THE POETICS OF EROTIC IMAGERY IN SHEN YUE

by

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Abstract

The development of love poetry during the late Southern Dynasties period reveals several important shifts in erotic imagery used. During this time, Shen Yue (441-513) was a very influential poet. This thesis examines how Shen Yue manipulated erotic imagery to effect profoundly the evolution of the love poem in the Qi-Liang age. This evolution reflected social movements that were occurring simultaneously, and that were propelling love poetry towards greater sophistication. Literary society, influenced by the aristocratic mores of the time, was separating into literary cliques centred about the royal family. This elitist culture encouraged the development of dualities of inclusion/exclusion through promoting certain imagery in love poetry. This thesis examines four realms of Shen Yue’s erotic imagery for the appearance of aristocratizing mechanisms: those of cosmological, natural and artificial origin together with that of the female figure. These four areas reveal Shen Yue’s constant agenda; namely, increasing the strictness of codification within each area while modifying the range of referents included. Shen Yue carries out both of these operations to increase the sophistication and urbanity of his works, successfully creating an aristocratic ethos in his poems. Consequently, the success of Shen Yue’s work with erotic imagery is shown in its influence upon the following school of Palace-style poets, who continued in developing the aristocratic and cultured aspects of love poetry.
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Chronology of Han to Tang Dynasties

Qin (秦) Dynasty 221-206BCE
Han (漢) Dynasty 206BCE-220CE

THREE KINGDOMS
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Shu (蜀) and 221-263
Wei (魏) Kingdoms 220-265

Western Jin (西晉) 263-317

PERIOD OF DIVISION

**Southern Dynasties**
- Eastern Jin (東晉) 317-420
- Song (宋) 420-479
- Qi (齊) 479-502
- Liang (梁) 502-557
- Chen (陳) 557-589

**Northern Dynasties**
- Sixteen Kingdoms 304-386
- Northern Wei (北魏) 386-534
- Western Wei (西魏) 536-566
- Northern Zhou (北周) 557-80
- Eastern Wei (東魏) 534-560
- Northern Qi (北齊) 550-77

Sui (隨) Dynasty 589-618
Tang (唐) Dynasty 618-907
## Chronological List of Emperors Ruling

### During Shen Yue’s Life (441-513)

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<td>Liu Yu (劉昱)</td>
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<td>Shun Di</td>
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<td><strong>Liang (梁) Dynasty</strong></td>
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Introduction

The third to fifth centuries of the Common Era in China were extremely innovative and creative times for literature. It was during this exciting time that Shen Yue (沈約) rose to prominence as one of the leading poets of his age. For the first time in Chinese history, various efforts were made to formulate paradigms solely for thinking about literature and its place in social-historical context. Those interested began to try to separate works of aesthetic merit (with wen 文) from other texts that were more scholastic and prosaic. Debates arose on the nature of wen (a word with connotations of patterning, decoration and aesthetics), and its presence or absence in texts. 1 Works of literary criticism appeared attempting not only to define what literature was but also to explore what the driving force for literary production was. 2 As a member of an influential literary clique during the Qi (齊) and Liang (梁) periods, Shen Yue was in the thick of the debate, which had been ongoing for many generations and which was to increase exponentially in sophistication and complexity during his lifetime.

Ideas about literature and its purpose had appeared as early as the Han dynasty 3 that placed a heavily didactic burden upon literature and also linked it to an expression of “what is intently on the mind,” 4 tying it to the mind-state of the poet on the most fundamental level. Both of these ideas were to affect greatly the attitudes expressed by

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1 For example Liu Xie’s work, Wen Xin Diao Long 文心雕龍, translated into English in Vincent Shih, The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons (Taiwan: Chung Hwa Book Company, 1975)
2 See General Introduction, Siu-kit Wong, Early Chinese Literary Criticism (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Company, 1983)
3 This occurred in such works as “The Mao Preface to the Shi Jing (The Classic of Poetry)” (毛詩序).
critics. The later, more expressionistic concept was of great importance to the first major school of poetry after the Han: that of the Jian'an period (196-220 CE). Led by Cao Zhi (曹植), this group of poets emphasized poetry as the expression of the personal ethical sentiments of the poet. However, during later times, with the rupture of the dynastic tradition, the expression of personal thoughts could be extremely dangerous. Later poets turned to metaphysical discussion in their works. This trend towards abstract philosophizing was deplored by later critics:

永嘉時，貴黃老稍尚虛談，於時篇什，理過其辭，淡乎寡味.
In the Yongjia period (307-313), the philosophies of Huang Di and Lao Zi were dearly cherished, and the discussions unfettered by practical necessities became the fashion of the day. It was a time in which the disparate essays written were more worthy of note for their arguments than their language, and the literature of the period will be remembered for its want of poetic exuberance and zest.

In this type of philosophic, didactical path that Chinese poetry took, the idea of poetry as an expression of “what is intently on the mind” was largely undeveloped.

It was to rectify this tendency that one of the period’s most admired works was written: Lu Ji’s Wen Fu (文赋 A Poetic Discourse on Literature). Lu Ji turned once more to the concept of wen to show that literary writing is the outward manifestation of the wen (patterning) that is inherent in nature, in that writing is influenced and sparked off by the presence of wen in nature. Thus, rather than creating the work, the poet serves to make manifest that which is present in all aspects of the world but which requires ‘activation’ by the literary mind (wen xin 文心) to become literature. With this emphasis on the role

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4 Stephen Owen’s translation for shiyanzhi 詩言志 (a concept first appearing in the Book of Documents [Shu Jing 書經]), translated in Readings in Chinese Literary Thought (Boston: Council of East Asian Studies Harvard University, 1992) 26
5 Zhong Rong (鍾嵘), Shi Pin Ji Zhu (詩品集注), ed. Cao Xu 曹旭 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Publishing Co., 1994) 24, trans. by Siu-kit Wong in Early Chinese Literary Criticism 91
of the mind of the poet as refiner of patterns, theories were produced that concentrated
on the way in which the poet shaped the literature that he produced. The questions of
how the poet was to fulfil this role and how it could be done well were questions of
paramount importance in the increasingly literary society that was encouraged by
Southern Dynasties regimes.

During this time, poets investigated many modes of literary expression. The
poetic interest in yuefu (folk-songs 樂府) grew steadily in the third to sixth centuries.
This interest began in the Han dynasty when a governmental department was established
for the collection and collation of folk songs. This was the Bureau of Music, the Yuefu
(樂府). Although the Bureau later collapsed, yuefu still were recorded in the Southern
Dynasties. Poets worked at refining and re-writing the folk songs that were collected,
and writing imitations of these songs became a popular pastime amongst the literati. Shen Yue himself had no small part to play in the popularity of this form.

Shen Yue, the late fifth-century statesman, historian and poet, is to be
credited with the emphasis on anonymous popular songs of the Han, giving
them the cachet of orthodoxy by including them in his "Treatise on Music" in
his History of the Southern Song.6

Also important during this period was the development of new poetic forms. In the two
fundamental sources for Chinese poetry, the Shi Jing (The Classic of Poetry 詩經) and
the Chu Ci (The Songs of the South 楚辭), only a limited number of metres were
employed. In the Han dynasty, innovative forms such as the fu (rhyme-prose) and the

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6 For a fuller discussion see Anne Birrell's Introduction in Popular Songs and Ballads of Han China (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1988) 1-28
7 For a discussion of the ways in which yuefu were used 'intra-textually' see Joseph R. Allen, In the Voice of Others: Chinese Music Bureau Poetry (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies University of Michigan, 1992) 25-29
8 Birrell, Popular Songs and Ballads of Han China, 10
pentasyllable metre were introduced. The later, in particular, became increasingly popular in the Southern Dynasties, becoming the most highly privileged of Chinese poetic forms.

All of these various experiments with forms and poetics became increasingly complex during the Southern Dynasties period, leading to the formation of groups and coteries dedicated to different aspects of poetics. These literary cliques formed influential groups within the palace and government. In the Southern Qi period (479-501 CE), one of the princes of the royal family, Xiao Ziliang (蕭子良) established a literary salon at Jingling not only to produce poetry, but also to discuss aesthetics and literary production:

Prince Ziliang of Jingling established the Western Villa, collecting literary scholars. The prince, with Shen Yue, Xie Tiao, Wang Rong, Xiao Chen, Fan Yun, Ren Fang, Lu Chui all flocked there, and they were called the ‘Eight Friends’. 9

These eight poets (the “Eight Friends of Jingling”) were to have an enormous influence upon late Southern Dynasties poetry and subsequently on Tang poetry. Their contribution to the poetics of the Chinese tradition, although not without controversy, 10 has been widely recognized. 11 Moreover, of this group of men, Shen Yue became one of the most revered and influential figures in literature.

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9 Yao Silian, The History of the Liang Dynasty (Liang Shu 梁書) (Beijing: Zhong Hua, 1973) 1.2
10 Particularly from such critics as Han Yu who espoused a return to the ‘ancient’ styles of the Shi Jing.
During the Yung-ming (Yongming) era (483-493) the Chancellor Prince [Xiao Ziliang] was fond of [Shen Yue's] writings, and Wang Jung and all the others attached themselves to him. At the time Hsieh T'iao [Xie Tiao] (464-499) had not yet reached his stride, Chiang Yen's [江淹] talent was exhausted, and Fan Yun's [范雲] reputation and status were still slight. For these reasons, [Shen Yue] was acclaimed the forerunner. By the end of his life, he was known as the ‘foremost amongst all contemporaries’ (dang shi ci zong 諧世辞宗), which meant that he had become the leader of the poets appearing during the Yongming-era. His approval was much sought after among his Yongming contemporaries and his influence considerably affected those poets of the next generation. This later group of poets was split into two cliques centred around the two important princes of the royal family: Xiao Tong (蕭統) and Xiao Gang (蕭綱), both sons of the Emperor Wu (Xiao Yan 蕭衍). Xiao Tong’s coterie worked to promote a more didactic and thus Confucian motive for literature, while the latter clique (in what became known as the Palace-style poetry [gongti shi 宮體詩]) concentrated on aesthetics, erotic expression and lyricism. Both of these groups recognized Shen Yue as a leading literary figure, and his influence can be seen through his interaction with the princes’ literary lives.

In 507, Shen Yue was appointed Xiao Tong’s Junior Tutor (Taizi Shaozhuan 太子少傅), which was a position of considerable importance over the young prince. This resulted, no doubt, in influencing Xiao Tong’s ideas of literature (even though the prince did not agree with Shen’s stance on the importance of technique and aesthetics).


13 The History of the Liang 33.485
Shen Yue also had the power to recommend a writer to the prince, such as in the case of Liu Xie where his “support resulted in [Liu Xie obtaining] a good position at one of the most prestigious courts, that of the Liang Crown Prince [Xiao Tong].” In addition to Xiao Tong, the crown prince’s younger brother, Xiao Gang (who became Emperor Jianwen of the Liang [梁簡文帝]) praised Shen Yue. In a letter which sums up his attitude to literature, Xiao Gang said, “In recent times, . . . Shen Yue’s poems [are amongst] the very pinnacles of the art of literary writing” (至如近世 . . . 沈約之詩 . . . 斯實文章之冠冕). He paid Shen Yue the courtesy of using his poems as models on which to base his own poems. In his literary clique, Shen Yue’s works were widely disseminated, admired and imitated.

Heartening though the respect of these two princes must have been, even more important to the preservation of Shen Yue’s poetics was the power which the princes held over the literary world. Since the aristocratic social-political system of the Liang dynasty was a highly controlling one, it was only through aristocratic connections that literature could be disseminated:

Only three contemporary literary women were selected for inclusion in the anthology. Since the cultural environment from which they emerged was the court circle and the literary family, one supposes that there must have been many more literary women. So the question arises, why were these particular three rescued from oblivion? The answer, in my view, lies in the

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14 For a comprehensive analysis of these coteries see Yan Caiping (閻采平), Research on Qi and Liang Poetry (Qi Liang Shi Ge Yanjiu 齊梁詩歌研究), Chapter 2
15 Stephen Owens’ introduction to Ch. 5 “Wen-hsin tiao-lung” Readings in Chinese Literary Thought, 83
16 A Letter to the Prince of Xiangdong, The Complete Collected Works of the Three Ancient Dynasties, the Qin, Han, Wei, Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties Prose, (Quan Shang Qi Sandai Qin Wei Han Sanguo Liuchao Wen 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文). ed. Yan Kejun, (Beijing: Zhonghua) 11.5; translated by Sui-kit Wong in Early Chinese Literary Criticism 139
17 One of which, (the yuefu “Night after Night” 夜夜曲) was so successful that scholars argued over its attribution to the prince or to Shen. See SYJ 317 for a discussion on the assignment of this poem (eventually to Shen Yue).
18 This anthology is the Yu Tai Xin Yong (New Songs from a Jade Terrace 玉臺新詠)
modern term 'networking'. All three writers had vertical and lateral lines of personal and familial connections. [For example, both of Liu Lingxian’s husbands] served at court [and she] was doubly lucky, since she also belonged to the famous Liu literary family: her brother was a courtier whose patrons were Hsiao Kang [Xiao Gang] . . and the previous crown prince. Her younger brothers also served at court. Thus she enjoyed five lines of communication to the centre of literary life, and more importantly, to the influential compiler of the anthology.\footnote{19} 

Due to the increasing arbitrative power of the aristocratic cliques, the two crown princes virtually controlled all poetic production through the anthologies they sponsored.

Both of the princes sponsored collections that were to epitomize their own beliefs in literature and both of anthologies were to survive complete down to the present day, the only ones of the time to do so. Xiao Tong was the patron for the Selections of Literature (Wenxuan 文選), a collection of ‘worthy’ (i.e. non-erotic, Confucian) literature which became the basis for the later civil examination and, thus, highly influential in later dynasties. In the Selections of Literature, there are no less than seventeen essays and fourteen poems\footnote{20} by Shen Yue, a number surpassed by just five other authors (only one of whom is his contemporary),\footnote{21} and a quantity that shows how important his works were to Xiao Tong.

His younger brother, Xiao Gang, with the poet Xu Ling (徐陵), compiled the New Songs from a Jade Terrace (Yu Tai Xin Yong 玉臺新詠), a book of love songs that, because of its subject matter, was condemned by most scholars as ‘decadent.’\footnote{22} However, the very fact that this anthology survived in large quantities speaks for its

\footnote{20} Lin Jiali (林家驄)“An Appraisal of Shen Yue’s Poems and their Place in the History of Literature” (Shen Yue Shige de Pingjia He Zai Wenxue Shi Shang de Diwei 沈約詩歌的評價 和在文學史上的地位), Hangzhou University Journal 杭州大學學報 21:2 (June 1991): 54-61
\footnote{21} Cao Zhi, Lu Ji, Xie Lingyun (謝靈運), Yan Yannian (顏延年) and Xie Tiao (his contemporary).
popularity among later generations. In contrast to the *Selections of Literature* whose works were heavy with principle and personal expression, *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* presented literature as the product of artifice and craftsmanship. In this anthology, Shen Yue's works are even more predominant. His poems number 317, a quantity only surpassed by the two royal poets, Xiao Gang and his father Xiao Yan.

Xiao Gang, in promoting and anthologizing love poetry was privileging it in a way that had never been done before, and in this collection he displayed the evolution of the love lyric from the Han to his own age. Although the love poem was never a major genre in China, erotic poetry has always been present in the Chinese tradition. In forming *New Songs from a Jade Terrace*, Xu Ling, under Xiao Gang's auspices gathered a collection of love poetry that ranged from the *yuefu* of the first century CE to poems produced by his contemporaries. Although love poetry forms one of the largest groups in the *Shi Jing* and erotic undertones are prevalent in parts of the *Chu Ci*, poems were not selected from these ancient texts since, as the name suggests, the anthology was created to display the "new" qualities of these love poems. The innovative nature of these works is shown in part by the predominance of the short (mainly pentasyllabic) metre, which had appeared in the Han, and by the increasing sensitivity to both euphony and the historico-literary aspects of the tradition. The fact that Shen Yue's works are so heavily featured is strongly indicative of his importance in formulating these innovations.

Through the quantity of his work that is featured in both *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* and the *Selections of Literature*, it can be seen that Shen Yue’s verse had a deep

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22 This label still clings to it today. In Appendix ii to *Early Chinese Literary Criticism*, Siu-kit Wong sums it up by stating "in style and substance, the anthology is decadent." (p.195)
effect upon the poetic production of the Liang dynasty. However, what exactly were his areas of influence in the development of poetics in the Southern Dynasties period? Most of the discussions concerning Shen Yue only review his area of principal influence: that of tonal rules and constructions, particularly his elucidating of the four tones. In fact, when Shen Yue is mentioned in most critical writings, only his theories of prosody are discussed, even up to this decade.\textsuperscript{23} This type of criticism emerged during his own lifetime; Zhong Rong recognized the popularity of these new poetics, even while disparaging them,

王元長創其首，謝朓，沈約揚其波，三賢咸貴公子孫，
幼有文辨，於是士流景慕，務為精密，襞積細微，專相陵架，
故使文多拘忌，備其貞美。

Wang Rong produced (the theories) first, and Xie Tiao and Shen Yue fanned the waves. These three came from an aristocratic background, and from their youth were attracted to literature. Thereupon, the gentry throughout the realm admired them, devoted to making (poetry) trivially fine, drawing together like the pleats of a dress the tiny and inconsequential, and competing with one another. Thus, they have caused literature to be greatly confined and restrained, harming its true beauty.\textsuperscript{24}

Since this time, nearly all work on Shen Yue has been limited to refuting or agreeing with Zhong Rong’s criticism. Little study has been carried out on Shen Yue’s poetics outside of tonal and prosody theories. However, there must have been some other aspects in his works which were also important, since his anthologized (and therefore, most canonical) works do not consistently stick to his own formulated rules of tonality and prosody.\textsuperscript{25} In addition, his admirer Xiao Gang’s literary tastes did not seem to lean towards strict adherence to formal rules of prosody. In fact, Xiao Gang specifically

\textsuperscript{23} Song Xiaoyong 宋效永, “Shen Yue’s Ideas of Literary Innovation” (Shen Yue de Xinbian Wenxue Sixiang 沈約的新變文學思想), \textit{Literary Review Collection} (文學評論叢刊) 31 (March 1989) 134-145

\textsuperscript{24} Zhong Rong, in \textit{SYJ} 522
disliked the “trammeling” of emotion and style that he felt was produced by such rules and yet, he was so pleased with Shen Yue’s poems that he had called them “the very pinnacles of the art of literary writing.” In the efforts to promote or discredit Shen Yue’s tonal theories, very little has been done to look at this discrepancy between the theoretical and actual attitudes towards Shen Yu during his life. If his position in the Chinese canon is entirely due to his technical theories, why were poems that did not follow his own rules considered worthy of preserving?

To understand what other aspects were innovative in Shen Yue’s works we must look ahead to the movement which immediately followed him. I feel that we may obtain a better idea of why Shen Yue was so influential and popular during his life by looking at less prominent aspects of his poetical production and how these influenced the later generation. Of these, I have chosen to examine erotic imagery because of its importance in Yongming and Palace-style poetics. As Fusheng Wu has discussed in his book, *The Poetics of Decadence*, the images associated with the erotic have a definite and distinct role within the history of Chinese poetics. Although love poetry has played only a minor role in Chinese literary history, in the Yongming and Palace-style poems, it provided great impetus for poetic innovation. The Palace-style poets with their predilection for ‘decadent’ aestheticism are excellent ‘descendants’ through which to examine the legacy of Shen Yue’s Yongming poetics.

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26 Letter to the Prince of Xiangdong
Erotic imagery and imagery in general are of great importance in Chinese poetics since one of the most heavily relied upon devices is that of the single image. As Kang-I Sun Chang words it:

The poetic value of the simple image lies in its power to evoke endless associations regarding the essential qualities of the object in question, despite its brevity in presentation. The assumption is that readers, already acquainted with the object will be inspired by the simple "comments" [on whatever aspect of the image chosen (the "topic") to imagine a entire range of meanings.\(^{28}\)

Shen Yue, as one of the most popular poets of his time, had the literary influence to codify certain relationships between 'comment' and 'topic' and thus to influence the future use of eroticized imagery. Once codified, the contemporary literary environment (with its system of literary cliques, aristocratic coteries and heavy dependence on intertextuality) would serve to ossify it. Thus, the codification process would became even more rigid within Palace-style poetry, which, with its concentrated use of stock imagery, shows its reliance on previous works. Through this, it becomes clear that not only did Shen Yue's use of love imagery reflect his poetics outside the sphere of prosody but his use also directly influenced the formation of the subsequent school of Palace-style poetry.

The move towards this genre reflected, in part, the shifts in socio-political groups that were taking place during the Southern Dynasties period.\(^{29}\) Upper society was divided between the powerful local families of the South and the aristocratic clans that had fled the conquest of northern China, who had set up their own elite circles with

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\(^{29}\) See Liu Yuejin's 劉耀, *Aristocratic Society and Yongming Literature (Menfa Shizu Yu Yongming Wenxue 門閥士族與永明文學)*, (Beijing: Sanlian, 1996)
appropriate shibboleths in the southern capital. The émigré cliques were in the dominant position where previous prestige and status favoured their families. Society became increasingly aristocratic in tone and structure. This increasingly exclusivity also developed in literature through literary salons that could only be joined though personal 'networking.' In order to be a literary producer, the would-be poet had to effect entry into the closed world of the court. Shen Yue believed that entry into the world of aristocratic privilege was not only dependant on family, but also required literary talent and intelligence, as Shigeaki Ochi states.

Just as it was on the basis of family status that [Shen Yue] judged the distinction between scholar-gentry and commoners, so he judged the indispensability of scholar-gentry members' individual talents and wisdom. The same attitude prevails in his contempt for local evaluation and the common people. This interpretation conforms to the new direction in the aristocratic system.

The exclusivity of society generated a close link between poet and audience, with strong separation between 'outsiders' and 'insiders'. Because all the salon members were part of the 'inside' aristocratic society, the poet could rely on this social commonality to use codification of poetic imagery to exclude the 'other'. The Qi-Liang poets exploited this to create, in their erotic imagery, a clear dichotomy of inclusion/exclusion.

I wish to examine the role of Shen Yue's imagery in codifying and defining elements in erotic imagery that subsequently resulted in the creation of this 'excluding' (aristocratic and urbane) force. As an extremely important 'linking poet' between the Qi and Liang periods, his poetry had the power to create and influence the increasingly

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30 For example, "the pronunciation of the North... became a snobbish affectation among the learned aristocracy" John Marney, Liang Chien-wen Ti (USA:Twayne, 1972) 70
31 ibid. 62
aristocratic feel in love poetry. This shift was accomplished through two main forces: increasing codification of erotic imagery coupled with an expansion in the semiotic associations within it. By examining Shen Yue’s use of erotic imagery, I hope to discover to what extent these two forces operated within his love poetry and what the consequences of these two forces were with regard to the increasing degree of aristocratization and urbaneness in Qi-Liang culture.

Chapter One deals with Shen Yue’s participation in the codifying of erotic imagery associated with the moon, sun and seasons. He had inherited a semiotically ‘loose’ system from the love poems of the *yuefu* tradition that he had studied. In his love poetry, he endeavored to codify certain relationships between ‘comment’ and ‘topic’ (in Kang-I Sun Chang’s terms), which were previously imprecise. By associating certain celestial phenomena with either fulfilled eroticism or negated emotion, Shen Yue helped to create a more rigorous codification within the love poetry tradition. His success in this area is manifest when the later Palace-style poems are examined for the same codified semiotic associations.

Shen Yue’s poems were also significant in forming associative relationships between nature imagery and eroticism, which are discussed in Chapter Two. The *yuefu* love poetry of previous dynasties had used much natural imagery in their tales of courtship albeit without strictly controlled codes. Yet, the characteristics of nature imagery usage were shifting in the Qi-Liang period, not only through the change from the rural atmosphere of the *yuefu* to the cultivated surroundings of the palace, but also

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through the elaboration of the differences in imagery of positive/negative emotional import. Nature imagery became bounded into ‘webs’ of associated referents. This had the result of both organizing the codification of such elements and augmenting their intra-web referential power. The former created a coherent system from the ‘loose’ material. The latter facilitated the inclusion of new elements into the semiotic web, thus enabling addition to referents involved in this ‘web’. The division of these ‘webs’ into opposing emotive forces (positive/negative desire) also posited certain intrusive nature elements as opposing fulfilled desire. This shows the cultivation of a particular privileging system where certain elements of nature are presented as a clearly opposing force, where nature opposes culture as an active force. Thus, the use of nature imagery by Shen Yue shows the increasing exclusivity in the transition from yuefu love poetry to Palace-style verse.

In Chapter Three, this aristocratic and urbane transition is shown even more clearly in the eroticizing of the artificial. The increasing use of images involving manufactured objects in an erotic context started to emerge during Shen Yue’s own time in Yongming poetry and continued throughout the Palace-style era. In addition, since Palace-style poetry was to become rigidly bound within the confines of the boudoir or palace, eroticizing the artificial was embraced because it also served to exclude ‘wild’ nature. This connection between the description of objects and evoking of erotic sentiment was wholly innovative. It served as well to increase the “literariness” of Shen Yue’s poetry since it not only introduced a new thematic expansion but also placed it into

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32 Yan Caiping specifically states that difference between Qi-Liang yongwu (Composing on an Object) poetry and all other yongwu poetry was that it had sexual overtones: “如果說 有什麼不同, 齊梁詠物詩 往往和寫豔情相聯係” Research on Qi and Liang Poetry 151
a novel form (*yongwu* poetry), innovations that combined to ‘make strange’ the poetic imagery (in the words of Russian Formalism). This effect was particularly noticeable in the closed, exclusive and intertextual world of the Qi-Liang literary salons, and Shen Yue’s poems played a crucial part in its dissemination.

Lastly, I would like to examine the construction of the female figure within the corpus of Shen Yue’s poetry to see the historical evolution of the female figure from the more simple and pastoral songs of the early Southern dynasties period to the complex and sexually-redolent Palace-style verse. The history of the feminine voice and figure in love poetry of these periods may seem to end in the reification of the female so present in the Palace-style poetry, yet there was also an increase in the personal erotic power of the woman in the poem. I plan to examine how Shen Yue produced this more eroticized figure and how he contributed towards the reification of it. In this way, he defined a new type of female sexuality, eroticized yet static, which was to dominate Palace-style imagery. This sexuality resulted in the presentation of an idealized woman, who embodied sensuality but was carefully cloistered. This sublimation of personality into closeted eroticism fitted perfectly into the increasingly closed society of the courtly aristocrats, through demonstrating the elitist upper echelon’s control of the passive female.

Thus, it can be seen that Shen Yue’s manipulation of erotic imagery was directed to increasing the aristocratic nature of love poetry. His poems contributed greatly to Qi

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and Liang development of the heavily codified Palace-style works, which in turn influenced both the early Tang poetic development and the late Tang decadent movement. Imagery of nature, man-made objects and the feminine all seem to serve in some way as vehicles for aspects of Shen Yue’s ideas beyond his theories of tonal structure and prosody. Thus, they may also aid in the elucidation of the ways in which Shen Yue influenced the production of the literary cliques that followed him and those in subsequent dynasties.

Chapter One- The Cosmos

When the Yongming poets looked to the tradition of love poetry, they saw that associative relationships between the heavens, seasons and aspects of desire were lacking coherency. The moon and the sun were rarely used as a main 'topic' in the single image so important in Chinese poetics. The seasons, by contrast, were often the theme of love poems but the sentiments associated with each particular season were variable. No rigid code had been established. Creating an orderly system of semiotic referents would call for examples to be set by poets whose works could then be exploited in the intertextual borrowings so popular in the Qi-Liang age. Writers could then utilize this regimented system in the social codification of eroticism as well. By sanctioning a certain emotional state, cosmological symbols and seasons could provide social approval of a particular desire.
Signs in the Firmament

Because they were popular songs 'composed' by the commoners who worked in the fields, the traditional love songs of China have tended towards the description of diurnal activities, describing the lushly sunlit countryside and the fields and rivers. Eroticizing an association with the moon began to take place in the Han dynasty with such poems as “The Bright Moon” (明月何皎皎) from the “Collection of 19 Ancient Poems” (Gu Shi Shijiu Shou 古詩十九首). This association took on melancholic overtones in some of these poems in contrast to the diurnal exuberance found in the love songs of the Shi Jing. Consequently, the direction of diction and emotional tenor that love poetry was to take in the post-Han period began to emerge slowly from this new type of imagery. The elegiac association of lost desire with the moon was foreshadowed in a Han dynasty yuefu “Shine White Moon” (昭昭素明月):

昭昭素明月，煇光燭我床。  
憂人不能寐，耿耿夜何長。  
Shine, shine, white bright moon,  
Let gleaming rays lighten my bed.  
One in despair cannot sleep,  
Restless, restless nights so long.

This song’s “setting, imagery, diction and emotional tone set it far apart from the typical Han popular song.” Its use of the moon as witness, presence and signifier presages the moon imagery that develops in the Southern Dynasties period. However, for the majority of love songs of the Han period (nearly all yuefu), the action was diurnal. Later, a body

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2 Translation by Birrell, in Popular Songs and Ballads of Han China, 159
3 Chinese text is from Xu Ling 徐陵 compiler, Yu Tai Xin Yong 玉臺新詠 (New Songs from a Jade Terrace), ed. Wu Zhaoyi 吳兆宜 (hereafter referred to as YTTYX), 40
of anonymous poems, the Ziye (子夜) emerged, which were part of the “Songs of Wu” (吳歌), a group of early-Southern Dynasties yuefu poems. They contained more of the melancholic moon imagery, and they provided many examples for the Yongming poets to develop in their own school of poetry.4

In Shen Yue’s love poetry, heavenly bodies have various functions, either symbolizing passion or as witness or participant in the eroticized setting. Due to his work with the yuefu corpus, Shen Yue knew a great deal about how the more innovative Han yuefu and Southern Dynasties yuefu poetry were moving towards affiliating the moon with melancholic feeling. As well as these poetic associations, Shen Yue also inherited many cultural associations with the moon: the moon as onlooker, the moon as link between separated friends, etc... The moon is also associated with the yin (陰) aspect and thus with passivity, femininity and other such notions.5 Thus, since much of the love poetry Shen Yue wrote concerned feminine desire, we should expect to find many references to the moon. This is borne out when the poems are examined closely: images of the moon occur more than twice as commonly than do those of any other heavenly body. The moon appears in no less than a dozen of his love poems and has a multitude of roles to play. In his love poetry, the moon is unmistakably associated with a desire that is frustrated or hampered in its fruition; the same symbolic use that can be seen to be emerging in the Southern yuefu tradition. However, since Shen Yue did not have a truly established intertextual tradition of melancholic moon imagery, his was the task of promoting moon imagery that would have a more established semiotic context. Thus, he

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3 Birrell, *Popular Songs and Ballads of Han China*, 160
4 Lin Jiali (林家騫) “沈約詩歌的評價和在文學史上的地位” 59
was in the position to help create and codify the position of moon imagery within the
Chinese love-poetry tradition.

In some of his works, the loneliness of the abandoned lover is so acute that the
rays of the moon are often the only ‘live’ things within the poem, floating in a room of
oppressive claustrophobia. These moonbeams may take on a very active role within this
quiet stillness, as in the poem “In Reply to Wang Siyuan’s Poem on the Moon” (應
王中丞思遠詠月詩):

月華臨靜夜，夜靜滅氛埃。
方暎寢戶入，圓影隨中來。
高樓切思婦...。
洞房殊未曉， 信悠哉。
The flowery moon overlooks the still night,
The still night obliterates oppressive dust.
Square beams stretch out, entering doors,
Rounded shadows are made, coming through cracks.
In the high tower, the wife thinks longingly....
In the hidden chamber, it is still not yet dawn,
Those pure rays- how truly far off they are! (my italics) SYJ 381

They afflict the wife in her tower room, creeping through the cracks and doorways. By
contrast, the beams of the dawn sun cannot reach her in her “hidden chamber”, when she
thinks of her far-away lover. Therefore, only the cold rays of the moon are able to
penetrate as far as her deeply recessed chamber, and they become the catalysts of
remembrance, reminding her of her loss through their light.

Moon imagery associated with this type of pain and loss is the most extended in
his poem “Climbing a Terrace to Gaze at the Autumn Moon” (登臺望秋月), one of a
set of eight poems in irregular metre. In this work, he describes the appearance and the
actions of the autumn moon as it shines on the autumnal landscape:

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望秋月，
秋月光如練，
照耀三爵臺，徘徊九華殿...
凝華入牖帳，清煒懸洞房。
先過飛燕戶，卻照班姬床...
...委清光兮，素。
照愁軒之蓬影，映金階之輕步。
居人臨此笑以歌，別客對之傷且慕。
經衰圃，映寒叢。
凝清夜，帶秋風...
悶階悲寡鶴，沙洲怨別鴻。
Gazing at the autumn moon,
The autumn moon's rays are like skeins of silk.
They shine on Three Sparrow Terrace,
Waver ing on the Nine Flowered Hall...
Frozen and ornamental they go inside patterned curtains,
Pure radiance hanging in hidden rooms.
They first passed by Feiyan's door
And illuminated Lady Ban's bed...
The brilliant pure beams are like silk,
Shining on the tangled shadows of grieving eaves,
Brightening light footsteps on the golden steps,
A person at home looking at this sings with a smile,
A lonely traveler facing it feels pain and desire.
[The beams] pass withered orchards, light up cold scrub,
Freeze the pure night, carry the autumn wind...
On the empty steps, they sadden a lone swan,
On the sandy isle, they distress a forlorn goose. (SYJ 441)

As can be seen from this excerpt, Shen Yue exploits moon imagery in several different ways to increase the pathos of the feelings of desire and loneliness. The moon both functions as part of the mind-state that the poet wishes to express and expands the lyricism of the poem through its imagery. The moon shines on the palaces, highlighting their opulent and aristocratic appearance. The description of the rays sets the scene for the entry into the boudoirs, which are the “hidden rooms” with their “patterned bed-curtains”. Shen Yue exploits the moon as a means of access to this world of closeted women, but the very fact that we are led in by the moon imbues the scene with stillness,

⁶ Zhao Feiyan was the favoured consort of Emperor Chang of the Han dynasty. She ousted the Lady Ban from his favour, but after the Emperor’s death was forced to commit suicide.
silence and, by association, 'illicitness'. Thus, the closed world of the palace becomes, in this work, a world where the moon is exclusively associated with forsaken women.

In the next lines, Shen Yue again reaffirms the codification of the moon with negated desire. He uses an historical precedent to re-enforce the pathos of despairing desire: the moon lights the “bed of Lady Ban” but passes by the room of Zhao Feiyan. Moonlight on the bed of Lady Ban became a commonly used conceit for the pain of abandonment by a lover. This elegiac illumination is heightened by the moon “passing by” the room of Feiyan. Thus the rays of the moon ignore the cherished concubine, Feiyan, and instead they linger with the deserted woman. Later in this poem, a similar contrast is also set up. The “person at home” looks at the moon and sings, secure in their proper place and sheltered from the cold and withering effects of the rays. However, the lonely traveler, who feels “pain and desire” from being separated from home, is forced to face the moon and its saddening light. This distressing effect of the moon is further witnessed in its effect on the solitary birds, as it accentuates their suffering and causing them to feel grief. Thus, the moon serves as an agent that actively inflicts pain through its rays. In this poem, Shen Yue establishes several functions for the moon, all of which show the increasing codification of this motif within his poetry.

However, there is another, more benevolent aspect to the moon as participant in the poetry of lost love, inasmuch as it may be the only entity to pay attention to the figure of the abandoned lover. In such poems as “A Song of Night After Night” (II) (夜夜曲), as the woman lies in her boudoir, hurt and alone, the “moon shines, horizontally darting

\[7\text{ After Lady Ban was replaced by Zhao Feiyan in the Emperor's affections, she was left to languish in the Empress Dowager's quarters.}\]
across her pillow" (月輝横射枕). The moonbeams light up the empty pillow and highlight her feelings of emptiness, becoming the only witnesses to the scene. The moon is the only ‘living’ thing within her room; just as only the moonbeams stayed to light up the bed of Lady Ban in the poem “Climbing a Terrace to Gaze on the Autumn Moon.”

This presence of the moon as sole companion to the abandoned lady has a two-fold result. It not only creates a sense of pathos for the woman, emphasizing her loneliness and abandoned state, but also, through the connection between the historical allusions of such esteemed examples as virtuous Lady Ban, the moon is an ever-present witness to the ‘correctness’ of the female’s feelings. Its presence endorses the proper expression of this female desire: a woman longing to be made ‘whole’ by love. This socializing aspect served to reflect the social structure of the surrounding aristocratic society. With the escalating movement of upper society into the closed world of the palace and courts, inter-personal relationships needed to be defined and controlled. With the uneven male to female ratio caused by the influx of concubines and entertainers, some women would inevitably be ignored. By showing that they should long for their husband, rather than an illicit lover, the presence of the moon in these poems sanctions their emotions, allowing them to find solace in their neglect. The poem, “Climbing a Terrace to Gaze at the Autumn Moon”, also contains this socializing function of the moon with its use of the images of the solitary birds under the moon. The birds should be in the rightful, paired state, as should the women; the moon attends both. The moon then becomes a symbol tied into concepts of the ‘correct’ social function of desire. The

\[\text{SYJ, 317}\]
people should be spurred on by its light to keep deserted women hopeful for restoration of proper male-female relationships.

Apart from the social use of moon imagery, Shen Yue also augments his verses' urbaneness through the images of the moon. He manipulated these images in order to promote the agenda of the Yongming era, which was to raise poetry's level of sophistication in both the technical and aesthetic aspects. Therefore, it is not just female grief that is written about by Shen Yu in connection with the moon. He also uses the moon as a signifier for other unrequited or frustrated love. In a departure from the more usual expression of female loneliness, in the poem "I Go to Meet a Neighbour about whom I have Feelings, but She Doesn’t Come" (為鄰人有懷不至詩), it is the poet's own longing which is disappointed:

影逐斜月來，香隨遠風入。
言是定知非，欲笑翻成泣。  
A shadow follows the slanting moon that's rising,
Fragrance is carried upon on a distant breeze which approaches.
Your promise that was true I know, for certain, is false,
I was about to smile but I turned to tears. (SYJ 431)

The moon not only looks on the poet's unrequited yearnings but also serves as a visible mark of the failure of the love affair. The moon and her distant fragrance are the only companions that he has on this night. This association with disappointed male desire and the moon helps to deepen the ties between the image of the moon and the idea of frustrated passion. Furthermore, by using a male persona as the sufferer in this poem, Shen Yue is extending the pathos associated with the acceptable (and by this time more conventional) figure of the female as unrequited victim to the male poet himself.

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This extension and change in gender-association in the use of moon imagery forces the reader to confront the change in gender-connotations of the erotic aspect of the moon. The accepted connotations of the moon as the *yin* aspect, the signifier of the grieving female are given an abrupt twist in this poem. This twist in turns serves to destabilize the reader’s expectations and conclusions. The entire reading of the text becomes undermined by the use of the image. When the moon image is first encountered, a reader of the time would immediately expect the concluding two lines to describe a boudoir-dwelling saddened woman, perhaps lamenting a lover who has forgotten their tryst. Suddenly, however, Shen Yue reveals that it is he who has made the tryst and the woman who has broken it. With this twist, the dynamic of the poem becomes much more sophisticated and urbane. This association of the moon with a man jilted by a casual lover is very different from the moon that attends upon a grieving woman. Moreover, the tenor of the poem is further subverted by the fact that the affair longed for by the poet could scarcely be socially ‘correct’. He has crept out at night to meet a neighbouring beauty. This is hardly the correct form of courtship: either the lady is already married or she is a girl not allowed out yet by her family and certainly not allowed to meet with poets on moonlit nights! Therefore, as opposed to the moon-female images, in which a female desires “proper” love, this moon is linked with the illicit desires of a male. The reversal in the semiotic change of imagery then contributes to the urbaneness of the poem since this effect is only fully appreciated by those versed in the cultural and literary norms. It is clear that grasping this subversion is dependent on a

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10 See Birrell’s “The Dusty Mirror: Courtly Portraits of Women in Southern Dynasties Love Poetry”
close relationship between the poet and his audience, and therefore their mutual participation in the elite literary milieu.

The reliance on a commonality within the literary environment also shows in Shen Yue’s use of star imagery. The moon is not the only denizen of the night sky but Shen Yue unquestionably makes the most use of it as a symbol. Nonetheless, in the poem “A Song of Night After Night” (I) (夜夜曲), Shen Yue employs the stars as witnesses to forsaken love.

河漢縱且横，北斗横且直。
星漢空如此，寧知心有憤。
孤燈暗不明，寒機曉猶織。
零淚向誰道，雞鳴徒歎息。

The Milky Way stretches out and vertical,
The Northern Dipper is horizontal then straight.
The Celestial Han\textsuperscript{11} is a void like this
How do you know the recollections in my heart?
The lone lamp is faint, not bright.
The cold loom at dawn still weaves.
Shedding lonely tears, to whom could I speak?
The cock crows and then I heave a long sigh. (SYJ 315)

The significance of the Milky Way is as a symbol of the separation of lovers. In Chinese mythology, the Milky Way separates the two stars of the lovers, Herdboy and Weavergirl.\textsuperscript{12} Those versed in the literary yuefu tradition would immediately understand this allusion. The female persona in the poem is isolated by everyone else’s ignorance of her condition and, in particular, that of her lover. She cannot speak to him and she cannot tell him of the “feelings in [her] heart.” Shen Yue thus draws parallels between the

\textsuperscript{11} Another name for the Milky Way
\textsuperscript{12} The legend says that when [the Herdboy and the Weaver] married they were so happy they would not work. The king and queen of Heaven were so angry with them that they separated them. The queen drew her silver hairpin across the sky and created the Han river, or the River of Heaven, to divide the lovers. But the king was moved by their plight and allowed them to meet once a year . . . during the rest of the year Weaver is shown fidgeting at her task of weaving, never completing her pattern because she is pining.
From Birrell, \textit{New Songs from a Jade Terrace}, 392
separation in the physical world (that of the Herdboy and the Weaver by the Milky Way) and the mental isolation of the woman (‘locked’ in her loneliness by the withdrawal of her lover).

However, such uses of astrological stories were more popular in the yuefu tradition and Shen Yue’s audience would have immediately placed this work into the ‘intratexual’ world of yuefu. That Shen Yue chose to break with this more rustic imagery can be clearly seen in his avoidance of the stars as subjects of poetry. In fact, this poem is his only love poem to contain a reference to stars. This break with rusticity is even more clear if we examine the poem “Imitating Shen Yue’s ‘Night After Night’” by Xiao Gang (Emperor Jianwen), leader of the Palace-style coterie:

露露夜中霜，何闌向曉光。
枕啼常帶粉，身眠不著床。
Heavy, heavy lies the night frost;
Nothing to do with the pre-dawn light!
My pillowed sobs are laden with powder
My body finds little repose on my couch.14 (YTXY 7.16)

Xiao Gang abandons the star imagery altogether in favour of the frost and the dark night. His move away from the rustic is shown in his description of the woman. She is plainly a concubine or palace lady of leisure, who has no loom in her room but is made-up with powder, even at night. These two poems show clearly the shift from the earlier poetics of Shen Yue to the Palace-style. The increasingly aristocratic diction was accompanied by a rejection of rusticity. Women of the court were not to be associated with herdboys or the mundane tasks of weaving. Hence, the urbaneness of the subject matter increased.

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13 For the ‘intratexual’ world of literary yuefu modelling themselves upon popular yuefu, see Joseph Allen’s In the Voice of Others
throughout the Yongming era to end in the completely aristocratic tradition of the Palace-style poetry.

Thus, it can be seen that Shen Yue built upon the tradition of both moon imagery and star imagery to contribute to three main thematic areas. First, his lack of interest in the more rural, traditional imagery signified a shift in subject towards the increasingly urbane. This rejection of rustic imagery was a reflection of the ongoing transformation in sociological structure. As the elitism of the literary cliques and court circles became more and more entrenched, the society in which poetry was disseminated became increasingly hostile to rustic and pastoral associations. It was a society based upon aristocratic cliques and alliances, centred about a profoundly elitist view of the participants' own cultured surroundings. Hence, the shift towards intensely sealed realms of literary circulation effectively encouraged shifts in semiotic connections towards stricter usage and greater exploration of the more 'genteel' way of life.

Furthermore, by reinforcing the association of moonlight with forsaken or disappointed female desire, he imbues the nighttime imagery with a socialized aspect, affecting the sentiments associated with nighttime. He socializes the boundaries of female desire by using the nocturnal imagery to give melancholic associations to the women who long for a 'proper' union. These deserted wives/concubines do not yearn for illicit affairs but are most often seen longing for the man who has abandoned them for another concubine. Because their situation is so grievous for themselves, the moonlight serves as a symbol to them and the reader of the despondency of the situation. Therefore, in this way the night sky is strongly linked to the acceptable social functioning of desire:
namely, desire as helping to form and consolidate bonds between a man and the 
women dependent on him.

However, upon the socialized use, Shen Yue also builds an ironic layer of 
contrary associations. In subverting the moon-female link into a moon-male link, where 
the male’s desire is anything but socially correct, Shen Yue alters the especial bond 
between the feminine voice and nocturnal imagery. By altering this connection, he 
dermines the stability of his audience who would be looking to place his work into a 
’slot’ in the tradition. In this way, he contributed to the increasing sense of urbaneness, 
sophistication and polish that was to permeate so greatly the works of the Palace-style 
poets. Thus, Shen Yue’s important and formative influence on this later school of poetry 
that emerged in his old age appears throughout his use of nighttime imagery.

From the above analysis, it can be seen clearly that all the images connected with 
the night sky concern negated desire or unrequited love. The contrast with the daytime 
sky is unambiguous; while the moon and stars show these feelings of desertion and loss, 
the sun shines on the more positive side of desire. Shen Yu consciously makes this 
contrast in his works where he uses solar imagery in his poems that describe fulfilled or 
unhampered love. He also creates this positive sexual association with the sun in order to 
allow it to eroticize objects and situations of desire.

This positive aspect is present in a few earlier poems, but is not a common motif. 
In the Ziye poem cycle from the “Songs of Wu” yuefu, very few poems mention the sun 
at all, choosing to concentrate rather on the description of the seasons. When the sun is 
mentioned, it is present to establish the season, rather than the mood:

朱日光素水，黃華映白雪。  
折梅待佳人，共迎陽春月。
A rosy sun shines on translucent water,
Yellow flowers reflect on white snow.
Breaking off plum blossom I wait for a beautiful girl,
Together we will welcome the spring full moon.\(^{15}\)

However, in Shen Yue’s works, his use of solar imagery clearly reveals the enhanced codification of both solar associations with certain feelings and the type of response elicited by the sun. Rather than merely using the sun to set a scene, the sun’s rays are used to highlight particular items which are associated with love. The ‘spotlight’ on the object serves to eroticize the objects by giving tantalizing glimpses of these items, blazoning the use of the objects in a sexualized context. This technique does not appear in the earlier love songs of the \textit{yuefu} tradition. In Shen Yue’s works, it adds an extra dimension of eroticism to the poem and intimately bonds the sun with this sensuality, much closer than ties in the \textit{yuefu} tradition.

An example of this is in the poem “Climbing on High to Gaze at Spring” (登高望春), where Shen Yue describes the exuberance of a spring scene. The boys and girls are dressed in their finery, and they are ready for courting. First the reader is given an overview of the city but the scene quickly focuses in on the people lining the streets:

\begin{quote}
登高眺京洛，街巷紛漠漠。
迥首望長安，城闕鬱盤恆。
日出照錦繡，風過動羅紗。
齊儔躍朱履，趙女揚翠翰... \\
Climbing on high to look upon Luoyang,  
The streets and alleys crisscross densely.  
Turning my head, I gaze at Changan,  
The walls and watchtowers in profusion.  
The sun comes out and shines on hairpins and kohl,  
The wind blows by, rustling gauzy silk.  
Qi boys tap their vermilion shoes,  
Zhao girls flutter their feathery headdress... (SYJ 345)
\end{quote}

Shining in the sunbeams, the hair-ornaments and make-up contribute to the erotic atmosphere that hangs in the spring air. Here, the sun shows off the objects of eroticism and beauty, drawing the focus of the description onto the hairpins and the makeup and complimenting these feminine accessories with its masculine light. In addition to the highlighting and subsequent eroticizing of those first ornaments, the actions of the boys and girls intensify the sexual atmosphere through their pride in their appearance. The preening of the groups relies on the sun; bright red shoes and feathered headpieces show best under the spring sun. The groups use the sunlight to come out and attract each other. This joyous aspect of the courting ritual is emphasized by the cheerful actions of the boys and girls.

This atmosphere combines with the sun imagery to impart a socialized aspect to the eroticism. The boys in the first part of the couplet are balanced by the girls in the second half. The delicate *yin* aspects of the girls and their accessories contrast with the *yang* associations of the boys and the sun. Their motions also balance each other. Thus, the actual structure of the couplet describing the boys and girls together with the connection between the ornaments and the sun indicates that the lovers in the poems will be matched, balanced and fruitful. Here the sun provides social approval of the pairing-off of the boys and girls. This balanced combination, in turn, reflects the suitability of the courtship that is going on.

Another example of the eroticizing of objects through sunlight occurs when the sun lights up the zithers in “Singing of the Spring” (春詠). The sun “highlights the
zithers”, which are ready to strike up a tune to while away the spring day (日华照趙瑟). The connection of these zithers with the courting of the boys and girls, in the same way as the previous poem, results in not only eroticizing the zithers, but also placing a greater social weight upon the sun imagery. The sun also takes a more eroticized role in the poem “Luoyang Road” (洛阳道) as well.

洛陽大道中，佳麗實無比。
燕裙傍日開，趨帶隨風靡...
In the midst of Luoyang’s broad roads, 
There is beauty truly beyond compare.
The Yan skirts embrace the sun and open, 
The Chao belts follow the winds, flapping... (SYJ 309)

This sun is actually opening the skirts of the beauties who are on the road. This action personifies the sun, making it the cause of potential licentiousness. Shen Yue thus takes traditional solar imagery and increases its eroticizing potential once more, clearly allying the sun with desire and expanding the degree of eroticism involved with solar imagery.

The active role the sun takes in revealing the attributes of the women (and men) that eroticized imagery can also be inspired by traditional sources. This can be seen in Shen Yue’s re-working of the Luofu narrative, “Sunrise over the Southeast Corner” (日出東南隅行). The Luofu story was very popular during the Six Dynasties period, with most poets producing their own versions by intratextual manipulation of the poem’s

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16 In this balancing of imagery and action, we also see Shen Yue’s ability in parallel couplets emerging. Parallelism was being increasingly important during this period and led to the exquisite parallelism of the Tang (for interesting examples of Shen Yue’s parallelism, see Lin Jiali 林家驪, 60)
17 SYJ 402
18 The Luofu narrative tells the story of a girl who, while out in the fields, is seen and desired by a high official. When he propositions her, she defends herself with a account of her husband’s powerful status. This narrative was an extremely common theme in the Six Dynasties period
elements. Shen Yue’s version begins with the traditional image of the sunrise
commonly found at the start of many versions:

朝日出邯鄣，照我叢臺端。
中有傾城豔，顧景織羅紗。
庭幃似織約，遺視若回懣...
The dawn sun rises out of Han-tan town
And shines upon our Clustered Terrace edge.
Within there is a city-toppling beauty
Looking at her own reflection, weaving gauzy silks.
Her lissome body’s like a slender skein;
Her glances like an overwhelming flood. (SYJ 284)

In the traditional version of the poem, the narrative quickly moves on from the dawn to
describe Luofu’s picking mulberries.

日出東南隅，照我秦氏樓。
秦氏有好女，自言名羅敷。
羅敷善蠶桑，采桑城南隅...
Sunrise at the south-east corner
Shines on our Qin clan house.
The Qin clan has a fair daughter,
She is called Luofu.

Luofu is skilled with silkworms and mulberry,
She picks mulberry at the wall’s south corner... (YTXY 4)

Although the sun shines on the house at first, the focus in the original poem quickly
moves to the figure of the woman actively working at an agricultural job, thereby
connecting the shining sun with sentiments of rusticity and nature. This more rural feel is
much more prevalent in the yuefu poem. Shen Yue’s poem, however, places the heroine
indoors and transforms Luofu into a cloistered beauty, staring at herself as she works.
The only way she is brought to our attention is by the sunbeams striking her house,
wherein she is cloistered. She is, however, as reliant on the sunlight as the Luofu who
works in the fields, since she would not be able to see her own reflection without the

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20 Translation from Mather, *The Reticent Marquis: The Poet Shen Yueh* 66
dawn light. Thus, the sunlight is intrinsic to Luofu’s situation and actions since, despite the fact that she is weaving, she still glances into the mirror, herself as a voyeur of herself. The sun becomes linked, not to the mulberries and women in the fields, but to an affluent household and a cloistered, cultivated and narcissistic beauty who can only seek recognition through the reflection of light in her mirror.

As well as carrying out this codification of associative aspects of sunshine, Shen Yue also endows the beams with much greater potential sensuality than those in the folk song original. The yuefu version is centred about a prefect-officer’s propositioning of Luofu and her spirited rebuff.\(^{21}\) The crux of the yuefu is Luofu’s refusal of the proposition and it ends with her rebuking of the officer and her return to work. Instead of yielding to the officer, she fends him off with boasting about her husband and successfully defends her honour by her own merits. Shen Yue’s version, however, concentrates on first the description of the woman, and then the description of her lover’s heroic appearance, placing them together as a perfectly matching pair:

瑶装映層緞，金服炫影欝...  
寶劍垂玉貝，汗馬飾金鞍...  
羅衣夕解帶，玉釵暮垂冠...  
[Her] precious ornaments reflect on layered silk,  
Golden attire gleams against carved wood...  
Jade and shell dangle from his fine sword,  
A golden saddle rests upon his sweating horse...  
He loosens the belt of her gauzy dress at dusk.  
The jade hairpin dangles from his hat in the evening. (SYJ 309)

Thus, Shen Yue changes the ethos of the poem completely. The characters transform into elegant aristocrats in an opulent setting. The mood of heightened sensuality increases through the poem, as the action moves from the solitary woman to the union of the two

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\(^{21}\) See Chapter Four, 90
lovers. This dramatic and licentious ending to the poem is diametrically different from the folk heroine’s rejection of her suitor. Shen Yue thus ties the traditional sunlit imagery of the beginning of the folk song to the sexual relations between Luofu and her husband. This results in charging the sun imagery with even greater eroticism.

Shen Yue’s increased eroticism in solar imagery shows clearly the direction in which Chinese love-poetry was moving. Expression of passion was to become much more explicit, which consequently increased the sophistication of tone. By charging the image of the sun with stronger eroticism, Shen Yue brought into play not only the new type of expression that was emerging. By imposing conformity within the solar imagery of his works, he also provided an orderly source of erotically charged imagery for later poetry that would augment other images. Therefore, he both organized the semiotic connections of celestial imagery and enlarged its erotic ‘force’. This duality can also been seen in his seasonal imagery.
The Four (or Rather, Two) Seasons

The very earliest poetry within the Chinese tradition contains many seasonal referents. The agrarian nature of life and the dependence upon the yearly cycle made the seasons prominent in early love songs. In fact, the love poems of the “Songs of Wu” tradition, the Ziye songs, were arranged around seasons. When the Song dynasty anthologist, Guo Maoqian (郭茂倩), collected the yuefu corpus into one book, he arranged the Ziye poems into five categories: the Ziye Songs and the Ziye Songs of the Four Seasons, which consisted of the Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter sections. However, in these poems, there is no strong, particular link between a certain season and desire: spring, summer, autumn and winter all may serve as a background to passion.

Because of these ambiguous associations between seasons and love in the yuefu tradition, Shen Yue and other Yongming poets were presented with a greater freedom in creating connections in his own poetry. Since one of the intentions of Yongming poetics was to establish and clarify literary devices and rules, Shen Yue wanted the opportunity to systematize the relationship between seasons and love. In truth, the Yongming poets were so successful in this area that their semiotic system was to dominate completely Palace-style imagery.

Shen Yue’s love poems and other love poems of his time contain many references to spring. In his rhyme-prose (fu 賦) “A Beautiful Woman” (麗人賦), Shen Yue describes a courtesan who is “lissome and charming as spring” (婉婉如春). This is a

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22 Although the poems in the ‘Spring’ and ‘Summer’ sections tend to be somewhat more positive than those in the ‘Autumn’ and ‘Winter’ sections.  
23 Hence their interest in codifying tonal rules. See Liu Yuejin 劉耀進, 門閥士族與永明文學, Part 3  
24 SYJ 2
highly innovative use of spring as a simile and it serves to unbalance the usual transference of qualities that occurs between simile and object. Instead of placing attributes of spring upon the female, the intensely feminine tenor of the adjectives and their specificity in reference to the feminine forces the adjectival attributes upon spring. Thus, this simile, rather than imbuing the female figure with the traits of spring, blends the season with the attractiveness of the woman. Here, Shen Yue is making the spring indelibly linked with feminine erotic potential. Further emphasizing this, he describes her appearance in sensuous detail and through this connotes her sexual readiness. She is looking for a suitable lover who finally “arrives at midnight” (宵分乃至) for their tryst. The entire poem focuses upon the girl’s desirability and worthiness. The comparison between her and the spring serves to help establish a strong link between spring and her eroticism.

This is not the only emotive force that spring can carry in Shen Yue’s poetry. In his other poems, there are other responses to spring, either associating spring with frustrated passion or, in most cases, fulfilled desire. These two associations, although opposite in sentiment, perform complementary modifications on the poetic semiotics of spring. By linking the spring with passion, regardless of outcome, Shen Yue strongly identifies spring with all eroticism. This contributes to forming a poetic tradition in which the primary erotic time is spring, a tradition that is much more controlled and regimented than the freer associations that are present in the Ziye poems of the earlier yuefu corpus. This refining and regulating of popular love-imagery was one of the most
important roles of the Yongming school. They would provide a polished system of imagery, technique and style that would serve as a guiding pattern for the Palace-style poets.

"Facing the Spring Wind" (臨春風) is not only one of Shen Yue’s longest lyrical poems, but it also holds many examples of the conformity in spring imagery that he was encouraging. In the beginning, he initially connects the spring wind with the awakening of nature and the burgeoning life. As the wind rises, it provokes the women and their clothing into activity, urging them into sensuous motion. Finally, the wind shakes the dust from the beds and boudoirs to prepare them for use:

Facing the spring wind,
The spring wind rises from the spring trees. 
Slow drifting gossamer like a net, 
Falling flowers thick as fog. 
At first, brushing over Heavenly Abyss ponds, 
Then passing through delicate willow branches... 
It opens Yen skirts, 
Blows on Zhao belts. 
The Zhao belts fly up in ruffles, 
The Yen skirts flap together then separate. 
It whirls about hairpins and streaks kohl, 
They glance down while walking, concerned about their appearance. 
Their appearance is indeed radiant, 
And the spring wind in turn diminishes... 
It brushes off the winter dust from bright mirrors,

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25 See Shang Ding 尚定, “The Literary Controversy over Refined and Popular Tastes in the Qi and Liang Dynasties” (Qi-Liang Wentan de Ya-Su zhi Zheng 齊梁文壇的雅俗之爭), Literature, History and Philosophy (文史哲), 196.1 (1990) 58-61
26 Dust, which will be discussed later, is in itself a powerful image.
And relaxes the autumn creases in gauzy silks.
It starts by hesitatingly entering the boudoir,
And in the end, wavers and slips through cracks... (XQHW 1664)

Not only does the spring wind produce and convey this sexual energy, but it also serves to foreground the eroticism of spring and to exclude the sexual aspects of the other seasons. Through the use of ‘spring’ as a repetitive adjective, Shen Yue linked his work to the tradition of the more erotic of the Ziye springtime poems, which have a similarly repetitive structure.

春林花多媚，春鳥意多哀。
春風復多情，吹我羅裙開。
Spring woodland flowers are truly alluring,
Spring birds’ thoughts are truly melancholy.
Spring winds are again truly tender,
Blowing apart my gauzy skirts. (YFSJ 345)

Thus, Shen Yue placed the previous poem within the yuefu continuum, giving it legitimacy within the heavily intertextual Chinese tradition. Yet, since his corpus does not contain erotic poems about the other seasons, he refines the yuefu imprecision by privileging spring above all other seasons. Through this and other poems, he makes it clear that the spring alone is responsible, as a season, for this type of erotic dynamism. He exploits all the associations that spring has with the beginnings of desire, using these to define the correct time and space within which desire is acceptable. Thus, Shen Yue also continues the codification of the poetic construction of what the ‘natural’ time for desire is.

As Shen Yue builds up these eroticized associations of the spring, he also contributes, in contrast, a more melancholy image. Towards the end of “Facing the Spring Wind”, he laments the fate of those women who are alone: “this season distresses the wife who is thinking, ‘How can he be soldiering for so long?’ (是時悵思婦 /
These women cannot share in the coming of spring and desire and they are excluded from the sexuality that is prevalent in this season. Shen Yue makes the plight of these women stand out in dissonance against the main ‘melody’ of spring. They stand as a bleak contrast to the glorious abundance of nature and the girls whose clothing flutters in the wind and whose make-up is caressed by the wind. The contrast attests to Shen Yue’s goal in codifying spring; namely, that the women who are forsaken are discordant with the season. In addition, the lament of their fate serves to intensify the identification of spring with desire in a social sense. Since the women long for their partners, spring is shown both as a propelling force for social pairing and as the socially correct time for uniting.

Another of Shen Yue’s works serves to accentuate the link between the seasons and desire. In “Early Spring” (初春), desire is ‘untimely’ and hence unsuitable. The disapproval of this unsuitable desire shown in the hostility of the season. In this work, there is an implicit criticism of girls who go searching for love at too early a time:

扶崖覓陽春，佳人共攜手。
草色猶自偽，林中都未有。
無事逐梅花，空中信楊柳。
且復歸去來，含情寄杯酒。
On the edge of the road, they seek out sunny spring,
Beautiful girls together holding hands.
[But] the colour of the grass is still pale,
In the woods there’s nothing yet at all.
It’s no use to pursue plum blossoms,
In vain they hope for willow.
So again they return to their home and leave,
Swallowing their feelings, they turn to cups of wine. (SYJ 401)

The first warning is sounded when the girls are out in public ‘seeking’ the spring, an action not only brazenly public (on the road, no less!) but also very precipitous. There is no green grass, no trees in bud and they seek in vain. The season is not yet proper to find
a mate and the girls have no choice but to hold in their feelings and to while away this
time with drinking, waiting for the proper time.

Therefore, by creating these associations with the seasons of spring, Shen Yue
gave spring not only a more eroticized role within love poetry, but he also assigned social
values to this season as he did with the sun and the moon. By redrawing and regulating
the links between eroticism and the seasons, Shen Yue provided the Liang dynasty poets
with a more rigidly codified set of images, which intensified erotic overtones. Some of
these later poets extended this even further, personifying spring as desire. A poem by
Shen Yue’s junior, Wu Jun (吳均), begins with the lines: “From whence does spring
come / Brushing clothes and surprising plum-blossom?” (春從何處來,
拂衣復驚梅). The Palace-style verses thus distinctly show the influence of Shen Yue’s
and other Yongming poets’ systematization of the erotic and springtime.

By using the spring imagery to socialize the correct time for eroticism, Shen Yue
seeks to define love within social boundaries, paralleling the cycle of the seasons with the
linear life of humans. As can be seen, Shen Yue continues this cycle through to the
autumn and associates the ending of the year with the withering of beauty or the
frustration of desire. This theme had been present in the Chinese tradition before, but had
not been closely adhered to. Autumn could be a time of melancholy but it could also be
sensuous, as in this poem from the Ziyue corpus:

> 涼秋開窗寢，斜月垂光照。
> 隱臂無人語，羅幃有雙笑。
> In cool autumn, sleeping with open windows,
> The leaning moon gleams, hanging down its beams.
> In the middle of the night, there’s no one talking,
> [But] from gauzy curtains, comes coupled laughter. (YFSJ 647)

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27 YTXY 133 (Roll 6)
The Ziye tradition is therefore imprecise in its semiotic associations of autumn, but Shen Yue again took an active role in creating more rigid associative boundaries for autumnal imagery.

In the previously mentioned poem, “Gazing at the Autumn Moon”, Shen Yue piles image upon image of neglected love: lone birds (swan and goose) sorrow for their partners, osmanthus trees shed their boughs, dew freezes over, abandoned beds are lit up and plants wither. The autumn destroys the eroticism of the spring, and if the woman is caught within this season, her lover has abandoned her and she, in turn, neglects her physical appearance. This autumnal aspect to fading love is also found in the yuefu style poem, “Holding Hands” (撫手曲):

斜簪映秋水...
所畏紅顏促，君恩不可長。
韋冠且容裔，豈吝桂枝亡。
Slanting hairpins reflected in autumnal water...
What is to be feared is the decline of rosy cheeks,
Your love will not be forever.
You, noble sir, please be at ease,
Who regrets it if an osmanthus branch dies? (SYJ 314)

The autumn combines with the lament of the woman who knows that she will be abandoned. This poem is posited firmly in intertextuality by the employ of a traditional image (woman as osmanthus branch) to reinforce the negative love-imagery of autumn. This type of intertextual enforcement of the negative aspects of autumn desire helped to create a coherent, stable association for autumn just as he had created one for spring.

The Yongming era transformation of poetic imagery promoted this lasting negative association of autumn, which the later poems of the Yu Tai Xin Yong exhibit in a

28 Anne Birrell, “The Dusty Mirror”
contrast between their spring and autumn imagery. Spring imagery is most prevalent in the “short-form love poetry section” (Roll Nine and Ten). This section concentrates on two couplet verses, which often are more playful and light in tone, as opposed to the longer *yuefu* forms, which took as their main theme abandonment and desertion. Hence, nearly all poems of positive love occur in Rolls Nine and Ten. Within these two rolls in particular, the use of positive (rather than socialized) springtime image is predominant. In fact, the springtime imagery of this section is all positive, containing no themes of desertion. This contrasts greatly with the earlier *Ziye* tradition, where positive images of love occur throughout all four seasons and there is no such apparent effort to establish a firm correlation between certain seasons and eroticism.

Furthermore, in the longer poems of the *Yu Tai Xin Yong* written after the Yongming era (Rolls Six to Eight), all of the poems that mention autumn ally the season to feelings of desertion and negated desire. The themes of desertion and despair in love are much more prominent in these sections. This is shown in such works as Prince Xiao Lun’s poem, “Singing of Autumn Nights” (詠秋夜) which begins, “During autumn nights, securely locked up and desolate/ The wanderer’s wife grieves by the window lattice” (秋夜九重空，離子怨房櫺). This is a very typical example of the use of autumn imagery that developed during the Liang dynasty, which was to influence the majority of the Tang corpus that came after it.

The importance of the Yongming era poetic development becomes apparent when such seasonal imagery is examined. Palace-style poetry was conceived in a spirit of urbaneness and sophistication. In order to develop this in their works, the poets promoted
polish and elegance far ahead of spontaneity. Therefore, an important aspect of the Palace-style love poetry was peer-recognition and interdependence, which would provide a background by which to judge the individual’s urbane use of the existing poetic tradition. In this way, imagery that was highly individualized or loosely associative was anathema to Palace-style poets. They did not wish to express love in a personal and subjective tone, but to make it an urbane and sophisticated subject of ‘erotics’ that they could use to display their erudition and craftsmanship. As such, they turned to heavy dependence on intertextuality to codify and create specific semiotic codes which could be shared within the audience of close literary cliques, whose members would all be familiar with poetic tradition. Thanks to the efforts of such earlier poets as Shen Yue who were intensely aware of being in the vanguard of an emerging highly crafted and intertextual poetic movement, the Palace-style poets had much material to work with.
Chapter Two- The Natural World

Nature imagery was very prevalent in the very earliest works of Chinese love poetry. Images of birds, trees and plants (both cultivated and wild) permeated the love poems of the Shi Jing. Therefore, in the very beginning of love poetry, nature occupies an important position within its semiotics. However, in the Southern Dynasties, these nature images underwent an important transformation, not in overall tenor but rather in associative groups. More and more of the same types of imagery were beginning to occur in groups, forming what Anne Birrell has described as “a string of images [that] form a cluster bound together by a single unifying theme.”

Larger ‘webs’ linked these images to each other through both association within individual texts and connection to the larger corpus of works, similar to the associative relationship in de Saussurean linguistics:

Outside discourse, on the other hand, words acquire relations of a different kind. Those that have something in common are associated in memory, resulting in groups linked by diverse relations. We see that the coordinations formed outside discourse are not supported by linearity...they are associative relations...[which] unite terms in absentia in a potential mnemonic series.

The poets of the Qi dynasty thus connected various images together so that the evocation of any single element would call the others (in the same cluster) to mind. Their aim was to provide each cluster with particular semiotic overtones that would exist only for that particular ‘web’ of imagery, thus strengthening individual referents as links in the web and codifying not just single images but an entire network of associative relations. The

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1 Birrell, New Songs from a Jade Terrace, Introduction, 19
organization of such a defined group of elements would result in a cluster construction. Another advantage of this more systematic clustering would be to allow poets to add more 'links' into the web (conditional upon their conspicuous placement in this group) which would result in the widening of poetic referents included within this codified system.

In this area, Shen Yue’s position in textual development is of great interest since these webs of imagery were employed to their fullest later in the Liang Dynasty, firmly posited on the basis constructed by Shen Yue and other predecessors. Shen Yue’s organization of nature imagery referents into clusters involved both the relating of the referent to the previous textual body of eroticized imagery and the consequent activation of the referent as part of the new, emerging image-cluster. Thus, this ‘clustering’ action can be seen to be operating not only on a syntagmatic level, but also on a paradigmatic level. It involves a horizontal movement of time-related associations, and the vertical movement of referent-subject related images, which clearly results in a double-layering action of codification.

In addition to the movement of related imagery into groups, clear distinctions began to arise between clusters. Poets began to separate the webs of images into two main types of image-clusters; those associated with fulfilled, or positive, eroticism, and those concerned with negated emotion. The positive cluster took its referents mainly from the previous yuefu imagery and the Yongming poets synthesized and codified their inter-referentiality. The clusters of negated desire were more complex. There were basically

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two types of cluster. In the first, the referents assembled are also derived from the yuefu tradition. They use a decline in nature to reflect passively the decline in love. However, a more innovative cluster also emerged at the same time that posited nature as a dynamic sign of negated emotion or frustrated desire.

In this cluster, the elements of nature (such as spiders and lichen) invaded the space of the forsaken woman and placed themselves in active antithesis. The inappropriateness of the referents present in this cluster to courtly life clearly posited these elements as active forces of erotic destruction. Therefore, the development of the second type of negated emotion cluster distinctly widens the range of natural imagery, opening it to actively ruinous aspects of nature. These two groups of imagery discriminate clearly between nature as reflecting emotion and nature as opposing the cultured and closed world of the court. The second type, in particular, appears in the late Southern dynasties period, showing the tendency of Qi-Liang poets towards the privileging of civilized life. Thus, the examination of these positive and negative clusters may shed much light on how the semiotic associations between love and imagery became established and the discord nature could have with the ongoing agenda of increasing aristocratization.
A Positive Web

In the previous yuefu tradition, positive imagery associated with the world of nature was very prevalent. This imagery originated in the world of the pastoral love song where the singers incorporated their rural environment into ballads. Since these ballads tended to describe the courtship of men and women, the love described within also tended to be viewed positively. In the Southern dynasties, when the yuefu became more associated with urban centres, images of refined and cultivated life were added to the nature imagery already in the tradition, yet the overall emphasis on nature still prevailed. When the “Songs of Wu” are examined, it can be seen that the nature imagery is based on two aspects of the objects involved: linguistic and semiotic.

In the first category fall names of (mainly) plants that, because of their linguistic sound, operate on a paronomasic level. The most common example of this, particularly in the Ziye tradition, is “lian” (蓮), which in its earliest meaning is ‘lotus seed’ but may also, as synecdoche, mean ‘lotus plant’. Regardless of specific meaning, the word lian (蓮) is often used as a pun for lian (戀), which means ‘to love’ or ‘lover’. It is also used in the binome lianzi (蓮子), meaning lotus fruit, to pun with lianzi (連子), which has the meaning of “sons in succession”. Thus, the lotus, lian, is one of the most common puns in the Ziye collection, occurring several times within the 115 poems in the group. The following poem illustrates well this type of pun.

青荷蓋綠水，芙蓉葩紅鮮。
郎見欲採我，我心欲懷蓮。
The green lotus (he) covers the green waters,
The mallow flowers are red and fresh.
He looks, and wants to pluck me,
My heart wishes to embrace the lotus (lian). (YFSJ 646)
Other plants are associated with fulfilled or positive love through other means, which are semiotic rather than linguistic. Grass, osmanthus, mulberries and peach trees are all associated with desire in the *yuefu* poems but not through paronomasia. They all occur in previous love poems from the *Shi Jing* and the Han tradition and are profoundly joined with the pastoral nature of life that the poems celebrate. Mulberries are also often found, since they are closely identified with the productivity of a countryside woman. Therefore, they are highly evident in such *yuefu* as Luofu’s story, which is also known by the title “On the Path are Mulberries” (陌桑上).³

When the earlier love-songs of the Han and before are combined with the later *Ziye* poems, it can be seen that the positive imagery in both types of *yuefu* was not extremely stable nor rigidly defined. As previously stated, this situation was not satisfactory to the poets of the Qi dynasty, since they wished for more sophisticated intertextual exercise, which would rely on greater orderliness in readable codes so it could be shared with participants in aristocratic cliques. Therefore, Shen Yue manipulated the past tradition of nature imagery to create a cluster whose individual elements could be assembled and then reassembled in various groupings both to increase the syntagmatic associative power and to expand the paradigmatic potentialities. He gathered together many elements used in the previous tradition and started to employ them in the clusters. This was a substantial shift from the *yuefu* tradition that had allowed one type of image (lotus, bird, grass, etc...) to dominate one text. Having amassed these nature images, he formed them into a positive ‘web’ ofimagery, though on differing bases.
On the most fundamental level, Shen Yue connected the desirable female image with vegetative imagery through metonymy. By associating certain plants with the desirable female image, he links such plants with this object of desire. This metonymic connection pushes back the female into the subtext and projects the natural imagery forward. It serves a dual function: to turn the woman into a static image of eroticism and to eroticize the plant itself, thus promoting it to centrality in the work. In “Modeled on an Old Theme” (古意), Shen Yue exploits the traditional association between osmanthus and women and laments for the abandoned woman: “Oh what a pitiful osmanthus branch” (可憐桂枝). She is just a branch, a part that is not whole, divided from her lover. Later, it will be seen that Shen Yue takes the image of the osmanthus branch and combines it with other nature imagery to form part of the cluster that would come to be associated with desire.

Shen Yue also linked other vegetative imagery not only to the erotic persona but also to desire itself. Willow trees had long been used to symbolize the elegance of a female figure in Yuefu poems. However, Shen Yue imbued willows with greater erotic force since, in his verses, they refer directly to desire. In his poem “Singing of the Willows” (詠柳), he writes about the appearance of the willow trees in highly eroticized words,

輕陰拂建章，來道連未央。
因風結復解，霧露柔且長。
楚妃思欲絕，班女淚成行。
一人應未去，為此歸故鄉。
Their thin shade touches Jianchang.

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3 This is obvious tied to the marriageable qualities of these women shown by their skill in sericulture 4 SKJ 365
5 They were also an example of another paronomasic image since willow (liu 柳) sounds the same as “to detain, stay” (liu 留), thus the willow was often used in poems of separation.
Along the road, they lead to Weiying.
Through the wind [the branches] furl and then unravel,
Wet by dew, they soften and elongate.
The lady of Chu's longing is about to end,
The Pan girl's tears fall in tracks,
There's a man who ought not to leave yet,
For their sake, return to the hometown. (SYJ 408)

The lush branches are the physical manifestation of the desire felt by the "lady of Chu."\(^6\)

In addition, because the willow has been associated with trying to detain a friend or lover who is leaving, the tree also brings pathos to this feeling. This pathos is an important element in the poems concerning the deserted women who ought to be in a relationship but, because of the absence of their husbands, are frustrated in this wish. The willows in the previous poem have a similar significance as the peach blossoms in the verse,

"Singing of Peach Blossoms" (詠桃), do.

風來吹葉動，風去畏花傷。
紅映已照灼，況復含日光。
歌僮暗理曲，游女夜縫裳。
詎減當春淚，能斷思人腸。
The wind comes and blows the leaves astir,
The wind leaves, and I fear the flowers have been harmed.
But their pink gleam is splendidly radiant,
Even more so when they capture the sun's rays.
Singing boys at dusk practice their tunes,
Wandering girls at night mend their robes.
How could I check my springtime tears
Which can so wound a loving heart? (SYJ 409)

The blossoms at first are intact. Their gleaming radiance is the very essence of the desires that are associated with the spring. This connection is echoed in the boys and girls preparing their 'tools' of courtship, showing the matchmaking that will be soon

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\(^6\) An interesting aspect of the willow is its connection with cultivated space. Instead of looking to wild plants, the Qi-Liang poets concentrated on the willow; a tree of fields and garden, of cultivated space. This would reinforce the concept of love as a social process, a process that needs the control and the civilizing aspects provided by domesticated surroundings. This seems again to reinforce the Chinese perception of love as a social process, part of the courtly scene in which this women were situated. Again, this illustrates the shift towards the cultivated and aristocratic setting that occurred during this period.
happening. However, these elements come together to create the pathos in the voice of the poem, whose tears indicate that to be apart at this time is most painful. The endurance of the peach blossoms, the boys and the girls all emphasize their own eroticism that contrasts severely with the predicament of the poem’s personae. Since the flowers are allied with desire, they serve to wound her in her solitude. Together both the willow and the peach bring more plants into the web of imagery associated with desire that Shen Yue and other Yongming poets were weaving. Thus, when these plants appear in a work, they not only can tell of the desire of lover but also can function as memories of this desire when love has been lost.

In the poem “Facing the Spring Wind” (臨春風), Shen Yue brings together many of the more eroticized nature images into one cohesive body. Since this poem was one of Shen Yue’s most influential, it would be safe to hypothesize that the clustering of positive nature imagery in it had many admirers.

Facing the spring wind,
The spring wind rises from the spring trees.
Drifting gossamer indistinct as a net,
Falling flowers thick as fog . . .
Then passing through delicate willow branches . . .
Butterflies meet it and whirl in flight,
Swallows encounter it and flutter their feathers.
Making osmanthus banners billow . . .
Flurries of plum and peach blossoms
And green calyx encircling white stems . . .
Rippling verdant streamers,

臨春風，
春風起春樹。
遊絲暖如網，落花霧似霧。
... 還過細柳枝。
蝶逢飄飄，燕值羽差池。
揚桂飄...
零飄桃李花，青桔含素萼...
搖綠帶，抗紫莖。
舞春雪，雜流鷺...
迎飛雨於高唐，送歸鴻於碣石...
想芳園兮可以遊，念蘭翹兮漸可摘。
Facing the spring wind,
The spring wind rises from the spring trees.
Drifting gossamer indistinct as a net,
Falling flowers thick as fog . . .
Then passing through delicate willow branches . . .
Butterflies meet it and whirl in flight,
Swallows encounter it and flutter their feathers.
Making osmanthus banners billow . . .
Flurries of plum and peach blossoms
And green calyx encircling white stems . . .
Rippling verdant streamers,
Raising purple stalks,
Making the spring snow dance,
Jumbling the gliding orioles . . .
Welcoming rivulets of rain on Gaotang,
Seeing off returning geese to Jieshi . .
Imagine it can wander through fragrant orchards,
Think of the tall heads of orchids that can be picked. (SYJ 442)

In this work, the associated images of blossoms, plants and springtime combine to form a semiotic group in which all referents’ interconnections are reinforced. This poem is one of Shen Yue’s major works and its web of strongly intra-referential of images is thus constructed with powerful associative relations.

Thus, Shen Yue’s love poetry was to help to provide the Palace-style poets with such a positive cluster. This could be taken and used as a whole to create very highly eroticized total poems, or as a source from which elements could be ‘deployed’ within a poem to evoke an erotic air. The poet Liu Lingxian used the first method to tell her husband of her desire in “A Reply to my Husband” (答外).

花庭麗景斜，蘭麝輕風度。
落日更新妝，開簾對春樹。
鳴鸝葉中響，戲蝶花間翩……
The lovely scenery slopes away in the flowery garden,
The light breeze crosses in front of the orchid window.
In the setting sun, I freshen up my makeup,
Opening the blinds, I face the spring trees.
Singing orioles are heard amidst the leaves,
Playing butterfly flit among the flowers … (YTXY 145)

The grouping of these referents into such few lines and in such a heavy concentration shows the wide dissemination of this type of cluster. The later Liang poets evidently assimilated this group of imagery very adeptly indeed as there are many more Palace-style poems with the exact same signs of nature7 (swallows, willow, peach and plum). Moreover, some poets took advantage of these related images to add new ones (such as
pondweed), allowing to the power of the intra-referential bonds in the cluster to dictate
the semiotic nature of the new element.

朝日斜來照戶，春鳥爭飛出林... 
上林紛紛花落，淇水漠漠苔浮。
The dawn sun rises aslant, lighting my door. 
The spring birds vie in flying out from the forest.
In the Imperial forest, the blossoms are falling abundantly, 
On the Qi river, the algae is floating quiescently. (YTXY 242)

Here, Xiao Gang introduces a new element to this positively charged nature imagery, that
of algae. Once this plant was introduced into the cluster, other poets could subsequently
use it with the same semiotic connotations. The exploitation of the cluster structure
shows how significant the intertextual tradition was to Palace-style poets. Since they
were striving after "artifice and craftsmanship... as the new aesthetic,"8 showing their
expertise and familiarity with the existent codes was of great importance in establishing
their poetic ability.

Thus it can be seen that the cluster of positive referents that Shen Yue (and other
Yongming era poets) had constructed had many benefits for Palace-style poets. It
provided much stricter and clearer codification of the semiotic range covered by various
images from nature, which had 'suffered' from more indiscriminate semiotic associations
in the previous yuefu tradition. It also provided a stabilized network of associative
relations. Within this stable formation, the later poets could add new imagery that would
automatically assume the full range of the already established semiotic import. Thus, the
regulating of the web of positive-emotion nature imagery proved highly useful for Liang
dynasty poets. They not only could rely on the semiotic connotations of each element in

7 See many of Xiao Gang’s, Xiao Lun’s and other poets’ works in the YTXY (Roll Seven). 
8 Wu, Decadence in the Chinese Poetic Tradition 29
the cluster, but they could also add subsequent images to the positive cluster to
increase the quantity of elemental referents they could draw upon. The loss of poetic
freedom to this formal deployment of nature imagery was compensated through its being
an abundant source of highly mutually comprehensible imagery, which could be used
both as a reservoir of material and as a springboard from which to form new connections.
This same process can also be seen in the gathering of imagery that involved desire that
was denied or frustrated and that which never reached fulfillment at all.
Since the most common theme of the Palace-style poets was frustrated desire, this emotionally negated type of imagery was of great importance to them. Even in earlier times, the theme of the abandoned lover was a common plaint but in the Liang Dynasty, it became the major genre of poetic production. The favourite Palace-style topic was the woman sitting in isolation within her boudoir, without hope for any ‘rescue’ by her lover. It was in this context that the ‘neglect’ image-cluster emerged.

From Shen Yue’s association of spring and autumn imagery with various erotic overtones, it is evident that he and other Yongming poets were moving towards establishing limits both semiotic and sociological for the expression of eroticism. As the celestial imagery proved, the expression of eroticism during this time was becoming more pervasive and demonstrative. Eroticism, as a theme, became more prevalent and its declaration more common. Yet, on the other hand, eroticized imagery was to become much more strictly codified; to embody societal approval or disapproval; and to operate within a poetic system that was more intertextual. Accompanying this was a shift from the previous rusticity to an elite and cultured poetic setting. These factors had a dramatic effect on the formation of the image-cluster associated with neglected love. The earlier love poem imagery showed the loss of love being reflected in nature’s decline (falling blossoms, parting birds), but in the Yongming era, loss of love was indicated by nature causing part of the decline (lichen, moss). In the Palace-style tradition, it can be seen that the entry of nature into the boudoir is intrinsically bound together with the deserted

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9 See Anne Birrell’s Introduction in *New Songs from a Jade Terrace*
woman’s isolation. In other words, certain elements of nature become an active force of negated desire. In Shen Yue’s verse, both tendencies exist: one works intertextuality with the yuefu imagery towards a more narrow codification of the ‘declining nature’ imagery and another initiates the promulgation of the ‘intrusive and destructive nature’ image cluster.

In the web of ‘declining nature’ imagery, Shen Yue exploited those images present in the yuefu corpus. The earlier images of the decline of nature in the yuefu poems are all indicative in some way of declining love. In the more melancholy of the Ziye poems, falling blossoms predominate as a sign of decline. By using the falling of the flowers, the poet shows in one of the “20 Ziye Poems of Spring” (子夜春歌二十首) that the decline of the woman is echoed in the deterioration of nature

崎嶇與時競，不復自顧慮。
春風振榮林，常恐華落去。
Restless they compete with the season,
They do not worry about themselves any more.
Spring winds shake the flowering trees,
I’ve always feared the blossoms’ fall. (YFSJ 645)

The decline in the forest is symbolic of the loss of love. This type of image is quite simple and straightforward, paralleling the change in the condition of nature to the change in emotional status of the lover. In the Yongming era, poets were still presenting imagery that presented ‘decline in nature/decline in affections;’ it was inherently part of the tie they were trying to establish between seasons and emotions. Previously, it was seen that Shen Yue helped to codify the relationship between seasons and desire in his verse. This seasonal change in desires can be found in the nature imagery of Shen Yue’s love poetry where the season’s effects upon nature reflect its effect upon people’s
relationships. In "A Song of the White Hemp for Autumn" (秋白紃曲),\textsuperscript{10} the freezing scenery conveys the loss of separated lovers, a separation that is stated explicitly in later lines as the female speaker implores her lover not to forget her.

\begin{verbatim}
白露欲凝草已黃，金琯玉柱響洞房。  
雙心一影俱迴翔，吐情寄君君莫忘。
\end{verbatim}

The white dew is about to congeal and the grass is already yellow, Golden pipes and jade frets resound in secluded rooms. Two hearts with one shadow spiral about each other, My murmured feelings are sent to you: please do not forget me. (SYJ329)

Here, the ominous yellowing of the grass indicates that this affair will not end well. Withered nature results in withered love. This type of grass imagery also occurs in the previously discussed poem "Early Spring" where the unsuitability of the season that the girls have chosen is accentuated by the pale colour of the grass. Both show that the condition of nature can echo the state of desire. Both bring pale grass into the negative web of declining nature imagery.

Other images that reflect attributes found in nature are those of birds. In contrast to plants, birds do not appear that commonly in poems celebrating love in the Ziye poems. Although pair-bonding birds were a widely used symbol of marital fidelity, they occur very rarely in this type of Southern Dynasties yuefu poetry. Only one poem states "The autumn love of two geese/ The spring desire of paired swallows" (秋愛兩兩雁/春感雙雙燕). Since the birds most commonly found in Chinese cultural imagery are birds which pair-bond (ducks, pheasants, swans), the natural dictate is that these birds should be in pairs. In other yuefu poems from before the Southern Dynasties era, the figure of a deserted woman or one looking for a partner is identified with being a lone bird, usually a duck or goose.

\textsuperscript{10}SYJ 329
A spring bird flies South,
Soaring, it glides away alone.
In a sad voice, it calls to its mate,
Its woeful cries hurt my heart,
Moved by the creature, I long for my love,
I weep: my tears drench my robe.11 (YTXY 40)

Since these types of birds form pair bonds, they are symbols of a stable pair-union and marital fidelity. Thus, these images emphasize the need for the woman to be with her husband, the proper social partner. In choosing to identify the neglected woman with a lone bird, the poet imbues the women with a more idealized form of female desire, which is more socialized and less direct.12 The disruption of nature’s pattern is again linked with the ‘negative’ imagery of the deserted female: the lone bird is a mirror of her neglected condition.

Shen Yue also used the lone bird trope in his poetry. In the poem “Modeled on an Old Theme” (古意), he uses traditional imagery (duck, osmanthus) to describe separation.

可憐桂樹枝，單雄憶故雌。
歲暮異樓宿，春至猶別雌...
An adorable osmanthus branch,
A lone drake longs for its mate.
The year fades, he changes his abode,
When spring comes, they are still parted ...13 (SYJ 400)

However, this imagery is not that common in his corpus of love poems. The above poem’s title shows that Shen Yue was well aware that ‘declining nature’ imagery was

11 From: “Two Yuefu Style Poems” by Emperor Ming of the Wei dynasty (Cao Rui) (魏明帝樂府詩二首)
12 This need to socialize desire also probably accounts for the lack of animal love-imagery in the Chinese tradition. The birds present a much less directly sexual image than mammals do, which would be more in keeping with the sophisticated and indirect tone of most love poetry of this period.
13 Translation based on Birrell’s in New Songs from a Jade Terrace 168
part of the older tradition: the very one he was attempting to renovate and renew. He
exploited it for use in a conscious imitation of the old style, but would reject it in his
more innovative works. This move away from the more traditional imagery reveals the
movement of the Yongming poets towards creating a new aesthetic sense with regard not
only to prosody but also to imagery. This aesthetic sense involved creating an urbane
feeling to the work. Furthermore, this urbane consciousness would rely on a
defamiliarization of the more traditional forms of imagery since urbanity is created
through the exclusion of those who do not participate in the courtly literary culture.
Thus, the traditional would not rejected outright, but preferably used in a setting which
defamiliarizes the reader. In the case of bird imagery, this is brought to an extreme in the
later poets who brought extreme morbidity to this tradition image:

.昔時嬌玉步，含羞華燭邊...
獨鶴罷中路，孤鸞死鏡前。
In the past, her jade steps were thought enchanting,
[Now] she holds in her shame beside the flowery candle . . .
A lone goose expires in the roadway,
A solitary phoenix dies in front of the mirror. (YTXY 166)\textsuperscript{14}

Thus, it can be seen that the Palace-style poets relied on previous poetry for a source of
imagery that would be mutually comprehensible and could be manipulated to destabilize
the reader through changing the conformation of the images. By associating fallen
blossoms, willows and lone birds into these semantically bound clusters, the Yongming
poets enabled these later poets to make their corpus even more urbane and aristocratic
through deliberate tampering with these clusters. Yet, this manipulation is partially
dependent on Shen Yue's weaving of the web of nature imagery to create a rigidly
codified collection of referents that could be manipulated.
Yet, even more popular (due, no doubt, to its novelty), was the ‘neglect’ imagery cluster connected not with ‘declining nature’ but with ‘intrusive nature’. In this construction of imagery, elements of nature, rather than passively reflecting loss, arise as a symptom of erotic neglect. Nature is placed in active Manichaean opposition to the cloistered world of the woman’s boudoir. This happens when plants and insects invade the dwelling. In the poem “In Reply to Wang Siyuan’s Poem on the Moon” (應王中丞思遠詠月詩), Shen Yue describes the desolate, overgrown house within which an isolated woman lives. Its “cobwebbed eaves glitter with pearly strands, / The Ying gate glimmers under green moss” (網軒映珠縷/應門照縷苔). The world of nature has overgrown the house, sealing the occupant inside. Nature, instead of staying peaceably in the confines of the field or garden, has intrusively and aggressively attacked the deserted woman’s surroundings. The condition of the residence also emphasizes the woman’s immobility; she has not stirred from her gates nor has her lover been to see her. Shen Yue provides an alternative type of ‘neglect’ cluster to that of ‘declining nature’, which is a cluster wherein nature turns aggressor and its unnatural presence within the residence serves as a barrier to any movement, in or out, of the boudoir.

This cluster of imagery that serves to ‘lock’ the female into her desolate boudoir is found also in the later tradition of the Palace-style poets, for whom the deserted woman was such an important motif. In a later poem about Lady Ban, the abandoned consort, the poet He Sicheng (何思澈) wrote

...蜘蛛網高閣，駭軒被長廊。
虛殿簾帷靜，閑階花薈香。

14 “A Poem about a Man who Abandoned his Wife” (詠人棄妾) by Xiao Gang.
15 SYJ 382
The combination of cobwebs and moss are found, in the Liang dynasty, to pervade many of the poems of the deserted woman. The displacement of declining nature by destructive nature reveals the increasingly courtly attitude of the poets from the Yongming onwards; in their world bounded by the court, there was little room for the unruly intrusion of nature. Nature could only intrude if the standards of 'cultured life' were abandoned. As long as the palace infrastructure was working correctly, nature would be tidy and picturesque for excursions and al fresco enjoyments. Outside of this cultured life, nature could be unruly and intrusive. The shift also shows the how the synthesis of a strong 'neglect' image cluster overcame the previous tradition of 'declining nature' by providing a more highly structured (and hence, more appealing) alternative to the images found in *yuefu*.

It was only through the Yongming clarification and construction of certain images of nature that the Palace-style poets were able to manipulate nature imagery to the degree they did. Viewed in diachronic perspective, Shen Yue occupies an important role of mediator and formulator in the tradition of eroticized nature imagery. He helped codify the 'positive' image cluster that had been so loose and indeterminate in the previous tradition, providing a stable and cohesive web of referents that could be added to if new elements were wanted. His poetry also clearly shows the waning power of the 'declining nature' imagery that was associated with 'negative' imagery. The cluster of 'negative' imagery that he worked on did not include more traditional imagery but moved toward...
the use of 'invasive' nature referents, which proved to be of great use in Palace-style poetry. These two trends together show the stricter codification of the system of nature imagery with the widening of the range of referents. Thus, Shen Yue's role in the construction of clear and coherent 'webs' of imagery was pivotal in the development of Chinese love poetry.

The great irony of this situation is that this role not only gave Shen Yue great import within the Qi-Liang literary history, but it also led directly to his being lambasted by critics in the Tang and later dynasties, which then led to the subsequent lack of interest in his work. By providing later poets with coherent clusters of nature imagery, each with its own overtone and associations, he created clear intertextual trends for this period. Thus, his peers and those who followed celebrated and venerated his works. It was this increase in intertextual dependence that added to the feelings of urbanity, elitism and sophistication, and it was these very elements which resulted in the charge of decadence that was laid against these poets. Thus, Shen Yue, partially through his handling of nature imagery, would become regarded by later critics as the first of the epigonic poets of the Qi-Liang age.
Chapter Three- Eroticizing of the Artificial

The Qi-Liang period was the earliest age in Chinese literature truly to celebrate the artificial. During this time, more and more poems took manufactured objects as their subjects, imbuing the objects with lyric and emotive qualities in an unprecedented way. Why did the 'artificial' rise in this way at this time? What conditions influenced this change in subject and what did Shen Yue contribute to the dissemination of this topic?

The first factor widely recognized to have played a part in this was a rise in material comfort and the extravagance that accompanied it. The Qi-Liang aristocrats lived at a time of prosperity and comfort. Trading had resumed between northern and southern China; links were forged between the southern capital, Nanjing, and the lands to the north. In particular, the Liang dynasty enjoyed a great deal of economic comfort due to the rise in trade. Because of the importance of displaying social position through beautiful possessions and extravagant entertainment, the aristocratic and elitist culture also encouraged material consumption, particularly in the South where a premium was placed on outward appearances. This in turn led to an increased awareness of aesthetics, particularly with regard to crafted or manufactured goods. Aesthetic appreciation was encouraged in this way, and celebrating the beauty of the artificial seemed a natural progression.

A change in religions was another aspect that may have influenced this rise of poetry celebrating the artificial. After Buddhism's entry into China during the Eastern Han, the new Indian religion had spread rapidly, and by the time of the Liang Dynasty,
had become the official religion of the court. Shen Yue too followed this new religion. He wrote much on Buddhism, including introductions to sutra collections and personal expressions of faith, which declared his wish to keep to a Buddhist way of life. His sentiments were hardly uncommon during this period. Most of the court elite frequently gave maigre feasts and contributed to the building of many temples and monasteries. This diffusion of Buddhist ideas into the aristocratic court culture obviously could influence the expression of ideas in a contemporary work of literature. The Buddhist concept of the ‘significance of the insignificant’ brought new interest to expressing thoughts and ideas about that which was habitually overlooked or discounted. Since the Buddha-nature could be present in anything, everything was of significance. In fact, the more ‘insignificant’ an object was, the better it could awaken a person to the boundlessness of the Buddha-nature. Naturally, they could turn to the everyday objects that surrounded them as a source of inspiration in this area.

In addition to this, Buddhism also, to some extent, legitimized the pursuit of aesthetic pleasure although this appears, at first, quite antithetical to it. However, when contrasted with Confucian philosophy, the Mahayanan Buddhism that was spreading throughout China asserted that each individual could, despite previous worldly attachments, supplicate a bodhisatva or buddha to help overcome these previous personal errors. This contrasts greatly with the Confucian ethic of lifelong study and self-discipline where vigilance had to be constant. This, Ronald Miao postulates, could justify a hedonistic way of life since “a full life of the senses could be redeemed at the

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end through acts of piety.” This rather cynical “play now, pray later” attitude is exaggerated by Miao, but nonetheless, Shen Yue himself made a “Statement of Penitence and Confession” (chanhui wen 懺悔文) to obviate his sense of culpability for his love affairs.

As can been seen, Shen Yue relies on his religion to help him come to terms with the “dissolute” life he has lead. Nevertheless, whether the rise of Buddhism so actively contributed to a lessening of moral discipline is debatable.

What is clear, however, is that a reduction in the importance of moral ethics did take place during the Southern Dynasties, though this was not due entirely to the emergence of Buddhism. Confucian ethics, at this time, suffered a great decline in popularity. The widespread Confucian system of the Han gave way to the Southern Dynasties’ governments formed mainly of Daoists or Buddhists. The leading thinkers of this period were, in the whole, Daoist or Buddhist. Therefore, the emphasis on Confucian virtues and morality did not play as important a role in either government or poetry as it had in the Han, when even purely descriptive poetry had moral endings tacked on to mollify Confucian criticism. This absence of Confucian morals and ethics led to both a

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2 For a detailed account of Shen Yue’s Buddhist beliefs, see Mather, Ch.7
decline in didactic and morally expressive works and a rise in literature that was more
focused upon aesthetics and personal emotion. Thus, with this change in the poetical
agenda, poets were searching for forms in which they could explore these new areas.
Landscape poetry had already emerged as a vehicle for lyricism; poetry celebrating the
artificial presented another possibility.

Also contributing to the rise of the artificial as a recognized poetic topic was the
growing sophistication of the voice that was appearing in not only the prosodic
techniques, but also in the subject matter and imagery. The poets of the Yongming era
were looking continually to expand the limits of poetic expression. In recent dynasties,
many new topics such as landscape and pastoral poetry had finally emerged as major
topics in their own right, and these novel topics had given poetry a fresh impetus.
Innovation was essential to creating a cosmopolitan air in poetry, and the shift to the
artificial as subject fulfilled the purpose admirably, perhaps accompanied by a variation
in poetic form. Consequently, through what means was the artificial introduced as fitting
subject? What form could serve as a vehicle to explore this rich area of potential themes?
It will be seen that the rise in the artificial as subject was closely tied with the rise of a
new genre during the Southern Dynasties: the yongwu (詠物) poem.

The history of yongwu poetry is not always clear because of its origins in non-
canonical (non-Confucian) lyricism, nevertheless, this form appears to have emerged
during the later part of the Southern Dynasties period. Yongwu itself translates as “to
compose a poem about a thing”. This type of poetry, which revolves about the
description of one particular object, appears to have arisen from the same spirit as that of
the Han dynasty fu. In fact, the genre is sometimes known as yongwu fu, but the yongwu
concentrates on only one object, in contrast to the rich and varied subject matter of most Han *fu*. Its aim was to give a detailed description of the object using elegant vocabulary and extravagant diction. Although the *fu* was also seemingly descriptive, the Han poets claimed for it a didactic function, claiming that it was through the rich description that a moral stance vis-à-vis the chosen subject could be taken. Thus, early on there existed a culturally recognized bond between the poet’s poet of view and the description in the poem. The purely descriptive *yongwu* form quickly became connected with lyricism through its relationship with the *fu*. However, because the *yongwu* poem concentrated on a single object in a succinct form, this placed a much larger emotive force upon that one object. It became widely recognized that the object could serve as the emotive link to the poet. This is the reason for the re-classification as “*yongwu* poems” of some poems that pre-date the emergence of the *yongwu*, on the grounds that they describe an object with emotional detail.\(^4\)

In addition, this connection between emotion and the poetic topic accounts for the legitimization of *yongwu* as a genre. Traditionally, the function of poetry was not aesthetic, but rather expressive, as can be seen in that fundamental work of criticism, “The Mao Preface to the *Shi Jing*” (毛大序):

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詩者。志之所之也。在心為志。發言為詩。
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\(^4\) For example “The Poem of Complaint”, allegedly written by Lady Ban in the Han dynasty:

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新裂齊繢素，鮮潔如霜雪。
裁為合歡扇，團團似明月。
出入君懷袖，動搖微風發。
常恐秋節至，涼飄奪炎熱。
棄捐箧笥中，恩情中道絕。
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New-torn fine Qi silk of white, Fresh and pure as icy snow.
I cut to make a “joy of togetherness” fan, Round, round as the bright moon.
In and out from your sleeves, It stirs a tiny breeze to rise.
Always fearing the arrival of autumn, With cold gusts annihilating the fierce heat.
Abandoned to a trunk; love ends in mid-path. (古代詠物詩 Gudai Yongwu Shi 3)
The poem is that to which what is intently on the mind (zhi) goes. In the mind (xin), it is "being intent" (zhi). Coming out in language (yan), it is a poem. Therefore, a poem that purely describes an object cannot be ‘true’ poetry by this definition. At some point, in order to be poetry, the writing must express the "intent" (zhi) of the poet. In a Confucian ethical system, the zhi of the poet was expected to be embedded in such Confucian virtues as righteousness (yi) or humanity (ren).

However, with the retreat of Confucianism, the more moralistic, ethical force zhi became increasingly subsumed by emotional force (qing), and the poem was expected to express emotion rather than ethics. The effect that this had on yongwu poetry was to encourage its development, as it was much easier for poets to incorporate emotive lyricism into their yongwu rather than ethical force.

Thus, the yongwu poem both developed as a genre in its own right and became increasingly associated with lyricism. In addition, the emerging yongwu genre was an elegant and compact poetic form that would contribute much not only to the development of the short-verse (jueju) genre, but also would provide an immensely suitable genre for the Palace-style poets. It became a wildly popular genre for two main reasons: its suitability as a courtly literary form and its blend of indirect and expressive lyricism. In aristocratic society, one of the requisites was the ability to extemporize on any given subject, and the yongwu genre was immensely suited to this through its shortness of form, and restricted scope of its subject. The succinct lyricism of the form also favoured it since it required the poet to instill much emotive force within narrow confines. This called for great control of the form, a skill that could demonstrate the poet’s abilities to

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5 Trans. Stephen Owen in Readings in Chinese Literary Thought 40
the fullest. Exceptional literary skill was one of the most important assets a courtier could possess due to the significant power of the literary cliques at that time. Therefore, a potential clique-member took every available opportunity to display accomplished literary skills. The *yongwu* was in all respects an excellent medium for this display as it called upon not only great technical skill but also a deft aesthetic sense to 'capture' the essence of the object in as few words as possible because of the condensed nature of the genre.

Even now, this connection between the *yongwu* genre and court mentality is seen as degenerate, a symptom of the increasingly aristocratic nature of society and its pursuits. Furthermore, fanning the flames of this criticism was the connection of the *yongwu* lyricism with aristocratic, non-Confucian morality. In the Qi-Liang period, this genre became closely identified with the world of the court and subsequently, the titillating world of the boudoirs of the women’s quarters. However, if we examine this phenomenon without the skewed lens of Confucian literary criticism, it is the aristocratic connections that resulted in some of the most sophisticated and urbane erotic poetry that has ever appeared in the Chinese corpus. The *yongwu* poems by such poets as Shen Yue show a sensitivity and refinement in erotic detail, which permeated this succinct form with a vapour that proved too heady for the later Confucian critics. Moreover, later criticism was leveled at the *yongwu* not only for its use in erotic poetry but also because of its change in focus during this period, a shift to the topic of the artificial, which these

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critics regarded as ‘trivializing’ the subject matter. The yongwu poem that had a subject taken from nature (plants, flowers, snow) was already popular before the Yongming era. These natural themes were all very acceptable as topics, especially as the intention was to provide an elegant description of a beautiful, natural object without erotic overtones. However, as the yongwu developed, it became increasingly lyrical in content, and poets wished to use it as a medium for erotic emotion. The object chosen then served as an emotive expression of the poet’s feelings. To enrich their expressive power, poets subsequently widened the range of subjects included as its topics. To elucidate this trend, Yan Caiping, in his book Research on Qi and Liang Poetry, has compared the yongwu production of the Qi and Liang dynasties. In the Qi dynasty, 10 authors were involved with writing yongwu poems; in the Liang, this figure rose to 65, showing clearly the explosion of interest in this genre. In addition, the number of yongwu poems with manufactured objects as their topic was 15 in the Qi and 62 in the Liang, revealing the increasing use of non-natural things as subject matter. Anne Birrell also points this out, with specific reference to Palace-style poetry.

Going far beyond the traditional repertoire, they now wrote love poems which mentioned all sorts of private details hitherto forbidden. Tinted notepaper, a coiffure net, ladies’ slippers, a camisole, a powder puff, all became fit for poetic parlance . . . These were items drawn from daily life in noble circles.

Therefore, a two-fold consequence resulted from the development of yongwu poetry as a genre in the Qi-Liang period. First, the concept of the yongwu poem as lyrical vehicle for desire was established; this was innovation in poetic order. Secondly, the

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7 Shen Yue’s success in the genre is shown by the amount of his yongwu poems left extant, which number 36, the most left by any Yongming poet. (Liu, Yongming Literature, 90)
8 See table on p.155
9 In Introduction to New Songs from a Jade Terrace, 26-27
scope of the yongwu topic was enlarged to include manufactured items; this was thematic innovation. Thus, the development in the imagery of the artificial conforms to the Russian Formalist view of effective poetic imagery:

If in informative or didactic prose a metaphor aims to bring the subject close to the audience, to drive in a point, in literary art it serves the opposite function. Rather than translating the unfamiliar into the terms of the familiar, the poetic image defamiliarizes or 'makes strange' the habitual by presenting it in a novel light, by placing it in an unexpected context.¹⁰

The theories of Formalism contribute much to understanding the rapid success of the yongwu poem which took manufactured objects as its subject. Shen Yue and other Yongming poets placed the newly emerging theme of the artificial into the context of the yongwu, a form whose theme hitherto was related to nature. These innovations combined to emerge in the eroticizing of the artificial, imagery that would thoroughly defamiliarize the reader, thus fulfilling an important role in the creation of a sophisticated and urbane feel of the love imagery in Shen Yue’s verse.

Value Through Association and Innovation

During the Yongming period, the various poets in court circles were promulgating innovation in theme and form with regard to the imagery of the artificial in yongwu poetry. How did Shen Yue employ these developments in his own works? Where did they fit in his increasingly urbane and aristocratic love poetry? It will be seen that Shen Yue exploited this new imagery in several ways, creating an innovative blend of form and theme. The inventive imagery is foregrounded by its deployment within the yongwu genre.

Before examining the combination of novel theme and form together, the imagery of the artificial in a non-yongwu verse should be explored. Since many of Shen Yue’s love poems were in yuefu style, these more traditional forms may also reveal associations between images of the artificial and eroticism. As we might have supposed to have found, the imagery used in the yuefu poetry is less innovative. The traditional form can been seen to inhibit the employment of the new theme. In fact, the yuefu works of Shen Yue seldom mentioned manufactured objects. When they do occur, they are merely provided as details to embellish the appearance of the protagonists in the work, showing their wealth and power.

寶瑟玫瑰柱，金韃玳瑁鞍。
淹留宿下蔡，置酒過上蘭...
A precious zither with garnet stops,
Golden harness with tortoiseshell saddle.
He tarries at leisure, staying at Xiacai,
He enjoys wine, passing by Shanglan...

("Climbing on High to Gaze at Spring" SYJ 345)

瑶裝映屜緹，金服炫熠漣...
寶劍垂玉貝，汗馬飾金鞍...
玉釵暮垂冠...
[Her] precious ornaments reflect on layered silk,
Golden attire gleams against carved wood. . .
Jade and shell dangle from his fine sword,
A golden saddle decorates upon his sweating horse. . .
In the evening, her jade hairpin hangs from his cap.
("Sunrise in the Southeast Corner" SYJ 284)

As can be seen, the objects in these poems serve to identify the rank of the character rather than to provide innovative themes. The presence of luxurious clothes and accessories makes clear the aristocratic station of the characters. In such poems (all of the more traditional yuefu forms), manufactured objects are merely placed in the poems to signify the nobility of the personae, rather than as substantive advance in the sophistication of the imagery. They are social markers of the increasingly aristocratic and courtly surroundings of this time.

However, when we examine Shen Yue’s placement of manufactured objects as theme in his yongwu works, a different tone is evident. These poems are among the most popular of Shen Yue’s works for not only the elegance of poetic skill shown but also for their subtle air of eroticism. This technique and essence combine through his images of the artificial, by his exploitation of the innovative nature of the images to establish an erotic atmosphere. In one poem, he takes a seven-holed flute as his topic ("On a Flute" 詠篳), and connects the item with the player.

江南簫管地，妙響發孫枝。
慳歎寄玉指，含情舉復垂。
彫梁再三遙，輕塵四五移。
曲中有深意，丹誠君詰知。
In the land of flutes and woodwinds, south of the Yangtze,
A beautiful sound appears from young boughs.
Assiduousness is carried in her jade fingers,
Reticent feelings she lifts up, then declines.
Up around the carved beams, the [sound] revolves twice, thrice,
It moves the light dust four, five times.
In the tune is profound feeling,
Pure sincerity: [but] how would you know? (SYJ 405)
In this poem, the object occupies an indeterminate place between the desirable woman and the addressee. The description of the flute and its sound is the mediator between these two spaces. The addressee becomes evident only in the last line where he is shown by the pronoun jun (君 - ‘you, sir’), which is the only pronoun in the poem. The flute becomes identified in association with the woman. The transfer of properties from the woman to the flute and vice-versa intensifies the amalgamation of the identities of the woman and the object. Which conveys the emotion? Which is the more expressive?

The lack of acknowledged subject in the Chinese allows both to fulfill these actions. It is this ambiguity of subject that gives free reign to the use of the artificial as image. The object hovers in the space between the woman and the addressee. It may, on the one hand, bring the addressee in closer through its immediate identification with the woman’s body (her ‘jade fingers), and on the other hand, it estranges the reader through its artificiality, a quality that does not hold the weight of the traditional love imagery.

Thus, this poem destabilizes the audience not only through the use of innovative form and object, but also through the positioning of the object within the addressing space of the poem.

Another poem that executes a similar destabilization but propels it further is the yongwu composed upon “The Embroidery on Her Collar” (領邊繡).

Her delicate hands produce new novelties,
She does embroidery in a lovely pattern.
She twists silk threads to make flying butterflies,
She has tied knots to make bees.\footnote{This line and the next could also be read “She has tied knots to form sitting musicians/ There’s no sound but they seem to play”. The meaning of \textit{hua er 花兒} may mean either bees or musicians. I have chosen to use bees to parallel the butterflies of the previous line.}  
There’s no sound but they seem to stir and buzz,  
There’s no wind but the branches move by themselves.  
If the beautiful appearance hasn’t yet faded,  
It will bear her flowing cloudy hair. (SYJ 411)

This is one of the most popular works in Shen Yue’s corpus. The theme of this poem is truly trivial. It is an item that previously would have never been deemed a suitable poetic theme, which adds yet another dimension to the estranging effect of the imagery concerned. The choice of theme coupled with the innovative yongwu form and the association with the desired woman produces not one, but two sets of conflicting elements, both of which contribute to the destabilizing of the reader.

The first tension is produced between the intrinsic triviality of the object (not only as poetic theme but also in inherent worth) and its erotic value, which is given worth by the poet’s attention and through its connection with the desired woman. The very title brings out in the triviality of the object, a triviality that would have been inconceivable as a theme in Chinese literature before the Yongming era. The act of writing poetry concerning a woman’s clothing shows the extent to which the Yongming poets had changed thematic direction. Moreover, the poem concerns only a tiny scrap of the clothing, the very scrap that serves as the focus for all of the woman’s erotic force. It is this focus and immediate connection to the object of affection that places upon the embroidery intense erotic value. This value conflicting with the triviality produces the pervasive air of sophistication through the unbalancing of the reader.
The second destabilizing aspect comes from the temporal nature of the erotic transfer between the woman and the embroidery. The embroidery has gained in erotic worth through its association with the woman. Through its artfulness and beauty, it represents the perfection of the woman and, through its contact with her hair, it takes on her erotic power to entice and attract. However, at the same time that the embroidery takes on the erotic force of the poem, the reader is also reminded of the fleeting nature of the contact. Shen Yue states that only if the 'beautiful appearance' is still fresh, will the embroidery be connected with her hair and thus with erotic force. Because of the ellipsis of the subject and the non-inflectional nature of Chinese, the reader is left to conjecture to whom or what the poet is referring when he speaks of the 'beautiful appearance'. However, regardless whom the beauty belongs to, what is emphasized is the nature of the link between beauty and the embroidery. Inherent in the temporal particle *wei* (未) is the presupposition of incomplete action, namely that it is inevitable that the beauty will fade in time. Thus, the use of this temporal particle stresses the temporary nature of the contact between the collar and the woman. Tension thus occurs both within the value of the object and in its temporal existence. The importance of the embroidery’s erotic gain from the woman interacts with the fleeting temporality of the connection of the object. The irony of such an ephemeral link being responsible for such erotic force would have startled and shocked a reader of that time.

Thus, it can be seen that within this work, Shen Yue unbalances the reader with two sets of amatory tension. This sense of destabilization creates a refined air by producing a sense of exclusivity. It is reliant on the production of a destabilizing aura upon reading the text, but this destabilization is dependent upon familiarization with the
ongoing literary codes and practices. Thus, it excludes all those who are not au
courant with the literary scene. The closed nature of the literary cliques abetted in this
because it produced an audience whose very presence in those cliques was a guarantee of
their intimate knowledge of literary traditions and practices. Shen Yue's works exclude
all those outside these elite circles since appreciation of his verse is dependent on great
familiarity with the textual tradition.

The object-woman link also contributes to the sophistication of the poem in
another way, that of manipulating the position of the desiring onlooker's persona. Shen
Yue is using the intermediary of the object to position the lover's persona in the woman's
immediate surroundings (while being absent from the text) and, at the same time, to
distance the erotic desire held towards the woman. He plays with the reader's perception
of space between the woman and the lover. These two mutually dynamic forces
supplement the tensions already present, adding to the air of sophistication in this work.
The great success of this poem can be seen in the development of the Palace-style poets
who followed, and who augmented this eroticizing of the object within a yongwu poem
and adding to its urbanity. Urbaneness is dependent on the exclusion of those who do not
participate in the ongoing high literary culture, and the closed world of the Palace-style
clique was particularly suited to exclusionary practices.

Defamiliarization is not merely limited to those works that link the artificial with
the desired woman, but may also occur in works where the object is connected more with
the identity of the (male) lover. This is also an estranging technique, not only through the
innovative use of theme and form, but also through the reversal of social dominance
(similar in tone to the poem, "I Went to Meet a Neighbour about whom I have Feelings
but She Didn’t Come”). The poem, “The Sandals beneath her Feet” (腳下履) can be contrasted with “The Embroidery on her Collar” for this reason.

丹墀上塗沓，玉殿下趨羅。
逆轉珠佩響，先表繡掛香。
裙開臨舞席，袖拂繞歌堂。
所歎忘懷妾，見妾人羅床。

Going up the crimson stairs with a clip-clop,
Descending to the jade hall with a tip-tap.
Whirling around, the pearl pendants jingle,
Advancing to appear, the embroidered blouse is fragrant.
Facing the dance mats, the skirts open,
Encircling the singing hall, the sleeves trail down.
What is regrettable is that the lady is heartless,
They are discarded as she enters the gauzy bed. (SYJ 412)

In this poem, several more layers of tension exist, caused by interactions between the slippers, the woman and the lover. The shifting equilibria of the previous poem are repeated here, with the eroticizing of the trivial subject, and the fleeting nature of erotic contact. Yet, there are more conflicts between theme, form, poet and reader, through which the reader becomes further estranged.

The sandals are caught up within the space of the desired woman in a precarious position. They are not associated with in figure in the same synecdochal fashion as her other pieces of clothing are. Moreover, as opposed to the embroidery, this object is discarded deliberately by the wearer. This places the sandals in a position of subordination to the woman. Notwithstanding their abandonment, the sandals still occupy a place of enormous importance to the wearer. They enhance her appearance, enable her seductive action, and thus play the major role in substantiating her desirability. This curious ambivalence transpires through their identification with the persona of the lover. They take the place desired by the lover, as an enhancement to the woman, as an attendant upon her, and as a partner for her. Through the sandals, the lover obtains a way
of reducing the distance between himself and the woman. Nevertheless, she rejects
and relegates them to the floor when she takes up with a new lover. She only has the
“heartless” power to abandon them. This subjugation of the lover is a blatant reversal of
the socially acceptable state of affairs. The male position is excluded and placed into
subjugation by the woman’s abandonment of him/the sandals. This blatant reversal and
trivializing of the traditionally dominant masculine position shocks the reader. Here once
more we see Shen Yue’s use of the artificial result in further shifting the equilibria that
exist between text, reader and poetic personae in a dynamic fashion.
**Devalued through Disuse**

Having seen how Shen Yue's creative and innovative use of imagery of the artificial created a new erotic tension within the *yongwu* genre, the question is raised: how did things lose their sensual connections and become erotically devalued? By showing the effects of the repudiation of a woman upon her personal effects, Shen Yue could produce an air of negated eroticism similar to that brought forth by the negative web of nature imagery he had spun. The negated value is created by laying dust over the objects, fashioning an atmosphere of inactivity and desuetude.

漠漠床上塵，中心憶故人。
故人不可憶，中夜長歎息。
歎息想容儀，不欲長別離。
別離稍已久，空床寄杯酒。
Unbounded is the dust on the bed,
In her breast, recollections of a lover.
The lover cannot be recollected,
In the middle of the night, she heaves a long sigh.
With a long sigh, she imagines his face and appearance,
She did not wish to be parted for so long.
The separation has become still longer,
With an empty bed, she depends on cups of wine. 12 (SYJ 297)

The dust shrouds the bed, showing how it has become devalued by the absence of sexual activity. By stating the condition of the bed in the initial line, and then relying on the tenor conveyed by the dust to influence the entire reading of the work, Shen Yue obliterates positive erotic feeling entirely. The dust, by being the principal and most dominant non-human image, is indelibly associated with the total absence of positive erotic emotion.

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12 "In the style of ‘Green, green the Riverside Grass’’ (擬青青河邊草)
This poem is exclusively devoted to the figure of the woman who is abandoned. This work presents, in lines of utter simplicity, a woman who is completely and totally deserted, a type of figure that was to become a favourite theme in the Palace-style poetry. In this Yongming work, we can see the foundations being set for the formulaic description of such ladies. One important aspect was the fact that the worth of these women was totally defined by their interaction with men. In this poem, not only is her lover absent, but even his image and form have been obliterated by the passage of time. This complete and utter removal of the masculine figure from the scene might lead to the hypothesis that desire and eroticism has been ‘killed’ in this work. Yet, through the woman’s sighs and her attempts at recollection, we know that desire is not absent, but rather its natural course (to flow out to the man she desires) has been forcibly turned onto the figure of the woman herself. The dust serves to turn the emotive force that is present inward. Her negative-eroticism and hopeless longing become internal from whence they cannot be dislodged, but merely drowned in ‘cups of wine’.

If, in this work, the erotic force in relation to the female figure is turned inwards, then no other object in the work should present a possible amatory space that could distract or divert from the main force. In this sense, the dust performs another function within the work. It provides a ‘concealment’ of the erotic force of any other object that is present. As we could see in other examples of Shen Yue’s poetry, the eroticizing of the artificial is a strong motif. Therefore, in this type of poem, it would serve the poet well to ‘cover’ any such objects. The dust covers the bed in a layer that smothers the eroticism of this object. The dampening of erotic force from the object forms a conflicting tension,
wherein the eroticism inherent in the object competes with the inactivity and erotic annihilation that results from the dust.

This type of contrast also adds to the general sophistication of the poem through increasing the amount of tension that surfaces within the reading of it. The very first line presents a highly urbane intertextual approach to the existing poetic corpus. The poem on which this is 'modeled' comes from the Han dynasty "19 Poems in the Ancient Style" (古詩十九首)

In Shen Yue's version, the unexpected shift in the focal point of the first line from the traditional grass to the dusty bed indicates the negated desire of the later version.

In the earlier poem, the ambiguity of the last line in the older poem allows the woman the possibility of escape into another space, if she tires of 'guarding' her bed. Her desires are ambiguous; she may leave her 'wanderer', unwilling to guard continually her bed. This woman is not trapped by an obsessive love as the Palace-style (and to some extent the Yongming) women so often are. The transposition of the dust indicates the

13 This is more closely explored in the next chapter.
smothering of erotic force and the consequent confinement of the woman. Thus, the Yongming poem severely deviates from the older model, which is so full of positive vegetative imagery. Therefore, the very presence of the dust in Shen Yue’s version serves to unsettle the reader who is anticipating the lush vegetative imagery of the original text. This, again, contributes to the urbanity and sophistication in his works and also paves the course for the Palace-style poets that were to follow.

\[14\] Lu Qinli 濟謙立, comp., Pre-Qin, Han, Wei, Jin and North and South Dynasties Poetry (Xianqin Han Wei Jin Nan Bei Chao Shi 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩) (Beijing: Zhonghua Press, 1983) 13.329
Throughout this chapter, we have examined how Shen Yue used the imagery of manufactured objects to manipulate the poetic material with which he entered the tradition. This began with the intense promulgation of imagery of the artificial in love poetry. In addition, by combining this new theme with the emerging form of the yongwu genre, Shen Yue succeeded in making the above poems thoroughly ‘strange’ to his readers, ensuring (as the Formalists would have it) the literariness of his works. These innovations were wholly in line with one of the main concepts in literary circles at that time: xinbian (新變). This term can be broken into its two etymological constituents: xin being associated with newness and bian the concept of changing. This concept was essentially a Yongming paradigm of innovation, taking an important role in the discourse of literary theory at that time.

Later literary theorists were to reject this in favour of a related concept: tongbian (通變), which was a paradigm of “continuity and change” (in Stephen Owen’s translation). First elucidated by Liu Xie in his Wen Xin Diao Long, tongbian expressed a dialectical relationship between tradition and the individual talent (also called ‘allusive variation’ in studies of this type of practice in Japanese literature).

Although there are constants in the forms in which literature is given, there is no limit to the mutations they may undergo. How can we understand why this is so? In the poem, in the fu, in the letter, and in the memoir, the name and the basic principle depend on one another: these are examples of forms in which there are constants. But phrasing, and the vital force (qi) endure long

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15 Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* 223
only by continuity (tong) and mutation (bian); of these there are limitless numbers.\textsuperscript{16}

However, as one can see from the above, the concept of tongbian did not include innovation in form or structure. Yet, Shen Yue and his Yongming contemporaries were well aware that their new style of poetics was not just dependent on a change in diction or content but on sweeping changes in all aspects. Therefore, they did not look to tongbian but chose to promote xinbian. They called their own poetry “new form poetry” (xinti shi 新體詩)\textsuperscript{17} which shows their awareness that what they were practicing was not tongbian, but rather xinbian. This deference in attitudes towards the tradition is particularly evident in Shen Yue’s love imagery of the manufactured. The original topic and form allowed him to explore more fully the expressiveness of innovation and this resulted in some of his most cherished works, which were not, however, openly admired by later, more Confucian literati.

Shen Yue made a clean break within this area with the concept of shiyanzhi on the grounds that ‘what is intently on the mind’ (zhi) had too strong a moralistic overtone. Since he was searching for elegance and sophistication in literary production rather than morality, he needed to separate poetic production from the morality inherent in this ancient concept. Looking to increase aesthetic quality, Shen Yue realized that Confucian poetic mores were unfulfilling; confining one’s work to issues of morality was severely limiting. By so using the new genre of yongwu as a vehicle for such ‘decadent’ imagery, he surely must have seen xinbian as a useful paradigm (this is even more likely since

\textsuperscript{16} Translated by Stephen Owen, \textit{Readings in Chinese Literary Thought} 224

\textsuperscript{17} See Luo Yuming (駱王明), and Zhang Zongyuan (寂宗原), \textit{North and South Dynasties’ Literature (Nan Bei Chao Wen Xue 南北朝文學)} (China: Anhui Educational Press, 1998) 104
xinbian was a main force behind his experiments with tonality and metrical structure. In his prosodic theories, he was looking for a completely original way of looking at the Chinese language as a poetic medium, and this search would also lead him to be original in other areas. Beyond the importance that xinbian would play in most aspects of his poetry, his cognizance of xinbian as a positive poetic force in itself is enough to hypothesize that he regarded it as an impetus for poetic exploration. Thus, his tonal work led to a predisposed affinity towards employing the paradigm of xinbian to produce some of the most alluring and imaginative poetry of his time wherein the most unexpected objects could radiate a powerful erotic force.

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18 For a full exploration of this idea see Song Xiaoyong (宋效永), "Shen Yue's Ideas of Literary Innovation" (Shen Yue de Xianbian Wenxue Sixiang 沈約的新變文學思想), *Literary Review Collection* (文學評論叢刊) 31 (March 1989) 134-145
Chapter Four- The Ideal Woman

The anthologizing of love poetry into the *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (*Yu Tai Xin Yong*) marked the beginning of a wholly new literary agenda. Xiao Gang sponsored the *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* in order to collate the corpus of love poetry into one chronological collection, revealing the historical progression in the development of this genre. Why did he choose to sponsor such an anthology? What was the new literary agenda he hoped to promote through this? To elucidate this, the anthologist Xu Ling wrote a preface to the work, professing that he had collected these poems for the enjoyment of the court women. These women, he stated, were beautiful and accomplished, but often had nothing with which to occupy themselves. Therefore, he presented this anthology to them to provide a distraction for the hours of ennui:

...优游少託，寂寞多閒...
無怡神於暇景，惟屬意於新詩...
撰錄豔歌，凡為十卷...
麗以金箱...
至若...朱鳥窗前，新妝已竟。
方當，閉茲縷帙，散此絹繚...
變彼諸姬，聊同棄日...
...Idling with little to do
Solitary with much leisure...
She takes no pleasure in wasted time
But bends her mind to new verse...
One has here recorded love songs enough to make ten scrolls.
Laid out in a golden casket...
There, before the Red Bird Window her fresh makeup is done.
This is the time when she
Opens this green scroll
Unties these binding cords...
Lovely are those [Palace ladies], it shall help them pass the time.¹

Therefore, Xu Ling was confident that women would form a great part of the readers of the *New Songs from a Jade Terrace*. This must have affected the selections he made for this anthology, not only in the choice of subject matter but also in the disposition of the works. He deliberately chose works that described women; moreover, he chose to arrange them chronologically. The older examples from the Han and early Southern Dynasties direct the reader towards the “New Songs” (*xin yong* 新詠) of the title: poems that were the epitome of the Palace-style and which focused primarily on the description of women.

From the Han to the Liang dynasty, many changes occurred in the way that women were presented in love poetry and other works. The love poems of the Yongming and Palace-style were the product of two specific traditions describing the female that converged and became codified. These two traditions were those of the Southern Dynasties (and Han) *yuefu* and of the Han and Wei dynasties *fu*. The *fu* concerned were part of a specific sub-genre of *fu*, namely, those dedicated to the description of a goddess, most commonly the Luo goddess.² This ‘high’ poetic form commemorated the beauty of a deified female in extravagant terms. The *yuefu* genre, on the other hand, concentrated more on the interactions between the female subject and the world about her, even if it also described her physical beauty. Both of these forms had a profound influence on the development of the presentation of the female. It is from these two paths that the Yongming and Palace-style feminine imagery emerged.

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² “Fufei, who, according to tradition, was the daughter of the ancient culture hero Fuxi. She drowned in the Luo River and was subsequently worshipped as the Luo River goddess.” From *Wen Xuan*, Vol. 1, ed. and trans. David R Knechtges (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) 355n
Although viewed by later Chinese critics as being symptomatic of the 'degeneracy' of these times, the theme of the female figure inspired Yongming and Palace-style poets to create some of their most elegant works. The increasingly strict systems of image-codification that were operating for all levels of eroticized imagery were at their most obvious and explicit in the codification of the female figure. This served a particular purpose for the increasingly aristocratic and urbane poets of the Qi-Liang age, that of promoting artifice and craftsmanship as the new aesthetic over 'naturalness.'

Excellence in artifice became the standard for women to emulate and for men to praise in the world of the court. Yet in what aspects did this desirable artificiality appear? How was the figure of the female constructed so as to project this trait?

What becomes clear when the feminine is examined in this tradition is that two parallel (and sometimes conflicting) directions of erotic definition for women were being taken. First, poets codified the woman as an object with artifice and adornment as her only permitted aspects. In addition, the behaviour of women was also undergoing a defining process. In other words, by reading these types of poems, women were encouraged to become erotic, yet immobile creatures. Thus, the *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* anthology served to provide men with a means of establishing the role of women by expressing approval of a certain feminine type, as a means of displaying their mastery over all the objects in their domain down to the very women contained with. It also served as a guide for the cultivation of this courtly artificiality for the intended readership of women so that they could 'study' how to fulfill their projected role.

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3 Wu, *Decadence in the Chinese Poetic Tradition*, 29
This exposition of women in verse presented a certain duality to the readership: expression of sexuality expanded at the same time as women were reified. The inner erotic intensity of these idealized women was contained in the vessel of the quiescent female object. These two aspects were intimately connected with the increasingly eroticized appearance of women in love poetry. This expansion of the eroticism in women was most dramatic in the development from Yongming to Palace-style poetics and served a dual purpose. It could not only ‘school’ women readers in the sexual aspects of behaviour in courtly surroundings but also allowed the (mainly) male poets to manipulate this behaviour to command increasingly the world of women. The increased eroticism defined the role that women were to play in the court, at the same time that the growing reification of women ensured that they would be fixed inside the court as sexual objects. Both of these would foster construction of the urbane, aristocratic and elitist mind-set, which was a leading goal in the Qi-Liang poetic movement.
Inward Eroticism, Outward Confinement

One aspect that came to change dramatically in the time that spanned the Han and Southern Dynasties was the type of sexual power and interaction that women could have within a poem. The women in Han yuefu reveal such Confucian virtues as “purity, obedience, filial piety, humility and virtuousness”⁴, holding themselves aloof from sexual action. The most famous ballad celebrating this type of chaste virtue is the Luofu ballad, where the heroine is so beautiful she stops all who see her in their tracks but she does not cultivate her erotic appeal. In fact, she repulses any sexual advance:

...行者見羅敷，下擔捋髭鬚。
少年見羅敷，脫巾著梢頭。
耕者忘其耕，劒者忘其劒。
來歸相怨怒，但坐觀羅敷。
使君從南來，五馬立踟躇...
使君謝羅敷，寧可共載不？
羅敷前致辭，使君一何愚。
使君自有婦，羅敷自有夫...
...When the passersby see Luofu,
They put down their burdens and stroke their beards.
When the youths see Luofu,
They take off their scarves, and rewrap their headbands.
The ploughman forgets his plough,
The hoer forgets his hoe.
Those returning home are happy and cross,
They all sit watching Luofu.
An official has come from the south,
His five horses stand, shifting restlessly...
The official asks Luofu:
"Wouldn't you like to ride together with me?"
Luofu advances forward and refuses.
"You must be stupid, official,
You yourself have a wife.
I myself have a husband..." (YTYX 4)

The rejection of the officer and her beauty are the two things that define Luofu. Her chastity is intrinsic to her identity. Although forced into the public gaze, she does not

flaunt or express her own sexuality. She cannot defend herself from the gaze of passersby, but she does defend herself when directly provoked. Luofu’s scorn cuts across the gender and the class imbalances between her and the officer. Despite being of low status and working in the fields, she has the spirit and the audacity to reject firmly the official’s offer. She is a symbol of consistency in virtue.

In the later Southern Dynasties, however, there occurs a sharp break with these earlier portraits of women whose lives outside the sexual realm are of importance. With the decline in the influence of Confucian thought, concepts such as virtue and morality received less and less attention. Instead of looking towards moral cultivation, the ruling class turned to aesthetic exploration and emotional expression. Xu Ling made this point clear in his preface to the *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* when he exclaimed “how could [reading my anthology] be like Empress Deng studying the *Spring and Autumn Annals*?” (豈如論學春秋). This shift to a more relaxed morality influenced the portrayal of women. No longer did they need be examples of virtuous rectitude; their sexuality and erotic potential could be manifest. This shift is reflected in the world of the Southern yuefu poetry. In the “Songs of Wu”, women’s actions are removed from the daily living and become much more eroticized.

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攬裙未結帶，約眉出前窗。
羅裳易飄飄，小闋罷春風。
Lifting my skirts, I've not yet done up my belt,
Knitting my brows, I come out from in front of the window.
My gossamer skirts freely flutter,
If they open a bit, blame the spring wind. (YFSJ 642)
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All of the actions in this poem emphasize this woman’s erotic display, which is the totality of her definition. It serves to turn the business of a woman towards an eroticism
that will become highly codified. These codes will define and restrict the areas in which this increasingly erotic woman can act.

Continuing the setting of codes and boundaries for the erotic action of women, Shen Yue also dictated what eroticism women could display. In his verse, women become prominent participants in the sexual life of the court.

残朱猶暖暖，餘粉尚霏霏。
昨宵何處宿？今晨拂露歸。
Last night, where did you sleep?
This morning, brushing the dew, you return home.⁶ (SYJ 431)

This delightful poem shows an independent lady returning from her lover’s home who meets with Shen Yue’s gently mocking. Although emphasis is placed on her looks, they are not depicted merely for the sake of reifying her, but rather as a teasing reminder of her sexual behaviour. The remnants of heavy make-up divulge the fact she has not returned yet to her own boudoir, and its smudged nature reveals that she certainly has not passed the night alone. By focusing on just her rouge and face powder, Shen Yue emphasizes her make-up, which is the outward sign of her eroticism. However, the poet does not morally censure her for her dalliance. This lack of moral overtone in this portrait of a woman diverges greatly from the chastity and virtue of Qin Luofu. This woman’s value is not judged in terms of her morality, but rather her popularity. This widening of permissible sexuality serves to show women the greater sexuality they could exhibit in this society.

⁵ YTXY 1
⁶ “On a Morning Walk, I Meet a Previous Lover in her Carriage and I Make her a Present (of this poem)” (早行逢 故人車中為贈)
This distinct alteration in morals reflects the increasingly aristocratic nature of the society in which Shen Yue lived with its decline of Confucian morals, which were replaced by the courtly mores of a closed society. Although it is not clear what the social position of this lady is, we may guess that she is wealthy (she rides in a carriage) and her place of residence is in a good location, probably within the palace itself. She is probably a professional female dancer or entertainer attached to the court, but too little is known about the roles of women in Southern Dynasties society to be sure. What is clear, however, is the attitude of the poet, which is expressed in the whole gesture of composing this poem as a little ‘present’ to tease her about her late arrival home. Shen Yue respects her right to find a new lover and his response shows his admiration of the woman’s sensuality.

However, women could not flaunt this more powerful eroticism at will. Barriers were erected around the area in which the woman would be eroticized, in keeping with the increasingly cloistered world of the court. Women were expected to express sensual desires but never too actively. Even in the previous poem, the woman returns in the early morning, in effect stealing back to her own boudoir. Thus, a court lady must only express this increasingly erotic role in private. Slowly, the boudoir becomes the boundary of this erotic expression. In Shen Yue’s most popular poem “Six Recollections” (六意) (of which four survive), he writes what amounts to a ‘textbook’ of what a woman should be in this courtly environment.

憶來時，灼灼上階墀，

7 In “Education of Women in China in the Southern Dynasties”, Beatrice Spade states that women enjoyed considerable freedom, but does not delve into this issue, nor does she cover the lives of women who were not aristocratic.
I recollect when she came,
Radiantly ascending a flight of stairs.
Over and over we spoke of our separation,
Resentfully talked of our yearning for each other.
Gazing on each other, we never had enough,
Seeing each other, we forgot to eat.

I recollect when she sat,
Tiny in front of the gauzy bedcurtains.
Sometimes singing four or five songs,
Sometimes playing two or three strains.
When she laughed, there was nothing could compare,
When she was angry, she was even more adorable.

I recollect when she ate,
On facing the dishes, she changed her expression.
She wanted to sit but was too bashful to sit.
She was about to eat, but again, was too shy.
She held food in her mouth as if she weren't hungry,
Raised her winecup like she had no strength.

I recollect when she slept,
When others slept, she forced herself not to.
She undid her gossamer clothes, didn't wait to be urged.
Approaching the pillow, she needed to be led anew.
Again fearing that people nearby might see,
Lovely and bashful, she stood in front of the candle. (SYJ 441)

This description of a Yongming male fantasy was an outstanding example for the Palace-style poets of how a woman should behave. In this portrait, the woman’s role is totally eroticized yet it is only revealed in her boudoir and to her lover. The sum of her actions and behaviour is an aggregate of what she should do to become a ‘perfect Palace lady’ by containing her eroticism within seclusion. The poem removes all other participants from the room besides the on-looking lover. All aspects of her life (such as servants, children or friends) besides her interaction with her lover are expunged from the world of this
poem, leaving the woman in solitude to concentrate solely on the expression of her desire for her lover.

In the first two verses, she displays her erotic 'virtue' by talking of her desire and by parading her abilities as entertainer in her room, "in front of the bedcurtains." Her playing and singing illustrates her high level of sophistication and her training in courtly culture, confirming her right to be in the elite world of the palace. The next verse praises her ethereal weakness and daintiness. Along with its emphasis on her shyness, her characteristics promote the ideal of the erotic yet reticent woman. In the last verse, the contradictions in the last lines summarize the paradoxical nature of her increased sexual nature: her sexual appetite is manifest but she needs the male to propel her into action. In Qi-Liang terms, this is the perfect woman who embodies ample erotic force, and yet will only assert it in the privacy of the boudoir, since she relies on interaction with her lover to express it. This stereotype becomes the supreme manifestation of the aristocratic palace order where women were openly acknowledged as sexual creatures, but who had to contain this force unless catalyzed by men.

Thus, Shen Yue contributed greatly towards creating this stereotype of the erotic yet demure woman, who is the epitome of the closed society in which he lived. This idealized woman could not be permitted to run free even in the sealed world of the palace, so the space in which she could be sexual was closely confined. Turning to the intertextual tradition of the Luofu narrative, it is seen that the original Luofu works outside of the house and has the freedom to behave quite freely, yet Shen Yue’s Luofu

8 As Anne Birrell points out in “The Dusty Mirror” 43, the Palace-style poets will carry this further by entirely removing the lover as well.
has been cloistered, reduced to staring at her self in the mirror. This reduction in mobility served to restrict greatly the boundaries within which women may act. This confinement promotes the image of her as stilled, inert and silenced, controlled by the domination of the poet. By locking the female image into a boudoir, he could force passivity upon the figure and let the enforced solitude turn the women into objects. In Shen Yue’s poem “On the Three Wives” (擬三婦), the third wife “alone has nothing to do/ She faces the mirror painting her feathery eyebrows” (小婦 獨無事， 對鏡畫蛾眉). In her cloistered existence, she lacks the most important catalyst (which is her husband) for her sexuality. She works on increasing her eroticism through adornment but, without her husband there, cannot act or interact with this force; she is incarcerated in her room.

Therefore, erotic interaction and action was manifestly present yet strictly bounded in the images of women that Shen Yue presented in his verse. The increased erotic power of women also continued in the Palace-style tradition, where they exude potent sensuality. Shen Yue’s influence can clearly be seen in the following short vignette by Ji Shaoyu:

残燈猶未滅，將盡更揚熒。  
惟餘一兩燭，纔得解羅衣。  
The guttering lamp is still not extinguished,  
It's about to go out, but again the flame sputters.  
There’s only one or two flickers left,  
She’s just able to undo her gauzy robes.10 (YTXY 294)

The focus upon the woman’s erotic behaviour again is foremost. Yet, it is expressed as a private action, in her boudoir for her lover as witness. This poem epitomizes the ideal of

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9 SYJ 293  
10 “A Poem about a Guttering Lamp” (詠殘燈)
the Palace-style woman; she should be highly eroticized yet scrupulous in the expression of her eroticism. This poetic fantasy directly created the main type of female seen in the Palace-style works, who has become immured in her boudoir and abandoned by her lover. Since only the presence of her lover would enable the full expression of her sexuality, she is frustrated in the only behaviour she is sanctioned to perform. Without her lover to dance for, sing to, or validate her sensuality, she turns increasingly to self-absorption in the effort to cultivate enough erotic force to draw her lover back. The presence or absence of men controls her very essence. Thus, in Palace-style poems, the confining, eroticized world of the boudoir becomes a woman's prison and the absence of her lover makes it completely unbearable.
The description of women in verse expressed their presence, not only in the previously discussed erotic sense, but also in others’ perception of them. The poetic presence of a woman in love poetry included what she was in society and to those about her. It is intrinsically caught up with her gender and her position:

...a woman’s presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her. Her presence is manifest in her gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surroundings, taste—indeed there is nothing she can do which does not contribute to her presence.\(^{11}\)

As the description of women became increasingly popular as a topic, poets concentrated on defining the parameters of a woman’s presence in their works, refining and codifying the elements that the poet decided were valid as a part of it. As poets increasingly imposed conformity on these referents throughout the Southern Dynasties, the female image progressed slowly from a view of the figure as individual to that of the figure as ‘object’. The female figure was silenced, stilled and turned into yet another manufactured object. In short, poets in the Southern Dynasties subjected the female figure to increasing reification within their works.\(^{12}\) This, working hand in hand with the increasing erotic potential of the female figure, produced (by the time of the Palace-style poets) the end result of women as purely erotic objets d’art.

By presenting an idealized, reified form of the female in this way, the Qi-Liang poets were not only setting down certain dictates as to how a woman should be seen, but they were also promoting the highly aristocratized agenda that was emerging at this time.

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\(^{11}\) Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (Norwich: BBC, 1972) 3:46

\(^{12}\) Yen, *Research on Qi and Liang Poetry*, 151
The women in these poems were set out as patterns of behaviour for women and as the ideal possessions for men. Many of these poems transformed women into things whose function was to be one of the aesthetic objects belonging to the court, just as a flute or a jeweled box would be.

Reification does not spring into full being *ab initio* but rather comes through manipulation of various poetic elements. In Han dynasty yuefu, the vitality of women was an essential part of their image. The ballad of Luofu, as seen earlier, promotes the chastity of Qin Luofu and, at the same time, it celebrates the vivacity, beauty, outspokenness, and intelligence of the woman:

...羅敷善蠶桑，采桑城南隅。青絲為籃繩，桂枝為籃鉤...
... Luofu is skilled with silkworms and mulberry,
She picks mulberry at the south corner of the city wall.
Green silk forms her basket strap,
An osmanthus branch forms her basket catch... (YTXY 4)

In this section, Luofu’s personal skills are shown not only in the praise for her sericulture but also in the blazoning of her equipment. Although the materials are incongruously romantic, their inclusion shows the importance of her skills. Her skills also lend her a sense of self that enables her to rebuff the officer so well. As Anne-Marie Hsiung says, "she quickly and firmly responds with a dignity that shows her tough and unyielding character." In other words, Luofu’s image is that of a balanced human being, who has as much right to personal expression as she can muster and who has skills associated with her livelihood, not with eroticism - a far cry from the pampered beauties in Palace-style poems.

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13 Hsiung, “Constructing Women in Han Ballads, Southern Dynasty Folk Songs and Palace-Style Poetry”, 104
The reification of women, therefore, was a distinctive break with the Han ballad tradition. In fact, its origin lies in a different genre of the same period. In the Han and Wei dynasties, many poets chose to write of women who were supernatural examples of female beauty. The focus of their *fu* was the opulent description of a beautiful goddess. As a supernatural being, she was to possess all the attributes of beauty looked for in a woman. Yet, even this idealized beauty could show a personality whose characters were intrinsic to their description and worth, as the "Fu on the Goddess of the Luo River" (洛神賦) reveals. In this work, the goddess is first praised for her looks ("scarlet lips shine without, bright teeth fresh within") but the poet, Cao Zhi, does not fail to praise her character ("Oh! The true virtue of the beauty / Fully conversant with the Rites and understanding the Shi Jing") [嗟佳人之信修，羌習禮而明詩]). In this literati poem, the total of the goddess was considered worthy of description, giving the reader a more rounded image of the woman concerned. Nonetheless, the aim of this type of *fu* was to emphasize the physical beauty of the goddess, her supernatural good looks and the poet's appreciation of them. The later poets concentrated upon this aspect to the exclusion of all others.

In the later Southern Dynasties, the physical beauty of the woman became central and the inclusion of individual character became less and less common. In the *Ziye* songs, the women exhibit much less character and their physical attributes are much more accented. The descriptions, which concentrate on hair, body, gauzy clothing and seductive glances, make the female image much more sexualized through imbuing the

figure with a more concentrated erotic aura. The woman’s personality shows less intelligence, wit and self-reliance than those seen in earlier works. Furthermore, there is much less opportunity for showing this sort of vital spirit since most of the Ziye poems describe only the actions and appearance of the woman in love. The description in one of the Ziye songs of spring (子夜春歌) describes how a woman should be:

Gracefully, she waves her sleeves in the dance,
Pliant and exquisite, she bends her body lightly.
Illuminated, shone on by the light of the cymbidium candle,
Her face is dazzling: spring wind born. (YFSJ 645)

The focal point of the feminine image shifts to the description of the woman’s charms for the man, singling out what the poet deems innately erotic of her body. The poet constructs a blazon of her body, arms and face, listing her admirable physical features as her most important traits. Rather than showing women as individuals with their own distinct personality, the description focused on the idealized aesthetic beauty that the woman may possess. Therefore, the feminine image shows a distinct shift during the Southern Dynasties period from that of an individual woman of women to a more stereotyped and general portrait of an idealized woman, who lacks distinct character traits of her own. In Shen Yue’s poetry, we can clearly see this trend and its continuation towards an increasing reification of the woman. Description becomes couched in the increasingly strict codes of what defined a desirable woman.

Shen Yue’s portrayal of women conforms to the emerging growth of reification of women, who lack distinct personalities, and who have become objects for display. In his poem, “I Composed this Poem for A Newly-wed Man” (少年新婚為之詠), Shen Yue describes the bride not as a person but as a list of her perfections.
A girl of the Shanyin Liu family,
No one can say she's straight from the fields.
A sensuous face and graceful figure,
Versed in rhetoric, skilled in speaking.
Her waist and limbs are supple and dainty,
Her clothing is resplendently lovely.
The red wheels of her carriage gleam in the dawn cold,
Her painted fan welcomes the beginning of summer.
Her brocade slippers have coupled-flower designs,
Her embroidered sash pattern is 'united heart endives'.
Her gauzy jacket has gold pins down the side,
Her cloudy hair raises up flowery hairpins.

This list serves to blazon the woman just as did the description of the woman in the Ziye poem. The male voice of the poem (the bridegroom?) gloats as he casts his gaze over the bride, effectively demonstrating his ‘ownership’ of her. However, the bride herself is not highly individualized, nor does she express a personality that could serve to distinguish herself from any other beautiful woman. The only line that describes her character concerns her skill in speaking; otherwise, she is a picture of a ‘woman’ interchangeable with any other woman in a similar situation. The poet’s blazon could serve for another bride, if he so willed it. Hence, as Shen Yue developed the image of women in his works, the description became increasingly codified into a ‘set’ blazon that could be used interchangeably for any of the women in his works, turning them into objects to be possessed.

15 Amending 工 (gong- work) to 工 (qiao- skill) as suggested in the YTXY
In this poem and other Yongming works, this codification in reification also reflects a thematic expansion in love poetry. There occurs an important shift in the nature of the things blazoned: a shift that resulted in the pure reification of the stereotype of a woman. This was the displacement of the blazon from the natural to the artificial. Whereas the Ziye poems tended to celebrate the naturally beautiful aspects of a woman, the later poets increasingly emphasized the artificial adornment of the woman. In the above poem, only one line depicts her physical beauty; the rest describes her outfit and accessories. No longer were her individual features of importance to Shen Yue, but the clothing and accoutrements formed the blazon of choice. This changing semiotic code associated with the blazon of a woman is indubitably linked to the rise in the artificial as poetic theme since this movement directed poetic attention away from the natural and onto manmade, constructed objects. The woman’s hairpins, clothing, carriage and pins all display not only her high quality of self-adornment but they are also the essence of her innate erotic qualities, just as in earlier poems, hair or slim waists were. Through their own artificiality, they make her into a ‘cosmetic being’, in the words of Birgit Linder.\(^\text{17}\) Without artificial enhancement, her erotic qualities would be much diminished.

In this poem which so neatly lays out a description of a bride, Shen Yue’s image clearly illustrates the changing nature of the codification concerning the female figure. The associations of the woman with her own natural beauty are insufficient; she must show that she has mastered the art of preparing herself for presentation to those surrounding her through her image. The artificiality of her beauty is necessary for this

presentation and they replace the natural beauty that is present in the Ziye tradition.
The cultivated character of her beauty speaks more highly of her desirability than
naturalness would. This transformation to artificiality in the woman’s image may also be
directly linked to the increased elitism that was present in the Qi-Liang courts. The
domination of the court by aristocratic families led to an increasing emphasis on the need
for social display of rank in order to effect entry into the courtly world.\textsuperscript{18} As personal
extravagance became more important, personal adornment was a signifier of rank. No
longer was great personal beauty of sufficient magnitude by itself to make an impression
in the palace.\textsuperscript{19} A woman had also to show her own abilities in self-adornment. As Anne
Birrell states, “what this amounts to is a convention that woman is adored when
adorned.”\textsuperscript{20} Therefore, the accoutrements of a woman became recognized as a greater
sign of her eroticism than personal beauty.

Shen Yue also shows this increased emphasis on social position by the naming of
the woman. In the above poem, the woman is identified not by her full name (as in the
case of Han Dynasty Luofu), but by her clan (Shanyin Liu). As the aristocratic system
became further entrenched in the Southern Dynasties, clan identification became
increasingly important in determining social status.\textsuperscript{21} By naming the woman in this way,
Shen Yue identifies her as part of a collective group (subsuming her own personal name)
that was part of the elite, by which he lauds the bride. Nevertheless the clan name also
suited another purpose; it gives her a worthy provenance like a precious objet d’art, a

\textsuperscript{18} Ebrey, \textit{The Aristocratic Families of Early Imperial China} 20
\textsuperscript{19} Richard Mather in his article “Intermarriage as a Gauge of Family Status in the Southern Dynasties” in
211-228 discusses how intermarriage clearly showed what social rank each clan could lay claim to.
\textsuperscript{20} Birrell, “The Dusty Mirror” 39
provenance showing her social status. Thus, the naming of the woman at first appears to give the woman an identity of her own, but its result is to reify her through identifying her with a particular lineage rather than her own distinct identity.

On the other hand, in the above poem, Ms. Liu at least possesses a last name. By contrast, in Shen Yue’s reworking of the Luofu narrative (“The Sun Rises in the Southeast Corner”), the original Qin Luofu has both her name and her occupation stripped from her. Her identity, even that of her clan, is nowhere in the poem. She is reduced to an idealized beauty within her boudoir, within any individual distinguishing marks. The emphasis of the poem turns from the personal narrative of the Han dynasty, (which contains Luofu’s spirited argument with the official: the core of her character) to a stereotypical description of a cloistered woman. In line with the increasing emphasis on artificial adornment, her ornaments and clothing rather than her own personal beauty designate her attractiveness. She has become the sum of all the artificial elements that adorn her; her body becomes the receptacle for these.

The interaction between poet, reader and figure also influenced the presence of the woman within the work. The gradual distancing of this interaction by the increasingly reifying ‘male gaze’ and the silencing of the female figure had a profound effect upon the construction of the female figure within Southern Dynasties love poetry. Shen Yue firmly keeps objectifying distance within the space of the poem. He displays this not only in the previously mentioned “Six Recollections” but also in the “Fu on a Beautiful Woman” (麗人賦):

... 出閨入光，含羞隱媚

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21 Ebrey, The Aristocratic Families of Early Imperial China 21
... Coming out of the dimness, she enters the light,  
She holds in her bashfulness, hides her charm.  
She lets down the gossamer, tugs the brocade.  
Jingles her jewels and rustles plumes,  
Coming, she removes her sparse makeup,  
Leaving, she leaves a remnant of balm. (SYJ 2)

The poet’s persona within this poem is a cool, distant voice: almost that of a voice-over in a film. He is removed; his emotions are hidden beneath the detailed description of the beauty. He contains the eye of the onlooker, and she “offers up her femininity as the surveyed.”

The distancing of the emotions in this poem is far removed from the spontaneous and natural interaction of earlier love poetry, where the lovers usually directly addressed each other. In contrast, the lovers in Shen Yue’s fu are completely distant from the demotic love of the fields and pastures. Since they are palace inhabitants, the eroticism of the love cannot be allowed full free rein. It must be sublimated into a more distant, objectifying gaze to keep this sexuality firmly within bounds. This strictly controlled and closed society must curtail a woman’s free expression of her desires and wishes, which are defined by her interactions with the man that controls her life.

The voyeuristic feel to such Yongming poems also permits a sophisticated play with the position that the reader occupies in such poems. Shen Yue, through the distancing of the lover-persona, allows the reader to occupy the lover’s point of view and thus his position within the poem. This playing with the reader’s identification with the persona draws us into the relationship between the persona and the woman, but at the

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22 Berger, *Ways of Seeing* 3:55
same time, the reader/lover is a removed spectator, disengaged from the action. This produces a detached tone to the whole set of images in the poem. The creation of the detached tone of the poem contributes to the reification of the woman thus portrayed. This tone is the same tone that occurs in the yongwu poems of this period, where the focus is on an object; thus linking the feminine image the status of a commodity. By fixing his gaze upon her in such a way, the poet memorializes her as an object of lyrical beauty. Her connection with the man determines her worth, just as the value of the yongwu objects was defined through their interaction with the women who wore or used them.

This is another example of the manipulation of the female figure so as to present a idealized object. The increasing distance not only added to the reifying of the woman inherent in the Qi-Liang descriptive process but also determined the focus on the woman; namely, whether the woman was seen as individual or representative. From the Han dynasty to the Qi-Liang period, the focus on the female figure shifts from differentiated women, who are immediate to the reader, to a feminine object, which the male gazes upon and regulates into silence. The gaze becomes increasingly encoded with certain strictures upon the figure and applies these in a more diffuse and wider spectrum, enabled by its increasing distance.

This increasing reification of women reaches its zenith in Palace-style poetry. The poets of this age were enormously aware of the poetic tradition that they had been

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bequeathed by the Yongming era poets. Thus, they added to and enlarged upon this highly codified portrait of women.

The author of a Palace poem no longer address and woos a lover but instead address his fellow poets in an extended commentary on an object they all observe and seek to capture in language.24 In other words, ‘homosociality’ becomes the driving force rather than heterosexual desire. In telling conceit, Xiao Gang compares a woman with her picture, revealing his calculated play with the standardized perception of the female image.

殿上圖神女，宮裏出佳人。
可憐俱是畫，誰能辨僞真？
分明浄眉眼，一種細腰身。
所可特為異，長有好精神。
Up in the hall is the portrait of a goddess,
From inside the palace comes a beauty.
Adorable, they are both 'paintings'.
Who can distinguish the real from false?
Clearly defined immaculate eyes and brows,
The same type of slim-waisted body.
What so specific makes them differ,
[One] will always have lovely vitality.25 (YTXY 171)

The use of the standard traits of the kohl-groomed eyes and the slim waist reveal the codified nature of the female image and its reliance on stock phrases. Xiao Gang knows that these traits will define instantly the painting and the woman as beautiful objects. However, in this poem, the artificial becomes supremely privileged over the real woman, since the one that will endure is the painting. Xiao Gang proposes that the epitome of a palace lady is essentially the image of one, rather than a living, breathing person. The resultant extreme reification is the consequence of the confinement and codification of the female image. The female image moves from portraits of individuated women, who are free to carry out daily life duties, to those of stereotyped objects, possessing all the

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24 Rouzer, "Watching the Voyeurs" 19
codified notions of the female image and yet retaining none of the humanity. The aesthetic pleasure of men imposes the codes employed in her description, and her incarceration is dictated by the social milieu in which she lives. Thus, demonstrating the complete mastership Palace-style poets claimed over the “presence” of women.

Overall, there are several constituents of increasing significance in the development of female representation from the Han to the Liang dynasties: the erotic value of women, their confinement, their reification, male voyeurism and admiration of the artificial. Each of these factors not only influenced the elaboration of the female figure as objet d’art owned by the men of the court, but also defined the boundaries within which women should dwell. Together they produced the fantasy vision of women who would serve to decorate the court in a highly aestheticized role. In constructing this Palace-style ideal, Shen Yue’s poetry was of great importance. In his works, he increasingly defined women and the role they were to play within the boundaries of love poetry. Many of his poems show both the greater eroticism that was imposed onto the female figure, and the increasing confinement that the woman was subject to as she moved from a rustic figure to a idealized court lady. Whether the projected goal of the New Songs from a Jade Terrace was to disseminate the ideals of male possession/female exemplar is not certain; Xu Ling never blatantly indicates a didactic purpose. Of all the women portrayed in the anthology, however, the women in Qi-Liang love poetry surely were the epitome of aristocratic object of desire.

25 “A Poem Composed on a Beautiful Woman Looking on a Painting” (詠美人觀畫)
Conclusion

Innovations created by poets have many causes and effects in their poetic tradition. Some, such as the Russian formalists, may argue that these acts of creation are a fundamental and necessary part of the literary process. Namely, that without the deliberate warping of the language, the ‘literariness’ of the work would not be realized. Bearing in mind the fact that these critics never looked at the poetics of sixth century China, innovation seems to have played this sort of literary role indeed during this period.

The author of the “History of the Southern Qi” (Nan Qi Shu 南齊書), Xiao Zixian (肖子顯 -of the royal family), argued that literary change (xinbian) in order to keep producing outstanding works of literature. He also realized that to become habituated to certain types of literature would result in the production of insipid works and banal reading.\(^1\)

習玩為理，事久則漸，在乎文章，彌患凡舊。若無新變，
不能代雄。

Habitual practice is a reasonable principle, but when pursued at great length, it can become contaminating. When this principle resides in literary composition, writing increasingly suffers from the banal and the trite. If there were no innovations (xinbian), it would be impossible to continue producing outstanding literary works.\(^2\)

Therefore, criticism of Shen Yue’s own age, far from denouncing bold change, emphasized the importance of innovation in the production of literature.

The poets of this time were famous for their innovations in the field of prosodic technique and, as a literary leader, Shen Yue was at the forefront. He capitalized on this

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innovative spirit in his imagery. In the Chinese tradition, imagery modifications have a considerable effect due to the importance of intertextual dependence. During the practice of Palace-style poetics, intertextuality was central to the works produced, which is evident in the rise in popularity of the poems “modeled” (ni 模) on earlier works. The increasingly large role of intertextual dependence was in no small way due to the nature of the literary society at that time. The formation of exclusive literary cliques, where the poet could rely on an intimate connection with his audience of peers, bolstered the exploitation of such close ties to create poetry deeply embedded in intertext.

As the dynamics of poetical production became increasingly enclosed, it required elitist and increasingly codified semiotic interplay. The problems that the existing semiotics of love poetry presented to the Yongming era poets were twofold, both directly resulting from the rustic yuefu pedigree of most love poems. This folk-song background generated imagery that tended both towards the rustic and towards the imprecise. Associations within love yuefu were loose and vague. In addition, many of the images were of an unsophisticated nature, relying on agrarian inspiration. The former problem became an issue due to the need for increasingly codified semiotics to be used within the heavily intertextual tradition of the emerging Palace-style poetics. The latter aspect was a great obstacle to cultivating culture and sophistication in the poetic setting, which was of serious consideration for the Liang poets.

The increasing codification of the semiotics of love poetry was an area where Shen Yue’s contribution was considerable, especially in celestial imagery. He constructed distinctive associations for the moon and sun. He changed the diurnal setting of most of the pastoral love songs into nighttime, because, with the rise of ‘civilized’ life,
the nighttime can be fully exploited. He linked the moon to unfulfilled desire and lost love, spurning the more rustic stellar imagery. However, he did not ignore the sun entirely either. He seized upon the concurrent increase of erotic expression and eroticized the sun far beyond earlier poems. In addition, by focusing on the hitherto vague connections of spring/desire and autumn/loss, he made these relationships more clearly defined and much stricter. This facilitated the exploitation of these signifers in Palace-style poetry, where autumn becomes synonymous with negated passion and spring with fulfilled eroticism.

When Shen Yue was presented with the ill-defined semiotics of nature imagery within the yuefu tradition, he endeavored to clarify their intra-referential nature. He systematized elements of nature into ‘clusters’ or ‘webs’ that presented contrast between positive and negative aspects of desire. The formation of all of these types of cluster meant that the poets could also rely on intra-referential connections to augment elements of nature included in any one of the webs. Finally, also as a result of the strengthened intra-referential links, the poets could rely on the presence of a single element in the poem to evoke the entire sentiment of the semiotic cluster.

Of particular interest, Shen Yue constructed an active opposition between some aspects of nature (webs, lichen, moss) and the ‘civilized’ court, forming a web of nature referents whose power violated the domesticated and trammeled palace life. This codification of nature imagery into clusters was of multiple benefit to later poets. First, they could use the actively hostile elements of nature to create strong contrastive situations in their poetry by placing this group of destructive elements in a Manichaean opposition to the cultured court. These presented an active force that threatened the
hegemony of power that the aristocrats prided themselves on: If nature cannot be preventing from invading, mastery of the situation has faltered.

However, it is outside nature imagery that Shen Yue shows some of his greatest innovation. As a rejection of rustic imagery, Shen Yue renounced the pervasiveness of nature imagery in love poetry and, instead, proffered imagery of the artificial. This was a profound change from the semiotic systems of the yuefu tradition and was closely tied with the emergence of a new poetic form: the yongwu poem. When Shen Yue participated in the propagation of eroticized artificiality, he was not only establishing clear erotic associations with the artificial but also broadening the semiotic codes allied with the expression of eroticism. Thus, these two agendas transpired at the same time.

A change in the imagery associated with women also ensued with the new yongwu form. Accompanying the eroticizing of the artificial, the perception of women as being themselves artificial objects also increased. Shen Yue clearly reveals this in his poems where the woman’s artificial adornment becomes the focal point in her description. Her external appearance becomes the object ‘sung of’ in the yongwu poem.

The codification of the female figure also served a sociological function; she reflected the social mores that were arising from the increasingly closed and aristocratic world of the court. The love poems of the time outlined a woman’s role as an inwardly (emotionally) eroticized, outwardly (physically) static objet d’art. Present in the palace as either court entertainers or palace ladies, the eroticizing of women expounded their purpose while their confinement to the boudoir delineated their boundaries. The court had no need of the active and self-willed ladies in earlier poetry; these were a threat within the closed palace, and brought the taint of rusticity into the luxury of the court.
These poems together with the *yongwu* about manufactured objects convincingly demonstrate the (male) nobility’s overwhelming need, through the medium of poetry, to display their dominance over women, possessions and hence emotions.

This change to elite imagery reflected the ever-clearer dichotomies that were occurring. As the sphere of the poet and his or her audience became increasingly closed due to the prevalence of the aristocratic literary clique structure, the world became fractured into such dualities as inside/outside, rustic/urban, courtier/commoner and, most of all, inclusion/exclusion. These dualities began to appear in all aspects of erotic imagery, differentiating between images that were positive and welcomed in the aristocratic tradition and those that were not. Dualities presented in this way reflected the restricted and bounded life of the upper echelon, which distinguished clearly between the aristocratic levels and others. This dichotomous feeling also encouraged the creation of a corpus of poetry that concentrated on exclusivity and elitism. Thus, Shen Yue’s poetry was a momentous contribution to the poetic advances not only in the field of prosody (for which he is most renowned) but also in the codification of coherent systems of eroticized imagery, the alteration of semiotic elements and, consequently, in the creation of the Palace-style aristocratic sentiment within his works.
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