Harvard-Yenching Institute

Poetry, Politics, Philosophy: Su Shih as The Man of The Eastern Slope
Author(s): Alice W. Cheang
Source: *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Dec., 1993), pp. 325-387
Published by: Harvard-Yenching Institute
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2719453
Accessed: 01-01-2020 05:18 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

Harvard-Yenching Institute is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Poetry, Politics, Philosophy: Su Shih as the Man of the Eastern Slope

ALICE W. CHEANG 鄭文君
The University of Montana

THE *Wu-t'ai shih-an* 烏臺詩案,[1] the so-called poetry trial of Su Shih before the Imperial Censorate in 1079, is the stuff of which legends are made. Indeed there have grown up around the case so many spectacular and entertaining stories[2] that it is easy to forget the seriousness of the charge facing Su Shih, for which, had it not been for an Imperial act of clemency, he would actually have been condemned to die. The case on which Su Shih's accusers based the charge of *lèse-majesté* was that he had written poems to slander and ridicule the reform administration, headed by Wang An-shih and backed by the Emperor Shen-tsung, during his provincial appointments as the governor of Hang-chou, Mi-chou, and Hsü-chou. Although such an interpretation seems far-fetched in the case of many of the poems, some are undeniably satires aimed explicitly at the incompetency of the reforms. In themselves the poems are unremarkable; but the idea that a group of such poems should have been considered powerful enough to be worth suppressing is significant. For although he was already well known as a *ts'ai-tzu* 才子,

I am greatly indebted to Stephen Owen, who directed the Ph.D. dissertation from which this article is derived, and to Ronald C. Egan, for giving me many helpful suggestions for revision. This article is dedicated to Helen, my mother and understanding reader.

[1] *The Wu-t'ai shih-an*, compiled by P'eng Chiu-wan 朋九萬, is included in the Ch'ing collectanea, *Han hai* 函海 (1881–82; photoreprint, Taipei: Hung-yeh shu-chü, 1968), 6:3077–3182.

[2] Some of these are retold in Lin Yutang's *The Gay Genius* (New York: John Day Compa-

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

a "literary talent," before his arrest and arraignment for treason, it was only after this trial and his subsequent banishment to Huang-chou that Su Shih acquired a reputation for poetry that could not only attract the admiration of connoisseurs, but had a political and social impact as well. The paradox is that the same organ that ensured his fame—or notoriety, rather—for being a poet of social concern and political involvement, also deprived him of the power to continue to express these interests openly. Su Shih's development as a poet in the five years of his exile in Huang-chou has its starting point in what happened to him during this trial.

POETRY AND THE EXILE

While in exile in Huang-chou, Su Shih gave up politics; for the first time since he had joined the civil service, he was prohibited from participating in the government of the place to which he had been posted. But this period of enforced suspension from political life also gave him an opportunity to re-examine what politics meant to him and what his contribution to it ought to be.

The first piece Su Shih wrote upon arriving in Huang-chou in the spring of 1080—besides the obligatory memorial to give thanks to the central government for the posting[3]—was the following seven-character regulated verse:

On First Arriving at Huang-chou[4]

I laugh at myself, busied all my life on account of my mouth:
The older I get, the more preposterous in what I pursue.
Where the long river rounds the city wall, I know the fish will be good,
Fine bamboo covers the hills— I can detect the fragrance of the shoots.

---

ny, 1947), Chap. 14. See also Yen Chung-ch'i 顏中其, ed., *Su Tung-p'o i-shih hui-pien* 蘇東坡軼事滙編 (Changsha: Yüeh-lu shu-she, 1984), pp. 55–68.

[3] Wang Wen-kao 王文誥, *Su Wen-chung kung shih pien-chu chi-ch'eng tsung-an* 蘇文忠公詩編註集成總案 (1819; photoreprint, Yün-shan-t'ang edition, Chengtu: Pa-Shu shu-she, 1985) [hereafter *Tsung-an*], 20.3a.

[4] Wang Wen-kao, ed., *Su Shih shih chi* 蘇軾詩集 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1982) [hereafter *SSSC*], 20.1031.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

It doesn't hurt an exile to be posted as a supernumerary,
Nor is it unprecedented for a poet to serve as a Water Bureau clerk.
Only I am ashamed not to be a single shred of use,
While still troubling the government to press out wine sacks for me.

(Poet's note: As a rule the commodity portion of a supernumerary official's salary is often paid in the form of used wine bags.)

初到黄州

自笑平生爲口忙，老來事業轉荒唐．長江繞郭知魚美，好竹連山覺筍香．
逐客不妨員外置，詩人例作水曹郎．只慙無補絲毫事，尚費官家壓酒囊．
（自注:檢校官例折支多得退酒袋）

This is a poem of self-definition, or to be more precise, of self-discovery. In it Su Shih explores his newly acquired character of political exile, but in order to do so he must first deal with the political failure that has brought him here. What is unusual about this poem is that he does not concern himself with qualities—what he is like—but with deeds—what he has done and what he will do. For the poem also serves as Su Shih's statement of purpose to the authorities regarding his plans for the next few years.

With a characteristic tone of mock self-deprecation Su Shih begins by telling his readers that he has done badly up till now and if anything (this somewhat archly for a recently convicted prisoner) is likely do worse in future. All his life he has been busy "on account of his mouth," presumably in order to feed it. He has been, in other words, occupied with the business of making a living, a "business," he goes on to say, that grows ever more hopeless of success. The word *shih-yeh* has an ancient and august history, going back as far as the *I ching*. The T'ang commentator K'ung Ying-ta 孔穎達 glosses *shih* as "what is planned" and *yeh* as "what is accomplished of the plan."[5] The application is, of course, political: *shih-yeh* was the "business" of the *chün-tzu*, the superior man; it was what he "pursued" in relation to the body politic. Here the word is used most irreverently, for Su Shih is referring to his own rather inglorious doings.

[5] *Chou I chu-shu* 周易注疏 (*SPPY* ed.), 1.16b.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

The couplet may, however, be read another way, and circumstances invite us to do so. To be busy on account of one's mouth can also mean that one gets into trouble because of what comes out of it—what one says. For a man who has spent his life not merely feeding his own mouth but from time to time putting his own foot into it—with disastrous results for his career as an official—Su Shih can certainly claim without exaggeration that the older he gets, the more absurd his hope of achieving his ambitions. But *huang-t'ang*, with which Su Shih describes his actions, can also describe words, indeed is more often used to describe words. As one whose words have got him into trouble, Su Shih seems to be promising that they will do so no longer; for from now on the things he says will be devoid of sense and meaning, mere verbiage, the harmless nonsense of a foolish man growing ever more foolish with age. Given that Su Shih had only recently been cleared of a charge of *lèse-majesté*, such jocular self-condemnation carries a somber undermeaning. Another poem, one of a pair Su Shih wrote about a month earlier, upon hearing of his banishment (in lieu of the expected death sentence), began with a similar, though less ambiguous, couplet: "All my life words have been my pitfall, / From now on I shan't mind if my reputation does not go far" 平生文字爲吾累，此去聲名不厭低.[6] In this way he announced his intention of keeping a low profile, as befitted one who was all too painfully aware that he is less famous than infamous for his writings. The present poem is, however, less straightforwardly meek.

The term *huang-t'ang* seldom appears in poetic language. When it does, it has the range of meanings covered in the preceding paragraphs: describing actions not likely to be realized, or words not founded on solid reality. However the *locus classicus* is not poetic at all, but is to be found in the following passage in the "T'ien-hsia p'ien" 天下篇 ("Below in the Empire") chapter of the *Chuang Tzu*:

Some of the ancient tradition of the Way is to be found in this, and Chuang Chou got wind of it and delighted in it. With his outrageous opinions, *reckless words*, extravagant formulations, he was sometimes too free but was not partisan, he did not show things from one particular point of view. He thought that the empire was sinking in the mud, and could not be talked with in too solemn language. He thought

[6] *SSSC* 19.1006.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

that ''spillover'' saying lets the stream find its own channels, that ''weighty'' saying is the most genuine, that saying ''from a lodging-place'' widens the range.[7]

古之道術有於是者，莊周聞其風而悅之．以謬悠之説，荒唐之言，無端崖之辭，時恣縱而不儻，不以觭見之也．以天下爲沈濁，不可與莊語．以巵言爲曼衍，以重言爲真，以寓言爲廣．

Graham has rendered *huang-t'ang chih-yen* as ''reckless words.'' But two T'ang commentaries, which would have been familiar to Su Shih, gloss *huang-t'ang* as ''broad, large'' and ''great and without boundaries.''[8] In context the phrase describes the kind of language in which Chuang Tzu is said to have couched his version of the ''ancient tradition of the way'' (*ku chih tao-shu*), because he considered the state of the world such that it was unfit to be addressed in ''solemn language'' (*chuang-yü*). Words characterized as *huang-t'ang* are therefore expansive and capacious, not bounded by the dictates of ordinary usage or subject to the logic of normal habits of thinking. So what comes out of Su Shih's mouth as he grows more and more *huang-t'ang* will be undisciplined and unorthodox to the conventionally correct, without value for the practical and the sober-minded. But from the perspective of the writer of the *Chuang Tzu*, to be *huang-t'ang* is to partake of the idiocy of the Taoist idiot-savants, men who, when the Way did not prevail, retired into obscurity, and who, because straightforward language could not properly convey their wisdom, used preposterous words to disguise their advice for the governance of a sinking empire. By espousing a course of behavior he calls *huang-t'ang*—by promising to speak in the tongue of fools and madmen—Su Shih has couched his retirement from the world in the form of a lofty renunciation. Banished indefinitely from the center of the realm and forbidden to participate in affairs of state, he has made a virtue of necessity, turning forced withdrawal into voluntary abjuration.

But Su Shih had other reasons for renouncing the world. When he was first discharged from prison at the beginning of 1080, he composed two poems to match the rhymes of two he had written while

[7] A. C. Graham, trans., *Chuang-tzu*: *The Inner Chapters* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1986), pp. 282–83 (my italics); *Chuang Tzu chi-shih* 莊子集釋 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1985), p. 1098.

[8] See, respectively, Ch'eng Hsüan-ying 成玄英, *Nan-hua chen-ching chu-shu* 南華真經注疏, and Lu Te-ming 陸德明, *Chuang Tzu yin-i* 莊子音義, in *Chuang Tzu chi-shih*, pp. 1099–1100.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

awaiting sentence. The second of these post-trial poems has already been quoted (p. 328). The first poem—the very first piece Su Shih wrote upon his release—begins with this couplet: "A hundred days and ready to go home—just in time for spring: / For the rest of my life, contentment my closest concern" 百日歸期恰及春，餘年樂事最關身.[9] *Le-shih* "delightful things, things that give me pleasure" stand opposed to the kind of activities in which Su Shih was engaged up till the time of his arrest, things for which his mouth made him busy—that is, things involving him in political life. To pursue *le-shih*, to do what one really likes doing, then, is to stop doing these other things. To cast off the burdens—and the perils—of public office: this had been the evinced desire of every civil servant since it was first articulated by the poets of the Wei and Chin. Su Shih, with the overwhelming relief of a man reprieved, has promised himself in this couplet that henceforth he too would pursue only his own happiness and lead a leisurely life of retirement. Now, having arrived in Huang-chou, he writes a new poem to work out how he is to execute this plan, this new way of life to replace the one in which he has so abjectly failed. Ironically it is because of his failure, because of the laughable absurdity of his pursuits in the public domain, that he has been freed to devote himself to this other calling. Thus, in naming his enterprise *huang-t'ang*, Su Shih has deprecated himself only in order to express a hidden pride.

So far Su Shih has described himself only in terms of what he has failed to achieve; he must next find something else to do, someone else to be. This he does in the second and third couplets, as he describes, first, the place in which he is to live, and then, the role he is to assume while living there. The analogy between the satisfaction of physical needs and the attainment of psychological well-being is to become a common theme in the poetry of Su Shih's exile periods; we have an intimation in the first of these poems. For Su, whose chief preoccupation up till now has been to feed his mouth, Huang-chou presents a reassuring vista of abundance. Here the fish promise to be fat, and from the look of the bamboo growing rampant on the hillsides one can almost taste the fragrant shoots. The outcast arrives, then, not in a landscape steeped in miasmic damp-

[9] *SSSC* 19.1005.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

ness, in the manner of places where loyal ministers are likely to find themselves banished (although Su Shih does make dutiful mention of morbid vapors elsewhere in his early Huang-chou poems), but in a choice and cheery setting that can only fill him with joyous anticipation.

An appetite for fish and an appreciation of the virtues of bamboo shoots have precedents in earlier literature. Chang Han 張翰 of the Chin dynasty is said to have resigned office when, feeling the autumn wind rising and being reminded of the vegetable soups and carp stews that were just then coming into season in his native land of Wu, he grew homesick. "What is important in life," he said, "is for a man to be able to follow his own inclinations. Why then should I bind myself in service thousands of miles (from home) for the mere sake of rank and reputation?" With that he turned his carriage round and drove away.[10] A longing for these delicacies has since become idiomatic expression for the desire to retire from office and go home. When Su Shih says that he is looking forward to eating the fish in his new place of residence, he is referring also to the anticipated pleasure of being "able to follow his own inclinations," of a life free from political responsibilities.

Eating bamboo shoots is a topic that appears in mid-T'ang poetry. Po Chü-i's treatment of the subject, dating from the period of his banishment in Chiang-chou (beginning in 815), is included in his collected works in the section entitled "Poems of Ease and Leisure" (*hsien-shih* 閑適), that is, poems written while out of office. It records the process by which the exiled Po Chü-i achieved the peace of mind of an official in retirement.

Eating Bamboo Shoots[11]

This county is a veritable hometown of bamboo—
Spring shoots cover every hill and valley.
A man from the hills cuts himself an armful
To carry in to morning market.
Things grow cheap for being plentiful:
Two cents will buy a whole bunch.

[10] See the "Biography of Chang Han," in *Chin shu* (*SPPY* ed.), 92.9a.

[11] Ku Hsüeh-chieh 顧學頡, ed., *Po Chü-i chi* 白居易集 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1979), p. 135.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

I pop them into the cooking pot
And they're ready by the time the rice is done.
Purple sheaths rip up old brocade:
Pale flesh splits open new jade.
And so every day I make a meal of them,
After a while I no longer think of meat.
Long a sojourner in the capital,
I never got enough of the taste of this.
Let me eat now without holding back,
Before the south wind blows them up into bamboo.

食笋

此州乃竹鄉，春笋滿山谷．山夫折盈抱，抱來早市鬻．
物以多爲賤，雙錢易一束．置之炊甑中，與飯同時熟．
紫籜坼故錦，素肌擘新玉．每日遂加餐，經時不思肉．
久爲京洛客，此味常不足．且食勿踟躕，南山吹作竹．

The poem shows the recent arrival in the course of adapting to his new life by getting used to the food. This Po Chü-i does—so well that he soon learns to love his humble fare (the bamboo shoots that are so "cheap" and "plentiful") and to forget the more sumptuous meals that he had once been privileged to enjoy. Realizing this—that what he formerly valued is now of comparatively little value to him and that what is generally held in contempt (*chien*) has become for him the thing of genuine worth—he has made the same discovery that T'ao Ch'ien made when, retiring from his government post to live on his farm, he said, "I am aware that what I do today is right, what I did yesterday wrong."[12] In this way, Po Chü-i, who starts off his poem as a "stranger" (*k'o*) to the place of his banishment, finishes by saying that it was really in the capital where he held office that he was a "stranger," thereby making this "hometown of bamboo" his home as well.

The tone of the poem is mocking and playful. Line 12, for example, contains a wonderfully irreverent allusion to the story of how Confucius was so moved by the sagely music of the Shao that for three months he did not even notice the taste of the meat he ate.[13] In

[12] "Kuei-ch'ü-lai hsi tz'u" 歸去來兮辭 ("Rhapsody on the Return"), in *T'ao Yüan-ming chi*, ed. Lu Ch'in-li 逯欽立 (Hong Kong: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1987), p.160.
[13] *Analects*, 7.14.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

"no longer thinking about meat," Po Chü-i has therefore not only fulfilled the Confucian prescription of remaining "steadfast in adversity" (*ku-ch'iung* 固窮),[14] but has gone on to imitate a much higher form of happiness, one originally attained by the Master himself! Such playfulness, however, underscores a certain belligerent complacency: Po Chü-i is writing to convince the world—and himself—that he is alive and doing quite well in exile. A lonely stranger in a strange place, he has by the assumed postures in his poem reinterpreted his situation to make himself more comfortable in it.

Su Shih faces a similar challenge upon his arrival in Huang-chou. Like Chang Han, he seeks contentment in the freedom to do as he pleases, but like Po Chü-i he must learn to find that contentment in a place not of his own choosing. The place itself is pleasant enough, he says, and as an "exile" and a "poet" he does not mind his position. After all, is not Ho Hsün 何遜 (?–518), one of the pre-eminent poets of the Liang, also remembered for having served as a clerk of the Water Bureau?[15] To follow in Ho's footsteps would certainly be no dishonor. Su Shih is emphatic on this: *pu-fang* "it does not hurt (one)" in line 5 is reinforced in the next line by *li-tso* "it is not unprecedented (for one) to serve as." But in this parallel couplet the words "supernumerary" and "Water Bureau clerk," both prosaic in the extreme, are juxtaposed in exactly corresponding positions against "exile" and "poet," words with highly poetic associations. The deliberate equation of two such unequal categories introduces a note of gentle irony. Exiles—men like Ch'ü Yüan and Chia I who were dismissed from court on account of their loyal words—and poets—those age-old bearers of moral sanction against the follies of princes and potentates—are precisely not the kind of people who ought to be made into the lowly understaff of a provincial public works department: that they are is the mark of an unjust and unenlightened employment (*yung*) of men's talents. The quiet sarcasm embedded in the innocence and candor of these lines prepares us for the tone of the closure.

[14] *Analects*, 15.2: "The gentleman is steadfast in adversity, in adversity the small man falls apart." A dictum frequently embraced by T'ao Ch'ien, as in Poems Two and Sixteen of his "Drinking Wine" series, *T'ao Yüan-ming chi*, pp. 87 and 96.

[15] Indeed his writings are to be found under the title of *Ho Shui-pu chi* 何水部集 (*The Collected Works of Ho of the Water Bureau*). However, Ho Hsün's post by the same name was in the Secretariat (*shang-shu sheng*) of the central government.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Huang-chou is a perfectly agreeable place, and the new job not intolerable, pronounces Su Shih, seemingly satisfied with the arrangement. Then, remembering to whom he owes the favor of his present position, he renders thanks to the Imperial government for its generosity. Gratitude is expressed in the form of a humble disclaimer: since he is unworthy of this (as of any other post), Su Shih says, he is ashamed to continue to collect an official's salary. In striking the modest pose of the ill-deserving civil servant, he is obeying convention, which dictates that in a poem in which one has mentioned one's office, the last couplet should contain an acknowledgment of one's unworthiness to receive the emoluments of that office; but here the sincerity of Su Shih's pose is clearly questionable. To be humble is one thing; to make an exaggerated gesture of humility is quite another. Su Shih is by his own confession not only useless and redundant, he is so useless and redundant that there is not "a single shred" he can call his contribution to the world of *shih*, of practical affairs. And yet in return for his doing nothing at all, the government, which has been so kind as to send him here, does him the further kindness of giving him an allotment of used wineskins. The inclusion of the mundane detail is telling. For if Su Shih deserves little, what the authorities are giving him cannot be said to be much. The picture of His Majesty's servants deedily squeezing out wineskins for the express purpose of disbursing them to Su Shih, while Su Shih himself fattens on good food and the leisure of a job that involves no responsibilities, is drawn with satirical relish: by expressing, a little too abundantly, his gratitude for the trouble that is being taken in his behalf, he has achieved the entirely opposite effect and diminished by faint praise those who have power over him.

In the closing paragraphs of Chapter 1 of the *Chuang Tzu*, the "Hsiao-yao yu" 逍遙遊 ("Going rambling without a destination"), Hui Shih compares Chuang Tzu's sayings to a giant tree that is "big but useless (*wu-yung* 無用), dismissed by everyone alike." To this Chuang Tzu replies that, rather than worry about the tree's uselessness, Hui Shih should "plant it in the realm of Nothing-whatever . . . and go roaming away to do nothing at its side, ramble around (*hsiao-yao*) and fall asleep in its shade"; for, after all, it is precisely because the tree has no conceivable use (*wu so k'o yung* 無所

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

可用) that no one will have occasion to harm it.[16] From *huang-t'ang*, reckless perversity, in the opening couplet Su Shih has passed on to *wu-yung*, total uselessness, at the close—and from there, perhaps, into *hsiao-yao*, the state of free and aimless wandering, out of his detractors' reach. By defining himself in opposition to those holding sway in the arena of political power, he has reaffirmed his disaffection from them, while at the same time proclaiming his intent of working out his own aspirations elsewhere: as with Chuang Tzu's tree, there will be a use for Su Shih that lies beyond the usages of these ordinary men.

For there is more to being useless than meets the eye.[17] Su Shih has named himself an exile and a poet, neither of which is known for being useful, at least not so far as the *shih* of the realm are concerned. We have come back, then, to Su's opening demurral, that he is so lacking in ability in his profession as to have made himself "preposterous." "Exile" thus defines the negative identity of the political failure, and "poet" a positive counterpart of the same: for is not a poet someone who is always busy with his mouth and out of whose mouth come "preposterous" words, words that are *huang-t'ang* because they are empty (*hsü* 虛), because they belong to the world of the imagination rather than to the world of the factual and the historical? Certainly, if Su Shih is banished from the court, he will have no opportunity to participate in the business of empire. From now on his *shih-yeh*, the vocation to which he has chosen to dedicate himself, will lie not in the realm of *shih*, but with words instead, words like the words in the *Chuang Tzu*, silly words, wise words, a poet's words. This, then, is the proper use of a useless man.

A man who is of no use is paid with commodities that have no use—a just reciprocity. There is, however, a deadly ambiguity in the seventh line. It can mean either: "The only thing is that I am ashamed of being useless in practical affairs," or: "The only thing of which I *am* ashamed is to be useless in practical affairs," that is, I

[16] Graham, p. 47; *Chuang Tzu chi-shih*, pp. 39–40.

[17] As the madman of Ch'u tells Confucius at the end of *Chuang Tzu*, Chap. 4, "Jen-chien shih" 人間世 ("Worldly business among men"): "All men know the uses of the useful, but no one knows the uses of the useless." See Graham, p. 75; *Chuang Tzu chi-shih*, p. 186.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

am only ashamed of that—but, by implication, of nothing else. As far as his bankrupt *shih-yeh* is concerned, Su Shih's efforts have indeed been ludicrous, but by apologizing for himself in this way he has withdrawn only a part of his claim to an identity: the other part, that aspect of himself which deals in the impractical, with words and not with actions, is left unchallenged. Su Shih says he is ashamed only to have been such an indifferent official; he has said nothing about being ashamed of being a poet. As the two sides of the power relationship—one that masquerades as a relationship of mutual obligation—neatly dissolves away, cancelling the bond that ties the civil servant to the government he serves, all that remains is the poet's pride in and affirmation of himself.

"On First Arriving at Huang-chou" is light in tone, informal in diction. But this casual way of speaking does not alter the seriousness of what is being said: its very airiness is the key to the success of the poem. For it is the mark of the truly civilized man that he should never cry out, though himself reviled and calumniated, but give vent even to the deepest feeling with urbane and humorous words.

THE POET IN TRANSITION: TWO EARLY HUANG-CHOU POEMS

The Huang-chou to which Su Shih was exiled was located in what is now the county of Huang-kang in Hupeh Province, an area known for the harshness of its climate; but even if he had been sent to a paradise in the temperate zone, tradition alone would have dictated that a banished minister find his surroundings hostile, if not downright baneful. Upon his arrival, in the second month of 1080, Su Shih was placed in lodgings at a local monastery, the Ting-hui Yüan; after his family joined him at the end of the fifth month, he was allowed to move to nearby Lin-kao Pavilion (literally, "Pavilion on the Water's Edge"), part of a complex of government buildings originally intended as housing for visiting financial commissions. Here he was to remain for five years. Living in a borrowed residence and holding only a nominal office, with neither power nor privilege attached, Su Shih soon became preoccupied with his displacement, both in the physical sense and in the sense of his exclusion from the body politic. And just as the loss of identity finds expression as a loss of place, so his search for a new identity takes the

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

form of looking for a place to call his own, a place to be at home in.

Two famous pieces from this period illustrate this sense of lost place and its concomitant, the loss of a stable sense of self. One is the *tz'u*, *Pu suan tzu* 卜算子 (To the tune of "The Fortuneteller"),[18] "written while in lodgings at the Ting-hui Monastery in Huang-chou" 黃州定惠院寓居作:[19]

Broken moon hanging on a leafless paulownia,
Water-clock stopped, everyone still at last.
Who sees the hermit walking back and forth alone?
Faraway and dim, the silhouette of a single goose.

Starting up, it turns around again,
Full of complaints understood by none.
Branch upon wintry branch, all unfit for rest:
Lonely[20] on the islet cold.

缺月掛疏桐，漏斷人初靜．誰見幽人獨往来，縹渺孤鴻影．
驚起却回頭，有恨無人省．揀盡寒枝不肯棲，寂寞沙洲冷．

This *tz'u* is a short form (*hsiao-ling* 小令), made up of two stanzas of equal length, the commonest of all the *tz'u* patterns. Here Su Shih takes advantage of the stanzaic division to mark a shift in the implied subject, from the hermit in the first stanza to the wild

[18] Lung Mu-hsün 龍沐勛, ed., *Tung-p'o yüeh-fu chien* 東坡樂府箋 (1935; reprint, Taipei: Hua-cheng shu-chü, 1980) [hereafter *TPYFC*], 2.17b.

[19] This is the subtitle that appears together with this *tz'u* in most editions. Wang Wen-kao seems to doubt the authenticity of the subtitle and dates the *tz'u* to the twelfth month of the following year, 1081 (*Tsung-an* 21.20a). However, there is some evidence to support the earlier date for this piece: (1) The persona of the "hermit" is also used in a poem that is definitely dated to the spring of 1080, "Ting-hui Yüan yü-chü yüeh-hsia ou-ch'u" 定惠院寓居月下偶出 (*SSSC* 20.1032, *Tsung-an* 20.3b). (2) In the poem, "Yü Tzu-yu t'ung-yu Han-hsi hsi shan" 與子由同游寒溪西山, written during a visit from Su Ch'e, who arrived with his brother's family in Huang-chou at the end of the fifth month of 1080, the following lines appear: "Now I am adrift, like the wild geese— / North and south of the great river, with no fixed place of rest" 我今漂泊等鴻雁，江南江北無常棲 (*SSSC* 20.1055, *Tsung-an* 20.6b). This rather prosy redaction of the sentiments expressed much more eloquently in *Pu suan tzu* suggests that the poem was composed after the *tz'u* and is referring to it. The habit of alluding to his earlier works appears in Su Shih's poetry with increasing—and, in his later years, almost annoying—frequency.

[20] *Chi-mo* in classical Chinese means "silent" and "still"; but in the *tz'u* of the late T'ang and Five dynasties—as here—it is used in its colloquial meaning of "lonely." Notice the visual alliteration in *chi-mo* and *p'iao-miao*, both descriptive binomials and both in matching positions at the head of the last line in each stanza.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

goose in the second; or rather to collapse together the two subjects, so that, in the second stanza, while it is the movements of the goose that are being described, the feelings and impulses imputed to these movements clearly belong to the human protagonist. The juxtaposition of the images in the third and fourth lines in the first stanza has already metaphorically identified the two: the back and forth motion of the hermit's nocturnal promenade (line 3) is repeated in the motion of the goose's silhouette as it floats, eerie and ghostlike, overhead (line 4), so that each becomes the counterpart of the other. Then, metaphor turning to metamorphosis in the stanzaic shift, the human merges into the animal—the hermit in his solitude becoming one with this solitary creature of the wild. This deliberate conflation of perceiving subject with perceived object is an invitation to an allegorical reading.

The theme of *hsien-jen shih-chih* 賢人失志, or "the virtuous man disillusioned"[21] (because he is at odds with a world in which vice is rewarded and virtue, if not punished, goes unrecognized), is often allegorized in Chinese poems about a bird separated from its flock or forced to take shelter in a flock of an inferior species. The prototype for this is Ch'ü Yüan's phoenix, which languishes in a cage while chickens and ducks roam free.[22] With this kind of symbolism in mind, later poets often wrote poems about solitary geese, as in the following poem by Tu Fu:

Solitary Goose[23]

The solitary goose will not eat or drink,
It calls on the wing, remembering its flock.
Who will take pity on this sliver of a shadow,
Lost in the thickly layered clouds?
Out of sight—or perhaps there yet?
Its grief so great—seeming still to hear.
Crows on the plain haven't the faintest clue—
Caught up in their own raucous chatter.

[21] Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of the Early T'ang* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 187.

[22] Lines 27–28 of "Huai sha" 懷沙, in *Ch'u tz'u* (*SPTK* ed.), 3.25a.

[23] Ch'iu Ch'ao-ao 仇兆鰲, ed., *Tu shih hsiang-chu* 杜詩詳注 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1979), 4:1530.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

孤雁

孤雁不飲啄，飛鳴聲念群．誰憐一片影，相失萬重雲．
望盡似猶見，哀多如更聞．野鴉無意緒，鳴噪自紛紛．

Tu Fu describes the loneliness of a goose trying to find its lost flock. In its desperation, the goose seems to be always on the point of gaining a glimpse of its companions or of coming within earshot of them—but always in vain. The poet, no less avidly, strains to keep the goose within reach of his own eyes and ears, and is reluctant to believe that it is no longer in sight as well as eager to discern lingering echoes of its mournful cry. In yearning for the lost goose, just as the goose yearns for its flock, the poet has achieved an emblematic unity with it. Poet and goose become indistinguishable from each other as they fuse into the common subject of lines 5 and 6: the same actions pertain to both. Meanwhile, such high-flying aspirations—of the goose and the poet who identifies with it—are inaccessible to the carrion-birds which, by their very nature, are doomed to hover near the ground, deaf to all but their own noisy concerns. The predatory kites and owls in the *Shih ching* are the anthropomorphized counterparts of evil men who stand in the way of the virtuous.[24] But Tu Fu's crows do not pay him the compliment of recognizing his worth by trying to do him harm; they are not even aware of his presence. To the question pitilessly raised in the third line, "Who will take pity on this sliver of a shadow?" the implied answer, then, is no one—neither those whom the poet aspires to be with nor those whom he abjures.

Tu Fu's poem is usually dated to 766, after his move to K'uei-chou on the banks of the Yangtze gorges in Szechwan. The solitary goose symbolizes the poet's loneliness, which includes both the physical isolation of being cut off from his kin, who are scattered all over the country, and the spiritual isolation of *pu chih* 不知, of not belonging to a brotherhood of like-minded men who can understand and appreciate him. The poem ends on a note of bitter melancholy, as Tu Fu is made all the more painfully aware of his lack of companions by the presence of those with whom companionship is impossible.

[24] See, for example, *Mao shih*, no. 264.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Su Shih's *Pu suan tzu* is more difficult to interpret. As an emblem of the poet's state of mind, the nervous, jittery movements of the goose embody perfectly the uneasiness of the newly banished political exile. But the images themselves are highly ambiguous. The goose "starts up," yet is unable to fly away; "turning back again," it refuses to roost in the trees and instead alights on a sandbank in midstream, choosing for its resting place this most unrestful spot, which leaves it vulnerable to the changing currents. The goose is lonely because "understood by none": yet there is no indication that it rejects the "wintry branches" out of contempt. Far from it: for these are the branches of a *wu-t'ung*, a fit perch for the phoenix, of all birds the most royal. In an earlier *tz'u*, a *Shui-tiao ko-t'ou* 水調歌頭 (To the tune of "Prelude to Water Music") composed on mid-autumn night in 1076 at Mi-chou and dedicated to his brother Su Ch'e, Su Shih writes: "I would like to return there (to the moon), riding on the wind, / Only I'm afraid, in those jasper towers and halls of jade / So high up, I shouldn't stand the cold" 我欲乘風歸去，惟恐瓊樓玉宇，高處不勝寒.[25] The palaces in the moon are identified with the Emperor's court, from which Su Shih, then serving on the provincial circuit, had alienated himself by his political affiliations. Now, in *Pu suan tzu*, Su Shih's goose will not roost in the *wu-t'ung*, the rightful abode of the phoenix, because it does not belong there, just as Su Shih has left the cold, high places of power because that is not *his* place. The key term in this anthropomorphic description is *chien* ("to pick over, to choose among alternatives"), a word conspicuous by virtue of its strong colloquial flavor. The use of *chien* in line 3, reinforced by *pu k'en* "to be unwilling, to refuse" in line 4, focuses our attention on the idea of choice. The whole line, literally translated, reads thus: "Picks over the winter branches and refuses them all for a perch." But the emphasis is ironic. Just as the goose has not really forsaken the treetops for the river islet—for, as critics have been quick to point out, geese cannot perch in trees[26]—so the banished Su Shih has no real power of election in his present circumstances. But then the goose acts as it does because it is a goose and not any other kind of bird; and Su Shih has exercised a kind of

[25] *TPYFC* 1.40b.
[26] *TPYFC* 2.18a.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

choice simply by being himself. He has chosen (*chien*) to rest in this place that can give no rest simply because he has run out of other choices (*chien-chin*); that is, this is his only choice. If he could have done otherwise than what his nature dictated, he too might have enjoyed a position of ease and rest; only because he had to choose as he did was he forced into such danger and isolation. The irony doubles back on itself, resolving at last into paradox.

The final act of settling down is reminiscent of another poem, "Su fu" 宿府 ("Overnight at the Office"),[27] which Tu Fu composed in 764 when, in the middle of a life filled with restlessness and turmoil, he found temporary refuge in the employment of Yen Wu, governor-general of Szechwan.[28] Tu Fu closes this poem with the metaphor of a bird coming to roost for the night: "Having endured ten years of trial and tribulation, I move perforce to perch for rest on this one branch of peace" 已忍伶俜十年事，強移棲息一枝安. *Ch'iang*, here rendered as "perforce,"[29] implies "constraint by circumstance" and is used to express polite misgiving—the misgiving of one who is reluctant to accept a favor (because undeserving) while at the same time he is grateful for being so favored.[30] The goose of *Pu suan tzu* is constrained after a different fashion to seek shelter in its new place of rest, but the echo of Tu Fu's poem underscores the total absence of "peace" in Su Shih's own situation. In another allegorical *yung-wu* ("poem on an object") about a solitary goose, Chang Chiu-ling (673–740) concludes with these lines: "Now off I roam into the darkening void— / What are you hunters pining for?" 今我游冥冥，弋者何所慕.[31] By contrast, the frightened and skittish creature in Su Shih's *tz'u* seems well aware that it is still within range of the hunters' arrows.[32]

[27] *Tu-shih hsiang-chu*, 3:1172.

[28] For a reliable chronology of Tu Fu's poems, see William Hung, *Tu Fu: China's Greatest Poet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952). This poem appears in 1:213.

[29] Cf. David Hawkes, trans., *A Little Primer of Tu Fu* (1967; reprint, Hong Kong: Renditions Paperbacks, 1987), p. 132.

[30] Cf. William Hung, 1:213.

[31] "Kan-yü" 感遇, fourth in a series of twelve. Kao Pu-ying 高步瀛, ed., *T'ang Sung shih chü-yao* 唐宋詩舉要 (Hong Kong: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1973), p. 8.

[32] In attempting to draw filiations between this piece and earlier poetry, I have discovered grounds for comparing it with several *shih* (rather than with other *tz'u*). The personal feelings (*hen* has a wide range of meanings, from self-reproach to rancor against others) portrayed in *Pu suan tzu* are close kin to the feelings of "resentment and anger" (怨怒) whose expression

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

In a line-by-line exegesis, the Ch'ing scholar Chang Hui-yen 張惠言 interprets *Pu suan tzu* as a political allegory in which he assigns a precise symbolic meaning to every image. Although such readings tend on the whole to be over-readings, this one shows the critic sensitive to the mood of restless hovering that pervades the poem. The phrase *pu an* 不安 "not at ease," or variations thereof, appears three times in Chang's analysis. Thus, the startled goose represents the "uneasy" state (*pu an*) of the worthy man; its reluctance to roost in a tree, his "unwillingness to enjoy stolen ease" (*pu t'ou an* 不偷安) in high places filled by darkness and corruption; and the deserted islet, the poet's present situation, in which he is "ill at ease" (*fei so an* 非所安).[33] But *an*, the state of being at ease, of having peace of mind, has another, more fundamental meaning: it means to be *in* a place of rest—a place where one can be safe from danger and flux. In Su Shih's *tz'u* the two converge: the search for peace of mind finds its analogue in the need for physical stability.

The instability of Su Shih's situation is inscribed in the very structure of *Pu suan tzu*. The *tz'u* avoids conventionally established correlations; rather, it suggests tentative analogies between the poet's situation and that of the object he describes, while resisting the reader's attempts to discover in them definite acts of signifying. Why, for instance, does the goose turn around and what are the complaints that no one seems to understand? What is it that the goose is rejecting when it refuses to perch on the branches? The reader can assign meanings to every line and image, but he will find that, if pressed, those meanings will shift and change, rearranging themselves in a fitful, enigmatic pattern like that traced by the movements of the goose itself. The result of this strange combination of opacity of meaning with a pellucidly clear style of expression is a poem of haunting yet impenetrable loveliness. Perhaps it is to this quality that Huang T'ing-chien was responding when he wrote of *Pu suan tzu* that its language seems unlike that of "one who partakes

---

has from early times been associated with the *shih* (see, for example, the "Great Preface" to the *Shih ching*). Here Su Shih has commuted values traditionally regarded as the purview of the *shih* form to the new and still experimental form of the *tz'u*.

[33] *TPYFC* 2.18a. For a detailed exposition of Chang's exegetical method, see Grace S. Fong, "Contextualization and Generic Codes in the Allegorical Reading of *Tz'u* Poetry," *Tamkang Review*, 19 (1988-89): 663-79.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

of the cooked food of [ordinary] men."[34] In any case, the pedestrian insistence on an exact connection between image and meaning would do violence to the fluid vitality of this piece, which reads perfectly smoothly as naturalistic description. The goose's movements are drawn with remarkable accuracy. Momentarily startled (by its human spectator, perhaps), the goose circles round and, in skimming the treetops, appears uncertain about where to land, then finally alights on a sandbank farther out from the water's edge. This is precisely what a water-fowl will do. Natural observation has been assimilated to symbolic intent with grace and aplomb.

The allegorical interpretation of *yung-wu* grows out of a convention of reading poetry that is almost as old as the poetic tradition itself: as the instrument of moral judgment (literally, *mei-tz'u* 美刺, the) apportionment of praise and blame, for good and bad government respectively). What can be symbolized by the description of the literal object is narrowly defined by a set of common themes, one of them being "the gentleman at odds with the world." These themes, some of which had already appeared in the later parts of the *Shih ching*, were fairly well fixed by the time the *Ch'u tz'u* began to be written. There birds and flowers commonly stand for good and evil ministers. Thus in Ch'ü Yüan's *Li sao*, Orchid and Pepper are evil men who maligned the poet and brought about his estrangement from his beloved prince, the Fair One; the *Chü sung* 橘頌 ("Song in Praise of the Orange Tree"), one of the *Chiu chang* 九章 ("Nine Pieces") attributed to Ch'ü Yüan, is an extended allegory which sets up the orange tree as a model for the virtuous young man. In the following poem, written during his first spring in Huang-chou, Su Shih plays upon the generic expectations surrounding the allegorical *yung-wu*.

To the East of My Lodgings at Ting-hui Monastery,
on a Hillside Covered with Flowering Plants,
There Grows One Cherry-apple Tree,
which the Natives are Too Ignorant to Prize[35]

In this river town—miasmic spot—burgeoning with shrubs and trees:

[34] Quoted in *TPYFC* 2.18a.
[35] *SSSC* 20.1036.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Only this famous flower, so secretive and alone.
One radiant smile from behind the bamboo hedge
Turns crude and coarse a whole hillside of peach and plum.
What is more, I know that the Creator had a profound purpose
For deliberately sending this fine lady to live in an empty vale.
Opulence is hers by nature, comes from her heaven-born state,
No need for golden bowls offered under a sumptuous roof.
Ruby lips touched with wine, a blush spreads on her face,
Jade-green sleeves of gauze rolled up, a red glow on her flesh.
In forests deep and dim with mist, morning light comes late,
When the sun is warm and breezes mild, she sleeps in spring till sated.
Weeping in the rain, she is much to be pitied,
Companionless under the moon, all the more pure and lovely.
The gentleman, having eaten his fill, has nothing to occupy him,
As he saunters off, free and easy, rubbing his belly.
Heedless whether it's the monks' or someone else's home,
He leans on his staff and knocks at the gate to see the tall bamboo.
Suddenly he meets matchless beauty, face to face with withered decay,
Sighing, speechless, he rubs his sickly eyes.
Where can this lowly place have got such a flower as this—
Could it be some aficionado moved it here from Shu in the west?
Shallow roots can't be easy to transport over a thousand miles,
The seed must have been carried here by a migrating goose or swan.
Castaways at the world's end, the two of us alike worth a care!
For you I'll drink a cup and sing this song.
Tomorrow when I'm sober I'll come again alone,
Petals falling snow-like, unbearable to touch.

寓居定惠院之東，雜花滿山，有海棠一株，土人不知貴也

江城地瘴蕃草木，只有名花苦幽獨．嫣然一笑竹籬間，桃李漫山總麤俗．
也知造物有深意，故遣佳人在空谷．自然富貴出天姿，不待金盤薦華屋．
朱唇得酒暈生臉，翠袖卷紗紅映肉．林深霧暗曉光遲，日暖風輕春睡足．

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

雨中有淚亦悽愴，月下無人更清淑．先生食飽無一事，散步逍遙自捫腹．
不問人家與僧舍，拄杖敲門看修竹．忽逢絶豔照衰朽，歎息無言揩病目．
陋邦何處得此花，無乃好事移西蜀．寸根千里不易致，銜子飛來定鴻鵠．
天涯流落俱可念，爲飲一樽歌此曲．明朝酒醒還獨來，雪落紛紛那忍觸．

Here Su Shih is at his virtuosic best. Like the cherry-apple, which in its solitary splendor outshines other flowering plants, making them seem "crude and coarse" in comparison, Su Shih's poem is his attempt to outdo the works of other poets. By means of a subtly textured network of resonances he invites earlier poems one by one into his own—and then subdues them to his own purposes. First comes Tu Fu's "Chia jen" 佳人 ("Fine Lady")[36] to which Su Shih makes an extended and explicit allusion by following the same rhyme scheme and using some of the same rhyme words. Thus, lines 1, 8, and 10 repeat rhyme words from "Fine Lady," while lines 6 and 18 end with the same words (*k'ung-ku* and *hsiu chu*) as the first and the last lines respectively of Tu Fu's poem. Moreover, *chia-jen tsai k'ung-ku* in line 6 is a foreshortening of Tu Fu's opening couplet, "There is a fine lady, matchless in all the world, / Living secluded in an empty vale" 絶代有佳人，幽居在空谷. But while Su Shih's cherry-apple, like Tu Fu's virtuous paragon, can stand alone, unsupported by a backdrop of luxurious surroundings (lines 7–8), she does equally well in the guise of a voluptuous sybarite. In the three antithetical couplets (lines 9–14) that follow, with their elaborate personification of the cherry-apple as pampered court favorite, we are reminded of that other "famous flower" in "Ch'ing-p'ing tiao" 清平調, a trio of songs to the tune "Pure and Serene Melody" composed for the Emperor Hsüan-tsung to celebrate an occasion of viewing peony blooms in the company of Consort Yang: in these songs the subject alternates between flower and woman and sometimes confuses the two.[37] The image in line 12 of the cherry-apple as a woman awakening refreshed from a nap in springtime (a clever inversion of the commonplace woman-as-flower trope) is Su Shih's answer to—and improvement upon—the story in which Hsüan-tsung likens the inebriated Yang Kuei-fei to "a cherry-apple blossom still

[36] *Tu shih hsiang-chu*, 2:553–53.

[37] Traditionally attributed to Li Po. See *Li T'ai-po ch'üan-chi* 李太白全集, ed. Wang Ch'i 王琦 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1977), p. 304.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

heavy with sleep.''[38] Then, having run the gamut from sublime to sensual in his celebration of the flower as woman, Su Shih caps his description by imagining what the cherry-apple is like when no one is about (line 14). He has thus exhausted all the possibilities in his attempt to write a perfect *yung-wu* on his chosen ''object.'' But for such a description to have been written, someone had to be present. Having reminded himself of his own presence as an observer of the phenomena he is describing, Su Shih decides to begin over again. This time he introduces himself as a protagonist in his own poem, a companion to the ''companionless'' cherry-apple.

On the surface level, the poem on the cherry-apple up to this point reads as pure description; but another level of interpretation has been proposed to the reader from the very outset. The title informs us that, like the poet who is merely ''lodging'' here, the cherry-apple is a stranger to her surroundings; yet for all her rarity, there is no one besides the poet to value her, just as the poet has no one to recognize his worth—except, perhaps, his reader, should he prove to be an understanding friend. The association between fragrant plant and poet-exile, made familiar to us by the *Li sao*, is set up before we begin reading. Su Shih then elaborates on the allegorical interpretation by embedding key words from ''Fine Lady'' throughout the first half of the poem. In Tu Fu's poem, the lady recounts how, originally ''of good family,'' she fell into obscure poverty when, ''as the heartland lay in chaos,'' her powerful male kin were killed and her fickle husband left her for a new wife. Tu Fu's narrative draws upon the stock theme of the ''neglected wife,'' commonly used in the political allegories of the Han and Wei: there the female persona figures a loyal minister ousted from his prince's favor through the traducements of slanderers.[39] When, in the third couplet of his poem, Su Shih claims that there is a divine purpose in sending the cherry-apple—*his* ''fine lady''—to this desolate place, he is pointedly referring us to such an allegorical reading. The

[38] *Ming-huang tsa-lu* 明皇雜錄, cited in *Tseng-pu tsu-pen Shih-Ku chu Su shih* 增補足本施顧註蘇詩, ed. Cheng Ch'ien 鄭騫 and Yen I-p'ing 嚴一萍 (partially reconstructed reproduction of the Sung collection by Shih Yüan-chih 施元之 and Ku Hsi 顧禧; Taipei: I-wen yin-shu-kuan, 1980), 18.14b.

[39] For an interpretation of Tu Fu's poem as political allegory, see the Ch'ing scholar Ch'en Hang 陳沆, *Shih pi-hsing chien* 詩比興箋 (Hong Kong: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1965), p. 167.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

cherry-apple, like the persona of the abandoned woman, is there to remind Su Shih of his fallen and despised condition, to serve as a parable wherein to "lodge" his bitter feelings. She has been appointed at once to stand as a counterpart to the poet's lonely virtue and to serve him as a companion in his loneliness.

Yet, when Su Shih walks into his poem at the beginning of the second half, he is far from being a disconsolate official in disgrace. Instead he is fat, well-fed, and manifestly content—the very picture of the retired gentleman with time on his hands and not a care on his mind. The gesture of rubbing his belly, in addition to being a yogic exercise to promote the digestion, is obviously an expression of physical satisfaction and emotional well-being. The traditional figure of the poet-exile has found a playful reincarnation here, for it is this comic persona who goes out to meet the cherry-apple. The discovery is set in the form of a dramatic encounter. Careless of other people's property—as the poet is of other people's poems—this leisurely rambler galumphs merrily through the woods in pursuit of a view of the "tall bamboo," trampling as he does so on the heels of the delicate and exquisite "Fine Lady," which closes with an image of the lady leaning against a "tall bamboo" in the twilight. At this moment the cherry-apple takes him by surprise and makes him realize the true nature of his situation. The "matchless beauty" of the tree in her full florescence "shines upon" the gentleman in his "withered decay": it illuminates his decrepitude, shocking him out of his complacency. The "sickly eyes," which he rubs in disbelief, have become so in the act of seeing what they have just seen. Thus does the evanescent beauty of the flowers arouse in man an awareness of his own mortality.

There is something else of which Su Shih's gentleman becomes aware. In wondering how such a magnificent tree could have come to such a depressed and lowly place, he asks rhetorically whether someone could have had it moved here all the way from the far-off province of Shu. Shu, modern-day Szechwan, is the native place of cherry-apples and of Su Shih himself. *Hao-shih* means a person with an "enthusiasm"—a hobbyist, as it were—but it can also mean a "meddlesome" person, the kind of cunning villain who would have enjoyed bringing about the dismissal of a good minister from office. Thus line 22 can be applied to the human protagonist as well as to

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

the object he describes, the fragrant plant existing in symbolic identity with the poet-exile. His speculations do not end here, however. With matter-of-fact credulity, the naive spectator goes on to answer his own question, reasoning that, since the roots of this plant are too fragile to have survived such a long and arduous journey, the present specimen must have grown from a seed fortuitously deposited by a passing bird (lines 23–24). But "seed" (*tzu*) is also "son," as a recent scholar has ingeniously pointed out; the airborne goose can then be seen as standing for the poet's father, its flight a fitting metaphor for the soaring ambition with which Su Hsün "carried" his two sons away from their home province in pursuit of an official career so many years ago.[40] Again, the figure of the perceiving poet merges momentarily with that of the thing perceived, the one taking the place of the other within the poem. Was it by accident or design—was it through the machinations of evil men or simply because he followed the meritorious course charted for him by his father—that Su Shih, like the cherry-apple, has arrived in his present circumstances? Through the contemplation of the object encountered, his persona seems to have chosen to take comfort in the more positive interpretation.

But by setting in a narrative framework the persona's encounter with this stimulus for reflecting upon his own situation—by locating the "gentleman" and the cherry-apple side by side in a moment of time and space—Su Shih has established their existence as two separate and independent entities. The gentleman wonders by what agency he and tree alike have been brought to this place and, in substituting one explanation for another, he manages to cancel out both. *Wu-nai* "could it be" in line 22 is negated by a much more emphatic *ting* "must have been" in line 24, but this rhetorical insistence on certainty only serves to call attention to the speaker's lack of assurance in what he is saying. For the tree is just a plain and simple tree, on which Su Shih tries out first one pedigree and then another, only to find that either—or neither—will do: in the end the cherry-apple ceases to be an allegorical emblem and reverts to being itself. The code of symbolic correspondences, so carefully set up in

[40] See Hsü Hsü 徐續, ed., *Su Shih shih hsüan* 蘇軾詩選 (Hong Kong: San-lien shu-chü, 1986), p. 122.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

the first half of the poem, has been disrupted in the second half by the poet's own impulse to discover meaning. The poet can do little more than try to console himself.

Line 25 echoes "P'i-p'a hsing" 琵琶行 ("Song of the Lute"), which Po Chü-i wrote in 816, during his banishment in Chiang-chou.[41] Here again, in referring to "the two of us"—in speaking of himself and his subject together—Su Shih has reaffirmed their separateness. In the preface to the "Song of the Lute," Po Chü-i says of his encounter with the lute-player: "This was the second year after my demotion and up till then I had been perfectly at ease. But I was moved by this woman's story, and from that night on, I began to feel what it meant to be an exile." Similarly, Su Shih's retired man of ease is shocked out of his carefree state only when, in recognizing the sad fate of the displaced cherry-apple, he also sees his own. "Castaways, both of us, at the edge of the world" 同是天涯淪落人, says Po Chü-i in his poem (line 65); to which Su Shih resonates, "Castaways at the world's end, the two of us alike worth a care." And, just as Po Chü-i promises to compose a song for the lute player in return for her playing him a tune (lines 81–82), Su Shih drinks and sings in celebration of the cherry-apple tree. Then, his song over, he writes a closing peroration on the impending death of the blossoms.

In 806, the spring before his recall from banishment in Chiang-ling, Han Yü wrote a poem on pear blossoms for his friend and fellow exile Chang Shu, which closes with these lines:

> Ever since becoming a castaway, worries crowd in on me,
> Before going out, before getting there, my mind is on the way back.
> If now, at forty, I'm already like this,
> What I'll be like in after days who can tell?
> With all my might I'll take goblet in hand until I'm drunk,
> I can't bear that you should be cast into the dirt, abandoned for naught.[42]

[41] *Po Chü-i chi*, pp. 241–43.

[42] "Li-hua tseng Chang shih-i Shu" 李花贈張十一署, in *Han Ch'ang-li shih hsi-nien chi-shih* 韓昌黎詩繫年集釋, ed. Ch'ien Chung-lien 錢仲聯 (Shanghai: Ku-tien wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1957), pp. 163–65.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

自從流落憂感集，欲去未到先思回. 秖今四十已如此，後日更老誰論哉.
力携一樽猶就醉，不忍虚擲委黄埃.

Han Yü's impassioned elegy on the dying blossoms in the closing couplet, with its images of violence and destruction, is inextricably mixed with his outcry at the suffering of banishment. The verbs *chih* "to cast (down)" and *wei* "to abandon," applied in the last line to the pear flowers, usually describe actions upon human subjects. Thus, when the poet says he cannot bear that the blossoms should be cast into the dirt, he is simultaneously crying out his grief at his own casting down, the beauty of the flowers being equated—in the tradition of the allegorical *yung-wu* on fragrant plants—with the purity of the poet's mind. Han Yü's poem, true to the mood of much of his work, is full of raw, unaccommodated emotion. In Su Shih's poem, the harsh *cri du coeur* has been modulated into restrained understatement. Here, too, the poet is distraught at the prospect of beauty ravaged by the whips and scorns of time, but the correlative to this—that virtue suffers at the hands of unrighteous men—is left tactfully unspoken, the lament on the passing of the flowers having displaced, or rather, replaced the poet's lament for himself. Where Han Yü exposes all, Su Shih reserves a hidden meaning. In this regard—in the refined reticence of its tone—the poem on the cherry-apple has indeed outstripped the poem on the pear blossom.

"Cherry-apple" is justly one of Su Shih's most famous pieces. Wei Ch'ing-chih 魏慶之 (fl. 1240–44) in his *Shih-jen yü-hsieh* 詩人玉屑 says that, judging from the many copies of this poem extant in Su Shih's own hand, it was "one of the pieces with which the poet was truly satisfied."[43] The Ch'ing critic Chi Yün 紀昀 comments: "No one but Tung-p'o is capable of such a poem and even Tung-p'o himself could only have done it with the proper inspiration."[44] Yet this poem, for all its lively exuberance, is curiously dissatisfying, not because of what it says but because of what it leaves out.

The poem is really many poems in one. First, it is full of "famous lines," some of them allusions to poems of the past, some of them Su Shih's own contribution to the ever-increasing store of the poetic

[43] *Shih-jen yü-hsieh* (Shanghai: Ku-tien wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1958), p. 384.

[44] *Su Wen-chung kung shih-chi* 蘇文忠公詩集 (1836; reprint, Taipei: Hung-yeh shu-chü, 1969), 20.5a.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

tradition. His description of the tree as a lovely woman is one of the great set pieces in the history of *yung-wu* on flowering plants, at once building upon the genius of the T'ang poets and claiming a place alongside them for its own achievement. Secondly, this is a poem of multifarious aspect. In it Su Shih explores and challenges the conventions of the allegorical *yung-wu*, complicating with subtle variations the process by which significance is attached to sign. The reader is invited to see the cherry-apple as a parable of the poet in exile, using the ready-made association of the fragrant plant with the figure of the virtuous man, but then finds that such a reading cannot be sustained throughout. Allegorical elements appear throughout the poem, but the poem is not an allegory. Refusing to yield a consistent pattern of correlative references between the literal and the symbolic, it forms instead a shifting and unstable pattern—full of *pien*, of magical changes—on which we attempt to impose meaning, through which we try to determine the poet's relationship to the world. What unifies the poem in the end is what remains unsaid. As the poet lapses into silence, weeping for the blossoms fated to die, the silence holds in perpetual abeyance the expression of his anguish at his own fate. The reader is left with the image of the poet standing irresolute beside the cherry-apple—outside the song he has just sung, outside the narrative framework of his encounter. "Cherry-apple" thus ends on a note of unresolved dissonance. It denies us that final moment in which the world is organized and made whole by the poet's perceptions.

In "Cherry-apple"—as in the *Pu suan tzu* lyric on the solitary goose—there is a powerful impulse toward allegorization. Here, however, the pressure to identify the central image as an allegorical emblem of the poet is met by an equally strong counter-pressure to create a distance between the poet and the object he perceives and yearns to identify himself with. These structural tensions mirror the contradictions of the poet's position in the order of things. Years later, when Su Shih was again banished, this time to Hui-chou, he wrote the poem "Ssu-yüeh shih-i jih ch'u shih li-chih" 四月十一日初食荔枝 ("Eleventh of the Fourth Month: Eating Lychees for the First Time").[45] The structure of this poem repeats that of

[45] *SSSC* 39.2121.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

''Cherry-apple'': it begins with a description of the lychee plant personified as a beautiful fairy immortal banished by the gods, and then halfway through introduces the persona of the ''gentleman,'' who, in sampling the delights of the lychee nut, comes to the (heavily ironical) realization that life in exile cannot be so bad if it includes such other-worldly fare as this. ''All my life I've struggled in the world on account of my mouth'' 我生涉世本爲口 he says—referring simultaneously, as before, to the business of feeding himself and of getting into trouble—and concludes: ''Coming south these thousands of miles was a good plan after all'' 南來萬里眞良圖. But the later poem, while also a source of memorable quotations, lacks the magical unpredictability of the earlier one. It is the quality of changefulness, of incongruous elements coming together in harmonious disharmony, that makes ''Cherry-apple'' a great poem, instead of a mere demonstration of skillful image-making.

THE RECLUSE OF THE EASTERN SLOPE

In the two poems from the early Huang-chou period discussed above, the sense of rootlessness is embodied structurally as well as thematically. The poet's position in the world of the *Pu suan tzu* lyric consists in his not having a position at all; in ''Cherry-apple,'' Su Shih plays with the role of the virtuous poet-exile but in the end holds back from stepping into that role. The failure in both poems to provide an identity for the poet—to integrate him in the world created by the poem—means that the self appearing in these poems remains essentially unstable, inchoate, and equivocal. The search for *an*, a place of rest, a feeling of rootedness—the theme that comes to dominate the rest of the Huang-chou period—defines the poet's search for a new identity. This Su Shih was to find when he acquired the plot of land that has come down in history as the ''Eastern Slope.''

Su Shih began farming the Eastern Slope in response to economic necessity, his meager income being insufficient to feed his large family. In the course of his stay in Huang-chou, however, he came to call himself *Tung-p'o chü-shih* 東坡居士, ''The Recluse of the Eastern Slope,'' a literary sobriquet (*hao*) he was to use for the remainder of his life and by which he is popularly known to posterity. By custom one assumes a *hao* only after reaching a stage in life from which one

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

can look back on earlier experiences with detachment and understanding, perhaps even wisdom. The act of taking such a name commemorates one's passage into maturity, and the name itself denotes one's mature style—"style" in the sense of a mode of behavior most characteristic of oneself. In this new name is encoded a man's final identity, the self that he hopes will be remembered. Thus when Su Shih began to call himself Tung-p'o, he became Tung-p'o; and in becoming Tung-p'o, he became wholly and truly himself.

The farm Su Shih created at the "Eastern Slope," on the lot of an abandoned army barracks, seems to have been so named because of its position in relation to the neighboring plot, the "Southern Slope" (*Nan-p'o*). However, "T'ung-p'o" has a less mundane association.[46] After Po Chü-i was demoted from Chiang-chou to Chung-chou in 819, he wrote two poems entitled "Tung-p'o chung-hua" 東坡種花 ("Planting Flowers on the Eastern Slope") and, in the following year, "Pieh-chung tung-p'o hua-shu liang chüeh" 別種東坡花樹兩絶 ("Two More Quatrains on Planting Flowers and Trees on the Eastern Slope").[47] In the first of the two quatrains, he begins: "Two years I've languished in a river town" 二年流滯在江城. Su Shih had also been living in banishment for two years when, in 1082, he obtained the grant of farmland; he too refers to Huang-chou as a "river town" in the first line of "Cherry-apple." In taking on a name found in poems by the exiled Po Chü-i, Su Shih has drawn a parallel between this phase in his own life and that of the poet whom posterity admires for being—as he said of himself—"Enlightened indeed! Enlightened indeed is Po Lo-t'ien ('Content in the Will of Heaven')!" 達哉達哉白樂天.[48] But unlike the sobriquet *Tung-li* 東籬, which the Yüan songwriter Ma Chih-Yüan (circa 1270–1330) adopted from a poem by T'ao Ch'ien in order to be associated with him,[49] the name Tung-p'o refers first to a place

[46] On the provenance of the sobriquet Tung-p'o, see Chou Pi-ta 周必大, *Erh-lao-t'ang shih-hua* 二老堂詩話, 1b-2a, in *Li-tai shih-hua* 歷代詩話, comp. Ho Wen-huan 何文煥 (1770; reprint, Taipei: I-wen yin-shu-kuan, 1956), p. 425.

[47] *Po Chü-i chi*, pp. 215-16 and 394 respectively.

[48] *Po Chü-i chi*, p. 827.

[49] From Poem Five of the "Drinking Wine" series: "Picking chrysanthemums by the eastern hedge, / I catch sight of the distant southern hills" 采菊東籬下，悠然見南山 (*Tao Yüan-ming chi*, p. 89). The translation is by James Robert Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 130.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

and only afterwards to the man. Thus the association Su Shih is attempting to forge will grow out of his experience of living and working on the piece of land he has called the "Eastern Slope." The "Eight Poems on the Eastern Slope" are not only about Su Shih's new life as a farmer, then, but about how, through this new life, he works out a sense of his own self—how he comes by his true and proper name.[50]

In the preface to "Eight Poems on the Eastern Slope," Su Shih writes:[51]

It was the second year of my stay in Huang-chou and I was in daily worsening straits. My friend Ma Cheng-ch'ing [Ma Meng-te] took pity on my hunger and asked the district authorities if I could have several acres of an old army campground to cultivate. The land, which had long lain waste, was no more than a pile of rubble overgrown with weeds; there had also been a severe drought that year. The mere task of breaking up the soil was nearly enough to exhaust my strength, and so, letting go the plough with a sigh, I wrote these poems to console myself in my effort, in the hope that next year's harvest will make me forget my labors.

余在黃州二年，日以困匱．故人馬正卿哀余乏食，爲於郡中請故營地數十畝，使得躬耕其中．地既久荒爲茨棘瓦礫之場，而歲又大旱，墾闢之勞，筋力殆盡．釋耒而歎，乃作是詩，自愍其勤，庶幾來歲之入以忘其勞焉．

To write a series of poems about one's experiences as a farmer is to beg immediate comparison with T'ao Ch'ien, the archetypal poet-farmer and the inventor of the poetry of rural life, of "fields and gardens" (*t'ien-yüan*). But the circumstances under which Su Shih has come to eke out his livelihood upon the Eastern Slope could not be more different from those in which T'ao Ch'ien wrote his poems; indeed, the preface to the "Eight Poems on the Eastern Slope" reverses all the major elements in T'ao Ch'ien's prologue to his "Rhapsody on the Return." There T'ao Ch'ien tells us that he had taken a job in a district magistracy because he was unable "to supply the necessities of life" by farming alone. Finding soon, however, that his disposition was ill-suited to the "discipline and restraint" of office and regretting that he had so "compromised his principles" for the sake of "mouth and belly," he resigned and

[50] For an extensive treatment of these poems, see Michael A. Fuller, *The Road to East Slope* (Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 271–85.
[51] *SSSC* 21.1079.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

returned to farm life.[52] Su Shih, on the contrary, has come to try his hand at farming only because his salary is insufficient. Reluctantly he has taken up the life of the rustic simple to serve *his* mouth and belly.

Nor does the Eastern Slope in any way resemble the scenes of georgic bliss that Wang Wei—the High T'ang poet responsible for popularizing T'ao Ch'ien (largely through a series of misreadings)—was so fond of painting. Instead it is a place of dereliction, a no-man's land, which Su Shih describes with trepidation and distaste—for our poet of the Eastern Slope is no T'ao Ch'ien, or at best, only a very unwilling one. This is the frame of mind in which he begins these poems. Yet in the midst of his despair, Su Shih manages to sound a note of hope, that "next year's harvest will make me forget my labors." Perhaps, things being even as they are, the wasteland may bring forth bounty and reward him for all his hardship. This is how we are to approach the "Eight Poems on the Eastern Slope": as the chronicle of Su Shih's education in suffering, how he learns, not mere resignation, but to transform the cause of his pain into a source of joy, to turn consolation into celebration. He will do this in the process of creating "fields and gardens" out of the wilderness, by imitating the efforts of T'ao Ch'ien, as both a farmer and a poet.

In T'ao Ch'ien's greatest works, such as the two poem series "Kuei yüan-t'ien chü" 歸園田居 ("Returning to the Farm to Dwell") and "Yin-chiu" 飲酒 ("Drinking Wine"), what is essential is that the poet seems to have lived what he was writing. Unlike the sophisticated literary exercises that made the fame of T'ao's contemporaries, these poems claim to be the product of genuine experience; they speak of the inner man, confiding to us his doubts and exaltations. This was precisely why T'ao Ch'ien enjoyed little prestige in his own lifetime and precisely why he came to hold such appeal for later readers. Such is the myth of T'ao Ch'ien: that his poems can stand for him, that his writing is utterly sincere—because he speaks in such a heartfelt way and what he says is all perfectly true.

Most of his life, Su Shih has been reading the works of T'ao Ch'ien, whom he greatly admires. When, suddenly and by coercion

[52] Hightower, p. 268.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

he arrives at that state to which T'ao Ch'ien came by choice, he can do one of two things. He can imitate T'ao Ch'ien's words and phrases, as other poets have done. Or he can try to experience for himself something of what he has read about T'ao's experience—to become, in effect, a little like him—so that his poems will of themselves resemble T'ao Ch'ien's. Accordingly, the first poem of the ''Eastern Slope'' series is a poem without T'ao Ch'ien, a poem about the world before one has learned to see it with T'ao Ch'ien's eyes, before one has learned to be T'ao Ch'ien.

Poem One[53]

An abandoned fort with no one to tend it,
Its tumbled walls all overgrown:
Who's there to lend his strength?—
Whom year's end will not recompense.
Only this lonely wanderer,
Impoverished by heaven, with no escape.
Straight away he picks up the rubble,
In a year of drought, when the soil is thin:
Up and down, in thickets of weeds,
He hopes to scrape an inch of down.
I let go the plough and sigh aloud:
''When will my store of grain pile up?''

東坡八首:其一

廢壘無人顧，頹垣滿蓬蒿．誰能捐筋力，歲晚不償勞．
獨有孤旅人，天窮無所逃．端來拾瓦礫，歲旱土不膏．
崎嶇草棘中，欲刮一寸毛．喟然釋耒歎，我廩何時高．

In its subject matter this poem is more reminiscent of a Six Dynasties meditation on the site of ancient ruins than it is of any description of rural life written by T'ao Ch'ien or his imitators. The opening view of the broken remains of human habitation and the despairing sigh at the end are properly the elements of elegiac verse. But these are more than stylized literary gestures: the piles of rubble overgrown with weeds are quite real, as Su Shih carefully establishes in his preface, and the dramatic outburst with which the poem

[53] The ''Eight Poems on the Eastern Slope'' are in *SSSC* 21.1079–84.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

closes is no generalized lament on the human condition, but a gasp of genuine physical exhaustion. The task that Su Shih faces is thus twofold: in clearing away the debris of the Eastern Slope, he will make a fertile farmland out of a desolate place, but in so doing he will also transform the dark, old world of elegy into a new one of pastoral contentment. The harvest mentioned in the preface will consist of not only the first-fruits of his agricultural labors but also the lasting reward of his poetic enterprise—a portion of T'ao Ch'ien's peace of mind; and he will reap the two together.

For the present, however, Su Shih looks around him and can see only things to awaken his dismay. Yet they are strangely matched, this unwilling fugitive and his unwanted refuge. *Wu jen ku* "with no-one to tend it" and *wu so t'ao* "with no escape, nowhere to run to"[54] are symmetrical epithets: with bitter irony the poet has seen to it that this place and he are made for each other. Here and there are traces of some long-forgotten tenancy, but they do not speak of history, of past relationships with man, only of the present lack of one. The land seems to exist in a vacuum, dislocated in time and space. Who, implores the poet, will lend his strength to this friendless and unfriendly ground? Like a faceless figure from some old *yüeh-fu*, a solitary traveler steps out to meet this unlikely challenge, a man equally out of joint, who comes from nowhere and has nowhere to go. His "extremity" (*ch'iung*) is "heaven-wrought"; it is not the doing of man and is therefore inescapable. Quite literally the poet has come to the end of his road (also *ch'iung*, as in *t'u-chiung* 途窮). For it is only fitting that the place without a man should be claimed by a man without a place.

The wayfarer sets to work. "Straight away, without further ado" (*tuan-lai*), he heaves the first brick aside. The gesture commits him to the place, puts man and land in partnership. The prospects do not change, but the perspective in which they are viewed does. Line 10 restates positively the same proposition negated in line 4. Apprehension that the land will yield no compensation for his labors has turned into hope of getting "an inch" of vegetation. The task may be futile, but the lonely wanderer takes it up anyway, and in taking it up is wanderer no more.

[54] *Wu so t'ao* can also mean "from which there is no running away."

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

The last line echoes Ode 279, "Feng nien" 豐年 ("Abundant Harvest"), from the *Shih ching*, which begins, "Abundant is the harvest, with much millet and much rice, / And granaries piled high" 豐年多黍多稌，亦有高廩.[55] The contrast between the overflowing plenitude celebrated in the ode and the backbreaking poverty of this plot is ironic. But is the question, "When will my store of grain pile up?" only a cry of despair? Or does that cry carry in it a note of supplication, of a desperate hope that, perhaps, through intoning this thanksgiving prayer of the ancients, the present harvest too may be blessed? The line is ambiguous. At once it laments the dreary hopelessness of the work in hand and declares the poet's heroic resolution to struggle on with it.

The landscape of the Eastern Slope is rocky and rugged, like the language of the poem describing it. With the single exception of the last line, the sources of this poem are to be found, not in poetry, but in prose works of the most archaic severity. The phrase "impoverished by heaven" comes from a commentary on the *Chou li*,[56] "the soil is thin" (literally, "not fat") from the *Kuo-yü*, and the reference to vegetation as a covering of "down" from the *Po-wu chih* 博物志.[57] The poem is naked, unadorned, as deliberately innocent of those beautifying symmetries of sound and image that make language "patterned, cultured" (*wen*) as the land is itself is bleak and barren. Prosaic in diction and content, Poem One seems to bear a closer relation to the preface than to the poems that are about to follow. Appropriately so, for this is a world still untouched by the civilizing influences of farming and of poetry. Then, with the invocation of the ancient harvest ode, couched in the form of a question that conflates doubt with self-exhortation, Su Shih opens up that world.

The allusion to the *Shih ching* is tonally consonant in a poem that consistently draws its vocabulary from the oldest sources. But here the addition of *wo* renders it dissonant. In a line taken from a solemn ritual hymn, that pronoun is too jarringly personal. It is

[55] Adapted from James Legge, trans., *The Chinese Classics* (1871; reprint, Taipei: Wen-shih-che ch'u-pan-she, 1972), 4:586.

[56] Cheng Hsüan's 鄭玄 commentary on the *Chou li* (*SPTK* ed.), 3.17a.

[57] *Chi-chu fen-lei Tung-p'o hsien-sheng shih* 集註分類東坡先生詩, conventionally attributed to Wang Shih-p'eng 王十朋, ed. (*SPTK* ed.), 4.4b.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

also, strictly speaking, unnecessary: Su Shih can be talking of no one else. The effect is one of emphasis. The poet identifies himself explicitly with the persona in the poem. I am the man, he says, who has been driven by the hand of heaven to this place; but when harvesttime comes, perhaps I shall be able to make it into the site of my store of heaven-given abundance. He has passed from constraint to acquiescence, even to anticipation. With this, Su Shih at last takes possession of the Eastern Slope. By confessing himself its owner, he has accepted his tenure here—his role as the farmer of the Eastern Slope—as his inevitable destiny. He is now ready to begin again.

So far Su Shih has talked about farming, but made no mention of "fields." Poem One takes place entirely in a scene of ruin, a wasteland filled with weeds and rubble. The second poem renames the place:

Poem Two

Though waste fields have run wild again,
High and low each have what they are suited for:
Low-lying wetland for planting rice,
The incline to the east, jujubes and chestnuts.
South of the river lives a man from Shu,[58]
Who's already granted my request for mulberry seeds.
Fine bamboo is not hard to grow,
The only fear is its running rampant.
What's needed now is to divine an auspicious spot,
Where I may take measurements for setting up my house.
The boy who was burning off the withered grass
Runs to say that a hidden well is found.
A full stomach I daren't yet anticipate,
But already I'm sure of a ladleful of drink.

其二

荒田雖浪莽，高庳各有適．下濕種秔稌，高原蒔棗栗．
江南有蜀士，桑果已許乞．好竹不難栽，但恐鞭橫逸．

[58] Wang Wen-fu 王文甫, a fellow native of Szechwan who befriended the poet in exile. See *Chi-chu fen-lei Tung-p'o hsien-sheng shih*, 4.5a.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

仍須卜佳處，規以安我室．家僮燒枯草，走報暗井出．
一飽未敢期，瓢飲已可必．

With the opening words *huang-t'ien* ''uncultivated fields, fields gone to seed,'' T'ao Ch'ien appears for the first time. Here is the starting point of ''Returning to the Farm to Dwell'' all over again: for, as T'ao Ch'ien tells us in the first of the poems in this sequence, he retired from office in order to cultivate fields that had lain waste for thirty years.[59] The farm at the Eastern Slope is no longer the site of old habitations destroyed, but of old lands waiting to be renewed: not *fei*—permanently ''abandoned''—but only *huang* ''lying fallow.''

Lang-mang in line 1 comes from Poem Four of ''Returning to the Farm to Dwell.'' The meaning of this rhyming binome as T'ao Ch'ien uses it can only be guessed from context. Most commentators relate it to other compounds with a similar sound but a different orthography, from which they derive the definition ''vast, large'' and, by extension, ''to abandon (oneself) to.''[60] The opening couplet of T'ao Ch'ien's poem would then yield the (grammatically awkward) reading: ''For long I left the joys of hills and lakes / (But now) I abandon myself to the pleasures of woods and fields.''[61] Su Shih's interpretation of *lang-mang* seems to run along similar lines and suggests a broad expanse of land that has been ''given over'' to wilderness.

The opening line of Poem Two frames a reply to the question that closed the first. The magic here lies in the qualifying particle *sui* ''even though'': it does not matter how bad things are now, the poet seems to be saying, because the promise is here of things to come. If the land has reverted to wilderness, it can be claimed back from the wilderness. The undifferentiated ''up(s) and down(s)'' (*ch'i-ch'ü*) of Poem One can be domesticated into ''high and low ground'' (*kao-pei*), and these can be further apportioned into areas suitable for orchard and paddy. As Su Shih begins to make his dispositions, chaos

[59] The term ''thirty years'' is the subject of much controversy. T'ao Ch'ien's period in office actually lasted some ten years or more. In calling it ''thirty'' he is perhaps exercising the poet's prerogative to exaggerate.

[60] For a discussion of the various possible meanings, see Hightower, p. 54.

[61] Cf. Hightower, p. 53.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

is divided and order appears. The land has acquired an internal geography.

Su Shih's plan is practicable, its execution already at hand. Mulberry seeds are available from his neighbor across the river and bamboo can be grown so readily that the only fear is their uncontrollable profusion. The chestnut and jujube trees have been designated for the grove on the incline to the east, but mulberry and bamboo are most often planted in the immediate vicinity of a house. We have thus been moving from the outer edge of the property towards its center—or where the center ought to be, if it were not lacking. Following this progression, Su Shih's next step is the siting of a house. Su Shih has decided to live here: the heap of broken tiles that nobody wanted seems not such a bad place after all; in fact, it contains a "good spot" (*chia-ch'u*) or two, which may be discovered by geomantic divination. There Su Shih will fix the location of his dwelling. The verb he uses is *an*. Here it means "to secure, to make fast" and hence "to set up, to establish"; but the related meanings of "to rest" and "to find rest in" are not far below the surface.

Against the image of "abandon" (*lang-mang*) are set images of containment; and to meet the movement toward burgeoning escape (*heng-i*) the poet proposes the counterimpulse to seek a point of stability. For Su Shih means to "tend" the Eastern Slope. *Li* 理 refers to all the activities involved in the "management" of a piece of land as they are described here; but in a broader sense *li* means "to set right, to put in order," and pertains also to the correct conduct of one's life. In cultivating the Eastern Slope, Su Shih has undertaken to cultivate his own person as well. (There is no accident in Su Shih's use of the verb *i* as a rhyme word in this poem. This is his subliminal answer to the "binding" fate—one that is *wu so t'ao*—of the political malcontent in Poem One: for *i* means not only "to escape," but also "to rusticate." Thus Su Shih inscribes the design of his bucolic retirement into the very forms of his physical environment as he begins to shape it.)

In the *Analects*, Confucius defines the *chün-tzu*, the true gentleman, as one who—among other things—"seeks neither a full belly nor a restful abode" (1.14). The key word here is *ch'iu* "to seek." Confucius is not advocating self-abnegation; he is concerned lest we put the desire for material well-being above our concern for finding

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

the Way.[62] But Su Shih was preoccupied in the first poem entirely with the problem of getting enough to eat, and now in the second he has just outlined a plan for a home where he will be safe and comfortable (*an*). Look, however, at how this poem closes. The discovery of a well, long hidden in the brush, provides Su Shih with the first solid evidence that his projected tenancy at the Eastern Slope will indeed come to fruition. He responds to this report with a shout of jubilation: "Although I still dare not anticipate getting a full belly, / Of a ladleful of drink I am already sure." In another part of the *Analects* (6.11), Confucius says: "A worthy man is Hui! Living in a mean dwelling on a bowlful of rice and a ladleful of water is a hardship most men would find intolerable, but Hui does not allow this to affect his joy."[63] "A ladleful of water": the allusion to Yen Hui, the most sage-like of all Confucius's disciples, cannot be mistaken. Su Shih seeks comfort and satiety, but he finds himself doing so in circumstances similar to those in which Yen Hui attained his exalted state of near-sagehood. Su Shih is not claiming here that he will become as enlightened as Yen Hui: what he does say is that the passive conditions for enlightenment are there, waiting for him to make something of them. By echoing one passage of the *Analects* he has circumvented the charge implicit in another. For the goal towards which Su Shih strives in his present labors has a spiritual as well as a physical dimension.

Yen Hui's happiness is "unaltered" even in the midst of the worst privation because, being a good man, he finds his well-being (*an*) not in material comfort but in the pursuit of goodness itself. But we know that he is a good man only because we can see he is happy: his virtue is manifest in his joy (*le*). If, then, Su Shih can arrive at the place where he can again feel happiness, perhaps he too will have attained something of goodness as well.[64] Strictly speaking, Su

[62] See also *Analects*, 15.32: "The gentleman makes plans about the Way, not about food."

[63] Adapted from D. C. Lau, trans., *Confucius: The Analects* (London: Penguin Paperbacks, 1979), p. 82.

[64] In alluding to Confucius's appraisal of Yen Hui, Su Shih has called up one of the fundamental paradoxes in the philosophical inquiry of Sung Confucianism. The Confucians, like the early Christians, thought of goodness as an affective state: it is not enough simply to do what is right, one must love to do it. The measure of one's goodness thus lies in the degree of pleasure one takes in doing good. But joy is a spontaneous quality, arising from one's own being, and cannot be acquired. In raising the example of Yen Hui, Su Shih has thus expressed his desire to become *hsien*; yet he can only enter into such a state, not by any exercise of will, but by allowing it to come upon him of its own accord.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Shih has not answered the closing query of the first poem at all. But in the final couplet of this second poem he has replaced it as the issue at hand. The problem is now no longer "Shall I be able to get enough to eat?" but "Shall I be able to experience joy, in spite of not having enough to eat?" Poverty has ceased to intimidate him and become instead a positive attribute: by enduring the hardships of a farmer's lot, Su Shih will eke out his contentment. And whatever the uncertainties he is yet to face, the outcome of such an endeavor is "already sure" (*i k'o pi*). To the plaintive outcry at the end of the preceding poem, Su Shih now replies that satisfaction is to be found, not in the material sufficiency of "having enough," but in a sufficiency of the spirit, in "accepting as enough" what he already has. There is a third passage from the *Analects*: "Look at the means a man employs, observe the path he takes and examine where he feels at home. In what way is a man's true character hidden from view?" (2.10). Having chosen to set up his home in these new surroundings, Su Shih is also going to be "at home" in them. Through his life as the farmer of the Eastern Slope, his "true character" will become manifest.

The "Eight Poems on the Eastern Slope" are about the passage of the poet from an estranged self back to a self reconciled with its own fate and the world. The first and second poems chart his progress from alienation to acceptance, from the model of the "lonely wanderer" in elegiac verse to the Confucian ideal of the enlightened stoic who embraces suffering with a smile. But these poems do not present a series of philosophical constructs. When Su Shih rejoices in the sudden appearance of a well, he is first and last crying out his exultation at having found something to keep himself alive; his ability to feel this joy then enables him to draw the connection between Yen Hui's achievement and his own prospects for re-enacting it. These poems, more than anything else that Su Shih had ever yet written, are rooted with a peculiar intensity in the physical world, even as—true to the Sung mode—they deal with intensely speculative questions. They are authentic precisely because the emblems of inner growth develop naturally out of the pattern of external events—for the consolation that Su Shih will find in the course of these poems is not a rhetorical posture, but part of a lived process.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Poem Three

There used to be a little stream
That came from the other side of that far-off range.
Skirting the town, passing by villages,
Its polluted current swollen with weeds:
Then away into the K'o family pond,[65]
Ten *mou* filled with fish and shrimp.
This year's drought dried up the stream,
Leaving wilted duckweed stuck to its broken clods.
Last night's clouds from the southern hills
Brought rain—a furrow's depth and more.
Gushing down, it found its former course,
Knowing that I'd disposed of the blockage.
In the mud were dormant roots of watercress;
Of these, a sorry inch or two remain.
When will the snowy sprouts begin to stir?—
Soon there'll be spring doves to stew!

(Poet's note: Watercress sprouts stewed with dove meat is a dish much prized in Shu.)

其三

自昔有微泉，來從遠嶺背．穿城過聚落，流惡壯蓬艾．
去爲柯氏陂，十畝魚蝦會．歲旱泉亦竭，枯萍黏破塊．
昨夜南山雲，雨到一犂外．泫然尋故瀆，知我理荒薈．
泥芹有宿根，一寸嗟獨在．雪芽何時動，春鳩行可膾．
（自注:蜀人貴芹膾，雜鳩肉爲之.）

If the first and second poems deal with resignation, the third poem is about regeneration. Here the horizons begin to expand. Temporally the poem extends from "in the past" (*tzu hsi*) to "last night" (*tso yeh*) to a projection into the immediate future (as indicated by the grammatical particle *hsing*); spatially it stretches from "behind the distant range" on one side of Su Shih's property to "the K'o family pond" on the other. No longer is the Eastern Slope an

[65] Identified in *Su shih pu-chu* 蘇詩補注, ed. Cha Shen-hsing 査愼行 (Wen-yüan-ko Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu edition; photoreprint, Taipei: Shang-wu, 1983), 1111: 21.3a.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

isolated spot; it partakes of an historical sequence, has a location relative to other locations.

The stream with which this poem opens continues the image of the well that closed the preceding one. The poet describes the stream's movements with verbs of lively animation (''comes'' *lai*, ''makes'' *wei*, ''becomes exhausted'' *ch'ieh*, ''seeks'' *hsün*, and ''knows'' *chih*) and these personified movements provide a subliminal parallel for the poet's state of mind. The stream—a mountain rillet turned swollen and sluggish in its lower reaches by noisome effluents that have given rise to a profusion of weeds—has dried up altogether because of this year's drought. Similarly, Su Shih was depleted of the vitality of hope when he first arrived at the Eastern Slope. Then, with dramatic suddenness, the rains come, bringing new life to the dead stream and the deadened poet. Replenished, the stream seeks out its old channel, seemingly aware that Su Shih has made room for its passage by clearing away the weeds. Seldom has there been a more powerful emblem of resurgent hope. Already the land is beginning to ''recompense'' the poet for ''lending his strength'' to tend it.

While expunging the unwanted vegetation from the stream bed, Su Shih noticed a few stalks of watercress, left over from before the drought; now that the stream's flow has been restored, he grows impatient for these old roots to put forth new shoots, so that he may enjoy one of his favorite dishes from his home province, spring doves stewed with watercress sprouts. However, ''last year's roots'' (*su-ken*) is also a Buddhist term, denoting a person's innate capacity for pursuing religious discipline, as determined by the karmic residue of past existences.[66] The new growth so eagerly anticipated thus symbolizes the recovery of Su Shih's former self, the man he was before he was forced to come here. This image of dessicated roots reviving, like that of the exhausted stream replenished, also signifies renewal; but in moving from the one to the other, Su Shih has broadened the poem's frame of reference.

The tradition of using a craving for food to express nostalgia goes back to Chang Han, who forsook the public office that ''bound him

[66] *Su-ken* is glossed as ''the root of one's present lot planted in previous existence'' in William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous comps., *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, Ltd., 1937), p. 348.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

in service thousands of miles away from home'' so that he might be able to eat the carp stews of his birthplace.[67] Chang Han was ''following his true inclinations'' (*shih-chih* 適志), a term that also describes T'ao Ch'ien's fulfilled aim in ''Returning to the Farm to Dwell.'' Su Shih has, like T'ao Ch'ien, gone down to the farm; but unlike T'ao Ch'ien, he has not gone home to the farm. He is farming fields that are, quite literally, thousands of miles away from home. By mentioning a Szechwanese specialty while away from Szechwan, Su Shih points to the discrepancy between where he is and where he would naturally prefer to be. He has drawn an analogy between himself and Chang Han, in effect telling us that he is as homesick for Shu as Chang Han was for his native Wu.

Up to this point the poet has been striving for a rapprochement with his enforced condition: the outcast, the stranger in a strange land, must be made over in the image of the pastoral recluse, a man at peace with himself and at home in his surroundings. Now Su Shih introduces a third term. From behind the self who seeks to be fulfilled in the joys of living in this place, there emerges another, an older self, one who remembers other joys, from another time and another place. Accordingly, Su Shih allows his thoughts to travel home to Szechwan in the next poem.

Poem Four

Planting rice before the spring festival—
Joys that I can number:
''Fuzzy skies'' darken the spring paddies,
And ''needles in the water''—those welcome words—are heard.
Transplant by early summer,
Delight growing as wind stirs the leaves;
By moonlight watch the dewdrops gather,
One by one, pearls dangling on threads.
In autumn, when frosty ears are heavy
And, helter-skelter, prop each other up.
The only sound from amid the fields is
Grasshoppers like wind and rain.

[67] See p. 331, above.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Then, fresh-hulled, straight into the pot,
Grains of jade shining in the basket.
Too long have I eaten of government granaries,
Red with rot, no better than mud.
Soon I shall know the taste of this:
I've already promised my mouth and belly!

(Poet's notes [on lines 3 and 4]: In Shu a drizzle is called "fuzzy rain," and when the rice seedlings first appear the farmers are in the habit of saying that the "rice needles" are out; [on lines 11 and 12]: At harvesttime in Shu the fields swarm with grasshoppers rather like miniature locusts but which do no harm to the grain.)

其四

種稻清明前，樂事我能數．毛空暗春澤，鍼水聞好語．
分秧及初夏，漸喜風葉舉．月明看露上，一一珠垂縷．
秋來霜穗重，顛倒相撑拄．但聞畦隴間，蚱蜢如風雨．
新春便入甑，玉粒照筐筥．我久食官倉，紅腐等泥土．
行當知此味，口腹吾已許．

（自注：蜀人以細雨爲雨毛．稻初生時，農夫相語稻鍼出矣．蜀中稻熟時，蚱蜢群飛田間，如小蝗狀，而不害稻．）

The main body of the poem (lines 3–14) consists of a catalogue of the "joyful events" (*le-shih*) to which Su Shih looks forward in the year to come; but these "events" are couched entirely in the idiom of the Shu farmer. "Fuzzy rain" (line 3) and "needles in the water" (line 4) are derived from Szechwanese dialect, and grasshoppers swarming the fields around harvesttime (line 12) is also a phenomenon peculiar to that region. The absence of any explicit subject or indication of tense throughout this descriptive section has the curious effect of suspending it in time and space, making it possible to read the whole passage simultaneously as recollected observations from the poet's youthful days in Shu and as the projected outcome of the approaching year at the Eastern Slope. Su Shih has thus superimposed past onto future, fusing memory with desire.

In contrast to Poem Three, whose every line pulsates with verbs of action (coming, passing, going, stopping, moving), Poem Four, with the pedestrian sequence of its movement and the somewhat generalized character of its images, is strikingly passive. It is also,

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

however, strikingly picturesque. The world of this farming community is one of idyllic harmony, where all the unpredictable vagaries of experience have been reduced to a series of well-ordered and carefully crafted vignettes. The pictures are pretty, even a trifle precious. This is an idealized abstract, at once a construct and a reconstruction of what Su Shih remembers once was and what he hopes will be again.

Su Shih is in reverie at this moment. This is the sort of landscape that he has always dreamed of living in after leaving government service. He envisions the harvest in this poem, as in Poem One, in terms of an allusion to the *Shih ching*. The line ''Grains of jade shining in the basket'' recreates the images of loveliness in these lines from Ode 15, ''Ts'ai p'in'' 采蘋 (''Gathering Duckweed''): ''And so she puts (what she has gathered) / In her square baskets and round'' 于以盛之，維筐及筥. Such a harvest will bring delight as well as plenty: it is the culmination of the ''joyful events'' for which Su Shih has been yearning all his life. Reality follows hard upon the dream.

In opposition to the grain cultivated in peaceful retirement in one's native hills, there is the ''red and rotten'' grain earned in office. Su Shih has had enough of the one and promises himself a taste of the other. Yet, in confessing that he has eaten ''too long'' of the grain associated with his bondage to service, while the grain of the farmer's life is something he can know only in the anticipation (''soon''), the poet has introduced a discrepancy between then and now, between here and there. What he is and what he would like to be are suddenly shown to be separate in time and space. The illusion of unity between past and future, effected by the suspension of tense and context in the descriptive section, collapses with the return to discursive language in the last four lines.

The term *hsing-tang* does not only indicate the future tense; it is also a modal auxiliary expressing certainty. Su Shih admits the failure of his lifelong desire: at the same time he is determined that this desire will be his with the coming harvest. For the ''taste of this'' (*tz'u-wei*) that is so soon to be garnered will be the taste of grain grown in the old way of the farmers of Shu, only that grain is to be grown here and now at the Eastern Slope. To taste it, then, is to realize in the rewards of farming the Eastern Slope the fulfilment

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

of the poet's old longing for that other life, the life of retirement back in one's home. Having been deprived of office, Su Shih has gone home to farm the fields, not in Shu, but at the Eastern Slope. What in former days existed for him as a metaphor is now going to be made real. He has thus recast the ideal of T'ao Ch'ien's "Returning to the Farm to Dwell" in terms of his present situation. By merging the agrarian activities of the past with his current project, Su Shih has just promised himself that life as a farmer at the Eastern Slope will be as congenial—as much in accordance with his true inclinations—as if he were in the beloved hills of his native Mei-shan. After this, the poet's thoughts return to Shu no more: unable to go to the place that is the avowed source of his happiness, he has relocated that source elsewhere. And by casting his words in the form of a promise (*hsü*), he has transformed desire into contract: resolved that these things should come to pass, Su Shih has just claimed the power to bring them into being.

Poem Four begins with the poet foreshadowing events to which he looks forward with joy; it ends with his telling us that he is confident that these same events will very soon take place. Reviewing the sequence, we notice that all the preceding poems share this open-ended closure. *Ho-shih* ("when") in the first poem points to an indefinite future and in the third to a future that is near at hand. In Poem Two, the closing statement, "Not yet A, but already B," also refers us to a time frame that extends beyond the poem. Each poem ends, therefore, with the poet yearning for a goal whose attainment is postponed to a moment just beyond his reach, just as a farmer's life consists of a sequence of anticipated outcomes. Taken together, these unfinished endings give the entire cycle a strong forward momentum, the opposite effect to that of the neatly rounded symmetry of the closed unit.[68] The solution to Su Shih's plans for rehabilitating the farm at the Eastern Slope, and himself through becoming the farmer of the Eastern Slope, is not latent within the poetic moment: he does not achieve it in any one poem or even in

[68] Contrast this, for example, with Ts'ao Chih's "Tseng Po-ma wang Piao" 贈白馬王彪, in *Wen hsüan* (Hong Kong: Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, 1973), 24.516–17. Except for the first two poems, each poem opens with the closing words of the preceding one, giving the whole an effect of repeated stops and starts that is highly appropriate to Ts'ao Chih's theme of reluctant leave-taking in the middle of a journey.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

the series as a whole. It exists—as do the poems themselves—in the speculative realm, something that is evermore about to be.

Poem Five

A good farmer is sparing of the land,
Lucky thing that this lay ten years fallow.
It's too soon to harvest mulberry yet,
But a crop of wheat—that I can look forward to.
Less than a month after sowing time
And already the clumps are dark with green!
But an old farmer admonished me thus:
''Don't let your seedlings grow too fast!
If you want lots of wheat for cakes,
Best turn loose a cow or sheep.''
I bow again in thanks for your hard words,
''When I get my fill I shan't forget this.''

其五

良農惜地力，幸此十年荒．桑柘未及成，一麥庶可望．
投種未逾月，覆塊已蒼蒼．農父告我言．勿使苗葉昌．
若欲富餅餌，要須縱牛羊．再拜謝苦言．得飽不敢忘．

Towards the end of Poem Four, the poet reintroduced the issue of reciprocity with the land. By refusing to live any longer on the ''corrupt'' (in both the physical and the moral sense) grain of government office, Su Shih has pledged to participate in the hardships and the rewards of agrarian life. He enters upon this life now in Poem Five with such an assumption of earnestness that he forces an indulgent smile from the reader. The line, ''A good farmer is sparing of the land,'' is both sententious and coy. Su Shih is now a self-styled farmer, and a good one at that. But after his timorous pessimism at the beginning of the venture, who would have thought that he could assume the role with so much panache? One can almost see the man wink. The second line continues in this bantering vein: ''It's a good thing that this plot has lain fallow these ten years.'' Instantly all the drawbacks of the abandoned farm are turned to good account; the land is only the better for having been left untended. But while the wording of this may be ironic, the thought it contains is a genuine

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

piece of wisdom. Here Su Shih is giving his attention to the pragmatic aspects of his new occupation, just as in Poem Four he presented a romanticized sketch. The speculative assurance in the conclusion of Poem Four ("I shall indeed . . . I have already promised . . ."), so full of airy expectation, is in Poem Five scaled down to the conservative estimate of the realist, who, too wary to count on the slow-growing mulberry trees, is nonetheless confident of getting a crop of wheat. Su Shih is working closely now with the modest standards of T'ao Ch'ien's husbandry; for, having donned the mantle of a good farmer, he must learn to play the part properly. The language of the remainder of the poem—essential details boldly but simply rendered—constitutes perhaps his most authentic attempt at imitating the master's voice. For this is above all an ode to the life of the farmer as Su Shih has undertaken to live it.

A kindly neighbor stops to give Su Shih the benefit of his superior age and experience. This *nung-fu* is kin to the well-intentioned *t'ien-fu* 田父 (both terms may be translated as "old farmer") in Poem Nine of T'ao Ch'ien's "Drinking Wine" series,[69] and T'ao Ch'ien's farmer in turn derives from the *yü-fu* ("fisherman") in the *Ch'u tz'u* piece by that name.[70] The farmer's advice to T'ao Ch'ien—"All the world agrees on what to do— / I hope that you will join the muddy game"[71]—is a contracted version of the fisherman's sterner admonition to Ch'ü Yüan: "If all the world is muddy, why not help them to stir up the mud and beat up the waves? . . . Why get yourself exiled because of your deep thoughts and your fine aspirations?"[72] T'ao Ch'ien's reply, like Ch'ü Yüan's, is to decline the implied invitation to continue to hold office in a corrupt court. Both pieces are straightforward political allegories. Farmer and fisherman are mouthpieces for the pragmatist's point of view, to which view the high-minded man of integrity opposes his.

Su Shih's poem exactly reverses the conclusion of T'ao Ch'ien's. "I bow again in thanks for your hard words" echoes T'ao Ch'ien's

[69] *T'ao Yüan-ming chi*, p. 91.

[70] See Hightower, pp. 137–38.

[71] Hightower, p. 137.

[72] David Hawkes, trans., *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yüan and Other Poets* (London: Penguin Paperbacks, 1985), p. 206.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

"I am deeply thankful for your words, old man";[73] but his deferential bow betokens grateful acknowledgment rather than polite demurral. The old farmer's wisdom is couched in "hard (literally bitter) words" (*k'u-yen*) on the analogy to medicine: something hard to swallow is generally thought to be beneficial. This sentiment is frequently invoked in the ancient histories to demonstrate that, while the honey-tongued blandishments of sycophants are likely to lead the prince into error, the unpalatable reproofs of his wise and loyal ministers have an invariably salutary effect. Here, however, the bitter words hold no allegorical meaning; they simply address tempering caution to amateurish enthusiasm. In the terminology of classical criticism, the poet "gives free rein" (*tsung* 縱) to his imagination in the first half of the poem, then "reins himself in" (*i* 抑) again. But ironically, it is the farmer, not the recently retired official, who is giving precepts here. The scenario is a humorous inversion of the conventional theme in "field and garden" poetry of the "exhortation to the farmer" (*ch'üan-nung* 勸農),[74] as well as of the function of the Han government office by that name. For now the willing but inept Su Shih is the one who must be encouraged to work harder. Beginning in exuberant ignorance, the poet finishes in a chastened attitude. Having said, even before he knew what he was talking about, that he was a "good farmer," Su Shih has by the end of the poem realized a little of what those words actually mean. And in learning how to take care of (*li*) his garden, Su Shih has learned something about putting his own self to rights (*li*).

The last line of Poem Five contains a gesture of humility and gratitude. It is also a promise of reciprocation. If the land will give Su Shih recompense for the effort he puts into it, Su Shih in his turn will give the old farmer a share in the harvest for having helped him. The "lonely wanderer," who in Poem One was driven to the ends of the earth by an inimical destiny, is now ready to re-enter society, to find his place again in the matrix of the human relationships of giving and receiving, obligation and repayment. Through his relationship with the land—through fulfilling his claim to be a "good

[73] *T'ao Yüan-ming chi*, p. 92.

[74] T'ao Ch'ien has a poem in archaic tetrasyllabic meter by that title. *T'ao Yüan-ming chi*, p. 24.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

farmer''—Su Shih will once more become a man in fellowship with other men.

Thus far these poems have traced a series of movements, between home and faraway, between exclusion and inclusion, oscillating between the twin poles of necessity and desire. Now, in Poem Six, as Su Shih passes from solitary to social being, he begins to break out of this pattern of plaintive polarities:

Poem Six

I plant jujubes against the time they can be plucked,
I plant pine against the time they can be hewn.
This is a matter of ten years hence or more,
For my plans, you see, are quite well laid.
But ten years are nothing to speak of
When a thousand go by like windblown hail.
Long ago I heard the story of Li Heng's ''slaves,''
A strategem perhaps to be followed.
There is an old colleague of mine,
Who's taken up office in Ch'ien-yüeh.[75]
He has made me a gift of tangerines three inches wide,
They fill the room with their resplendent light.
If he could provide me with a hundred saplings,
They'd arrive by the time the ice starts to glint in spring.
I can see, in my mind's eye, by the bamboo hedge,
Green and yellow suspended round the eaves.

其六

種棗期可剝，種松期可斲．事在十年外，吾計亦已慤．
十年何足道，千載如風雹．舊聞李衡奴，此策疑可學．
我有同舍郎，官居在灊岳．遺我三寸甘，照座光卓犖．
百栽倘可致，當及春冰渥．想見竹籬間，青黃垂屋角．

With Poem Six we move beyond the limits defined by the seasonal calendar. Su Shih has just planted fruit and timber trees, such crops as—he begins to reflect—will take an investment of not one but ten or more years. Then, reflecting upon his own reflection, he

[75] Poet's note on this line: ''This refers to Li Kung-tse 李公擇 [i.e., Li Ch'ang 李常],'' for whose biography see *Sung shih* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1977), 344.10929–31.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

decides to congratulate himself on his providence in laying down provisions so far into the future. This is what I was planning all along, he claims tendentiously. Thus liberated by his self-interpretation, he goes on to bethink himself even farther into the future and then far into the distant past: after all, in the absolute order of things, even a thousand years are but as a flurry of wind-blown hail. Agricultural time is superseded by universal time, and Su Shih's ''well-laid plan'' gives way to a lesson to be learned from long ago: Li Heng of the Three Kingdoms period had a thousand orange trees planted so that at his death his children would be able to inherit a thousand ''wooden slaves.''[76] Su Shih was no doubt reminded of Li Heng's scheme by the gift of oranges from his friend by the same surname, Li Ch'ang (lines 9–12). He goes on to project how, if he could obtain orange seedlings from the same source, he would be in the way of attaining Li Heng's goal. Suddenly the object of Su Shih's husbandry has ceased to be sufficiency—a ''full belly''—but superabundance: to provide not just for himself, but for countless others besides.

Growing a whole grove of oranges is a vastly more ambitious undertaking than the modest proposal of the opening couplet, with its resonances from the *Shih ching* work song. Following the chain of utilitarian logic initiated at the beginning of the poem, Su Shih's avowed preference for Li Heng's ''stratagem'' would seem to be based on the consideration of practical results (*shih* 實, literally ''fruits'') to be gained therefrom. But whereas the first two lines emphasize the purposive relation between planting and reaping, the advantages of the orange trees are not made explicit. Indeed there is a pointed contrast between the step-by-step circumspection of the first half of the poem (lines 1–8) and the winsome tone of the second half, with its glorious revelry in oranges real and imaginary. The last six lines are filled with images of light and color. The fruit that Li Ch'ang sends are not simply oranges, but ''three-inch'' oranges, of a kind fit for Imperial tribute.[77] They are not merely bright, but

[76] See P'ei Sung-chih's commentary on the ''Biography of Sun Hsiu,'' in *San Kuo chih* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1962), 5:1156–57.

[77] An allusion to the biography of the Prince of P'eng-ch'eng in the Sung (Southern Dynasties), who was so powerful that the oranges sent in tribute to his court eclipsed those sent to the Emperor himself. See ''Biography of the Prince of Peng-ch'eng, [Liu] I-k'ang,'' in *Nan*

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

dazzlingly bright, their resplendence filling the whole room. If the seedlings Su Shih plans to ask for arrive straight away, it will be just the time when the ice is "glinting" with the spring thaw. Finally, as Su Shih looks forward in his imagination, all he sees is a host of "greens and yellows" crowding about the eaves. The poet who started off with the most down-to-earth intentions has ended up instead with a vision of pure delight. The oranges that Su Shih conjures up are there not to be picked or eaten or presented as gifts, but to be enjoyed. They exist in the poem as beauty incarnate.

Throughout the series Su Shih has shown a near-obsessive preoccupation with food. Poems One to Five all close with a specific comment—whether serious or joking, hopeful or wistful—on that topic: (1) "When will my granary fill up?" (2) "Though I dare not presume to hope for a full belly"; (3) "I'll soon be making a stew of spring doves"; (4) "I have promised (a taste of this) to my mouth and belly"; (5) "I shan't forget you when my belly's full." His object all along has thus been "to seek his fill"—precisely the sort of thing that, according to Confucius's prescription, a gentleman ought not to do. Now, at the end of the sixth poem, for the very first time, despite a prospect of the most compelling immediacy, despite such an invitation to mouth-watering anticipation, he does not mention his appetite at all. For in the course of making plans for the purpose of "seeking his fill," Su Shih has found, quite by accident, not *pao*, the satiety of physical need, but *le*, an access of sheer enjoyment.

The oranges themselves are *shih* ("fruits," "solid objects") and must be garnered in days to come; but the pleasure of contemplating their vivid colors belongs wholly to the realm of speculative activity (*hsiang-chien*) which, being *hsü* 虛 ("insubstantial"), may be enjoyed presently. Thus satisfaction of a certain kind has come to Su Shih ahead of the physical satisfaction he has been seeking. He has managed, then, to be content—to experience *le*—on an empty stomach, and, in his own perverse way, to pre-empt the achievement of the ancient worthies.

With the adoption of Li Heng's "stratagem," Su Shih has at last

---

shih (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1975), 2:367. ("Three-inch oranges" appear frequently in Tu Fu's poems, e.g., in "Chi-shih" 即事, in *Tu-shih hsiang-chu*, 4:1782–83.)

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

assured (or, more accurately, projected a way of assuring) his livelihood at the Eastern Slope. It will not only make him sufficient; it will also afford him a surplus that he can share with others. The requirements of the quest for a full belly, which have been uppermost in his concerns till this moment, are fulfilled; now, as he has pledged in the closing line of Poem Five, it is time to remember those who have helped him toward this end.

The "Eight Poems on the Eastern Slope" are often read as poems on Su Shih's life as a farmer. The last two poems have very little to do with the actual experiences of living on the farm and for this reason are usually excluded in anthologies in favor of selections from the first six in the set. But the series as a whole does not take farming as its subject at all; instead its subject is Su Shih as he becomes Man of the Eastern Slope, as he gradually receives his personal definition through his activities in cultivating the Eastern Slope as well as through the relationships he forms in the course of those activities. Poems Seven and Eight are about these relationships: they are poems written in praise of friends, and of friendship in general. As such they constitute the most intimate statements of self within the entire sequence; for it is to a man's friends, the handful of people who know him best, that his true self is revealed, or rather, from them it cannot remain hidden. In writing about his friendships with his three Huang-chou associates and with his lifelong crony Ma Meng-te 馬夢得, Su Shih is really telling us about his own qualities as they are reflected—clearly and candidly—in these relationships. Seen in this light, the last two poems not only form an integral part of the series; they also represent its culmination.

Poem Seven

Master P'an has been long without a post,
He sells wine in the village on the southern bank.
Master Kuo comes of a general's stock,
And purveys physic by the West Market wall.
Master Ku is a bit of a fanatic,
A scion, one suspects, of the Imperial Bodyguard of storied fame.
His house has ten *mou* of bamboo,
There I may go knocking whenever I please.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

In my extremity, all acquaintance cut me off:
These three alone remained, their solicitude unchanged.[78]
Visiting me at the Eastern Slope,
They bring me refreshment, sharing a meal.
How sweet of Omissioner Tu
To take up conversing with Chu and Juan.
But for my teacher I take Pu Tzu-hsia:
"Within the four seas all men are brothers."

其七

潘子久不調，沽酒江南村．郭生本將種，賣藥西市垣．
古生亦好事，恐是押牙孫．家有十畝竹，無時容叩門．
我窮交舊絶，三子獨見存．從我於東坡，勞餉同一餐．
可憐杜拾遺，事與朱阮論．吾師卜子夏，四海皆弟昆．

P'an Ping 潘丙, Kuo Kou 郭遘, and Ku Keng-tao 古耕道 were residents of Huang-chou when Su Shih arrived there. Little is known of Kuo Kou. According to Cha Shen-hsing's notes, Ku Keng-tao had attained the *chin-shih* degree, although there seems to be no record of active government service.[79] P'an Ping apparently came from a family with a tradition of success in the civil service examinations, but, as the first line intimates, he himself may not have passed beyond the preliminary level.[80]

In the three sketches that open the poem a contrast is implied between what each man might have done and what he is actually doing now. P'an seems at one point to have entertained aspirations for an official career, but he makes his living as a tavern-keeper. Kuo was born "of a general's stock," but he owns a market stall where he purveys herbs and medical advice. Ku is jokingly suspected of being descended from a T'ang knight-errant by the same family name—an association suggesting that his "fanaticism" is of the chivalric sort that compels him to "enjoy meddling" (*hao-shih*) in other people's business whenever feelings of sympathy or a sense of

[78] *Chien-tsun* more literally means "to condescend to show kindness."

[79] *Su shih pu-chu*, 21.4b–5a.

[80] *Pu-tiao* probably means that he had passed the prefectural examination for the *hsiu-ts'ai* degree, but did not do well enough to be sent up for examination at the provincial level for the *chü-jen* degree. See Wang Wen-kao's notes, *SSSC* 21.1083.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

honor are stirred. Yet Ku lives in the peaceful obscurity of a bamboo garden, in an attitude of withdrawal from the world. Each of these men is thus presented in the light of the *huai-ts'ai pu-yü* 懷才不遇 type, the talented individual who, given the opportunity, can accomplish great things—as civil bureaucrat, military leader or knightly hero—but whose potential for one reason or another remains untapped. They are exemplars of the frustration felt by the man of worth living in retirement from a corrupt society—a frustration that Su Shih must himself have been feeling when he first met them.

As a prominent exile to a remote riverside town, Su Shih was indeed *ch'iung* ("in extremity") when he came to Huang-chou—desperately poor and at the very end of his prospects. Amid all the acquaintances to abandon him at this time, only these three men saw fit to remain. For like likes like, and the outcast has found three unusual men who, in the humility of their station or the reclusiveness of their habits, are themselves on the margins of society. Their newfound friendship is consummated in the act of helping Su Shih to farm the Eastern Slope, where they work and rest and eat of the same food: that is, the three come to know him through their joint interaction with the land, and to know him as the owner of that plot of land, as the Man of the Eastern Slope. They have sustained his spirit with their kind condescension when all others have cruelly turned away, and they have given him material succor in his livelihood as well. Their friendship having thus withstood the test of adversity, the relation that Su Shih bears to them is one of indebtedness.

Then the paradigm shifts. "How sweet of Omissioner Tu," the poem continues, "To take up conversing with Chu and Juan." The allusion is to Tu Fu's "Chüeh-chü" 絶句 ("Quatrains: First of Four"):

> I've promised, when the plums ripen, to share them with old Chu,
> When the pines grow tall, I plan to converse with Master Juan (in their shade).[81]

梅熟許同朱老喫，松高擬對阮生論.

[81] *Tu shih hsiang-chu*, 3:1142.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

These are vintage lines from Tu Fu's pastoral period, written when he was staying at his "Thatched Cottage" in Cheng-tu (760–62). They portray the idyllic existence of one who has chosen a life of quiet seclusion in the country, consorting only with rustic neighbors and genial eremites. The analogy recasts Su Shih's association with his Huang-chou friends in terms of these friendships of Tu Fu's. Like the metropolitan Tu Fu, Su Shih has settled down in a provincial backwater, where he finds friends among the local residents and enjoys with them an intercourse that is artless, simple, and harmonious. From benefactors who came to him in his necessity, the three have metamorphosed into the chosen companions of Su Shih's bucolic leisure. His position has thus changed from that of a passive recipient of favors to one who actively dispenses them, offering plums and hospitality. In Chinese terms, the "guest-host" relation has been reversed.

Then comes the finale in this ode to friendship: "For my teacher I take Pu Tzu-hsia: 'Within the four seas all men are brothers.' " Su Shih is again alluding to the *Analects*:

> Ssu-ma Niu appeared worried, saying: "All men have brothers. I alone have none." Tzu-hsia said: "I have heard it said: life and death are a matter of Destiny; wealth and honor depend on Heaven. The gentleman is reverent and does nothing amiss, is respectful towards others and observant of the rites, and all within the Four Seas are his brothers. What need is there for the gentleman to worry about not having any brothers?" (12.5)[82]

Ssu-ma Niu's complaint about being brotherless is, in point of fact, untrue, because according to the historical sources the man had brothers in plenty. The above exchange seems to have taken place around the time that the eldest of these brothers, the reprehensible Huan T'ui, was plotting rebellion; therefore Ssu-ma's expressions of grief may have had the political motive of dissociating himelf from the treasonous action before the fact.[83] The causes of the predicament that has made Su Shih poor in fortune and in friends are, of course, also political, making the citation of this story particularly apt.

To the man who laments having no brothers, Tzu-hsia answers

[82] D. C. Lau, p. 113.

[83] See the commentaries in *Lun yü cheng-i* 論語正義 (*SPPY* ed.), 15.3b–4a.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

that he should look upon all men as his brothers. A similar consolation of philosophy ought to apply, then, to one who complains of being friendless, that he should look upon the whole world as his friends. There is one stipulation, however. It is the *chün-tzu*, a gentleman who "is reverent and does nothing amiss, is respectful towards others and observant of the rites," who is thus able to feel equally at home everywhere, who is thus comfortable with his destiny, whether it be to live or die.

The deserted pariah, cut off (*chüeh* 絶) from all former acquaintance, suddenly has mankind for his family, has gained full access (*t'ung* 通) once again into the society of man. His fortunes are therefore no longer "at the nadir" (*ch'iung*), but rather "in the ascendant" (also *t'ung*). For the gentleman is in his own person *t'ung*—"unobstructed" by the accidents of circumstance and "enlightened" in his resignation to bear his fate.

Poem Seven presents three models of friendship, each one superseding the last. The first is friendship in the hour of need, the friendships that fall to a man who has been forced to live on the periphery of human society. The second is the friendship of pastoral simplicity, the friendships chosen by men who want to live in sequestered peace, with little human company. The third is the friendship of the *chün-tzu*, the perfect friendship of one who lives at the very heart of humanity wherever he may be. In passing from one to another, Su Shih has made three statements about himself, marked three stages in his personal development. From an isolated corner of the world, he has worked his way back to the center; and from a state of moral and physical destitution, he has moved on to aspire to the highest ideal, to become a *chün-tzu*, a true man. The many kindnesses he has received from his friends P'an, Kuo, and Ku are going to be repaid, at first—as befits a poet-farmer—with ripe fruits and conversation, and later on with virtue.

Poem Eight

Master Ma has always been a poor man—[84]
And my friend these twenty years:

[84] On the poverty of Ma Meng-te, see *chüan* 1, no. 46, *Tung-p'o chih-lin* 東坡志林, (Shanghai: Hua-tung ta-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1983), p. 39.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Day and night hoping for my success,
That he might beg of me the money to buy a burial plot in the hills.
Now, instead, I have become a burden to you,
A borrowed plough stopping in these fields.
Scraping the down off a tortoise's back—
When ever would we get a thickness of felt?
Pity Master Ma in his folly—
Even now he brags about my worth!
To the end not regretting, though the mob laughs:
Giving once shall get back a thousandfold.

其八

馬生本窮士，從我二十年．日夜望我貴，求分買山錢．
我今反累君，借耕輟茲田．刮毛龜背上，何時得成氈．
可憐馬生癡，至今夸我賢．衆笑終不悔，施一當獲千．

Su Shih has saved the best for last. To Ma Meng-te, his oldest friend and greatest patron, are due thanks and love in proportionate degree, and both are duly rendered. Out of this simple act of dedication Su Shih has forged one of the most moving poems in the language. In the intimacy of its tone and the universality of its message it is no less powerful than the last poem in Ts'ao Chih's cycle of "Poems presented to Ts'ao Piao, Prince of Po-ma," while sharing none of its aspirations to grandeur. For the greatness of Su Shih's poem lies precisely in the smallness of its pretensions: he is speaking to his friend Ma and to him alone. The poem captures in its twists and turns the changing inflections of the human voice: now waggish, now serious, now shyly apologetic, now flippantly absurd, now simply overcome with emotion. This is a private conversation, full of ironic banter and affectionate derision—the indirect forms of expression that bosom friends reserve for one another when feelings run too deep to be expressed outright: because it is a measure of the sincerity of an attachment when the parties involved do not need to make a public issue of it.

The poem begins with a most unflatteringly truthful epithet. Whereas Su Shih's other friends are dignified as an aspiring candidate to office, the scion of a general, and a whimsical fanatic, Ma

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Meng-te's chief distinction seems to lie in his poverty. Poor he has always been—and the implication is—as long as he remains friends with Su Shih, poor he will probably always be. At any rate their twenty-years' friendship has profited Ma nothing, for he has waited all this time in vain for Su Shih to strike it rich and famous. The ugly word *ch'iung*, since its appearance in Poem One loaded with the sinister connotations of ineluctable misfortune decreed by heaven, is now neutralized—bourgeoisified, so to speak—into its relatively innocuous meaning of "money-poor."

As Su Shih's friend, Ma had hoped one day to share his wealth, but he has been obliged, by the same token, to supply Su Shih in his want instead. Far from being able to depend on Su Shih in his old age, Ma's commitment has landed him in the awkward position of having to help Su Shih to obtain farmland for his present livelihood. The opposition between the "hills" of a faraway time and place and "these fields" of the Eastern Slope, so emphatically of the here and now, is pointed. The two friends have had to give up dreaming of the final resting place of the future and make do with this pathetic little patch instead. The one exists in the insubstantial (*hsü*) realm of desire, the other is unpleasantly and uncompromisingly real (*shih*); and the latter has altogether displaced the former.

Farming the stony waste of the Eastern Slope is not at all like the tranquil round of communion with Nature so often depicted in "field and garden" poetry. If anything, farming the Eastern Slope is like trying to "scrape down from the back of a tortoise," a popular figure for a lost cause.[85] Su Shih has turned away from empty speculations about the future (*hsü*) to grapple with the hard reality (*shih*) of his present life at the Eastern Slope; but all his endeavors to obtain *shih*, to harvest "fruits," out of this stubborn ground are turning out to be so much wasted effort, a project—like that of collecting tortoise-fur—which will only prove "fruitless" in the end! "Scraping down" (*kua-mao*) was used in the first poem (line 10) to image the difficulties of attempting to grow crops in impoverished soil. When it shows up again in the last poem, it has been exaggerated into a metaphor for the impossibility of such an attempt.

The problems Su Shih has to confront have not in fact changed:

[85] *Chi-chu fen-lei Tung-p'o hsien-sheng shih*, 4.6b.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

what has changed is the nature of the language in which he deals with these problems. Chi Yün complains that he finds the couplet on fur-scraping "a little affected" for his tastes:[86] but that is precisely the point. Su Shih is trying to be funny, and he wants the reader to see him as trying to be funny. The reappearance of the figure of "scraping fur" in a new context in Poem Eight is a humorous redaction of its earlier appearance in Poem One, which was entirely serious. Su Shih has not altered or even ameliorated the harsh realities of his situation, but he is looking at them now in a different way. Filtered through the comic perspective, the hardships of living at the Eastern Slope have ceased to be problematical and become merely absurd. The source of anxious worry is transformed into a subject for good-natured self-mockery. He has conquered his pain, not by removing it but by laughing at it. Su Shih cannot do much as a farmer to change the world, but as a poet he can and does change it—in the exercise of his imagination. For in the end, the "Poems on the Eastern Slope" are less about being a farmer than they are about writing about being a farmer.

The series remains speculative to the very last. The final poem concludes with a gesture that lies somewhere between a promise and an assurance, pointing still to the future, to an unrealized state of being. With his crops still to be harvested and his friends yet to be rewarded, Su Shih has nothing in hand, nothing solid. But then he is no longer engaged in the realm of the concrete. The poem began by opposing "poor" (*ch'iung*) and "rich" (*kuei*) as the two poles of reality and desire: Ma Meng-te is poor and he wishes Su Shih were rich. Now the pair is replaced by another one, "fond, foolish" (*ch'ih*) as opposed to "good, virtuous, sage" (*hsien*), the former being Ma's true condition and the latter Su Shih's desired state: "Pity Master Ma in his folly— / Even now he brags about my worth!" "Rich" and "poor" are extraneous attributes; "silly" and "wise" inherent qualities. Pivoting around the central metaphor of gathering the fur of a tortoise—of trying to get something out of nothing—the poem has been translated from the realm of easily quantifiable values to that of intangible, incalculable value, from the material to the immaterial, from *shih* to *hsü*.

[86] *Su Wen-chung kung shih-chi*, 21.2a.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

All along Ma Meng-te has overestimated Su Shih's potential in the world of externals, thinking that he would find success when all he did was to become poorer than ever. Not only that, but Ma has compounded his misjudgment by entering into the arena of personal valuation and boasting (again, by inference, quite baselessly) how his friend is such a virtuous man. Su Shih's gratitude to him is thus twofold. On the one hand, he owes Ma apologetic thanks for taking up the burden of continuing a friendship when to do so was indeed a physical "burden" (*lei*), for answering the querulous summons of Poem One and lending his friend a plough (*chieh-keng*); on the other hand, he feels impelled to deride Ma, ever so gently, for his foolishness in so overvaluing Su Shih's worth as a man. For Ma Meng-te has shown more faith in his friend, in matters both practical and personal, than his friend has had in himself. You are daft to think so well of me, the poet protests—at once discomfited and deeply reassured—but thank you for doing it all the same.

"Worthy" (*hsien*) is the word Confucius uses to characterize Yen Hui. Having come at last to rest at the Eastern Slope and found in the midst of adversity a modicum of contentment and joy, Su Shih is on his way to becoming a good man, a *hsien* like Yen Hui, one whose happiness does not depend on external circumstance, on the world of *shih*, but is carried within his own self. The last value in the equation has thus appeared; but the equation is still lopsided. Su Shih is not saying, even now, that he has come any closer to achieving sagehood. He makes no such exaggerated claims for himself, rather putting them in the mouth of his best friend. After all, that is the man who knows—better than himself—what he is and what he is capable of becoming.

The last couplet hovers with the same delicate ambiguity between certainty and conditionality. Syntactically the lines are open to two different interpretations. Taking the auxiliary *chung* to mean "to the end" (as in *shih-chung* 始終), indicative of an ongoing process, the lines may be read: "If in the end you do not give in to (that is, change your mind on account of) the ridicule of the mob, for what you give you shall surely be rewarded a thousand times over." Taking *chung* in the sense of *ching* 竟 ("even so, sure enough, things being even as they are"), indicative of completed process, the lines may be read: "You have not, after all, given in to the public scorn;

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

to you are due a thousandfold returns on what you gave.''

The first reading is exhortatory, looking forward to the blessed moment when Ma Meng-te's confident expectation will be met in Su Shih's fulfilment as a man; the second is a gesture of exulation, as though such a state has already come to fruition. The Chinese words conflate the two, putting a decided air upon the indefinite. The promise of *pao* 報—of mutual provision, of sharing out and paying back—voiced here, half jestingly, half in earnest, as the cry of a Buddhist mendicant begging for alms, has finally been raised to the level of an apotheosis.

There is a third possibility: that the lines are also ambiguous in their referent. The couplet may, following the preceding couplet, take Master Ma as its subject, but it is equally possible that the subject is the poet himself. With Ma's support and encouragement, Su Shih will go on to brave the opprobrium of his present condition to the bitter end, and in so doing obtain a future ''yield'' of a thousand times what he has now ''put in.'' The laughter of the mob (*chung-hsiao*) defined the isolation—moral, political and social—of the ''lonely wanderer'' in the first poem. Disarmed of its sting, it has been made into an instrument to subserve Su Shih's newfound contentment. *Shih* is ''to give'' and *huo* ''to receive''; but the character *huo* is also used interchangeably with *huo* 穫 ''to reap,'' and by extension *shih* can then be taken to mean ''to cast forth'' and hence, of seeds, ''to sow.'' The language of the last line is thus appropriately reminiscent of the language of farming; but it is language used at the figurative level, sowing and reaping—the cultivation of fields—serving as a metaphor for self-cultivation. We have come to the final and true end of Su Shih's struggles at the Eastern Slope: for what Su Shih is about to harvest is his own self, renewed, sprung to new life from the seeds of the old, a self that is a thousand times happier—and better—than before.

The image of the plentiful harvest unites three patterns of meaning, which together make up the world of the ''Eight Poems on the Eastern Slope.'' The first is the world of Su Shih the farmer, the real world of stony fields, in which he gathers a hard won crop of ''fruits.'' The second is the world of Su Shih the farmer-poet, in which he enacts the roles of earlier models of ''field and garden'' poetry, reworking his own experience in terms compatible with—or

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

in deliberate conflict with—these models: a world which lies between living on a farm and writing about farm life, between *shih* and *hsü*. The third is the world of Su Shih the man, an interior world, made up of subjective values which have no connexion with, and no correlative in, outside reality. Yet this world contains the other two, for it is only through his life as a farmer and as a poet of farming that Su Shih approaches his new selfhood as the Man of the Eastern Slope. And it is only in becoming the Man of the Eastern Slope that Su Shih—or Tung-p'o rather—comes close to being a worthy man, a *hsien*, for that is the image in which Tung-p'o has been made, and made known.

The ungentlemanly quest for "a full belly and a restful abode" has ended in the discovery of a self who is "at rest" (*an*). But Su Shih is not only "rooted"—settled and in repose—in his new home; he can now be "at home" wherever he happens to be: the place of rest that he has found does not rest in any one place, but, being carried within his own self, transcends place. As Poem Six, which functions within the cycle as the *chuan* 轉 or "turning point," translates the realm of the poet's concern from the objective world of a "solidly" inhospitable landscape to a subjective inner world, *an* has given way to *le*, to the "joy" that is the constant state of the man of worth no matter what his circumstances. In looking to mend the insufficiencies of his life at the Eastern Slope, Su Shih has thus come within reach of grasping that which cannot be found through seeking—a state of being that is sufficient unto itself. For *le* contains both the aspiration and the attainment: the man who experiences *le*, who partakes of the joy of the virtuous, is also a man who takes joy in being virtuous. He at once embraces the good by delighting in it and, in his delight, shows himself to be good. In the final accounting, these poems are—more than they are about farming and the poetry of farming—about becoming a good man. This is the real reason why T'ao Ch'ien figures in them at all: not so much because he is the model poet-farmer, but because he provides the model for a poet who is—more than a good poet—a good man, one whose poetry is distinguished less for how well it is written than for how fully and truthfully it reveals him to his reader, making his inmost qualities apparent.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

The "Eight Poems on the Eastern Slope" are in their language plain, in their shape assymmetrical and irregular. Lacking the verbal brilliance and conceptual ingenuity that distinguish Su Shih's more famous poems—and of which as a young poet he was so proud—they seldom find their way into popular anthologies and as such are little known to the modern reader. Nevertheless they represent a new and important experiment in the use of poetic language and of the poem cycle. Elsewhere in his exile poetry Su Shih was to return to the related themes of cultivation and self-cultivation,[87] but these poems are unique in the compelling intensity with which Su Shih has through them transformed the poetic act into an act of becoming. Poised somewhere in between the "solid" and the "empty," between what has "substance" (*chih* 質 or *shih* 實) and what—being made of words—is "name" (*ming* 名) only, the "Eastern Slope" poems deal precisely with naming and the fulfilment of names. Taken as a whole, the sequence makes up one continuous moment of self-manifestation: in them, the poet names the ideal, gestures towards the self that he would like to be; then through them, through the act of writing these poems, he actualizes the ideal, entering into the self that he names in the naming of it. For a *chün-tzu*, a true gentleman, is someone in whom the name and the reality are commensurate.

[87] As in "Yüan-hsiu tsai" 元修菜 (*SSSC* 22.1160–62), written while still living at the Eastern Slope, and "Hsiao-p'u wu-yung" 小圃五詠 (*SSSC* 39.2156–61), a poem series from his later exile to Ling-nan, to name a few examples.

This content downloaded from 128.119.168.112 on Wed, 01 Jan 2020 05:18:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms