to honour him at noble receptions,
How lofty was the Bronze Sparrow, towering in the heights.
Flowing melodies circled around, urging on the clear wine-cups,
24 Wondrous dancers on every side revolved their slender waists.
One morning at Xiling he saw a massive tree,\(^{136}\)
How lonely then his tapestries, empty in the soughing wind.
At that time the bleakness was already deplorable,
28 How much more in later generations do we mourn former dynasties!
The lofty tower has long since toppled, slowly becoming level ground,
This tile, as soon as it fell, was buried in choking weeds.
Half obscured under patterned moss and sullied by barren earth,
32 It had to endure the blood of battles, and scorching of rural fires.
Yet ruined leather and broken nets can still find useful employment,
And someone chiselled and carved [this tile], forming the central dip.
The powerful strokes of Jingshan’s brush are sturdy as a crossbow,
36 His phrases are lean, his diction venerable, suiting his boldness of gesture.
Alas for me, seizing it by force, what use do I have for [this tile]?
Official documents, red and black inks, pile up in meaningless confusion.

\(^{135}\) I interpret the first half of this line as an allusion to the period after the death of King Wu, founder of the Western Zhou (traditionally established c. 1100 BC). King Wu had entrusted his territory to the Duke of Zhou (\textit{Zhou Gong} 周公) and the Duke of Shao (\textit{Shao Gong} 召公) while his successor, King Cheng, was still too young to take power. However, the former Duke (Zhou) soon died, leaving the Empire in a weak position. Ouyang seems to treat the weak Wei Kingdom as similarly divided, perhaps due to the rise of the Sima family (see preceding note). The final 3 characters, \textit{Yao wu gao} 堯無高, leave me rather nonplussed. Above (in line 14), Yao is clearly used to make a parallel with the last Han Emperor; and \textit{wu gao} literally means “without a hill,” hence my attempt at a coherent translation. In other words, the whole line implies that after the collapse of the Cao house, the orthodox succession which Cao Pi had received from the Han Emperor was usurped, and the new rulers would no longer respect their Han ancestors.\(^{136}\) Cao Cao apparently had such a premonition of his death in a dream.
But changing my post from South to North, I've never once left it behind,
40 I wrap it in three or four layers of silk, and carefully seal the package.

There have been times when my inner thoughts wanted to fly and scatter,
My moods would become completely tangled, hard to separate the strands.

Travelling by boat, I was often prepared to be seized by the Water God,
44 And constantly in the gloomy darkness I encountered wind and waves.

Stubborn by nature this object has lasted, bearing an essential strangeness,
I constantly dread its metamorphosis into a spirit or ghoul!

In the famous capital wherever I go I'll hand it around for amusement,
48 I love it and wouldn't exchange it even for a jewelled sword of Lu.\textsuperscript{137}

The long song that you gave me is strange yet also powerful,
Though I wish to repay you, I'm ashamed to say I possess no jasper or jade.

The last fourteen lines explain to a certain extent what comes before. Ouyang makes his customary claims about lacking both the talent to answer Xie Bochu's poem on the inkstone, and even the worthiness to possess such a powerful object. The ancient tile inkstone should be used as a receptacle for writing-ink. Since it has come through such a checkered history — originally part of Cao Cao's Bronze Sparrow Tower roof, then surviving repeated battles over the centuries, sullied and worn down by blood, moss and earth, before being carved out into something useful — it must therefore contain an essential strangeness helping it to endure. Thus, those who grind their block of ink on this tile mix some of its mysterious power with that ink, and can produce writing like Xie's, "sturdy as a crossbow,/His phrases . . . lean, his diction venerable, suiting his boldness of gesture." Ouyang has no such talent, he declares, yet still hordes the tile, taking it

\textsuperscript{137} I haven't found a specific reference to swords made in Lu (around present Shandong Province), but Ouyang was a connoisseur of antiques, and composed a poem on an ancient Japanese sword. See \textit{Ji} vol.1, 6.77; and full translation by Watson in Yoshikawa 10-12.
wherever he goes. Unable to channel the tile’s latent force into writing, Ouyang experiences its less benign effects: his mind becomes agitated and his mood turbulent; in his travels winds and waves rise up against him; he constantly fears the tile will transform into a monster.

Earlier, I suggested that in Ouyang’s poetry certain objects with their origin in a wild mountain environment may still contain the elemental powers of those former surroundings, even when moved to a civilized, small-scale setting. Here, a similar process occurs with an ancient, man-made object, which has survived through centuries of conflict and suffering to become part of a scholar’s everyday equipment. It bears somewhere within itself all the traces of that heroic, terrible history. And what exactly is that history? It is what Ouyang sets down in the first two-thirds of the poem; and as he writes, presumably he wets his brush in this very inkstone!

This last poem is quite an extreme example of the imaginative depth and power which Ouyang discerns in an everyday object or activity. Yet comparing the work with those above, on eating and drinking, sleeping and cultural products, there is a similar dynamic at work. Continually, Ouyang seeks the creative source of objects in the natural world or in the ancient past; constantly he finds some kind of hope or consolation amidst the ruins and decay of aging; he includes all aspects of daily life, transforming them into significant, entertaining events; he displays deep appreciation for ordinary human pleasures and natural beauties, and for the talents and generosity of others. Finally, he never loses sight of the essential balance between indulging in cultural or political pursuits and retaining a humane and sympathetic regard for those in the real world surrounding him.
Chapter 4: Everyday Environment — Buildings, Gardens, Creatures, Plants

In the previous chapter, I pointed out the continuous presence of the natural world behind Ouyang’s cultural and everyday activities. Particularly important in his poems on these topics was his tendency to seek out the distant source of everyday objects in a dynamic natural environment, and to derive a deep spiritual inspiration from that source.

In this chapter, I concentrate on Ouyang’s immediate surroundings rather than his activities. As I will show in the first section, in Ouyang’s view, buildings and other human structures gain virtually their whole significance and character from their natural environment. In his poetry, they function as another excellent image for the blending of the natural or cosmic world with the human world. In this regard, Ouyang’s poems on buildings continue the concerns of the preceding chapter.

However, in the second and third sections of this chapter, on his poems about the individual plants and animals which constitute that natural environment, we discover a quite different emphasis. Here, Ouyang deliberately and obtrusively brings the human world into his poetic description, implying that perhaps the natural world is not quite complete in itself without the features human beings can bring to it. I discuss in detail the important techniques Ouyang adopts in these poems to juxtapose human and natural worlds, including wit and caricature, and a kind of spurious argumentation which I have termed “caricatured reasoning.” In the course of my analysis, I suggest the ways in which such techniques add emotional and intellectual depth to what could arguably be termed trivial subject matter. Also, especially in the final section on plants, I show briefly how Ouyang gradually evolved his distinctive, witty approach: an area to which I will return in my concluding chapter below.
To open the discussion, I will translate a work Ouyang composed on a pavilion, or more accurately a villa, constructed by his friend Su Shunqin. The poem indicates admirably Ouyang’s view of the intimate relation between a building, with its human occupant, and the natural surroundings. The pavilion, in present Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, was Su’s home after his disgrace and exile for alleged slander of the Emperor during a party in the capital.1

Green Waves Pavilion [1047].

Zimei sent me a Chant of Green Waves,
Inviting me to write with him a Green Waves composition!
Green Waves is certainly scenic, but since I’m unable to go there,
4 I can’t help gazing towards the East, my heart consumed with longing.2

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1 For this poem, see Ji vol 1, 1.28-29. Also in Xuanji 116. Ji notes that one manuscript of this poem bears the subtitle “Inscription Sent to Zimei [i.e. Su Shunqin].” For Su’s disgrace, see James T.C. Liu, Ou-yang Hsiu 49-50.
2 Green Waves is a translation of the Chinese canglang. The associations of this term are relevant to an understanding of the poem. Though in ancient times, Canglang was used as the name for at least 4 rivers or sections of rivers, all connected in some way with the Han River (flowing mainly through present Hubei Province), for literary purposes, reference works tend to quote as its source a passage from Mencius, Bk.4, part A, sect.8, which in Lau’s translation reads: “There was a boy who sang, ‘If the blue water (滄浪之水) is clear/It is fit to wash my chinstrap./If the blue water is muddy/It is only fit to wash my feet.’ Confucius said, ‘Listen to this, my little ones. When clear, the water washes the chin-strap; when muddy, it washes the feet. The water brings this difference in treatment upon itself.’ Only when a man invites insult will others insult him.” See D.C. Lau, trans., Mencius (Middlesex, England: Penguin 1970; rep. 1984) 121; Chinese text in Zhu Xi [Song], ed., Si shu zhangju jizhu (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1983) 280. The colour of the water here is described by commentators as qing, which Lau translates “blue” but which includes a range of tones from blue to green, as the following note on the Lushi chunqiu 呉氏春秋, shenshi 審時 section, by the Qing commentator Bi Yuan 比沅 (1730-1797) shows: “Canglang (蒼狼) is blue-green colour (青色). In bamboo, it is named canglang (蒼篁); in the sky it is named canglang (蒼浪), and in water it is named canglang (滄浪).” (See Zhongwen dacidian, op.cit. vol.20, 8429, entry for canglang 滄浪). In other words, varying the radical on the character indicates whether it is the colour
A wild bay and rustic waters: the atmosphere is ancient,
High forests and azure hills circle round about it.
Fresh bamboos, sprouting shoots, add to the summer shadows,
8 Old tree stumps everywhere revive, vying for spring beauty.
Waterfowl are calm and carefree, serving the high style,
Mountain birds, morning and evening, cheep and chirp to each other.
Who can know how often this land has flourished and declined?
12 Looking up, the lofty trees are all swathed in grey mist.3
A pity that, although not far from human habitation,
Even with a road, there was never a chance to visit.

of bamboo, sky or water. Though Su Shunqin uses water radicals (滄浪亭) in the name
of his Pavilion, his record describing the building (partially translated below) makes a point
of juxtaposing both the water and bamboo around the site; hence I have used “Green
Waves,” a name that might evoke both a surrounding lake and an extensive grove of
bamboo swaying in the wind. As for the passage from Mencius, it is possible that Su,
exiled from Court, considered he had brought misfortune upon himself. Alternatively, he
could have been thinking of an equally well-known passage from the “Fisherman” (Yu fu
漁父) section of the Chuci (楚辭), dated by Hawkes to the 3rd. century BC, in which the
Fisherman of the title chides the character Qu Yuan for being so concerned to get back
into government service in a corrupt time. The fisherman quotes the same song, “when the
blue/green waters are clear, I can wash my hat-strings in them,” and so on, then disappears
without saying anything else. Hawkes comments: “Tasselled hat-strings [or “chin-strap”
in D.C. Lau’s version above] were a badge of official rank. The meaning is that you should
seek official employment in good times and retire gracefully when the times are troubled.”
See David Hawkes, trans., Chu T’zu: the Songs of the South (Oxford 1959; Boston:
Beacon, repr. 1962) 91; Chinese text in Jiang Liangfu, ed., Qu Yuan fu jiaozhu (Hong
Kong: Shangwu 1964) 573. Ouyang Xiu picks up on both the descriptive and allusive
notations of the Pavilion’s name, as my analysis will demonstrate.
3 The site of Su Shunqin’s pavilion was originally a garden belonging to Qian Yuanliao,
Prince Guangling of the Wu-Yue Kingdom during the Five Dynasties period (918-960).
The Kingdom was actually founded by one Qian Liu (852-932) in 893, during the fading
years of the Tang Dynasty, and became one of ten kingdoms struggling for supremacy
around this time (not five). Wu-Yue covered most of present Zhejiang Province and part
of present Jiangsu, but the Kingdom surrendered to the Song Dynasty in 978. This
background explains Ouyang’s reference to flourishing and declining; presumably the fact
that the garden’s trees are now “lofty” suggests that peace has prevailed for many years
since the chaos of the preceding century.
In plumbing the rare and exhausting the strange, who can compare with you?

16 You sought out hidden reclusion to pursue the gods and immortals.

At first, you followed a single path to enter the thick undergrowth,
Then your eyes opened wide at the wonderful realm of boundlessness.
With pure wind and white Moon, it is most suited to nightfall:

20 A stretch of crystal purity expands over jasper fields.

In the clear light you cannot distinguish the water from the moonlight,
All you see is an emerald emptiness, holding rippling waves.
A pure wind and bright Moon are naturally priceless:

24 What a shame that they sell for only forty thousand cash!

And yet I suspect that this realm was a gift from kind Heaven:
When a worthy man is haggard and worn, Heaven ought to pity him.

Chiyi in ancient times also took lonely journeys,²

28 On rivers and lakes, the waves and billows churned in the sky’s vastness.

Wanting to escape the jagged edge of the worldly road,
Instead he tested his mortal frame in the dragon-infested depths.

How can that compare to a single boat, bobbing up and down,

32 And among red lotuses, clear waves rocking you to drunken slumber?

If a gentleman only possesses life, he won’t be long abandoned,
With new poems and fine wine, for now you can last out the year.

And even though you wouldn’t permit a vulgar guest to visit,

36 Don’t begrudge passing down your excellent lines to the world!

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² Chiyi refers to the late Spring and Autumn period statesman, Fan Li (fl. early 5th century BC), who adopted the nickname Chiyizi pi (literally “Skin of a Leather Wine Sack”) after he retired. See my analysis below for more details.
Ouyang makes it clear that he has not visited Su Shunqin’s Green Waves Pavilion (in line 3), hence his poem is largely based on the record and poems which Su wrote about the building, rather than personal observation. I will first translate part of the record in order to demonstrate the transformation Ouyang works on it in his poem:

Record of the Green Waves Pavilion
by Su Shunqin [written 1045].

As a result of my crime, I had no home to return to, so I moved south on a single boat, and lodged in Central Wu, at first temporarily renting rooms. At the time, it was the height of the steaming, humid summer, and my mud-walled rooms were all cramped and narrow; I couldn’t breathe easily, and longed to find a high, clear, empty and open place to relax my emotions — but it wasn’t to be found.

One day, I went past the prefectural school, and to the east I noticed that the plants and trees were dense, with high hills and broad waters, as if not within the city walls. Next to the water I found a tiny path between tall bamboo and mixed flowers. I headed east for several hundred paces, and there was an abandoned piece of land, stretching broadly across for fifty or sixty xun. On three sides there was only water, and south of the bridge the land was even more broad. There were no homes around, and on both sides it was completely shaded and cut off by forest trees. I visited several local elders, and they said that when the Qian clan held the

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5 In Hu Wentao and Fu Pingxiang, eds., Su Shunqin ji bianmian jiaozhu (Chengdu: Bashu shushe 1990) 625-628. Central Wu, mentioned in the first sentence, would have been in the environs of present Jiangsu Province.

6 A xun was a length measurement equivalent to approx. 3 metres. So 50 or 60 xun would be quite a distance, around 150-180 metres.
region, it was the garden of their near relative, Sun Chengyou. The low [waters] and high [hills] were majestic, still bearing traces of past design. I loved it and wandered around it, and eventually managed to acquire it for forty thousand cash. I built a pavilion on the winding bank of the north side, and called it “Green Waves.”

In front is bamboo and behind is the water, and on the north side of the water is still more bamboo, extending endlessly: a clear stream with azure stems, the light and shadow mingling among walkways and doors, especially suited to a windy, moonlit [night]. Occasionally, I paddle a small boat and go there, wearing a rustic headscarf. Arriving, I feel a sense of release and forget to come back; drinking wine and singing joyfully, sitting cross-legged and whistling to the sky. If the rural elders don’t come, I share my joy with birds and fish. Since my body is comfortable, my spirit is not troubled; since I see and hear nothing evil, the Way becomes clear. Turning my thoughts back to the frenetic arena of glory and humiliation, with its daily clashes over the tiniest advantage, when compared with this true enjoyment, it seems utterly base! ...

For Su, it is a happy accident that he finds such a beautiful place — he had already searched for some time, but previously a “high, clear, empty and open place ... could not be found.” Ouyang, by contrast, declares that Su’s unique character led him inevitably to a correspondingly rare place. Lines 13-18 of the poem express the point very clearly: “A pity that, although not far from human habitation,/Even with a road, there was never a

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7 See note 3 above.
8 The Record then concludes with some general reflections on the need for exiled officials to find inner peace through harmony with nature, instead of allowing their bitterness to destroy their health.
chance to visit” (13-14). The word translated “chance” (yuan 緣) also has the stronger sense of “affinity,” “destiny,” or “Karma.” Other people had no affinity with this place because they lacked Su’s curiosity and sense of adventure: “In plumbing the rare and exhausting the strange, who can compare with you? / You sought out hidden reclusion to pursue the gods and immortals” (15-16). Finally, Su’s determination and perseverance are rewarded with visionary discovery: “At first you followed a single path to enter the thick undergrowth, / Then your eyes opened wide at the wonderful realm of boundlessness” (17-18).

Su’s description of the site is relatively sober; his emphasis is on the bamboo growing profusely on both sides of the stream, and it is this plant which inspires his only noticeably lyrical passage: “In front is bamboo and behind is the water, and on the north side of the water is still more bamboo extending endlessly: a clear stream with azure stems, the light and shadow mingling among walkways and doors, especially suited to a windy, moonlit [night].” Ouyang has mentioned the bamboo earlier, as part of a general description of the area, as if before Su’s discovery: “Fresh bamboos, sprouting shoots, add to the summer shadows” (line 7). Yet, taking his cue from the pavilion’s name, Green Waves, and from Su’s final clause just quoted, Ouyang heightens immeasurably the impact of discovery, creating an inspired vision of watery moonlit transcendence: “With pure wind and white Moon, it is most suited to nightfall: / A stretch of crystal purity expands over jasper fields. / In the clear light you cannot distinguish the water from the moonlight, / All you see is an emerald emptiness, holding rippling waves” (lines 19-22).

Although this vision constitutes the poem’s heart, the surrounding lines also provide many hints of the otherworldly character of the place, and the profound relation between Su’s personality and his new home. In lines 3-4, Ouyang declares: “Green Waves is certainly scenic, but since I’m unable to go there, / I can’t help gazing towards the East, my heart consumed with longing.” At first, Ouyang’s words appear merely those of a polite guest unable to spare the time to visit his friend; however, later we discover that
other people have no “chance” to visit the place either, and in the final couplet, Ouyang concludes: “And even though you wouldn’t permit a vulgar guest to visit,/Don’t begrudge passing down your excellent lines to the world!” Hence, Ouyang’s opening “longing” to visit becomes that of a vulgar, or ordinary, person unable to reach the immortal realm of Green Waves Pavilion in the East, from which Su “passes down” his transcendent writings. Likewise, Ouyang claims that Heaven has bestowed this place on Su — otherwise he couldn’t have purchased it for next to nothing: “A pure wind and bright Moon are naturally priceless:/What a shame they sell for only forty thousand cash!/And yet I suspect that this realm was a gift from kind Heaven:/When a worthy man is haggard and worn, Heaven ought to pity him” (lines 23-26).

Finally, the allusion to Chiyi, nickname of one Fan Li — a minister of King Goujian of Yue (d.465 BC) during the late Spring and Autumn Period — at first seems quite a random choice. Su does not mention this historical figure either in his record or in the poem “Green Waves Pavilion” found in his own collection. However, one of his lyrics (ci 詞), composed around the same time (1045-1046) to the tune Shuidiao getou 水調 歌頭, and subtitled “Green Waves Pavilion,” contains the lines:

Only now do I recall Zhu of Tao and Zhang Han:
Suddenly there was a single boat, with rapid oarstrokes
Beating the waves, carrying perch, returning home:
A gentleman’s ambition,
Just at its peak,
Is ashamed of carelessness and leisure.

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9 This work, found in Hu Wentao, op.cit. 218-219, is a short poem that adds virtually nothing new to the prose account. Ouyang seems not to have used it as a model.
10 Full text of lyric is in ibid. 219-221.
In prime of life, what was the cause of such haggardness,
Of hair growing white, and ruddy face aging? . . .
Stabbing with my oars, I pass through the reeds;
Silently, I watch the waves.

Duke Zhu of Tao was the name Fan Li took when he finally settled in Tao (part of present Shandong Province) after retiring from King Goujian’s service. The relevant passage in the Shiji 史記 (“Records of the Historian”) by Sima Qian (c.145-90 BC) relates his decision as follows: having helped Goujian to achieve immense success and crushing victories in battle, Fan Li considered that “with such a great reputation, it would be difficult to survive long, and that Goujian was the kind of person who would bring suffering on him without allowing him any peace, so he wrote a letter bidding farewell to Goujian.”11 In his lyric, Su mentions Fan Li along with Zhang Han of the Western Jin dynasty (265-317), a native of Wu and minister under Sima Jiong, Prince of Qi, who retired when he foresaw the defeat of his ruler.12 According to the Shishuo xinyu 世説新語 (“New Account of Tales of the World”), autumn arrived and Zhang suddenly longed for perch and vegetables cooked in the Wu style. He ordered his carriage and returned home straightaway.13 In his lyric, Su Shunqin emphasizes that both men were still in their prime when they retired — just as he was when exiled — and that a gentleman (zhangfu 丈夫) faced with the frustration of his ambition will inevitably grow old and haggard (qiaocui 憔悴).

11 From Ma Chiying, ed., Shiji jinzhu (Taiwan: Shangwu 1979) vol.4, chapter 41 (Yue Wang Goujian shijia, di shiyi) 1782.
12 For Wu, see note 5 above. Qi was in the environs of present Shandong Province.
13 See Liu Yiqing, Shishuo xinyu (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju 1962) vol.2, part 7 (Shijian 諸鑑) no.10; English translation in Richard B. Mather, Shih-shuo hsin-yu: A New Account of Tales of the World (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota 1976) 201, no. 10.
Ouyang Xiu's poem, by contrast, concentrates only on Fan Li, referring to him as Chiyi, the sobriquet Fan had adopted during an earlier stay in Qi. Ouyang answers Su's lyric by altering the import of his historical allusion. The *Shiji* passage quoted above goes on to relate that, after his retirement from King Goujian's service: "Fan Li floated on the sea out to Qi and changed his name, calling himself Chiyizipi ("Skin of a Leather Wine Sack"), and he ploughed by the sea, working extremely hard." The account then continues with Fan amassing a great fortune, due to his hard work, so that the local people ask him to become prime minister of Qi. Tired of political office, he gives away all his money and moves again, to Tao. According to his predictions, this place is ideally suited to building up wealth, and by his death Fan has once again acquired an enormous fortune amounting to a hundred million in cash. Sima Qian's summary of his achievements reads: "Fan Li moved three times, and each time gained a glorious reputation, and his name was passed down to later generations. Being a minister like this, even if he wished not to be outstanding, could he avoid it?"  

Ouyang takes two motifs from this biographical sketch to transform Su's melancholy lyric. First, he compares Su's present situation, at Green Waves Pavilion, with Fan Li's plight. Fan, "wanting to escape the jagged edge of the worldly road, instead tested his mortal frame in the dragon-infested depths [i.e. the ocean]" (lines 29-30). Su, on

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14 Part of this passage is quoted in *Xuanji* 117. The original is in Ma, op.cit. vol.4, 1782. Ma Chiying notes the contrast between Fan Li and an earlier minister of Wu named Wu Zixu (whose biography is also in the *Shiji*, ibid. vol.4, 2213-2224). After serving the King of Wu for many years, Zixu was slandered and finally committed suicide. The enraged king exhumed his corpse, and put it in a leather wine sack (*chiyi ge* "Skin of a Leather Wine Sack"), then floated it on the Yangtze River (ibid. 2221-2222). Fan Li's adoption of this nickname seems to be an ironic admission that he would have suffered a similar fate, had he remained in King Goujian's service. Instead, he prefers to be a living "wine sack." See Ma's note 1, in ibid. 1783.

15 Tao was a city situated north-west of present Dingtao County, Shandong Province. In the late Spring and Autumn period, it belonged to Song Kingdom, and was a centre of trade and communications.

16 Ma, op.cit. vol.4, 1787.
the other hand, can let himself bob up and down in a single boat, with clear waves rocking him to drunken slumber among red lotuses (lines 31-32). Secondly, adopting Su’s diction, Ouyang claims that his friend has reason for hope: Heaven, pitying his haggardness (憔悴), allowed him to discover the site for Green Waves Pavilion (lines 25-26); and with Heaven on his side, how can such a gentleman (丈夫) be abandoned for long (line 33)? The implication is that like Fan Li, another gentleman, Su will gain a glorious reputation wherever he goes.

This poem displays a number of characteristics which recur in Ouyang’s works on the places where he himself lived. There is the deep affinity between individuals and their chosen homes: in this case, the transcendent quality evident in Su’s writing and character also exist, according to Ouyang, in his Green Waves Pavilion. Secondly, and just as important, the man-made building is inseparable from, and even subordinate to, its natural surroundings — it is the latter, in fact, which give any building its distinct character. In his poem, Ouyang stresses the hiddenness of the pavilion within tall trees, and its virtual encirclement by water, a contrast with Su’s emphasis in the prose account on the endless bamboo groves stretching into the distance. Finally, the historical allusion to Fan Li, and the portrayal of the haggard Su, remind us that the pavilion is a retreat from the suffering of public life, a place to discover inner, spiritual healing, to drink fine wine, and create poetry (line 34).

A pair of Ouyang’s poems from 1050, on his “Pavilion Within the Bamboo,” again illustrates well the crucial importance of nature in endowing a building with its unique character. Here, the bamboo grove inspires some of Ouyang’s most limpid verse:
Pavilion Within the Bamboo.\(^{17}\)

(i) 'Chuck, chuck,' go the birds within the bamboo,
    Day and night, they sing and chirp to each other.
Floating, drifting, the fish in the water,
4 Swimming in and out of rushes and duckweed.
Water, bamboo, fish, birds, home:
Who was the one that built this pavilion?
The old man comes without horse and carriage,
8 He is not armed with bow and arrow.
But those who swim dive to the depths,
Those who fly scatter in all directions.
Why, old man, do you come so often,
12 Recklessly making us fly and flee in shock?
Have you forgotten your glory and profit?
Have you removed your official's cap and hat-strings?
Still you come pursuing fish and birds,
16 And wandering beside this bamboo and water.
Birds chatter, playing in dense greenery,
Fish swim, sporting in clear pools.
And as for the old man: what does he do?
20 Alone he gets drunk, and alone sobers up.

\(^{17}\)Poem (i) is in Ji vol.1, 2.5; poem (ii) in Ji vol.1, 6.76. Though the two works are in different parts of the collection, and the second poem bears no date, a note to the latter states: "[One of] two poems, the first already seen in Jushi ji ("The Collection of the Recluse")." As I noted previously, the Jushi ji was the collection made by Ouyang himself towards the end of his life. Other surviving poems were collected by his son Fa in an "Outer Collection" (Waiji) in 1072, and edited in 1191 by one Sun Qianyi. Hence, either Ouyang Fa or Sun would have noted that these two poems actually belong together, both dating from 1050.
The three of them all content themselves,
Likewise, they share a common wish to retire.
Old man, if you know such enjoyment exists,
24 Don't tire of climbing up here every single day!

(ii) The high pavilion reflects the first daylight,
Bamboo shadows cool the silent density:
Groves of new shoots, gradually shedding bark,
4 Greeny hue, daily growing deeper.
Much rain makes moss and lichen green,
On secluded paths, there's no-one to seek them out.
A tranquil pastime I've discovered at last:
8 I come for a while, and briefly relax my emotions.
A clear breeze rises with a whisper,
Calling birds give out fine tones.
Good times are not easily found,
12 As for me, I pour some unstrained wine.
Satisfied, I speak of returning home,
When I come again, I plan to bring my zither!

In both cases, the pavilion literally blends in with the background: poem (i)
mentions it only once, in lines 5-6: "Water, bamboo, fish, birds, home:/Who was the one
that built this pavilion?" The unusual list of five nouns in the first line here sketches out the
main constituents of the poem which, Ouyang implies, perfectly harmonize with each
other. The "old man" enters in line 7, at first comically disturbing the harmony — the fish
dive down and birds fly away. Yet, realizing that he bears no malicious intentions and in
fact shares their wish to retreat from the outside world, the creatures soon return to their
contented pursuits, allowing the old man to become the sixth member of this carefree environment. The possibility that the pavilion might be an “outsider” in this scene is not even considered. Likewise, in poem (ii) the building appears only in the first couplet — “The high pavilion reflects the first daylight,/Bamboo shadows cool the silent thickness” — and is then absorbed into the natural surroundings.

In order to demonstrate that the Pavilion Within the Bamboo, and the poems about it, gain their character from the tranquillity and reclusive associations of bamboo, rather than forcing a man-made architectural form onto the natural scene, I will first translate another poem on a bamboo grove in which there is no pavilion at all. The similarity with the mood of the pair above is striking. Afterwards, I will move to a pair of poems dealing with a different building, “Returning Geese Pavilion,” whose atmosphere, shaped by its own unique setting beneath the flight path of migrating geese, contrasts dramatically with Ouyang’s bamboo-surrounded paradise.

_Early Summer, Taking a Drink in Master Liu’s Bamboo Forest_ [c.1049].^{18}

Spring's splendour has suddenly faded,
But summer leaves first show their beauty.
Brushing through the wilds, I find a deep path,
Where sweeping greenery shades the clear daylight.
Ten thousand stalks, criss-crossing, stand erect,
A thousand acres, their lushness oh so rich.
Startling thunder cracks its wild whip,
8 Misty shoots extend patterned embroidery.

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^{18} In _Ji_ vol.1, 6.74-75.
Modest at heart, they rise up high,\textsuperscript{19}
And strong-jointed, grow thinner as they age.
Though ashamed before the beauty of peach and plum,
They deserve their ranking with pine and cypress.\textsuperscript{20}
The stream source is clear in fresh sunlight,
Forests in the foothills are washed in thick mists.
Beautifully flourishing, their colour seems edible,
Dripping wet, their greenness overflows.
Even more so in this first month of summer,
When all things gain the optimum climate.
Late butterflies dance on bright new yellows,
Solitary birds warble with limpid beaks.
Peering deeper, I enter a window of darkness,
Playing in denseness, I love the forest’s abundance.
Linger, lingering, a creek circles the seclusion,
Dimly, dimly, I see a solitary mountain.
Forest vegetation: a mat fit for sleeping,
A rustic well: cold sweetness to rinse my mouth.
Sounding my zither, I pour out mountain winds,
Nature’s music resounds with immortal accompaniment.
Summer’s heat retreats, and my thirst is quenched,
My heart relaxes: it seems my illness is cured.

\textsuperscript{19}“Modest at heart” is literally “empty-hearted” (\textit{xuxin} 虚心), which means both modest and, for bamboo, hollow-stemmed.
\textsuperscript{20}I.e. bamboo, like pine and cypress, is an evergreen, hence is associated with endurance and strength in a difficult, wintry environment, and gives cool shade in the uncomfortably hot summer. Peach and plum, in the previous line, may be beautiful but soon lose their blossoms.
Cup and tray mingle their fragrance,

32 Drawings and books are arranged on both sides.

Blissful, I forget my silk belt and hatpins,21

I'm free as if untied and loosed from the stable.

Thus do I long for a single hill,

36 But I still haven't removed my yellow sash.22

Should official duties give me more time for leisure,

I must knock frequently at this rural gate.

New bamboo gradually fills out the forest,

40 And late shoots are fit for offering on a tray.

Whoever invites the Duke of the Rustic Headscarf,

If there's wine, he'll happily keep them company!23

Though certainly more detailed in its description, this work echoes almost all the images of the two preceding poems: the season is early summer, a rainy period in the climate of Central China; the bamboos produce their abundant shoots; an atmosphere of

21 Like hat-strings, silk belt and hatpins refer to an official's attire.

22 According to the Quan Tangshi diangu cidian, op.cit. vol.1, 4, “single hill” alludes to a description in the Han History, quoting one Ban Si, of a worthy man named Yanzi (Master Yan) who, “if he could fish in a single valley, would not allow ten thousand things to interfere with his will; and if he could linger on a single hill, wouldn’t change his happiness for the whole empire.” For original text, see Ban Gu, Hanshu (Zhonghua shuju 1962; repr. 1975) juan 100 (vol.8) 4205. In this edition, a note identifies Master Yan (嚴子) as Zhuangzi, the ancient Daoist philosopher (ibid. 4206, n.1). This seems possible, since Ban’s previous comments place “Yanzi” alongside Laozi, the other great Daoist sage, contrasting their ideas with those of Confucianism. As for the “yellow sash” of line 36, officials of the Han Dynasty receiving an income between 200 and 2000 piculs of grain wore yellow sashes. These lines thus indicate the wish to retire from office to live in rural seclusion.

23 Ouyang often compared himself with the famous Jin Dynasty lover of wine and conviviality, Shan Jian (see previous chapter, section on Ouyang’s wine poems). On one occasion, Shan rode home drunk with his rustic headscarf upside down on his head.
cool, lush dampness after warm refreshing rain pervades the scene; the narrator follows a path to a place hidden from the outside world, and calms his mind in a deeply tranquil setting; birds sing melodiously, and water is clear and sweet; Ouyang has brought his zither, as he promised in the last line of poem (ii) above, and his music evokes a similar harmonious natural response: "Nature’s music resounds with immortal accompaniment" (line 28) — compare also poem (i) above, where animals and human beings find a similar sense of harmony: "The three of them all content themselves,/Likewise, they share a common wish to retire" (lines 21-22); finally, he forgets the troubles of public office for the moment, and vows to return here often, whenever someone is willing to share wine with him.

The relatively static picture of life within the bamboo, an existence which one feels will be just as tranquil on any successive visit, contrasts sharply with the insistent rhythm of change in the following two works, particularly the latter. The all-too-quick departure of geese in autumn, and their early return in spring after months of absence, provide continual reminders of the transitory nature of our lives:

\textit{Returning Geese Pavilion [1043].}\footnote{In \textit{Ji} vol.1, 6.68. Also in \textit{Xuanji} 74.}

Snow of midwinter was still burying the barren paths in spring.
The first time I came here, with only Master Xu to keep me company.
The city walls stood high, with trees ancient, and birds untamed,
4 Their calls echoed, "Caw, caw," as they perched cold and dishevelled.
The derelict walls and dilapidated rooms still rose up loftily,
Vaguely down in the distance I could glimpse a toppled tower.
As for tall trees, only a few dozen willows still survived,
8 Lining the road, they faced each other: I wonder who first planted them?
We steadily chopped down thorns and weeds, distinguishing plants from trees,
Turned out there were peaches and plums by the corner of the wall.
Happily I made plans to take advantage of the season,
12 With axe and hoe, from morning to evening I worked to weed and cultivate.
The surroundings of the new year improved as each day passed,
When skies cleared, I looked up to see the geese returning!
The old veins of withered stumps were frozen, refusing to sprout,
16 I circled them a hundred times, but my lingering was in vain.
I blamed Transforming Creation for their stubborn and rustic attitude,
The God of Spring was simply unwilling to send out a warming breath.
Drunk on wine, many a time I wanted to beat a great drum,
20 Shocking awake hibernating dragons, to drive out vernal thunder.
It happened that I didn’t go there for several days in a row:
At whose urging have all the colours suddenly been transformed!
Green sprouts and red buds come bursting out of the twigs,
24 Slender sepals and tender petals, like ornamented papercuts.
Supine stumps and scorched branches also shoot up forcefully,
Though old and rotting, they’re not afraid of the laughter of beautiful throngs!
Exquisite, the mountain apricot is first to send out blossoms,
28 As for the others — reds and whites — each makes plans for itself.
First bloom, full blossom, then scattering and dropping:
All hold their attraction, and touch our human emotions.
Flowering throngs, do not plan to open all at once:
32 It should be arranged that when one falls, another comes into bloom.
By the end of spring, that would allow ten thousand quarts of wine:
With you for company, I’ll become drunk on three thousand cups!
The second poem bears a longer title explaining the new context:

_Fifteen Years After I Built the Returning Geese Pavilion at Huazhou, Mei Gongyi [i.e. Mei Zhi (995-1059)] Went to be Governor of this Region; So He Obtained My Poem and Carved it on Stone, also Sending Me a Long Rhyme, which I Now Answer [1056].^{25}_

The wind blows over the city wall, and autumn grasses yellow,
Looking up, I see honking geese beginning to soar southward.
Autumn grasses, blown by the wind, in spring grow green once more,

4 The geese fly back from south to north, sounding their stern calls.
Below city walls, beside the tower, was a path of peaches and plums,
I recall first clearing the wilderness and raising them with my own hands.
With snow dispersing and ice melting, the plants and trees were stirred,

8 It was then that I recorded the geese as they started to head back home.
For a decade since that time, the place has been empty of human traces,
Flying geese, year after year, have travelled from south to north.
On neglected ruins of the toppled tower, plants grow wild and cold,

12 The trees are old, without blossoms; spring, lonely, goes by.
The poem of the Eastern Governor is particularly beautiful,
Its composition and literary form dazzle like patterned silk.
He carved my lengthy poem's major lines on a square stone,

16 And in one day, a hundred copies were spread around the capital.

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^{25} In _Ji_ vol.1, 2.50. The number fifteen in the title is an approximation, judging by the poems' dates of completion. For more on Mei Zhi, see below in the section of this chapter on animal and bird poems.
The ancient people for whom I long all received treatment like this:
Thus were their inspiring names passed down for hundreds of years!
After I die, the sunken memorial will record my rise and fall,
20 Holding wine, people will weep, mourning the mountains and rivers.
And though your leaving an appreciation was only a coincidence,
Future ages will pass it down, and will not let it decay.

In the first of these works, the geese appear only once, returning from south to
north in line 14, as Ouyang struggles to clear away years of accumulated weeds and
thorns. Apparently, this was an abandoned old pavilion (line 5) which Ouyang has decided
to renovate; he is just beginning to make a little progress when the geese arrive,
encouraging him with the thought that spring is not far off. Clearly, the change here is
from barren winter and dilapidated ruins to glorious, flower-filled spring and nearly-
completed repairs. The symbol of returning geese is thus a hopeful one.

The second work, by contrast, is crowded with geese. Ouyang is much more
sensitive now to the swift passage of time: line 2 shows geese flying south in the autumn;
in line 4, suddenly it is spring, and they return north honking.26 An explanation for this
compression comes in lines 9-10: “For a decade since that time, the place has been empty
of human traces./Flying geese, year after year, have travelled from south to north.” Only
now does the true appropriateness of the pavilion’s name become clear since Ouyang, like
the original builder, had to leave the place and let it fall into disrepair, and the geese
remain its only constant visitors. We can imagine that each time they come back — in the
poem as well as in real life — the pavilion has grown a little shabbier. Hence, the symbol

26 Notice also the rhyme-scheme: the two lines of the first couplet share a single rhyme;
the second couplet changes to another rhyme. This arrangement of rhyme according to
individual couplets is quite unusual in classical Chinese poetry, though very common in
English poetry, for example, in the heroic couplets of the 18th. century poet, Alexander
Pope. I will discuss Ouyang’s use of rhyme in more detail in my concluding chapter.
of returning geese has become a pessimistic evocation of the inexorable cycle of creation and subsequent decline over time.

Despite a contrast in the immediate emotional effects of the returning geese, both poems share a profound sense of the rhythms of creation and destruction inspired by the unalterable fluctuation of the migration cycle. Thus the second work, instead of concluding with the pavilion ruined again, suddenly brings in the Eastern Governor, Mei Zhi, who carves Ouyang’s former poem onto stone, and presumably places it on the pavilion which he has once more repaired. Now, Ouyang feels, people can read this inscription even after he is dead, and “future generations will . . . pass it down, and will not let it decay.” Out of destruction comes survival and continuation. The first poem, on the other hand, barely conceals its agitation beneath the comical, optimistic surface. The subject of the work, an impulsive figure, at first intends to accelerate the arrival of spring by banging drums to rouse the seasonal rains. Giving up hope, he then stays away, ignoring the outside world; suddenly, everything is blossoming by itself, as if mocking all his previous horticultural exertions. Now, however, he worries that all the plants blooming at once will leave nothing when they all wither together. He suggests a revision of the natural order so that one plant begins to bloom as another fades. The added advantage is that he can toast them all individually with wine, and consume three thousand cups of wine in a single spring! Yet beneath the carefree surface is the uneasy feeling that, just as he could do nothing to quicken the arrival of spring, so he will be equally helpless to prevent the falling blossoms later.

As with the Pavilion Within the Bamboo, here it is the surrounding natural environment and its characteristic rhythms upon which Ouyang focuses, rather than attempting direct description of Returning Geese Pavilion itself. And one reason for adopting this standpoint is that the rhythms of nature endure, even while the buildings’ walls crumble. Only poetry, carved on stone and passed down through generations, can emulate such endurance, and become a lasting memorial of human endeavour.
The first of the Returning Geese Pavilion poems contains another theme: a detailed portrayal of clearing away weeds and other obstructions so that plants can grow. Such activity reappears in several of Ouyang's other works on buildings and construction. In my chapter on his mountain poetry, I mentioned Ouyang's deep attraction to pure, flowing springwaters as symbols of renewal. In the following work, on the subject of renovating a watercourse, Ouyang's acquaintance, named Zhu, clears out a channel, allowing flowing waters to irrigate the surrounding land once again:

Written at the End of the 'Record of Constructing a Wooden Channel at Yicheng':

Presented to Temple Orderly Zhu [1070?]27

Bringing about peoples' benefit is not very hard to do,
Make the people happy, and they'll surely forget their tiredness.
Oh how joyful you are, Master Zhu! On Zhangling dyke

4 You guided the Yan along to the Man, reviving all the reservoirs.28
The ancient channels were long abandoned; people knew nothing about them,
Within the space of only three months, Master Zhu managed to rebuild them.
The moist earth is like high-grade soil, and stony ground now productive,

8 For miles around, in future years there'll no longer be terrible famine.
The waters of the Yan and Man will flow on without ceasing,
And Xiang people likewise will remember you for ever.29

27 In Ji vol.1, 6.63. Though this work is placed among Ouyang's poems of the 1030s from Yiling, the Southern Song editor notes that the "Record of Constructing a Wooden Channel at Yicheng," mentioned in Ouyang's title, was written by one Zheng Xie in 1069, and hence this poem belongs to Ouyang's late period, probably written in 1070. The original confusion was caused by the reference to Yicheng in the title, another name for Yiling. See ibid. vol.1, 6.71.

28 Originally separate tributaries of the Han River (running through present Hubei Province), the Yan and Man Rivers are now a single river called Man 潭. See Cihai (Shanghai 1986 repr. of 1979 ed'n) 455, entry under Yan shui 鄱水.
I have mentioned several times Ouyang’s ingenuity in suiting rhyme-schemes to the content of his poems. Here, he adopts the same rhyme for every line, causing the work to flow along without interruption, like the newly-channeled waters. By contrast, the rhyme scheme of the second “Returning Geese” poem above unsettles the reader with its constant changes, echoing the unsettling departure and arrival of the birds. Another feature of this poem is the way the subject, Master Zhu, manages to achieve a kind of permanence, at least in reputation, through constructing a water-work that benefits people for many generations. Ouyang, too, is anxious to find some way of enduring beyond his own death. Above I noted the importance of poetry in this connection; in another late work, translated below, Ouyang portrays himself excavating a spring to benefit other people, and then recording his action in a poem carved on stone, to guarantee receiving the credit after he is gone!

Left to be Inscribed at Shun Spring in Qizhou [1068]30

In time, high banks become valleys,
In time, oceans become dry fields,
Yu Shun has already been buried for three thousand years;
Though ploughing fields and digging wells are lowly occupations,
Till now the traces he left survive, unchanged from ancient times.
At the foot of Mount Li one finds a chilly spring,
In days gone by, he wept here and cried out to the Heavens.31

29 Xiang refers to Xiangzhou, a region covering what is now Xiangyang, Gucheng, Guanghua, Nanzhang and Yichang Counties in Hubei Province, then including the city of Yicheng mentioned in the poem’s title.
30 In Ji vol.1, 2.57. Shun 夏 refers to Emperor Shun, mythical ancient sage ruler, also known as Yu-Shun 奚舜 (line 3 of the poem). Under his leadership, the Great Yu (Da Yu 大禹) channeled the waters of the Empire to overcome a great flood, hence the relevance of lines 1-2.
8 Heartless, the plants and trees changed their colours as before,
Mountains and streams, pale and drab, produced their clouds and mists.
One morning, in long robes, he faced directly south,
Gao, Kui, Ji and Qi came to flatter their ruler.32

12 His achievements were noble, his virtue great, covering ten thousand generations,
People passing here today still feel inclined to linger.
The Governor of Qizhou, taking a day off from politics,33
Drilled a channel and opened a pool, freeing the clear ripples.

16 Excursion carriages' wheels collided: the only fear was being last,
Massed flowers bloomed chaotically, as if struggling to be first!
And is it only local people who know the joys of this place?
Even travellers halt their journeying wagons on its behalf.

Even before Ouyang has carried out any construction work, the site is one that
makes passers-by linger (line 13). The reason is that the well here has survived, so Ouyang
claims, since the time of Emperor Shun, as an example of the sage's work to order
society. Visiting the place reminds people that Shun provided the foundation for Chinese
civilization, selecting officials to organize agriculture, education, music and the penal
system, and thus bringing structure to a chaotic country. The very fact that this well

31 Li Mountain is south-west of present Jinan City, Shandong Province. Another name for
the mountain was Shungeng (which translates as "Shun ploughs"), the supposed site
where Emperor Shun did agricultural work to show that he didn't consider it beneath him
(see lines 4-5, which imply that Shun also built a well). Later, there was a Shun Shrine set
up on the mountain, and a large cave at its foot containing the so-called Shun Well.
32 To face south was the privilege of a ruler. Gao, Kui, Ji and Qi were all mythical officials
under Emperor Shun, responsible for punishments, music, agriculture and education
respectively.
33 At this time (1068), Ouyang was Governor of Qizhou (covering the region around
present Shandong Province).
remains, even after three thousand years, is a proof of Shun’s immense beneficial influence and transforming power (lines 11-12).

Having explained the historical background of the place, Ouyang proceeds to open up a spring and pool supplied by the waters of Shun Well. Instead of just a trickle of people passing by, the roads now become crowded with visitors from near and far, and even — a witty touch — with flowers, all trying to reach the place first (lines 14-19). Ouyang’s action is an extremely symbolic one: springwaters now flow out of the cave source, making the surrounding land more fertile — hence the profusion of blossoms; the spring also attracts people who will be reminded of the virtue of Shun in controlling disastrous floods during his reign and overcoming social chaos; thirdly, Ouyang himself, the representative of the Song Emperor in Qizhou, brings joy to the people, and thus continues the long tradition of benevolent government initiated by Shun; as a result, these traces of Ouyang’s own work will hopefully survive for countless generations too.

Once again, we see an inseparable blending of the natural with the human, and a deep concern with finding some way to endure beyond a short lifetime. Added to these themes is the process of clearing away rubbish or obstructions to reach a fertile, creative source, whether in a literal sense, as in these poems on channeling water; or in a more figurative manner, as with Su Shunqin’s Green Waves Pavilion and Ouyang’s own Pavilion Within the Bamboo. Both these discovered places provide a retreat from the violent scheming and insecurity of public life in the capital to a tranquil, pure environment of simple constancy and spiritual “cleansing.” Finally, poetry is the means to record all these sites and, as Ouyang demonstrates, poems can evoke the atmosphere of places even after they have crumbled away and there is no possibility of the reader visiting them in person.
I have shown how the natural world, especially its flora and fauna, deeply affects the character of Ouyang’s various residences and retreats, and those of his friends mentioned in his poetry. Yet also apparent in several of these works is his concern about the problem of individual human endurance. Hence, rather than hastily concluding that Ouyang is attempting to transcend his individual self and blend with the larger cosmos, I will instead turn to his poems on specific animals, birds and plants, which provide a contrasting approach to nature.

Ouyang deals with animals and birds mainly in a series of remarkable works from the second half of the 1050s. It seems that the scholars of the Tang and Song developed a fashion for keeping exotic pets, and Ouyang’s poems on this topic are as much concerned with his own attachment to these creatures, as with the creatures themselves. Apart from their literary brilliance, therefore, they also act as a fascinating inner record of one scholar’s enjoyment of this unusual hobby.

By contrast, his poems on plants and trees, composed throughout his career and in a variety of places, reveal the gradual development of his unique and highly imaginative poetic style, and his increasing tendency towards including caricatures of himself and his friends in his description of natural objects — a practice whose culmination we see in the works of the late 1050s.

34 Previous to the Tang Dynasty, it was mainly only Emperors and other rulers who kept exotic creatures, as signs of their far-reaching influence. The most famous example was Emperor Wudi of the Han (r.140-87 BC), whose enormous Shanglin Park contained a menagerie of animals from all over the known world. By the Mid-Tang, the practice had spread down to scholars: Bai Juyi, for example, often mentions his pet cranes in poems. For cranes and other animals in the literature of the Tang Dynasty, cf. Madeleine K. Spring, Animal Allegories in T’ang China (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society 1993), esp. chap. 1, where several of Bai’s crane poems are translated. The practice of writing about pets increased rapidly in the northern Song. Apart from Ouyang, several poets mention their cranes: the recluse Lin Bu (967-1028) referred to his cranes as his wives, and to flowering apricot trees as his children (see Yoshikawa 53). Later Su Shi also wrote a famous poem about his snobby crane: see Hetan 鶴嘆 in Feng Yingliu, op.cit. Su Shi shiji, vol.3, 2003. Yet as I will show, Ouyang seems to have been one of the most adventurous at recording other kinds of pets in his poetry.
As a transition to Ouyang’s poems on animals and birds, I will translate one more composition on a building, probably dating from the 1050s, which well illustrates his general attitude to working in the capital during this period. With this background, the content and mood of the following pieces become more comprehensible.

_Tower of Longevity [late 1050s?]_35

Emerald tiles reflect the sun, producing blue-green mist,
A high tower of somebody’s house stands by the side of the road.
Yesterday, they were hacking away with axes and gouging awls,
4 This morning, turquoise tapestries hang across crimson columns.
The owner climbs to the top of the tower: how loftily it rises!
He wishes to show off his wealth and power, crushing all other men.
Halfway up the tower is his daughter, fifteen or sixteen years old,
8 Her brows are painted with rouge, and her temples glossy black.
From morning to night, spring breezes bear down music of pipes and strings,
Passers-by all raise their heads, and linger for a while.
Doubtless they’ll laugh at the man riding his horse in front of the tower,
12 At his waist hangs a golden seal, but his head is already white.
He’s so greedy for name and profit, he’s almost destroyed his health,
He competes with crude stupidity, and revels in sensual pleasures.
Morning they see him riding by,
16 Evening they see him riding home.
Throughout the year he seldom brings any benefit to the government:
What’s the use of his officiousness, and his wandering back and forth!

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35 In _Ji_ vol.1, 6.80. The poem is undated, but comes just before a work from 1057.
The poem begins as a slightly satirical portrait of the wealthy family’s new tower — the head of the family wishes to show off his success, “crushing all other men” (line 6). Suddenly, however, Ouyang turns the observed people into observers, imagining their view from the tower. One component of that view is himself, the horserider, old and sick from his futile daily struggle for fame and profit; obsessively riding to and from work, yet unable to bring the slightest benefit to the government. Of course, this is an exaggerated portrait, yet the poem nevertheless demonstrates Ouyang’s consistently negative attitude to his official posts in the poems of this period, and hints at the corresponding relief he felt when he could retreat from public life to enjoy some brief hours of leisure with his plants and pets.

White Animals and Birds: Poems from the 1050s

Between 1055 and 1059, Ouyang composed a group of remarkable poems dealing with white animals and birds. Most of these works were produced either while Ouyang, Mei Zhi and Mei Yaochen were locked inside the Ministry of Rites, marking the 1057 Presented Scholar (jinshi 进士) examinations, or soon afterwards during the same year. The two Mei’s also composed works on these topics, some of which are extant.

36 Although the poem doesn’t name this man, I assume him to be Ouyang’s self-portrait, since Ouyang uses very similar terms to refer to himself in many other poems of this period; for example, the pair of poems entitled “Having Reported Sick for a Long Time, I Now Go to My Post, and Happen to Compose Two Crude Verses” (Ji vol.2, 7.27), written around 1057, contains the lines: “Would I dare to announce to the Sagely Court that I’m giving up my generous income?/But I’m greatly ashamed that the Imperial Palace is supporting a vulgar and lazy [person like me]” (poem i, ll.7-8); and “The years and my vigour swiftly, swiftly flow away together,/The hair at my temples grows ragged and stringy: a sick old man alone” (poem ii, ll.5-6).

37 Actually only examples of Mei Yaochen’s poems on these creatures survive, to several of which I refer below. Among Mei Zhi’s 32 surviving poems, there are no references to white animals or birds. See Fu Xuancong, et al., ed., Quan Songshi (Beijing daxue
However, the poem with which Ouyang began the series, entitled simply "White Rabbit," dates from 1055:

The sky was dark and gloomy,
Clouds were dense and looming,
The white rabbit pounded medicine in Heng’e’s palace.

4 But the golden lock of the Jade Pass was not fastened that night,
She scampered down to the Chu mountains’ ten million folds.
Chu springs were pure and sweet, gushing into mighty ravines,
Chu grass was soft and green, swaying in the light breeze.

8 Thirsty, she drank from the spring,
Tired, she rested on the grass.
A man of Chu encountered her on the Abundant Mountain road,
With nets and cunning strategies, somehow he managed to catch her.

12 He carried her over three hundred miles to be a Hanlin treasure,
At Hanlin, he exchanged her for a crooked golden disc.
In pearly baskets and flowery cages, with delicate jade to eat,
Mornings she tailed a peacock companion,

16 Evenings she followed the phoenix’s wings.
The owner invited visitors to grow tipsy beneath her cage,
The wind and dust of the capital weren’t allowed to soil her mat!

chubanshe 1991) ce 3, vol.178, 2036-2043. Evidence for his having written poems on these topics comes from the titles of Ouyang’s and Mei’s poems below. For the importance of the poems written during this period, also noted in my biographical sketch, cf. concluding chapter below.
38 In Ji vol.1, 6.76-77.
39 The Hanlin Academy was a kind of research institute for distinguished scholars, in Kaifeng.
Hordes of poets and famous painters exhausted their passionate expressions,

20 But was this rabbit aware of them? That’s something no-one can know.

Her Heavenly bearing and white purity had now become a burden,

When a creature’s nature is restricted, it does no good in the end.

The flourishing and fall of Shanglin: when will it ever cease?  

24 She turns her head, but peaks and crags have cut off any news.

Traditionally, a white rabbit was supposed to inhabit the Moon, pounding elixirs of immortality for the mythical beauty Chang’e, referred to by an alternative name Heng’e in line 3. Ouyang imagines that his pet rabbit with its pure white fur must have escaped from there. Again, as with several of Ouyang’s poems on foods, tea and stones above, he traces the rabbit subject to its mysterious source, and relates its journey via Chu mountains to the capital. Yet caged up in the city it soon wearies, and by the final couplet is certainly in decline, if not already deceased.

This poem, more than others belonging to this group, implies a parallel with Ouyang’s own career: like the rabbit, he spent time in Chuzhou — though he was “captured” before going there — then later was brought to the capital to work at the Hanlin Academy. Though not caged, Ouyang certainly felt trapped and restricted working in the central government, as poems like “Tower of Longevity” make clear. There is thus a definite double reference, to the rabbit and Ouyang himself, in line 22: “When a creature’s nature is restricted, it does no good in the end.”

40 For Shanglin Park see note 34 above. Perhaps this line refers to the rise and fall of dynasties.
41 As far as I can tell, this line implies that the rabbit is exiled, and cut off from news of her fellow rabbits. There may be a semi-comical allusion to several of Du Fu’s (712-770) exile poems, which express a similar sentiment. For example, see William Hung, ed., Du shi yinde (Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series, Supplement 14: Taipei repr. 1966) vol.2, 120, poem 10, line 29: “News from the Central Plain has been cut off”; ibid. 295, poem 5, line 7: “News from several prefectures has been cut off”; and ibid. 509, poem 20A, line 7: “Riding a boat, I am cut off from any news.”
The connection between rabbit and Moon is an extremely ancient one in the Chinese literary tradition. One of the oldest texts in the Chuci 楚辭 ("Songs of Chu"), the so-called “Heavenly Questions" (Tianwen 天問), dated by Hawkes to the 4th. century BC, contains the lines: “What virtue does the night light [i.e. the Moon] have, dying and then reviving?/What advantage has it to keep a rabbit in its belly?”

Countless later poets, writing about the Moon, referred to this rabbit along with the other mythical lunar inhabitants: Chang’e — exiled there for stealing a peach which conferred immortality — an osmanthus tree, and a cold toad or frog (han chan 寒蟾). Mid-Tang poets such as Han Yu and Li He (790-816) particularly enjoyed focusing on the grotesque aspect of these images, and the white rabbit appears several times in their works on the Moon.

In the above poem, Ouyang’s use of the poetic associations of the white rabbit is thus quite conventional, especially line 3: “The white rabbit pounded medicine in Heng’e’s palace.” Nevertheless, his suggestion that his pet rabbit had somehow escaped from the Moon is a witty extension of the tradition, as is the fact that the rabbit feels trapped and alien when removed from its natural surroundings — most previous poetic references treated all these mythical beings as lonely prisoners of the forbidding lunar environment. Similarly, as far as I can tell Ouyang is unprecedented in making a real rabbit the subject of

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42 See David Hawkes, op.cit. 45, and 47, ll.17-18; Chinese text in Jiang Liangfu, op.cit. 283-284, which includes a discussion of the Han commentator Wang Yi’s gloss on these lines. Hawkes changes rabbit to “frog,” despite Wang Yi’s note: “It says that there is a rabbit (tu 兔) in the Moon, and what is the advantage to occupy the Moon’s belly and gaze out? For 兔 one text has tu 兔 [meaning rabbit].” Jiang Liangfu suggests that the final question should be read as: “What kind of thing is its darkness (or shadow): is it nothing but a rabbit in its belly?” (op.cit. 284).

43 For one source of the Chang’e story, and subsequent references to her by Tang Dynasty poets, see Quan Tangshi diangu cidian, op.cit. 1555-1556 and 2296-2297; for the osmanthus tree see ibid. 1596, and for the toad and rabbit, which often come together, see ibid. 1292, which gives many couplets by Han Yu and Li He. This book lists the page numbers of these poems in the 1960 Zhonghua shuju edition of Quan Tangshi.

44 See above, n.43.
his poem: earlier poets who refer to the creature do so incidentally as part of their
depiction of the Moon, a more conventional literary topic.

Having completed this poem, Ouyang requested matching poems from his friends. However, as Mei Yaochen relates in a note to his work "Once Again Composing on the White Rabbit" (of 1056): "Yongshu [Ouyang Xiu] said that all our compositions used Chang’e and the Moon Palace as explanations, and he really hoped we would make a different interpretation and write more poems; in this way we might rise above the common herd. But this is impossible except for experienced writers!"\(^\text{45}\) Not only does Mei’s note prove that Ouyang initiated this whole series of unusual poems, it also demonstrates Ouyang’s desire to go beyond conventional use of imagery and subject matter.\(^\text{46}\) In fact, Ouyang’s innovations in the following poems are not confined to poetic imagery, but extend to structure, metre and rhetoric as well.

For example, the fate of the rabbit is presented more clearly in a later poem, from 1059. Ouyang over-turns any preconceptions about the associations of whiteness with the cold Moon by comparing the rabbit with a tropical white parrot. The slightly lilting metrical irregularity of "White Rabbit" here becomes a violently varying, choppy metre, at least for the first 8 lines — perhaps an indication of Ouyang’s strong attachment to his erstwhile furry companion. The metre then settles into a perfectly regular seven syllables per line, as Ouyang’s reason takes control:

\[^{45}\text{In Zhu Dongrun, op.cit. vol.3, 900, poem preface.}\]
\[^{46}\text{In a poem entitled "Snow," written 1050, which I discuss in the next chapter, Ouyang calls for a similar innovation, telling his fellow poets to avoid typical snowy words like white, jade, flowering apricot (meihua), and the Moon. For this poem see Ji vol.1, 6.75.}\]
Rhapsody Answering Shengyu’s “White Parrot” [1059]

I recall, recently, a man from the Chu mountains gave me a jade white rabbit,
Yet by the following spring the jade white rabbit had passed away.
The sunlight emerges in the daytime; at night the Moon is bright,
4 As the proverb goes: “Rabbits gaze on the Moon when it is rising.”
And it’s said that all such white and dazzling things,
For instance, water, when it turns into snow and then transforms to ice,
Receive the purest essence of single *yin* congealed and solidified.
8 I’ve always regretted that, in any place except great wilds, the north pole,
or utterly cold deserts,
To raise them violates their nature, and lowers their chance of survival.
Who could have known that in fiery latitudes of land, wild and cut off,
Where swelling seas join Heaven, boiling with Heaven’s heat,
12 Yellow-crowned, black-clawed, speaking like a person,
There lives a bird with jade plumage, even more white and pure?
Thus I know that, regarding creatures born between Heaven and Earth,
Ten thousand species can’t be unified within a single pattern.
16 Among the islands in the middle of the sea, at the edges of human habitation,
There are only eight kingdoms that come to market in Guangzhou.
Of these, it is Zhunian that comes the least frequently.

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47 In *Ji* vol.1, 2.42.
48 *Yin* 陰 was one of two polar, or opposing, forces in the universe, according to traditional Chinese cosmology. It was associated with cold, darkness, the Moon, females, softness, etc. The opposite force, called *yang* 陽 was associated with heat, light, the sun, males and hardness, etc. Ouyang questions these fixed and arbitrary relations, as I show below.
49 In a note to the poem by Mei Yaochen “Answering Liu Yuanfu’s ‘White Parrot,’” (also written 1059), which may be the work by Shengyu [i.e. Mei Yaochen] referred to in Ouyang’s title, Mei explains that the parrot comes from Zhunian 注鞏, a country “in the

217
Some year this bird must have pursued one of her ocean vessels.

20 Can anyone cover all the peaks that rise up from the sea?

Ten thousand wonders, a thousand rarities: how can we exhaust them?

The rabbit was born in the bright Moon; the Moon is in the Heavens;
Such a jade rabbit cannot last very long in human society.

24 How much more you who come from scorching miasmal lands:

How could you know of the Central Regions’ frost, snow and cold?
Even though you can drink when thirsty, and peck at food when hungry,
Anyone knows that, in the end, being tied up brings you no joy.

28 Heaven is high, the ocean is broad, the road stretches into the distance,
Alas, your frame is tiny, and your feathered wings are weak.
If you were able to recognize the road, or know the way back home,
I would be willing to open your cage, and let you fly away free —

32 I’d send you back to your homeland to boast of Wanling’s poems,
Then the Elder’s poetry will be famous throughout the world!

Mourning for his rabbit, Ouyang declares that its white purity — a sign of the predominance of the $yin$ aspect — was suited only for life in a barren and freezing northerly climate, hence it could not survive in more temperate Kaifeng (lines 8-9).

Western Sea, 410,000 [li] from the Central Regions [of China]. By boat you must travel for three years past the Queen Mother of the West [possibly the Kunlun Mountains, in Chinese Central Asia], till you reach Fanyu.” This rather mystifying note does at least suggest that Zhunian is an island in the Indian Ocean. The Zhongwen dacidian gives a more precise location, on the shores of the Coromandel Sea near India, and adds that the Sanskrit name for Zhunian is Cola, and its Arabic name Culian. Representatives from the island first came to give tribute to the Song Emperor in the year 1015. See op.cit. v.19, 90, character no. 17614.49.

50 Wanling, or Master Wanling, was the name Mei Yaochen used for his collected works, Wanling xiansheng ji. Ouyang also called him by the nickname Poet Elder, Shilao 詩老, hence the final line.
However, he now encounters a parrot with “jade plumage even more white and pure” — hence also apparently predominating in yin — yet it lives in the “fiery latitudes . . . where swelling seas join Heaven, boiling with Heaven’s heat” (lines 10-11): in other words, the most extreme yang environment. From this new piece of evidence, Ouyang must infer that the world is more complex in its correlations than he had imagined: “Thus I know that . . . ten thousand species can’t be unified within a single pattern” (lines 14-15). In fact, there are almost certainly many more species that people haven’t even discovered, inhabiting remote ocean islands: “Can anyone cover all the peaks that rise up from the sea?/Ten thousand wonders, a thousand rarities: how can we exhaust them?” (lines 20-21). Faced with the fecundity and infinite variety of the natural world, Ouyang can only lose himself in wonder.

As I noted, Ouyang has already utilized comparison twice in this poem, first, in relating the white property of the rabbit to snow, ice and, by inference, coldness; second, relating the same white property of the parrot to fiery heat. From line 22, he extends this “comparative method” to the sense of displacement each creature feels in captivity. He addresses the parrot thus: “The rabbit was born in the bright Moon; the Moon is in the Heavens./Such a jade rabbit cannot last very long in human society./How much more you who come from scorching miasmal lands:/How could you know of the Central Regions’ frost, snow and cold?” (22-25). The effect is perhaps to deflate his excessive lamentation for the rabbit at the beginning of the work.

Closely connected with this method of comparison is Ouyang’s use of inference, or drawing conclusions based on evidence. Apart from the examples just mentioned, which also involve inference, there is an extended double inference from lines 16-21: among the islands at the edge of human habitation in the ocean, only eight kingdoms come to market at Guangzhou; among them, people from “Zhunian” come the least frequently, and some year this bird must have followed one of their boats to reach the mainland. This is the first inference, closely followed (in line 20) by the second: “Can anyone cover all the peaks that
rise up from the sea?” — which picks up the fact that only eight, among numerous other, kingdoms come to China — hence, by inference: “Ten thousand wonders, a thousand rarities: how can we exhaust them?”

Another example of inference extends over the final eight lines of the poem, and indicates that Ouyang is using these intellectual tools in a parodic manner. Having indicated just how remote is the parrot’s original environment, and how rare it is for people to visit from there, he draws the obvious conclusion that the parrot must be homesick. If the bird knew its way home, he declares, he would release it and, based on the fact that it can “speak like a person” (line 12), it would naturally boast of Mei Yaochen’s excellent poems. In this way, Ouyang concludes, Mei’s reputation for poetry would extend beyond China, to cover the whole world!51

There are two more of Ouyang’s poems which mention the white rabbit, this time in connection with a pair of white cranes belonging to Mei Zhi (whose style name was Gongyi). These works use similar techniques of parodic argumentation. The crane is another ancient literary symbol in China. Before translating Ouyang’s poems, it may be helpful to note some earlier references to these birds.

In the 3rd century BC text Han Feizi 韓非子, chapter 3 (“Ten Errors,” Shi guo 十過),52 there is a moving story about black cranes (xuan he 玄鶴):

51 Though I have not discovered earlier poems on white parrots, apart from those by Mei Yaochen and Liu Chang of the same period, mentioned in note 49 above, parrots of other colours have occasionally been depicted in the Chinese literary tradition. There is, for instance, a “Rhyme-Prose on Parrots” by one Mi Heng (173-198): see Li Shan, ed., Pingzhu zhaoming wenxuan, op.cit. juan 3, 12. English translation by William T. Graham in Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 39 (1979) 39-54. There is also a humorous regulated verse by Bai Juyi on a pair of green parrots, in which he proves that the birds belong to him by the fact that they know how to “intone poems.” See Bai Xiangshan ji vol.4, 8.95, Shuang Yingwu 雙鶴鶴. Ouyang Xiu perhaps appropriated this idea for his final couplet above.

52 For Chinese text, see Tang Jingzhao and Li Shi’an, ed., Han Feizi jiaozhu (Jiangsu renmin chubanshe 1982) 85. The whole episode with Duke Ping surrounding this quotation (84-87) is an interesting discussion of the effects of certain musical modes on natural forces. The Duke’s curiosity to hear more tunes ends with his country destroyed
The Duke said: “Can you let me hear the pure zhi mode?” Master Kuang answered: “I cannot. Those of ancient times who heard the pure zhi mode were all lords of virtue and righteousness. Now, my lord’s virtue is slight and not worthy of hearing it.” Duke Ping continued: “What I like is musical tones: I wish to try and listen to it.” Master Kuang had little choice, so picked up his zither and plucked the strings. He played it once, and twenty eight black cranes came to the south of the road, gathering at the ruins of Lang Gate. He played it again, and they formed a line. The third time he played it, they extended their necks and called out, then unfurled their wings and danced. When the tone struck the sounds of the gong and shang modes, their cries rose to the Heavens. Duke Ping was extremely delighted, and those present were all joyful.

White, as opposed to black, cranes appear in the biographies of one Ding Lingwei of the Wei-Jin period (220-465), who was transformed into a white crane after studying the Dao; and Su Dan of the former Han dynasty, who welcomed several dozen white cranes to his home, whereupon they changed into young men, and conferred on Su the status of immortal (xian). Finally, all of them flew into the sky, disappearing in the clouds.

53 The zhi mode was one of five modes, or keys, in traditional Chinese music. This account mentions two others below, the gong and shang modes.
54 For Ding Lingwei, see Wang Shaoying, ed., Soushen houji (Zhonghua shuju 1981), attributed to Tao Qian (c.365-427). Many later poets alluded to Ding: see Quan Tangshi diangu cidian, op.cit. 641-642, for over 20 couplets from Tang poets. Mei Yaochen also refers to Ding in his poem “Matching Gongyi Longtu’s [i.e. Mei Zhi’s] ‘Remembering My Small Crane,’” (in Zhu Dongrun, op.cit. 927, line 5 of poem). Su Dan is mentioned in the Shenxian zhuan, by Ge Hong (284-364): see Ge Hong ji (Jiangsu:
In the first poem below, Ouyang utilizes these conventional associations of cranes with purity, dance, immortality, and companionship to those who study the Dao. However, by setting up more comparisons, first, between his rabbit and Mei Zhi’s cranes, and second, between the two old men who own these creatures — himself and Mei — and those young people who mock their eccentricity, he creates another comical and original composition:

*Rhapsody on Longing for My White Rabbit; Playfully Answering Mei Gongyi’s Composition “Recalling My Crane”* [1057]

The white cranes in your home have snowy white feathers,
The white rabbit in my home has jade white fur.
Someone gave them to a pair of old men
4 Saying: “These two creatures’ dazzling purity surpasses precious jasper.”
   I already liked their rustic nature, easy to tame and raise,
   I also loved their transcendent bearing, standing aloof and noble.
The jade rabbit’s four paws are not suited for dancing,
8 They cannot compare with your pair of cranes, able with pure clarity
   To droop their wings, adapting themselves to the rhythm,
   Revolving and playing with their shadows; showing off their seductive charms.
As for the pair of old fellows, longing for these two creatures,
12 Not seeing them for such a long while, their hearts become quite troubled.
The youngsters in the capital are extremely high and mighty,
   They exude energy and enthusiasm, and strive with heroic gallantry.

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unnumbered page.
55 In *Ji* vol.1, 2.27.

222
From clear goblets they drink substantial amounts of vintage wine,
16 For a thousand gold pieces they struggle to buy a ruddy-faced entertainer.
Don’t allow any youngsters to hear about what I’ve said,
They’d laugh at our eccentricity, and make us suffer mockery.
Perhaps in secret the two cages will be opened at our homes,
20 Releasing those two creatures, letting them wander far away —
The rabbit will flee to the wide ocean and hide in the bright Moon’s grotto,
The crane will fly to the jade mountains that rise up sheer for three thousand feet,
and nest in the green pines.

At a loss, two decrepit old men:
24 What will there be to console their languor?
Slender waists and glossy hair are not the concern of the elderly,
But, lost to jade mountains and ocean’s breadth, how can one summon them back?

It seems at this stage (in 1057) that Ouyang’s rabbit is still alive. Locked with Mei Zhi in the Ministry of Rites, grading examinations, the two men miss their respective pets at home. Ouyang begins by comparing the two kinds of creatures: both have “dazzling purity [which] surpasses precious jasper” (line 4), but the cranes’ ability to dance, “revolving and playing with their shadows, showing off their seductive charms” (line 10), gives them a slight advantage. As with Ouyang’s comparison of rabbit and parrot above, there is a sense of opposition, or competition: the rabbit, not understanding dancing, “cannot compare with [Mei’s] pair of cranes” (line 8). Here, however, the competition extends further, embracing the human participants. Thus, in lines 11-20 Ouyang opposes the “enthusiastic energy” of young men in the capital, interested only in wine, and in “competing to buy” the services of beautiful, healthy-faced entertainers, with himself and Mei, old fellows content to spend their days contemplating pure white pets. Once again, Ouyang makes use of self-caricature, “worrying” that these young men will play a
malicious prank on their eccentric elders, opening the pets' cages so that they escape to their original homes, and leaving their decrepit old owners disconsolate and at a loss.56

In the poem involving the parrot, Ouyang focused on the bird's sadness in captivity and his wish to release it. Here, he stresses the consolation and pleasure that the pets can provide for old men who lack energy for more worldly pursuits. As with many of his poems, on paintings, screens and the like, Ouyang is again using objects — living creatures, in this case — to evoke a vast imaginary world, of bright Moonlight over the ocean (rabbit), or green pines atop the massive and sheer jade-like mountains (crane). This poem indicates, in comic fashion, how dependent he is on all these kinds of evocative "objects of transcendence."

Mei Yaochen composed a poem answering the above work in a similarly comic vein, and Ouyang countered with another poem. To show how these poets drew their inspiration from each other, I will first translate Mei's work, followed by Ouyang's pseudo-indignant response. Mei's poem runs as follows:

56 The idea of comparing creatures was perhaps suggested by Bai Juyi's series "Eight Quatrains on a Pond Crane" (translated in Spring, op.cit. 46-48; Chinese texts in Bai Xiangshan ji vol.4, 10.90-91), in which the crane engages in "dialogue" with a rooster, crow, kite and goose, wittily proving its superiority in each case. Ouyang uses a speaking bird below when comparing cranes with silver pheasants. Here, however, he juxtaposes cranes with a rabbit, an utterly different kind of creature that just happens to be the same colour. As for the pain of losing one's pets, another poem of Bai Juyi, "Losing My Crane," contains the lines: "Its sound is cut off beyond the blue clouds./Its shadow deepens the centre of the bright moon./From now on, in the studio of the governor,/Who will accompany the white-haired old man?" Bai Xiangshan ji vol.4, 8.48.

The Drunken Old Man was in the East Hall,
I planted an osmanthus tree for him.
But just when I was about to break a branch to give to him,

4 It struck my mind that in his home was a jade-coloured rabbit.

At night I saw the bright Moon approaching over the ocean,
Its dazzling light, dense and chilly, entered halls and homes.
I made a request to Chang’è to take a look for him,

8 Since though the Drunken Old Man had a home, I had no way of reaching it.

From tens of thousands of miles away, Chang’è regarded me,
Without a sound she gradually departed, heading towards the southwest.

At this point the Old Man grew unhappy and rather resentful,

12 He retreated, complaining that Lu Ji had first longed for his cranes, And this had caused him to think of his own “short-sighted eyes”:

Not like the companion of pools, able to eat and drink by itself.

At first he feared that when the rabbit hungered, his boy would forget to feed it,

16 He was also scared that her white fur would be sullied by dust and soil.

She still cannot compare with cranes beside a shallow spring,

Freely and happily sipping, and occasionally preening their feathers.

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57 In Zhu Dongrun, op.cit. vol.3, 927.
58 Lu Ji (261-303), poet and author of the “Rhyme-Prose on Literature” (Wen fu 文賦), came from a place called Huating which was famous for its cranes. When sentenced to death, Lu supposedly bemoaned the fact that he would never see the cranes at Huating again. Mei Yaochen refers to Huating in line 23 below, and here is clearly drawing a parallel between Mei Zhi, missing his pet cranes, and his illustrious forebear Lu Ji. Mei Zhi’s poem “Recalling Cranes” has obviously caused Ouyang to long for his rabbit, hence Ouyang’s complaint.
59 I.e. the rabbit.
Before the flowers they raise their wings, flapping them in the spring breeze,
20 Just waiting for their master to come home any morning or evening.

I’ve heard that the two masters have quite different inclinations:
One raises a creature of the Moon,
One raises a fledgling of Huating.
24 One, he fears, will flee to an ocean cave,
One, he fears, will nest on pine boughs.

Though I am certainly old, I have no creatures around to bewitch me,
I plan to visit the Eastern Residence, and watch the dancing girls!60

Though this poem also adopts the conventional association between rabbit and
Moon, and utilizes a more regular metre than Ouyang’s work, it picks up on Ouyang’s
worry for the pets while he is away from home, giving a humorous portrait of the extra
attention required for raising a rabbit, as compared with the relatively independent cranes.
Taking his cue from Ouyang’s fear that someone might release the creatures as a malicious
prank, Mei Yaochen concludes: “One, he fears, will flee to an ocean cave;/One, he fears,
will nest in pine boughs./Though I am certainly old, I have no creatures around to bewitch
me,/I plan to visit the Eastern Residence, and watch the dancing girls!” Mei thus claims
that such creatures have no use, only causing inconvenience and stress to their owners,
and he still prefers what gives pleasure to younger men.

Ouyang’s answer first justifies raising these pure white animals, and then chides
Mei for refusing to recognize the reality of his aging. Again, the main part of the poem
involves an extended comparison, this time between artistic representation and real life.
Rather than claiming that a great painting appears so real that it comes alive and supplants
the living creatures which it depicts, as he has done elsewhere, Ouyang reverses the

60 I haven’t found any reference to Eastern Residence as the city’s pleasure quarters, but
this is the implication.
argument with the lines: “Painting masters paint the living; they do not paint the dead,/But what they attain is merely two or three parts out of a hundred./In playing with creatures, what compares to playing with the reality?/Since what is lovable in all creatures is only their vital spirit” (see lines 12-15 below). Hence, pets are superior to artworks because they are more alive:

Playfully Answering Shengyu [1057]^

The cranes walk and peck,  
With green jade beaks and withered pine legs.  
The rabbit crouches and hunches up,  
4 With two pointed ears and paws close together.  
Frequently I have seen them, in the clean rooms of peoples’ high halls,  
Where brocade mountings and jade scroll-holders hang down from the walls.  
At first glance, I rub my eyes and look quite shocked and suspicious,  
8 Their feathers and fur are tidily preened; their eyes are full of vitality,  
Not moving yet seeming to move: it’s as if they are ruffled by the breeze.  
The owner boasts that he purchased them for a hundred pieces of gold,  
He says such wonderful brushwork is remarkably rare in the world.

12 Painting masters paint the living, they do not paint the dead,  
But what they attain is only two or three parts out of a hundred.  
And playing with creatures, what compares to playing with the reality?  
Since what is lovable in all creatures is only their vital spirit.

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^ In Ji vol.1, 2.27-28. Ouyang’s comment in lines 12-15 may be a sly dig at Mei Yaochen, whose poem “Observing Juning Paint Grass Insects,” of 1044, makes the opposite argument, for instance in the lines: “Thus I know that the Spirit of Creation/Cannot match the agility of the brushtip!” See Zhu Dongrun, op.cit. vol.1, 241, and full translation in Chaves, op.cit. 202-203.
16 Even more so with these two creatures, the rarest among all creatures,
   When moonlight looks down over peaceful nights,
   Or snow skims across clear mornings,
   It is then that these two creatures
20 Shine without one speck of the finest dust.
   Not only can they sober up the drunkenness of the Drunken Old Man,
   They can add purity and freshness to the poetic thoughts of the Poet Elder!
   The Drunken Old Man tells the Poet Elder:
24 “Do not censure us for our stupidity.
   Growing old, we play with bunnies and care for crane fledglings,
   Surely you are just as old and decrepit as ourselves!
   So why then do you cast us aside,
28 And ‘head for the Eastern Residence to watch the dancing girls?’
   If you want to prevent the dancing girls from laughing when they see you,
   Just take a look at your white-haired, sallow-faced reflection in the mirror!”

The mock censures at the end of this work, and the playful tone running right
through it, remind us that Ouyang’s “theoretical pronouncements” on art, like his other
persuasive arguments earlier, should be taken with a pinch of salt. As I have suggested, a
close reading of his poetry demonstrates, firstly, that he does borrow rhetorical devices
and diction from philosophical and intellectual argumentation — a feature which has often
been remarked upon regarding Song dynasty poetry in general62 — yet secondly, that he
uses these linguistic tools to add, not seriousness, but humour and freshness to his poems.
As I have also noted in previous chapters, Ouyang enjoys creating caricatures within his
poems, both of himself and of his family or friends. The works in this section are no

62 For example by Yoshikawa, op.cit. chapter 1, esp. 10.
exception, with their exaggerated depictions of senile old men obsessively worrying about their absent pets, and of Mei Yaochen "white-haired and sallow-faced," stubbornly heading off to the houses of pleasure to indulge himself. By extension, we could call Ouyang's frequent use of rational argument for humorous ends "caricatured reason."

To illustrate this feature further, the following three poems, the last on this animal and bird theme, deal with a pair of silver pheasants belonging to Mei Zhi — like the white parrot, another very unusual poetic subject. In the first work, Ouyang seeks to persuade the personified pheasants not to be jealous of Mei's cranes, towards whom Mei seems to show partiality by addressing poems to them. Ouyang begins his argument by stating that a poem, being an exclusively human thing, is not a suitable vehicle to address any non-human creature. Therefore, it would be nonsensical to claim that Mei's poems to the cranes are a sign of his partiality. Nevertheless, Ouyang overturns his argument as he speaks, by addressing this poem directly to the personified birds:

**Matching Longtu Mei Gongyi's "Declining Pheasants" [1057]**

Matching Longtu Mei Gongyi's "Declining Pheasants" [1057]

Having a poem, cranes, don't be so smug,
$L_2$Lacking a poem, pheasants, don't be so sad.
$L_3$People and birds surely possess different natures,
4 Each tends towards what is fitting for itself.

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63 Though in this case it was Mei Yaochen who pre-empted Ouyang, with a brief poem entitled "Silver Pheasant," of 1037 (in Zhu Dongrun op.cit. vol.1, 99). And there is also a short work by Li Bai (701-762) entitled "Presented to Master Hu of Huangshan, Asking for a Silver Pheasant," with preface. See Qu Tuiyuan and Zhu Jincheng, ed., *Li Bai ji jiaozhu* (Shanghai guji chubanshe 1980) 2.808. Actually the Chinese name for this bird, *bai xian* 白鶴, translates literally as white pheasant — thus connecting it with the other white creatures in this section. However, the modern botanical name is silver pheasant (*Lophura nycthemera*). See Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee, *The Birds of China* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Inst. 1984) 189-190 and 191, fig.7.

64 In *Ji* vol.1, 2.28. *Longtu* 龍圖 was the name of a hall of study in the Song capital. Addressing Mei as *longtu* is like calling him a scholar.
In the morning you play in the green bamboo forest,  
In the evening you perch on a high tree branch.  
“Ee-aw,” the mountain deer cries,  
8 “Chuck, chuck,” the wild birds twitter.  
Their sounds are not mutually understood,  
Each follows those of its own species.  
To make cranes live in a cage,  
12 Drooping their heads as if listening to poems,  
[Is like] the yuanju enjoying bells and drums,  
Or fish and birds catching sight of Xishi.  
Pheasants and cranes are not suited for competition,  
16 The result of their fighting is readily known.  
A soldier ant and a worker ant  
Among creatures are certainly tiny.

65 The yuanju 頂鶖 was a kind of sea-bird, mentioned in the pre-Qin historical text, the Guoyu 國語 ("Conversations of the States"). It landed on the East Gate of Lu State, and was then captured by a government official who persuaded the king to make offerings to it as if it were an auspicious bird. See Wolfgang Bauer, compiled, Guoyu yinde (Taipei 1973) vol.2, 39, sentence 3193ff. The reference to the bird listening to bells and drums (part of the offering ceremony perhaps) alludes to a poem by Jiang Yan entitled Zati shi 齊器詩 in the Wenxuan, which includes the lines: “At Xian Pool they gave food offerings to the yuanju, With bells and drums it seemed to mourn and suffer.” (Quoted in Zhongwen dacidian, vol.21, 8888, character no. 20119.5; original text in Wenxuan, op.cit. juan 7, 43, 3rd. couplet from end of poem imitating Xi Kang). As for “fish and birds seeing Xishi,” this alludes to the Daoist work Zhuangzi, chapter 2 (“On Making Things Equal”), where the writer is demonstrating that other creatures do not share human standards of beauty or ugliness. The legendary ancient beauty Xishi could go down to a river, and the fish and birds there would still be terrified, flying and swimming away from her, because they did not consider her any more attractive than other human beings. See A Concordance to Chuang Tzu (Harvard-Yenching Institute, Sinological Index Series, Supplement no.20: Harvard 1947, repr. 1956) 6. English translation in Watson, The Complete Works of Chuang-Tzu 46.
But when they cross paths and start to fight,
20 They are brave as if hearing drums of battle.66

Yet everyone with a heart loves victory,
And can't avoid struggling for right versus wrong.

"To me you are so distant;
24 To them you are so partial.

On the terrace they peck at your flowers,
Crying out and calling they startle the sleeping child.
Leaping, their legs are gangly,
28 Dejected, their two wings hang down.

How are they enough to satisfy your enjoyment?
Against what standard do you fix beauty and ugliness?"

Yet the mouths of the pheasants are unable to speak,
32 You can confide in them all your nighttime dreams.
Their owner has taken the initiative to decline them,
It won't be long before they follow after me.

66 Ouyang mentions two kinds of ant here, the pipu 蟲 蟲 and the yizi 蟲 子. The former is supposedly larger than the latter, hence its alternative name of "horse ant" (墮 蟲 子). There is a story in the Peiwen yunfu involving one Xu Xuan, who late one night while reading, observed a whole army (of ants) cross his desk and swarm around his inkstone. Thinking nothing of it, Xu covered them with his book and went off to sleep. In a dream, he was arrested by ant soldiers, and taken to see the ant king, who expressed great rage that his evening's "army manoeuvres" had been curtailed by Xu's behaviour. He ordered that Xu be severely punished. Waking up the next day, Xu searched around his study till he found the ants' nest, dug down into the centre and set it on fire. See Zhang Yushu, Peiwen yunfu (Shanghai: Shangwu 1937) vol.2, 1387, row 1. Later, the image of ants fighting became synonymous with those of puny strength claiming that they can overcome people much more powerful than themselves: in other words, making empty threats. In this figure, Ouyang is paralleling crane and pheasant with the two insects to show both the violence of their emotions, and perhaps that their struggle seems ridiculous to those who observe it from a distance.
"My servant and maid will carefully protect you,
36 Taking trouble to carry you out and in.
  Wandering carefree, you can perch where you will,
  Feeding and watering, there won’t be any unfairness.
  Beneath flowers you’ll sport with the shadows of the sun,
40 In the breeze, you’ll preen your feathered plumage.
  So how can you ignore your owner’s generosity?
  To pay him back properly, it is fitting you should think of him.
Nowadays your owner has a head of white hair,
44 And lacks raven-browed beauties to toast him with wine.
  He’s raising cranes, and you pheasants are also jealous,
  So permit him a smile at what I’ve just said!"

If the previous poems dealt with animals and birds away from home and in captivity, or with Ouyang and his friends away from home marking examinations, this work and the two brief works below describe the pheasants finding a suitable home, where they need not compete with other creatures for affection. As Ouyang asks in the final poem below: after moving to his loving home, what reason could the birds have for missing the miasmal fogs of the backward region in which they were born?

As in the poems above, "Matching Gongyi’s ‘Declining Pheasants’" builds up a caricature of a reasoned argument, this time undermining itself as it proceeds. The work revolves around the word 宜 ("suitable, fitting") which occurs three times (lines 4, 15 and 42). In the first section (lines 1-14), Ouyang declares that the natures of people and birds differ, therefore each tends towards what suits, or is fitting for, itself. Even though the various creatures, such as wild birds and mountain deer, all produce noises of some kind, no species understands what another species is expressing. Thus, by inference, to cage a bird and expect it to listen to poetry recited in its honour, as Mei Zhi does with his
cranes, is bound to cause nothing but suffering, as in the two examples cited from the
*Guoyu* and *Zhuangzi* (lines 13-14). Hence, there is no need for the pheasants, lacking
poems, to feel jealous of the cranes, since poetry is not a "suitable" way to entertain any
bird. Such an argument, framed as it is within a poem addressed to birds, is unlikely to
persuade anyone of its seriousness.

The next section (lines 15-30) begins with the couplet: "Pheasants and cranes are
not suited for competition./The result of their fighting is readily known." In other words,
they may be full of resentment and agitation, but like the ants in lines 17-20, their fighting
is pointless. Again, however, his argument proves ineffective even to himself, as he is
forced to admit that "everyone with a heart loves victory,/And can't avoid struggling for
right versus wrong" (lines 21-22). He then imagines how the pheasants might pour out
their grievances, were they able to speak, thus supporting them in their "unsuitable"
struggle.

In the final section (lines 31-40), Ouyang attempts to convince the pheasants that
Mei Zhi is allowing them to move to Ouyang's house, where they will receive the best
treatment and undivided attention, in order to demonstrate his grace and affection for
them. Hence, he urges them, "to pay him back properly, it is *fitting* you should think of
him" (line 42). Presumably, the pheasants treat this specious reasoning with as much
disdain as the previous examples. Ouyang, failing to placate the birds, can only hope that
their aging owner, Mei, will get a laugh from his poem, to compensate for the stress of
raising a double brace of warring wildfowl (lines 45-46).

To prove that Mei Zhi later did present the two pheasants to Ouyang, I will
translate the pair of regulated verses with which Ouyang expressed his gratitude for the
gift.67 Here, Ouyang returns to the deep consolation that he receives from contemplating

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67 Mei Yaochen also mentions this gift in his "Presenting Silver Pheasants to Yongshu;
Matching the Rhymes of Gongyi," of 1057. (Zhu Dongrun, op.cit. vol.3, 935). And in
another poem, "Declining Pheasants: Matching Gongyi" (ibid. vol.3, 934), Mei gives more
details on the quarrel between the birds: first heportrays Mei Zhi declaring his innocence
such pets, and their ability to inspire imaginative flights to a pure region of cloud-covered peaks:

Matching Gongyi’s “Presenting Silver Pheasants” [1057].

Duke Mei, pitying my moustache white as snow,
Presented me with two birds; his intention was as follows:
All he saw was me constantly missing my white rabbit,
4 He suspected that I no longer enjoyed growing drunk with “crimson skirts.”
Calling in my studio, though they delight to welcome carefree guests,
With such wild natures, I cannot forget they belong among peaks and clouds.
I have a one-foot square tile, taken from the bronze tower,
8 I’m ashamed it’s not the jade table I should give you in return!

Matching Again [1057]

Fine playthings can help me to forget all the hundred matters,
They’re not merely carefree companions to my pouring of leftover wine.
Their priceless rarity comes from the ocean a thousand miles away,
4 Their shining purity is quite as clear as a pair of precious jade discs.
When the day is warm, I turn their cages towards the green stone terrace,
In spring cold, they sleep at night by the emerald gauze window.

on the charge of partiality towards the cranes; next, he gives Zhi his poem, and urges him to read it straightaway to the birds in lieu of writing his own; Mei Zhi accepts the poem, with the excuse that he had been writing about the pheasants’ all-surpassing beauty compared with the kingfisher and peacock, but when the cranes arrived, there was no competing with them!

68 In Ji vol.1, 2.94.
69 This tile is perhaps the tile inkstone from Cao Cao’s Bronze Sparrow Tower, which Ouyang lauded in verse in the 1030s. See previous chapter for a translation of the poem.
70 In Ji vol.1, 2.94.
Though mists of Man and miasmal fogs provided your native surroundings, why must you be so petty as to recall that backward region?71

Having discussed a number of poems written over a short period which show Ouyang at the height of his creative powers, I will turn now to his compositions on plants and trees, another aspect of the natural environment. These works, dating from the early 1030s to the late 1050s, allow us to trace the gradual evolution of Ouyang’s tendency to include exaggerated and humorous portraits of himself and his acquaintances within his poems, and to experiment with various kinds of caricatured arguments.

Plants and Trees

I have already mentioned a number of plants which appear frequently in Ouyang’s verse, particularly in connection with wine-drinking. He is moved by the ability of chrysanthemum and flowering apricot to bloom when other flowers are dying or dormant. Likewise, in early summer, dense bamboo groves provide cool, green shade to ward off the scorching sun and hide Ouyang from the competitive world outside. Each season has its representative plants, and the deep desire he feels for the companionship of all of them is reflected in the following quatrain, addressed to his gardener at Secluded Valley in Chuzhou, site of the Drunken Old Man Pavilion:

71 As I noted in my chapter on mountain poems, Man was the name given to the “southern barbarians,” i.e. indigenous people of what is now Central China. The silver pheasant is native to that region.
To Officer Xie, Growing Flowers at Secluded Valley [1046/47]

Pale and bright, reds and whites, all matching with each other,  
From first to last, you must ensure they are planted in orderly fashion.  
In all four seasons, I intend to carry wine and venture there,  
4 So don’t let a day go by without some kind of flower blooming!

Poems on beautiful flowers are probably standard fare in any poetic tradition.  
Ouyang’s early works from the 1030s depart little from the well-crafted, though miniature,  
style of early Song poets like Lin Bu (967-1028). Here are three of Ouyang’s poems in  
this vein, the first comparing apricot blossom (xinghua), which he encountered in  
Luoyang, with the flowering apricot (meihua), a native of more southerly regions,  
and the other two celebrating the flowering apricot and the wintersweet (lamei),  
companions of Ouyang’s first exile in Yiling:

Matching Mei Shengyu’s “Apricot Blossoms” [1032]

Who said the flowering apricot blooms early?  
The dregs of the year: how can that be spring?  
Can it compare with the days of enchanting breezes,  
4 When single-handed she takes the fragrant season?

72 In Ji vol.1, 2.78. Also in Xuanji 109.  
73 Lin Bu’s poems on flowering apricots are very famous. For Lin, see note 34 above.  
74 In Ji vol.2, 7.13. Also in Xuanji 7. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the  
flowering apricot (mei) belongs to the same genus as the apricot (xing), hence their similar  
botanical names, Prunus mume and Prunus armeniaca respectively. See H.L. Li, op.cit.  
48 and 156. For the wintersweet, see n.76 below.
Three Days After the End of Winter, I Accompanied Ding Yuanzhen on an Outing to East Mountain Temple [1036]\(^75\)

The official documents of local government daily become fewer,

Taking clear wine, I happily join you for a New Year celebration.

Cold mountains form a ribbon to the wall; a road penetrates the pines,

4 My skinny horse seeks the springtime, treading through snow and mud.

Dense moss and grey cliffs; trees are stern and ancient,

Green creepers climb the stones; the stream is dark and deep.

Because we were greedy to admire the plants, we’ve come a little early:

8 We encounter blooms of the wintersweet, emerging but not yet tidy!\(^76\)

Although these poems are quite conventional, expressing the joys of seeing early-flowering plants, there are hints of Ouyang’s later witty style. For instance, the three rhetorical questions of the first work, in which he solicits intellectual agreement about the superiority of the apricot; and the slightly comic personification of the second, in which the wintersweet seems like a lady caught unawares before she has arranged her coiffure, are features which predominate in Ouyang’s mature poetry. The other short poem on the flowering apricot below adds to the personified plants the consoling quality which I have

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\(^75\) In Ji vol.1, 2.71.

\(^76\) The wintersweet (*lamei*) actually belongs to a distinct species, *Chimonanthus praecox*, not the *prunus* of the similarly named *meihua*. Indigenous to Central China, it has yellow flowers resembling the shape of the pale pink flowering apricot blossoms, but with a rather waxy texture (the Chinese name translates “waxy flowering apricot”). It also blooms around the time of the Chinese New Year, as in Ouyang’s poem. See H.L. Li, op.cit. 166-167. Li mistakenly states that the first poem on the wintersweet was by Huang Tingjian (1045-1105), a point which is disproved by Ouyang’s poem here.
noted in several poems translated earlier. Judging by the content, this quatrain was written to see off the same Ding Yuanzhen of the preceding work:

*Playfully Presented to Officer Ding [1037]*

At the mouth of Xiling River, I break off a cold flowering apricot, I strive to persuade the wayfarer to lift his winecup once more. You must believe the spring breeze is not affected by distance, 

4 Every place you tie your boat, the flowers there will be blooming.

While still in Luoyang, Ouyang had developed an attachment to another flower, the peony (*mudanhua* 牡丹 花), and even composed a prose account detailing the many varieties cultivated in the city, entitled “Record of Luoyang Peonies” (dated 1034). Though no poems on the peony survive from his Luoyang days, he did compose at least four later in his career, all of which look back fondly on his time there. Since the plant was not native to his other postings, whenever Ouyang received gifts of peonies sent by friends in Luoyang, he would naturally be made aware of the rapid passing of years since his first official post. In this sense, his peony poems resemble the works he composed on the “Returning Geese Pavilion,” where the recurring natural rhythm of migrating birds reminds him of the incessant march of time. One of Ouyang’s peony poems dates from

77 In *Ji* vol.1, 2.73. Xiling in line 1 was an ancient name for Yiling.
78 See this prose account in *Ji* vol.2, 9.2-10. See also a partial translation and helpful discussion in Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, vol.6, part 1 (Sect. 38) (Cambridge 1986) 394-408, esp. 402-405. Needham calls Ouyang’s account the “outstanding book of the whole genre” of works on peony cultivation, of which there were over twenty important publications (ibid. 401).
79 Apart from those I translate below, see especially the long work “Answering Secretary Wang of the Western Capital’s ‘Sending Peonies’” in *Ji* vol.1, 2.102.
1042 when he was serving in Kaifeng, the capital, and describes a set of illustrations of these flowers which he is examining:

**Drawings of Luoyang Peonies [1042]**

The soil and terrain of Luoyang are most suited for flowers,  
And everywhere its peonies are considered especially rare.  
As for the several dozen kinds I once noted down,  
4 It is ten years since then, and I have half forgotten them.  
Opening the drawings is just like seeing familiar faces of friends,  
And among them are several kinds that I’ve never spotted before.  
My guest tells me in recent years the blossoms are really exceptional:

8 Frequently, they are grafted to produce novel strains.  
People of Luoyang boast in amazement, trying to think up new names,  
Buying the seeds, they take no heed of their family’s resources.  
Comparing and weighing new and old, it’s hard to give them ranks,

12 Each has its moment coming to the fore, and going for the highest price.  
At that time, among those of outstanding quality worth noting,  
Were the charm of Wei’s Red, and the beauty of Yao’s Yellow.  
The slender petals of Peace and Longevity then rarely bloomed,

16 And Crimson Dots or Jade Banners: well nobody knew of them!  
But it’s said that even the Thousand Petals once did not exist,  
Only after Zuo’s Violet did its fame first spread abroad.  
In forty years, the flowers went through a hundred transformations,

20 The latest and the finest was the Qianxi [Temple] Crimson.

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80 In *Ji* vol. 1, 1.19. See also *Xuanji* 68.  
81 All of the names capitalized here, and those that follow in the poem, were varieties of peony mentioned by Ouyang in his prose account. See his list of 24 varieties in *Ji* vol. 2, 9.4-5.
Though today’s blooms are certainly novel, I don’t recognize them at all, I can’t believe anyone compares their beauty with the old. At that time, those that I saw were said to be outstanding, 24 Can there be even better ones? That is surely debatable.  

The ancients claimed that nowhere were there any correct forms, I only fear that the world’s tastes change with every season.  

The Girdled Red and Crane’s Feathers: are they not also pretty?  

28 But they wipe off their smiles as if to avoid the newly-arriving beauties!  

How much more Su and He, mentioned in the distant past:  

They seem to belong to a different world which boasted of Qiang and Shi.  

“Transforming Creation is ruthless” would be a fitting summary,  

32 It certainly displays partiality, working so hard in this place.  

I also suspect that peoples’ hearts have become more cunning and false,  

So Heaven wished to combat their cleverness, exhausting exquisite subtlety.  

Otherwise primal transformations, dispersing over the ages,  

36 Wouldn’t have chosen the most recent years to concentrate their fertility.  

Struggling for freshness, fighting for beauty: if it isn’t brought to an end,  

In another hundred years from now, what will come to pass?  

No doubt only new flowers will become finer each day,  

40 As for me, I’m growing old; more senile every year!

The poem begins in light-hearted vein as Ouyang looks at the pictures of his favourite peonies, “like seeing old friends’ faces” (line 5), but his mood soon degenerates when he comes across several varieties he has never previously encountered (line 6). His  

82 Su and He were the family names of two peony cultivators of the Tang Dynasty, hence their strains were considered old-fashioned by the Song. Qiang and Shi refers to Wang Qiang (better known as Wang Zhuojun) and Xi Shi, two legendary beauties of ancient China, who are now transformed to dust.
guest explains that these are “novel strains,” produced in the last few years, which have become extremely popular among the people of Luoyang (lines 7-10). At first, Ouyang admits that the various blooms he catalogued were also the result of mutations, culminating in the strain he most admires, the Qianxi Crimson (lines 19-20). Yet he certainly feels disgruntled that, having taken such pains to list and describe over twenty of the best peonies, now only eight years later, his account is obsolete. He vents his frustration in lines 21-24: “Though today’s blooms are certainly novel, I don’t recognize them at all,/I can’t believe anyone compares their beauty with the old./At that time, those that I saw were said to be outstanding,/Can there be even better ones? That is surely debatable.”

His mood of skeptical grumpiness remains for the rest of the poem. In lines 27-28, he gives a sardonic illustration of the rapidity with which peoples’ tastes change by personifying two older, though still beautiful, varieties, now ashamed to show their faces: “The Girdled Red and Crane’s Feathers: are they not also pretty/?But they wipe off their smiles as if to avoid the newly-arriving beauties!” Next, he begins to suspect that only an aberration in the natural rhythms of creation would concentrate such extreme beauty in one place. Either “Creative Transformation is ruthless” (line 31), and randomly displays partiality in certain regions; or perhaps more convincing in Ouyang’s present mood, peoples’ hearts have become more “cunning and false” (line 33). As a result, they attempt to improve upon nature, and Heaven counterattacks by “exhausting exquisite subtlety” to produce more and more excellent peonies, thereby forcing people to recognize their limitations (line 34). Unfortunately, the battle is not easily won, and Ouyang predicts disastrous consequences for the future: “Struggling for freshness, fighting for beauty: if it isn’t brought to an end,/In another hundred years from now, what will come to pass?” (lines 37-38).

Even as early as 1034, in his “Record of Luoyang Peonies,” Ouyang had attacked the theory connecting the beauty of peonies with a concentration of harmonious cosmic
forces. Since ancient times, he wrote, people had treated Luoyang as the centre of China, and by extension, of the world. As a result, they claimed that, due to its centrality, the city’s soil received a particularly harmonious balance of qi 氣 ("vital spirit") from Heaven, hence was able to produce such exquisite peonies. Ouyang counters this theory first, by denying that Luoyang is at the centre of the world — a privilege he awards to the Kunlun mountain range — and second, declaring that any harmonious qi which the city received would naturally spread over at least the surrounding regions. Since, however, even in neighbouring counties the land cannot support peony growth, Luoyang becomes an aberration from the norm, rather than a harmoniously balanced centre. The extreme beauty of its peonies, just like any other extreme characteristic, such as ugliness, is at best a marvel or monstrosity (yao 妖). It is only because most people prefer beautiful objects to ugly that the peony is esteemed, whereas a grotesquely swollen tree trunk, another kind of marvel, is abhorred.83

Of course, the logical consequence of the idea that beautiful peonies prove Luoyang’s centrality and special endowments is the elevation of the city, and more importantly its people, to a position of moral superiority. The flower, instead of being appreciated for itself, becomes one more reason for people to boast (see line 9 of the poem above). In the poem, as I have mentioned, Ouyang makes explicit the moral implications of his own critical standpoint (lines 33-34). Moreover, it is not only the content of his poem which attacks the use of beauty to claim such superiority; his style is noticeably plain too, consciously avoiding any detailed description of the flowers’ charming appearance. Instead, he merely lists the names of varieties he knows, in the manner of a botanist, and refuses to mention the new strains individually at all, dismissing them with the line: “Though today’s blooms are certainly novel, I don’t recognize them at all” (line 21). And the rest of the work Ouyang devotes to developing an argument, as

83 My summary of Ji vol. 2, 9.3. This section is also translated in Needham, op.cit. 405.
detailed above, with its usual prosaic collection of rhetorical questions, proofs and intellectual speculations.

Such stylistic avoidance of beauty, though here taken to an extreme to underscore his argument, recurs in many of Ouyang’s poems on plants. Though as I shall demonstrate, he frequently includes short descriptive episodes of great beauty within other works, they are almost inevitably surrounded by passages of argument and mundane activity. More often than not, the result of this technique is to draw our attention to the persona observing the plants, just as Ouyang’s animal poems concern the old men who would keep cranes and rabbits, as much as the pets themselves. In the above poem, I suggested that Ouyang portrays himself as a grumpy, out-dated peony connoisseur, who refuses to admit in the face of change that his careful studies have become irrelevant. The final couplet of the poem explains a deeper motive for the obstinacy of this person: “No doubt only new flowers will become finer each day./As for me, I’m growing old; more senile every year!” If he doesn’t construct such an elaborate argument to place the blame for change on human beings, he will be forced to the conclusion, briefly glimpsed earlier, that “Transforming Creation is ruthless,” killing off people like himself, but constantly renewing and improving flowers.

In Ouyang’s other flower and tree poems, there is a continual fluctuation between treating plants as companions, with their pure blooms giving him hope in adversity, and resenting them for their freshness, which contrasts so dramatically with his increasing decrepitude. Nevertheless, whatever his conclusions in particular poems, virtually all these works display touches of humour, especially an ability to laugh at himself, and a fascination with natural and poetic forms. The following two poems, also from the 1040s, deal with sickness and old age respectively, and exemplify the more transcendent aspect of Ouyang’s poems on flowers:

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84 And on many other topics!
Remaining Apricots at Zhenyang [1045]\textsuperscript{85}

Zhenyang in the second month, the spring was bitterly cold,
The east wind was feeble; ice and snow stubborn.
With Northern Pool just steps away,\textsuperscript{86} I was sick and couldn’t go,
4 So what chance did I have to ride out seeking rural plains?
At Hawk Hill, in fresh sunshine, the warmth was already stirring,
Flowing waters came gurgling past, underneath the terrace.
All I heard was the changing tones of birds among the eaves,
8 I didn’t know that peach and apricot had already finished blooming.
Our life lasts only a generation; it is vain to make ourselves suffer,
We flourish and die between the bloom and fall of peach and apricot.
Yesterday, I happened to venture alone to the Western Pavilion,
12 A single tree was still flowering, facing the southern terrace.
With remaining fragrance overflowing, it seemed finer than ever,
Shining white as spring snow, clusters grew dense on the branches.
Even without any breeze blowing, I fear they will scatter and fall,
16 The slender branches may be admired, but mustn’t be broken off!
I still intend to bring some wine, and grow tipsy at its foot:
Who is willing to accompany me, removing my headscarf and hat?\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{85} In Ji vol.1, 1.17. A note to the title says: “Sent to Shengyu [i.e. Mei Yaochen].”
\textsuperscript{86} An original note explains: “This is the rear pool of Mount Chang Palace, the only beautiful sight in the prefecture.”
\textsuperscript{87} I.e. relaxing.
The Chrysanthemums East of "Hoping for Truth Hall," Which I Planted With My Own Hands, Have Just Started to Bloom in the Tenth Month [1047]88

Planting flowers for spring time, you only fear being late,
I plant only chrysanthemums, and do not censure me for it!
Spring branches fill the gardens with gorgeous spreads of brocade,

But wind and rain in no time cause them to tumble and fall.
And seeing so many, it's easy to tire; one's feelings cannot engage:
Struggling violets and boasting reds are suited for vulgar tastes.
How open is high autumn, when Heaven and Earth become stern!

A hundred plants decay and fall; who has time to mourn them?
Yet look at the golden sepals, just opening up so fragrantly,
In morning sunlight they float over frost, dazzled by their reflections.
Shining, shining, their true colour, so exquisite you could eat them!

Dense, dense, their pure scent, more outstanding in the cold:
High-minded men avoiding the clamour, remaining secluded and solitary,
Noble ladies, serene in appearance, cultivating elegance and refinement.
When they're about to sway and fall, they seem to become more exquisite,

In return for consoling my loneliness, what reward can I offer?
Often I’ll take a winecup, and approach to drink beside them,
Just like finding a friend in need, and discussing our future plans.
Hitherto, I've had many troubles; my strong mind has declined,

In silence or noise, my habits differ from people in worldly society.
So planting flowers, I do not plant the blossoms of boys and girls:
Now that I’m old, how can I still pursue the youths in their prime?

88 In Ji vol.1, 1.32. For comparison, see some other poems on chrysanthemums by Ouyang translated in the preceding chapter, where he makes clear his debt to Tao Qian, another old man seeking consolation through flower appreciation.
These two poems involve a similar dynamic: in the first, an apricot tree is the sole survivor of spring flowering; Ouyang, venturing out after sickness, discovers that he is too late to view the massed blossoms of other trees, hence he treasures this single tree inordinately, and intends to drink wine beneath it as a sign of his appreciation. The second poem treats the chrysanthemum, another flower that remains with Ouyang when others scatter; Ouyang again rewards its faithfulness by becoming drunk in its company (line 17).

Similarly, both works contain central passages describing the flowers’ excellent purity. In their surprising contrast with the surrounding bleakness of tone and content, these passages have quite a visionary effect, momentarily removing Ouyang from his immediate preoccupations. Thus, in the first poem he is bemoaning the transitory nature of human existence, which flourishes and decays during the blooming and falling of peach and apricot flowers — certainly life might appear so brief for one who has spent the entire spring in his sick-bed. Unexpectedly, however, he discovers one tree “still in bloom, facing the southern terrace./With remaining fragrance overflowing, it seemed finer than ever./Shining white as spring snow, clusters grew dense on the branch” (lines 12-14). Compare the second poem’s chrysanthemum description, coming in desolate autumn after another accelerated passing of spring: “Yet look at the golden sepals, just opening up so fragrantly,/In morning sunlight they float over frost, dazzled by their reflections./Shining, shining, their true colour, so exquisite you could eat them!/Dense, dense, their pure scent, more outstanding in the cold” (lines 9-12).

Still, the first poem is much simpler than the second. Apart from its condensing of human life into a single spring (line 10), and the poet’s possessive, protective attitude to the delicate flowers — “The slender branches may be admired, but mustn’t be broken off!” (line 16) — the poem lacks many touches of wit. By contrast, Ouyang invents three different metaphors and similes to help portray the chrysanthemums: they are “high-minded men, avoiding the clamour; . . . noble ladies . . . cultivating elegance and
refinement;” and drinking with them is like “finding a friend in need, and discussing our future plans” (lines 13-14, 18). Also Ouyang’s use of a humorous persona is clear even from the first couplet: everyone plants flowers to bloom in spring, but “I plant only chrysanthemums, and do not censure me for it!” Towards the end of the poem, he again explains his eccentric obstinacy: “Hitherto, I’ve had many troubles; my strong mind has declined, /In silence or noise, my habits differ from people in worldly society” (lines 19-20). Why should he plant flowers that fall “in no time,” reminding him of his own decline? (line 4). And the “struggling violets and boasting reds” of massed blossoms in spring are vulgar and impossible to focus on individually (lines 5-6).

The person making these claims is a much clearer, and perhaps more entertaining, presence than the pedantic implied narrator of the peony poem above. Here, he has not only discovered an alternative to the struggling confusion of a glut of spring flowers — namely, a unique individual plant that flourishes out of season — but has also learned to express his own idiosyncratic humanity. Hence, he is no longer a bitter, inconsolable old fellow, depressed at losing his grip on the world; instead, by including himself as a witty, though still old, character within his own poetry, he can stand opposed to the vulgar youths just as the chrysanthemum stands up to the destructive forces of autumn.

Thus far in his floral poems, Ouyang has emphasized this opposition between struggling masses, which change too rapidly to allow careful appreciation, and individual plants which survive or transcend that struggle, allowing their observer moments of visionary joy. The following poem describes an equivalent opposition on a completely individual level, as one tree, the pagoda, or sophora (*huai* 槐), attempts to suck the life from the juniper (*gui* 檜), its host:

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89 The noble ladies (*shunü* 淑女) originally appear in the first poem of the *Classic of Poetry*, longing for their lord.
Parasitic Pagoda [1050]

The juniper has a character which skims the clouds,
The pagoda is actually base as common trees.
So how can its weak and brittle form,
4 Burden this tall, solitary trunk?
Dragon scales are venerable and thick,
Rats’ ears are slippery and shiny.91
There never was cause for their affinity,
8 Moved and shocked, in vain do I sigh.
It steals life by relying on others,
Gaining sway, it competes to flourish.
Reaching the season of glorious splendour,
12 You cannot distinguish the true from pretender.
You wish to know how it lasts the haggard season:
Then why not test it with frost and hailstones?
When buds first send out tiny shoots,
16 Distinct and separate, the discrepancy is clear.
To prune and remove them is easy at first,
Only when fully grown does it cause harm;
And though the nature of the roots still differs,
20 You always fear confusing the branches and leaves.
Perhaps only if the gardener is profound,
Will he be lucky enough to cure it without training.

90 In Ji vol.1, 2.9. Also in Xuanji 135. One edition adds to the title: “Answering Judge Zhang’s ‘Courtyard Juniper.’”
91 Dragon scales refers to the juniper’s refined leaves; rats’ ears to the small ugly pagoda leaves!
To be over-tolerant is certainly harmful,
24 Cutting and chopping demands clear decision.
But you must be cautious using your axe:
Remove the bad without wounding the good.

As with Ouyang’s other allegorical works, such as “Olives” translated in the previous chapter, the reader is left with several possibilities for interpretation. Removing the parasitic tree could refer to reform in government to weed out corrupt officials, or on a more personal level, to ridding oneself of sycophantic, false friends, or even perhaps to self-cultivation, cutting out harmful and self-destructive habits. The tone of the poem is serious, and the ending ambiguous — since the risky task of pruning has not yet begun — but still Ouyang is convinced that there exist two distinct roots, of good and evil, and the struggle should be directed to ridding ourselves of the latter.

A further possible reading of this work, more relevant to Ouyang’s earlier poems on plants, would take the parasitic pagoda simply as representing the natural process of aging and decline attacking a once healthy body. Certainly, a number of other poems from the 1050s incline towards the view that nature is actually the destructive force, wearing us down even as she renews herself. Two seven-syllable regulated poems and one short old-style verse from this period, all concerning trees, show Ouyang in various situations reacting to this ruthless natural aging process:

Matching the Rhymes of Premier Du Chongshi’s Composition [1051]

At Drunken Old Man and Abundant Joys I was able to relax my body,

Haggard now, I come here to the banks of the River Bian.

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92 In Ji vol.1, 2.86. Original note to the title reads: “I was honoured when I received your excellent work. It was a real pity that I couldn’t go to the party at Eastern Gardens, and that I was frequently ill throughout the spring. I have carefully matched your original rhymes, and have written them on plain silk.”

249
Whenever I hear birdsong, I know that the season is changing,

4 When willow catkins blow around, I regret that spring is ending.

My whole life I’ve never avoided defeating poetic foes,

Nowhere have I ever censured passing wine around.

But the grinding down of my firm will is now utterly finished,

8 Looking at flowers, I’ve been transformed into a tea-totaller!

I am Moved Because the Pair of Willows I Planted by Myself at “Depart Longing” Hall

Now Already Provides Shade [1054]94

On the winding path the tall willows brush the layered eaves,

Making me recall when they were first planted, reflecting in emerald pools.

The people with whom I went out together: do any of them remain?

4 And yet the trees have reached such [a height]: how can I endure it?

My once-strong mind has not revived; my body follows into old age,

But worldly affairs completely disappear when I grow half tipsy with wine.

Does anyone know how many future days are left to come?

8 Break a branch, and do not grudge halting your travelling mount.95

93 Drunken Old Man and Abundant Joys were pavilions constructed by Ouyang in Chuzhou. The River Bian ran through Kaifeng, the capital.

94 In Ji vol.1, 2.87.

95 Usually willow is connected with parting poems: breaking a willow branch and presenting it to friends is an indirect way of urging them to stay, since the word for willow is pronounced very similarly to that for stay (both liu). Here it is not clear whom Ouyang is sending off: perhaps he is urging the willow itself not to grow so quickly?
Matching Shengyu's "Moved by Plum Blossoms" [1057]96

Yesterday, plucking flowers, I first saw the peach,
Today, plucking flowers, I saw the plum too.
Warm days and sunny breezes really urge them on,
4 Do you know what will remain of springtime vegetation?
In mid-life, often sick, my once-strong mind declines,
Facing wine I long to retire, but retirement is not granted.
I can't compete with flowers and plants down by the foot of the wall:
8 Spring comes, and everywhere their fragrance follows suit!

Though basically rather sombre and fatalistic in content, these poems share a characteristic which Yoshikawa has noted in the verse of Su Shi (1037-1101), namely, the ability to sum up events occurring over a long period of time.97 I have already mentioned that in his longer poems, Ouyang likes to compare places and objects from different stages of his life. Yet probably due to the brevity of these eight-line verses, temporal progression becomes much more noticeable here. Though the final poem above covers only two days — or a little longer if we count Ouyang's projection into the future in the second couplet — the first two poems are much more ambitious. One describes Drunken Old Man Pavilion and the Pavilion of Abundant Joys, both from Ouyang's Chuzhou period (1045-1048) over three years earlier, and then moves immediately to the present in Kaifeng (1051). Hence, the "grinding down" of his will (line 7) is given a specific temporal context, rather than remaining an abstract generalization. The other poem shows the willow, now tall and mature, reminding Ouyang of when he planted it as a sapling. While

96 In Ji vol. 1, 2.28. Plum is a translation of 木 李.
97 See Yoshikawa 104-118. Yoshikawa doesn't specifically connect this feature with Ouyang's poetry, but implies that it is a Song Dynasty characteristic.
the willow has grown, all his friends have passed away, and he is also rapidly aging, heading towards a similar fate.

Hence, despite the pessimistic tone, we see Ouyang’s intellect working to create a wider perspective than the present moment. And yet, rather than concluding that it is this aspect of Ouyang’s intellectual style which allows him to transcend the momentary shock of his aging, I would suggest a different interpretation. First, ever since the early 1040s, Ouyang has become increasingly aware of this aging process, with its attendant sicknesses and fears of mortality. The preceding poems in this section provide ample evidence of this preoccupation. And far from being a consolation, the awareness of time passing, as reflected in the blooming and scattering of blossoms, or the seemingly rapid growth of a willow tree, only heightens Ouyang’s sense of loss and “grinds down (his) firm will.” In order to transform his mood, he must distract himself from such painful reflections with the help of humour and wit, or, through the use of caricature, make his situation seem so ridiculous that he cannot avoid laughing at his worries. It is clear that even in two of the rather sombre poems just translated above, he manages to conclude with touches of wit: the first work makes a spurious causal connection between looking at flowers and giving up wine-drinking — ignoring the more logical conclusion that alcohol disagrees with his old age and poor physical condition (lines 7-8); likewise, the third poem on plum blossoms assumes that flowers must make an effort to produce fragrance, just as people must struggle to be creative (lines 7-8). The second poem, on the willows, lacking much in the way of wit, seems unable to provide any such consolation, despite its much more dramatic sense of temporal progression (lines 1-4). It comes across as a less successful, perhaps even conventional, poem.

If some of the poems of the early 1050s, for instance those on the “Parasitic Pagoda Tree” above (1050) and the willows here (1054) display a tendency towards moroseness, Ouyang soon manages to revive his spirits. Though in the following two works from the late 1050s, his awareness of temporal progression is even stronger, his use
of wit has also correspondingly increased its effectiveness as a weapon against depression. The first work counters the painful reality of the loss of sight with a startling conclusion; the second, through its very compression of such a long period into such a short poem, seems to caricature the whole idea of time passing — certainly, judging by the work’s visionary ending, Ouyang no longer seems overawed by the transitory existence implied by the first three lines:

Black Flowers in My Eyes: Written for Fun to Entertain Myself [after 1050]

In Luoyang, three times I saw the month of peonies, Drunk in spring, I often dozed at other peoples’ homes. At Yangzhou only once I encountered the season for herbaceous peonies, 4 Drinking all night, I wasn’t aware of rosy clouds rising at morning. Of the famous flowers throughout the Empire, if only this one remained, It wouldn’t lessen the joyful times I’ve known before the winecup. So reaching the present, white-haired, in the warm breezes of spring, 8 There’s no need for my sick eyes to tire of seeing black flowers!

In the Palace I Sowed a “Girdled Red” Peony [1059]

[original note: one of the rare flowers in Luoyang]

Spring excursions round West Luoyang: at that time I was still young, Later I descended to Southern Regions, with the nickname Drunken Old Man.

98 In Ji vol.1, 6.75. The “black flowers” of the title refers to spotty or blurred vision due to cataracts or eye disease. 99 The herbaceous peony is a plant related to the tree peony, but indigenous to Yangzhou (on the East coast of Central China) in the Song Dynasty. Its Chinese name is Shaoyao 薔. For more details on this plant, see Needham, op.cit. 408-409. Ouyang was posted to Yangzhou from 1048 to 1049. 100 In Ji vol.1, 2.100.
White-haired, I return now to offices at Jade Hall,
And behind the Royal Palace, I see a “Girdled Red”!

These two poems cover very long stretches of Ouyang’s life, from his first post in 1032, right up to the 1050s. The first work implies both that the “black flowers” are just another kind of peony — though an imaginary one — like the herbaceous and tree varieties encountered on his earlier travels, but better suited to an old man; and also that, having experienced such great joy from viewing flowers throughout his life, he should not complain if he cannot see very well now. The second poem covers the same long period in only four lines: peonies are so synonymous with 1030s Luoyang that Ouyang need not mention them in line 1 — “Spring excursions round West Luoyang: at that time I was still young” — and then, after a lengthy exile (line 2), he finally returns to Kaifeng in the 1050s (line 3), and in this place, which is not known for peonies, unexpectedly comes across one of the rarest strains growing behind the palace (line 4).

The theme of discovery — here actually rediscovery — which was evident in Ouyang’s earlier plant poems of the 1040s recurs in this work of the late 1050s, after a number of years in which nature and passing time seemed joined to all the other, human, forces attacking Ouyang and wearing him down. A unique flower, blossoming where one would least expect to find it, gives him a sense of constancy and inspiration.

A final longer poem from the same year (1059) involves a humorous portrait of Mei Yaochen making a similar discovery:

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101 More literally, Southern Qiao (南方) probably referring to Qiao Commandery, an ancient name for the region covering present Anhui and Henan Provinces, the environs of Ouyang’s Chuzhou exile.
There is rue; its flowers are yellow,
In among these crowded plants.
Pure scent is washed in morning dew,
4 Exquisite hue sways in spring breezes.
Luckily it stood in the shade of ornate halls,
And not one glance ever came its way.
That superior man of utmost refinement,
8 Happened by from the halls of study.
His writings tower over a generation,
His debating brings down all his peers.
His great knowledge is rooted in broad learning,
12 His new poems are certainly not “carved insects.”103
Singing and responding, his works dazzle the crowds,
His bright radiance lights up this secluded hedge.
Anything alive which finds employment,
16 Until it succeeds, must endure long poverty.
It is moving that every plant and tree,
Produces greens and reds from earth and dung!

The poem is quite simple, but Ouyang’s wit is evident in the idea that a brilliant scholar and poet, a true gentleman, like Mei, radiates so much “light” that he can spot a small plant hidden in the undergrowth, overlooked by lesser, dimmer souls. Ouyang

102 In Ji vol.1, 2.38.
103 This phrase refers to petty and miniature trinkets.
declares that the experience of this plant is an emblem for that of all objects (including people): they must suffer a long time in “poverty” before an appreciative person eventually discovers them (lines 15-16). As with many of his plant poems, Ouyang gains encouragement to persevere from a plant which has patiently waited for its moment of glory. Here, though, he adds to the traditional theme a humorous portrait, which also acts as a consolation to his closest friend, Mei. The final couplet expresses Ouyang’s philosophy succinctly, even bluntly: “It is moving that every plant and tree,/Produces greens and reds from earth and dung!” By implication, human beings, given time, can also transcend the earth and dung of a competitive society and a decaying body by means of their creativity.

In this chapter, I have discussed Ouyang’s poetry on his immediate surroundings from several perspectives. First, I noted the importance of the natural environment in fixing the character of human structures, and the necessary affinity between people and the place they choose to live. In his poems on this topic, Ouyang emphasizes the constancy of the natural world, within which human beings temporarily make their homes. Significantly, however, he declares several times that people can achieve permanence through poetry, which can be passed down through the generations.\footnote{Another important way in which Ouyang hopes to “survive” beyond his own death is by building waterworks which will benefit later generations through irrigating the land, as in two of the poems in this chapter. I deal with Ouyang’s literary treatment of water in more detail in the following chapter.}

In order to examine further Ouyang’s attitude to his natural environment, I then turned to his poetry on individual natural objects, found mainly in and around his successive homes — animals and birds, plants and trees. Certain characteristics continually emerged, such as the consolation Ouyang sought from all these “objects,” and his preference for uniqueness and purity, as opposed to a vulgar, confusing and short-lived mass of struggling colours. Most important, however, and a sign of Ouyang’s own
uniqueness, was his adoption of exaggerated personae, and what I have termed “caricatured reasoning.” By following the development of his poems on plants, I showed that Ouyang’s growing sensitivity to the passing of time, doubtless exacerbated by his frustration with the petty struggles of Court politics, caused him acute anxiety, especially after the 1040s. By portraying himself, in exaggerated fashion, as an old, sick man, reacting with bemusement and peevishness to the vigorous world around him, and finding solace only in his favourite pure pets and flowers, Ouyang makes an art of laughing at his plight, and thus manages to make his existence bearable.

Hence, while recognizing the crucial importance of the natural world in shaping human lives, and our powerless subjection to the natural processes of growth and decline, Ouyang rejects the conclusion that human existence is therefore futile. On the contrary, he includes distinctively human qualities — wit, intellect and persona — to an even greater extent in his poetry as he grows older, using his creative energy to search out the inspiring and vital aspects of both the natural and human worlds.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{105} I return to this point in more detail in my concluding chapter, which examines the chronological development of Ouyang’s style in more general terms.
Chapter 5: Transforming Water

Several times in my discussion, I have referred to the cosmic forces which Ouyang's poetry reveal. Such forces are especially evident in his more powerful, dynamic mountain verses, but even in the domestic setting of the last two chapters, the reader frequently glimpses the immense universe beyond the immediate individual subject of the poems. In this chapter, I would like to revert to the explicitly cosmic level, and analyse a group of poems on the themes of water and the rain cycle.

Ouyang composed several works on rain, particularly storms and their aftermath, and even more on snow. Water, of course, is essential to human survival and the propagation of crops and livestock. Arriving at appropriate times, rain and snow are thus cause for celebration. Ouyang constantly refers to their effects on ordinary people, and the necessity for good government to “channel” these beneficial waters in the most effective way. At the same time, in some poems he seems just as interested in the personified, cosmic battle between the forces of winter and spring, or yin and yang, made especially visible in storms, as he does in the social effects of that battle.

Also in previous chapters, I noted Ouyang's preoccupation with purity — expressed most memorably, perhaps, in his series of poems on white animals and birds. In his snow poems, the whiteness and tranquillity of new snow likewise evoke moods of visionary purity, and this characteristic is even more evident in the third group of poems I will discuss in this chapter, which deal with the moon. Since these works invariably describe the moon reflected in, or rising over, tranquil waters, I feel they provide an interesting counterpart to the violent conflicts of the storm poems.
Finally, I will follow these waters as they are collected in rivers, and eventually reach the sea. I will translate several works in which Ouyang expresses his wonder and awe at the enormous breadth and life-bearing, occasionally life-threatening, capacity of water.

Rain and Storms

Beginning with poems on rain, here is a very early piece in which Ouyang puts into poetic form his philosophy of sensible foresight in government:¹

*Answering Yang Zijing’s seven-syllable poem “Praying for Rain”* [1031]²

I’ve heard that the forces of *yin* and *yang* in Heaven and on the Earth,
Rise and fall, above and below, never once ceasing their motion.
In their cycle, they cannot avoid producing lacks and losses,
4 As a result, at the year’s end, the harvests are not always good.

The ancients who invented policies understood how these things were,
At regular seasons they gathered tithes, urging the people to labour.
Every three years, there would certainly be a whole year’s food left over,
8 In nine years, they always prepared for three years’ terrible harvest.

¹ For a detailed analysis of Ouyang’s political philosophy as expressed in his prose works, see James T.C. Liu, op.cit. esp. 114-130.
² In.*Ji* vol.1, 6.41-42. Also in *Xuanji* 171. The original title for this poem is “Answering Yang Pi’s seven-syllable poem ‘Celebrating Rain.’” Zijing was Yang Pi’s style name. Notes to the poem’s title in *Ji* say: “One has Zijing [instead of Pi],” and “one has praying [instead of celebrating].” I have chosen the variant reading, since the poem makes no mention of rain actually falling: on the contrary, the people are still desperately praying for rain at the end of the work. Contrast the poem translated below, entitled “Celebrating Rain.”
Even if there were drought conditions, or times were really exceptional,
They took the surfeit to make up the shortfall and managed to pull themselves through.
As for today, officials are ignorant and lack the skills of governance,
12 The people drift into laziness, and neglect agricultural tasks.
The militarized nation raises levies faster than a shooting star,
Then the officials double their salaries, surpassing kings or dukes!
A whole year’s ploughing, through good fortune, is just producing its fruits,
16 When those who gather to waste it swarm more numerous than hornets.
Thus it is that year after year the harvests are constantly good,
And yet the homes of the common people always remain empty.
As a result, whenever there is a short time without rain,
20 On account of their worsening plight, they all cry out to the Old Man of Heaven!
Relying on Heaven to pity the people, and not censuring the officials,
How can the “sweet moisture” spread about its beneficent thickness? 3
The peasants ought to increase their efforts; officials should be ashamed:
24 Would they dare not to pour wine in offering to divine dragons! 4

Ouyang’s diction here is extremely plain and his argument matter of fact — a
contrast from many of his earliest poems, which imitate the dense, allusive late-Tang
style. 5 Apart from the constant seven-syllable metre, and rhyme on alternate lines, the

3 Sweet moisture refers to rain.
4 Divine dragons: dragons were associated with the force of water; they dwelt at the
bottom of all sizeable rivers and lakes, rising up to the sky during storms and heavy rain. I
will translate a couple of poems below which graphically describe such dragon-storms.
See some excellent modern depictions of dragons in clouds and rain in the book by Terano
Tansai (1952-),  Hyakuryū gacho 百龍畫帖 (Tokyo 1987) especially plates 59-69
(“Wave Dragons and Cloud Dragons”). The book also gives some impressions of Tang
Dynasty Chinese dragons on carved seals (66-69).
5 For some examples, see the group of undated poems at the beginning of the “Regulated
Verse” section of his  Wai ji 外集, especially Ji vol.2, 7.7-8.
only allowances he makes to poetry are two rather conventional metaphors: in line 13, where levies increase “faster than a shooting star”; and line 16, where those who collect and waste the peoples’ hard-earned harvest swarm “more numerous than hornets.” This is didactic poetry at its most blunt, and gives the impression of a skeptical, rationalistic narrator Ironically challenging the superstitious prayers of hungry people.

Nevertheless, a closer reading suggests that Ouyang is not advocating a complete turning away from prayers and belief in “divine dragons” (line 24) to a more effective, planned economic strategy, but rather making a realistic assessment of what human beings can do to survive in the face of uncontrollable, “divine” cosmic irregularity. In some ways, Ouyang’s attitude is more reverential and respectful towards the immense forces at work in the cosmos — the cycles of $yin$ and $yang$ — than those officials and peasants who ignore Heaven in good years, but desperately pray for rain in times of famine.

Another early poem, from 1032, displays this more reverential aspect of Ouyang’s character. Part of a local official’s duties at this time involved praying for rain in the name of the Emperor. Ouyang’s superior at Luoyang, Qian Weiyan — referred to in the title as “Governor in Residence and Premier” Lishou xianggong 留守相公 — carried out this ceremony, and no doubt due to the sageliness of the Emperor’s reputation, Heaven responded (ying 應) with heavy rainfall. Ouyang’s poem was probably composed as a formal record of this “response”:

_The Governor in Residence and Premier Prayed for Rain at the Shrine of Nine Dragons, and When the Response Occurred We Received Timely Rain: Presented to My Colleagues at the Governor’s Office [1032]_

Ancient trees are gloomy, dark and dense,
At temple pavilions he approaches in formal attire.

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6 In Ji vol.1, 2.63. Note the reference to Nine Dragons in the title.
Thunder drives out, sounding beyond the mountains,
4 Clouds thicken, darkening beside the sun.
Lightly drizzling, it comes and first gathers,
Distant, then close, its force steadily grows.
Within the soil, a hidden pulse moves,
8 The country air will produce heavy rain.
Above raised paths: the forms of clouds linked up,
Amidst fields: the sounds of soil being struck.7
The Clear Bright Pavilion should be told of the good sign,
12 In the Golden Carriage, his heart is full of worry.8
Around the Imperial City, the Three Rivers are beautiful,
At the Alternate Palace, ten thousand tiles grow dark.9
Abandoned ditches sound in old gardens,
16 Red flowers bloom in green forests.

7 Though a literal interpretation of this line suggests the sound of heavy rain striking the earth, Ouyang also alludes to an ancient song intoned by contented farmers under the sage Emperor Yao. The Jirang ge 捶壇 歌 (“Song of Striking Rang”) refers to a game resembling marbles or bowls. A tapered wooden counter (called a rang) was thrown 20 or 30 paces, and the player who hit the counter with his own throw won the game. Legend has it that under Emperor Yao, the people had such a relaxed life that they could spend their time playing this game. The “Song of Striking Rang” was sung by old men while they did this. (See Cihai op. cit. 402, under ji 捶). Ouyang alters ge (“song”) to yin 音 (“sound, tone”) in order to maintain his rhyme. He suggests that Qian Weiyan’s successful prayers will allow the common people to rest from their labours.
8 The Clear Bright (ming guang 明光) Pavilion was a building in the Han Dynasty Imperial Palace. The Golden Carriage (huang wu 黃屋), literally “golden compartment (of a carriage),” refers to the Emperor’s carriage, which was traditionally lined inside with golden silk. Both appellations are conventional ways to refer to the Emperor.
9 The Three Rivers were the Luo, Yi and Yellow Rivers, in the environs of Luoyang. Luoyang was not the capital during the Song, but there was a palace there for the Emperor to stay while away from Kaifeng: the so-called Alternate Palace (li gong 離宮). Hence, when Ouyang speaks of the Imperial City in the previous line, he means Luoyang too.
In the Southern Fields we should still urge them on,
For the rest of Spring there remains some hope.
They should allow the Guest who Waits on the Carriage,
20 Frequently to perform the Chant of the Scholar of Luo!10

This poem is an extended regulated verse (*pailü 拍律*), and like the more common eight-line regulated verse (*liishi 律詩*) makes extensive use of parallelism. Thus from lines 3 to 16, the two halves of each couplet share the same parts of speech and syntax — a marked contrast from the preceding ancient-style poem (*guti shi 古體詩*), none of whose couplets are parallel. This poem is also much more allusive — and in fact virtually every line contains an evocative allusion, hence the abundant explanatory notes. The effect of these techniques is to slow the reader’s pace, and create a sense of symmetry and formal balance well suited to the ceremonial circumstances described in the title.

The implication of both these poems is that the natural forces which produce rain — variously addressed as The Old Man of Heaven, Divine Dragon, and so on — are certainly beyond human control, but that a good governor is able to attain a certain harmony with those forces, so that his prayers for rain are offered at the correct time!

10 I assume the Guest who Waits on the Carriage (*hou ju ke 後車客*) to be Qian Weiyan, carrying out the ceremony. He figuratively waits on the carriage of the Emperor (see line 12 of the poem above). Ouyang is praising his effectiveness in gaining a response from Heaven. I haven’t located a “Chant of the Scholar of Luo” (*Luosheng yin 洛生吟*), but the *Zhongwen dacidian* refers to a “Lyric of the Scholar of Luo” (*Luosheng yong 洛生咏*), glossed as “a tune intoned by a scholar from the south bank of the Luo [River].” The use of *yin* instead of *yong* is again for the purposes of rhyme. Apparently, one Zhang Rong 張融 of the Qi dynasty (479-502) was caught by bandits, who were about to kill and eat him. Zhang remained completely unperturbed, and composed a “Lyric of the Scholar of Luo.” The bandits were so amazed by his calm that they decided not to harm him (see *Zhongwen dacidian* op.cit. vol.19, 8130, character 17804.22). In this poem, the scholar of Luo would be Qian, the governor of Luoyang. It is not certain whether Ouyang knew of the Zhang Rong anecdote.
A number of Ouyang's poems on snow also deal with political and social concerns, but before turning to those works, I will give several examples of his later works on rain and storms in which we notice a slightly different emphasis. First of all, here are two compositions which again mention ordinary people, but in a much less didactic fashion than the previous works. The former is a truly exhilarating depiction of a storm personified as a dragon emerging from the depths of a lake:

*Offering to the Dragon at Cypress Pool* [1046]^{11}

Alas, the wisdom of the dragon! Who can possibly grasp it?
Emerging and sinking, its transformations are truly abrupt and sudden.
The altar is level, the trees ancient; the Pool's waters blacken;
Deep and muffled, its echoes and shadow: I doubt if it's there at all.
Clouds and mist on surrounding mountains suddenly merge in broad daylight,
In a flash it rises vertically, seizing the empty sky.
Turtles and fish are carried in its wake: they drop down from the heights,
Thunder rumbles and lightning races: they drive each other on.
It brings down cliffs and overturns ravines just for its own amusement,
In moments the ten thousand creatures are completely soaked to the skin!
But blue skies then sweep across; a thousand miles become peaceful,
All I see is green country, as if wiped clean by the clouds.
The next morning, there are old peasants worshipping beside the Pool,
Their drums sound with a *kan, kan*, echoing at the foot of the mountain.^{12}
Rustic shamans are drunk and satiated; temple doors are closed,
And desperate bedraggled crows struggle together for leftover scraps.

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^{11} In *Ji* vol. 1, 1.26. I use the alternative title given for the poem: the original character is *bai* 百 ("a hundred") rather than *bai* 柏 ("cypress").
^{12} *Kan, kan* 坎 坎 is an onomatopoeic binome indicating the sound of a drum, hence my phonetic translation.
It seems that the offering (sai 賞) mentioned in the title occurs the morning after this violent storm (line 13). Ouyang provides some of the highlights of the offering ceremony in the final four lines: old peasants banging their drums; shamans drunk and stuffed with food from a thanksgiving, or propitiatory, feast; and crows scavenging for the leftovers of the same feast. Yet his attention is focused squarely on the storm-dragon itself, a creature that cannot be controlled, emerging and retreating in an instant, and wreaking havoc on its surroundings.

Along with the excellent extended metaphor of the dragon, Ouyang's choice of words throughout the poem heightens the visual impact of the storm. Lines 3-4 create a threatening atmosphere with their "blackened" waters and deep, muffled "echoes and shadows"; line 5 portrays the sudden closing in of clouds in broad daylight, not as the natural cause of the storm, but as a theatrical cue for the dragon's vertical leap into the sky (line 6). The dragon does not merely hang there passively, but dramatically "seizes the empty sky." Line 7 adds to the shock with a further piece of imaginative hyperbole: "Turtles and fish are carried in its wake; they drop down from the heights," continued in line 9 with the capricious dragon "bringing down cliffs and overturning ravines just for its own amusement." Finally, having disrupted and soaked everything, the dragon disappears, leaving blue sunny skies, and wettened green countryside.

Hence, in this poem the emphasis is shifted to the imaginative description of an unusual natural phenomenon, rather than its social or political consequences. The beneficial effects of the storm are only implied by the celebrations and feasting of the local people.

Personification and hyperbole, used to fine effect in the above poem, are even more evident in the following work, which depicts in extremely dramatic form the battle, in the form of a storm, between the yang forces of spring and the remaining yin forces of winter. In the title, Ouyang acknowledges his stylistic debt here to the Mid-Tang poets
Han Yu and Meng Jiao (751-814), who jointly composed several such “extraordinary” works:13

Encountering Wind at Luan City: Imitating the Style of Han and Meng’s Linked Verses

At year’s end, the clogged atmosphere is foul,
Winter finishes, provoking a seasonal battle.
A light breeze brings back the warmer pulse,

4 Orders are given to spread the new year.
Distant echoes: their approach seems slow,
Then charging wildly, their force spreads unchecked.15
Toppling city walls, they fight to the sound of battle drums,

8 Charging over the countryside, they overcome troops of Yin;16
Swept clean away, no trace of mist remains,
Crushed and destroyed, no stalks can make a stand.
The Five Mountains shake their lofty towers,

12 The Nine Cauldrons seethe, frying and boiling.17

13 For Han and Meng’s examples, see Qian Zhonglian, op.cit. 410-432; 465-524; 594-620; 679-680; and 1037-1065. The poem most clearly related to Ouyang’s subject here is “Linked Verse on Autumn Rains” in ibid. 473-481. For some English translations and discussions of these Linked Verses, see Stephen Owen, The Poetry of Meng Chiao and Han Yu (Yale 1975) 116-136.
14 Text of this poem in Ji vol.1, 2.75-76. Linked Verses: two or more poets would take turns to complete a couplet or 4 lines of a poem, retaining the same rhyme and attempting to outdo each other’s imaginative flights. This work is by Ouyang alone, hence the imitation perhaps refers to the poem’s hyperbolic diction. Ouyang’s collection does contain some true linked verses, written with various of his colleagues (see Ji vol.1, 6.82-84).
15 Ouyang adopts the metaphor of attacking troops to refer to the spring storm, hence my use of the third-person plural “their.”
16 Since Ouyang is treating the yin force as an army, I capitalize it as a name.
Jade stones burn and mountain ridges split,
Waves and breakers roll; the ocean overflows.
I hear in the distance the markets close at noon,
16 With struggles and shouts, confusion shakes the night.
The gloom reaches its apogee, clouds are drained of colour,
Yin becomes exhausted, and fire is born.
Lightning’s whips repeatedly swish and crack,
20 Thunder’s chariot-wheels add their clamorous rumble.
Crevices and caves produce a thousand reverberations,
From darkness and gloom emerge a hundred strange creatures.
Fox spirits hide in the desolate thickets,
24 Ghostly flames flee, glimmering greenly.\textsuperscript{18}
Excited by anger, gods increase their terror,
But suddenly they cease, giving respite to my ears.
Barbarian troops possess the moon’s corona,
28 Travellers on the river await the crocodile drum.\textsuperscript{19}
Floating [like] leaves, a thousand boats are lost,
Flying in the sky, ten thousand tiles are scattered.

\textsuperscript{17}“Five Mountains” probably indicates Mounts Tai, Hua, two Mount Hengs, and Song, peaks representing East, West, North, South and Central China respectively. The Nine Cauldrons were bronze vessels supposedly forged by the mythical Emperor Yu (founder of the first Chinese dynasty, the Xia) to represent each of the Nine Regions of the Empire.\textsuperscript{18} Ghostly flames (\textit{gui yan} 鬼焰, also known as \textit{gui huo} 鬼火): the phosphorescent light emitted by a decomposing corpse left above ground. Usually these flames indicate the aftermath of a battle, but here Ouyang uses them in his figurative description of the “battle” between \textit{yin} and \textit{yang}.\textsuperscript{19} Perhaps the “barbarian troops” line refers to an eclipse of the moon? As for “crocodile drum,” Ouyang’s actual phrase is “crocodile cry” (\textit{tuo ming} 龜鳴), which could either imply that crocodile skin was used to make drums, or that the crocodile’s cry sounded like a drum. See Xia Zhengyi et al, ed., \textit{Cihai} op.cit. under \textit{tuo gu} 龜鼓.
Brave hunters encourage their horses to be strong,
32 As boats grow stable, the rest of the voyage is considered.

Afraid of being crushed, I repeatedly shift my seat,
Praying in the darkness, I keep adjusting my hatstrings.

Yet what is frozen melts, first waking the hibernating,
36 Then the withered revive, preparing to send out shoots.

With my sick frame I’m sad in this mountain lodge,
In the cold days of Spring I depend on the clinking wine-bowl.

A rooster crows: Heaven and Earth grow white,
And climbing to a plateau, I gaze at the sunny brightness.

Like the preceding work, this poem involves an extended metaphor which allows
Ouyang to depict the power of the storm in an exaggerated, dramatic manner. Here, he
skillfully interweaves martial imagery with climatic phenomena to give the impression of an
advancing and attacking army “overtaking the forces of Yin” (line 8). Though he is using
an image from the human sphere, rather than the mythical dragon, he becomes similarly
hyperbolic in his description, particularly from lines 11-14, where the whole Empire seems
to rock and seethe, mountains split apart and the sea overflows onto the land. Another
example occurs from lines 22-25, where all manner of strange creatures emerge in the
darkness, including fox spirits, macabre ghostly flames, and gods “excited by anger.”
Again, like the dragon-storm poem, the clamour and chaos suddenly cease (line 26), here
with the moon’s corona occupied by “barbarian troops” (line 27), leaving people to return
to their normal occupations.

Although we can see parallels between these two depictions of storms, the latter
poem, at least up to line 32, creates a much more sinister atmosphere — an intimation that

20 Ouyang is afraid that due to his slovenly official dress, Heaven will punish him in the
storm, hence he must “adjust his hatstrings,” i.e. tidy himself up.
the cosmos is about to collapse — worthy of its Mid-Tang predecessors.\textsuperscript{21} The conclusion (lines 33-40), on the other hand displays some aspects characteristic of Ouyang's verse, and I would suggest helps to set the rest of the poem into a more effective, even realistic context. There is the first hint of a changing mood in the humour of lines 33-34: "Afraid of being crushed, I repeatedly shift my seat,/Praying in the darkness, I keep adjusting my hatstrings." Ouyang here portrays himself as a lily-livered official, cowering in his home. As if cheered by this ridiculous image, he then notices the benefits of the storm, namely, the creative forces released after its destructive passage: "What is frozen melts, first waking the hibernating,/Then the withered revive, preparing to send out shoots" (lines 35-36). The following couplet balances the pain of his sick body with the consolation of spring wine, and the poem ends, in quite optimistic fashion, with the rooster signalling a new day, Heaven and Earth made white (by sunrise, or possibly snow?), and Ouyang climbing high to admire the "clear brightness" — a marked contrast from the foul, "clogged atmosphere" before the storm (line 1).

I have several times noted that Ouyang refuses to become overwhelmed by destruction and decay. It is interesting that even when violence occurs at the cosmic level, he does not allow the "forces of Yin" to gain the upper hand.

Before turning to poems with more social relevance, I will translate one further work depicting a storm, this time concentrating on heavy rain. Dating from the late 1050s, the poem fully develops the comic persona hinted at in lines 33-34 above, and this persona, along with his caricatured surroundings, replaces hyperbolic, supernatural description to provide the main interest of the work:

\textsuperscript{21} The extensive use of parallelism, in almost every couplet, in this case also emphasizes the archaic, imitative character of the work.
Answering the Poem “Heavy Rain,” Sent to Me by Mei Shengyu [1057]22

Evening clouds resemble a mountain avalanche,
Night rain is like a burst pipe spilling out.
Momentarily, I catch sight of dark blue sky,
4 Flaming brightly, the toad-moon rises,
But suddenly the Spirit of Yin solidifies,
On all four sides it seems to be urged on.
Wild thunder races through obscure blackness,
8 Startling lightning illuminates fierce monsters!23
They go on the prowl, waking dragons from hibernation,
Descending, they strike the tombstones and the graves.
Every time the thunder sounds its rumbling cartwheels,
12 The rain correspondingly adjusts its pace.
At first, it seems that it will flood without ceasing,
But shortly it pulls back, silent and exhausted.
There is only, suspended, a three thousand-foot rainbow,
16 Violet and azure, stretching across the emptiness.
In a matter of moments, a hundred changes of aspect:
Who rolls up and unfolds this darkness and light?
And do they know of the people below on the Earth,
20 The watery downpour flooding their sleeves and hems?
Wallowing about in the midst of mud and mire,
They seem no different from ducks or common swine!

22 In Ji vol.1, 2.41-42. Also in Xuanji 171.
23 Fierce monsters: literally kuixu 兔兔, a monster mentioned in Zhang Heng’s (78-139 AD) “Prose-poem on the Eastern Capital,” and glossed there as “a kind of dragon with scales glowing like the sun and moon; if it appears then the city will suffer a great drought.” See Cihai op.cit. under kuixu.
Alas for me! Just come to the capital city,
24 With hardly a mean hut to shelter my body.
   In the leisure district, I'm renting an ancient room,
   Crude and mean, it's mixed up among back alleys.
   The gushing from the neighbours pours into our ditches and drains,
28 The flow from the street surges over our courtyard.
   Leaving at the gate, I'm saddened by vast floods,
   But staying behind closed doors, I fear being submerged.
   The walls are full of holes, opening in all directions,
32 It's fortunate my family has no valuable possessions!
   Toads croak beneath the kitchen stove,
   My old wife can only snivel and sob.
   At the Nine City Gates they've run out of firewood,
36 For the morning cooking-fire we're about to smash the cart.
   Weighed down and under water, I'm worried about survival:
   How can I concentrate on drawings and books?
   Thus I know that when Emperor Yao was alive,
40 He couldn't avoid the fear of becoming a fish!24
   Master Mei is still able to think about me,
   He sent me poems and showed concern for my residence.
   He consoled me with his latest compositions:
44 Brightly shining, as pure as jasper or jade.
   My official duties are few, and my abilities are meagre,
   I'm ashamed I've done little to pay back the State.

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24 There were supposedly nine years of floods during the reign of the mythical sage emperor Yao.
My years will soon reach their final destination,
48 Why do I not retire to rivers and lakes?
Since anyway I dwell in a traveller's rest,
There's no point in waiting to make my plans!

Though the poem begins with similar supernatural/mythical imagery to those above, mentioning the “dragons” again, and kuixu monsters (lines 9 and 8), and adds the sinister detail of rain striking tombstones and graves (line 10), even in the first 14 lines of description Ouyang has made concessions to achieve a greater sense of realism. For instance, in three of these lines, he lessens the shock of the imagery by using simile, rather than the constant metaphors of the preceding poem: evening clouds “resemble” a mountain landslide; night rain “is like” a pipe spilling out (lines 1-2); and the Spirit of Yin “seems to be” urged on (line 6). Contrast the previous poem: “The Five Mountains shake their lofty towers ... Jade stones burn, and mountain ridges split” (lines 11,13), and so on. Similarly, Ouyang’s ability to express his perceptions of the storm has become more acute, as in the carefully observed sequence of lines 11-12 [literally]: “Every time the thunder rumbles its cartwheels,/The force of the rain becomes correspondingly faster and slower.”

Following the image of the rainbow, which forms when the rain stops (lines 15-16), Ouyang continues with a remarkably vivid and believable portrayal of the storm’s aftermath, focusing particularly on his own plight. Here we have not hyperbole, but caricature — everything he describes is plausible, even realistic, yet the combined effect of his series of images is incongruous and humorous. He sets the tone by depicting all the soaked people wallowing through muddy streets, just like “ducks and common swine” (lines 21-22), and then proceeds to show in great detail how unsuited is his poorly-built, rented accommodation to coping with such rain. Water “gushes” from the neighbouring homes, pouring into his “ditches and drains,” and “overflows” from the street into his
courtyard; he cannot go out due to the “vast flood,” but fears he will be “submerged” in a large puddle if he stays home; the walls are full of holes, and aquatic creatures like toads have found their way inside, croaking under the stove; that stove cannot be lit because flooding has cut off supplies of firewood: his family will have to smash their cart for wood to cook breakfast; finally, his wife is reduced to a state of sobbing, and such a crisis is no time to be reading books — his normal consolation. Ouyang concludes this catalogue of disasters with a tongue-in-cheek reference to the sage emperor Yao: now he can sympathise with those who lived through nine years of floods under Yao, until they were afraid they might become fish (lines 39-40).

Ouyang has two motives for thus emphasizing the utter desperation of his situation, as he makes clear from lines 41 to 50. First, he wishes to show that Mei Yaochen’s poetry, arriving in the midst of hopelessness, is an enormous consolation: “He consoled me with his latest compositions,/Shining bright, as pure as jasper or jade” (lines 43-44). Elsewhere, I have often remarked on Ouyang’s joy at receiving poetry, and its ability to improve his mood. Secondly, the disruption exerted by one shower of rain reminds Ouyang of the need to enjoy life while he has the opportunity. Earlier in the poem, he remarks that “in a matter of moments, a hundred changes of aspect [occur]” (line 17). By the poem’s conclusion he realizes that he too is changing quickly — “my years will soon reach their final destination” (line 47) — and shouldn’t waste his life in a job that contributes nothing to the country — especially since he must live in such a run-down hovel: “Why do I not retire to rivers and lakes?” (line 48). Though “rivers and lakes” is a standard phrase which Ouyang uses to refer to an idyllic pastoral environment free from care, he is perhaps taking advantage of the term’s more literal meaning in this poem — why not retire to rivers and lakes since, he implies, my home in the city has turned into a deep puddle!

The poem thus delineates a similar dynamic twice: the first 16 lines portray the rainstorm wreaking havoc then abruptly stopping, leaving a visionary rainbow, “violet and
azure, stretched across the sky.” Secondly, Ouyang depicts at length the destructive force of the flood, which causes more and more chaos until suddenly Mei’s “shining” poems arrive, like jade or jasper, providing spiritual consolation and enlightenment. In this way, the human world “below” seems to reflect the pattern of the cosmological realm above.

A final poem on rain returns to Ouyang’s earlier concern for the common people. This time he is content to share the delight of peasants at timely rain, and not urge them to work harder:

Celebrating Rain [1050]25

Though heavy rain certainly plummets down,
Between two cart-ruts you can distinguish sun from cloud.
Light rain spreads out its soaking moisture,
4 Its fruits are diffused widely and deeply.
As long as the soaking moisture doesn’t cease completely,
Its beneficial wetness will truly be limitless.
No need to discuss whether rain is light or heavy,
8 Since light rain especially delights the peasants.
They’ve already harvested the winter wheat,
And new grain has not yet sent out shoots.
One day’s rain at the appropriate time:
12 For a whole year they’ll be filled with the fruits of abundance.
The night echoes to the sounds of falling drizzle,
By dawn’s glow, the day is clear and cool.
The river plain is clean, as if it has been washed,
16 Plants and trees seem to produce their own light.

25 In Ji vol.1, 2.4-5. Also in Xuanji 136.
Little boys are delighted at their melons and taros,  
Ploughers look up to their irrigation pools.  
Who said that country folk are destined to suffer?  
20 This joy has certainly not reached its end!

In its concentration on rustic peasant life, this poem is most similar to the first work I translated above, “Answering Yang Pi’s Seven-Syllable Poem ‘Praying for Rain,'” from 1031. Both poems also make use of the rain cycle as the foundation of an explicitly stated philosophy. Yet, whereas the earlier poem seems to draw its rather simplistic philosophy from books — “I’ve heard that the forces of *yin* and *yang* in Heaven and on the Earth/Rise and fall, above and below, never once ceasing their motion” (lines 1-2) — the present work, composed in 1050, relies on observation to produce a more complex conclusion. It is not the dramatic and forceful “heavy rain... plummeting down” (line 1) which most delights peasants, but rather “light rain, spreading out its soaking moisture,” and covering a much wider area with its subtle fertilizing power (lines 3,6). One day of such light rain, if it comes at the right time, will allow people to eat their fill for a whole year (lines 11-12).

Similarly, where the implied author of the first work attacks the ignorance of peasants and officials, as they pray for rain when they should much earlier have made preparations for drought, and seems to know all the solutions to their miserable plight, here he adopts a quite different, and perhaps more approachable, persona. His judgmental attitude towards officials has not changed at all, as a poem of the same year, “The Dregs Eaters,” makes clear: “Alas for those who act as officials and officers:/... Above, they cannot increase the profits of the country,/Below, they cannot fill you [common people] in your hunger.”26 Yet he is aware of his own dubious position as one of those officials who

26 See *Ji* vol.1, 2.8, and *Xuanji* 142. This poem is translated fully in Yoshikawa 70-71. The above quotation comes from lines 15 and 21-22 of the poem.
drink wine while peasants grow hungry: “I drink wine;/You must eat the dregs:/Though you do not censure me,/How can I avoid censure!”27 Hence, in “Celebrating Rain,” he is no longer comfortable criticizing the common people from his privileged position.

He seems, moreover, to realize now that peasants and country folk, due to their close proximity to the natural cycles of growth and decay, have developed a profound understanding of what is truly important for life. Therefore, instead of teaching them to work harder, he has learned from them to appreciate the immense creative potential within natural phenomena. Furthermore, I would argue that Ouyang is using what he learns from those closest to nature to inspire and renew his own creative energies. Certainly the distinction he draws between “light rain,” spreading over a wide area, sinking deeply, and “heavy rain,” impressive but narrow in its effects, might be extended into all areas of daily life which involve creativity. The observation that one day’s rain “at the appropriate time” can be sufficient to fertilize crops for a whole year is similarly suggestive, emphasising the importance of timing, rather than simply prolonged effort, in successful cultivation.

In these poems on rain and storms, Ouyang generally attempts to describe those transitional moments between destruction and creation which occasionally occur in the natural world, in the hope perhaps of giving them more permanent form. Then, when he returns to his poems at a later time, or alternatively, receives answering works from his friends like Mei Yaochen, Ouyang can experience a similar creative inspiration rooted in those natural transitions, which will alter his mood from stagnation to productive activity.

27 Lines 23-26 of the poem cited in the preceding note. Since officials taxed peasants too harshly, the latter would run out of grain for themselves, and had to buy the dregs of grain left over from making wine, in order to survive.
Snow

Turning to poems on snow, here too Ouyang often prefers to adopt the peasants' attitude that a fall of snow in late winter moistens the ground and benefits spring crops, rather than the typical city-dweller's dislike of the cold and inconvenience. Two works stylistically quite similar to "Celebrating Rain" illustrate this tendency. The first dates from 1045, during Ouyang's second exile in Chuzhou. The Yongyang of the title was an ancient name for Chuzhou:

Heavy Snow in Yongyang [1045] 28

Before the Clear-Flow Pass, a foot of snow on the ground,
Birds cannot fly across it, and peoples' movements cease.
Ice fuses the creeks and valleys; deer and elk die,
4 Wind is stiff in the wild fields; mulberry branches break.
The Yangtze and Huai are wet and low-lying: so different from Northern lands, 29
If winter is not severely cold, contagious disease will break out. 30
An old peasant declares that he has survived for seventy years,
8 And he's only seen as much snow as this on three or four occasions.
Yet reviving yang gradually stirs; winter sun spreads its rays,
Subtle and mild, brushing gently, the spring breeze will blow.
One foot of snow,
12 Means many feet of mud!
Only when the mud is deep will sprouts of wheat grow plump.

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28 In Ji vol.1, 1.22. Also in Xuanji 99.
29 The Huai, like the Yangtze, was the name of a river. It flows through present Henan, Anhui and Jiangsu Provinces, joining the Yangtze at present Jiangdu County, Jiangsu Province. Here Ouyang is obviously indicating the region around these two rivers, i.e. central China, and more particularly the environs of his exile in Chuzhou.
30 Freezing weather kills off most of the malaria-carrying mosquito larvae, hence reducing the risk of epidemics in the ensuing humid summer.
Old peasant, how would you know of the mighty Emperor’s strength?
Just hear me as I sing aloud my “Poem on Abundant Years.”

Though well aware of the pain and damage caused by heavy snow, which kills animals and snaps trees (lines 3-4), Ouyang points out its efficacy in preventing disease from spreading later on in this humid environment, and the added moisture it will bring to crops at the thaw. His final couplet implies, as I suggested above, that the old peasant may understand little of politics and theories of government, but with his experience and long memory, he is remarkably sensitive to the rhythms of nature. Hence, he can appreciate as much as the exiled Ouyang the creative potential hidden in freezing, wintry conditions.\(^{31}\)

In the second poem, a much later work, Ouyang has himself become an old fellow with definite rustic inclinations, preferring to sacrifice the superficial beauty of early blossoms in favour of Spring snow and, later, bumper harvests to fill his belly:

Snow in the Second Month [1060]\(^{32}\)
Better to damage the peach and plum flowers,
And not harm wolfberry or chrysanthemum.
It’s wolfberry and chrysanthemum that I like,
4 I’m only afraid I can’t consume enough!
Blossoming flowers are matters for the young,
They don’t even come to an old fellow’s notice.
An old fellow has no distant concerns,
8 What moves him is his mouth and belly.
When wind clears, sun warms, and snow begins to melt,
Treading through mud, I’ll seek for myself the greens beside the hedge.

\(^{31}\) Wintry, too, in the figurative sense of being attacked and disgraced.
\(^{32}\) In Ji vol. 1, 2.45-46.
Wolfberry (qi 杞) and chrysanthemum are both autumn plants. The latter I have mentioned often in connection with Ouyang’s wine-drinking — “consume,” of line 4, probably refers to the habit of eating chrysanthemum petals floating on autumn wine, in the hope of gaining some of the flower’s vital power.33 Eating wolfberries was supposed to be good for one’s sight, which may have been Ouyang’s original motive for taking them, since in his later life he often suffered from blurred vision.34 Thus he prefers snow in spring rather than autumn, not only for the reason that spring snow fertilizes later “green” crops, but because those plants which bloom or produce fruit in autumn help to prolong his own life, and are tangible symbols of creative potential to inspire him in old age, the autumn of his life.

Both these poems are very simple, with plain diction, effective use of repetition, and slightly lilting, folksong-like metres, but both express deep awareness of the springs of human and natural creativity.

Though falling snow tends to arrive more silently than heavy rain, and is rarely accompanied by the clamour and shock of thunder and lightning, Ouyang does use the battle between the forces of yin and yang to evoke in some of his snow poems the drama of the works on storms above. Yet the victors, in a poem on snow like the following, are the cooling forces of yin overcoming the harmful effects of premature yang warmth in late winter. Ouyang thus shows no absolute preference for cold or warmth, as long as they occur at appropriate times. A noticeable feature of the following poem is Ouyang’s clever interweaving of the climatic yin-yang battle with the real conflict on the borders of the Empire — presumably that directed against the incursions of the Xixia Kingdom from

33 See the section on wine-drinking in my chapter 3 above.
34 For one poem mentioning his blurred vision, see “Black Flowers in My Eyes,” translated in the section on flowers and plants in chapter 4 above.
1040 — a crisis which would have preoccupied the “Military Commissioner” Yan Shu (991-1055) to whom the poem is addressed:35

Song Rejoicing At Snow in Military Commissioner Yan’s Western Garden [1041]36

\textit{Yin} and \textit{yang} are out of joint, bringing chaos to the Five Phases,37
In depths of winter the mountain valleys are warm without any ice.
And after \textit{yang} has emerged onto the surface of the ground,

4 Beneath the Earth, who will send up shoots of ten thousand plants?
When supreme \textit{yin} ought to be employed but does not gain employment,
Doubtless it stems from Treacherous Generals not being killed,

demeaning the country’s punishments!

Thus the pestilent wind manages to sneak through gaps and openings,

8 And secretly strikes with epidemics at exhausted common folk.
How divine, His Majesty! Supreme in benevolence and sageliness!
With deep concern he faithfully prays, and communicates utmost sincerity.
A sagelike person shares a common substance with the Heavens,

12 His intention doesn’t even pass his lips, and Heaven already hears him.
Suddenly she gathers her cold severity, aided by Watery Officials,
At New Year’s season, the stern objects freeze into clear purity.
The cold wind receives its forces: they charge, gusting and blowing,

16 Hailstones accelerate onto dry tiles, pouring down without ceasing.

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35 For details of the Xixia problem, cf. James T.C. Liu, op.cit. 35. For Ouyang’s opinions and involvement, see also my biographical sketch above.
36 In \textit{Ji vol. 1}, 6.64-65.
37 The Five Phases, or Elements (\textit{wu xing 五行}) were water, earth, metal, fire and wood. As I noted in my discussion of Ouyang’s poem “Olives,” from these basic substances, all things were supposed to have been constituted, and every object was formed from a particular combination of the five. If the normal proportions of the Five Phases were disrupted, unusual climatic phenomena, and other inauspicious signs, would result.
Vague and blurred, Heaven and Earth grow white in the middle of the night,
Hordes of roosters miss the morning, and do not crow on time.
In the clear dawn, attending the audience, I ascend the Eastern palace gate,
20 Dense, dense, the auspicious spirit fills the palaces and halls.
Leaving the Court, I ride my horse beneath the silvery porticos,
The horse stumbles and slips, unaccustomed to walking on jasper and jade!
At evening I head for the Guesthouse, to rejoice with the Military Commissioner,
24 Now I notice, filling the streets, the sounds of overflowing joy.
At once we open the Western Garden, sweeping a path for walking,
Then I see the jade-like trees, their flowers all withered and scattered.
Still we sit on the small terrace, facing the mountainous stones,
28 Wafting over our wine-filled faces, a crimson mist ascends.
Our host and the nation together may cease their worries and agitation,
But should we simply rejoice that we’ll receive a bumper harvest?
We ought to think of the cold armour, penetrating the bones
32 Of over a hundred thousand soldiers camped in the border regions.

To a certain extent, this poem is a conventional expression of piety towards the
Emperor’s sagely power, and flattery towards Ouyang’s host for the evening, Yan Shu.
However, a more careful analysis reveals some unsettling details. The idealized portrayal
of the compassionate sovereign in lines 9-12 seems almost too fulsome, were it not for
Ouyang’s admission that the weather changes before the Emperor even opens his lips to
pray! Is this really an acknowledgement that the Emperor “shares a common substance”
with Heaven, so need not even articulate his intentions, or rather a hint that nature is
running out of control? Likewise, Ouyang’s reminder of massed troops on the border,
whose armour “penetrates to their bones” in the freezing cold, lends ambiguity to his
praise for Yan Shu as a person constantly worried at the nation’s plight (line 29). We can
celebrate the snow, Ouyang implies, but in our warm, wine-filled state we shouldn’t become too comfortable or complacent, since the enemy is still a threat.⁴⁸

Unsettling events occur elsewhere in the poem too. “Yin and yang are out of joint” (line 1), making the winter disturbingly warm. Likewise, “supreme yin . . . does not gain employment” (line 5): here Ouyang clearly adopts a term, yong 用, referring to employment of officials; “supreme yin,” normally meaning utmost cold, may also have a political reference — meaning officials suited for work in difficult circumstances — especially when placed in the context of line 6: “Doubtless it stems from Treacherous Generals not being killed, demeaning the country’s punishments!” This line stands out, both due to its unmistakable criticism of Song military policy, and because it contains nine syllables, rather than the seven of the other lines in the poem.

Of course, the first 8 lines describe an extraordinary situation which is resolved by a sudden snowfall. Following this abrupt return to seasonal freezing weather, one would thus expect Ouyang to assume a more peaceful, contented attitude, since the combined threat of rampant epidemics and drought conditions is staved off. Disturbing details still abound, however, as the snow makes night uncharacteristically bright, and roosters are confused about when to crow (lines 17-18) — the former distortion of yin and yang in the seasons is replaced only with another yin-yang confusion, that of night and day. Though Ouyang sees an “auspicious spirit” filling palaces and halls (line 20), his feeling of euphoria becomes a little unsteady when he leaves the Court and his horse “stumbles and slips” (line 22). Finally, he notices the “overflowing sounds of joy” in the streets as he heads to Yan Shu’s garden party (line 24), but in the garden freezing snow has caused all the blossoms to “wither and scatter”: not a typically joyful sight.

⁴⁸ According to the Qing critic Wu Jingxu, Yan Shu was “very displeased” by Ouyang’s last four lines, and claimed that instead of praising the beauty of the garden like a good poet and polite guest, Ouyang was “wilfully making trouble!” See Lidai shihua (Zhonghua shuju 1958) vol.2, 830-831.
In the last two lines of the poem, Ouyang finally articulates what has lain at the back of his mind all along, disturbing him even after the auspicious fall of snow, namely, the undiminished threat to the Empire’s existence at the borders. Hence, in this particular work, the normally positive appearance of snow cannot entirely eradicate the menace of destruction in these extreme circumstances. At the same time, though in the real world Ouyang is not able to set his mind at rest, he does at least provide a kind of resolution to the poem’s inner tension. In the last couplet, his sense of unease is at last given a tangible object — the suffering and freezing soldiers still at the border — and the unnamed agitation built up through the second half of the poem gains release.

If we contrast the above poem with the following work, written perhaps a year later, a much more positive attitude towards snow reveals itself:

_Celebrating Snow, Shown to Master Xu_ [n.d.: c.1041]^{39}

The clear sky grows cold with winter severity,
Drought-struck fields thirst for Heaven’s bounty.
In the space of ten days, three feet of snow!

4 The ten thousand things transform their colour.
Miserable clouds won’t be shoed away,
Pale and grey, they link up day and night.
A cold wind borrows the Heavenly force,
8 Howling, it freely unleashes its violence.
On bare branches, birds are frozen stiff,
So dull they cannot avoid the bow and arrow.\(^40\)
The long river becomes solitary and soundless,
12 The deep earth resembles a split turtleshell.

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^{39} In _Ji_ vol.1, 6.67.
^{40} This arrow (yi – 靼) would have been attached to a string, for easy retrieval.
On gloomy terraces, night illumines itself,
Broken tiles by dawn are submerged once more.
I store some of the purity, making an ice-bottle dazzle,
16 Measuring the depth, I bury my jade ruler.
When congealed yin revives its extreme harshness,
The sign of a bad year is only then wiped out.41
Spring returns to the hearts of a hundred plants,
20 The spirit moves the pulse of underground springs.
Solid ice has not broken up just yet,
But earthy moisture is released beneath the surface.
I often hear old peasants telling each other:
24 “In one winter month, we’ve seen white three times;
This augurs well for a bumper year,”
Divining with such experience beats using yarrow stalks!42
The Heavenly Troops bleed on the Western Frontier,
28 Ten thousand carts rush to keep them supplied.
Alas, I’m ashamed before the tired common folk,
What skill of mine can overcome your hunger?
I can only rejoice at the year’s abundant crops,
32 This generosity is beyond human efforts.
It will not only provide for taxes and levies,
But can even make robbers and bandits disappear.

41 According to the calculations of Han dynasty divinators, a period of 4617 years was termed a yuan 元; and during the first 106 years of each yuan period, there would be nine years of disaster (known as yangjiu 陽 九). Later yangjiu came to mean simply a year of disastrous natural calamity, as in Ouyang’s line 18: yangjiu zhao chu hua 陽九兆初畫. As the climate returns to its normal wintry state (in Ouyang’s words, yin revives its harshness), the sign or augur of a bad year (unseasonal warmth) disappears.
42 Yarrow stalks (shi ce 萎 筭) were commonly used in drawing lots, to tell the future.
From today we'll clean up storehouses and granaries,
36 Together we can hope to gorge on wheat and barley!

Here, possibly one year after the previous poem, Ouyang is no longer so obsessed with the threat of disease and epidemic, and while he does mention the soldiers still “suffering on the Western Frontier” (line 27), he is able to concentrate more fully on celebrating the snow, without the deep feeling of unease which pervaded the preceding work. The structure of the poem is also clearer, without any irregularity in the five-syllable metre, and divides neatly into two sections; the first 18 lines describe the parched fields and freezing snow, and the second 18 lines, beginning with the words “Spring returns to the hearts of a hundred plants,” express joyful expectation of a bumper harvest, which even the painful trials of border troops cannot dampen.

Two points in the second half are worth mentioning, since they occur elsewhere in Ouyang’s snow and rain poems too. First, in lines 23-26, Ouyang again notes the prediction of the old peasants that heavy snow will result in increased crop production, and declares that “divining with such experience is better than using yarrow stalks.” Above, I noted his respect for the opinions of those close to nature in connection with the poem “Heavy Snow in Yongyang,” of 1045. Secondly, having expressed shame that he cannot improve the livelihood of common people (lines 29-30), Ouyang is able to appreciate to an even greater extent the incredible creative power of nature: “This generosity is beyond human efforts!” By the 1040s, Ouyang is thus beginning to realize that only the rhythms of nature are able to sustain human life, and scholar-officials like himself should leave peasants to do what they know best. In fact, in many of his later works, such as “Snow in the Second Month” (1060) translated above, he actually adopts the persona of a rustic dweller, or an extremely unwilling city dweller longing to return to country life, as if confirming that the true meaning of life can only be discerned through cultivating harmony with nature by living in a rural setting.
Of course, as I have indicated, even while adopting his rustic personae, Ouyang does not hide the marks of his scholarly sophistication, such as wit and poetic craft. Two poems on snow from the late 1050s demonstrate further this juxtaposition of nature-loving sentiments with scholarly wit, through the use of slightly different personae:

*Spring Snow* [1057]\(^{43}\)

Teasing the morning, the sound of the wind is nasty,
I lift my curtain: the driving snow slants sideways.
It must pity the traveller, not returned home,
Therefore it holds back the flowers about to bloom.
Feverish thoughts: the cold prolongs my sleep,
Spring sadness: my dreams are back at home.
Who can console me in my loneliness?
There is only wine, like rosy evening clouds.

Here, Ouyang becomes a “traveller not returned home,” for whom the snow obligingly falls, preventing flowers from blooming until he arrives!\(^{44}\) In the following work, written two years later, he becomes an old fellow, familiar from several poems in previous chapters, stuck at home with his family, for whom snow brings eventually hopes of spring:

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\(^{43}\) In *Jì* vol.1, 2.93.

\(^{44}\) This poem was actually written while Ouyang was locked in the Ministry of Rites, marking the national civil service examinations of 1057. Hence, though not a traveller as such, he was certainly away from home. One edition added to the poem’s title the words “Matching Shengyu” [i.e. Mei Yaochen]. See ibid.
Facing snow, I have no fine phrases,
Staying inside, I just bar the door.
At leisure I see it first beginning to fall,
4 The wind stills, and its density is remarkable.
How delightful its form, so light and clear,
Completely without traces of cutting and carving.
It spreads over the plain, obscuring pools and ponds,
8 Floating more rapidly, it sounds on windows and terraces.
It’s a pity I cannot shake the excellent trees,
Or following my mood, dash along in an ornate carriage.
The cold deceives me that white liquor is smooth,
12 Old now, I love my warm marten coat.46
Distant mists disperse as if washed clean away,
Sad clouds, at evening, grow still more dense.
My children chatter: the language of phoenix fledglings,
16 The Old Man sits: a squatting, frozen owl!
My feverish thoughts are shocked that the year is ending,
For joys of friendship, I rely on a goblet of wine.
When it gets a little sunnier, my thoughts of Spring will stir,
20 Who will go with me to look for Famous Gardens?

45 In Ji vol.1, 2.101-102.
46 Literally: “The warmth of the violet marten” (zi diao wen 紫貂 溫), the marten being prized for its fur.
Though most of the poems on this theme do include passages describing the snow as it falls and transforms the landscape (here, lines 3-8), Ouyang almost invariably mixes these descriptions with more human concerns, whether those of war and politics as in the earlier poems, or here, his own caricatured reaction as he sits watching the snow. In this case, he invents a remarkably vivid metaphor, portraying himself as a “squatting, frozen owl.” Thus, on the one hand he appreciates the other-worldly beauty and purity of the snow, and the way that it makes the world seem “washed clean,” yet on the other hand, he never loses sight of the everyday world, and the effects, whether painful or comic, which huge, cosmic occurrences exert on ordinary people, including himself. This conscious mixing of levels is also apparent in his adoption of rustic, or cantankerous old man, personae, where his clever wit and humour prove the presence of a much more acute and subtle sensibility observing the surface character.

On occasion Ouyang claims to be avoiding conventional description of natural phenomena altogether. For the following poem, composed at a party, he invented the rule that no mention should be made of any words and images traditionally associated with snow. His note to the poem’s title runs: “Written when I was at Yingzhou. I requested that such words as jade, moon, pear, apricot, silk, catkins, white, dancing, goose, crane and silver should not be used.” Yet, as I will demonstrate, this particular test of poetic skill was weighted in his own favour:

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47 See poem text and this note in Ji vol.1, 6.75. Also in Xuanji 133-135. Most of these words are clearly associated with snow in the English poetic tradition. Pear and flowering apricot have blossoms like snow; geese and cranes have snowy plumage; and jade is often used, especially by Ouyang, to describe pure white objects. See above, section on animals and birds in chapter 4, for a crane-moon-jade-dancing complex. Chen Xin and Du Weimo, in Xuanji 135, n.7, suggest that Ouyang was the inventor of this poetic game forbidding the use of certain words.
Snow [1050]

New forces of yang are still undeveloped, just allowing buds to break through,
When yin the guest uses its strength to elbow its way back in.
Morning chill is biting cold, and none can oppose the wind,
4 Evening snow, in bits and pieces, stops then starts again.
Driving at a gallop, clouds before the wind at first are pale and colourless,
Dazzling and sparkling, mountains and rivers slowly reveal their outlines.
The bright radiance is charming in the rising sun’s reflection,
8 Melting moisture will ultimately shine, giving forth a mild spirit.
The beautiful lady in her high halls rises startled in the morning,
A hidden recluse, through his empty window, hears it falling in the silence.
Before the wine shop a path has formed, bottles and winejars pile high,
12 Hunters ride out, seeking the footprints, and bag a fox or raccoon dog.
Tracks swept away by dragons and snakes come to an end, then continue,
Gnashing tigers are formed from balls, baring their teeth and claws.48
Everyone looks to harvest-time, when they can fill themselves with barley,
16 Why should they pity the starving birds inside the empty forest?
On the sandy road at the morning celebration, one loses his ivory seal,49
In rural fields, singing as she walks, another has her grass sandals buried.
Thus I know that whenever it snows, ten thousand people are delighted,
20 But look at me: not able to drink, what can make me happy?
Sitting, I see Heaven and Earth cleared of atmospheric dust,
It makes my inner emotions seem to be utterly washed and clean.

48 Chen and Du, op.cit. 134, n.4 interpret this line as a reference to snowmen, or snow-monsters, made by children.
49 An ivory seal of office.
I escape and leave behind the words of the past, and laugh at their dusty confusion,
24 I search and explore the ten thousand phenomena, peering towards deserts and oceans.
Even if Yingzhou is a backward place, there are plenty of literary types,
One after another, they wield huge brushes resembling spears or halberds.
If it weren’t for the fact that I invented this [pastime] at the beginning,
28 What reason would our frozen mouths have for breaking into guffaws!?

Over forty years after this poem was completed, in 1091, Su Shi was also posted to Yingzhou. On one occasion there was a fall of snow, and remembering Ouyang’s earlier poetic contest, Su arranged a drinking party at which two of Ouyang’s sons were present, and there he attempted to compose a poem avoiding the same “taboo” words. He noted that nobody had yet managed to obey Ouyang’s restrictions, and a reading of his poem shows that he too was unable to avoid the words “white” and “dancing,” two of the prohibitions.50

Rather than concluding merely that Ouyang was good at solving a kind of poetic puzzle, an examination of the six other poems on snow, dating from 1041 to 1060, which I have translated above, reveals that he hardly ever employed those words elsewhere in the context of snow either. In all these works, some of them quite lengthy poems, he uses “silver” and “jade” only once, and “white” just three times: none of the other words appears at all. What was a unique and difficult test for other poets was for Ouyang more or less normal practice — as he expresses it: “I escape and leave behind the words of the past, and laugh at their dusty confusion;/I search and explore the ten thousand phenomena, peering towards deserts and oceans.” (lines 23-24). Hence, his “competition” is perhaps more of a sly attempt to promulgate his own approach to poetry, rather than a fair

handicap! The poem contains a similar mix — description of the snow’s purity; the reaction of local people involving humorous and slightly caricatured details; joyful hope for a good harvest — as his other mature works on snow. The only main difference is that here he explains more clearly his aim in adopting such a style — to “leave behind the words of the past . . . search and explore the ten thousand phenomena” — and the effect on his emotions and mood — “If it weren’t for the fact that I invented this [pastime] at the beginning,/What reason would our frozen mouths have for breaking into guffaws!” Based on the evidence of Ouyang’s whole poetic corpus, we might paraphrase this statement as “artistic creation in the midst of suffering brings joy.”

At the same time, it is also instructive to note which words Ouyang did not prohibit in “Snow,” despite their obvious snowy associations. Among these, I would suggest various binomes meaning “bright” or “shining,” such as guangmang 光芒 (“bright radiance”) and xuanhuang 炫晃 (“dazzling and sparkling”) in the above poem (lines 7,6); also words connected to clarity or purity like qing 清 (“clear” or “pure”); and finally, terms describing washing or being clean, such as xi 洗 (“washed”), or in this poem xiyue 洗浴 (“washed clean”: line 22). In this chapter alone, there are examples of such words in almost every poem, and it is not only in his works on watery subjects that they appear: there are frequent recurrences throughout his oeuvre, whether in poems on animals and birds, flowers, tea, wine, mountains or cultural artifacts. It seems that Ouyang is constantly seeking out objects which will arouse such associations of purity, light and clarity, and recording their effects in his verse.

Apart from those topics with which I have already dealt, an excellent example of Ouyang’s preference for purity is his treatment of the moon. Since he almost invariably juxtaposes the moon with still or flowing waters, I feel it is relevant to translate some of these lunar poems in this chapter on water. In fact, the moon provides an informative case study by which we can trace Ouyang’s gradual inclusion of more and more elements from
everyday life into an ethereal, otherworldly topic, without ultimately losing sight of its original purity.

The Moon

Most of Ouyang’s poems specifically on the moon date from his early years. The first two below are from his stay in Luoyang, both composed in 1032, and the third is from his journey into exile at Yiling, written four years later. In all these works, Ouyang evokes an atmosphere of sublime oneness:

Walking in the Moonlight, Returning from Bodhi to Guanghua Temple [1032]51

From vernal peaks, waterfalls and springs resound,
Deep in the night, the mountains have become solitary.
The bright moon purifies the pine forest,
4 A thousand peaks share a single hue.

Matching “On the Fifteenth of the Eighth Month, Facing the Moon at the Retreat Palace” [1032]52

A shining white moon: the Three Rivers are peaceful,
The clear atmosphere spreads over ten thousand li.
Spiritual light, on the fifteenth night, becomes full,
4 Cold colour, entering the waves, ripples.

51 In Ji vol.1, 1.3. This quatrain is the seventh in a series of short poems entitled “An Excursion to Luoyang, Dividing the Topics into Fifteen Poems.” Also in Xuanji 7-8, third poem.
52 In Ji vol.2, 7.12: number vii from the series “Eight Poems Matching Scholar Xie [Jiang].” The fifteenth of the eighth month in the Chinese lunar calendar was the Mid-Autumn Festival, traditionally a moon-viewing evening.
Dazzling vitality forms into mountain mists,
Floating clouds shelter the fields and crops.
From the temple’s ruins, dark glimmers emerge,
In abandoned gardens, dewy fireflies flit about.
At the Retreat Hostel, my heart is finally tranquil,
The autumn city, at night, seems distant already.
Making pure conversation, we face the Primal Brightness,
Jasper radiance reflects from rustling, falling leaves.\(^{53}\)

Though both very early works, these two poems encapsulate the expansive mood of a vast panorama lit up by the bright moon. The exaggeration in “a thousand peaks” (first poem, line 4) and “ten thousand \(l\)” (second poem, line 2) adds to the breadth of the scene. Though clearly describing two different seasons, spring and autumn, Ouyang manages to produce in both poems a few moments of “timeless,” pure contemplation.

The third poem involves more awareness of temporal progression, a feature often associated with the moon, and famously expressed in a later quatrain, “Mid-Autumn Festival” (of 1077), by Su Shi: “Evening clouds are all gathered in; overflowing clarity is cold,/The Milky Way soundlessly revolves about the jade disc./This life and this night will not stay fine for ever:/At the next full moon, in the next year, from what place will we gaze?”\(^{54}\) Ouyang’s poem, by contrast, suggests the transience of a beautiful moment by means of the disappearing sound of a boatman’s song:

\(^{53}\) The last two characters in the original are icrobial, usually an onomatopoeic binome imitating the sound of leaves rustling as they fall. Here Ouyang uses the word metonymically to refer to the falling leaves themselves.

\(^{54}\) See Chinese text in *Su Shi shiji* op.cit. vol.1, 753.
Evening, Mooring at Yueyang [1036]55

Lying down, I hear the bells within the Yueyang City walls,
I have tied my boat to a tree, beneath the Yueyang City walls.
Then I see the bright moon coming over the empty river,

4 Clouds and water are vast and vague: I lose the river’s course.
Night is deep, and the river moon is playing upon clearest radiance,
Over the water someone sings, returning beneath the moon.
The sound of a single verse rises, but I do not hear its end,
8 The light boat and the short oars depart, as if in flight.

Ouyang uses repetition to great effect in this work. In the first couplet, “Yueyang City wall” appears twice, forming a solid, this-worldly image: Ouyang is close enough to hear the city bells, and his boat is “tied” to a tree beneath the city walls. During the central two couplets, he notices the moon and river which merge into a single “vast and vague” radiance; his attention is drawn again and again to the river and moon (line 3), the water and river (line 4), the river moon (line 5), and once more the water and the moon (line 6).
The solid city is replace by this mystical floating vision — accentuated when a song sounds over the waters, hangs for a brief moment, then disappears with its singer, not down the river, but “as if flying” on merged moonlight and water into the sky, like an immortal.

Hence, though there may be a degree of melancholy in this poem — not surprisingly considering that Ouyang is heading to his place of exile — the ending implies an other-worldly transcendence, resembling more his two earlier poems rather than Su Shi’s sad questioning in “Mid-Autumn Festival.”56

55 In Ji vol.1, 6.55. Also translated by Egan 120.
56 Of course, in other contexts Su Shi could joyfully celebrate moonlight over a river, as in his poem “Getting Up at Night and Looking at the Moon,” of 1100, translated by Watson in Yoshikawa 26.
Two more of Ouyang’s works on the moon should suffice to demonstrate that this transcendent atmosphere lasted at least until the 1040s. The first, entitled simply “Moon,” is an undated quatrain probably written between 1039 and 1041; the second was composed in 1049 at Yingzhou, the year before Ouyang wrote his poem “Snow,” with its prohibition of snowy words:

*Moon* [n.d.: c.1039-1041]^{57}

Heaven rises high; the moon’s reflection soaks into the Long River,
The River is broad and the breeze is weak: the water’s surface cools.
Heaven and water link together, becoming a single colour,
4 No longer does the finest strand of mist divide their clear light.

The other poem adopts an extremely orderly progression, drawing the reader gradually from a vast panorama down to a single individual, and then into the narrator’s mind as it is transformed by the moonlit scene:

*Enjoying the Moon at Flying Canopy Bridge* [1049]^{58}

Heaven’s form gathers lightness and clarity,
Water’s power is originally empty and silent.
When clouds are drawn in, wind and ripples still,
4 Then the character of Heaven and water is revealed.

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^{57} In *Ji* vol.2, 7.19.
^{58} In *Ji* vol.1, 2.5. Also in *Xuanji* 127. Flying Canopy Bridge was one of three bridges built by Ouyang at his Yingzhou residence.
Limpid radiance, and utmost purity of appearance,
Above and below, contain and reflect each other.
And positioned between the two of them
8 Brightly, brightly suspended: a chilly mirror.
And what shines radiant in its overflowing glow?
Ten thousand creatures, all fresh and luminescent.
Even more so with the souls of human beings:
12 Can it fail to awaken their sight and hearing?
And as for me, on this occasion,
Free and easy, I chant my solitary song.
Confusion and darkness are joyfully washed clean,
16 Following the flow, I swim to my heart’s content!
My human heart feels expanded and at rest,
The moon’s appearance becomes nobler as it grows distant.
I only fear the clear night will come to an end:
20 Time and again, I glance at the handle of the Dipper.

This latter work contains a noticeably large proportion of prosaic diction,
particularly when compared with the earlier poems on this topic. Some lines are
consciously awkward, such as line 7 — “And positioned between the two of them”: nai yu
qi liang jian 乃 于 其 兩 間 — or line 13 — “And as for me, on this occasion”: er wo yu
ci shi 而 我 于 此 時. Such “unpoetic” diction is not new in Ouyang’s poetry. At the
beginning of this chapter, I translated a work, “Answering Yang Zijing’s Seven-Syllable
Poem ‘Praying for Rain,’” almost entirely couched in similar language. Here, however,
Ouyang chooses to juxtapose awkwardness with poetic beauty. For example, following
the plainness of line 7 comes the phrase “Brightly, brightly suspended: a chilly mirror”: 
jiao jiao gua han jing 皎 皎 挂 寒 鏡, (describing the moon); and many other descriptive
binomes, such as “shining radiant” *zhao yao* 照 耀, “fresh and luminescent” *xian ying* 鮮 玖 (lines 9,10); and “purity of appearance” *cuirong* 粹 容 (line 5) are clearly drawn from the poetic sphere.

Why this juxtaposition of styles? One possibility is that Ouyang is attempting to draw the distant, other-worldly image of the moon down to a more familiar everyday world. His interpolation of ordinary language into the poem thus becomes an expression of familiarity. At the same time, an opposite movement occurs, whereby the ordinary becomes rather other-worldly through its placement alongside the ethereal moon and the poetic epithets which describe this “Heavenly body.” Adding support to this hypothesis is the way in which Ouyang treats the moon in other poems from the 1040s onwards. For example, in his works about animals and birds of the late 1050s, the rabbit, one symbol of the moon, escapes from its lunar captivity and descends to the human world, where it becomes part of Ouyang’s everyday existence, a creature reminding him of other-worldly purity. Though the above poem, “Enjoying the Moon at Flying Canopy Bridge,” lacks such a vivid illustration of descent, I feel that its mixture of levels of diction expresses a like dynamic, especially since Ouyang, as I noted above, follows the moon from its distant suspension between the Heavens and the waters, via its radiant light, down to human observers, and into their souls (lines 7-12).

In this poem, Ouyang must rely on the coincidence of a clear, still night and a full moon, hence his fear at the poem’s conclusion that the night will soon end, and his enjoyment of purity will fade (lines 19-20). In the following work, from 1047, ending this series of moon poems, his friend shows him a screen which glows like the moon, an object that he can admire whenever he likes. Ouyang is inspired to invent another “descent myth” to explain the stone’s origins; but finding his powers of expression inadequate to the task, he makes a picture of the stone to send to Su Shunqin, supposedly the only person who can do justice to such an extraordinary object:

297
Song of a Violet Stone Screen [1047]

The moon comes up from the bottom of the sea,
Rising up in the South-East of the Heavens.
And just when it reaches the centre of the Heavens,
It sends down a ray to Three Thousand-Yard Pool.
At the pool’s heart the wind is still: the moonlight doesn’t stir,
Its up-ended reflection radiates, entering a violet, stony cliff.
In moon’s glow and water’s purity, the stone shimmers cleanly,
How moving, this Soul of Yin coming to seep into its heart!
Ever since the moon entered into this stone’s heart,
The Two Fires in the Heavens were divided into three.
Its pure glow has lasted for eons without erosion or destruction,
Yet supreme treasures of Heaven and Earth cannot be hidden or sealed.
The Duke of Heaven cried for the Duke of Thunder:
By night He wielded an enormous axe to destroy the towering cliff.
He brought down this single slab from a height of eighty thousand feet,
Brightly shining, the cold mirror now lies in a jade compact box.
The toad and the white rabbit both escaped into the Heavens,
All that’s left is the osmanthus’ shadow extending long and slender.

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59 In Ji vol.1, 2.3. An alternative title to this poem is “Moon-stone Inkstone Screen Song, Sent to Su Zimei [Shunqin].” An inkstone screen (yan ping 碧 稱) was perhaps a utensil to prevent ink from splashing over the table.
60 It seems that the moon was believed to reside in a cave beneath the Eastern Sea during the day, only emerging from there at night. Cf. the poem in which Ouyang worries that his pet rabbit will escape to the wide ocean, and hide in the “grotto of the bright moon,” from “Rhapsody on Longing for My White Rabbit . . .,” fully translated in chapter 4.
61 Literally “thousand zhang pool,” one zhang 尺 being equivalent to about 3 yards.
62 Two Fires (liang yao 兩 曠) refers to the sun and moon.
63 Toad and osmanthus, like the rabbit, were supposedly found on the moon.
Jingshan was able to obtain it; he could not bear to part with it.\(^{64}\)

20 Giving it to me, he was of a mind to ask for a thousand gold pieces!

He himself claimed that every time it came to a full moon night,

In a dark room, the glow from the stone would come right out to the eaves!

How great are Heaven and Earth, and all in between:

24 Ten thousand wonders cannot be fully expressed.

Alas! I cannot help going too far,

Longing to probe the depths of every matter.

I wish to take all that two eyes and ears can perceive,

28 And put up a fight with Creative Transformation for every tiniest hairtip!

Dazzling, the Three Heavenly Bodies proceed,\(^{65}\)

Of them, sun and moon are especially stern and awesome.

If they were made to descend [to Earth], and compared with creatures below,

32 Then no-one could see the multifarious ranks of species again!

And yet this stone: what kind of object could it be after all?

I have a mouth and wish to explain, but alas, it seems clamped shut.

I marvel at the heart of Master Su:

36 Lined up in ranks, the myriad phenomena are all contained within it!

Not only is his heart expansive, his boldness is also great,

He always creates words and sayings to startle the ignorant and common.

Since I was able to obtain this stone,

40 I haven’t seen Master Su at all, and my heart is full of shame.

Without first having to undergo the guidance of a master craftsman,

Even with hands, who would dare to execute carving and chiselling?

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\(^{64}\) Jingshan was the style-name of Ouyang’s friend and fellow collector, Xie Bochu, also mentioned in the poem “Answering Xie Jingshan’s Song on a Gift of an Ancient Tile Inkstone,” translated in the section on writing tools, chapter 3 above.

\(^{65}\) Three Heavenly Bodies (\textit{san chen 三辰}) refers to the sun, moon and stars.
I call an artisan to make a painting of the stone and take it to you,
44 I hope you’ll give your opinion — and don’t be constrained by modesty!

As in the previous poem, a fortuitous conjunction of clear skies, still waters and radiant moonlight produces a mystical scene, which here gains permanence by penetrating a “violet stone cliff” beside the water. Now Ouyang need no longer worry that the pure glow will fade, since it has already lasted for “eons” (line 11). And though the stone lacks some of the genuine characteristics of the moon, such as the rabbit and the toad, it does contain a vein reminiscent of the shadow of an osmanthus tree (lines 17-18). Ouyang, in his most playful mood, censures himself for attempting to describe this unusual object despite lacking the ability to do so (lines 24-28). In an interesting conceit, he questions his earlier claim that this stone is comparable to the real moon, since if the moon had descended from the Heavens, no-one would be able to see anything at night (lines 31-32)! Hence, the stone must be an object belonging to a realm of experience beyond that of ordinary people — the kind of object with which Su Shunqin is completely familiar, and regularly describes in his writings (lines 35-38). Ouyang asks Su, the “master craftsman,” for a suitably marvellous explanation (lines 41-44).

Thus, Ouyang implies, there are certainly objects in our human world which bear an uncanny resemblance to Heavenly Bodies like the moon, and although we should not confuse such evocative objects with the reality, we can at least find in them cause to wonder, and use them to enter an imaginative world of purity and visionary radiance.
Rivers and the Sea

I mentioned the presence of the Heavens and water in both the poems above. In the former, "Enjoying the Moon at Flying Canopy Bridge," Ouyang makes an important statement about these two elemental phenomena:

Heaven's form collects lightness and clarity,
Water's power is originally empty and silent.
When clouds are drawn in, wind and ripples still,
Then the character of Heaven and water is revealed:
Limpid radiance and utmost purity of appearance
Above and below, contain and reflect each other (lines 1-6)

The stilling of wind in the air and ripples on the water is a precondition for the revelation of the moon's full light, which washes peoples' souls and enlightens, or awakens, their perceptions.

At the same time, I have shown that in his mature works Ouyang uses various techniques to draw down this other-worldly, enlightening stillness into the everyday world of human activity and experience. And it is not only the moon which becomes intermingled with ordinary life. Almost any kind of powerful, unusual or distant object that Ouyang encounters, whether animal, vegetable or mineral, undergoes a similar transformation in his poetry. In this context, the humorous, down-to-earth personae of Ouyang's mature poems on snow and rain might also be included as examples of ordinary humanity reacting to mysterious and powerful cosmic phenomena.

I have previously noted that Ouyang attached particular importance to the inspiring power of spectacular mountain scenery, and often made use of stones and cultural objects to trigger the exhilarating emotion of viewing immense peaks. I also demonstrated that
Ouyang describes mountains in two contrasting ways, first, as dynamic, startling vistas full of grandeur and excitement, and second, as tranquil, calm retreats where he can lie beside clear, flowing springwaters and forget his cares. In a sense, the characters of both these environments originate as much from their waters as from the mountains themselves. Thus, Ouyang adds to the force of his description in the most dynamic poems by juxtaposing the mountain subject with an enormous river pounding at its base. Likewise, the tranquil poems gain much of their atmosphere from the presence of springwaters, symbolic of purity and creative renewal.

In this chapter, I have given many examples of water in its other aspects: Ouyang’s poems on the moon depend to a large extent on the stillness of water, and without such stillness, producing in the observer a corresponding tranquillity, the quality of the reflected, awakening light would be drastically reduced. And in his snow poems, he emphasizes a similar cold purity — often uncomfortably cold — which nevertheless bears within it the potential for germination and fertilization.

In fact, Ouyang is fascinated by all the different states of water, whether active or still, and manages to discover creative potential in each of them. Even the destructive force of heavy rain and storms brings benefits, clearing clogging dust from the atmosphere, washing the countryside “clean,” and removing the ever-present threat of drought and famine for another year.

To conclude this discussion, I will translate a handful of poems on water in its most powerful and majestic aspect, namely, in great rivers and the ocean. Not surprisingly, these watery counterparts to Ouyang’s most dynamic mountain poems follow a similar stylistic progression, beginning with earlier works describing real scenery, then by the

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66 As in the poems “Lu Mountain High! . . .” and “Great Stone of Ling Creek,” in my chapter on Ouyang’s mountain poems (chapter 2), involving the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers respectively.
1050s concentrating more on artifacts and man-made objects which evoke that enormous watery realm through the imagination.

A fine example of the earlier group is the following poem on the Yellow River, a truly remarkable poetic tour-de-force, especially considering its early date of composition:

*At Gong County, Seeing the Yellow River for the First Time* [1033]^{67}

The [Yellow] River bursts through three passes and combines the waters of four rivers,
Its course flows over three thousand miles; to the East it heads for the sea.
The mountains of Gong and Luo are pressed together and stand erect,
4 The River comes and gnaws at the mountains, forming a sandy bank.
The mountain contours wind away as if fleeing and dodging aside,
The River increases its pounding force, angrily hurling curses.
The boats' skippers relax their oars, and need not make use of the sail,
8 In the space of a moment they hurtle past, faster than the human eye.
Dancing waves and deep whirlpools are thrown onto sandy islets,
Their gathered foam in the blink of an eye transforms to a level plain.
Peering down, it is unfathomable, dirty and also deep,
12 Dull dragons and strange fish are completely in their element.
All my life I’ve resided in the South: I didn’t know the Yellow River,
I only saw the Tribute of Yu written down among the Records.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{67} In *Ji* vol.1, 6.47-48. Another, much shorter, poem on the Yellow River is in *Ji* vol.1, 2.64 and in *Xuanji* 15: “Eight Rhymed Couplets on the Yellow River, Sent to be Presented to Shengyu.” Gong County was in the region of present Central Henan Province, on the south bank of the Yellow River. The Luo River also flowed through the county.

\textsuperscript{68} The “Tribute of Yu” (*Yu gong 禹貢*) is a chapter in the *Shangshu* — also known as *Shujing* and usually translated as the *Classic of Documents*. This chapter, found in the Books of Xia section, records in two parts how the mythical Emperor Yu surveyed first the Rivers of the Empire, and second the Mountains, dividing the land into Nine Regions.
In its words, the River’s form was huge and ferocious too,

Encountering the River proves the writing: truly it is just like that!

Once, long ago, when Emperor Yao and Emperor Shun were alive,

There was a son called Zhu Shang unfit to take the succession.69

August Heaven’s intention was to make Yu into a Sage,

It used the waters to disturb Yao’s people by bursting through the dykes.

Yao felt sad for the common people, thin as dried sliced meat,

The massed ministers recommended Gun, and the Emperor said: “Let him try!”70

They tried him out for nine years, but his work bore no results,

Thus he was executed on Mount Yu, an ignominious end.

Yu, ashamed of his father’s crime, grew sad yet also determined,

Heaven then, by means of a decree, gave it to Yu’s descendents.

The decree read that among the Five Phases water was flooding down,71

Yu had found the correct method, and thus could bring it to order.

He drilled through mountains to guide the flow, and dug out ditches and channels,

He divided it up into branches and tributaries following an orderly pattern.

Ten thousand tribes sent in their tribute; the Nine Regions were settled,

Only then could living people avoid growing fish-tails and scales!

His merits were profound, his virtue great, the Xia became his dynasty,

His work was such that Three Dynasties were able to receive the benefits.

In the part on rivers, the quality of the land between each pair of rivers or each river and the sea is graded, and the natural and man-made commodities produced in the respective regions are described. The work makes fascinating reading. See original text and translation in James Legge, *The Chinese Classics, vol. III, The Shoo King* (Hong Kong and London 1865). The “Tribute of Yu” sections are on 90-127 and 128-151.

69 I have not yet located a reference to this Zhu Shang.
70 Gun (鲧) was the mythical father of Yu.
71 Another imbalance in the Five Phases (cf. n. 37 above).
The Sea and the Yangtze, the Huai and Ji, the Ju, Han and Mian [Rivers],

Who can deny they are vast and boundless, surging in their greatness? But gathering their waves, rolling up their anger, they feared his stern virtue, From ancient times they no longer dared to release their threatening force. Only this murky flowing mass could never be properly disciplined,

From Qin and Han times, throughout the ages, its menace has been extreme. Collapsing strong [banks], bursting through dykes, its force grew increasingly rampant, Leaping across and sneaking around was all it had mind to do. To control it by means of force alone, without making use of virtue, Is driving people to suffer drowning, letting their possessions be smashed.

You’ve probably heard that the River’s source emerges from the Kunlun Range, These mountains are the highest of all; their greatness is truly infinite. From the heights it gushes down with the swiftness of an arrow, With each straight and each bend it covers a thousand miles. The current strengthens, the pulse gains speed; thus does it burst through and flood, With such power it has no choice but to end up being this way! Last year, the River grew angry and shocked the people of Hua, Soaking and spilling, spreading wide, its wildness couldn’t be stopped.

The people of Hua fled in haste, like hornets frightened away, Seeing this, the River God thought it was just an entertainment!

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72 All these bodies of water, six rivers and the sea, are mentioned as boundaries to the regions marked out by Yu in the first section of “Tribute of Yu” in the Shangshu (see n.68 above). I have emended the fifth character of line 34 here from Ouyang’s ji 浚 meaning “soaking,” to ju 滁, the name of a river in the “Tribute of Yu” (see Legge op.cit. 123). Since this line is clearly a list of 7 nouns — a noteworthy structural device — and the other 6 nouns all appear in the “Tribute of Yu,” I feel this change is justified.

73 Hua (華) probably refers to the region of Huazhou and its environs, in present Hua County, Henan Province, facing the former course of the Yellow River to the north.
Seething and gnashing, its angry mouth gaped open like a gate,
56 Every day it devoured firewood to the tune of a million bundles.
In the Bright Palace, the Son of Heaven, sagelike and divine,
Mourned at the River’s lack of benevolence, sighing and crying: “Alas!”
The River God was stubborn by nature, and could not be ordered about,
60 But moved by Supreme Sincerity, it was worried and frightened too:
Guiding its flow, it retreated in shock towards its original course,
Shutting its mouth, it no longer dared to trouble the local officials.
Respecting the path, keeping its position, it descended directly East,
64 It wouldn’t depart from its orderly procession even as much as an inch!
Since that time, the yearly stars have covered a whole revolution,
The peoples’ cattle are filled with straw, and provinces produce a surfeit.
The people of Hua live by the River, and drink from the River’s flow,
68 They plough by the banks of the River, and irrigate on River dykes.
I rejoice that the River has changed from dangerous threat to peoples’ blessing,
Oh, how marvellous, the Bright Palace and the Sagely Son of Heaven!

Though longer than most of his other poems, Ouyang manages to sustain interest here through clever changes of direction and surprising twists. The first 12 lines describe the geography of the terrain around Gong County, and the extremely rapid flow of the Yellow River through mountain-rimmed gorges. Even at this early stage, Ouyang adopts personification to a significant degree — in lines 4-5 the mountains seem to be “fleeing and dodging aside” to escape the River “gnawing” at their bases; in line 6, the River is described as “angrily hurling curses.” Later in the poem, Ouyang extends this personification into a full-blown caricature of the River God. Before this, however, in lines 13-24 he recollects his previous knowledge of the Yellow River gained through study of ancient histories. Yu, the sage ruler, and mythical founder of the Xia Dynasty (c.2200 BC-
c. 1700 BC), was always credited with overcoming a terrible flood covering much of the Empire in the time of his predecessors, Emperors Yao and Shun. Yet at first Yao had appointed Yu’s father, named Gun, to tackle the flood, and in these 12 lines Ouyang details the disaster itself, and then Gun’s failed attempts to find a solution, lasting nine years and ending with his disgrace and execution.

The next 14 lines (25-38) are devoted to Yu’s successful flood-control measures. Not only does he channel the country’s waters so that the Nine Regions can be cleared and settled (line 31), he also wipes out the shame of his father’s failure, and becomes the founder of the Xia Dynasty (lines 25, 33). The benefits of his great “virtue” — de 德 which can also refer to virtuous power — extend down through the Three Dynasties of Xia, Shang and Zhou: in other words, for almost two thousand years (line 34).

And yet, as Ouyang remarks in lines 33-37, though all other rivers, including the Yangtze, never dared to overflow their banks again, even Yu was unable to control the “murky flowing mass” of the Yellow River. At this point, the reader is perhaps startled to discover that Ouyang has spent the last two sections, describing the failure of Gun and the success of Yu, only to make them foils proving the sheer enormity and uncontrollable malevolence of the Yellow River. Hence, in the following 12 lines (39-50), detailing the increasing seriousness of the River’s flooding since the Qin and Han Dynasties, he seems to be heading for a despairing and fatalistic conclusion. As he declares, the reason the ancient Sage Emperors couldn’t influence this River is because its source lies in the Kunlun Mountains, supposedly the highest in the world. Therefore, descending from such a height, it is bound to build up unstoppable and potentially destructive momentum (lines 45-50). All efforts to control the River with force alone are thus simply suicidal (lines 43-44).

Yet, in a further twist, Ouyang relates the dramatic events of “last year.” Gradually, the reader becomes aware that Ouyang has hitherto made the situation seem as hopeless as possible just so that in this section (lines 51-64) the present Emperor’s
intervention will be that much more impressive. In some ways, the whole poem is a
cleverly constructed eulogy to the Emperor’s sagely power, which can overawe the
mightiest and most destructive natural phenomena. Nevertheless, Ouyang again avoids
descending into fulsome flattery by introducing the humorous character of the River God
(he bo 河 伯), who enjoys the “entertainment” of watching people flee in terror (lines 53-
54) and whose mouth “gapes open” like a rude savage, devouring bundles of firewood by
the million (lines 55-56). Even the portrayal of the Emperor’s “mourning” seems a little
comical, as he sighs “alas!” and the River God, previously impervious to any discipline,
suddenly “retreats in shock” and never dares to “overstep his position” again (lines 61,63-
64)! This section is perhaps Ouyang’s earliest attempt at an extended caricature, a
technique which he frequently utilized in his mature poems.

The last 6 lines of the poem then depict the climate of peaceful coexistence
between local people and Yellow River which has continued since the Emperor’s intervention. Ouyang’s exclamations in the final couplet imply that the whole cosmos will endorse a virtuous ruler by preventing any further natural calamities during his reign.

In his other poems, particularly those works composed after the mid-1040s,
Ouyang rarely praises the Emperor so directly, preferring instead to suggest a natural
rhythm and order existing beyond human control, to which human beings should adapt
themselves. As a corollary to this view, he becomes more inclined to discern not only
destructive but also creative forces within the natural world, rather than depicting a
struggle between virtuous or innocent human beings and harmful natural forces. The
conclusion of the above poem, where the Yellow River is transformed into a “blessing,”
hints at this later emphasis. The following quatrain provides a succinct illustration of the
subsequent evolution of Ouyang’s thinking:
Egret [1045]

Racing over stones, the sound of rapids is loud as battle drums,
Rolling to the Heavens, the forms of waves resemble silver mountains.
Rapids startle, waves beat, wind combines with rain:
4 Standing alone, upright and aloof, her mind is still more at ease.

Cosmic forces attack and seem intent on destruction — note the martial imagery in line 1 — but nature simultaneously reveals powerful symbols of resistance: here it is an egret, tiny and alone, yet ultimately overcoming all opposition through its unruffled inner serenity.

Ouyang does not confine himself to delineating a simple opposition between the small, hopeful survivor and an enormous, destructive universe. He is able to adapt his vision to many different, even contradictory, contexts, as long as there is an opportunity to express the force of creative potential within each poetic situation. In the final two poems below, enormity becomes an ideal to strive towards, contrasting with the narrow and cramped environment immediately surrounding his subjects. In both these works, Ouyang expands considerably on his brief hint above that the Yellow River can be home to manifold strange creatures: “Peering down, it is unfathomable; dirty and also deep,/Dull dragons and strange fish are completely in their element” (lines 11-12). Where the first poem portrays the vast Yangtze River, the second ventures out to the ocean. Both bodies of water have the capacity to nourish a staggering variety of living organisms, from tiny shrimps to “thousand foot” dragons or whales.

The first poem, “Pond on a Tray,” of 1059 is reminiscent of a work composed a year earlier, “Offered in Answer to Shengyu’s ‘Poem on the Bulgy-Headed Fish,’” which I

74 In Ji vol.2, 7.22. Also in Xuanji 90. See as well another excellent quatrain on the egret in Ji vol.1, 2.79.
75 In fact the poem does not mention the bird at all, except in the title, only implying a subject by the word “mind” (yi 意).
translated in a previous chapter. His tongue-in-cheek argument there might be summarized: “What is the point of eating a tiny fish with no meat between its bones, when you can live for weeks off the flesh of a giant walrus, another inhabitant of the ocean?”

The depiction of the walrus and its ocean habitat come entirely from Ouyang’s imagination, and give the poem a breadth and profundity of vision which plain description of a single bulgry-headed fish would certainly lack. Here, he indulges in a similar “demystification” of the fashion of raising small fish in a miniature garden pond. These living creatures must feel extremely constrained in this cramped pool, he declares, since their true home is in the Yangtze River, swimming freely amongst its myriad creatures. And in order to prove his point, Ouyang once again invents a remarkable Yangtze scene, complete with gargantuan dragon. Hence, unsatisfactory as the “pond on a tray” is for supporting life itself, it can at least inspire Ouyang to create a greater alternative in his mind:

**Pond on a Tray [1059]**

In the West, the waters of the River are remarkably expansive,

Passing around the Gan Monolith, they grow treacherous and winding.

Remaining waves twist in wrath, still rocking and swaying,

4 Dashing breakers and beating waves raise constant clamour and din.

But sometimes at night you can climb up to King Teng’s Pavilion,

Where the moon reflects off clean silk, without a speck of dust.

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76 See section on foods, in chapter 3 above. That poem dated from 1058.
77 In Ji vol.1, 2.47.
78 The River “in the West” refers to the upper reaches of the Yangtze; the Gan Monolith was a huge rock protruding out of the middle of the River near the highest of the Three Gorges, making the passage through the Gorges dangerous and rough.
The rocking billows of Zuoli Lake are situated to the north,\(^{79}\)

8 The waves rise without a wind: [a story] passed down from the ancients.

An old dragon in its deep retreat, was fed up with caves and grottoes,

Its serpentine body crept along: those who saw it doubted.

Crying: “Dragon!” they poured out wine, but had no time to offer it,

12 Its five-coloured, dazzling brilliance towered loftily in the heights.

Suddenly it dragged its thousand foot length away to the far distance,

For hundreds of \(l_1\), the face of the waters divided down the middle.

Gathering its traces, destroying its tracks, no-one knew where it went,

16 There only remained rain and hailstones pursuing a thunderous wind.

A thousand wonders, ten thousand changes, were simply its little game,

Would it consider those who drowned as worthy of its mourning?

It treated the lives of people lightly as if they were ants or crickets,

20 It wouldn’t stop if mountain peaks were about to topple and fall.

Besides these, fish and shrimps are hardly worth a mention:

Stuffed and replete, it only feels that they foul its cups and plates!

How majestic! Surely this can stimulate your eyes and ears.

24 So why on earth do you watch over this empty corner of the garden?

An earthenware tray and a litre of water: and worse, the bottom leaks!

On all four banks, persistent rain makes moss and lichen grow.

“Roaming fish, jumping and leaping,” are less than an inch or two long,

28 Mud covers them, the sun bakes them: sad, their protruding gills!

\(^{79}\) For the first 4 words of this line, \textit{yanglan zuoli} 楊闊左里 I use the variant reading in \textit{ Ji} vol.1, 2.49, exegetical note to this poem, which has \textit{yanglan zuoli} 揚瀾左蠡, which clearly refers to Zuoli Lake, near Mount Lu. Ouyang uses the same 4 characters to describe the lake in his poem on Mount Lu, translated in chapter 2 above. Cf.\textit{ Ji} vol.1, 2.16; see also further discussion in note 81 below and analysis in the main text.
Fish are certainly not very happy in such a cramped situation:
If I could burst the banks I’d let them depart and return to their wandering.

Ouyang spends most of the poem ignoring the miniature pond. Instead, he uses several short episodes to indicate the huge force and mysterious transforming power of the Yangtze River. At the Zhang Monolith, a rock which stands at the centre of the River amidst the Three Gorges, there is constant noise, swirling “angry” activity, and pounding breakers (lines 1-4). Further down-river, at King Teng’s Pavilion, the Yangtze waters become utterly smooth, shining in the moonlight like “clean silk, without a speck of dust” (lines 5-6). King Teng was a brother of the founding Tang Emperor Gaozu (r.618-627). He built this Pavilion near the site of his official posting in Nanchang (present Jiangxi Province). The early Tang poet Wang Bo 王勃 (c.650-676) composed a famous poem with lengthy prose preface on King Teng’s Pavilion, admiring its beautiful situation and sighing that the King was no longer alive to share his enjoyment. Though neither Wang’s poem nor preface mention “clean silk,” both emphasize the calm and peacefulness of the river scene.80

Not content to dwell on such tranquillity, in the next two lines (7-8) Ouyang immediately heads north, to Zuoli Lake, formed by the Yangtze River at the foot of Mount Lu (also present Jiangxi Province). By now the reader probably realizes that Ouyang is piecing together fragments from his memories and his reading which describe the Yangtze River as it follows its long course eastwards. In this couplet, he adopts an allusion to the saying of a Chan Buddhist master named Xixian Daojian 行賢道堅

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80 See poem and preface in Wang Zi’an Ji (Changsha: Shangwu 1940) 17 and 39-40. The metaphor of moonlight on the river as “clean silk” is in fact an allusion to the Six Dynasties Period poet Xie Tiao (464-499), whose “Poem on Climbing Three Mountains in the Evening” has the line: “The limpid river is clean as silk” (澄江浄如練). This, then, is yet another fragment of Ouyang’s past knowledge of the Yangtze (as I note in the main text below).
n.d.), in which a local official asks the Master: “What was the intention of the Patriarchs in coming from the West?” The Master replies: “The rocking billows of Zuoli: without a wind, the waves rise up.”\(^{81}\) Here, Ouyang uses the allusion divorced from its Buddhist context to show that the Yangtze can alter its form from complete stillness, at King Teng’s Pavilion, to “swaying billows” at Zuoli Lake, without relying on the wind to stimulate its waves. And now Ouyang’s imagination is triggered to explain the reason for the River’s inner power, its ability to alter its character independently of outside circumstances. From lines 9 to 23, he describes an enormous hornless dragon (jiāo 貝) which grows tired of its home in underwater caves, and after making waves at Zuoli Lake, leaps into the sky before any local people can offer wine to placate it. Its form resembles a rainbow, five-coloured, dazzling and towering aloft (line 12), and the aftermath of its dive back into the waters is a raging storm, complete with rain, hailstones, thunder and wind (line 16). It is contemptuous of human life, and able even to topple mountains; and it lives on a diet of fish and shrimps. Ouyang’s sketch of the dragon as glutton, stuffed with the abundant creatures which inhabit the River (lines 21-22) is particularly comical, and the whole portrait is highly imaginative and forceful.

In a sense, this dragon, whose “relations” we have met in the earlier storm poems, is the personified soul of the Yangtze River, an ingenious literary device which makes the “thousand wonders and ten thousand changes” (line 17) of the River more understandable in human terms, and certainly more entertaining than plain description. And although he does mention the likelihood of people drowning in the Yangtze storms (lines 18-19), Ouyang is at pains to emphasize the humorous aspect of the “dragon,” because his final aim is to ridicule the smallness and inadequacy of the “Pond on a Tray.” Hence, he must create a positive image of the Yangtze River, and underplay its destructive aspects by transforming them into comedy. His conclusion to this section — “How majestic! Surely

\(^{81}\) Cited in n.2 of Chen and Du’s notes to Ouyang’s poem “Lu Mountain High . . .,” which also mentions Zuoli Lake. See Xuanji 145, n.2.
this can stimulate your eyes and ears?” (line 23) — will then seem appropriate rather than callous!

Having thus described an enormous body of water, able to nourish and support this mighty dragon, Ouyang finally allows a grudging 7 lines to the garden pond. It can hold just a “litre” (dou 斗) of water, and even then it leaks. The moss and lichen growing on its banks are well in proportion with the scale of the pond, and the fish in the water are “less than an inch or two long.” Even so, they still find the pond “cramped,” and so shallow that they live half in the mud and half baked by the sun.

There is a clear influence from Zhuangzi in this final section (lines 24-30). In the chapter “The Turning of Heaven” (Tianyun 天運) of the Zhuangzi, the character of Lao Dan — better known as Laozi — berates Confucius for constantly talking about artificial concepts like benevolence and righteousness. He compares the followers of Confucius to fish stranded when their springs dry up: all they can do is “spew each other with moisture and wet each other down with spit — but it would be much better if they could forget each other in the rivers and lakes!”82 In another chapter, “The Great and Venerable Teacher” (Da zong shi 大宗師), the narrator explicitly compares the rivers and lakes with the Way (dao 道), arguing that, just as fish naturally return to water, so people, left to themselves by their ruler, will naturally seek the Way. He concludes with the comment: “Therefore it is said, ‘Fish forget each other in the rivers and lakes, and people forget each other in the arts of the Way.’”83 Ouyang expresses a similar sentiment, declaring that he wishes to break the banks of the tiny pond and allow the fish to return to their “wandering” in the Yangtze.

The Zhuangzi stories clearly have a human reference. The dried-up springs indicate a psychological narrow-mindedness, which can be transformed into “rivers and lakes”

83 Watson op.cit. 87; Wang op.cit. 42-43.
simply by altering our terms of reference, realizing that our values and judgments are relative. Such a transformation will overcome the tendency to rank everything according to its importance, since from the viewpoint of Zhuangzi all phenomena are equally significant and deserving of wonder.

Ouyang’s poem also contains a clear connection with the human realm, especially if we recall that most of his mature works dwell on the theme of escape from the restrictions of political office, and return to a rustic world of freedom and relaxation among “rivers and lakes.”

It may even be possible to give a different reading of the poem’s final line, as Ouyang, imagining himself to be the trapped fish, cries: “If I could burst the banks and leave, I would return to my free wandering.” Ouyang’s view of the Yangtze River, able to transform its character independently of outside circumstances, also seems to express an ideal for human creativity and contentment.

The influence of Zhuangzi does not just appear in this poem alone. The Zhuangzi was probably the first work in the Chinese tradition to make extensive use of caricature, personification and humour as aids to expound a philosophy, features which frequently recur in Ouyang’s poetry, alongside references to this Daoist text. Thus, the River God (he bo) in Ouyang’s poem on the Yellow River above makes a memorable appearance in the “Autumn Floods” chapter of Zhuangzi. There, he is a proud observer of his domain — the Yellow River, swollen to enormous breadth by late-summer rains — and imagines himself ruler of everything, until he floats down to the Northern Ocean and discovers with a shock the meaning of true vastness.

Ouyang’s River God, though ruder and angrier than that of Zhuangzi, is similarly personified, yet his defeat and humiliation come, not at the hands of the God of the Northern Ocean, but from the Song Emperor!

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84 In this chapter, see for instance the poem “Heavy Rain . . .” above, in which Ouyang uses this very phrase to refer to retirement (line 48).
85 This episode is in Watson op.cit. 175-182; Wang op.cit. 90-92.
A further allusion to Zhuangzi occurs in the final poem below, on a deceased sea-snaill, whose brightly-coloured shell resembles a parrot, hence the title "Parrot Snail."

Ouyang borrows a story, again from the "Autumn Floods" chapter, about a turtle which lived for three thousand years in the ancient state of Chu. After its death, the King of Chu wrapped the turtle and stored it in the temple halls as a sacred object and symbol of longevity. The character of Zhuangzi in the anecdote asks the rhetorical question: "Would [the turtle] prefer to die, and leave only its bones to become noble, or would it rather live, and drag its tail in the mud?" Zhuangzi tells this story to messengers sent by the King of Chu requesting that he become a great minister in the government. He prefers to remain like the living turtle, happy in his undiscovered, ordinary existence.86

The situation behind Ouyang's poem appears to be a banquet at which the beautiful shell of the "parrot snail" is used as a wine goblet. In composing his poem "praising" the shell, Ouyang imagines that its former snail inhabitant would have preferred to stay alive, "chasing oysters beneath the mud," rather than dying, and having its shell cut off to be the focus of attention at a lavish dinner party:

*Parrot Snail* [c.1049-1050]87

How great the blue ocean, so vast and boundless!

The hundred treasures of Heaven and Earth are all concealed therein.

86 Watson, op.cit. 187-188; Wang op.cit. 98.
87 In Ji vol.1, 2.7. There is some information on the Parrot Snail (*yingwu luo* 鴨鵷螺) in the Zhongwen dacidian. Its Latin name is *Nautilus pompilius*, and its shell looks like a bird; it can be made into a winecup. It holds mother-of-pearl inside; it often leaves its shell to roam during the day, at which time insects reside in the shell, only leaving when it returns in the evening (p.16890 under *yingwu luo*). A more helpful reference comes under *yingwu bei* 鴨鵷杯 ("parrot cup") on 16889: this is described as a wine vessel, made from the "parrot snail," the shell of the latter being shaped like an overturned cup whose end resembles the head of a bird looking towards its belly, like a parrot (a sleeping parrot perhaps?). "Meddlers (*haoshi zhe* 好事者) use gold to decorate it, adding [parrot’s] head, neck, feet and wings complete, placed on a table it’s abnormal, and that’s all there is to it." This last quotation is from a text entitled *Haicha lu* (海槎錄).
Teeth, tusks, shells and horns compete to have the sharpest points,
4 In a rank wind, strange rains splash secluded wilds.

The delicate patterns of coral formations are finely adorned and embellished,
Pearly palaces and cowrie gates shine with a dazzling glare.

Living in mud, housed in a shell, you're so tiny you can't be distinguished:
8 A red sea-snail roaming on the sand, producing a glow in the night.

But carrying such wealth you burden yourself, and suffer a ripped open belly,
Whenver somebody holds the jade disc, from ancient times he has suffered. 88
With ammonium chloride they rubbed and chafed you, imprinting their delicate patterns,

12 They ground you down with jade powder, and rimmed you with golden yellow. 89

Now a clear goblet of tasty wine is lined up in the ornate hall,
But the "bird of Long" turns its head, longing for its former home. 90
Beautiful ladies sing pure songs, their seductive eyebrows floating,
16 One draught, and biting cold transforms to springtime warmth.

Though the object is tiny and distant, it gains praise through being employed,
A thousand gold pieces for one snail shell: its value is truly immeasurable,
But can this really compare with chasing oysters beneath the mud?

88 A metaphor from government and diplomacy, the "jade disc" being a seal of high office
or of an ambassador.
89 I take this couplet to refer to human craftsmen making the shell look more like a parrot.
See n.87 above.
90 The "bird of Long" is the parrot. In the "Parrot Prose-Poem" (鸚鵡賦) by Mi Heng
(173-198), found in the Wenxuan, the writer records that the parrot originates in Western
Regions (see Li Shan, Wenxuan, op.cit. 3.12). Li Shan's gloss on this statement specifies
the place Longdi (or Longchi? 龍池) as the parrot’s home. Mei Yaochen uses the term
"traveller of Long" (Longke 龍客) in his poem "Matching Liu Yuanfu's 'White Parrot'"
of 1059 (in Zhu Dongrun, op.cit. vol.3, 1116), and from there it is a short step to
Ouyang's "bird of Long" (Longniao 龍鳥).
The poem contains 19 lines, all of which bear the same rhyme, making the work an example of a Boliang tí 柏梁體.91 The effect of a rhyme at the end of every line is to speed the pace of the reading, and to allow sudden changes of perspective within a single “couplet,” for instance, between lines 3 and 4: “Teeth, tusks, shells and horns compete to have the sharpest points./In a rank wind, strange rain splashes secluded wilds.” Here perhaps a further effect of the urgent repetition of rhymes is a sense of heightened drama — mock drama, considering the poem’s subject is now just a shell — as Ouyang juxtaposes in quick succession the snail’s former marine environment with its present alien surroundings. Also the odd-numbered, literally overhanging, last line stands out as a negation of the superficial values of those preceding it.

As with the previous poem, “Pond on a Tray,” this work seems to adopt a pessimistic outlook on life: the sea-snail, being beautiful and containing treasure, inevitably falls victim to collectors, who rip open its belly, decorate its shell and make it into a piece of novelty crockery. Doubtless the poem again expresses some of Ouyang’s own bitterness at giving up his freedom, to waste time attending endless official functions.

And yet, first of all there is something quite comical in the way Ouyang expresses his pity for this shell wine-goblet shaped like a parrot. The reader might imagine him reciting his poem at the banquet, holding up the winecup, with its painted bird face exhibiting a glazed look, as his fellow guests dissolve into uncontrollable laughter around him. Secondly, the remarkable picture of abundant marine life in the first 8 lines of the poem is entirely the product of Ouyang’s fertile imagination. Without the shell to inspire him, he would be unlikely to invent such a vivid background at all. Hence, Ouyang is able to draw out life, and enormous energy, from a dead shell, and above, from a meagre fish-pond — objects which less imaginative observers might overlook, or treat as mere

91 See Wang Li, Hanyu shili xue (Shanghai: Jiaoyu chubanshe 1979 repr. of 1958 ed’n) 369-379, for discussion of this form. Wang actually gives this poem as one of his examples (376).
trinkets. Once more, humour and imagination are instrumental in giving him strength temporarily to overcome a demanding reality. And most important, in this and so many other works, it is the fertility and life-containing depth of water from which he draws his vitality and inspiration.

In this chapter I have demonstrated that water, in its many guises, inspires a great variety of poetic reactions from Ouyang Xiu. In his earlier poems on rain and snow, he is often deeply concerned with the effect of water, or its absence, on the common people, and is quick to point to solutions in times of drought. Later, though still involved with the plight of the people, he becomes more sympathetic, and correspondingly, less judgmental — he even seems willing to learn from the painfully acquired wisdom of those living close to nature. As we have seen in previous chapters too, Ouyang tends to include himself more and more in his rain and snow poems as he grows older: a hapless old man caught in the floods; a rustic minded “peasant” wittily celebrating snow; or a poet figure laughing at the conventional words of the past.

I pointed out a distinction in his earliest rain poems between a plain, prose-like diction in ancient-style verse, and an ornate, allusive style in his extended regulated verse. I also suggested that in his poems on the Moon over tranquil waters, Ouyang began by treating this transcendent topic in a “suitably” lyrical fashion, but over the years tended increasingly to include aspects of the everyday and mundane alongside the purity of the Moon, culminating in his poem on the “moon stone” inkstone screen of 1047.

In the next, concluding, chapter, I will give some reasons for both this early stylistic variety and for Ouyang’s eventual gravitation towards his distinctive mix of the ordinary and the transcendent.

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92 For this point, see also the section on plants and trees, chapter 4 above.
Finally, I translated three poems on rivers and the ocean. Here we saw first, an immensely forceful subject, the Yellow River, given suitably powerful and lengthy treatment in verse — a correspondence characteristic of Ouyang’s earlier poetry on landscape. Second, however, we encountered two mature works of the 1050s on quite “trivial” subjects — a tiny pond and a shell ornament — which yet managed to evoke a similarly vast panorama. In the final chapter, I will draw together a surprising number of such works, written by Ouyang at the height of his creative powers, and show how they exemplify his witty approach to poetic composition.93

Conclusion: Ouyang Xiu, Style and the Tradition of Wit.

Many times in my study of Ouyang Xiu’s poetry, I have referred to his use of wit. In this conclusion, I will first provide a more extensive definition of the term “wit,” and then proceed to examine Ouyang’s own statements on poetry, to ascertain whether he formulated a similar concept. Since Ouyang deals almost exclusively with other poets in these statements, I will next discuss the possible influence of these poets on the development of Ouyang’s style. Finally, I will trace that development from Ouyang’s earliest poems, some of which are surprisingly ornate and allusive, through the mature, often technically brilliant, poetry of the 1040s and 1050s, to his more subdued and tranquil late works. In particular, I will discuss whether Ouyang’s comments on poetry are reflected in his poetic practice.

A Definition of Wit

The modern usage of the term “wit” tends to be restricted to clever and humorous conversation or writing. One representative modern dictionary gives the following definition of wit:¹ “The ability to perceive and express in an ingeniously humorous manner the relationship or similarity between seemingly incongruous or disparate things . . . One noted for this ability, especially one skilled in repartee . . . This quality of wit as manifested in speech or writing.” Yet even today, there are still suggestions of the broader implications of wit in some usages of the word. The same source gives two alternative definitions:

definitions: "(1): The natural ability to perceive or know; understanding; good sense: had the wit to wrap up in the cold weather. (2): (Usually plural) . . . Resourcefulness . . . sound mental faculties: scared out of one's wits."  

In the English literary tradition, wit has been used to describe various writing styles over the centuries. The modern Chinese scholar Qian Zhongshu 钱钟书 has suggested a parallel between the works of the Northern Song poet, Huang Tingjian (黄庭坚 1045-1105), and the 17th century English Metaphysical Poets. The brand of witty conceit used by the most famous Metaphysical poets, such as John Donne (1572-1631), requires a different definition from the modern ones listed above. The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes this earlier form of wit as, "the apt association of thought and expression, calculated to surprise and delight by its unexpectedness." Yet shock, rather than surprise, would better describe the effect of some of John Donne's outlandish analogies and conceits. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), the famous lexicographer and literatus, was the first to coin the term Metaphysical poetry, and his definition of Metaphysical wit, though highly critical, still provides the best encapsulation of the style of poets like Donne:

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2 Ibid. Italics in original.
3 See Qian Zhongshu, *Tan Yi Lu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984; repr. 1990) section 2, 22. Qian is particularly interested in the conceits used by the Metaphysicals. He also suggests that Huang Tingjian's inspiration came from Mid- and Late Tang poets, especially Han Yu, Meng Jiao, Jia Dao, and Li Shangyin (ibid.). For the possible influence of all these poets on Ouyang Xiu, see below, main text.
Wit . . . may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. . . . The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased.

After turning to Donne’s poetry, some might object to Johnson’s characterization of it as “unpleasing,” though without necessarily asserting that it is pleasant. In his poem “The Flea,”6 for example, Donne’s narrator claims that since the flea has sucked both his own blood and that of his lover, she should therefore spare its life: “Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,/Where we almost, nay more than married are!”7 When his lover does squash the bloated insect, declaring that she feels no weaker for her crime, the narrator immediately finds an excuse to seduce her: “Just so much honour, when thou yield’st to me,/Will waste, as this flea’s death took life from thee.”8 Here, Donne’s wit lies first in giving this tiny creature great, almost sacred, significance — containing its own blood as well as theirs, its death would involve “three sins in killing three”9 — and second, in suggesting that such a grotesque description of a blood-sucking insect can be used as a love poem at all.10

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7 Ibid. 59
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Other examples of Donne’s unusual figures, though not so grotesque, include his extended comparison of himself and his lover to a compass (“A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,” ibid. 84-85); and “The Ecstasy,” which includes several far-fetched
It is true that, like Donne, poets of the Northern Song are not afraid of "low" topics, which they treat in what I feel is a caricatured rational manner. Ouyang Xiu's close friend Mei Yaochen, for instance, composed the following poem involving fleas (in the translation of Chaves):¹¹

*Picking for Lice I get Fleas Instead*

This is a day of satisfaction,
I was picking for lice and got some fleas instead!
But both are pests to be gotten rid of,
4 And happily I have found a little peace.
Who can be sure about the deaths of creatures
When the foolish grow old and the clever die young?¹²
Ants live in hills and never bite people,
8 So their lives are perfectly secure.

Yet notably absent from Northern Song *shi* 詩 ("poems") are the two most common concerns of 17th century English poetry, namely, love and the religious conflict between sin and virtue. Ouyang Xiu does deal with love in some of his lyrics (ci 詞), but these form a small minority among his literary output.¹³ Among his poems are a handful

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ⁱ² "Foolish" (*dun* 鈍) could also be translated "dull": doubtless the contrast is between the dull, crawling lice, who somehow survive, and the "clever," nimble fleas, who are squashed by Mei.
ⁱ³ For translations of some of Ouyang's *ci* dealing with love, see Egan 134, 136, 138-140, 141 and 149. Note also the fact that Ouyang's authorship of the bolder love *ci* has been questioned (ibid. 161ff). Other translations appear in Victor Mair, ed., op.cit. 319-320
of works mourning his first two wives, in which he reveals his love by the extent of his sorrow, and a long work addressed to his third wife, where he praises her for remaining close through his political vicissitudes. Another pair of poems uses personified turtledoves to criticize a fellow scholar for planning to abandon his wife, since she will have no means of support. Extramarital affairs or pre-marital seduction, though occasionally hinted at in Ouyang’s poems, are clearly not his main focus.

Likewise with religion, works like John Donne’s “Holy Sonnets” would be inconceivable in Ouyang’s collection. Yet a great part of Donne’s poetic oeuvre deals with the conflict between sin and redemption, leading to paradoxes like:

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o’erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.

For his part, Donne differs from poets like Ouyang Xiu in being quite uninterested in the landscape and the surrounding natural world. Even when he does make a rare visit to a garden, he cannot prevent his thoughts from dwelling on his hard-hearted lover. If

(translated by Hightower); and in James J.Y. Liu, Major Lyricists of the Northern Sung (AD 960-1126) op.cit. 34-41 and 46-47.
14 I have translated some of these works in my biographical sketch: chapter 1 above.
15 In Ji vol.1, 2.37-38; dated 1059.
16 For example, in a poem to Liu Chang of 1055, Ouyang relates that he had recently “admired” Liu’s newly purchased servant girl, “like a freshly opened flower untouched by human hands” (Ji vol.1, 2.22). Cf. similar implications in Ouyang’s poem on listening to the pipa, (Ji vol.1, 2.32-33) which I translated in my chapter three above.
17 A.J. Smith, op.cit. 306-316.
18 From the 14th. of Donne’s “Divine Meditations,” in ibid. 314.
19 “Twicknam Garden,” in ibid. 82.
this is the Garden of Eden, he declares, then my thoughts are the sin-bearing serpent: "And that this place may thoroughly be thought/True paradise, I have the serpent brought."  

In spite of these obvious differences in subject matter, resulting from their distinct cultural environments, Ouyang Xiu shares with poets like Donne a tendency to juxtapose the noble and base, grotesque and elegant, everyday and poetic, within a single structure — an act of intellectual, often humorous, ingenuity which I believe closely resembles and anticipates the witty approach. I will examine this point further in a moment.

Before turning to Ouyang's comments on the art of poetry, I would like to introduce another quite different, but still relevant definition of wit from the English literary tradition. Especially important in the late 17th and early 18th centuries was the idea of wit as "good or great mental capacity; intellectual ability; genius, talent, cleverness; mental quickness or sharpness, acumen." Perhaps the most entertaining and vivid discussion of this later conception of wit is contained in the long poem "An Essay on Criticism" by Alexander Pope (1688-1744). After proposing that only by first learning to write well can one criticize others' writing, Pope then sets down detailed prescriptions for composing poetry. The first requirement is to follow Nature.

First follow NATURE, and your Judgment frame
By her just Standard, which is still the same:

Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,

One clear, unchang'd, and Universal Light,

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20 Ibid. See also another poem, "The Blossom," whose first stanza describes flowers in spring; the rest of the poem becomes a dialogue between the narrator's heart and body on the subject of his lover, and the natural scene is forgotten (ibid. 44-45).
23 References following quoted passages from "An Essay on Criticism" indicate first the page number in ibid., then the line numbers of the poem. The copious use of italics and capitalization in the poem is Pope's, as is the spelling.
Life, Force, and Beauty, must to all impart,
At once the Source, and End, and Test of Art. (146: ll.68-73)

If Nature provides a general aesthetic standard, more specific instruction comes from the “Ancients”:

Those RULES of old, discover’d, not devis’d,
Are Nature still, but Nature Methodiz’d;
Nature, like Liberty, is but restrain’d
By the same Laws which first herself ordain’d. (146: ll.88-91)

For Pope, of course, the Ancients who discovered the “Rules of old” were the poets of Classical Greece, most notably Homer, and of Rome, especially Virgil.24 Their rules are necessary because our natural genius, or “wit,” like a swift horse, needs guidance, or “judgment,” to channel its vital energy:

[Judgment is] more to guide than spur the Muse’s Steed:
Restrain his Fury, than provoke his Speed;
The winged Courser, like a gen’rous Horse,25
Shows most true Mettle when you check his Course. (146: ll.84-87)

Yet occasionally rules in poetry should be bent for the sake of a higher artistic end:

24 For Homer, see ibid. 146: line 92; for Virgil, 148: ll.129-130. Pope calls Virgil the “Mantuan Muse,” Mantua being the poet’s birthplace.
25 A “courser” is a swift horse; “generous,” applied to animals, means “spirited” (ibid. 146, textual note).
Musick resembles Poetry, in each
Are nameless Graces which no Methods teach,
And which a Master-Hand alone can reach.
If, where the Rules not far enough extend,
(Since Rules were made but to promote their End)
Some Lucky LICENCE answers to the full . . .
... Thus Pegasus,26 a nearer way to take,
May boldly deviate from the common Track. (149: l.143-148;150-151)

Nevertheless, justification for such exceptions can be found in the natural world:

In Prospects, thus, some Objects please our Eyes,
Which out of Nature's common Order rise,
The shapeless Rock, or hanging Precipice. (149: l.158-160)

Here, Pope emphasizes his point by interrupting the flow of regular rhyming couplets with a triplet: the third line thus stands out as a literary “hanging Precipice.” He uses a similar technique in the previous quotation when describing “nameless Graces” that go beyond normal literary rules.

A full analysis of this poem would require a much longer study. Here, I will note just two further points relevant to my discussion of Ouyang Xiu. First, Pope returns to the question of poetic technique — including conceits, use of language, “numbers” or metre,

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26 Pegasus, also referred to as the “winged Courser” above, was a mythical flying horse of ancient Greece, who struck Mount Helicon with his hoof, causing the fountain of the Muses to well forth. Note the slanted rhyme in the following line (“track” as compared with “take”) which gives an aural impression of “deviating from the common track.”
and sound — later in the work, giving several examples of what he considers ideal lines.27

His illustration of “Sound” is particularly vivid:

When Ajax strives, some Rocks’ vast Weight to throw,
The Line too labours, and the Words move slow;28
Not so, when swift Camilla scours the Plain,
Flies o’er th’unbending Corn, and skims along the Main. (155: ll.370-373)

Pope manages to compose a line of twelve syllables (the fourth line here) which reads more rapidly than the second line, consisting of his usual ten syllables.

Secondly, frustrated by poets who produce works that are too clever and ornate, whose every line is filled with “glitt’ring Thoughts,”29 Pope stresses the importance of simplicity and clarity in the use of wit:

Poets, like Painters, thus, unskill’d to trace
The naked Nature and the living Grace,
With Gold and Jewels cover ev’ry Part,
And hide with Ornaments their Want of Art.

True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,
What oft was Thought, but ne’er so well Expres’d;
Something, whose Truth convinc’d at Sight we find,
That gives us back the Image of our Mind:

27 See section from ibid. 153: 1.289 to 155: 1.383.
28 Ajax was a mythical Greek warrior of great stature who fought against Troy. Camilla, in the following line, was a Roman woman warrior who fought Aeneas, the hero of Virgil’s epic Aeneid.
29 Ibid. 153: 1.290.
As Shades more sweetly recommend the Light,
So modest Plainness sets off sprightly Wit. (153: ll.293-302)

Taken out of context, Pope's definition of "True Wit" as "Nature to Advantage drest" suggests a rather ornamented style; but in the previous lines, he equates ornamentation with lack of artistic skill. By contrast, adopting a style of "modest Plainness" inspired by Nature will help one's occasional witty devices stand out much better than they would in a bejewelled "Heap of Wit."  

I have dwelt at some length on the concept of wit, especially as enunciated by Alexander Pope. My purpose in doing so is twofold: first, I wish to give at least an impression of the central place of wit in the 17th and 18th century English poetic tradition; and to indicate the broad area of human experience implied by the term, ranging from the ability to find ingenious and humorous relationships between widely divergent subjects (in Donne) to the natural creative genius within us which, guided by our judgment and that of the Ancients, produces excellent poetry (Pope). In both cases, wit is far more than mere clever joking.

Secondly, I feel that Ouyang Xiu develops a style whose characteristics anticipate the wit of these English poets to a certain degree. I am especially intrigued by the parallel between the works of Ouyang Xiu and Pope's prescriptions for poetry. Unlike John Donne, Pope shows little interest in spiritual or religious conflict — in his poetry, the God of the Metaphysical poets has retreated, leaving only Nature to guide us — and only 

30 Ibid. 153: l.292.
31 Pope makes this point at the start of his poem "An Essay on Man: Epistle 1" (ibid. 504, ll.17-22).
one of his major poems takes romantic love as its central concern. The majority of his works deal with moral and aesthetic philosophy, or with the foibles and vanities of people in the society around him. While not known for landscape poetry, Pope certainly enjoyed depicting his natural surroundings: his oeuvre contains a series of “Pastorals,” describing a couple of shepherds in their bucolic surroundings over the four seasons; a long celebration of the beauties of Windsor Forest; and an excellent “Moral Essay” giving advice on how to design a garden. His own garden at Twickenham, complete with a cave-grotto adorned with curious geological specimens, became famous during his lifetime, and though he seems not to have composed poetry about pets, he did write a remarkable prose essay on the need to treat animals humanely, since, he claims, they too have feelings.

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33 For the former, apart from “An Essay on Criticism,” see especially the long work “An Essay on Man” (ibid. 501-547). For the latter, see “The Dunciad Variorum” (ibid. 317-459), and “Imitations of Horace” (ibid. 613-703).
36 This essay is quoted in full by Sitwell, ibid. 331-339. Pope did compose a couplet on an animal, entitled “Epigram: Engraved on the Collar of a Dog which I gave to his Royal Highness,” which goes: “I am his Highness’ Dog at Kew; Pray tell me Sir, whose Dog are you?” (Butt, op.cit. 826).
Ouyang Xiu on Poetry

Turning to Ouyang Xiu, I will now examine his various statements on poetry in the light of the foregoing discussion. Are there any terms in his critical vocabulary that characterize his general style in the way that “wit” has been used to characterize English poetry? This question is especially important owing to the stylistic parallels between Ouyang’s poetry and some of the acknowledged masters of English wit.

Most of Ouyang’s comments on poetry are contained in the section of his collected works entitled Shihua 詩話 (“Remarks on Poetry”).\(^{37}\) Though in a subtitle to this section, Ouyang notes that he collected together the anecdotes which comprise these “Remarks” after he retired to Ruyin (i.e. 1071), several of them appear with slight differences in other parts of his collection.\(^{38}\) Hence, the “Remarks” probably include material from various stages of his life which he refined and edited before his death.

Other brief comments on poetry appear scattered through his “Notes on Returning to the Fields” (Guitian lu 歸田錄),\(^{39}\) a collection of anecdotes about court life; also in his “Calligraphy Exercises” (Shi bi 試筆) and “Jotted Theories” (Bi shuo 筆說);\(^{40}\) in letters, prefaces and writings about his literati friends; and occasionally within his own poems.

\(^{37}\) Ji vol.3, 14.111-119. Later known as Liu-Yi shihua 六一詩話 ("Poetry Talks of Six Ones [Recluse]", following Ouyang’s nickname adopted in retirement. In Ouyang’s collection this title is not yet adopted. There are translations of parts of the Shihua, the most complete being that of Stephen Owen, in his Readings in Chinese Literary Thought (Harvard 1992), 359-391. He includes 17 of the 27 entries. Jonathan Chaves, op.cit., also translates many entries, scattered through his chapters 3 and 4 (69-132). Chaves’ study is the most detailed work in English on the style of Mei Yaochen, and includes much useful material on Ouyang which I have found invaluable. Entry xii of Ouyang’s Shihua, which cites Mei Yaochen’s ideas on poetic composition, and entry xiii, in which Ouyang quotes his own poem praising Mei and Su Shunqin, have both been translated frequently. In this regard, cf. also Yoshikawa 36-37; Egan 103-104.

\(^{38}\) I will deal with these duplications below.

\(^{39}\) Ji vol.3, 14.77-109.

Some of Mei Yaochen's poems addressed to Ouyang also provide useful evaluations of Ouyang's style.

Since I am attempting to establish whether or not Ouyang developed a view of poetry which involves wit, for convenience I will examine his statements in an order corresponding to Alexander Pope's extended definition above: (i) on following Nature; (ii) taking the Ancients as guides; (iii) the specific effects of (i) and (ii) on diction, metre, rhyme and the like.

Ouyang's clearest discussion of Nature in relation to writing comes in his "Preface to the Edited and Corrected Huangting Classic." Thinly disguising himself beneath the persona of a Daoist "Master Wuxian" (Wuxian zi, literally "Master who Rejects Immortals") Ouyang proceeds to criticize those who try to prolong their lives by unnatural methods:

From ancient times, the Way (dao 道) has existed but immortals have not. Yet people of later generations, though they knew the Way existed, didn't attain that Way; they were unaware that immortals are non-existent, so they recklessly followed immortals. This is something that causes me sadness.

Now the Way is the Way of Nature (ziran zhi dao 自然之道). That we are born and will certainly die is also a principle of Nature. Taking the Way of Nature and accepting a natural life, not harming or destroying

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41 Tentatively dated to the late 1040s by Chen and Du, in Xuanji 394. Original text in Ji vol.2, 8.31-32; Xuanji 392-395. The full title of this Daoist work is "Classic of the Inner Sun of the Supreme Yellow Halls, and Classic of the Outer Sun of the Supreme Yellow Halls" (Taishang huangting neijing jing; Taishang huangting waijing jing 太上黄庭内经, 太上黄庭外经). Ouyang estimates the text to have been written in the Wei-Jin Period (220-420).

42 This phrase could also be translated as "they did not know [Master] Wuxian": it is a pun on Ouyang's nickname.
oneself, but living out all one’s allotted years — this is what the sagely and wise since ancient times had in common. Yu roamed about the whole Empire, drove four chariots, and channelled the hundred rivers. One could say that he wore out his body. But he lived for a hundred years. Master Yan lay down emaciated in a mean alleyway, with barely enough to eat or drink. Yet outside, he was not led astray by possessions; within, his heart never wavered. One could call this supreme joy, but he didn’t even live to be thirty years old.

These two men were both benevolent people of ancient times, but the one who wore out his body lived long; the one who was content with his joy had only a short life. Doubtless fate involves varying lengths of time: they received their allotment from Heaven and it was not something they could influence with their own efforts. Yet what these two people shared was simply avoiding harming themselves, and instead living out their allotted years. This is what I have called the “Way of Nature,” and “accepting a natural life”...

Ouyang Xiu leaves his readers in no doubt about the strong connection between the Way of Nature and the “Ancients.” The latter, for him, are typically those sages who appear in the Six Classics or other works traditionally attributed to Confucius. Yu, often known as the Great Yu (Da Yu 大禹) is a major figure in the Classic of Documents. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the section of the Documents entitled “The Achievements of Yu” describes his immense task channeling the waters of the Empire to

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43 Yu (禹), mentioned in my discussion of Ouyang’s poem on the Yellow River (chapter 5 above) was a mythical ancient hero who overcame disastrous floods in the Empire.

44 Master Yan, full name Yan Hui (顔回) was the favourite disciple of Confucius.
overcome floods. Master Yan, or Yan Hui, favourite disciple of Confucius, is mentioned frequently in the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), a collection of sayings attributed to Confucius.

Although at first sight, this preface has little to do with literary style, Ouyang later implies a connection when he declares: “I have a stone version of the Huangting Classic which was copied in the third year of the Yonghe Reign [347 AD], by a person of the Jin Dynasty. Its text is very concise (*jian* 簡), and comparing it with those that are passed around in today’s society, it is the only one that is reasonable. I suspect that I have found the true [text].” Ouyang uses the same character *jian* 簡 to praise the style of his favourite Classic, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋): he calls the work “precise and concise” (*jinyan er jianyue* 精嚴而簡約); or, in another passage, “concise and a good model” (*jian er kefa* 簡而可法). Elsewhere, he discusses the reason scholars prefer to read commentaries rather than the Classic itself: “[The *Spring and Autumn Annals*] are concise and direct (*jian er zhi* 簡而直); the commentaries are novel and unusual. The ‘concise and direct’ contain no words to please the ear, but the ‘novel and unusual’ contain many delightful discussions. Therefore, scholars enjoy hearing them and are easily confused!”

In other contexts, Ouyang’s discussions of the Classics and ancient writings similarly emphasize their directness, clarity, concision, and concern with reality. In one letter to a young scholar asking for advice on writing, he runs through the merits of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the *Classic of Documents*, focusing entirely on their simple, uncluttered concern with immediate reality — problems of governance, pacifying

45 *Ji* vol.2, 8.32.
46 For these phrases, see respectively *Ji* vol.1, 3.33; and ibid. vol.2, 9.13. In the latter, Ouyang justifies calling his friend Yin Shu’s writing “concise and a good model,” saying that only the *Spring and Autumn Annals* deserve such high praise. For Ouyang’s attraction to this Classic, see also James T.C. Liu, op.cit. 100-101. I have borrowed Liu’s translation of the first phrase.
47 *Ji* vol.1, 3.32.
48 “Second Letter to Scholar Zhang,” in *Ji* vol.2, 8.45-46. Composed in 1033, when Ouyang was himself quite a young, though outstanding, scholar-official.
the population, solving flood disasters, sacrificing to mountains and rivers, fixing weights, measures and musical pitch, and so on. He then turns to Mencius (Mengzi 孟子), whose words “never went beyond teaching people to plant mulberry and hemp, to raise chickens and swine, and to consider looking after the living and burying the dead as the basis of the Kingly Way . . . These are matters that are close to people in society and very easy to understand. They are completely concerned with reality, and no more.”

Thus, the Ancients were satisfied to deal with the affairs of everyday life, and content to live out the years naturally allotted them. The concise style and extremely tangible content of their writings reflect the natural simplicity of their way of life.

The Classic of Poetry

Most of the preceding comments on the Classics date from the 1030s when Ouyang was a young official beginning his career in government. It is not surprising, therefore, that he sees these ancient works primarily as models for running an Empire. Yet the concern with writing clearly and concisely, and dealing with everyday realities, lasted throughout his life and overflowed into his poetry.

The ancient text most relevant for a discussion of Ouyang’s poetic style is of course the Classic of Poetry (Shijing 詩經). Significantly, it was not until later in his life that he showed greater interest in this text, producing a lengthy commentary in 1061.

49 Ibid. 8.46.
50 Chen Yushih, Images and Ideas in Classical Chinese Prose (Stanford UP, 1988) 109-132, provides further examples of Ouyang’s interest in the natural.
51 His preface to the Huangting Classic, by contrast, dates from around the late 1040s, and although it adopts a similar cast of ancient role models and moralizing vocabulary, seems more concerned with individual acceptance of fate than with the practical concerns of government.
52 This commentary is published separately from Ouyang’s collected works, and entitled The Fundamental Significance of the [Classic of] Poetry [Shi benyi 詩本義] (Shanghai: Sibu congkan, 1966). For an interpretation of Ouyang’s views on the Shijing, see Steven
Judging by remarks in several of his own poems, Ouyang had only begun to appreciate the joys of writing poetry after middle age, and his enthusiasm for the *Classic of Poetry* perhaps stems from his increased awareness of the expressive potential of poetic composition. As early as 1045, he had declared to Mei Yaochen: “Wishing to see your new poems, I suffer great hunger and thirst./All the matters that concerned me as a young man are now left behind:/It is only love for poetry that never tires my heart.” And similar statements occur in the late 1050s. In one poem to Mei, after claiming that he is too old to enjoy the charms of singing-girls, that flowers in spring wither in no time, and he has lost his capacity for wine-drinking, he concludes: “It is only chanting poems that never makes me weary,/Now I finally realize that the joys of the written word are endless!” In 1059, he reiterates the point, producing at the same time another excellent old man persona:

*While Taking Sick Leave from Work, I Long for Zihua and Yuanfu* [1059]

In my wild past, I had the will to struggle with the spring,
Now I’ve grown old, my emotions gradually lose their remaining strength.
Among worldly flavours all that remains is the plain blandness of poetry,
My life has half surrendered to the encroaching forces of illness.
Flowers shine in the morning sun, dense as gauze brocade,
Alcohol bubbles float on wine, green as the waters of the Sheng.

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53 *Ji* vol.1, 1.17-17, lines 36-38 of the poem. Interestingly, 1045 was the year of Ouyang’s second exile to Chuzhou, which may explain his frustration with “matters that concerned me,” i.e. public affairs.

54 *Ji* vol.1, 2.92, from poem “Playfully Answering Shengyu’s Lines on Carrying a Candle.”

55 *Ji* vol.1, 2.99. Zihua refers to Han Jiang (1011/2-1087/8); Yuanfu refers to Liu Chang.
From this point on, my youthful heroic expansiveness departs,

8 And now I’ll be dull and stupid: just like a chilled fly.

Not only does Ouyang claim here that poetry is his sole remaining pleasure — probably an exaggeration, but still an admission of the value of poetic composition in his life — he also contrasts the “plain blandness of poetry” (shi danbo 詩平淡) with the “heroic expansiveness” (haoheng 豪橫) of his youth. It is true that the latter phrase refers not to poetic style here but to other more energetic pursuits, yet at the same time Ouyang’s poems of the 1060s certainly become more subdued and calm than those of the previous three decades. I will return to this point later in my chronological summary of his stylistic development. For the moment, it is sufficient to note the centrality of poetry as a spiritual support for Ouyang, increasingly apparent as he matures.

Ouyang draws the connection between his own poetic style and that of the Classic of Poetry in his preface to the collection of poems he compiled following the Ministry of Rites examinations of 1057. As I mentioned earlier, Ouyang was chief examiner on this occasion, and spent the fifty-day marking period together with five colleagues, including Mei Yaochen and Mei Zhi, locked inside the Ministry of Rites complex. His preface clearly describes the circumstances, and includes a very important statement of his poetic ideals:

56 The Sheng (淇) was an ancient river mentioned in the Zuozhuan in connection with wine: “There is wine like the Sheng; there is meat like a mound.” See original text in James Legge, The Chinese Classics: Vol. V (Hong Kong University Press 1960) 637, line 11 (commentary on 12th year of Duke Zhao 昭公). Legge’s translation, on 639, is slightly different. In the Zuozhuan passage, the emphasis is on the quantity of wine, like a river; Ouyang, however, focuses on the colour of the wine which resembles green river water.

57 He also uses terms similar to haoheng when describing poetic style, as I will demonstrate below.
Preface to Poems Composed and Answered in the Ministry of Rites

[1057]58

In the spring of the second year of the Jiayou reign period [1057], I was lucky enough to be chosen to accompany five others to the Secretariat of the Ministry of Rites to examine candidates from all over the Empire, altogether six thousand five hundred people. We were cut off from contact with others for some fifty days. So during this time we frequently came together to compose ancient-style, regulated, long and short poems, songs and rhapsodies. One could more or less call them writings of convivial conversation at the banquet table, and also an expression of our feelings of being cooped up, and a means of forgetting our weariness.

Consequently, their diction is easy and approachable, carefully chosen but not too refined. Yet in their tightly structured repetitions, their starting and stopping, their occasional forays into the strange and wonderful, and their incorporation of joking, teasing and laughter (\textit{huichao xiaoxue} 詼嘲笑謔), at their best they often achieve a refined subtlety (\textit{jingwei} 精微).

Thus far, Ouyang seems to be introducing a light-hearted collection of verse simply for his readers' pleasure. But then he draws a surprising parallel with the most revered collection of poems in the Chinese literary canon:

\begin{quote}
Now the superior person (\textit{jun zi} 君子), in broadly adopting things from others, should not neglect even the comical or the crude and base (\textit{huaji bili} 滑稽鄙俚). All the more so in poetry! There are no words that
\end{quote}

\begin{footnote}
\textit{Ji} vol.1, 5.69-70.
\end{footnote}
cannot be found among the three hundred poems of ancient times [i.e. the *Classic of Poetry*]. Yet they are free without being abandoned, joyful without being decadent, and ultimately they return to correctness. This is the reason they are considered so highly.

Therefore, I have put [our poems] in order and copied them down, making a total of 173 works, and I have sent them around to our six homes.\(^{59}\) Alas! One could say that in will and spirit the six of us were then in our prime. But the strong, over time, weaken; the weak, over time, age. In our employment and reclusion, separation and coming together, there has been a great disparity between us. Nevertheless, these poems are sufficient to revive past days once more, to let us shake hands and be filled with laughter and joy. And there are also some which make one close the book with a sigh and burst into sobbing tears. Even so, how can I withhold them for this reason alone? Readers will certainly find something worthwhile in them. Preface by Ouyang Xiu of Luling.

Ouyang is clearly calling for broad inclusiveness in the style and subject matter of writing, especially poetry. In particular, he justifies mixing laughter, joking and the comic with the more exalted, intense and serious emotions typically associated with earlier poetry. He implies that the *Classic of Poetry* already contained such a variety of moods, hence his new collection is simply following the normative model of the canonical text.

Some earlier poets had incorporated humour and joking into their works — most notably the circle of poets around Han Yu during the Yuanhe period (806-820) of the Tang Dynasty. I will mention these writers again in my discussion of Ouyang’s “Remarks on Poetry” below. Yet as far as I am aware, no extended theoretical statement on poetry

\(^{59}\) I.e. the homes of those who had been grading exams with Ouyang, including his own.

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before Ouyang's preface explicitly justifies humour and joking as worthy concerns of the poet, or as part of a tradition dating back to the *Classic of Poetry*.

Perhaps the most famous defence of easy diction and everyday subject matter in poetry is that of Bai Juyi (772-846) in his "Letter to Ninth Yuan [i.e. Yuan Zhen 779-831]." While he does praise the breadth of interest in the *Classic of Poetry*, and criticizes later poets for their narrow restriction to particular areas of experience, such as "fields and gardens" (Tao Qian c.365-c.427) and “landscape” (Xie Lingyun 385-433), Bai is mainly concerned with the function of poetry as social criticism. Breadth of interest for him means depicting the lives of the common people so that “those above” can see their suffering. Similarly, easy diction is a way to aid ordinary people in learning his poems, and finding an outlet for their frustration through his words. At no point in his long letter does he suggest that humour and joking are fit concerns of the poet, or that breadth of subject matter in itself, divorced from criticism of social injustice, can be a virtue. It seems, therefore, that Ouyang's preface is unique in this aspect.

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60 In *Bai Xiangshan ji* op.cit. vol.2 (juan 28), 5.25-30. An exhaustively annotated edition is in Wang Rubi, ed., *Bai Juyi xuanji* (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980) 344-364. Though in this theoretical statement, Bai makes no mention of the comic, he does claim in the preface to his “Eight Poems on a Pond Crane,” (mentioned in my chapter 4 above) that he is composing the poems just to make himself laugh. See Spring, op.cit. 46, for translation of this preface.

61 *Bai xiangshan Ji* op.cit. 26
62 Ibid. 27-28.
63 Ibid. 28-29.
64 One of Ouyang’s anecdotes in “Notes on Returning to the Fields” describes the time locked within the Ministry of Rites in even more glowing terms. After noting that most of the markers were his old friends, and all were brilliant writers, he concludes: “The six of us were delighted to find ourselves together, and spent every day in each others’ company creating long compositions with perilous rhymes, taking turns to treat every genre. The writing clerks wearied of copying them down, and the servants had to dash back and forth [taking poems between the scholars?]. With humour and joking, expressing ourselves in satirical vein, we kept responding to each other, constantly breaking out into laughter. I’d say it was the most memorable event of that whole period: nothing like it had ever happened before!” From *Ji* vol.3, 14.103-104.
Ouyang’s own poems from this examination period, and the years immediately preceding and following, accord very closely with his characterization. For example, the series of works on white creatures, several of which are translated in chapter four above, generally adopt interesting irregular metres and varying rhyme schemes, include humorous caricatures of himself and his colleagues, and involve “laughable” parodies of intellectual arguments, while simultaneously dealing with more profound themes of separation from home, and fear of aging. Theory and practice thus merge into one.

The “Remarks on Poetry”

Having examined Ouyang’s views on Nature and the Ancients as they relate to poetic composition, I will now attempt to discern further the ways in which these broader views translate into specific stylistic and technical devices. I will divide my discussion into two main sections, dealing first with the techniques and devices which Ouyang favoured and utilized most frequently, and second, with the development of his style over the years. Both sections will involve some consideration of earlier poets who may have influenced him.

The preface to the poems written in the Ministry of Rites is Ouyang’s only extended description of his own poetic style. In his “Remarks on Poetry,” compiled some fourteen years later, he deals exclusively with other poets, of the Tang and Song periods. The nearest he comes to himself is in the sections on his contemporaries, including Mei Yaochen, Su Shunqin and Xie Bochu.65 It is true that he does frequently praise or criticize particular poets and their styles, allowing us a glimpse into his evaluative criteria.

65 For Xie Bochu, see entry xxiii in Ji vol.3, 14.117. The separate entries of Ouyang’s “Remarks on Poetry” are not numbered in his collection, but are clearly divided into paragraphs, each paragraph beginning a new entry. So entry xxiii refers to the 23rd paragraph. Owen, op.cit., uses the same numbering system (see note 37 above). For convenience, I also give the exact page number of each entry.
However, admiration for other poets does not necessarily lead to imitation of their style in one’s own work, and any conclusions about Ouyang’s favoured poets should be carefully weighed against his own practice before crediting them as influences. 66

Another equally important feature of Ouyang’s “Remarks on Poetry” is their apparently random, occasionally even contradictory, structure and content. I feel that the more blatant contradictions between entries, such as his praise for the poems of the Nine Monks of the early Song in entry (ix) and criticism of the same in (xvi), 67 result from the

66 Ouyang’s views on the High Tang poets, especially Du Fu, Li Bai and Wang Wei, provide a good illustration of this point. Despite his generally flattering remarks about poets of this period, one senses a vagueness and a certain distance in them, which is entirely lacking in his detailed critiques of Mid- and Late Tang poets. He often refers to High Tang poets simply as the “Tang worthies” (Tang xian 唐賢): Ji vol.3, 14.113 and 117, entries viii and xxiii. Also he tends to treat pairs of quite different poets as indivisible units: Li Bai and Du Fu appear together of course (ibid. 14.114, entry xi; also in a poem in ibid. vol.1, 2.52); but so, more surprisingly, do Du Fu and Wang Wei, when Ouyang claims of a couplet by an early Song poet: “People say it is not inferior to Wang Wei or Du Fu” (ibid. vol.3, 14.117, entry xxii). The over-simplified nature of such comments suggest that Ouyang is not particularly interested in the High Tang poets as basic models for his own writing style, despite his using their names to praise the works of more recent poets, and occasionally borrowing phrases and lines from them in his own poems. Having said this, it is certainly Li Bai whose poetry Ouyang most admires among the High Tang poets. Yoshikawa 71-72 (referring to a comment in Ji vol.3, 14.122) notes that Ouyang compared the painstaking craftsmanship evident in Du Fu’s poetry unfavourably with the naturalness of the works of Li Bai. As Chaves, op.cit. 98-98, points out, Ouyang did also praise Du Fu elsewhere: he certainly did not dislike Du’s works. However, his preference for Li Bai is very clear, not so much from his “Remarks on Poetry” in which Li appears only in passing, but from his own poems. One work, “Taibai: Joking with Shengyu,” which has the alternative title “Reading Li Bai’s Collection, Imitating his Style” (Ji vol.1, 2.17-18; translated by Egan 100), borrows several lines from Li’s works, and overflows with admiration for his inspired energy. This work is undated, but is placed among dated works from 1054-1055. Many of Ouyang’s poems in irregular metres date from the 1050s, beginning with his celebration of Mount Lu in 1051 (Ji vol.1, 2.16), and it is possible that his use of this technique was partly inspired by reading Li’s collection — Chaves calls the Mount Lu poem “an exercise in Li’s heroic mode” (op.cit. 100). Nevertheless, where the influence of Li Bai must generally be inferred from hints in Ouyang’s works, that of Mid Tang poets like Han Yu is several times explicitly acknowledged in his theoretical statements, as I will demonstrate below.

67 In Ji vol.3, 14.113; and 14.117 respectively.
fact that these anecdotes were originally composed at different times, reflecting Ouyang’s varying moods and tastes over the years, and in collecting them at the end of his life, he was willing to retain that variety and sense of development. In my chronological summary, I will demonstrate that certain entries accord with specific stages in Ouyang’s stylistic development, but seem less relevant at other stages.

On the other hand, even within single entries, Ouyang frequently juxtaposes poets with markedly different styles, or treats a poet’s works with high regard at first, but concludes with a joke at that person’s expense. Rather than ignoring these constant oppositions and reversals, I feel that they reveal a fascination with complex structure which is also a central feature of Ouyang’s poetry. Though the order of the entries in the “Remarks” is quite random — the only criteria for placement being perhaps that of sustaining the readers’ interest — Ouyang has certainly expended much effort crafting the individual entries to give them the maximum rhetorical force and ingenuity, using as concise a style as possible.

Craft, or skill (gōng 工) is one of the most important features in Ouyang’s comments on poetic composition. He seems as much concerned with the technical features of poetry as with its content. Among the poets of the Tang Dynasty, his highest praise is reserved for Han Yu. Significantly, Ouyang uses very similar terms to introduce Han Yu’s verse as those with which he described his own when drawing a parallel with the Classic of Poetry — breadth of interest and a wide range of feelings, including of course laughter. He then turns to Han’s skilful use of rhyme:

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68 Part of the entry praising the Nine Monks also appears in Ouyang’s “Calligraphy Exercises,” which are undated but clearly contain a heterogeneous mix of material from different periods. See Ji vol.3, 14.131. The comments on Meng Jiao and Jia Dao’s poverty, translated below, appear there too, again with minor differences (ibid. 14.131-132). Later, I will give further examples of Ouyang borrowing and reworking earlier material for his “Remarks on Poetry.”

69 Stephen Owen makes some similar observations in op.cit. 359-362.

70 Ji vol.3, 14.119; entry xxvi.
With the force of Tuizhi [Han Yu’s] brush, there was nothing he could not accomplish, but he often considered poetry to be a peripheral matter compared with prose. Thus a poem of his says: “When I’m full of emotion, I long for a drinking companion, When serious matters allow time, I become a poet.”

Yet his invention in conversation and laughter, his encouragement of humour and joking (xie xue 謔諧), his portrayal of human feelings and characterization of objects, as soon as they were lodged in his poetry, offered up all their wonders in a roundabout way. In the hands of a master of heroic literature, of course, this goes without saying.

But I alone appreciate his skill in using rhymes. Thus, when he receives an easy rhyme, the waves and billows surge along, overflowing into slanted rhymes, now returning, now departing, in and out, twisting and merging — almost impossible to fix in a regular framework. An example of this type is “This Day is Full of Regret.”

When he receives a difficult rhyme, he then no longer strays to the side; instead his true ingenuity is revealed through difficulty, and the more perilous it gets, the more wonderful [the result]. An example of this type is “While I was Sick, Presented to Eighteenth Zhang.”

I once discussed this with Shengyu [Mei Yaochen]. I declared that [Han] resembles a skilled driver of fine horses: on a clear road or broad path he drives them at a tremendous pace, only concerned to reach the

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71 See this poem in Qian Zhonglian, op.cit. 84-98. Full title translates as “This Day is Full of Regret: A Poem Presented to Zhang Ji,” and Qian dates it to 799. Stephen Owen has translated this work in The Poetry of Meng Chiao and Han Yu, op.cit. 74-78.

72 Poem in Qian, op.cit. 63-71. Dated by Qian to the previous year, 798. Eighteenth Zhang is also Zhang Ji (ibid. 64, n.1). Translated in Owen, op.cit. 52-53.
destination. But coming to winding waters or a bumpy surface, he relaxes to a regular pace, and they do not lose their footing in the slightest. He is surely the most perfect craftsman in the Empire.

Shengyu answered with a joke, saying: "Earlier histories relate that Tuizhi’s character was “upright and strong” (mujiang 木强). But if he could have been satisfied with an easy rhyme, yet instead always strayed to the side; if, on the other hand, using difficult rhymes which are not readily sustained, he did not diverge from them, is it not because he was “stubborn and inflexible” (ao/niu jiang 勃强)? At this, all the guests laughed.

Ouyang’s admiration for Han Yu’s poetry is very evident in this passage. Despite Han’s treatment of poetry as a peripheral pastime, he still manages to produce wonderful works involving “conversation and laughter,” “humour and joking,” “human feelings” and vivid “characterization of objects.” Most of these ideals Ouyang has already praised in his preface above. Yet his comments on Han’s use of rhyme are remarkably perceptive, and extremely significant when we recall Ouyang’s own propensity for ingenious rhyme schemes designed to fit the content of each poem.73

If we examine the two poems of Han Yu mentioned here as examples, further striking points emerge. The first work, “This Day is Full of Regret . . .” is a long narrative poem in which Han describes fleeing his post at Bianzhou after a rebellion, and recalls his long journey and eventual reunion with his family, all within the framework of a lament for the departure of his friend Zhang Ji (c.766-c.830).74 As Qian Zhonglian notes, Han frequently juxtaposes “ancient rhymes” (gu yun 古韵), supposedly based on the pronunciation of those in the Classic of Poetry, with the “modern” rhymes of the Tang

73 See for example his second poem on Returning Geese Pavilion, and the poem “Shun Spring at Qizhou,” both translated in chapter 4 above. Also “The Stone Screen of Scholar Wu” in chapter 2.
74 See note 71 above.
Dynasty. Even in today’s Standard Mandarin pronunciation, the contrast is clear in most cases — for instance, Han uses the modern rhymes guang 光, fang 方, and zhang 章; later in the poem, he co-opts the ancient rhymes ming 鳴, ting 庭, and ding 丁, all of which, as Qian shows, were in the same category as the former three in earlier rhyming dictionaries.

The purpose of these archaic, and by the Tang certainly slanted, rhymes was of course to give an “ancient” atmosphere to the poem, with all the breadth, heroism and expansiveness that the term implied. The fact that Han Yu also repeats many of the rhyme words in the poem supposedly adds to this ancient effect — evidence, perhaps, of not being concerned with the over-refined aversion to repetition normally practiced during the Tang.

I have not come across a poem by Ouyang Xiu in which he borrows the rhymes of Han’s “This Day is Full of Regret . . .” In this case, Ouyang seems to admire first, the use of rhyme for a specific literary purpose, and second, Han’s awareness of the power of repetition. Both these features are evident in many of his own poems.

However, in the case of the second poem, “While I was Sick, Presented to Eighteenth Zhang,” Ouyang clearly borrows Han’s “difficult rhymes” to produce one of his own most expansive and exciting poems. Han Yu’s work, much shorter than the previous one, describes a kind of verbal sparring contest which he held with Zhang Ji while taking sick leave from his post. Though Han admits that Zhang’s powers of

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75 Qian, op. cit. 93, note 62. Earlier commentators had often noted this point, as listed by Qian on pages 96-98.
76 Ibid. 89, n.23; n.25; 90, n.38.
77 Qian cites a comment by one Cai Mengbi praising Han’s use of repeated rhyme words, and connecting this technique with his attempt to use ancient pronunciations: ibid. 96.
78 In Ouyang’s poetry, repetition occurs not only on rhymes but throughout the body of his works. See for instance his poem “Evening, Mooring at Yueyang,” with its evocative repetitions of “moon,” “river” and “water” (translated in chapter 5); also most of his poems on animals and birds translated in chapter 4, in which the repetition seems to imitate the style of a folksong. For his expressive use of rhyme, see note 73 above.
discourse are awe-inspiring, he is rather like a surging river that has burst its banks: full of force, but without any sense of direction. Using various highly imaginative historical and literary metaphors, Han relates how he manages to overcome Zhang’s arguments and set him back on the correct course “flowing eastwards.” The poem contains 44 lines with a rhyme on every other line (i.e. 22 rhymes).79

The sheer variety of subject matter that a rhyme category with few constituents demands, tests a poet’s unifying powers to the utmost. Han Yu takes the extraordinary force of Zhang Ji’s conversation as his excuse to range widely over different areas of human experience, allowing him to include disparate words which happen to bear the same rhyme.

In 1051, Ouyang Xiu was inspired by a similarly extraordinary subject — Mount Lu, juxtaposed with the talents of his friend Liu Huan — to produce an equally imaginative climb through unusual poetic territory.80 Though his poem contains only 38 lines, he manages in his 19 rhymes to include 13 of Han’s original rhyme words. Since he also adds an excellent varying metre to these “difficult” rhymes, it is not surprising that this poem proved such a delight for Mei Yaochen.81

In fact, two years earlier in 1049, Mei had also written a clever poem, incorporating rhyme words from the same poem by Han Yu, entitled “Ancient Willow Tree” (Gu liu 古柳).82 In this ancient-style verse, Mei uses a regular five-syllable metre, incorporating 14 of Han’s original rhymes in just 30 lines, concluding with an explanation of the context:

79 See note 72 above.
80 See Ji vol.1, 2.16. Cf. my translation in chapter 2 above. Full title of poem translates as “Lu Mountain High! Given to Fellow Student Liu Zhongyun [Huan] on his Retirement to Nankang.”
81 See Mei’s comments in Zhu Dongrun, op.cit. vol.3, 756-757. Also translated in my chapter 2.
82 Ibid. vol.2, 524-525; Zhu dates the work to 1049.
... My friend has evaluated Han’s poems [saying]
His perilous rhymes are ancient and unparalleled.
How will I persuade him to sing of this [willow] with me?
I can only sigh that we’re both in different regions.83

Thus, it seems that Mei Yaochen’s “friend” — almost certainly Ouyang Xiu —
first commented on Han Yu’s skill in using rhymes some time in the late 1040s. Mei was
inspired by Ouyang’s remarks to emulate the Tang poet’s rhymes in 1049, and Ouyang
made a similar attempt in 1051, altering the topic to Mount Lu, and adding his irregular
metre.

I have analysed this feature of rhyme in some detail for three reasons: first, a
number of Western scholars have suggested that Han Yu and his circle influenced Ouyang
Xiu,84 and the aspect of rhyme provides a piece of hard evidence for this claim which
none of them has noted previously. Secondly, since Ouyang doubtless viewed Han Yu’s
use of rhyme as an “ancient” characteristic, his own preoccupation with rhyme, and
incidentally, with repetition, should also be seen as attempts to emulate the Ancients in his
poetic technique.

Finally, and related to the second point, we see here a deep concern with the craft
of poetry which goes beyond the appreciation of evocative couplets in many of Ouyang’s
other “Remarks on Poetry.” Previously, scholars have tended to refer to both Ouyang and
Mei Yaochen as “easy” poets using prosaic, everyday diction to describe the world as
accurately as possible.85 Jonathan Chaves, in particular, continually emphasizes the
“almost scientific precision” with which Mei depicts objects, and suggests that “prose
paraphrase” is often the best way to give the flavour of his poems.86 Not surprisingly, in

83 Ibid.
84 Yoshikawa 62,64; Chaves, op.cit. 82-85; Egan 105.
85 Egan 83-84, on Ouyang; Chaves, op.cit.133-134 on Mei.
86 Chaves, op.cit. 128; 219-220 respectively.
order to reach this conclusion, Chaves underplays Mei's skilful use of rhyme and other aspects of his craftsmanship. For example, apart from the ingenious imitation of Han Yu's rhymes just quoted, another poem which displays Mei's skill is “Cai Junmo Showed Me a Large, Ancient Crossbow Trigger” (dated c.1052).87 Chaves gives an excellent introduction to crossbow triggers, demonstrating the way in which Mei's description accords remarkably closely with the archaeological evidence. Yet he fails to mention that of the poem's sixteen lines, all but one rhyme, making the work virtually a full Boliangti.88

I would suggest, therefore, that the true brilliance of Mei's poetry, and even more so that of Ouyang Xiu, lies in their ingenious, even perhaps incongruous, mixing of the everyday and mundane with the highly literary. And to underestimate or overlook the latter is surely to remove a great part of the pleasure of reading their works. One is not merely neglecting certain technical features in their poetry, but far more crucially, refusing to admit the extraordinary, and to use the Western term, “witty” nature of their juxtapositions.

As a final illustration of Ouyang's ingenious utilization of rhyme, again involving Mei Yaochen, a poem by Mei entitled “Prefectural Judge Fan Urges Me to Give Up Wine” (dated c.1046)89 contains some very strange and harsh rhyme words, including several exclamations and interrogative particles — for instance zena 則那 (“what's the use of that? then what?”); e 阿 (“flattering words; ingratiating words”); ruhe 如何 (“how about that!”); and he 訝 (an exclamation expressing strong censure: “hmph!”). Since Mei is relating that he can no longer drink wine without vomiting violently, growing dizzy and

88 For the boliangti, see my discussion of the poem “Parrot Shell” in the chapter on water above, and that on “How Happy the People of Xiangyang . . .” in my chapter 3.
89 Zhu, op.cit. vol.2, 333; translated in Chaves, op.cit. 139-140.
making himself ill, the harsh sounds of his rhymes are entirely appropriate in evoking his discomfort.

Ouyang’s poem “Olives,” of 1050, is a slightly longer work — 22 lines to Mei’s 16. He borrows five of Mei’s rhymes, including he 詶, for which he uses a variant character he 呀; zena 則那, and he 何; and he adds some equally jarring rhymes of his own, such as e 病 (“chronic illness”), and e 咒 (“to chant a poem”). Hence Ouyang has not simply imitated Mei’s original, but has again created an equally ingenious poem on a new topic. Just as olives require some chewing before one can truly appreciate their flavour, so Ouyang’s rhymes must be carefully savoured within their literary context in order to appreciate the extent of their wit.

The Necessity of Poetry

Before proceeding to further analysis of Ouyang’s poetic techniques, I would like to mention a more general concern implicit in the two theoretical passages translated above, and made explicit by other entries in the “Remarks on Poetry.” In the first passage, Ouyang declares that a wide variety of subjects deserve the attention of the superior person, including humour and joking, and the crude and base — “all the more so in poetry!” He then points to the catholic interests of the writers of the Classic of Poetry. In the next passage, he notes that Han Yu considered poetry a peripheral pastime, but that he still composed wonderful works on “human feelings” and the “characteristics of objects,” including laughter, conversation and the like.

90 Ji vol.1, 2.7. See my translation and discussion in chapter 3 above.
91 See below for Ouyang’s comparison of reading Mei Yaochen’s poems with eating olives, in another section of his “Remarks on Poetry.” A precursor to Ouyang’s poem on olives is that of Wang Yucheng (in Xiaoxu Ji op cit. 62). Significantly, Wang makes no effort to echo the sense of his ideas, quite similar to those of Ouyang, with his sounds.
Ouyang's implication is that poetry should delineate those areas of human experience which other kinds of writing necessarily overlook. With regard to another literary genre, his informal collection of anecdotes entitled “Notes on Returning to the Fields” (Guitian lu), Ouyang explicitly makes such an assertion, declaring: “The ‘Notes on Returning to the Fields’ contain minor matters of the court, things which the historians did not record but which were worth copying down from the tidbits of laughter and conversation among the gentry.”92 Here, he uses virtually the same phrase xiaotan ("laughter and conversation") as he did in his comments on Han Yu, only inverting the order of the characters. He makes the point even more clearly in another entry from the “Remarks on Poetry,” this time dealing directly with poetic composition:93

The one hundred Palace Lyrics (Gongci 宫词) by Wang Jian [c.767-c.830]94 mostly relate events within the Tang Imperial Palace. All those things which the histories, biographies and stories do not deal with can usually be found in his poems.

An example is: “Within the Palace, for several days there were no shouts or cries, / Then they passed out Prince Teng’s butterfly illustrations.”95 Yuan Ying — Prince Teng — was the son of Emperor Gaozu [r.618-627]. Neither the New nor Old Tang Histories describe his abilities. Only the “Record of Famous Painters” briefly notes that he was good at painting, and even then does not mention his skill at doing

92 From his preface to the “Notes on Returning to the Fields,” in Ji vol.3, 14.77; full translation of preface in Egan 222-223.
93 Ji vol.3, 14.115: entry xvi.
94 Wang Jian 王建, a Mid-Tang poet and friend of Zhang Ji, was known for poetry of social criticism. Ouyang does not mention this aspect, concentrating instead on his “Palace Lyrics.” Chinese texts of these works are found in Wang Jian shiji (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1959) 88-96 (juan 10).
95 No.60 of Wang’s “Palace Lyrics,” in ibid. 92. Wang has “printed” instead of Ouyang’s “passed.”
butterflies. And the "Judgments on Painting" merely says: "He was skilled at doing butterflies, as can be seen from [Wang] Jian's poem." Someone heard that today one family still possesses an illustration by him.

All those who were good at particular arts in Tang times — for instance, "Great Aunt Gongsun dancing with swords"; 96 "Cao Gang playing the pipa"; 97 and "Mi Jiarong's singing" 98 — are found in the poetic lines of the Tang greats. As a result, they have become famous in later generations.

At that time, there were numerous superior people who hid their virtue, went into reclusion in mountains, forests and rural fields, and were no longer heard about in the world. But [those with] lower skills and peripheral arts found a medium of expression, 99 hence [their names] were passed down and never decayed. It seems that everything depends on good or bad fortune!

At first glance, Ouyang seems to belittle the information contained in the poems of Wang Jian and his contemporaries, since it deals with "lower skills and peripheral arts" (jiangong moyi 貧工末藝). However he uses very similar adjectives to describe poetry in the passages I translated earlier: the superior person should not neglect the "crude and base" (bili 鄙俚); and Han Yu considered poetry a "peripheral matter" (moshi 末事) yet still produced wonderful compositions. Surely, therefore, Ouyang's main point here is to

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97 See Bai Juyi's poem "Listening to Cao Gang's Pipa, Also Shown to Zhonglian," in Bai Xiangshan ji, op.cit. juan 56, 97-98.
99 Literally, "found something to attach [themselves] to and lodge [themselves] in."
prove that, given good fortune and a "medium of expression" — in this case, a poem— even the most minor and trivial occurrences can attain a kind of immortality.

Closely allied to this view of poetry, as transmitting information valuable for later generations, which would otherwise be lost, is Ouyang’s deep concern with factual accuracy in poems. This concern is revealed in several ways throughout his “Remarks on Poetry.” First, he corrects a number of factual errors that he has discovered in the works of his near contemporaries — in entry (i), he has spotted a historical error in a couplet by one Li Fang (925-996) concerning the number of times the founding Song Emperor made offerings to his ancestors; in another entry, he points out misunderstandings of court protocol, and a mistake about the timing of bell-ringing in Buddhist monasteries. In still another entry, he praises a poet for a quatrain which, though rather shallow and simple in its diction, manages to depict the “real situation” — officials visiting a wineshop after their morning audience, and following a custom of keeping silent while they drink — with perfect accuracy.

A second way in which Ouyang reveals his preoccupation with facts in poetry is through his determination to rediscover the meanings of particular words or phrases that are now obsolete or divorced from their original context. For instance, after noting two obsolete expressions in poems by Tang writers, and stating that nobody today seems able to explain them, he concludes: “I only record them here, since there must be someone who knows about them.” In a later entry, he is again forced to admit defeat in deciphering a

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100 Ji vol.3, 14.111. Ouyang refers to Li by his posthumous title of Li Wenzheng Gong.
102 Ibid. 14.111: entry iii. Even the famous entry praising Mei Yaochen’s poem on a blowfish (literally “river pig fish”) is preoccupied with the factual accuracy that Mei achieves under a “natural” surface. For translations and comments, see Chaves, op.cit. 179-185; Owen, op.cit. 365-366.
phrase by Wang Jian, and concludes with a very similar request for information from the scholarly community.\textsuperscript{104}

There is no need to conclude, with Stephen Owen, that because Ouyang notices the factual errors in more recent poets, he is therefore tacitly questioning his assumption that earlier Tang poets can provide any reliable information whatsoever.\textsuperscript{105} Actually, the opposite is more probable: because Ouyang reads poetry to discover aspects of life neglected by other writings, it is extremely important to him that the writer gives a reliable account. Hence, he corrects any errors he discovers, so that future readers will gain a more accurate understanding of his own generation. No doubt there are mistakes in earlier writings — whether the result of faulty transmission or lack of knowledge on the part of the writer — but Ouyang is confident that overall they give a dependable picture, as in the case of Wang Jian’s “Palace Lyrics.”

I feel that a deeper question at issue here is whether Ouyang’s view of life is basically optimistic and positive, or pessimistic. Owen tends here to emphasize the sense of loss, of continual misunderstanding (or “misprision”) and broken transmission in the literary tradition.\textsuperscript{106} Ultimately, he implies, our efforts to piece together a writer’s works are futile. Owen’s view may be valid for other writers, but I would agree with Yoshikawa Kōjirō that Ouyang Xiu’s outlook on life, and specifically on the transmissability of texts, was generally optimistic.\textsuperscript{107} Of course, he is well aware that even valuable writings are

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid. 14.118: entry xxiv. This entry seems to include two separate anecdotes, but is treated as a single paragraph in Ouyang’s collection. The section on Wang Jian is the second part of the entry.

\textsuperscript{105} See Owen’s commentary in op.cit. 383. He makes similar comments about Ouyang’s evaluation of poets, for instance, that praise of one poet necessarily involves “dispraise” of another; therefore, by implication, Ouyang has no strong preference for any style (ibid. 386-387). Elsewhere, Owen is less extreme in treating Ouyang as an almost “postmodern” figure, for example 372-373, where he parallels Ouyang’s concern for preserving past poetry with his love of collecting ancient inscriptions.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid. 383-384; comments on entries xviii and xix. Also 363-365, on entry vii.

\textsuperscript{107} Yoshikawa 64.
lost over time — he can see this already with certain late-Tang and Song poets. But far stronger is his belief that, given a degree of good fortune, fine writers can attain immortality by means of their words. Out of all the destruction and loss comes, amazingly, survival and a strange vitality. His comment in the poem “Book-Reading,” of 1061, is typical of his pronouncements on this theme: “Thus do I know that what lasts long is valued,/And the costliest treasures are refined a hundred times.”

Hence, the third way in which Ouyang emphasizes factual accuracy is in the broader, and to him no doubt most crucial, area of reputation. In his “Remarks on Poetry,” he sets down several “fine” couplets by earlier poets which he feels deserve to be remembered; and he attempts to revive the reputations of poets unjustly neglected. Yet his real contribution in this area surely lies outside the “Remarks” in his tireless efforts to produce editions of poets and writers whose works are worth transmitting, and in his prefaces to similar collections made by others. Not only did he compile the collected works of Mei Yaochen and Su Shunqin, but also composed prefaces to the writings of

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109 Ji vol.1, 2.53; also partially translated in my biographical sketch above. Cf. Ouyang’s second poem on the Returning Geese Pavilion, in which his friend carves Ouyang’s poem on stone, allowing it to last for hundreds of generations; also the poem “Shun Spring at Qizhou,” where Ouyang hopes his composition will last as long as the works of the legendary Emperor Shun. Both these poems appear in chapter 4.

110 Most obviously Mei Yaochen, mentioned in several entries; also Su Shunqin and his brother Su Shunyuan (1006-1054), (entry xix, Ji vol.3, 14.116), and Xie Bochu, for whom see n.108 above. He even tries to revive the reputations of the Xikun poets Qian Weiyan (ibid. 14.117, entry xxii), Yang Yi and Liu Yun (ibid. 14.117, entry xxi). See below for discussion of the Xikun style. Owen, op.cit. 364, also notes Ouyang’s attempt to remember and record, correct and preserve fragments.

111 Prefaces to their collections in Ji vol.1, 5.63-64; and ibid. 5.53-54.
less well known contemporaries, such as the sister of Xie Bochu, Zhong Na (999-1053), Jiang Xiufu (1005-1060), and Xue Kui (967-1034).¹¹²

It is particularly in these prefaces, most of whose dedicatees have already died, that we find Ouyang praising the vitality which remains in their writings and even grows with the passing of the years. And he explains his motivation in his “Preface to the Collected Writings of Jiang Linji [Xiufu],”¹¹³ composed in 1070. Having noted that he was fortunate enough to know most of the outstanding people of his age, he continues:

Yet though I was able to associate with them, suddenly I found myself mourning their deaths, and then writing their funeral inscriptions. This was very sad. I am sure that since the death of Yin Shilu [Yin Shu, d.1047], there are at least twenty people for whom I have written inscriptions these last twenty five years. And there were others for whom I did not finish writing the inscription in time, and those who weren’t my friends or acquaintances, for whom I still wrote them: I am not counting these. Alas! There are so many of them — not merely good and superior people, so hard to find and easily lost, but even my friends — who have all been dispersed and scattered.

When I look back and view their time in this world, their births and deaths, rise and decline, it seems so tragic! And among them, if there are those who suffered pain and worry, who fell into traps, who faced dire difficulties and were forced into exile until their deaths, or who were

¹¹² For Xie’s sister, see *Ji* vol.1, 5.59-60; for Zhong, ibid. 5.75; for Jiang, ibid. 5.77, partially translated below; and for Xue, ibid 5.77-78. Obviously, some of these prefaces were written for personal reasons, not simply due to admiration for their writings. Xue Kui, for instance, was the father of Ouyang’s third wife. Yet the frequency with which Ouyang dwells on the possibility of people living on through their writing is noteworthy.

continually restricted to low positions — who died without fulfilling their potential, so that only their writings could still be seen in the world — is this not also something to be mourned?

But such being the case, then even the remnants of their works and their damaged manuscripts are still worth cherishing — all the more so those which can be passed down through generations, and last into the distant future! Consequently, following the deaths of Shengyu [Mei Yaochen] and Zimei [Su Shunqin], I not only wrote funeral inscriptions for their tombs, but also collected and ordered their writings and composed prefaces for them . . .

Ouyang concludes by noting that Jiang Xiufu was a friend of Mei and Su, and since his writings are equally fine, he has decided to collect them for posterity as well.

What is the connection between Ouyang’s deep concern for factual accuracy, his efforts to revive the reputations of unjustly neglected writers, his faith in the possibility of immortality attained through the written word, and his own poetic practice?

Certainly there are parallels to these ideas in the content of his poems. His praise for Mei Yaochen and Su Shunqin constantly recurs in compositions addressed to them. Similarly, he often expresses the hope that his own poetry will be passed down through the generations. As for factual accuracy, Ouyang is not nearly as precise and careful in his descriptions as Mei Yaochen; yet in the broader sense of recording interesting details from everyday life — eating, drinking and various pastimes, for example — he is

114 I have translated some examples, e.g. “Green Waves Pavilion” and “Song of a Moon Inkstone” on Su, in chapters 4 and 5 respectively; also “Composed on Meeting for a Drink at Shengyu’s House . . .” on Mei, in chapter 3.
115 See n.109 above.
116 I demonstrated the difference in my discussion of Ouyang’s poem “Picture of a Climbing Cart,” in chapter 2 above. Chaves also notes Mei’s precision: op.cit. 210-218.
tireless. But is there any way in which Ouyang’s poetic style reflects his preoccupation with death and its aftermath? I believe a positive answer to this question is possible, but further evidence is necessary from Ouyang’s comments on poetry before attempting it.

**Incongruous Juxtaposition and Caricature**

Ronald Egan has noted that Ouyang makes a definite distinction between the plain, prosaic and carefully descriptive style of Mei Yaochen, and the wild, heroic, extraordinary style of Su Shunqin; and this contrast, Egan feels, might just as well be applied to two distinct stylistic tendencies within Ouyang’s own poetry, namely, serene, tranquil works, and works on extraordinary topics full of hyperbole and strange diction.\(^{117}\)

There are a number of problems with this thesis. First, it is true that Ouyang did compose many poems that display a “serene” mood, particularly during his second exile in Chuzhou (the late 1040s) and towards the end of his life in the late 1060s. However, as far as I am aware, he never describes Mei Yaochen’s poetry as serene or tranquil. In the passages Egan refers to, the nearest Ouyang comes to tranquil is the phrase “profound and distant, ancient and bland” (shenyuan gudan 深遠 古淡);\(^{118}\) but he qualifies this phrase with others, portraying Mei’s poems as “teeth of stone [or jagged stones] washed in a cold stream”; claiming that they resemble a beauty who still retains some charm, even after she grows old; and that they are “extremely hard to swallow,” and “must be chewed for a long time” before their flavour emerges.\(^{119}\) Are these really tranquil or serene images? At the very least, there is an element of the grotesque and shocking here. In another poem,

\(^{117}\) Egan 104; also 84, where he mentions the term “serene,” and distinguishes it firmly from “strange, fantastic” works.

\(^{118}\) From entry xiii, in *Ji* vol.3, 14.112. Cf. Egan 103-104.

\(^{119}\) Ibid. See full translation of this passage below.
Ouyang is even more vivid, claiming that Mei's poetry fills him with "terror"! Similarly, reading Mei's works — for instance most of those translated by Chaves — one is struck by their frequent direct and uncompromising description of pain and suffering: again hardly what one would term tranquil.

Secondly, as I have demonstrated in my analysis of Ouyang's poems, he is more likely to include both extraordinary and mundane, wild and serene, elements within individual poems, than to separate his moods rigidly between different works. This is perhaps my main objection to Egan's thesis: he implies that there is little variety or emotional contrast within each poem, thus overlooking one of the central and most compelling features of Ouyang's work.

Nevertheless, Egan's suggestion that Ouyang combines divergent stylistic tendencies in his own poetry as much as in his comments on others' works is certainly a valid insight, with the above qualifications. In fact, judging by most of the "Remarks on Poetry" and his own poetic practice, juxtaposition and contrasting of unlike objects seem

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120 Ji vol. 1, 1.32. Title of poem translates as "Autumn Sentiments: Two Poems Sent to Shengyu," with a note to the title saying "Imitating the style of Meng Jiao." See poem 2, line 10 for Ouyang's characterization. Chaves translates this poem (op.cit. 87-88), but for "terror" (song 慑) uses the much more flattering "awe." I cannot find such a definition for song.

121 Another problem with Egan's argument which should be pointed out is his rather careless reading of Yoshikawa's chapter on Ouyang's poetry. For instance, Egan 97, writes: "It will not do to argue, as Yoshikawa does, that the sorrowful element in Ou-yang Hsiu's collection is one that occurs rarely and only as a result of exceptional stress" (referring to Yoshikawa 66-67). There is no such argument in Yoshikawa, either on those pages or elsewhere. In fact, Yoshikawa seems eager to choose some of Ouyang's most melancholy works for comment, including that on the death of his daughter (66) and another beginning "I have no way to drive off deep sorrow" (67). His argument is rather that Ouyang's poetry displays a "breadth of outlook" and fondness for "philosophical comment" (65), which helps to restrain "preoccupation with sorrow" (64); in this respect, his works show the influence of Han Yu's poetry, Han being the least melancholy of the Tang poets (64). Egan 105, mentions the influence of Han Yu, but does not cite Yoshikawa in this connection.
to well up from the very root of Ouyang’s being, affecting much of his oeuvre. The entry on Mei and Su from the “Remarks,” partially quoted above, is a typical example:122

Shengyu and Zimei became famous at the same time, but their two styles are extremely different. The power of Zimei’s brush is unhampered and heroic; he produces wonders through overflowing and striding out, sweeping across and cutting off. Shengyu’s clear thoughts are refined and subtle; he takes as his intention the profound and distant, detached and bland.

Each is extremely good at what he does best, and even a fine debater couldn’t say which is superior. Once, in my poem “Travelling by Night, at Shuigu,”123 I gave a vague idea of their merits:

Zimei’s vitality is particularly heroic:
Ten thousand caves howling with a single cry!
Sometimes he overflows with wild ferocity,
Drunken ink splashes, pouring on every side.
He is like a thoroughbred racehorse,
Once he starts, he cannot be reined in;
Or before the table, emptied pearls and beads:
Impossible to follow them all at once.
Old Man Mei concentrates on clarity and concision:
Teeth of stone washed in a cold stream.124

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123 Full title of poem translates as “Travelling by Night, at Shuigu, Sent to Zimei and Shengyu,” dated 1044. In Ji vol.1, 1.16.
124 Burton Watson, in Yoshikawa 36, has “washing his stone teeth in the cold stream,” which is followed by Chaves, op.cit. 125; Egan 103, gives the passive “his stone teeth are washed in a cold stream.” I’m not sure what they mean by Mei’s stone teeth — perhaps an ancient brand of dentures? — or his method for washing them in a stream (suspending
He has already composed poems for thirty years,
And regards me as a younger protegé.
His diction becomes ever more refined and fresh,
Despite the maturity of his heart and mind.
It resembles a beautiful, elegant lady:
Though old, she still retains some charm!
His recent poems are especially ancient and hard,
I chew, but they’re extremely hard to swallow;
It’s just like when I try to eat olives:
Their true flavour only strengthens over time.
The freedom of Su overflows from his vitality,
But in the world he causes shock and bewilderment.
Mei is poor, and I alone understand him:
Ancient goods are hard to sell at present.

Though my description is not well-crafted, I would say it gives a crude idea
of what they are like — but I cannot judge which of them is superior!

Ouyang immediately makes it clear that he is comparing two unlike objects, in this
case the respective poetic styles of Mei and Su. Significantly, he declares twice that no-
one can judge which of the two is superior: such divergent tendencies both have a place
within the broad confines of his poetic sphere.

Another feature of Ouyang’s description here, which has apparently been
overlooked or left unstated by previous scholars, is its use of humorous exaggeration

himself upside down from an overhanging tree, possibly?). Only Owen, op.cit.380,
correctly omits the subject, implying that these are jagged stones in the stream, with his
excellent version “teeth of stone scoured by cold rapids.” Compare the second line of the
poem, on Su — “Ten thousand caves howling with a single cry!” — which is a similar
construction.

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which, as I suggested above, results in rather grotesque portraits of his friends and their poems. Su is completely out of control. The horse analogy contrasts clearly with the horse-driving simile by which Ouyang portrayed Han Yu’s skill with rhyme: Han has complete control in spite of the twisting, bumpy road; but once Su has started, he “cannot be reined in.” The other metaphors are similarly chaotic: “ink splashes, pouring on every side”; pearls and beads scatter all over the place; ten thousand caves “howl.” This is a caricature very reminiscent of Ouyang’s other poetic portraits. Likewise, as I indicated above, Ouyang’s depiction of Mei, though obviously an expression of enthusiasm, does not exactly strike one as an unalloyed compliment.\(^{125}\)

In this entry, Ouyang thus endorses two important elements in his conception of poetry — comparison of unlike objects, and humorous exaggeration — which combine features of both style (diction, juxtaposition/antithesis, humour), and content (caricature and grotesque imagery). These elements are also central to his own poetic practice. Of course, most of this entry is actually a portion of Ouyang’s poem “Travelling by Night, at Shuigu . . .,” from 1044, yet it is interesting that the prose sections reinforce such an interpretation, rather than confuting it. To ascertain whether Ouyang adopts a similar viewpoint in other contexts, we need only examine some more of his “Remarks.” Here is another entry involving Mei Yaochen:\(^{126}\)

\(^{125}\) No translation could soften the bluntness of “extremely hard to swallow” (ku nan zuo 举报); some scholars have mellowed down Ouyang’s comparison of Mei’s diction to an old lady — Watson, op.cit. 36, has “a beautiful woman/Whose charm does not fade with the years” — but still, one cannot really avoid Ouyang’s use of “old” (lao 老), with its connotations, fully exploited in his other mature poems, of wrinkles, grey hair and stiff joints.

\(^{126}\) Entry v, in Ji vol.3, 14.112. Also translated by Owen, op.cit. 366.
Scholar Su Zizhan [Su Shi] is a man of Shu. He once obtained a Man cloth bowcase, sold by a South-Western native at Yujingjian. Its pattern was an embroidery text of Mei Shengyu’s poem on spring snow. Among the works of Shengyu’s collection, this poem is not one of the best. No doubt it is because his reputation is known throughout the Empire, and every poem and song of his is passed around even to the barbarian tribes, that people of foreign climes esteem [this work] so highly. Zizhan, considering that I am the one who especially understands Shengyu, obtained [the bowcase] and presented it to me.

One of the old possessions in my home is a zither carved out by one Lei Hui in the third year of the Baoli reign period [in the Tang, 827 AD], some two hundred and fifty years ago. Its sound is clear and transcendent, like the striking of metal or stone [chimes]. Therefore, I used the cloth as a zither case instead. The two objects are truly treasured possessions in my home!

In the most “unlikely” place, Ouyang’s friend and protegé Su Shi discovers a poem by Mei Yaochen. Ouyang, however, manages to make the discovery “natural” by using it, perhaps slightly tongue-in-cheek, as evidence for Mei’s immense reputation. The argument is very similar to that of Ouyang’s poem “Answering Shengyu’s Rhapsody ‘White Parrot’” (from 1059), in which the exotic, speaking parrot, regaining its freedom, would return to its home in the South-Western tropics, and would naturally help to spread Mei’s poetry all over the world.

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127 Man referred to the indigenous peoples of south-central and south-west China. Yujingjian was a small town in Rongzhou (on the borders of present Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou Provinces, in south-west China).
128 One version of the text quotes the whole poem. See n.126 above.
129 Translated in my chapter 4.
Having gained possession of this bowcase, which combines the foreign with the familiar in such an unexpected manner, Ouyang then finds an equally ingenious justification for using it as a zither case. The sound of the zither echoes the style of Mei’s poetry, both being “clear and transcendent.” As in the previous entry, Ouyang is most at home juxtaposing unlike objects, and searching for a clever way to fit them together. Here, however, the bowcase is “presented” to him — he implies that such fascinating incongruities occur not only in his fertile imagination and writings, but in the world too.

The group of Ouyang’s “Remarks” which are basically jokes or humorous anecdotes are most relevant to this tendency towards comparing unlike things. Though Ouyang uses two of these entries as examples of how not to write poetry, it is clear that he enjoys their humour, and that this is one of the main reasons for sharing them with the reader. Thus, he relates an anecdote by Mei Yaochen which begins with the warning: “Poetic lines may be perfectly reasonable and clear in meaning, but if their diction errs on the side of shallowness and crudeness to the point of being ridiculous, it is also a fault.” Mei then gives two examples, the second of which is supposed to describe the difficulty of producing a good poetic line: “All day I search and cannot find it,/Yet given time, it comes by itself.” Mei declares, a little unfairly perhaps, that this couplet could also refer to someone looking for a lost cat.

Is this really a prescription against writing bad poetry? Ouyang produced numerous examples of equally plain and “crude” lines and couplets throughout his career. Is not the main point rather Mei Yaochen’s ingenuity in discovering a second possible

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130 In a poem sent to Mei, Ouyang uses virtually the same simile “like striking metal or stone [chimes]” (ru ji jin shi 如 捶 金 石) to refer to Mei’s poetry as he does to describe his own zither here. See Ji vol.1, 1.32, “Autumn Sentiments, Two Poems . . .,” poem 2, line 9: Mei’s poems are “mother-of-pearl knocking on metal and stone [chimes]” (langgan kou jin shi 琅玕 叩 金 石).


132 Ibid. 14.115 (entry xv).

133 Ibid.
reference that transforms a plain description into a humorous and unexpected double entendre? Perhaps the difference between Ouyang's own poetry and the unfortunate writer quoted here is that Ouyang, like Mei, is always aware of the multiple associations and complexity of words, and intentionally juxtaposes the plain and the refined to entertaining effect. In this sense, the mixing of cat (plain, everyday) with poetic inspiration (refined) in the above entry is quite typical of Ouyang's poetic practice.  

Another kind of anecdote, represented by entries (vi) and (xiv) in the "Remarks on Poetry," does not even pretend to give any prescription for writing poetry, but simply relates the clever use of poetic rejoinders. In the latter entry, a rather sober scholar Lü Mengzheng (944-1011) has gained a reputation for creating startling poetic lines. One Hu Dan asks him for an example, and Lü recites: "I have trimmed the wick of the cold lamp right down, yet still my dreams do not come." Lü is preparing for the civil service examination, hence his line gives the impression of a hardworking student, not sleeping even when his lamp gutters. But Hu Dan teases him with a pun, saying: "So this is only a 'fellow thirsty for sleep!'" A note indicates that "thirsty" (渴) is pronounced 渴 in colloquial speech, which would make it a homonym of 克 ("to overcome"). Hence, another more complimentary interpretation of Hu's comment would be "a fellow overcoming [the temptation to] sleep," i.e. a hard-working scholar. Hu probably intends both possibilities — giving with one hand while taking away with the other. At any rate, Ouyang relates that Lü was very offended and left the party. Though Hu's remark is not

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134 Elsewhere, Ouyang notes the importance of judging lines within their whole context, referring to one of his own poems from Yiling: "Without the second line, the first would be unbearable; but once you see the second, the first becomes quite well-crafted! This is doubtless the reason that literature is so difficult to evaluate." Ji vol.3, 14.123, comment entitled "Explanation of a Poem from Xiazhou." The first, unbearable, line is: "I suspect that spring doesn't come to the edge of the world."

135 Ji vol. 3, 14.115.

136 Ibid.
very friendly, Ouyang seems to appreciate his ingenuity in expressing opposite implications with a single word.\footnote{The other clever rejoinder (entry vi: ibid. 14.112) involves a learned monk, Zanning, who counters an allusive insult by a Confucian scholar with an equally allusive insult of his own, perfectly parallel with that of the scholar. Translated in Owen, op.cit. 367-368. In previous chapters, I have noted many examples of Ouyang’s word-play: to mention just a few, he plays on the double meaning of \textit{wen zhang} (\textit{fine design}, and \textit{literary work}); he describes a stone that resembles a bamboo shoot, claiming that it “grows” (\textit{sheng}) on the cliffside; and he draws together a person and a mountain by using the same adjectives to depict their appearance: \textit{qingshan baishou} (\textit{dark-shirted and white-haired}), and \textit{qingyun baishi} (\textit{dark clouds and white stones}). See pp.47, 53 and 61 above. Other such examples abound in Ouyang’s poetry.}

If these entries underscore Ouyang’s delight in comparing unlike objects, the following passage suggests a possible source for his inclination towards exaggeration and caricature. Though the tenor of the entry resembles previously cited examples of his interest in the factual basis of poems, Ouyang’s use of the word “enjoyed” (\textit{xi}) in the first sentence indicates that he also recognizes these Tang couplets to be well-crafted caricatures.\footnote{\textit{Ji} vol.3, 14.113-114, entry x. Compare the parallel passage in Ouyang’s “Calligraphy Exercises,” where Ouyang provides some more examples of Meng and Jia’s expert description of poverty, and notes that their “followers were especially able to carve out words of poverty and suffering as a way of enjoying themselves.” (\textit{Ji} vol.3, 14.131-132).}

Meng Jiao [751-814] and Jia Dao [c.793-c.865] both died of poverty due to writing poetry; but all their lives, they particularly enjoyed composing lines on poverty and suffering.

Meng has a poem “Moving Home,” which says: “I borrowed a cart to load my household possessions,/But all my possessions did not fill the cart!”\footnote{I haven’t yet located this poem.} This is simply to possess nothing. Also his “Thanking Someone for a Kind Gift of Charcoal”\footnote{Now entitled “Responding to a Friend’s Gift of Charcoal,” in QTS 12.4262 (\textit{juan} 380).} says: “Warming up, my hunched body can
straighten itself." Someone said that if he had not personally experienced this, he could not have expressed such a line.

Jia Dao writes: "Though there are 'silken threads' at my temples, They cannot be used to weave a coat for the cold." And even if they could be woven, how many could he find? And his poem "Morning Hunger" goes: "Sitting, I hear a zither from the western bedroom, Frozen, two or three strings break."

Ouyang seldom had reason to complain of poverty, except in his early youth. It is Mei Yaochen who becomes for him the epitome of the poor, unrecognized scholar, and many of his poems contain caricatured portraits of Mei's penury. An excellent example is "Composed on Meeting for a Drink at Shengyu's House . . .," of 1059, translated in chapter three above, where he describes Mei's tiny courtyard with its two dying chrysanthemum bushes, and a group of friends including himself, squeezing into Mei's home to listen to his exquisite poetry. Though there is doubtless exaggeration here, as there perhaps was too in Meng Jiao and Jia Dao's self-portraits, the impact of the caricature depends on a basic connection with the true fact of Mei's lack of success in his career.

For Ouyang, at least, it is also equally important to use caricature in a constructive way — as a means of laughing with others in spite of suffering — rather than as a destructive personal attack; hence his criticism of another friend, Liu Chang, for a rather harsh and heavy-handed reference to Mei's low official status in one of his other "Remarks

141 I.e. thin white hair.
142 From Jia's poem "The Visitor's Delight," in QTS 17.6621-6622 (juan 571).
143 Ibid. 17.6618.
144 Nevertheless, he still composed a few poems adopting a poor scholar persona, one of which I translated in my section on wine-drinking, chapter 3 above.
145 Ji vol.1, 2.43-44.
on Poetry.” By implication, therefore, poetry itself emerges as a response to suffering and difficulty, and caricature is one way to transform the raw pain into a bearable, even compelling, artistic work.

If Ouyang’s portraits of Mei tend to dwell on his friend’s poverty, his self-portraits are preoccupied with drunkenness, and later, with aging and sickness, a point which should be very clear from my previous chapters. Ronald Egan has implied that Ouyang’s distinctive voice, often expressed through the persona of a “Drunken Old Man,” reached its highest stage of development during his second exile in Chuzhou, in the mid-1040s.

I agree that this period saw the first sustained appearance of an identifiable persona in Ouyang’s verse and prose, but I feel that he continued to refine and perfect this technique after the Chuzhou period, turning more and more from the persona of Drunken Old Man to that of Pure Old Man. In the following section, I will provide more evidence for this assertion.

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146 Entry vii, Ji vol.3, 14.112-113. Translated in Owen, op. cit. 363. This entry mainly involves Zheng Gu, an obscure late Tang poet, whose style, Ouyang feels, was not very “superior.” In his career, he only reached the position of Director of the Criminal Administration Bureau (du guan lang zhong 都 官 郎 中), hence he was known to posterity as Zheng Duguan. Towards the end of Mei’s life, he also attained this position. On one occasion, Liu Chang remarked to their circle of friends that Mei’s official career would go no further: he would end up as Mei Duguan just like Zheng before him. Soon afterwards, Mei died, and Ouyang laments that people did call him Mei Duguan. This is not only a slight to Mei’s official status, but also to his poetry, since Zheng was certainly considered a second-rate poet.

147 For poetry as a response to suffering, cf. Ouyang’s preface to Mei Yaochen’s collected works, in which he claims: “It is not that poetry makes people poor, but I believe poverty leads to greater craftsmanship” (Ji vol.1, 5.63-64). Ouyang’s other prose works about Mei and his writing make similar arguments: see “Preface Seeing Off Mei Shengyu as he Returns to Heyang,” and “Written at the End of a Manuscript by Mei Shengyu,” both dated 1032 (Ji vol.2, 8.25-26 and 9.61-62 respectively).

148 Though he does not attempt to trace the chronological development of Ouyang’s use of persona, in his section on Ouyang’s “serene” verse Egan mostly translates poems dealing with the “Drunken Old Man” of Chuzhou (e.g. op.cit. 84-89). In the body of my thesis, I have attempted to redress the balance, showing the sheer variety of personae which Ouyang adopts, especially during the 1050s.
The Development of Ouyang’s Poetic Style

Having discerned several features common to Ouyang’s statements on poetic style and his own poetic practice, I will conclude by tracing the development of his poetry, both before the Chuzhou period — from his first works, through the Yiling exile, to the early 1040s in Kaifeng and Zhending — and beyond into the 1050s and 1060s. I will focus on his shifting views about the style and function of poetry, and define his unique contribution to the Chinese poetic tradition. Some of Ouyang’s other “Remarks on Poetry” seem relevant to specific periods of his poetic development, and I will refer to them as they affect the course of my discussion.

I feel that throughout his poetic career, Ouyang was attempting to combine two contrasting stylistic tendencies which might be summed up as the carefully crafted style and the energetic, free style. Certain descriptive phrases constantly recur in his “Remarks” characterizing these two tendencies. On the one hand, he praises various poets for “profound thought that is refined and subtle” (tansi jingwei) or for their “remarkably painstaking conception” (gousi youjian). On the other hand, his admiration extends to poets who are “untrammeled and free” (haofang), a compound he associates with “heroic writing” (xiongwen) that is “lean and strong” (qiujin), and deals with the “wonderful” (miao) or the rare (qi).
Judging by frequency of occurrence, it is the latter group of phrases associated with *haofang* that Ouyang particularly wishes to stress. However, the fact that he refers to the highly allusive and carefully crafted poems in the Xikun style as “heroic” (*xiong* 雄), and that one of his most favoured poets, Mei Yaochen, is firmly placed at the “refined thought” (*jingsi*) end of the spectrum, precludes any simplistic conclusions about Ouyang’s preference for one or the other tendency. I suggest that Ouyang views the greatest poet as one who can excel at both tendencies simultaneously.

Probably the first style which clearly influenced Ouyang’s own poetic practice was that of the Xikun poets. A number of works grouped at the beginning of the regulated verse section of Ouyang’s “Outer Collection” (*Waiji*) display most of the characteristics normally attributed to Xikun poets like Yang Yi, namely, use of densely allusive parallel couplets; evocation of a gloomy, decadent atmosphere resembling the works of late Tang poets like Li Shangyin (c.813-c.858); a preference for regulated verse over longer, ancient-style forms; and a conscious obscuring of any direct relation between the poet’s life and the content of the works.

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152 As Ouyang explains in entry xxi (ibid. 14.117), Yang Yi and Liu Yun brought out a collection of poems by themselves and their circle of friends matching each others’ rhymes. The full title of the volume was *Xikun chouchang ji* 西昆酬唱集 (“Xikun Collection of Poems and Responses”). Egan 13, notes that Xikun alludes to a legendary imperial library in the Kunlun mountains, and that the collection was published about 1004. The style of the poems in the collection tends to imitate the late-Tang poet Li Shangyin, i.e. densely allusive and recondite. Ouyang goes on to relate that after the Xikun collection came out, people of the time all competed to copy its style. As far as I can see, although his mature style is quite different from Yang and Liu, Ouyang never censured the Xikun poets; on the contrary, he showers them with praise. Therefore, I cannot agree that his whole approach to poetry was a conscious attempt to oppose the Xikun style (Egan 78, 106), or that he considered Xikun poetry “bad and even morally wrong” (ibid. 78).

153 See most of the works in *Ji* vol.2, 7.1-2, especially “Han Palace” (7.1), “Seeing Off Scholar Zhang to be Governor of Yingzhou” (7.2), and “Morning Song” (7.2). Cf. also his highly allusive poem on praying for rain (*Ji* vol.1, 2.63) which I translated in my chapter on water above. There is little difference between these poems and those “typical” of the Xikun poets translated by Chaves (op.cit. 65); Egan (op.cit. 79), and Yoshikawa (op.cit. 371).
Several times in his “Remarks,” Ouyang praises the Xikun poets, especially Yang Yi, Liu Yun and Qian Weiyan. Though his own poems in this vein are mostly undated, Ouyang’s reminder that Qian Weiyan, his first superior, composed one of the best poems describing Luoyang hints that his own Xikun style poetry dates from his first posting in this city, and was written under Qian’s influence.\textsuperscript{154}

Also important is Ouyang’s realization that the poems of the Xikun chouchangji do not slavishly follow a single, highly obscure style, but occasionally avoid the use of allusion altogether.\textsuperscript{155} There is clearly another criterion at work here, apart from allusive density, according to which Ouyang judges poems. What he really admires in the better Xikun poets is the same talent that he has elsewhere praised in Han Yu — both produce “heroic writings” (xiongwen) due to the “force of their brushes” (bili 筆力), and as a result, “there is nothing they cannot achieve” (wushi buke 無施不可).\textsuperscript{156} Flexibility of style — the ability to master any technique and use it where it is most appropriate — is central to the achievement of great poets. Ouyang implies that the Xikun poets were most skilled at varying the extent of their allusions; Han Yu at varying the force of his rhymes.\textsuperscript{157}

Despite the influence of the Xikun poets, particularly evident in his regulated verse, most of Ouyang’s creative efforts after the early 1030s are directed towards ancient-style poetry, in which — as we might expect from such a proponent of stylistic flexibility — simplicity and plainness, overflowing energy and a discursive, argumentative tendency predominate. The most impressive early examples of such ancient-style works

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51). Chaves, however, gives a very balanced account of the breadth of Yang Yi’s poetry and the Xikun collection (64-68), and of Ouyang’s comments on the Xikun style (75-76).
\textsuperscript{154} Entry xxii, Ji vol.3, 14.117.
\textsuperscript{155} Entry xxi, ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} For Han Yu, entry xxvi, ibid. 14.119; for Xikun poets, entry xxi (see previous note). The identical critical vocabulary is striking.
\textsuperscript{157} It should not be so surprising that Ouyang appreciated expert use of allusion, since this technique involves a kind of ingenious coupling of the apparently unlike. See below for Ouyang treating the use of imagery, another poetic technique, as a test of ingenuity.
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are his enormous poem “At Gong County, Seeing the Yellow River for the First Time” (of 1033), and his series of short sketches on Mount Song and the Longmen range (both from 1032). \textsuperscript{158} Instinctively, Ouyang realizes that to depict such splendid, powerful natural objects requires a freer, more expansive poetic style than that of the Xikun collection.

In his “Remarks on Poetry,” Ouyang refers to this contrasting style several times. He associates it with Bai Juyi, though apparently it is the simplicity and plainness of Bai’s ancient style verse that most early Song poets revered, rather than his social criticism. \textsuperscript{159} During the 1030s and early 1040s, many of Ouyang’s longer poems, especially those he sends in lieu of letters, display a rather rambling, almost prosaic, descriptive plainness, with little attempt to include metaphor and simile or adopt a tight artistic structure. \textsuperscript{160}

At the same time, doubtless mainly under the influence of his poetic partnership with Mei Yaochen, Ouyang begins to experiment with various techniques for creating greater interest within this plain style. He was certainly attempting to keep up with Mei’s more rapid poetic output from the early 1030s, and continued to respond to his works after they moved to different parts of the country in 1034. \textsuperscript{161} In his “Remarks on Poetry,”

\textsuperscript{158} For the former, see translation in my chapter on water above; for the latter two series, see Ji vol.1, 6.42-44 and 1.2-4 respectively. Cf. one example from the Longmen series in chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{159} See entry ii, where Ouyang states that at the court of Renzong (r. 1023-1064), many high officials became famous for their poetry, and frequently emulated the style of Bai Juyi. Consequently, their diction was mostly confined to the simple (Ji vol.3, 14.111). Cf. entry viii, ibid.14.113, where one Chen Congyi is referred to, whose poems “mostly resembled” Bai Juyi’s. Of course, there were other poets inspired by Bai’s social criticism as well as his plain diction — for instance, the earlier poet Wang Yucheng (954-1001) — but Ouyang does not mention this aspect in his “Remarks on Poetry.” For further discussion of the Bai Juyi “school” in the Song, see Chaves, op.cit. 51, 59-64. Chaves also demonstrates the importance of social criticism in Mei Yaochen’s poetry, especially in his final chapter. As I have noted, compared to that of Mei, Ouyang’s collection is rather lacking in poetry of social concern.

\textsuperscript{160} For example, the poem to his third wife in lieu of a letter, of 1045 (Ji vol.1, 1.17-18); translated in my biographical sketch above.

\textsuperscript{161} As is evident from his letters to Mei, in which he frequently declares his inability to match Mei’s productivity (see Ji vol.3, 17.33, 34, 36). See also his remark in “Notes on Returning to the Fields,” where he states that Mei has been his poetic partner (shi you 詩
he attributes two important statements on poetic technique to Mei, and although it is not clear when Mei first made his comments (or whether he really made them at all), their emphasis on finding a balance between crafting words and naturally expressing one’s feelings seems relevant for this period.

I mentioned one of these entries earlier, including Mei’s warning: “Poetic lines may be perfectly reasonable and clear in meaning, but if their diction errs on the side of shallowness and crudeness to the point of being ridiculous, it is also a fault.” Mei’s other statement reveals that prevention of shallow and crude diction, particularly when one adopts a basically free and plain style, depends on very careful crafting — the kind of crafting that paradoxically produces a sense of naturalness:

Shengyu once said to me: “Even if poets emphasize the meaning, developing diction is still difficult. Yet if the meaning is fresh and the diction well-crafted (gong 工), and one discovers that which people haven’t expressed before, this is to do well. One must be able to describe a scene that is difficult to express, as if it is before one’s eyes; or to evoke boundless meaning, revealed beyond the words — only then will one reach perfection.

“When Jia Dao writes: ‘In a bamboo basket I carry mountain fruits,/In an earthenware jug I shoulder a stony spring’; and Yao He [c.779-846] writes: ‘My horse follows the mountain deer free,/My chickens

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162 See my discussion of the passages below.
163 Entry xv. See above, n.132.
164 Entry xii, Ji vol.3, 14.114. Also translated by Owen, op.cit. 375-376; and Chaves, op.cit.110-111; and partially by Burton Watson in Yoshikawa 78; and James T.C. Liu, op.cit.135-136. Note, with regard to naturalness, Pope’s lines: “True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance./As those move easiest who have learn’d to dance” (from “An Essay on Criticism,” Butt, op.cit. 155, lines 362-363).
pursue wild birds to their perches,' and the like, they present the wild remoteness of a mountain village and the relaxed nature of official duties there. But they are not as well-crafted as: ‘The region is ancient: roots of sophora emerge;/The official is pure: the bones of his horse protrude.’”

I said: “Well-crafted diction is certainly like that, but as for describing a scene that is difficult to express, or evoking boundless meaning: how does one do that in a poem?”

Shengyu answered: “The writer discovers it in his heart, and the reader comprehends it from the meaning [expressed in the poem]. I’m afraid it is difficult to indicate it in words, but though that is the case, I can still give a sketchy idea of what it is like. If we take Yan Wei’s: ‘At the willow pond, the vernal waters are calm;/On flowery walls, the evening sun lingers’; in presenting the natural scene and characteristics of the season, and in its sense of harmonious vitality, does it not seem to be before your eyes? Or if we take Wen Tingyun’s (c.812-866): ‘The rooster calls in the moonlight over the thatched inn,/A person leaves tracks in the frost on the board bridge’; or Jia Dao’s: ‘Strange wild birds sing in the expanse of wilderness,/The setting sun terrifies the travelling man’; are not the harsh suffering on the road, the sadness of exile, and the longings of the traveller revealed beyond the words?”

Here, Mei gives three sets of antitheses which the poet must somehow resolve in order to produce a fine work. The first is the apparent opposition between “emphasizing meaning” — which I interpret as simple, plain description of a situation — and “well-

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165 This interpretation of the sentence is based on Richard J. Lynn’s review of Chaves, op.cit., in Journal of Asian Studies, vol.xxxvi.3 (1976), 551-554, esp.552.
166 I cannot locate Yan Wei’s dates, but he received his jinshi between 756 and 758.
crafted diction.” Earlier, I mentioned that Ouyang praised the Xikun poets, whose works
tend to focus mainly on craft. In one of the passages on these writers, he also notes that
some people “complain about their using so many allusions, to the point of eccentricity in
diction and obscurity. But they simply don’t understand that this is just a scholar’s
failing.”\[167\] He then adds a couplet which is a fine piece of poetry despite its use of
allusion.

It is very likely that the critics of the Xikun style mentioned here were those who
advocated the plain, simple style attributed to Bai Juyi.\[168\] Yet judging by their literary
criticism and poetic practice, both Ouyang and Mei quickly realized the main drawback of
a style that is too plain, namely, lack of interest. Mei, the narrator of the passage above,
calls for the crafting of poetic diction so that what appears natural has an arresting effect.
He gives three examples of couplets illustrating this first point, the last of which he calls
the most “well-crafted.” In this couplet, neither line is remarkable by itself — one
describes an old tree; the other a thin horse — but cleverly taking advantage of the
required parallelism, which encourages a comparison of the two lines, the poet has
managed to create a rather grotesque amalgam of protruding tree roots and bones jutting
out on the horse: “The region is ancient: roots of sophora emerge;/The official is pure: the

\[167\] From entry xxi (\textit{Ji} vol.3, 14.117).
\[168\] In ibid. Ouyang calls these complaining people “teachers and old folk” (\textit{xiansheng
laobei} 先生老輩), i.e. the previous generation to the Xikun poets. In another entry (viii,
ibid. 14.113) he notes that Chen Congyi had been a famous writer, whose poems mostly
resembled Bai Juyi’s; but when the Xikun collection came out, his style was eclipsed by
that of the Xikun poets, whom everyone followed. Earlier, I quoted Ouyang’s remark that
during the reign of Renzong (1023-1064), many high officials imitated Bai Juyi. It seems,
therefore, that the Bai Juyi “school” had begun with late 10th century poets like Wang
Yucheng and Chen Congyi. It was neglected for some 20 years after the publication of the
Xikun collection (c.1004); but then revived among scholar-officials after the 1020s.
Ouyang adopts the plain style of the Bai “school” during the 1030s, but is unwilling to
eschew aspects of the ingenuity and craft of Xikun poets like Yang Yi, and more
importantly, of the Mid-Tang poets in Han Yu’s circle.
bones of his horse protrude.” It is perhaps this strangeness which Mei terms “discovering that which people have not expressed before.”

The other two antitheses are related to that above. Firstly, one must “describe a scene that is difficult to express, as if it is before one’s eyes.” The example Mei provides for this quality — “At the willow pond, the vernal waters are calm; On flowery walls, the evening sun lingering,” — certainly portrays a scene very vividly, yet doesn’t seem particularly “difficult to describe.” In three passages from Ouyang’s “Calligraphy Exercises” which he has apparently combined and edited to form this entry, Ouyang mentions this couplet twice.169 On neither occasion does he attribute his comments to Mei Yaochen.170 He does, however, explain the significance of the couplet for himself, and his statements prove extremely helpful for understanding one aspect of his poetic practice. In one of the passages,171 having made a similar comment about the atmosphere evoked by Yan Wei’s couplet — “all things are harmonious and joyful in spring, and people are calm and relaxed” — he continues: “[The couplet] also has a meaning that words cannot fully express, and is not this obtained by refining one’s intention through careful carving?”172 The other passage is more enthusiastic. In the couplet, Ouyang declares,173

170 It is possible that Ouyang’s comments were influenced by Mei Yaochen (as Chaves suggests, op.cit. 232, n.13), yet the weight of evidence suggests that they are Ouyang’s own formulation. In what is probably the final version, in the “Remarks on Poetry,” it is not surprising that he attributes these views to the narrator-figure Mei, since he treated his friend as a much better poet than himself, and a more authoritative critic.
171 Ji vol.3, 14.132.
172 Ibid. “Careful carving” (kezhuo 刻琢), applied to poetry would refer to skilful crafting of literary techniques.
173 Ibid. Ouyang refers to “four lines” here: two belong to the couplet by Yan Wei, and the other two to a couplet by Wen Tingyun which I will discuss below.
... the breeze is satisfying, the sun is bright; ten thousand creatures renew their vitality; the intentions of nature and human beings are joyfully harmonized. Reading it, I straightaway feel deeply moved by joy. I would say that these four lines can change cold to heat even as one remains in one's seat . . . . Thus I realize that it is possible for writing to compete with the ingenuity of Creative Transformation!

The other couplet Ouyang mentions here is the one by Wen Tingyun — “The rooster calls in the moonlight over the thatched inn,/A person leaves tracks in the frost on the board bridge” — which the narrator Mei uses to illustrate his third antithesis, “evoking boundless meaning, revealed beyond the words.” We can therefore assume that this characteristic is very similar to the second, “describing a difficult scene as if it is before one’s eyes.” The latter focuses on the natural immediacy of the description; the former on the curious evocative power a skilled natural description exerts on the reader. As Ouyang remarks in his alternative version: “It seems that one is treading on [the bridge] oneself.”

How do these comments relate to Ouyang's poetic practice, and more specifically, the development of his style during the 1030s and 1040s? Clearly, both "Mei" and Ouyang are advocating much more than poetry which simply and plainly describes the world around them. Ouyang's statements in particular claim that great poems will alter one's mood completely, and can even give the impression of changing the season from summer to winter through their evocative force. By searching out those objects in the surrounding world that are especially evocative, and then describing them as naturally and clearly as possible, one creates a poem which will potentially reproduce the same depth of feeling whenever one reads it, no matter how different the circumstances. For Ouyang, this is a

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174 Ibid.
mysterious power akin to the Creative Transformation (zaohua 造化) that produces and destroys the ten thousand creatures.

Ouyang’s first really distinctive style emerges during his exile to Yiling in the mid-1030s. Here, he encounters a dramatic, mountainous landscape and an indigenous way of life which fascinate him. Simply to describe what he sees in poems with regular metres and generally parallel couplets is sufficient to express fresh and evocative content.

However, it is not until the 1040s that he begins to realize the true expressive potential of poetic technique. Inspired by his poetic partnerships with Mei Yaochen and Su Shunqin, he makes his first experiments with irregular metres, and shows greater interest in imitating the more innovative Mid-Tang poets such as Han Yu and Meng Jiao. Many of his works from this period display a profound interest in questions of style. For instance, his poem comparing the styles of Mei and Su, quoted above, dates from 1044. By 1047, in his poem on a moon-coloured inkstone, he is making statements on style quite similar to those on Yan Wei and Wen Tingyun’s couplets: “I wish to take all that my two eyes and ears perceive,/And compete with Creative Transformation for every single hairtip.” Here, however, he is discussing his own poetry. Likewise, before 1049, when Mei Yaochen composed “Ancient Willow Tree,” Ouyang was obviously preoccupied with the possibilities of rhyme — his own imaginative borrowings of Mei’s rhymes in “Olives,” and Han Yu’s in “Lu Mountain High . . .” appeared in 1050 and 1051 respectively. Finally, his interest in poetic experimentation extends even to imagery: in 1050, he forbids the use of images typically associated with snow, and as I have

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175 See Ouyang’s tentative experiment with irregular metre in “Song Rejoicing at Snow in Commissioner Yan’s Western Garden,” of 1041 (Ji vol.1, 6.64-65); and for the Mid-Tang influence: “Encountering Wind at Luan City: Imitating the Style of Han and Meng’s Linked Verses,” of 1045 (ibid. 2.75-76). Both are translated in my chapter on water above.
176 See note 123 above.
177 Complete translation in my chapter on water. Original text in Ji vol 1, 2.3.
178 See above, notes 79-81, and 89.
demonstrated, he tends to practice a similar kind of “self-censorship” in many of his earlier snow poems.  

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Also during the 1040s, along with this greater attention to questions of rhyme, metre and imagery, Ouyang discovers still other methods for adding interest to his verse, again partly under the influence of the Yuanhe period poets, notably Han Yu, Meng Jiao and Jia Dao. In the 1030s, his poetry had been very dependent on its subject matter: powerful topics, such as the extraordinary mountains of Yiling, or the enormous Yellow River, are treated in a forceful, inspiring manner; more ordinary topics seem rather mundane and lacking in focus. During the 1040s, armed with his insight that the poet can “compete with Creative Transformation,” Ouyang reverses this tendency, to incongruous and entertaining effect. Apparently small and insignificant objects — inkstones, lumps of rock, single chrysanthemum bushes — swell with the aid of Ouyang’s fertile imagination and powers of exaggeration into mysterious vessels bearing cosmic ramifications. By contrast, the jagged, gloomy peaks and roaring waterfalls of Yiling, home to sinister owls, gibbons and tigers — certainly an awe-inspiring environment, treated with suitable drama in his poetry — are replaced by the tranquil, refreshing coolness of the Chuzhou mountain springwaters. Ouyang has chosen to emphasize an entirely different aspect of the natural scene, in order to underplay the frightening grandeur and enormity of the mountain image.  

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179 See his poem “Snow” (*Ji* vol.1, 6.75). Cf. my translation in chapter 5 above, including a discussion of Ouyang’s use of snowy imagery. Also relevant is an entry from the “Remarks on Poetry” dealing with the Nine Monks (*Ji* vol.3, 14.113). Though he praises some of their couplets, Ouyang notes that the monk-poets had little stylistic flexibility, and were unable to compose poetry which did not include typical landscape images. To use his own terms, the Nine Monks could not “compete with the ingenuity of Creative Transformation.” I should point out, however, that the test of their skill which Ouyang relates was an extremely difficult one: they had to avoid all references to “mountains, water, wind, clouds, bamboo, rocks, flowers, plants, snow, frost, stars, moon, birds and the like.” I wonder how many other Chinese poets could pass such a test.

180 Of course, the landscapes of the Three Gorges, around Yiling, and the less dramatic mountains of Chuzhou differ in appearance; but as I demonstrated in my chapter on
Hence, by the 1040s, Ouyang has discovered the intellectual and emotional stimulation offered by unexpected or incongruous juxtaposition. Although some of Han Yu’s poems prefigure Ouyang’s use of this technique — for instance, his “Poem on a Pair of Birds” in which the two birds upset the whole balance of the cosmos, or “Teasing Zhang Ji,” where his portraits of Du Fu and Li Bai use hyperbolic comparison to comical effect \(^{181}\) — and other Tang poets like Meng Jiao and Jia Dao also utilize shock and exaggeration to underscore their poverty, \(^{182}\) I feel that Ouyang is unprecedented in the extent to which he creates clever combinations of the unlike, and arranges the whole structure of each poem around them.

One of the most ingenious examples of Ouyang’s newly-developed style from the 1040s can serve as a reminder. His “Song of the Violet Stone Screen” (1047) takes as its topic a small piece of translucent rock which is now used as a screen for an inkstone. \(^{183}\) Ouyang juxtaposes the sliver of rock with the real Moon in the sky — not such a clever comparison, until he begins to wonder whether the Moon has actually fallen from the sky and landed on his desk. Yet since he still sees the real Moon every night, moving across the Heavens, he finds himself at a loss to explain the identity of his strange stone. He has now prepared us for a second juxtaposition, of his own “meagre” poetic talents with those of Su Shunqin: Su is so accustomed to singing of the strange and wonderful that he will naturally be able to do justice to the moon-stone. Thus, instead of simply adding to his description of the stone a conventional request for an answering poem, Ouyang manages

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181 In Qian Zhonglian, op.cit. vol.2, 836-842 and 989-994 respectively.
183 Ji vol.1, 2.3-4. See my translation and discussion in the chapter on water above, section on the Moon.
to make Su’s appearance in the poem inevitable by means of careful structuring, and to equate Su’s remarkable talents with the supernatural world evoked by the stone.

If this poem involves an incongruous opposition of scales — the tiny confused with the cosmic — other kinds of juxtaposition abound in Ouyang’s poetic works. I will expand on this feature in a moment when I discuss his poetry of the 1050s. Here, I will mention one further example from 1042, which involves not an opposition of scale, but one of aesthetic values, and at the same time utilizes the other major poetic technique which Ouyang developed during the 1040s. “Drawings of Luoyang Peonies,”184 which I discussed in detail earlier, gains much of its force from the contrast between what are certainly exquisitely beautiful flowers, and Ouyang (or the narrator’s) refusal to acknowledge that beauty. I suggested that the poet-narrator, by dealing with the topic in such an inappropriate way, draws attention to himself, an aging man who cannot keep pace with changes in the society around him, and vents his frustration in the poem.

Hence, along with juxtaposition of aesthetic values, we see here one of Ouyang’s earliest attempts at adopting an exaggerated persona, or self-caricature, a poetic technique which he would use extensively over the following thirty years. In the early 1040s, such personae are not fully developed: Ouyang rarely places himself as a character within his poems, at most appearing only as an implied narrator. However, exiled to Chuzhou in 1045, he suddenly begins to treat himself in the third person, as the Governor (Shijun 使君) or as the Drunken Old Man (Zuiweng 醉翁) — a character who is only interested in becoming inebriated on the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape, and remains oblivious to the conflicts and factional struggles raging in the distant capital.

Once again, Ouyang’s adoption of this persona certainly owes something to his continued reading of Han Yu and the circle of poets around him during the Yuanhe period. In a poem of 1045, he explicitly compares Mei Yaochen with Meng Jiao, and

184 Ji vol.1, 1.19. See my translation and discussion in chapter 4 above: section on plants and trees.
implies that he himself resembles Han Yu.\footnote{In the work “Reading the ‘Poem on the Peach of Immortality,’ Sent to Zimei.” This poem begins with the lines: “In their writings, Han [Yu] and Meng [Jiao]/Were two heroes matched in strength.” Ouyang then makes an extended, hyperbolic comparison of the styles and careers of Han and Meng. In lines 19-30, he declares that Mei Yaochen has taken over from Meng Jiao, both in his hunger and poverty, and in his style — “frosty cold which enters one’s bones.” Ouyang feels inspired to respond to Mei’s poems — i.e. adopt the role of Han Yu in the partnership — but lacks the ability to do so. Once again, he calls upon Su Shunqin to compose an answering poem, since only he has the power to match Mei. Mei Yaochen composed several poems during the 1040s and 1050s in which he compares Ouyang with Han Yu, and himself with Meng Jiao: see Chaves, op.cit. 81-86. Cf. also Mei’s poem “Matching Hanlin Scholar Yongshu [Ouyang Xiu]” of 1057 (Zhu, op.cit. vol.3, 926), in which Mei declares “We have not only defeated Dongye [Meng Jiao], we have also defeated Han [Yu]!” Ouyang refers to these lines in his “Notes on Returning to the Fields,” \textit{Ji} vol.3, 14.104.} Han was skilled at exaggerated self-caricature — his works “Teeth Falling Out” and “First Eating Southern Food, Presented to Eighteenth Yuan, Matching His Rhymes,”\footnote{Qian Zhonglian, op.cit. vol.1, 171-174; and vol.2, 1132-1136. “Teeth Falling Out” is translated by Kenneth Hanson in Irving Yucheng Lo and Wu-chi Liu, eds., \textit{Sunflower Spendor} op cit. 172.} as I have noted, show him as a hapless, rather grotesque victim of tooth decay and spicy food respectively. Ronald Egan has suggested other Mid- and High Tang figures who also adopted wine-drinking personae, such as Du Fu, Du Mu (803-852) and Bai Juyi, though Egan distinguishes Ouyang from these earlier poets by his lightness of tone.\footnote{Egan 89-93.} Du Fu in particular was a typical model for the exiled scholar-official seeking solace in wine and nature.

And yet Ouyang’s very recent predecessor Wang Yucheng (954-1001) seems a more likely influence for this first, and most famous, of his self-characterizations. Wang, who is traditionally placed among the Bai Juyi imitators of the early Song due to his plain diction and social criticism,\footnote{As I noted above.} was also exiled to Chuzhou for two years late in his life (from 995-997). In 1046, Ouyang composed a poem on a portrait of Wang left behind at Chuzhou,\footnote{\textit{Ji} vol.1, 2.77.} which begins with the couplet: “I happen to come here and follow the traces
of my illustrious forebear;/Truly, everything resembles his words of long ago!” A note to the poem explains that Wang had written a memorial expressing gratitude for his posting, and enthusing about the fertile Chuzhou soil and the contentment of the local populace.  

It is very likely that Ouyang also read Wang’s poems from Chuzhou. Wang was the first to write poems about the Langye Mountains — later the site of Ouyang’s Drunken Old Man Pavilion, and the backdrop to many of his own poems. Wang also composed poems on Li Yangbing’s seal-script calligraphy and the Shuzi Spring, both of which appear as topics in Ouyang’s works from Chuzhou. Though Wang does not refer to himself as Drunken Old Man, he does use the third-person nickname “White-Haired Old Gentleman” (Baitou lang 白頭 郎), and titles like “Prefectural Governor” (Weijun 爲 君), and he frequently takes wine and goes to become drunk among the surrounding mountains.

Nevertheless, in his poetry and prose from Chuzhou, Ouyang creates a much clearer self-identity than Wang, and a more humorous one, and hence it is his nickname which has lasted through the centuries, inextricably linked with Chuzhou. His claim that poetry can compete with Creative Transformation, and evoke powerful moods long after it is written, has certainly been vindicated in his own case. And his act of placing

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190 Ibid.  
191 See Wang’s poem, and his claim to be the first to write on these mountains, in his Xiao xu ji (Taiwan: Shangwu, 1968) 147.  
192 Ibid. 46 and 45. I have partially translated Ouyang’s poem on the seal-script calligraphy in my chapter on mountains. His poem on Shuzi Spring is in Ji vol.1, 1.34.  
193 Ibid. 150, line 7 of poem “Court Hairpin.”  
194 Ibid. 149, line 8 of poem “This Winter.” Wang also uses the term “Directing Officer” (langli 郎 史; or weilang 爲 郎), in the poems “Mocking Myself,” line 4 (ibid.148); and “The Prefectural Governor,” line 1 (ibid.147) respectively.  
195 For instance, in ibid. 147, “Langye Mountains”; and 149, “Banished to Live in Chu[zhou], Four Poems”; and ibid., “Two Works Written in Jest, Relating Official Life at Chuzhou, Sent to My Old Office Colleagues at the Hanlin Academy.”  
196 Ironically, in his poem on Wang’s portrait, Ouyang concludes: “Since your name already shines in the history books,/It is no matter that dust obscures your likeness on the wall.” Ji vol.1, 2.77.
entertaining self-portraits within his poetry and other informal writings is a major reason for their continued vitality and attractiveness.

The Mature Style of the 1050s and 1060s

Ouyang continued to develop and refine these various poetic techniques in the 1050s. After a somewhat gloomier period in the early years of the decade, including a complete break in poetic production for two years following the death of his mother, Ouyang returned to the capital in 1054 with an uneasy awareness of his rapid aging. His nickname "Drunken Old Man" had been more or less a literary pose — as he admits in one poem from 1046: "Forty years is not so old!"\(^\text{197}\) — and he had actually led a very active life in Chuzhou (1045-1048) and Yangzhou (1048-1049), climbing mountains, taking boat trips and enjoying extravagant wine parties. By the mid-1050s, however, he really was old — even the Emperor expressed concern that his hair had turned completely white — and a feeling of helpless resignation had begun to pervade his poetry.

Yet once more inspired by poet friends like Mei Yaochen and Liu Chang, among others around him in the capital, he perfected his experiments in caricatured persona and incongruous juxtaposition, producing much of his most brilliant and profound poetry from 1056 to 1060.

Whereas his works from the 1040s can basically be divided into those that make incongruous juxtapositions and unexpected comparisons, often adopting irregular metres for forceful effect; and those that focus on the Drunken Old Man persona — calmer

\(^{197}\) From the poem "Inscribed on Chuzhou’s Drunken Old Man Pavilion," in Ji vol.1, 6.70. Full poem translated by Egan 89. See also the poem of 1057 entitled “Song Presented to Doctor Shen” (Ji vol.1, 2.30) which contains the lines: “In the past I was exiled to live in the Chu Mountains, Though my name was Old Man, I was really just a youth . . . Now my face ages, my hair recedes: I’ve truly become an Old Man, /And my heart is ‘drunk’ with worry, so how can I know any happiness?”

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poems in regular metres, with fewer startling effects — by the late 1050s, Ouyang frequently manages to combine all these techniques. With regard to technical brilliance, his series of poems on white animals and birds are, as I have suggested, most impressive. They build up several humorous oppositions within a single complex structure — for instance, two different creatures are compared for their ability to evoke a world of purity, then juxtaposed with their two old owners, Mei Zhi and Ouyang, who are inclined towards purity now that they cannot indulge in youthful pleasures. Sketches of the “young blades in the capital” heighten the contrast between age and youth, and Mei Yaochen is caricatured as one who refuses to abandon his craving for sensual delights and accept his aging. The rhymes and metre vary in an expressive manner, and the tone and diction find a perfect balance between poetic and prosaic elements, utilizing direct speech, flawed scholarly argumentation — what I term caricatured reason — and folksong-like repetition. Nevertheless, in spite of the humorous, playful mood, Ouyang is clearly concerned with a deeper problem: of finding contentment when one is rapidly aging. His solution is to transform himself from a Drunken Old Man into a Pure Old Man:

When moonlight looks down over peaceful nights,
Or snow skims across clear mornings,
It is then that these two creatures
Shine without one speck of the finest dust.
Not only can they sober up the drunkenness of the Drunken Old Man,
They can add purity and freshness to the poetic thoughts of the Poet Elder!

198 In the poems “Rhapsody on Longing for My White Rabbit, Playfully Answering Gongyi [Mei Zhi’s] Composition ‘Remembering Cranes,’” and “Playfully Answering Shengyu,” both from 1057, in Ji vol.1, 2.27 and 2.27-28 respectively. Translated in chapter 4 above.
199 A technique which Ouyang first used in 1042 in his poem “Drawings of Luoyang Peonies,” mentioned above.
200 Referring to a white rabbit and a pair of cranes. See note 198 above.
Ouyang’s search for evocative topics that can inspire in himself and others a mood of transcendence, and now purity, also reaches its climax during the late 1050s. Vary rarely does he directly describe dramatic landscapes or natural phenomena in his poems of this period, but they constantly appear in his imagination, indirectly evoked by the small objects that comprise his subject matter. Tea leaves, paintings, stone screens and musical performances all trigger memories and images of an elemental mountainous environment. Eating clams, drinking from a shell winecup, observing fish in a tiny pond: these point to the huge power and life-bearing capacity of great rivers and the ocean. And in almost all these evocative poems, we find Ouyang himself, as a quirky old man or intrusive, opinionated narrator, appreciating rare objects, becoming inspired by their purity and vitality, complaining at the superficiality and faddishness of “people today,” or celebrating the joys of friendship with his like-minded and similarly aging cronies.

The death of Mei Yaochen in 1060 was not only a tragic personal blow, but also marks a transition in Ouyang’s poetic style. His later poems are much less ambitious, generally shorter, and calmer in tone. A crude division of Ouyang’s poetry, adopting his own terms “free and untrammeled” (haofang), and “refined in thought” (jingsi), would categorize the 1030s, after his Xikun phase, as clearly “free and untrammeled” — full of energy, but basically lacking much craft or refinement; the 1040s as the gradual attempt to incorporate refined thought into a free style, perfected in the works of the late 1050s; and now, the 1060s, in which the sense of untrammeled energy and forcefulness steadily disperses, leaving simply refined tranquillity.

A great many of his later poems express a yearning for retirement, and for the quiet, calm pastoral surroundings of Yingzhou. He composed so many works on this

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201 From “Playfully Answering Shengyu,” Ji vol.1, 2.27. Note the irregular metre. In the original, the lines contain 5, 5, 5, 7, 7, and 9 syllables respectively; also there is Ouyang’s characteristic repetition in the final two lines.
theme that he was able to publish two collections entitled “Poems Longing for Ying[zhou]” (Si Ying shi 思穎詩).\textsuperscript{202} And in the works of his final five years, in semi-retirement at various provincial postings, Ouyang has mastered the art of understated, “natural” transcendence:

Cold rain overflows the Pool of Jiao,
People have departed: the Pool is silent.
All that remains is a flower before the frost,
Brightly, brightly, facing the high halls.\textsuperscript{203}

\textbf{Ouyang Xiu and Wit?}

In my discussion of Ouyang’s poetic style, I have tended to avoid the term wit, waiting instead to see whether he formulated a similar concept himself. In conclusion, I will sum up the similarities and differences between the English witty tradition, as exemplified by Donne and Pope, and the poetic theory and practice of Ouyang Xiu.

Many of Ouyang’s poetic techniques look forward to those of Donne — clever combination and comparison of unlike objects; humorous exaggeration and self-parody; and a variety of stanzaic forms and metres.\textsuperscript{204} At the same time, Ouyang shares with Pope a concern for following Nature, a habit of ingeniously adapting his rhymes and diction to

\textsuperscript{202} No longer separate collections, but see original postface of first collection, dated 1066, in Ji vol.1, 5.73-74, and preface to a “Sequel to Poems Longing for Ying[zhou],” dated 1070, in Ji vol.1, 5.76.
\textsuperscript{203} “Quatrain,” dated 1072, in Ji vol.1, 6.81. A note to the title states: “Composed on my deathbed.”
\textsuperscript{204} The length of their poems tends also to be similar: in Ouyang’s case, his preference for ancient-style verse makes his poems generally longer than the 4 and 8 line regulated verse favoured in the Tang; Donne’s poems, however, are short by the standards of much English poetry, for instance Milton (1608-1674) and Spencer (1552-1599).
suit the content of the poem, and profound admiration for the "Ancients," seeing himself as part of a long tradition stretching back through Han Yu and his circle as far as the *Classic of Poetry*. Like Pope, Ouyang also perfected the technique of satirical caricature, yet he very seldom wields it against his enemies, except in the general and harmless sense of "people today" or the "young blades in the capital." Instead, he prefers to caricature himself and his friends — what I would term constructive caricature — as a means of altering his mood.

In his theoretical statements, Ouyang adopts a range of terms, including especially those related to the phrases "free and untrammeled" and "refined in thought." His tendency in criticizing poetry is almost always to utilize a complex, juxtapositional method, avoiding reductive simplification to a single, inflexible prescription for style which would suit every context. Notable too is his justification of humour and laughter as fit subjects for poetry. The same love of complex structure, fertile variety and humorous ingenuity definitely inspires his own poetic practice.

If there were one phrase that might sum up his approach to poetry in very general terms, it would surely be his claim that poets can "compete with the ingenuity of Creative Transformation" (*yu Zaohua zheng qiao* 與 造 化 爭 巧). As he explains it, to "compete" is not to try and overthrow or destroy the cosmos, but rather to emulate the creative potential of Nature through composing evocative poetry. And the urgency of this task stems from two factors: firstly, our moods are continually affected by present circumstances, in society and the natural world, and our freedom is constantly restricted by forces beyond our control. Through humour, unexpected comparisons, and the imaginative depiction of "trivial" objects as triggers evoking an expansive world of power and purity, Ouyang's poetry acts to transcend present preoccupations.

Secondly, and even more central, at the root of all Ouyang's juxtapositions and antitheses lurks the most frightening opposition that human beings face, namely, the inexorable cycle of creation and destruction, life and death. Aging and sickness, the first
signs of death in his own body, obviously figure large in Ouyang’s mature poetry, as does the seasonal decay of living things in autumn and winter. Even the prose works in his collection are overshadowed by the threateningly large number of funeral inscriptions, more than any other of his prose genres. And yet Ouyang is not prepared to submit silently to inevitable decay. He seeks out objects and creatures that persist and thrive through wintry suffering; he sees a creative and hopeful aspect in the storms and snow that cause present pain; he imbues tiny objects around him, even people neglected by society, with tremendous significance; and he constantly shows himself within his poems, as an old man finding joy in spite of unpromising circumstances — such juxtapositions, which lie at the root of his poetic style, acknowledge the terrible forces of destruction in the world, while simultaneously proving his determination to overcome them.

Finally, Ouyang’s preoccupation with fact, reputation, and preserving the writings of his friends and acquaintances; and the careful editing of his own works, which took up so much of his time in the last few years of his life, once again reveal indirectly the realization that concludes many of his poems: after his death, these writings will survive, and it is his poetry that will provide the most comprehensive record of his humanity and vitality, including everything omitted by the official histories, and thus will allow him a kind of immortality.

Surely there are enough similarities between Ouyang’s approach to poetry and that of Donne and Pope to justify characterizing him as a witty poet. At the very least, the perspective of the tradition of wit, one of the most important concerns of earlier English poetry, should provide support for the claim that Ouyang Xiu is a great poet. To conclude, one might say that Donne’s wit lies in the juxtaposition of immortal God with weak humanity, of virtue with sinfulness, all combined in a single human body. Ouyang’s

205 A point noted by Egan 29, referring to the Jushi Ji which Ouyang edited himself. Altogether, Ouyang composed 110 funeral inscriptions (ibid. 50).
wit lies in juxtaposing life and death, creation and destruction, in a body-mind-universe complex. Though the parallel is not exact, I feel that Ouyang Xiu would have enjoyed such an incongruous, cross-cultural comparison.
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