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East Asian Studies

2012

Twentieth Century Chinese Prose Poetry

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Princeton, NJ : Princeton University

<http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dsp0100000005m>

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TWENTIETH CENTURY CHINESE PROSE POETRY

Nick Admussen

A DISSERTATION

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY

OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE

BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES

Adviser: Perry Link

September 2012

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ABSTRACT

The term prose poetry (散文诗) has been used to describe works of literature in China ever since the term was translated into Chinese in 1918. This dissertation studies that act of generic naming, as well as the formal practices that the term most consistently describes. Its methodology combines genre study, literary history, analysis of the literary field, and close reading.

The dissertation finds that Chinese prose poetry is most aptly described not as a static category made up of measurable qualities of shape, size or sound, but instead as the result of a series of compositional and conceptual processes, most important of which are condensation, recitation, and refusal. It further finds that Chinese prose poetry before 1949 is neither similar to prose poetry after 1949, nor similar to itself: strong generic and formal identities appeared later, as a result of prose poetry's process of self-justification during the literary-political transformations of the Hundred Flowers period (1956-7). Contemporary official prose poetry, which has been published and disseminated widely since the early 1980s, therefore maintains a strong generic and formal identity, and continues to have many characteristics of socialist literature. Meanwhile, avant-garde poets who work in prose forms have defined their work in contradistinction to politically orthodox work, and often avoid the category of prose poetry even when their works have formal and procedural affinities with other prose poems.

Finally, this dissertation is an anthology of translations. Artists translated include Ke Lan (柯蓝), Guo Feng (郭风), Liu Zaifu (刘再复) and Ouyang Jianghe (欧阳江河). Due to copyright restrictions, these poems have been redacted from the online version of the dissertation.

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INTRODUCTION

I first became interested in Chinese prose poetry after reading Lu Xun's *Wild Grass*, one of the fundamental texts of modern Chinese literature and a work that has long been synonymous with Chinese prose poetry. *Wild Grass* repeatedly calls for itself to be supplanted: ironically, for a book that is still being studied intently after eighty years, it seems to revel in the possibility that it will burn away, and ends with an image that's all the more startling for being quotidian. Its final sentence reads, "...cigarette smoke rises in the motionless air like tiny specks of cloud in the summer sky, to be slowly transformed into indefinable shapes."¹ I took this concluding image as a challenge and an opportunity: could I track the book's shapes as they shifted through the work of later poets, and later poems? This interest in conceptual shapes turned into a practical interest in the way in which *Wild Grass* was and was not made up of prose poems — short pieces of text that feel and often sound like poetry, but are organized on the page like prose. As I was to discover, Lu Xun was not the first Chinese writer to experiment with the form, and today, the genre called prose poetry is written and read by well over a hundred thousand mainland Chinese every year.²

My curiosity about Chinese prose poetry took me from the restricted circulation room at Beijing University, to the little town of Yiyang in Hunan, China, to long-distance phone calls with exiled poet Liu Zaifu as he sat in his daughter's study in Maryland. At some point, the shape of the territory I was traversing stopped including *Wild Grass* — which barely figures in the pages to come — and came to include a wealth of creative work whose existence I had never even suspected, and which has heretofore never been translated into English. This world of work includes about sixty years of history, a newspaper, two magazines, a dozen previous critical monographs in Chinese, upwards of thirty writing organizations and communities, dozens upon

dozens of anthologies, hundreds of poetry collections and an uncountable number of poets and poems. As a result of research into that body of work, the following pages will argue that contemporary Chinese prose poetry is most often a product of the twin, simultaneous processes of recitation and refusal. At the same time, however — and perhaps more importantly — the act of this book is to reveal the heft and dimensionality of the world of prose poetry, associating a community and a culture with a generic category that can initially seem as insubstantial and variable as smoke. That means both attempting to conceptualize a way in which the literary practice of prose poetry makes sense as one body, but also providing materials for readers to have their own varied encounters with contemporary Chinese prose poetry.

By way of introduction, then, I will suggest a few methods through which contemporary Chinese prose poetry might be encountered in the following discussion. This book is designed to be read cover to cover in the traditional way, but for those who are particularly interested in one or another facet of prose poetic or literary experience, I will recommend focusing on particular sections.

As a Genre Study

Chapter one proposes a structure for determining the generic qualities of contemporary Chinese prose poetry. In short, these qualities are the visual form of prose, the process of condensation, the simultaneous processes of recitation and refusal, the aesthetics of hinting, and intentional identification as prose poetry (散文诗). Chapters two through four work according to the criteria set out in chapter one, historicizing and concretizing those structures. The discussion of genre boundaries becomes central again in chapter five, which points out two types of

contemporary work that lie outside the boundaries of prose poetry, but which have an intimate relationship to the genre.

I therefore recommend a focus on chapters one and five to students of genre, which I take to mean a socially defined, community enforced category of literary practice.³ To attempt a genre study is to have already entered into a hermeneutic circle: the study, or the examination of concrete texts, is already shaped by the assumption of the existence of an abstract genre. It is not possible to study prose poetry without making at least an experimental hypothesis about what prose poetry is or might be, and that hypothesis will color the ensuing discussion. Adena Rosmarin provides a possible solution for this problem by arguing that critics interested in genre should start with the "edifying mistake" of acting *as if* genres exist, or a particular genre exists, the basic, hopeful error we make when we see faces in the clouds.⁴ She believes that all genre criticism is necessarily deductive — we must always begin with some abstract idea of boundary in order to examine particulars, even if we claim not to.⁵ This necessity does not, however, mean that we must make claims towards inductive formation of genres. She counsels genre critics to hypothesize with the full admission of assertion, rather than a false pose of objectivity or, in the Chinese context, a simplistic "seeking truth from facts." This allows entry into a genre or proposed genre with the expectation that it is not the formation of a fixed, closed category of literature that is the goal, but the conversation about category, about sameness and difference, that is the real result of the impossible struggle to categorize.⁶

This pragmatic stance leads Rosmarin past the well-traveled dialectics of historical versus theoretical, inductive versus deductive, and descriptive versus prescriptive to a much simpler, and much more challenging call to evaluate genre criticism as an explanatory tool, one that argues for the value of the work that it explains.⁷ Where it finally leads her, I believe, is back to

art: founded on metaphor, a proposition with its "*as if*" deleted, judged by its effects to instruct, enlighten, persuade or intrigue. Indeed, it is no new idea that literary criticism, genre criticism included, is a subset of art.⁸ What has kept this concept from becoming the dominant critical attitude, I believe, is the view that critical stylistic and argumentative standards constitute a source of authority that is impossible to surrender. Our critical structures — the argument stated cleanly up front, the evidence arrayed, the conclusion reaffirming the argument — show us to be the products of a tradition and an educational process to which a certain amount of authority has long been considered to adhere. In an attempt to destabilize that authority, I have attempted to include works that my genre boundaries do not aptly describe, thereby making the *as if* assumptions that appear in chapter one visible, and revealing the discussion as based not on processes of categorization, but on metaphoric description and organization of a large, heterogeneous body of poetic practice. As Rosmarin concludes, metaphoric genre criticism has "not only the power to correct previous readings but also the power to inspire the future readings that constitute its own correction."⁹

As a Genre History

Authorial and editorial identification of a work as *sanwenshi* (散文诗), the Chinese term for prose poetry, is not legible in individual poems, but is rather a socially and communally constructed quality of any given poem, and that constructed quality changed greatly over time. Accordingly, in chapter two, I narrate the early development of the use of the term *sanwenshi*, arguing that it was codified and formalized as a genre title during the Hundred Flowers Movement (1956-7). In the first half of chapter four I outline the editorial structures through

which the term has been managed and reauthored up until the present day. For students of history, these two sections are worth reading together: between them, they describe prose poetry as a concept and a practice handed down from Hundred Flowers innovators to Deng-era advocates to the semi-official magazine staffs of the 1990s and beyond.

My study of genre conceptualizes prose poetry as a process, a series of compositional, aesthetic, political and commercial decisions: my study of the history of prose poetry is driven by the same methods. As Michael Prince says, "Categories of interpretation are historical. They represent choices people make."¹⁰ Deciding to put "prose poetry" on the cover of a magazine or a collection can be (but is not always) as important a decision as the organization of images, the lyricization of language, or the selection of a political standpoint. In this, I am indebted both practically and theoretically to the many well-made histories of Chinese prose poetry published in China, although my conclusions often differ from theirs.¹¹ What I believe has complicated prior attempts to create genre histories in the West, though, is critical resistance — human resistance, really — to the first part of Prince's statement. Theory, especially Marxist theory and certain types of deconstructionist practices, can offer the critic a vantage point outside history from which to assess or chart historical motion. When one begins with postulates or first principles, they can be investigated and interwoven through deductive reasoning in a way that is not itself intended to be transformed by the passage of time. This can be read, for example, in Richard Terdiman's *Discourse / Counter-Discourse*: "We cannot repeat it often enough: the dominant *remains dominant*; its antagonists are ceaselessly obliged to internalize this fact which defines *all* social reality up to the horizon of the revolutionary." Marxist first principles like materialism and the fundamental nature of class struggle allow his argument to be true "ceaselessly." Paul De Man's criticism has a similar quality: "Since any narrative is primarily the

allegory of its own reading, it is caught in a difficult double bind. As long as it treats a theme, it will always lead to the confrontation of incompatible meanings between which it is necessary but impossible to decide in terms of truth and error. If one of the meanings is declared true, it will always be possible to undo it by means of the other...."¹² His argument's abstract geometry and ahistoricity come from the use of a postulate: narrative is the allegory of its own reading. In practice, however, we see the dominant ground under by the subaltern, we see the establishment of new and unpredictable dominions, we see narratives that gain, at least in particular contexts, the imprimatur of truth and temporarily cannot be undone by their others. Adherence to one or another postulate limits critical ability to see change.

The following discussion also begins with a postulate, that of the existence of a genre. That postulate is transformed over course of the discussion on the basis of my own investigation, testing, and correction; it is also transformed as the discussion moves through the twentieth century. This is metonymic for the way in which twentieth-century Chinese literary culture has at times encouraged, at times repressed, at times rewarded, and at times ignored the composition of prose poetry; it also reveals the way in which postulates, or literary-theoretical abstractions, are dependent on the material from which they are drawn. In this discussion, nothing happens "ceaselessly," and no finding can be said to affect "*all* social reality." That perhaps limits the discussion's utility for those readers who are looking for basic truths that lie at the heart of literature, but it also reveals a relationship between the shifting practice of prose poetry and the rich varieties of historical and social context in twentieth-century China.

As a Description of a Literary Field

In addition to and supporting this book's narrative about the transformation of prose poetry over time, I also attempt to describe the way in which prose poetry has become its own literary field, and the shifting position it has occupied in the literary field of contemporary China.¹³ The book's finding is that prose poetry had its origin in the writings of loyal moderates and humanist cadres in the Hundred Flowers period, and that after the ascension of the Deng government, those moderates became the backbone of a community of official, orthodox, and semi-official *litterateurs*. This process is described in the last half of chapter two, and the last half of chapter four. Avant-garde and experimental work that more closely resembles American or French expectations about the subversiveness of the prose poem does exist in China, but because of the solidity of the genre's association with socialism and official literature, those works are not often categorized or named as prose poems, as we see at the end of chapter five.

Bourdieu describes the literary field as a conceptual space in which individual poets are identified by their social position relative to each other. A painter who focuses on nude ankles will be considered risqué in an artistic field where no flesh is shown, and may very well be considered conservative in an artistic field where full nudity is common. An artist's understanding of the literary field in which they live is called their *habitus*, and that body of knowledge helps them position their art in relationship to the art of their community. Scholars of Chinese literature who publish in English have been active in applying Pierre Bourdieu's theory of literary *habitus* to modern and contemporary China.¹⁴ With some exceptions, however, they have almost exclusively focused on either the May Fourth period, or on the world of avant-garde "unofficial" writers.¹⁵ I believe that the literary field encompasses official, orthodox, and socialist

writing just as much as it does avant-garde, experimental, and politically dangerous work. These two types of writing should be considered as part of the same contemporary literary field because of their continuous interaction: whether or not an artist identifies as orthodox, their *habitus* includes an opinion about what it means to be an orthodox prose poet. A particularly good example of this is the transformation of Liu Zaifu's career as described in chapter three: after he is exiled from the mainland and begins to publish in Hong Kong, his literary practice changes drastically. His practical sense of what is and is not possible in the two different literary communities serves as an external factor in his composition and publication process, and involves a transformation from a poet accepted by orthodox publications to a prose writer who is still occasionally difficult to discuss in mainland histories of prose poetry.

What Bourdieu's theory allows this book to describe is the part of the writing process in which an author examines and considers the work and reception of other authors, and the way in which they use poetry to compete for attention, authority, and identification with positive values. This not only provides context that helps unlock the language and occasion of individual poems, but also reveals genre decisions as one of the expressive methods through which artists give voice to thought. The concept of the literary field reveals one way in which history, and genre history, are inscribed into the poems themselves, and it reveals the poems as products of historical and social movements, as well as aesthetic and compositional processes.

As an Anthology of Translations

The following pages contain twenty-six original translations of Chinese poems. Most are pieces I consider to be prose poems; some (for example, "Hanging Coffin") fit less well into my

descriptions of the genre. Whenever possible, I have translated poems in their entirety, but some sacrifices have been made for space. Most of the translations appear at the beginning of a chapter or of a chapter's subsection, and readers who are interested in poetry above all else can use the table of contents to flip from heading to heading.¹⁶ Several sections of the book are intended as introductory author studies for writers who have not been or have rarely been translated into English in the past: the second half of chapter two introduces Ke Lan and Guo Feng, chapter three introduces Liu Zaifu, the second half of chapter four introduces Zou Yuehan, and chapter five discusses Ouyang Jianghe and Xi Chuan.¹⁷ In these cases, especially for Ke, Guo, and Zou, who have never before appeared in English translation, the selection of translations is slightly thicker, and intended to showcase a poet's best work as well as representative poems.

I do this not only because prose poetry is a rarely translated art form, and because there are many excellent works to choose from, but because a full-length work of genre criticism and close reading seems like a rare opportunity to print considerable numbers of first-time English translations alongside critical discussions of those translations. It is in this way, more than others, that I hope to take my own place in the contextually contingent, ever-changing history of prose poetry. In doing so I respond both to the classical Chinese description of the human drive to *yongge* 永歌 or make songs last, as well as Walter Benjamin's desire to catch *erfahrung*, lived experience, while experiencing *erlebnis*, or the isolated moment.¹⁸ One way to encounter a poem is as a single frozen moment, a rush of images, sounds and ideas, in the way that one might hear a single note from a musical instrument. There is another way, however, to encounter a poem in which it stays with the reader past the end of the reading experience. This encounter can be extended in time through mnemonically powerful prosody like rhyme or rhythm, through narrative, through connection with the reader's preexisting experience, or by educating the reader

in a skill, a way to think or speak that they will then repeat for some purpose. Because English readers will have little access to the prosody and music of Chinese prose poems, this "lived experience" quality to a translation is something I hope to provide through critical close reading, something similar to the energetic and intense Chinese tradition of commentary (*zhujie* 注解): a means by which we, you and, I, can linger within the translated text, experience the worlds of its contexts, consider the narrative of its production, and discuss its intricacies.

This feeling of tarrying — of experience — is important to me as a scholar, as a writer, and as a critic of the modern and contemporary period, both in translation and in literary criticism. Theorists, critics, and teachers have been engaged for generations in the attempt to make a set of arguments or observations that will somehow survive the coming revisions, oppositions, and new givens that are the entropic forces of intellectual production. As I point out at the end of chapter five, it is possible that the genre category of prose poetry itself will shift out from under this monograph, and the term in the future will describe some other aesthetic tradition that is the result of some other genre history. By anchoring my discussion to these particular poems I hope to reinforce the contingent, descriptive, metaphoric nature of my critical interventions: prose poetry in these pages is not an objective, abstract, idealized form, but a communicative and expressive tool used to categorize these particular poems during these particular historical periods.

As a Study of Literary Process

In chapter one, the difficulty of defining prose poetry is solved, in part, by looking at prose poems not as literary products but as the result of literary processes. Although prose poems

might have diverse shapes, sounds, and significations, many of them undergo the same process that starts with the recitation of prose forms, and transforms them through what I call refusal. Once literary activity is seen as a process, however, it becomes clear that the process is not undertaken by the author alone, but is a cooperative enterprise that includes educators, editors, censors, publishers and readers. The last section of chapter one outlines a way in which readers participate in the literary hinting that prose poetry uses as one of its communicative strategies; the first half of chapter five argues that editors are the authors not only of the genre of prose poetry, but also that they make crucial decisions in the making of individual poems; and the last half of chapter five shows how the influence of the literary field plays a role in determining the formal shape and generic name of individual poems.

My discussion about literature as a process is heavily influenced by both Heidegger and Marjorie Perloff. For Heidegger, literature is most often described as a *gerund*: a gathering of or a calling out to far-flung materials. Marjorie Perloff brings this distinction to contemporary letters by pointing out the distinction between literature that refers to indeterminacy and literature that is itself generated by and generative of indeterminacy.¹⁹ I turn to these theorists out of necessity: just as I would argue that contemporary literary theory can be ill-fitting when applied to premodern literature, the literature of the twentieth century is best described by twentieth century literary theory.

In addition to allowing a particular understanding of the genre of prose poetry — one that is not troubled by the diversity of shapes, idioms and philosophies that are the products of Chinese prose poetic processes — focus on literary process has required me to accept the scholar's place in that process. As a translator, a commentator, a non-native Chinese reader, a theorist and a selector of texts, I hope that my participation in discussion plays a positive role in

continuing prose poetry's tradition of border-crossing. From one perspective, it is quite unique that prose poetry has made a francophone-sinophone transition (or arguably a francophone-russophone-sinophone transition), and is now being brought in these pages from the sinophone cultural sphere into the anglophone cultural sphere, where it already resides as the result of a francophone-anglophone importation. From another perspective, this happens constantly in literature, and is in fact the endless global circulation of text and experience that Paul Celan describes in his essay "The Meridian."²⁰

The aforementioned are just a few possible paths through the book that have been intentionally designed into the discussion. I hope, additionally, that the work engenders and supports many more possible experiences — the afterword outlines some potential next steps for research. I also hope, however, that it will be challenged, contradicted, extended and eventually, superseded by future generations of criticism. I have such a hope because this book itself is the product of a large, altruistic community that has supported my research and writing in the hopes of making a long-term contribution to the study of literature. It would not have been possible to complete without the wisdom, insight, and generosity of my adviser Perry Link, or the care and talent of Princeton professor Wang Ping. I additionally received crucial advice during the early stages of my project from Maghiel van Crevel and Susan Naquin. The support of Princeton University and the Donald and Mary Hyde Fellowship Fund allowed me to travel China in 2008, where I benefited greatly from the sponsorship of professor Jiang Tao 姜涛, the knowledge and experience of Huang Yongjian 黄永健, the tutelage of professors Zang Di 臧棣 and Zhang Taozhou 张桃洲, the friendship of Beijing University's Hu Yong 胡泳, and the acumen of Yanzi 燕子, now a graduate student at Columbia, who helped me accumulate what must be New

Jersey's largest library of photocopied prose poetry. Chapter four is deeply dependent on my experiences at *Prose Poetry* magazine in Yiyang, Hunan, where the past and present editorial staff, including Feng Mingde 冯明德 and Zou Yuehan 邹岳汉 treated me with warmth and patience. A partial version of chapter two appeared in the journal *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, and I owe my thanks to the careful and thoughtful revisions of the editors and readers there; I presented part of chapter one at the 2010 meeting of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association, part of chapter four at the 2011 meeting of the Modern Language Association, and part of chapter two at the 2012 meeting of the Association for Asian Studies. In each case, my panelists and other colleagues provided transformational suggestions. The final writing was accomplished under a dissertation completion grant at the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies. Throughout the process I have had the great fortune to be borne up by my friends and family, especially my wife and partner Emily Fridlund. I hope this final product justifies all the hard work and sacrifice of this far-flung community.

CHAPTER ONE

RECITE AND REFUSE: WHAT IS A CHINESE PROSE POEM?

背诵与辞演: 什么叫中国散文诗?

"Never has a work of art that counts corresponded exactly to its genre."

-- Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

Insisting Upon Process

Here is a piece of literature by Zhou Genghong, called "Say Wither, and the Peach Flowers Wither" (桃花说谢就谢了) and published in 2007:

27 lines redacted

In his introductory near-apologia for the works of Jacques Derrida that he collects in *Acts of Literature*, David Attridge points out the unfairness of the claim that Derrida's work deconstructs literature as a category or somehow argues against the possibility of finding it meaningful. Deconstruction, Attridge argues, takes place only in particular and individual acts of reading.²² I believe this to be true, and believe it to be equally true for the construction of categories and genres: just as Derrida returned to so many literary works looking for meaning — Paul Celan, *Ulysses*, Franz Kafka — and found them most often plumbing the mysteries and slippages of received philosophical wisdom, so must we go directly to literary works and attempt to draw categories while knowing, at some level, that the categories they lead us towards will be ephemeral and partial. It is a necessary struggle, even if it must be continually refreshed: artists categorize their own poems by seeking out publication in the form of one or another genre, editors use classifications in selecting and combining works, and readers use their understanding of literary genres in order to understand works. The fact that this understanding changes over time, and that our work to understand genre or a particular genre can never be complete, is no excuse for ignoring the task. We plant crops every year; we clear weeds exactly as fast as they grow, if we're lucky; to use Derrida's terms, we attempt to enter the infinitely nested gates of the law of genre until we are no longer able.²³ To hear the poem above tell it, the earth is continually emptying itself out — in entropy, in decay, in the fall from flight — only to be reconstructed and refilled as the petals twist and dive.

In more concrete terms, when we see a poem like the one that opens this chapter out of its context in a magazine or anthology, we are likely to ask "what is it?" before, after, or during our first reading of the poem. We may know that, as in the animal kingdom, any classification we

give it is approximate; we may believe that it is a unique piece of art that ignores or confounds attempts to categorize it; we may think that the undertaking of classification is futile, or has negative side effects. We ask anyway, and the question "what is it" and its answer, or the failure to arrive at an answer, is part of the experience of any poem. The poem above first appeared in China's *Prose Poetry* magazine (《散文诗》), and was later collected in an anthology called *90 Years of Chinese Prose Poetry* (《中国散文诗 90 年》). Commenters to the author's blog, where the poem also appears, call it a poem (诗) as well as a prose poem (散文诗) without being corrected, and the author does occasionally step in to engage with his readers, so we can assume at least a tenuous consensus between them that this is both a poem and a prose poem.²⁴ As those who create literature, writers and editors can (and do) claim that virtually anything is a prose poem simply by putting it in one book or another, one magazine or another, or by writing "prose poem" at the top of the page: this is what Derrida calls the "power to produce performatively the statements of the law."²⁵ This performance does not imply, though, the presence of an identifiable system: if the title "prose poem" is to have any meaning, the act of naming is simply a starting point. What will be further necessary are acts of reading and interpretation, to figure out the reasons that artists call works prose poems and the ways in which poems' generic identity can affect their composition and reception.

I intend to approach the invention of this definition in two ways: first, through examining the form of the prose poem, and in chapter two, by looking at its traditions and history.²⁶ What does "Say Wither, and the Peach Flowers Wither" look and sound like? Like many prose poems since about 1950,²⁷ it is a short piece of prose with irregular or no rhymes. By prose, I mean writing that only allows the insertion of white, non-text space once at the end of each paragraph, as opposed to poetry, which allows it to be inserted before or after any word, and sometimes

even inside words. This lack of division into poetic lines as well as the lack of regular, predictable rhyme, both of which have been used to indicate the presence of pauses during oral performance,²⁸ combine to drastically reduce the available options for creating organized poetic meter, leaving only punctuation as a way to create audible and non-colloquial oral rhythms. What is left in "Say Wither," then, is a literary piece that looks like other kinds of short prose, such as a joke, a scientific abstract, a consumer warning, or short Chinese essays called *meiwen* 美文, *xiaopinwen* 小品文 or *zawen* 杂文 — a literary piece which, like many other prose poems, has nothing but colloquial rhythm. These two qualities, namely similarity to other forms and colloquial meterlessness, are absolutely crucial in determining what kinds of roles prose poetry *tends* to play, but neither of them are defining qualities, alone or in concert with each other. Although any brief survey of works of art commonly called prose poems will find that they often look like other types of writing and, when read, overwhelmingly sound like other types of speech, the presence of these two qualities would not be enough to help a reader confidently claim that a piece of prose is a prose poem. Zhou Genhong's poem could be an inspired passage from a novel or he could call it a *meiwen*: there is no audible quality of "Peach Flowers" that identifies it specifically as a prose poem. Accordingly, we can tentatively reject aural qualities as parties to the definition of prose poetry that we are seeking to construct.

This leaves one unexamined descriptor in the above list of visual and aural qualities that could be valuable in a definition: prose poems are pieces of *short* prose. "Peach Flowers" is just about 300 characters long, depending on whether one counts spaces and punctuation; at this length, it is shorter than the average piece of Chinese prose, and approximately the same length as many works of poetry.²⁹ Brevity is, in critical literature about prose poetry whether Chinese or not, the most common quality ascribed to the prose poem. Influential prose poet Ke Lan 柯蓝

wrote: "In order to prevent prose poetry from being casually listed as a kind of prose, it is necessary once again to emphasize its brevity. Brevity is not only its form, but indicates its content." (要使散文诗不随便被人列入散文一类中去，有再强调一下它的短小的必要。短小不只是它的形式，也指它的内容。)³⁰ This is strong language: a formal quality so important that it is the indicator of a poem's content, just as the cropping of a photograph indicates, by limiting and defining what is in a photograph, what is important to look at inside the frame. The author of the standard monograph on French prose poetry, Suzanne Bernard, sees brevity not as an indicator of content, but as a crucial principle driving the genre: "More than the poem in verse, the poem in prose must avoid digressions, moral or otherwise, and explanatory developments – everything that returns it to other prose genres, everything that would undermine its unity, its density." (Plus que le poème en vers, le poème en prose doit éviter les digressions morales ou autres, les développements explicatifs -- tout ce qui le ramènerait aux autres genres de la prose, tout ce qui nuirait à son unité, à sa densité.) She concludes: "People have often remarked, and it can be established as a principle, that modern prose poetry is always brief." (On a souvent remarqué, et on peut poser en principe, que le poème en prose moderne est toujours bref.)³¹ That there is a relationship between shortness and prose poetry seems to be the consensus opinion in the critical literature of many nations: the tenor of this relationship, however, differs from critic to critic. Ke Lan describes the shortness of prose poetry with the term 浓缩 *nongsuo*, condensation, emphasizing the poem as a reduction of a longer thought or text, and Bernard uses the term *densité*, density, emphasizing a kind of innate quality. On face, the overlap between these ideas — shortness — would seem to be a strong candidate for a formal quality that can be used to distinguish prose poems from other kinds of prose: there is a difference, however, between condensation and density.

"Peach Flowers" clearly participates in certain types of condensation: if this piece were a short story, or an essay, it would be clear that much had been elided, including aspects of the setting, the identity of the speaker, and much of the interstitial material that gives readers a sense of cause and effect: "when I was flying with the peach flowers, and then after I had fallen," the poem reads, withholding from us any explanation as to how the speaker could actually do this. The most likely explanation, an almost magical act of empathy that has transported the speaker into the bloom and wane of the peach blossoms such that the speaker takes part in their flight and fall, is left for the intent reader to supply: instead, the poem moves on to a separate scene, with different people and concerns, expecting us again to fill in the gap between the swirling petals and dinner in the countryside. What it lacks, and in a certain way, what has been sacrificed in the interests of brevity and density, is Bernard's "unity" —the narrator, the scene, and the time of the poem all, at different points in the poem, shift, change, and undergo what Bernard might call "digressions." In the first paragraph, the narrator reacts to the petals, writing "How quickly they twist," and then mingles with them in paragraph four, writing "When I was flying with the peach flowers, and then after I had fallen..." The poem's generally natural scenery is contrasted sharply with a quotidian social scene at the end of that same fourth paragraph, and the poem constantly wavers in time between the moment of the blossoms' fall and the moment after.

Bernard, writing expressly on French prose poetry until 1959, is predisposed to find unity: classical unities have been important to varying degrees to French dramatic criticism since the seventeenth century. This is not so in the Chinese poetic tradition, where large conceptual leaps are mediated by convention or simply foregrounded as part of the mystery and joy of poetry, as between the moon and thoughts of home in Li Bai's "Autumn Thoughts" 《夜思》: "I lift my head and watch the bright moon; I hang my head and think of home."³² There is, of

course, a powerful connection between the context and the image, but that connection is supplied by the reader, rather than spelled out by the poem, and the reader's initial confusion at the poem's associative leap turns into a cooperation between the reader and the text as the reader identifies and fills in a set of feelings that bridges the gap that the poem crosses, but does not explain.

Chinese prose poetry in general, and "Peach Flowers" in particular, carry on this tradition of carefully placed dissonance, of associative connections whose complexity is born of their lack of unity. This leaves us back where we started: brevity, density, *nongsuo*.

Note, however, that unlike some of the formal terminology used to describe traditional verseforms, brevity as a criterion is exceptionally subjective. While it's easy to show that the average prose poem is shorter than the average novel, identifying a clear standard is extremely difficult, especially when compared to the mathematical purity of classical verse, which can be classified simply by the numbers of syllables in each line. Huang Yongjian, the author of a 2006 study of Chinese prose poetry that is both ambitious and carefully considered, has pointed out that Ke Lan, over the course of the article cited above as well as his entire career, has claimed the existence of different, mutually exclusive, concrete ranges for the appropriate length of a prose poem — around three hundred characters in the essay above, later five hundred, and eventually around a thousand.³³ Additionally, Ke Lan is himself the first, and widely imitated, practitioner of the modern prose poetry *series*: by placing several separate pieces under one title using numbering, subsection titles, or other typographical marks, Ke Lan did more than many other poets to complicate what it means to have written "a short piece." Poem series are neither singular nor, in many cases, particularly short.

This is not, however, to criticize Ke's position: since he is a poet-critic, the appeal of his writings on prose poetry depend less on their internal consistency ("Do I contradict myself? Very

well then, I contradict myself") and more on the kind of conversation they provoke about the form, as well as what they reflect about his attitudes towards his own work. He is concerned with brevity and interested in condensation, but this preoccupation creates poems of varying lengths. Those who write about prose poetry, regardless of the language of the works that they study, are extremely likely to cite the necessity of brevity without ever even hinting at what that means in practice, or what might serve as a basis for comparison. For instance, in addition to Suzanne Bernard, the forward to *The Prose Poem in France*, Mary Ann Caws lists brevity as a major quality of "the prose poem at its best," but never with any real intent to determine the meaning of the word brevity: brevity is a positive quality, but not a categorical boundary. Many authors cite the influence on Baudelaire of Edgar Allen Poe, who believed that "'A long poem' is simply a flat contradiction in terms." Poe, however, who like Ke Lan actually defines what he considers brief, goes on to say that to him, "undue brevity" is a piece between twenty-four and thirty lines, half again as long as Shakespeare's sonnets and the approximate length of a number of classic Chinese prose poems.³⁴ "The Raven" would certainly be considered, by modern standards, quite a long narrative poem, and Huang spends several paragraphs in listing contemporary prose poems which violate the spirit of brevity as well as Ke Lan's letter of the law.³⁵

Accepting Huang's point that it is useless to create real practical criteria for the brevity of a prose poem, we can turn to the more valuable conversation concerning brevity, one which is present in the above critical writings, but not in a way that draws much attention. After giving his rules about poem length, Ke Lan continues, "I repeatedly tell myself and my young friends: prose poems, real prose poems, aren't that easy to write. This [the condensation described above] is the reason." (我反复对自己和青年朋友说：散文诗，真的散文诗，并不是很容易写成的。就是这个道理。) To be blunt, there's nothing hard about writing three hundred characters:

the average Chinese typist could probably accomplish this easily in about six or seven minutes. The difficulty, I think, that Ke Lan is referring to is not the achievement of the goal, but the process one must take in order to get there: what a prose poem needs is not the quality *nongsuo* 浓缩, an adjectival quality like density, but instead to become a poem through the *process* of 浓缩 in its verbal form. This is comparable to the way that not all liquids with the consistency of condensed milk have undergone an actual process of condensation; we are here talking about the way a thing is made, rather than its qualities as a finished product. This attitude would lead us to reinterpret his idea that brevity is not just part of the form of prose poetry, "but its content": one of the things that prose poems are *about* is a version of life that has had this intensifying, miniaturizing process applied to it.

The difference between categorizing prose poems in terms of their brevity and reading them as products of a process of condensation is a significant one. Reading in terms of brevity requires us to count the number of characters in "Peach Flowers"; reading the poem as a process requires us to attempt to understand what the writer, or in some cases the speaker, has elided from the poem. In the description of the sky at the start of paragraph four, we have only one detail, that the sky has just moments ago held a flock of birds: perhaps it is not so important that the poem allows itself only one detail about the sky (what Ke Lan might call its "form"). Instead, we may want to ask why the poem has left out so many possible details (and in this way, the condensation does, as Ke Lan says, strongly indicate the poem's content) in order to describe the sky as something that has just taken place, that has just now been a certain way and is no longer. That other descriptions of the sky have been removed could mean that, in the eyes of the poem, the sky is nothing but a just-having-happened, and this seems fundamentally similar to the peach blossoms, which fall as quickly as they can be described and are therefore described in an odd

blend of gnomic general statement and past narrative. They are always already gone, and it is the condensation of the poem that helps us perceive this.

This concept of the condensation process of prose poetry could also help us make sense of some of the critical disconnections discussed above, namely why many writers and critics agree that the idea of brevity is somehow involved with the form of prose poetry and yet no clear criteria for the length of these poems exists. Prose poems, perhaps, do not need to be demonstrably brief, but can instead be conceptualized as literary works which have undergone a process of concentration: the result might be quite long, as Huang points out. Seeing prose poems in this way, as the record of a thinking and writing process and not any particular class of product, not discernible by its length or width, its sound or appearance, helps us understand how such a wide variety of texts can be categorized under a single genre, as well as how to perform that categorization. In Marjorie Perloff's terms, prose poetry may well be the result of an aesthetic moment that prefers "process to structure."³⁶ Accordingly, in defining and talking about prose poetry, it could be more valuable to look for processes than it is to look for reliable structures. We might say, for example, that "Peach Blossom" attempts to literalize the cliché 说谢就谢 that is its title, rather than simply saying that the poem is titled with a familiar set phrase. Exactly how we should look for these processes — the way in which we should read after we have replaced static, definitional genre boundaries with animating processes — will be discussed below.

Condensation alone is insufficient to explain or organize all the similarities among prose poems. Brevity is a fundamental part of the definition of poetry as a whole, and many other kinds of poems undergo condensation. The *Hanyu Da Zidian*, the *Great Chinese Character Dictionary*, describes poetry as 精炼, *jinglian*, concise, succinct.³⁷ We can therefore consider condensation to

be a process that prose poetry shares with other poetry, a difference from prose that is a hallmark of both kinds of poetry. Seeing condensation as something you have to do to write a prose poem — something that's less necessary when writing prose — helps us go further in making sense of Ke Lan's comment that "real prose poems" are "not that easy to write." The process of condensation, and the poetic expectation that a piece should have part or most of its words taken away during the writing process, makes prose poetry difficult to write. Now that we see both difficulty and brevity arising from a process of condensation undertaken when writing poetry and prose poetry, we can supply the missing term in the comparison. Ke Lan might mean that prose poems are harder to write *than prose* because they have to undergo condensation and concentration *unnecessary when writing prose*. As we continue searching for a definition for Chinese prose poetry, our experience with brevity and condensation instructs us to first search for *processes* of thought and composition that may result in the genre of Chinese prose poetry, rather than a set of static *qualities*, such as measurable rhyme, meter, density or length.

My emphasis on interpreting prose poetry by examining the process of its conception and creation is not unique to me. Huang Yongjian, who rejects concrete strictures on the length of the prose poem for reasons similar to mine, cites this idea from Jiang Dengke's critical work: prose poetry's language "...can seem to lack order, but from the spirit's viewpoint (the inner viewpoint) and to its ears (inner listening) as well as feeling and comprehension, it is a new 'order,' it is a higher level of 'order.'" (这种语言可似无序，但以心灵的视角（内视角）和听觉（内听觉）加以感受和体悟，是新的“有序”，是更高层次的“有序”。)³⁸ Even though this observation comes on the heels of a discussion of internal rhyme in Mallarmé, what is being spoken of in this passage is not audible rhyme. It is inaudible sound and invisible sight, and although this concept

certainly has a Romantic overtone of the transcendental heart of poetry, it also has something in common with perceptions of the processes that create prose poems: readers must look *through* the outer appearance and sound of the poem, whatever it may be, into an interior. Jiang Dengke sees that interior as the spirit of a poem; I see it as the process of the poem's conceptualization and composition.

This difference in terms stems at least in part from aesthetic and traditional differences between Chinese and American criticism: Jiang, as well as Wang Guangming,³⁹ and a number of other Chinese-language scholars writing on prose poetry since the start of the Deng era, are heavily influenced by the tradition of Chinese Romanticism. Leo Ou-fan Lee identifies two strains of Romanticism in the May Fourth movement, which I believe continue to operate: the Wertherian, which is passive and sentimental, and the Promethian, which is dynamic and heroic.⁴⁰ The language Jiang uses above is colored by the passive language of emotion: it values the inner, the hidden, a transcendental truth available to those who are sufficiently introspective and have sufficiently powerful feelings. The conceptualization of a prose poet as a Promethian revolutionary hero and a destroyer of old rules is also quite common, and will be considered elsewhere. Contemporary poetry criticism in the English tradition,⁴¹ and therefore a certain amount of my own language and attitudes, is likely to be more strongly influenced by contemporary English-language aesthetics. English-language poetry has struggled between the near-infinite possibilities of a language whose very claim to meaning is seen as fluid and changing (in the hands of Stein and Ashbery, for example), and this increases the fluidity of poetry's role in reflecting, acting upon, and patterning our experience (that we can see in Robert Pinsky's work, or that of Larry Levis). To my mind, these differences in tradition and the differences they create in literary criticism are one of the great contributions offered by the

transnational study of literature. Put simply, English-language criticism and terminology, for example Perloff's work, is not in dispute with Chinese critics like Jiang Dengke or Wang Guangming: both sets of works are contingent on their prior scholarship and on their own historical moment and cultural tradition, and each presents a separate facet through which original works can be viewed. What is fascinating in this particular case is the overlap between the two critical traditions.

Whether it stems from a drive to express emotion or an interest in identifying a compositional process shared by all prose poems, the concept that modern prose poetry has something crucial, and something specifically formal, taking place *inside* it is one shared across many Chinese and Western critical works.⁴² Wang Fuming writes, "Due to prose poetic language's extreme inclusiveness (apart from various literary languages, it also can include slang, proverbs, stammering, alien language styles, psychological language, etc.), it can in its complete result create an aesthetic concept that other literary forms cannot often achieve: the internal rhythm of the writer's feelings harmonizes with the rhythms of nature..." (由于散文诗语言极大的包容性（除各种文学语言外，也包括俚语，俗语，吃语，外来语式，心里语言等），他在整体效果上可以创造出其他文学形式常常不能达到的美学境界：作者情绪的内在律动与大自然律动的和谐一致...)⁴³ This contact between the internal and the external is a constant theme in the criticism of Chinese prose poetry, one perhaps built on the the relationship between internal 情 (emotion, feeling) and external 景 (scenery) in classical poetry, or the ancient critical formulation 诗言志, "poetry speaks the will/intent." In the modern period, in discussions of prose poetry, the difference between the internal and external is almost always arrayed as an argument against the establishment of concrete, external formal strictures: because they are 外, outside, they restrict rather than express what is internal. In discussing Ke Lan's character limit

for prose poems, Huang Yongjian writes, "This manner of speaking can't be called irrational, as the crucial precursor of its standpoint is in ancient Chinese *shi* and *ci* poetry's various verse conventions and the fact of their character length limits, but it hasn't gone more deeply towards understanding that prose poetry's external form...is nothing but its internal form (the inner emotional state and structure of feelings) externalized..."⁴⁴ (这种说法不能说没有道理，其立论的主要前提为中国古代诗，词各具格律，字数限定的事实，而没有更深刻地认识到散文诗的外形是...只不过内形式（内在情绪状态和情感结构）的外化...）The sum total of rhyme, rhythm, vision and hearing in the poem has been made an externalization of the inner, the 情, and the 志, although Huang would be unlikely to use those terms. At the same time, however, Huang uses the language of prosody to argue that the emotions and attitudes that make up the interior of the poem have their own structure, their own "rhythm" and that this is, or at least its eventual externalization is, the structure of the prose poem even when there is no discernible rhythm or structure in the poem.

For some readers, Huang's writing in this passage might be considered a fairly abstract, nearly mystical line of investigation, one that might not bear ready fruit: what is the structure of a feeling? How can feelings structure a work? What could be instructive, though, is an understanding of the kind of questions that he is asking: to echo a distinction Marjorie Perloff makes, what the critical discussion in Chinese is describing is not a poetry based upon "reference to indeterminacy" or repeated proofs and examinations of life's basic unknowability, but "the creation of indeterminate forms,"⁴⁵ forms whose structures and rules have been withdrawn to the interior of the poem and become 内在, inner, internal, and to a certain extent invisible. The distinction helps us conceptualize a literary practice where indeterminate forms are used to talk about perfectly determinable topics: "Peach Flowers," above, is in many respects about time and

flowers — topics shared by innumerable poetic works back to and including the *Classic of Poetry*. The work of Ke Lan himself provides another set of excellent examples.⁴⁶ Martin Heidegger defines a term from the Western experience that can help elucidate some of the mysteries of this 内在 structure:

To the Greeks *technē* means neither art nor handicraft but, rather, to make something appear, within what is present, as this or that, in this way or that way. The Greeks conceive of *technē*, producing, in terms of letting appear. *Technē* thus conceived has been concealed in the tectonics of architecture since ancient times.⁴⁷

To interpret a little, it is possible that we should not be speaking of prose poetry in terms of its form, using metaphors of shape and physical structure: most critics, and I would argue most readers, believe that there are few or no formal constants present in prose poetry.⁴⁸ We should instead be speaking of prose poetry in terms of its process, its quality as verb, its *technē*: the way in which the poem appears, the method by which the effect of the poem is produced. This not only avoids the confusion implicit in ascribing inaudible "internal rhyme" to poems that actually do, in many cases, have audible rhyme, but lets us focus more specifically and accurately on the ways in which this process is pursued, ways that may be very different from, and difficult to compare to, qualities of verse and free verse poetry. Huang occasionally touches on the need for this type of thinking when reading prose poems: in trying to explain the difference between prose poetry and other kinds of prose, he says that one key method of definition should come "from function" (从功能上).⁴⁹ This touches on, but does not perhaps adequately specify, the desire to search for *how* prose poetry does the things it does.

A more specific instruction to explore *technē* in contemporary Chinese literature appears in the early critical work of Gao Xingjian (高行健), whose long 1981 essay "A Preliminary Exploration of the Techniques of Modern Fiction" examines techniques common to Chinese and foreign fiction such as use of the vernacular, stream of consciousness, third-person narration,

symbolism, etc.⁵⁰ The defense of the study of technique itself is left to the introduction by Ye

Junjian (叶君健), who writes:

In the practice of making art or art criticism, the principle we really respect is "politics first, art second." The aforementioned saying has indisputable logic, and everybody accepts it, but when we speak of an individual author, in his or her compositional process, after ideological decisions have been made, when he or she picks up a pen to write, it might be that the secondary question of art rises to a position of first importance. At this point the artist becomes an artisan, just like a creator of handicrafts, what he or she works hard at is how to create a fresh, lively form and a unique, individual style, to fully manifest their craftsmanship and conception of art...

在我们的创作与批评的实践中，我们实际所遵循的原则则是“政治第一性，艺术第二性”。上述的这些说法都是无可争辩的道理，大家都接受，但就一个作家而言，在他的写作实践中，主题思想确定以后，他一提起笔来写作，艺术第二性的问题恐怕就要提到第一位了。这时他便成了一个工匠，正如一个制作手工艺品的艺人一样，他所要努力做到的是如何创造新鲜活泼的形式和与众不同的风格，把他的手艺和艺术观充分地表现出来...⁵¹

Excepting the "politics first" assertion that starts the quotation — regardless of the true place of politics in art, the essay itself focuses on questions of technique⁵² — there are two points that are important in this passage. One is that the role of the artist and the role of the critic are fused: they must undergo, at least imaginatively, similar processes in order to create or interpret works. The second is that the work of art and the work of the artist is shown to be present in the writing process. "When we speak of an individual author," we speak of the craft of their process, *how* it is that they make their works into art.

An emphasis on looking for processes to define prose poetry also helps us remember that these processes are often internal to the poem, perhaps acting upon us at the same moment in which we are considering them, and that they are not, as is sometimes true with formal elements or other qualities that define genre, the surface of the artworks. If we cannot understand how a poem works by simply examining its exterior, then how can we, as readers of poems, read *technē*? Paul Celan, an author of beautiful, dense lyrics and one of Heidegger's most sensitive

readers, gives us a valuable model in his essay "The Meridian." The essay, an inspired reading of the work of Georg Büchner, arrives in its final paragraphs at a meridian, "something as immaterial as language, yet earthly, terrestrial, in the shape of a circle which, via both poles, rejoins itself and on the way serenely crosses even the tropics...."⁵³ The meridian is a path, something to be traveled; it is the place where the poem, which is "lonely and *en route*"⁵⁴ also travels, and although it is not a place where the poem can be encountered (no individual point on the meridian, he insists, exists), it is the *way* in which the poem can be encountered. The image is one of the reader circulating, moving together, with the poem and with some part of its author. We may not be able to, as has sometimes been possible through art, take a clear message from poems read in this way, but he remains hopeful, throughout the essay, that "there may be, in one and the same direction, two strangenesses next to each other."⁵⁵

The citations of Celan's essay above are abstract, but as they appear in the essay in full, which immediately puts these abstractions into practice, the idea is considerably more concrete. His reading practice is to follow a piece of art, to travel with it through its words, its sentences, its paragraphs, its context, its author's biography, its critical history, and its place in the history of literature. The text, to Celan, travels not only from word to word, but from age to age, and he takes pains to pursue it in its travels. What this consists of, in "The Meridian" and hopefully in the readings that will follow, are readings which ask traditional questions about what a poem means, how it looks, how it feels to read, why the author might have written it, how it reflects the culture around it, but defer answers to those questions, let the poem guide its readers through the asking, and focus on what happens to the reader who directs certain questions to an individual poem. In the fourth paragraph of "Peach Blossoms," we might for example ask "what is happening now?" and we would first answer, there is a remnant of "the clamor and chaos of the

moment the peach flowers turned." We step along with the poem, picture its image, and ask, "and now what?" The speaker remembers "when I was flying with the peach flowers, and then after..." provoking us to ask, perhaps, "what happened back then?" "People went home, they sat at the dinner table..." and talked about, but didn't exactly attend to, the falling flowers. Our trail, simply by asking some obvious and traditional questions of the poem, has led us from a description of an echo to the speaker's enactment of that echo: just as the sky still holds clamor and chaos, so does the speaker still remember being a falling blossom. The content of that enacted echo, that memory, is of people moving along, acting identically "when I was flying...and then after..." in remembered discussion. The moment is so slim as to be constantly experienced in memory: it is always an echo, but the echo is always of the moment of falling, which pushes itself into the present, and into the poem, again and again. Drawing a picture or schematic of the poem would be possible, but would miss much of the poem's beauty: drawing a flowchart, or a flip-book animation of the poem, recording somehow the way in which it moves repeatedly in and out of the present, might come closer to the beat of the heart of the work. Although the reader's process is never demonstrably identical to the poem, and the poem's is not identical to the process undergone by the author — Celan's great anxiety in "The Meridian" seems to be that the path of the reader, the path of the poem, and the path of the author never intersect — this is a fundamental challenge to all literature and all communication, a matter of faith that exceeds our ability to interpret or reason, and certainly exceeds the responsibility of the literary critic. Opening a book or writing a poem already evinces faith in the possibility that something can be transmitted: once that book is open and that poem exists, our role as readers is to pursue it, to attempt to match its process, its travels, with our own.

We have, then, a method by which we can experience, and record our experiences of,

poetic process: we pursue the poem as if it has a meaning or a goal, read from one word to the next, ask questions of the poem and use any answers it provides to ask still more questions, then attempt to interpret what has happened to us, what process we have undergone, in relationship to the poem that we read. The problem that remains is simply where to start, and Celan's decision in regards to this problem echoes Adele Rosmarin's liberating "*as if*" mentioned in the Preface. In his essay on painter Edgar Jené, he again conceptualizes interpretative experiences with art as journeys: "Though I had known the journey would be strenuous, I worried when I had to enter one of the roads alone, without a guide. One of the roads! There were innumerable, all inviting, all offering me different new eyes..."⁵⁶ He chooses to enter the first painting by "returning to absolute *naïveté*," by believing in the "proper names of things," and for this reason admits that "I listened to my own thoughts during that last break, before facing the dangers of...following Edgar Jené down underneath his paintings." Immediately after, he begins with the title of one individual painting, as arbitrary a starting place as any, without any introduction. "*A Sail Leaves an Eye*. One sail only? No, I see two..."⁵⁷ Because the meridian, the path that art determined by its process follows, is a circular and repeating track, readers can encounter it in many, infinitely many ways, and any of those roads can intersect with the meridian, the poem in its own travels. We would be naive to think that our own thoughts, our starting position, our preconceptions and ignorances have no effect on the way we read poetry; that naïvete, though, is a necessary, and necessarily brief, precondition of travel, and we can therefore start in any way that we like, with the understanding that our method will be to travel *with* the poem, and not *to* the poem. We are explorers, not jewelers; we want *the story of how the poem is made* in its mysterious relationship to *the story of how the poem is read*.

To summarize, there are few formal qualities shared by prose poems that can help us

understand these poems as a genre. Even brevity, the quality of being short, ends in individual poems of greatly varying length. We do, however, recognize some connection between brevity and prose poetry: it may not be any specific character limit, but a process of abbreviation and condensation, that prose poems have in common. We should, then, look for processes — a term here used as shorthand to explain *how* a poem appears to us, the method by which it reveals itself, its *technē* — when trying to understand the genre of prose poetry, and individual poems. We can do this by naively choosing any arbitrary starting point, and attempting to travel along with the poem: we may never find one individual place that we identify as the center of the poem, but we can find ourselves moving along the poem's traces, and in so doing come to understand the experience of a poem's process, as well as what different poems might have in common that makes them members of the same genre.

Recite and Refuse

My reading of three poems will follow, an attempt to travel along with a group of works in a way that will reveal processes common to Chinese prose poems, and therefore serve to define the genre. Here, then, are pieces from the second half of the twentieth century that are short works of prose written by poets, and which are otherwise identified as poems or prose poems — since we have no definitions yet ourselves, let us start by naively assuming that whatever someone calls a prose poem is in fact a prose poem, and work from there. The first is from 2008, and is written by an avant-garde, experimental poet and editor who lives in Beijing:

54 lines redacted

58

The second poem was placed at the Monument to the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square shortly after the death of Zhou Enlai, at a time when the succession struggle near the end of Mao's life was threatening to burst out onto the street:

24 lines redacted

59

The final poem was written by a newspaper reporter in Yunnan province, and published in *Prose Poetry* (《散文诗》) magazine in 1994:

36 lines redacted

60

In a work on European and American prose poems, Jonathan Monroe writes that although he uses close reading to make his arguments, "I have not intended these readings to be ends in themselves or to serve merely for the elucidation of difficult passages..."⁶¹. In this section, for reasons outlined previously, I basically intend the opposite: to take the readings of these three poems as ends in themselves, and then to refine commonalities and concepts from them that can be used to elucidate difficult passages in these and other poems.

Xi Chuan's poem "After Wang Ximeng" first appeared as a suite of three prose pieces in

the culture pages of a newspaper; the suite is called "Three Historical Inquiries" (鑑史三首), with the measure word *shou* indicating quite clearly that these inquiries are poems. The topic is a massive eleven-meter scroll painting accomplished by an 18-year old painter during the Northern Song (960-1127). The enormity and vivid color of the landscape in "A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains" is set off by the occasional presence of tiny, often white-garbed figures in delicate pavilions and boats. Xi Chuan begins the poem much in the way that most ekphrastic poems begin, with a description of the work. Almost immediately, though, we are taken from a viewing perspective that is far distant from the painting — the figures aren't visible to viewers who are standing far away from the scroll — to one that is extremely close, practically internal. "Some people are walking in them, but they're still empty mountains, as if the people walking there have no faces..." Because the scope of "Rivers and Mountains" is so grand, the people of the painting have a cartoon simplicity, with many performing easily recognizable tasks, like poling a boat or playing an instrument. It feels counter to the expectations encouraged by the painting to zoom in on individual figures with an expectation that they will have individuality or interiority: the painting's drama and its genius are in its attempt to make a panorama as broad as certain vistas in nature, in the technique it chooses to indicate the times when we can see for a "thousand miles." The people in the painting aren't simply included for scale, but they do serve an instrumental purpose, a group of "decorations in mountains and waters."

This is not so in Xi Chuan's poem; although it works to set us in Wang Ximeng's painting, it questions the tiny figures in a way that is less appropriate for ekphrasis and more appropriate to a "historical inquiry": it wants to know their names, it questions the pleasures of their society, it asks what they do all day, how they feel, what they think. When we arrive at "just like, today, people, in black, go to banquets, concerts, and funerals, surrounded by golden colors and more

golden colors..." it becomes clear that we are not necessarily experiencing a poet describing the world of an ancient painting in modern terms, but also that the poet is describing the contemporary social landscape in terms of an ancient painting. The ekphrastic expectation, namely that the poet will faithfully describe the painting or make contact, somehow, with the painting's effect on its viewers, has been upheld in an unexpected way; the expectations produced by naming the series as a group of "historical inquiries" have been upended by shifting the lens to the present day.⁶² These two observations unlock the poem: first that the poem is "about" a painting but has a view of the painting that takes a defamiliarizing perspective, and second that the poem claims to be an examination of history, but also examines the present day. The joy of the poem is that once it is unlocked, a rich world of content opens up, and resonant connections appear between the painting, the poem, and the world: the way in which the contemporary Chinese macroeconomic story diminishes individual figures, the way in which superabundance causes amnesia, the silence that comes from happiness and the assumption of happiness that we take from silence.

It may seem counterintuitive to put Xi Chuan's poem next to something like "We Pledge Our Lives to Defend You," which is brutally direct, unadorned, and speaks in the idiom and terms of its own particular historical moment. Whether or not this piece is as self-conscious of its strangeness as "After Wang Ximeng," though, it is a terrifically strange piece of writing. The occasion for the placement of this piece at the Monument to the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square was the first Qingming Festival (清明节) after the death of Zhou Enlai, a popular leader and a moderate voice in government. It was a political act to commemorate Zhou Enlai on Qingming, a traditional day of obeisance and sacrifice to ancestral spirits: by overlooking his funeral, the seriously ailing Mao (or those who spoke for him) had made it clear that Zhou was to

be given no special honors. Even though, as Jonathan Spence points out, Mao was in good enough health to formally entertain Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan more than four months after Zhou's death, there was no letter sent to Zhou's widow or any kind of official observation of his death.⁶³ In this context, although it was quite common to remember fallen leaders at the Tiananmen Monument, placing this ceremonial piece of literature at the Monument to the People's Heroes on the day of Qingming was a show of public disagreement with the leadership's position. The poems were taken down by public security forces, sparking demonstrations that were met with bloody suppression as those in power struggled to control the people of Beijing. Not long later, however, when the secession crisis triggered by Mao's death ended with Zhou's ally and political heir Deng Xiaoping in the ascendancy, the poems not only lost their political taint, but became proof of the public support for and legitimacy of the new government.

This particular piece performs more subtle intertextual work than simply supporting a leader who has become unpopular with the central government: it also knits in two kinds of language familiar from the Cultural Revolution, formulaic epithet and the call to action. The "Khrushchevite plotters and careerists," namely those who formed an inner circle around Mao and would soon be tried and imprisoned as the "Gang of Four," are accused of acting like hated CCCP General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev in exactly the same way that Mao and his partisans had accused, and on which grounds they eventually arrested, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping at the start of the Cultural Revolution. Then, in 1976, a damning essay in the Party organ *Red Flag* directly addressed moderate Liu Shaoqi: "You are surely no 'old revolutionary', you are a fake revolutionary, an anti-revolutionary, you are a Khrushchev sleeping beside us!" (你根本不是什么“老革命”，你是假革命、反革命，你就是睡在我们身边的赫鲁晓夫!)⁶⁴ Deng Xiaoping was the overwhelming choice for Mao's successor among those close to Zhou Enlai: the way this

piece and those that accompanied it reverse the language used to imprison him, and direct that language against his persecutors, is truly surreal. The call to arms that ends the poem is also a kind of skin graft onto the poem's basic message of support for Zhou and criticism of his enemies: it hovers somewhere between a future that is assured, one that "we have seen" and cannot be stopped by "houseflies," and a plea either to the spirit of Zhou Enlai or to the young "future of the Chinese race" to seize control of that future, and the government at its center. The indeterminacy hinges on the word 让, "let," also translatable as "make": the feeling, a surge of energy washing over all negative elements, is clear, but the origin of that feeling, and the identification of the agents who will cause it to happen, is left intentionally vague. This is a common quality of Cultural Revolution-era slogans, but *not* a quality of an average memorial speech, letter or poem.⁶⁵

But is this truly a poem? Xi Chuan, the author of "After Wang Ximeng," is widely considered to be a poet and he calls his collections poetry collections; "After Wang Ximeng" is called a poem in the newspaper where it first appears. In the case of "We Pledge Our Lives to Defend You," and the many pieces like it that were anonymously deposited in Tiananmen Square in 1976, however, there is no critical or editorial consensus. The editors of the first collection of pieces from Tiananmen, who collectively went by the pen name 童怀周, a pun for "together we remember Zhou," considered at least some of the prose works delivered to the Memorial to be poems, separating them in their own section in the anthology and saying that the section in question was made up of "Eulogies, prayers, oaths, prose poems, etc" (第三辑收悼词, 祭词, 誓词, 散文诗等.)⁶⁶ without distinguishing, or instructing us as to how to distinguish, between them. This problem is exceptionally complex considering prose poetry's ability to take the form of a eulogy, prayer, or oath.⁶⁷ Huang Yongjian considers them to be the product of a "special"

period in the history of the prose poem:

Today we see these few pieces and consider them to be prose poems produced in the course of a poetry movement with mass characteristics...when their poetic conception is compared to mainstream Cultural Revolution poetic works, they are certainly the same—political fervor, the cries of the sloganeer, and a poverty and flatness of artistic imagination. Perhaps we can consider these as aberrant prose poems of a special historical context, this principally speaking in terms of modern aesthetic characteristics.

现在我们见到的几篇认为是这场群众性的诗歌运动中产生的散文作品....其诗歌观念相对于文革的主流诗歌写作来说，并无二致——政治的激情，标语口号的呼告，艺术想象贫乏单调。或许我们可以认为这是特殊历史背景下散文诗的畸变，这主要是就散文诗的现代审美特性而言。⁶⁸

Huang never argues that this poem, or others like it, lack the *form* of the prose poem: reproduced alongside "After Wang Ximeng" and especially "Firewood Seller," above, the visual resemblance is clear, and although the figurative language is tipped toward *chengyu* cliché and political euphemism in "We Pledge Our Lives," it is still figurative, carefully crafted language that strays at least slightly outside the realm of purely practical speech. Huang's main focus in the case of these poems is on the way that they reflect their times, times quite different from those in which the majority of prose poems were composed. For this reason, he concludes, whether or not they are prose poems, they are "only a kind of regressive, aberrant form."⁶⁹

But is this regressive form actually prose poetry? In the historical survey that fronts his massive anthology of prose poetry, Wang Fuming doesn't mention the 1976 Tiananmen poems: he says that "the period from 1963 to 1977 was a low period in Chinese prose poetry."⁷⁰ The place where he resumes his narrative, though, is with what he considers the first prose poem of the new period, published in the *People's Daily*, a poem called "Only Because — Scattered Thoughts on a Female Party Member" 《只因 —— 关于一个女共产党员的断想》 by Shuo Wang 朔望, that commemorated the martyrdom of Zhang Zhixin 张志新, a CCP member persecuted to death during the Cultural Revolution for criticizing Mao Zedong. Examination of

the archives of the *People's Daily* shows that the poem was actually published on July 14, 1979: intentionally or unintentionally, Wang has moved it forward to place it earlier than other works, such as a prose poetry collection by Li Hualan 李华岗,⁷¹ and considers it notable enough to give it pride of place at the beginning of the history of post-Cultural Revolution prose poetry. Most would agree that "Only Because" is a better poem, and more artfully arranged, than "We Pledge Our Lives": however, "Only Because" could not easily be called a different *kind* of poem. The whole poem is seventeen short paragraphs, and here are the first two and the final two:

Only because a bright butterfly has flung itself plummeting into the mud, the world in the poet's eyes is no longer ash-gray and brown.

Only because a tender girl has gone calmly to her death, the full weight of Chinese territory has begun to turn at great speed.

....

Only because you were radiant, we abhor all darkness.

Only because of your great suffering, have the people of China undergone a great enlightenment?!

只因一只彩蝶翩然扑到泥里，诗人眼中的世界再不是灰褐色的。
只因一个弱女子的从容死去，沉重的中国大地飞速地转动起来。

....

只因你是光明，我们痛恨一切黑暗。

只因你的大苦大难，中华民族其将大彻大悟？！⁷²

Oddly, this poem's speaker stands in much the same position, and performs the same kinds of speech acts, as that of "We Pledge Our Lives," namely inhabiting the persona of a mourner directly addressing a departed martyr in order to advance specific political goals. What seems different is not recourse to "political fervor" or "the cries of the sloganeer" but a degree of difference in "artistic flatness," as well as context: "Only Because" was published as a poem in a national newspaper, and "We Pledge Our Lives" attached to a national monument, and then anthologized. There is also an interesting political difference, an ambivalence inserted not in the text, but in the punctuation: while the final sentence is the kind of language acceptable during the Communist period, and would without punctuation be an unremarkable statement of faith, the

question mark resists, casting a very light shadow of doubt over the poem's final line and the prospects for progress past the brutality of the Cultural Revolution.

Unlike Wang Fuming, Huang Yongjian likely considers "Only Because" another example of aberrant Cultural Revolution-style poetry, and would probably categorize it along with Tiananmen poems like "We Pledge Our Lives." When "Only Because" and "We Pledge" are placed next to "After Wang Ximeng," however, when they are provisionally read as members of the same group, there are certain visible similarities. All three poems begin in utter familiarity: a famous painting, a memorial occasion, a widely known story of a martyr. They are not only about familiar topics, but they initially claim to engage in those topics in a familiar way: Xi Chuan describes the painting, and "Only Because" and "We Pledge" mourn the deaths to which their poems refer. These performances are sincere: we are intended, I think, to really examine "A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains," to experience the painting through the poem.⁷³ While the thoughts and feelings in the poem differ from traditional reactions to the painting, the poem still upholds its ekphrastic promise to describe and react to the painting. Similarly, regardless of his or her other motivations, the anonymous writer of "We Pledge Our Lives" truly does seem driven to mourn the passing of Zhou Enlai. None of these poems are engaging in ironic indications of speech acts that they will then deride; none of them pretend to be one thing and then suddenly turn into another. Simultaneously, however, over the course of these poems' recitation of familiar forms of writing, there is also a willful twisting, a refusal to carry these traditional forms through to the conclusions that other works of the same type have previously insisted on, or a refusal to set them in the contexts on which these traditional forms have depended in the past.

The acts of recitation that appear in the prose poems above are not simply acts of citation,

quotation, or allusion, a practice that has taken place immemorially in Chinese and world literature. When David Lattimore describes Tang-dynasty allusion, he quotes Freud saying that allusion is the pleasure of finding "something familiar when one expects to find something new instead," and associates it with a kind of combinatory intelligence. As evidence, he points out that in ancient China, deft allusion to the *Classic of Poetry* was a way to make counterintuitive connections and thereby build continuities between the present and the past that helped guide a listener or a reader through a work of art.⁷⁴ "After Wang Ximeng" makes a citation of its title: we are expecting to read something new, but are surprised to find it pointing to a painting that we have, perhaps, heard of before. The other two poems, though, don't share this act of citation — although they do repeat prior ways of speaking, they don't identify their source material by name. What all three have poems have in common is instead that they handle their materials by inhabiting or possessing them, recreating them: what they share is not a pointing to or quotation of previous works, but instead a re-performance of those works. Readers expect the same thing from the prose poem that they received from the previous work of prose or poetry. The effect is that of creating the expectation of familiarity, rather than counteracting an expectation of novelty, and that expectation then becomes the field upon which the poem will enact itself. When we read the physical specificity of the title, the "Blue and Green Horizontal Landscape Scroll" (青绿山水长卷), we expect an account of the contents of the painting, which is too large for most people to scrutinize in its entirety. That scrutiny does, in fact, take place, and the contents are accounted for: the figures are described, the colors, the vastness of the sea — the painting is not indicated, or pointed at, but summoned, recreated in words. The title cites the painting, but the poem performs it, recites it.⁷⁵

By citation, I mean to include any kind of language that indicates another original work,

that points to it: using a title, for example, or referring to an author's work specifically. Quotation is one of the most common forms of citation: by reproducing exactly the characters of another text, a writer or speaker can focus the reader's attention on that text, and establish a link between the outside text and the text at hand. Recitation is different in intent, and almost always different in form. Although it repeats something which has come before, no overt link is drawn to an outside text, and the work being created performs that which has gone before in its own voice. This transports the prior text, the one being recited, into the present: it makes the speaker the site of the prior art. In a situation where an employee is forbidden to date the boss (or the boss the employee), a response in citation might look like: "this is a lot like the problem Shakespeare's Juliet was talking about in the balcony scene," and a response in recitation might involve someone throwing a window open and saying, "what is in a name? Wherefore art thou assistant director of operations?" Citation is reference, and it points outside the situation at hand, while recitation uses prior texts to perform the present. The original text can be known to the audience, or unknown: recitation is meaningful in either way, and although the fact that prior texts are not always explicitly identified makes the critic's job harder, it makes critical labor more useful as well.

Just as recitation performs rather than advocates previous work, refusal in these prose poems is not, exactly, a simple negation: the poem "After Wang Ximeng" does not end with the argument that "Rivers and Mountains" has little relationship with the real world, but goes on to show how the painting's creation of an idealized world is identical to the idealizations and decorations of modern society. "We Pledge Our Lives," similarly, does not simply assert that the actions and speech of Mao's inner circle are hypocritical and dangerous, it twists their language back towards them and in doing so creates a new piece of language in service to a new political

direction. Out of the scraps of a familiar narrative, well-worn idea, or traditional art form, something new is fused together and takes shape. This is what happens in the third poem above, "Firewood Seller," where the poem starts by reciting an extremely familiar sight and story, a hardworking peasant mother coming into town to make some money from roadside commerce. One early appearance of a similar scene takes place in the short story "Mrs. Shi Qing" 《石青嫂子》 by Ai Wu 艾芜, written in 1947: "Even after the stars had come out, a light evening mist had swallowed up the woods and cottage, and the baby left by the door had begun to cry, she could still be found working in the fields, gathering melons, beans, eggplants or peppers. Next morning she would sell them at the market five *li* away and buy some rice with the proceeds."⁷⁶ Where this poem goes, however, refuses to take us to the terminus of the cliché, which usually ends in the poor mother either escaping her plight through a stroke of luck or, in Ai Wu's hands, with her complete destitution and homelessness. Instead, "Firewood Seller" separates the elements of the story, the son, the marriage, the labor, the wood, and the customer in the city, then (re-) fuses them together in a completely novel set of combinations.

Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker begins her history of peasant representation by focusing on traditional distinctions between intellectuals, the most common subjects and writers of literature, and peasants, who are far more likely to be an object of literature.⁷⁷ She examines a number of different kinds of relationships between intellectual and peasant, like Lu Xun's 鲁迅 self-consciously distanced and ultimately powerless intellectual narrator in "The New Year Sacrifice" 《祝福》, or Gao Xiaosheng's practice of entering peasant subjectivity in order to illustrate that "they would like to express themselves, but are unable to." The poem "Firewood Seller," too, begins by empathizing with the mother and her imagined family, then falls into the grinding cycle of an urban intellectual's worries about housing, money, and love. The speaker reveals

himself as a grown version of the boy chopping wood, identifying wholly (and fantastically) with the imagined struggle of the fictional family: the poem has become, rather than a single story, a meditation on the types of interactions possible between the writer and the written, the watcher and the watched.

It is in the last paragraph, though, that these elements, object, subject, and shifting perspective, are re-fused into a new kind of structure. The speaker of the poem addresses an implicit 'you,' the subject of the imperative "to make," someone able to transform the speaker into the firewood itself. This addressed 'you' seems like it must be either the creator or reader of the poem, but the paragraph then names a particular "you," one identifiable as the peasant mother, broke, hauling her goods back to her village. By offering several possible interpretations of the "I" of the poem — city dweller, country boy grown up, figment of the writer's imagination, valueless object shouldered by rural workers — the poet creates a speaker who can be none or any of these things, a poetic object that, unlike the peasant mother with her familial and economic concerns, can truly be made into anything. Although the story of the poem, in a sense, *does* send the peasant mother back home with no money and a heavy load, there is a simultaneous, and almost uncomfortably ecstatic moment of freedom when the speaker consents to being transformed into the fragrant wood that is at the center of the poem's imagery and is its central sensual desire. This is not simply an explosion of a traditionally unexamined narrative or style of writing: acts of deconstruction, satire, and political criticism have been practiced on stories about peasant hardship since they first began appearing in the May Fourth movement, as Feuerwerker illustrates. It is instead an act of creation taking place in the moment of that explosion. It annuls, with a wave of its hand, the dialectical preoccupations of so much Chinese literature (the rich and the poor, the watcher and the watched, the voiced and the voiceless) and

collapses into sense, scent, and identity as object. The world continues as it has and the peasant mother returns with her goods unsold, but the narrating voice is no longer present to comment on the situation, and has instead been made its own kind of commodity. The way that this inhabitation of the commodity by a poem has been "allowed to appear," to use Heidegger's language, is by a brief recitation of a familiar story and a familiar storytelling form that is followed by a refusal to follow the story, and its form, through to its expected terminus. It is the process of recitation and refusal that makes the speaker's inhabitation of the firewood seem revolutionary and freeing even though it is, in its way, a kind of sad capitulation.

The twin movements, sometimes simultaneous, sometimes in procession, of recitation and refusal appear, to vastly different effects, in all three of the poems reproduced at the start of the section. In "After Wang Ximeng," the elements of Wang's painting are atomized, scrutinized, and reconstituted into a peaceful, bloodless, ominously quiet ideal society; in "We Pledge Our Lives to Defend You," the idiom of leftist rage is summoned, and then focused on leftists themselves; in "Firewood Seller," clichés about class are repeated, examined, and almost imperiously turned away from. All three cases perform the process of recitation in multiple valences of the word: whether or not they clearly indicate (cite) an extant tradition or type of language, they repeat one, carry it out again and anew, as Chinese children are sometimes taught to recite the poems of the Tang. In a similar way, they refuse the conclusions, morals, meanings or applications of the prior art that they recite, and make of that refusal a new thing, a new piece of art, something welded or melted together in the process of resisting received forms and ideas. It is, in a way, the new piece of art that makes this process, this technique, so hard to see: at the end of "After Wang Ximeng" we are focused on the singing figures, the way that they transform their surroundings, "acquiring" them, but are simultaneously powerless, distanced, alienated

from their surroundings. They sing and we get the feeling that the mountains could not exist without them; they sing and the empty mountains are empty of them, ignorant of them, neutralizing them. The way this image is revealed to us, the cradle of the ancient painting in which it is raised, seems of low visibility, arbitrary, a question of how instead of the more immediately sensible what. Where definition is concerned, however, it is perhaps this quality, a process of recitation and refusal, that links these poems.

The following, then, will be the crux of the definition of Chinese prose poetry with which this discussion will proceed, a definition intended to be used as a tool for understanding rather than to exclude or include individual works in a fixed canon. As noted in the preface, this definition aims to be a metaphor for a group of poems which in reality have no fixed boundaries, a metaphor that we will be able to use for our own instruction, to match against individual works. We will take prose poems as pieces of prose that have undergone a process of condensation similar to that found in poetry. We will ask if they *recite* a previous piece of language, recreating it, performing it once again in the present, and then *refuse* that previous writing, both in the sense that they eschew the previous resolution, conclusion, aesthetic ideology or narrative path of the recited text, and in that their refusal of the prior text is in itself an artistic gesture. Unlike negation, which is a relationship between two things as static as negation in mathematics, refusal is a process, an action, and a gesture — a kind of *non serviam* — that complicates and animates prose poetry's recitation of prior texts. We will be asking if these two processes result in prose poems, but just as "Firewood Seller" ends in saying and doing much more than repeating or refusing to fully repeat the image of the peasant doing business on the roadside, prose poetry cannot be reduced to these processes. Recitation and refusal are not the point or meaning of individual prose poems, they are our starting point, our supposition about prose poetry's internal

structure, its process, its shared *technē*.

Recitation and Refusal in Critical Context: Subversion and the Poetics of Hinting

The following prose poems are by Ke Lan 柯蓝, who wrote his piece in the Mao-era Chinese mainland, and Janet Yeung (Yang Huisi 杨慧思), a contemporary poet from Hong Kong.

24 lines redacted

26 lines redacted

79

Western criticism of prose poetry, particularly that in the U. S., has formed a partial and tenuous consensus around the idea that the genre is mainly notable for its subversive, anti-dominant or anti-traditional tendencies. Marguerite Murphy puts it most directly in her study of American prose poetry, *A Tradition of Subversion*: "The prose poem...is of special interest as a genre in which the traditional and the new are brought continually and inevitably into conflict, a conflict in which presumably every literary text participates, but which is here intensified and foregrounded."⁸⁰ Murphy's criticism, founded on Bakhtin's theory of the novel and influenced heavily by the prior studies of Richard Terdiman and Jonathan Monroe, updates those critics' arguments that the prose poem in English and French is basically revolutionary, a "counter-discourse" that expresses and enacts class struggle in the Marxist sense.⁸¹ What her work inherits from them, however, is an increasingly unexamined assumption, prevalent in Marx and Foucault, that language is always and necessarily struggle, that it is always a competition among powers. Terdiman cites Foucault: "The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning," and concludes that

"*the form of language itself is contradiction.*"⁸² Even if her dialectic is non-Marxist and non-Hegelian, it retains this basis of struggle and strife, and as such she theorizes that struggle repeats "inevitably" in literature, especially in the form of the prose poem.

Murphy's method of classifying prose poetry describes only a subset of the poems which can be composed through the processes of recitation and refusal, in which prose poems recite outside aesthetics, ideas or texts, and then refuse identity with those recited ideas or texts. Recourse to particular poems, especially Chinese prose poems, can help us differentiate this process from one of simple conflict or subversion: simply put, individual poems demonstrate that it is possible to refuse to be identical to prior art or dominant political systems without entering into conflict with those outside forces, and further that it is possible to use the processes that help form prose poetry in overt service to dominant ideologies or traditional values. This is, perhaps, a particularly common situation where Chinese prose poetry is concerned, both because of the dangers that faced writers of subversive literature throughout the second half of the twentieth century, and because of China's long history of overlap between the worlds of poetry and those of service to the government.

Ke Lan's poem "Snowy Ground" both demonstrates and intentionally engages with these issues. Published in an official literary journal during a period of Communist Party control over literature and the arts, it has several marks of ideological purity with regards to Marxism-Leninism, the dominant political discourse of the time. Hunting being a rural pastime, the poem takes place outside the city, among (if not demonstrably 'about') the peasantry that was the backbone of the 1949 revolution; it praises this pastime; it promises, very specifically, 'victory' to those who have undergone privation and challenges to their faith. It visualizes this victory as violent and glorious by using terminology that can also be easily applied to the Chinese

Communist revolution, in which people who have suffered greatly and undergone great chaos rise up dramatically and with superhuman strength to forge a new and eternal nation. Even the structure of the final sentence resembles orthodox Chinese government speech. Compare this line from the *Quotations of Mao Zedong*: "The party that leads a great revolutionary movement, if it does not have revolutionary theory, if it does not have knowledge of history, if it does not have a deep understanding in regards to practical action, it cannot prevail." (指导一个伟大的革命运动的政党，如果没有革命理论，没有历史知识，没有对于实际运动的深刻的了解，要取得胜利是不可能的。)⁸³ This echoing of Party ideology is *not*, however, the strongest act of recitation in which the poem engages: it makes its formal mask very specific by listing, as Ke Lan often does in his prose poems, the genre in which the poem participates, in this case "Hunter's Notes." Ke Lan often, in what seems a very clear act of recitation, specifically identifies the genre in which his prose poems take part, and those genres are most often letters, journals, or addresses that seem to be undertaken by the author, rather than a fictive speaker: after a poem series called "A Souvenir Album Picked Up" 拾到的纪念册,⁸⁴ he identifies that series as 作者的补记, "the afterthoughts of the author." We are intended, then, to interpret "Snowy Ground" as arising from an author's first-hand experience of the act of hunting — the revolutionary ideals that these notes contain refuse, though, to remain a simple record of a hunt, but expand to become much more, a reaffirmation of Communist and revolutionary truths bursting forth from the actions and writings of the people.

This is *not subversive* — this is an imaginative recapitulation and gesture of support for a nation's dominant political ideology. Much prose poetry, especially those few works published in the years between 1949 and 1978, but certainly including work published afterwards, overtly or covertly makes itself amenable to the political philosophies and expectations of the day.

Although Murphy's *Tradition of Subversion* limits itself to French and English poetry alone, "Snowy Ground" and other poems like it provide clear proof that her project "to offer a model for reading prose poems irrespective of language or national literature" is not necessarily reliable in the case of non-English, non-French prose poetry.⁸⁵ Adrian Wanner, writing on Russian and Soviet prose poetry, makes essentially the same point, calling the prose poetry of Solzhenitsyn, for example, "completely monological" and not dialogical in Bakhtin's sense.⁸⁶ Prose poetry's lyric roots give it the option of creating one poetic voice; this is the quality of the lyric against which Bakhtin was originally defining the novel, and it seems clear that cross-application of his theories of the novel is inappropriate for much prose poetry. Recitation and refusal are not inherently dialogical processes: when poetic speakers recite, they most often remain themselves (someone who gives voice to a Du Fu poem does not become Du Fu, and their attitude, identity, and appearance all affect the recitation of the poem) rather than fragmenting into many fictive characters, as is the norm for the novel. More concretely, Ke Lan's speaker is a hunter, albeit a uniquely revolutionary hunter who does not precisely fulfill our expectations of what a hunter should be like. He is emphatically not a hunter-self in some sort of dialogue with a poet-self or a revolutionary-self. This is similar to Xi Chuan's work "After Wang Ximeng," wherein the poetic speaker really does work to describe the painting, or the anonymous speaker in "We Pledge Our Lives," who really has come to remember Zhou Enlai. That they have other motives, and that those other motives guide the poem away from formal or generic expectations, does not mean that these motives are necessarily in dialogue or in conflict: they are simply simultaneous. The structure that conflicting and cooperative emotions, ideas, sensations and stories make in prose poetry is not that of a dialogue, but that of a poem.

Past its expressly nonsubversive quality, what makes "Snowy Ground" particularly

interesting as a poem is the way in which it reveals, much in the way Terdiman, Monroe and Murphy attempt to do, the violence at the heart of its vision of human action. The hunter's bravery, his push forward, the blankness of the snow, the intermittent sense of direction through which he must forge ahead — all of these are common, sufficient metaphors for revolutionary practice and the post-1949 founding of "New China"; bravery and persistence are also familiar ways to talk about the hunter. What is less intuitive, perhaps, is that these assessments sit side by side with the underlying goal of the hunter's (or the revolutionary's) excursion. It is the victorious bullet, the kill, that justifies these acts and this hunter's privations, just as Mao's government comes from the barrel of the gun, and just as Marxist revolution is so often considered to be an unavoidably violent uprising. At the heart of the Marxist theory of literature, of the Hegelian dialectic, and of Foucault's assertion that movements of language are movements of power, is the opinion that violence is omnipresent in and necessary to language. In Ke Lan's terms, there is no progress forward and no play of tracks in the snow without the motivation of the killing bullet.⁸⁷

The paradox that ensues, a work of art that is a completely orthodox and acceptable view of the violence inherent in life and necessary for revolution, is one that shows some of the genetic limitations of Marxist criticism in the Western world. Having established itself during a period in which it was itself subversive, and interesting itself far more commonly in abstractions and tropes than in temporal politics, Western Marxist literary criticism has little drive or ability to conceptualize a real, concrete society or a literature built on and reifying Marxist values,⁸⁸ a weakness that may also motivate Wanner's objections to claims about the subversive qualities of Russian literature. Whether or not Chinese Marxism can be easily equated to European or American Marxism, certain shared concepts, such as language's inescapable role as a class battleground, were considered basic truths in Chinese politics and letters of the 1950s and 1960s,

and we can see from their history some of the effects of wide acceptance of such a belief. A society in which all literary acts are considered to be subversions, or in Terdiman and Monroe's more radical formulations, in which they are assumed to be revolutions against the dominant order, not only gives those with a stake in the dominant order unlimited license to suppress literature, but leads to an exaggerated sensitivity to conflict when reading individual poems. A good example of this is Murphy's discussion of the prose poems of Oscar Wilde, which emphasizes that Wilde's use of Biblical imagery was intended to subvert the Bible's authority: she writes, "Wilde's prose poems, then, were especially daring through his gesture of putting the artist, or himself, in the place of Christ as well as his transformation of sacred writing into profane, blasphemous in the eyes of the devout."⁸⁹ That this is blasphemous is certainly true, but focus on the subversive qualities of literature suppresses our experience of the creative qualities of literature. The discourse of subversion obscures what Wilde actually intends to say about the nature of an artist's work and life, the part of his poems that are directed not backwards against prior literature, but build on the foundations of prior literature and are oriented towards the present and future. A comparison with poets like Tagore and Gibran, both of whom also use religious and specifically Biblical idiom to talk about art and life without recourse to formal Christianity, reveals that it is not necessary to be in opposition to the work and ideas that one recites.⁹⁰ Tagore and Gibran can echo Biblical, Qu'ranic, and Hindu language while remaining ambivalent, indifferent to or even in support of those traditions.

There are critics of English-language prose poetry who question whether its subversive qualities are essential to the form: Steven Monte, in particular, is very direct, writing that "My general point is that prose poetry raises many questions that tend to get elided in the debate about its revolutionary character," and that "I am antiessentialist when it comes to questions of form or

genre: the fact that a poem is written in prose does not necessarily mean it is subversive."⁹¹ The way in which he chooses to understand prose poetry, a "negative dialectics" that describes a poem's "refusal to steer its meditations toward a fixed end that nevertheless, through a kind of tacking movement necessitated by moments of impasse, gives form and direction to the poem"⁹² is ideal for the poems, like Ashbery's, that he studies, and captures the contemporary American struggles with closure and truth. American poems are more apt to refuse all fixed ends as an ontological category — to feel that it is simply untrue and indefensible to finish a poem with an epiphany, a moral lesson, or an exhortation towards certain behaviors. Chinese poems, on the other hand, are more likely to refuse one particular fixed end as a procedural step en route to a separate fixed end — to argue, for example, that moral lessons previously enforced are wrong, and we should instead learn a new set of moral lessons. The refusal of Chinese prose poetry, as described in section one, is a process, and that process can be applied to the full range of goals, both subversive and nonsubversive, both "negative," in Monte's sense, and positive.

One example of this is Janet Yeung's poem "Once," which creates an immediate scenic expectation. The speaker stands in a viewer's position, looking out over a river, and then complicates it by applying that visual language to the description of a time, a "once." The kind of refusal that Monte argues is omnipresent in Ashbery is here, as well, but in this case it is a single refusal, as the poem uses its refusal of the landscape tradition to describe and ultimately exorcise the moment that titles it. This refusal, unlike refusals appearing in poems like "After Wang Ximeng" or "Firewood Seller" that are discussed above, seems less interested in what it refuses: it spends no time demonstrating that a landscape or a history is impossible or undesirable, but swiftly offers and then refuses traditional landscape and history in order to create a landscape that is a memory, a past moment that can be looked out over in the present tense, and ultimately

one that can be willfully left behind. Proponents of prose poetry's fundamentally subversive nature would likely center their comments on the nature of that "once," and point out that it can be interpreted as a prelapsarian Hong Kong, a bustling city in the middle of an almost metaphoric summer, energetic but peaceful in the time before the lightning and the cold autumn. This poem, they might argue, is a counterdiscourse aimed against the dominant PRC narrative that Hong Kong's 1997 repatriation to the government of mainland China was necessary to end colonial oppression of the citizens of Hong Kong and of China. The poem does seem to speak to issues relating to Hong Kong and its history, especially considering the direct reference to the "injured Hong Kong orchid" at the end of paragraph three.

There is a considerable difference, however, between engaging in discussions of history and politics, and being an act of subversion or counterdiscourse. The poem can be divided in half: in paragraphs one and two, the speaker thinks back to Hong Kong before the "lightning," while in paragraphs three and four, the speaker considers the "autumn" of Hong Kong after repatriation. Description in the first half of the poem is couched in generally positive terms: romantic, decorated, serene but intensely felt, the city is lively. There is also, however, a repeated note that this is a construction of memory, a product of distances in time and changes in the speaker that have taken place since the moment of the "Once." The poem's continuous present means that the speaker is already standing "on the balcony" looking back at that which has passed, and this is reinforced by the fact that the night before lightning in paragraph two "seems" (显得) particularly serene. That "seems" reiterates that the speaker is not experiencing or reexperiencing this moment through memory, but watching it: the speaker and the reader are squinting at this moment from across a darkness, and even the city in the heat of its energy anticipates the future and "looks off towards the silver river." The locations in this poem are, in a

sense, all *elsewhere*: the balcony where we look off towards the opposite shore, the spring city looking off towards the future, the autumn city marching as if in its own funeral procession all emphasize that the titular "once" is in motion, is "drifting." Put succinctly, this poem is not about the past: it is about a present thought of, remembrance of, and desire to exorcise the past.

Chinese poetry has a long tradition of using the past as a source of allegory to speak to the present, but it is rare to see a poem that takes such great care in sealing off the past from the present.

This intentional distance does not, however, directly discount the possibility of a subversive reading for "Once." In the first sentence of paragraph three, the poem echoes Republican revolutionary and poet Qiu Jin 秋瑾, who when forced by Qing officials to write a confession of her crimes against the state, wrote only that "the autumn wind and autumn rain aggrieve a person to death" (秋风秋雨愁煞人). Because Qiu Jin was a non-Communist revolutionary — a hero of the Republican government separate than that which reclaimed Hong Kong from British rule — it is tempting to read "Once" as a poem that subverts contemporary rule of Hong Kong by the PRC. Put simply, one could argue that the poem claims that Hong Kong was more beautiful in the past, and that the spirit of Qiu Jin counsels revolution against an empire. In truth, however, the poem holds out no possibility for revolution or even concerted opposition. Qiu Jin's poetic response to her capture, and her unavoidable death at the hands of the Qing government, is one that recasts her struggle as that of the individual against nature, and in so doing identifies the Qing with the unstoppable change of seasons, and their oncoming violence with the ineluctable loss of beauty that autumn brings. This is not subversion: it is a kind of suicide, one that paints the empire as negative and destructive even as it accepts its ascendancy. Similarly, "Once" pines for past times, but sees no solution to that pain except

motion forward. In short, it is certainly not orthodox government speech, but neither is it in any kind of direct conflict with government policies or expectations. If there is any ideology represented by Qiu Jin's presence in "Once," it is the attitude of classical Chinese poets like Du Fu who grieve for the state and the populace from a remove that is both temporal (as they are often powerless to make changes, and writing after the fact) and attitudinal (owing in part to the Buddhist or Daoist belief that transcendence comes as a result of disengagement from the world of pleasure and suffering). Confusing the matter further is Hong Kong's position as a city of the future, and Qiu Jin's role as a precursor to modern China, both expressed with the materials of classical poetry, a once-dominant form that no longer holds sway. What Terdiman terms the methods through which poets "contested the dominant habits of mind and expression of their contemporaries"⁹³ become impossible to discuss if critics and readers have no shared concept of what is and is not dominant, and as "Once" makes clear, the dominant changes unpredictably over time.

Marguerite Murphy might respond to the layers of ambivalence, remove, and capitulation in "Once" by saying that the hiddenness of a prose poem's opposition to the dominant is part of its opposition: she claims that the convention of prose poetry is "a convention of subversion, and of subversion of prose conventions, engendering an a priori unknowability, a norm of undetermined contention."⁹⁴ Murphy's insistence on subversion leads, as we see above, to some oversimplified interpretations of poems; in this context, her assertion that the conventions of prose poetry cause "a priori unknowability" might seem like simple hand-waving designed to make her claims unverifiable. One cannot, after all, claim that a poem is not subversive if the poem's conventions, and its relations to such, are unknowable by fiat. However, her idea that the process that prose poetry takes part in does tend to be undetermined is a familiar one,

approximate to Marjorie Perloff's description of contemporary poetry as indeterminate in form. In Murphy's discussion of William Carlos Williams's *Kora in Hell*, she gets a bit more specific: "to hint without telling is an essential element of the poeticity of *Kora*: it is a deviant way of saying, through figure and lacuna, that remains evocative through its ambiguities."⁹⁵ This observation may be the real contribution that a conversation about subversion can have when reading and interpreting Chinese prose poems. Huang Yongjian, in addition to listing the making of conceptual leaps 跳跃 and use of metaphor 隐喻 as common qualities of the prose poem, argues that prose poetry is best when it *hints* 暗示.⁹⁶ This is not, in his estimation, a definitional quality of the prose poem, but one that gives aesthetic pleasure, and he believes that it was a quality generally missing from Chinese prose poetry in the 1930s and 1940s. It is possible to see hints — qualities to a poem that may not be immediately or easily visible to a reader — as the "sub" in "subversion," the difference between a document announcing or enacting open conflict and a poem. In theories which establish class struggle or other conflicts over power as the fundamental qualities of language, the difference between what is called art and what is called politics often seems to be the urge to hide or submerge political messages or struggles for control — into the paratext, the context, the subtext, or the subconscious. Contemporary Chinese critics abandon what Murphy has called "contention" and move directly to remark upon and examine the aesthetics and poetics of hinting in relationship to the prose poem. One reason for this critical practice might be a reaction to Maoist era paranoia about the threat of subversion through literature: the argument that this or that genre is necessarily subversive has been used against Chinese scholars and poets for generations. Discussing a poem by Lin DENGHAO, Huang writes: "It depends on a knowledgeable reader to discriminatingly appreciate the music outside of its speech, and the subject outside of its language" (那要靠会心的读者细细品味它的话外之音,

言外之旨). He continues later by saying that the poem "is the external product of some sentiment or emotion belonging to a modern spirit; it must correspond to an identically located modern spirit, and only then can it produce a sympathetic response in the reader." (它是一个现代心灵的某种情绪或感情的外化之物, 必须对应于一个出于同质同构的现代心灵, 才能产生阅读的共鸣).⁹⁷

Huang's terminology to describe the way readers interpret hints helps us identify the difference between subversion, which Murphy claims is at the heart of prose poetry, and opposition, which would be simple prose: opposition happens *against* its object, and subversion happens *with* and *in* its object. The reason that authors of prose poems might engage in song outside speech and examinations outside language, the reason that they may withhold full elucidation of their internal 内在 structure from their readers, is that readers will then relocate themselves into a position from which they can enter into and participate in the poem. Huang's word above that I have translated as "sympathetic response" is *gongming*, and its characters taken separately mean to cry out together, as animals might. Reading the back-and-forth of "Once," full of grief for the loss of the past and fatigue at its own grief, acknowledgment of the inevitability of loss and the understanding that lights seem more picturesque when seen from afar, is the process of ambivalence, is participation in the push and tug in which the poem, we may feel, was originally conceived. This seems to be the joy in the successfully applied poetics of hinting, and is also a byproduct of subversion: if a poem succeeds in subverting its reader, or if it succeeds in creating *gongming*, then it has created a small consensus, one between the author of a poem and a reader of that poem.

This consensus, and the other acts of reading and of writing that the aesthetics of the hint prefer, are not only a considerably more accurate description of Chinese prose poetry than older

notions of subversion, they avoid the practice of weaponizing language. If we as critics are creating metaphors for genres, if we are acting *as if* we are able to produce compelling categories and shared qualities for groups of literary works, then we must be sensitive to our own responsibilities in telling stories about the literary works we read. To see the prose poem as a "battlefield"⁹⁸ is to see authors, readers, editors, and publishers as antagonists and as victims: whether or not this is true, and it seems clear that the presence of struggle as the fundamental experience of literature is neither provable nor disprovable, it is simply better to speak in terms that allow a literature of peace, of consensus, of construction, and of creation to be possible. To consider the prose poem as a genre basically committed to "subversion" is to assume that all acts of refusal are zero-sum, that Wang Ximeng, for example, loses something and is somehow diminished when a writer refuses to follow in his footsteps. To insist upon subversion is also to underestimate the power of recitation, of taking someone else's position and, even if only for a moment, echoing it, reaffirming it, bringing it into the present. Prose poems can be subversive: "We Give Our Lives," above, certainly attempts to subvert Maoist power, and even "Once" could be argued to oppose a particular kind of rosy attitude towards contemporary Hong Kong. To say, however, that these poems must be fundamentally subversive or to classify the genre as one of subversion is to insist on violence, and to ignore the fact that these poems are often made to be distant to their readers, to speak in terms other than those that we recognize from our own lives, and in so doing to invite us into strange new interiors.

CHAPTER TWO

WORD AND WORLD: WHAT IS THE TRADITION OF CHINESE PROSE POETRY?

故事与历史：中国散文诗的传统是怎样？

"Southern Winnow, Dipper in the north,
Draught Ox that will not bear a yoke --
truly, with no rock to underpin them,
what good are empty names? "

— from the *Nineteen Old Poems* 古诗十九首, tr. Burton Watson

In the Beginning, the Word

This is a set of works culled from anthologies, arranged in chronological order. The first is from 1918, the second written in 1920 and published in 1926: both appear in numberless anthologies and literary histories, and they are often identified as early and exemplary instances of the literary form called prose poetry.⁹⁹

14 lines redacted

46 lines redacted

The first of the next two poems was published in 1957 by Xu Chengmiao, a poet who later

became an influential editor, and who has continued to compose poetry into the 21st century. The second was first published in 2004, by a prize-winning 43-year old poet and novelist from Anhui province.

24 lines redacted

22 lines redacted

In addition to genre qualities like those discussed in chapter one, a literary form also carries with it a set of traditions and historical contexts. People who compose Chinese regulated verse today place themselves in a tradition that stretches back to the early Tang dynasty; in English, when a writer chooses to create a sonnet, that piece participates, whether willingly or not, in a long history of the form that links past sonnets all the way back to Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard. If a literary form can be said to mean anything — to have associated with it a tone, a set of ideas, a politics, or a body of narratives in the ways that we consider poems to mean things — it must largely be a function of the tradition of the form, the way its past use creates an expectation in the present. These expectations aren't rules, as has been amply proven by works like William Gass' limericks about Auschwitz, or the Communist Party's unironic use of classical-style *qiyan* septasyllabic couplets.¹⁰⁴ Whether or not they are part of the poem's text, though, the feeling we get when we encounter violations of the expectations associated with literary forms proves that the expectations themselves are a part of the experience of a poem for both writers and readers, and therefore might supply answers to the question "what is a Chinese prose poem?"

My response to this question centers around what Giorgio Agamben describes as a particular quality of Western deconstructionism, one that it inherits from theological traditions.

To deconstructionists, the signifier precedes and is superior to the signified, just as in the Gospel of John, the word precedes creation and is necessary for creation.¹⁰⁵ This is a very different attitude from that visible in much classical Chinese literary criticism, which often looks back to the practices of the prior world, and then names and explains them. In classical Chinese literature, we have what Confucius calls the *Shi* 诗, *The Poetry*, the collection of poems that we now call the *Classic of Poetry* or *Shi Jing* 诗经. This particular anthology spent at least part of its history as the most direct referent for what we now use as the word "poetry": a title that came to represent one particular poetic practice, and then later expanded to become a more abstract category. Contrast this to the English word *sonnet*, a transplant from Italian poetry — English sonnets are not exact replicas of Italian sonnets, but are an invention in English poetry designed to simulate or mimic an Italian verseform. The genre was created, and defined in a significant sense, by being named, especially by being named in a way that argued that the English poems were somehow similar to or to be equated with the Italian poems. The question in both cases centers around whether a literary tradition is interpreted as gaining its character from the moment that it is first *practiced*, or the moment at which it is *named*.

Both these approaches are worthwhile, but the latter is particularly suited for prose poetry. Because prose poetry looks and sounds like short prose, and can in fact be indistinguishable from short prose (as is particularly true for Liu Bannong's poem "Rain," above), the exploration of the practice of prose poetry takes us far afield, back into the early history and prehistory of Chinese literature itself, looking for the first literary pieces that lacked lineation, rhyme and meter. Some scholars have undertaken and continue to undertake this project, most famously Guo Moruo 郭沫若, who created a history of prose poetry that started with Qu Yuan 屈原 in the third and fourth century BCE.¹⁰⁶ The overwhelming number of critics

today, however, along with most prose poets who have recorded opinions on the matter, consider Chinese prose poetry to be a tradition that starts from the May Fourth-era translation, and then importation and adaptation, of foreign prose poetry. Huang Yongjian puts it this way: "Did classical times have prose poetry? No, for two reasons. First, classical times never had a name for prose poetry; second, so-called classical "proto-prose poetry," or "types of prose poetry" show enormous differences from modern prose poetry in regards to their fundamental qualities, expressive capabilities and language."¹⁰⁷ 古代有散文诗吗？没有，原因有二，其一，古代从来就没有散文诗一名；其二，所谓古代的“前散文诗”，“类散文诗”与现代散文诗在质性，表达功能及语言上都有极大的差别。This very succinctly sums up the opposition to Guo's argument for a classical prose poetry: it is hard to seriously study a literary form if its authors were unaware of the existence of the form in which they are later presumed to have been writing. Additionally, the works of Qu Yuan are literally written in a language foreign to writers of modern prose poetry, such that one would be nearly unintelligible to an average reader of the other. Even with these enormous differences between the poems themselves, in Huang's list, it is first the name or lack of a name that indicates the presence or absence of a tradition of prose poetry. Some scholars do not even see the need to justify their decision to see prose poetry as a genre that begins in the May Fourth movement: Che Zhenxian, who writes on the interrelation of prose poetry and the novel, takes a position identical to Huang's and simply states it as fact, writing in the abstract to his book that "The prose poem emerged as a new literary form in France in the mid-nineteenth century, and took its regular form in the late nineteenth century. It reached China at the turn of the century through translations, and has now become one of the most popular literary forms in the country."¹⁰⁸

The consensus that the classical period had no prose poetry, and it does seem to be a

consensus, seems to be a result of the fact that the artistic prose of the classical period meets neither of Huang Yongjian's two criteria. However, poems after the fall of the Qing are more difficult to categorize. We can determine the beginning of the tradition of prose poetry by identifying the earliest act of the *naming* of prose poetry, or some considerable *similarities* between prose poems. Modern critics seem, with some exceptions, to agree that both of these things take place early on in the 20th century, immediately before and during the start of the May Fourth movement. Agamben's essay, however, describes much of Italian poetry as a situation in which acts of naming or other creation in language overwhelmingly determine our experience of the world around us, that words "construct what is lived on the basis of what is poeticized."¹⁰⁹ Just as poems name the world around us, and thereby, in a sense, create that world, literary criticism and literary history name poems and therefore, especially where genre is concerned, create our understanding of literary practice. We should therefore look carefully into what it means for a critic or a poet to call a poem *sanwenshi*, and test to see if the invention and use of the term represent a passive reaction to new literary practices (the signified provoking the signifier), or the creation of and argument for a specific kind of literary practice that may or may not have predated the construction of the genre (the signifier forging a category by the strength of its naming, and creating, rather than reacting to, a relationship with what it claims to signify).

Put simply, are the literary works that critics, poets and readers call and have called prose poetry over the years related by the name alone, or do they have other kinds of relationships? Is the tradition of prose poetry created by the language acts of people who describe it, or by similarities like those described in chapter one, which can be read in individual poems without dependence on historical context? The first poem reproduced above, "Moonlit Night," creates some significant doubt that our current histories of prose poetry describe a genre united by

specific, identifiable prosodic or ideological similarities. Zou Yuehan 邹岳汉 considers Shen's piece to be one of the first prose poems ever written in Chinese; it is anthologized at the head of Wang Fuming's anthology of twentieth century prose poetry; Huang Yongjian says flatly that "the first prose poem was Shen Yinmo's "Moonlit Night."""¹¹⁰ What is astonishing about this poem is that it is *lineated*: there is a break after the commas in lines one and three, something that would clearly never happen in prose. This lineation, further, is not a mistake or an artifact of a prose sentence fit into a particular column width: reproductions of the poem's original appearance in *New Youth* 新青年 magazine show that there was plenty of white space on the individual page to make the lines of the poem stretch to their margins, in the manner of prose. Further, each line in the original Chinese ends in the particle *zhe/zhao* 着, which applies the technique of lineation to provide a kind of sonic and visual return familiar from rhyme. The particle's use here, however, changes in the last line: *zhe* in the first three lines indicates a continuing state, but in the final line, it appears after *meiyou*, which implies completion of a specific action. In this case, 着 is likely pronounced *zhao* and serves as a grammatical indicator of a completed action, giving the poem a decisive and unequivocal finish that, considering the repetition of its structure, comes as a surprise to a reader perhaps expecting the trailing motion or transcendent gesture that finishes many classical poems. This reading of the poem is unavailable to those who see "Moonlit Night" as a prose poem.

In critical literature, however, the fact is rarely pointed out that "Moonlit Night," as well as many of Shen Yinmo's other poems,¹¹¹ fail to meet one of the basic criteria of prose poetry. Wang Fuming's anthology goes so far as to remove the lineation from the poem, transforming it into one unbroken prose sentence and reifying Agamben's article of faith: for Wang, perhaps, in the beginning, there was the category *sanwenshi*, and it is the rules of the category that can alter

even the physical shape of individual poems, which are plastic and receptive to critical manipulation. Reading this poem as a prose poem, one which eschews lineation in favor of the effects of prose sentences and paragraphs, suppresses its classical balance as well as the minor revolution of its transformation from *zhe* into *zhao*, and makes the work look like a pair of oddly balanced but ultimately repetitive sentences — sentences that rather poorly reflect the speaker of the poem's cold-eyed rigor and inability to make spiritual contact with the natural world, as well as the way that the structure of the poem engages and then violates classical expectations.

The reason that editors call "Moonlit Night" a prose poem must not, then, be that it resembles prose in the way that we see contemporary prose poems simulate prose. Many May Fourth authors used the term *sanwenshi*: Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎 and Guo Moruo 郭沫若 both wrote critical essays that featured the phrase, and both advocated for what they considered to be prose poetry. The literary form they envisioned, however, is quite different from what we consider to be prose poetry today. In "On Prose Poetry," (*Lun Sanwenshi*) Zheng consistently opposes prose poetry with rhymed poetry, for example by writing "The works of many prose poets have already shattered the article of faith that is 'no poetry without rhyme.'"¹¹² He goes on to argue that "If an expression must have rhyme to be considered a poem, then can the works of poets Whitman, Carpenter, Henley, Turgenev, Wilde, and Amy Lowell¹¹³ be considered poems?" Wilde and Turgenev wrote works that could very strictly be considered prose poems; Lowell wrote what she called "symphonic prose," which is very similar to what we consider prose poems; Carpenter called his works prose poems, but they feature some lineation; Henley seems to be a metrical poet with strong free verse tendencies, and Whitman has always been considered a free verse poet. That Zheng Zhenduo's concept of poetry has little relationship to lineation makes perfect sense in his milieu: classical Chinese poems were rarely printed with careful

respect to the end of individual lines of verse, and it was instead rhyme, or occasionally rhythm, that indicated the end of one poetic phrase and the start of another. The difference between free verse and prose poetry, highly visible to Western readers habituated to Western lineation practices in poetry, would have been less important to Zheng Zhenduo. Where other critics used the term *ziyou shi* 自由诗, free verse, or *xin shi* 新诗, new verse, to indicate modern poetry unfettered by traditional rules, Zheng used *sanwenshi*. Chinese writing has long been divided into the categories of *yunwen* 韵文 (with rhyme) and *wuyunwen* 无韵文 (without rhyme). *Wuyunwen* was, as an opposite to *yunwen*, often replaced with the term *sanwen* (metrically disorganized writing). It seems reasonable to think that Zheng has applied the term *sanwenshi* to mean "poetry without rhyme".¹¹⁴

Guo Moruo had an attitude that was similar, but applied even more broadly to works originally intended as prose: he advocated for prose poetry and against the stricture of end-rhyme in the introduction to his translation of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which he considers a prose poem. "Recently some of my countrymen have been discussing poetry; what is surprising is that the debate over rhyme has been especially fierce and that prose poems have been slandered as somehow unsound."¹¹⁵ Prose poetry in these formulations is the poetic nature of all exceptional prose, as set against rhymed verse: to Guo, it is identical to the term *wuyun shi*, rhymeless verse.¹¹⁶ This is likely why, in the case of both Guo Moruo and Zheng Zhenduo, modern editors who specialize in them as authors do not consider their short prose to be prose poetry. For both authors, poems that the editors of prose poetry anthologies select as prose poems do not appear as prose poems in the authors' *Collected Works*. Additionally, while Zheng Zhenduo's works "Briar" (荆棘) and "Suffering" (痛苦) are collected as poems in his *Collected Works*, his piece entitled "Leaving Towards Brightness" (向光明走去), anthologized as a prose

poem in Wang Fuming's anthology, appears as a short story in his *Collected Works* and a prose essay in his *Selected Works*.¹¹⁷ From the perspective of a scholar conscious of prose poetry as a formal or generic distinction, the works are prose poems; from the perspective of a scholar familiar with these authors' lives and works, the works are not necessarily so.

This confusion — wherein one editor calls a work a prose poem, another calls it an essay, a third calls it a short story — points to another quality of early May Fourth prose poetic naming, which is its basic disregard for consistency and consensus. The May Fourth movement was a revolution, one interested first in destroying the monopolization of literature by the tradition of classical letters, and then in creating new literary forms. There were few interested in creating critical systems by which to categorize and assess those new literary forms.¹¹⁸ This disinterest is visible in Liu Bannong's poem "Rain," which from the beginning tries to decrease or argue the irrelevance of its own identity as a poem. "This is all in Xiaohui's words, I just took it down for her and linked it together, that's all," he writes. This could be seen as a kind of ironic fictive gesture — like the introduction to Lu Xun's "Diary of a Madman," which claims that the diary is real when it is clearly not — but some of Liu's other writings make the first line of "Rain" seem more sincere.¹¹⁹ In his preface to the collection in which "Rain" appears, he writes "I am not a poet. This word 'poet' originally just meant a person who makes poems. But ever since it became a name, it hasn't been able to avoid acquiring the stench of 'professionalism'." [我不是个诗人。诗人两字，原不过是做诗的人的意思。但既然成了一个名词，就不免带着些“职业的”臭味。] The process of writing prose poetry, its *technē* that was the topic of chapter one, is here something that Liu Bannong sees not as a revolutionary or transcendent inspiration, but as practical experimentation with a series of “tricks” or “patterns” (花样) like different varieties of flowers: "in regards to the form of poetry, I am one who is most capable of playing fresh tricks.

The rhymeless poetry of the time, the prose poetry, and the use of dialect to imitate folk songs that came later...all these were things I attempted first." [我在诗的体裁上是最会翻新花样。当初的无韵诗，散文诗，后来的用方言拟民歌，拟“拟曲”，都是我首先尝试。]¹²⁰ The idea that Liu Bannong's piece was not the start of a long tradition of prose poetry, but was a "fresh trick" — that it was not an attempt to use the magic of poetry to get inside the mind of a child and describe its world, but the separate observation that everyday language and experience can be as poetic as heavily worked regulated verse — would allow us to see the poem as a composition directed backwards against formal poetry and the Chinese poetic tradition, the artificial "stench of professionalism" of the self-identified poetic genius. In this way, it returns to us the reality of the poem's leaps, not as artificial and invented language, but as those naturally produced by a child's mind on the edge of sleep. Liu identifies himself (perhaps disingenuously) as a non-professional maker of poems, and as such is claiming only to record a simple, daily moment of wonder on behalf of his readers. It is, from one perspective, understandable that some contemporary editors include this work alongside Liu's other prose: even though he seems to have felt otherwise, it is possible to read this piece as a demonstration of the fact that prose can be just as beautiful and meaningful as poetry, rather than as a very particular kind of poem.¹²¹

Many other key May Fourth writers also wrote confusing or confused statements about their own works' identity as prose poetry. About his poem "Rivulet," Zhou Zuoren wrote that "When people ask what form this poem of mine is written in, even I can't respond. The Frenchman Baudelaire advocates the prose poem (*sanwenshi*), and this is a bit like that, but he uses the form of prose, while I'm now dividing my writing line by line....perhaps it doesn't count as poetry, we'll never know; but this is irrelevant."¹²² Lu Xun was also rather coy about and dismissive of the categorization of his works as prose poems: about *Wild Grass*, almost

universally accepted among critics both Chinese and Western as the apex of prose poetic production in China, he wrote, "I had some little emotional impressions, so I wrote short pieces, to exaggerate a bit they were *sanwenshi*, and later they were printed into a book which I called *Wild Grass*."¹²³ Unlike some other May Fourth writers like Shen Yinmo or Liu Bannong, who went through different periods with respect to their understanding of the use of the term *sanwenshi*,¹²⁴ Zhou Zuoren and Lu Xun both knew plenty about foreign and domestic prose poetry. Yet they chose to consider the term, in Lu Xun's case, a kind of pompous inflation of "little emotional impressions," and in Zhou's case, a categorization whose application is beside the point entirely. May Fourth writers are almost universally named as important predecessors to later prose poets, and *Wild Grass* especially is considered the fundamental text of modern prose poetry, appearing as a matter of course in every literary history of the form;¹²⁵ this does not mean, however, that *Wild Grass* is prose poetry in a contemporary sense or that its qualities, varied and iconoclastic enough to have occasioned dozens of studies, are the basis for the prose poetry of the contemporary period. In any event, in order to decide whether *Wild Grass* is a fundamental piece of modern prose poetry, we must first find the moment in which that designation — what a prose poem is — was first reliably named. Lu Xun seems almost haphazard in his discussion of prose poetry, and as a result, his writings provide no definition or even practical application of a category of prose poetry.

Slippages in ideas about, and more importantly, authorial disinterest in creating, defining or protecting a category called prose poetry among May Fourth authors and critics are important to us because they indicate that the current consensus definition of Chinese prose poetry does not come exclusively from the works of these writers. It seems clear, as well, that any definitions of the form that we have today are considerably different from those that were prevalent in the

1910s and 1920s. This is not an enormous surprise: Steven Monte claims that our current definition of prose poetry in the French and American context is a "simple abstraction," a stable category that appears after a pre-history of varied historical practice.¹²⁶ This is an instance of Agamben's observation about deconstructionism and "in the beginning, there was the word": we see May Fourth prose works through the use of a word whose meaning solidified sometime considerably later than the May Fourth period. The *name* determines our experience of the *practice*: we encounter works by Shen Yinmo and Liu Bannong as prose poetry in large part because later editors have named them to be so. The most accurate description of the practice of May Fourth prose poetry would have little to do with lineation, brevity, or the recitation of and resistance to prose forms. These works instead seem to be directed against the rules and restraints of classical poetry, and are accordingly not engaged in positive self-categorization or the construction of structures or restrictions that could define prose poetry as a genre.

In contemporary Chinese criticism of prose poetry, many critics concur with the assessment that prose poetry is a category that has been named backwards into the 1920s and 1930s. Ou Mingjun 欧明俊 points out that A Ying 阿英 praised Lu Xun's *Wild Grass* as a set of *xiaopin* 小品 essays, and then concludes,

"Variant" prose poems, in their lyricism, in their poetic feeling and intent, are very similar to short lyric essays (抒情小品), so they are seen as essays. The boundary between the two is extremely murky, so people's understanding varies from person to person, with some interpreting them as prose poems, and others understanding them as short essays, and sometimes the two being forged into one connected form. This kind of attitude was primarily popular in the 1920s and the 1930s. After the 1940s, basically nobody connected prose poetry to the short essay (小品).¹²⁷

"别体" 散文诗在抒情性, 诗情诗意上与抒情小品相似, 故被视为小品。两者界限十分模糊, 因而理解上因人而异, 有人理解为散文诗, 有人则理解为小品, 两者有时是合二而一的联系。这种观念, 主要流行与 20 世纪二三十年代。40 年代, 基本上无人再将散文诗与小品联系在一起了。

This "murky boundary," at some point after the 1940s, became clear: we project our contemporary clarity back onto considerably more complex May Fourth works, and this causes misreadings and misinterpretations like Wang Fuming's unfortunate de-lineation of "Moonlit Night."

In this study, though, I am interested in the process of writing as well as the process of reading prose poetry. While observations about the name *sanwenshi* being projected back onto earlier poems give us some insight into the possibility that contemporary readers experience May Fourth prose works through an anachronistic lens, these are observations of a miscategorization or a slippage, and do not get to the heart of what it is that the writer's craft transmits to his or her readers when a piece of prose poetry is published and appreciated. What they do instead is to instruct more careful attention to a possible separate beginning for the prose poetic tradition in the 1940s and after, and lead us to see the crucial conceptual work in the history of prose poetry as it takes place after the end of the May Fourth movement. Using Agamben's observation, let us look, then, for the time of the *speaking of the word* of prose poetry as its genesis, and move to the 1940s and 1950s in search of the roots of the contemporary naming of the prose poetic tradition.

In the first chapter, we read contemporary prose poems and provisionally decided that many of them *recite* or mimic other forms, but *refuse* to fulfill or support the expectations and conclusions of those forms. According to this definition, Xu Chengmiao's "Advice" may seem much more familiar than the work of Shen Yinmo and Liu Bannong. Xu's poem immediately announces what kind of language it will feature: almost uniquely among poems up until the 1950s, it is named not after its content, but after its genre or form. This literary piece really is a piece of advice: it uses quotation marks to ventriloquize the person that the poem intends to

advise, and then delivers its corrective message. But this is not regular, prosaic advice: this advice is about time, grief, and beauty, and no matter how one interprets the title, *quangao* (劝告) — whether as "advice," "admonition," "exhortation," or "warning" — the sheer abstraction and poetic romanticization of what comes after it creates a kind of surprise. It is as if the *carpe diem* attitude of the *Wen Xuan* 文选's "Nineteen Old Poems," or the meditations of "Ode on a Grecian Urn" have been poured into a kind of paternalistic, pedantic, early Communist voice and occasion.

"Advice" is a simple poem, and like many works written during the 1950s as well as what little was composed in the 1960s, it is not too difficult to understand or interpret. It combines *baihua* grammatical clarity with the practice of repetition common from classical poetry, in which parallelism often allowed for the reiteration of one concept or conceptual relationship several times. The basic and simple thing that "Advice" does, however — create a disembodied, acontextual voice and have an abstract argument with it — subjectivizes and personalizes a trope common to political writing of the time: to cite (or summarize) and then respond to an opponent in the same piece.¹²⁸ *Sanwen*, or prose, was also the literary form of journalism, and of socialist realism: even fiction written after the founding of the PRC was intended, in some way or another, to reflect the lives of the people in documentary fashion, and to do so as specifically as possible. Apart from refusing to name those it disagrees with, "Advice" differs from regular argumentative prose in that it has almost no concrete detail; unlike prose, poetry's claim to express the situation of the people centers less around their material experience, and more around the spirit of the age. Xu Chengmiao, in a 1981 critical essay, does just this kind of crystallization of the political spirit of the age: obliquely referencing the government's early 80's push for modernization and their focus on development, he writes that "the people are striving, the nation

is just now undergoing painful yet hope-filled changes, humanity worldwide is facing its complex and diverse histories and realities and searching for the road ahead,"¹²⁹ (人民正在奋斗 , 民族正经历着痛苦然而有希望的蜕变, 世界人类在复杂纷纭的历史与现实面前寻求道路,) and he calls on prose poets to use literary tradition as well as innovation in order to get to the heart of those changes, and the emotions they spur. But prose poetry, including "Advice," very crucially performs this representation of the people through the transformative filter of the individual consciousness, a process of individuation that is reflected in Chinese poetry all the way back to the classical belief that 诗言志, poetry expresses the will — often the will of the people as represented by the will of the artist. Ke Lan writes that "Whether it is a lyric poem, or a long historical narrative poem, they all pass through the author's abundance of subjective passion in order to reflect objective reality."¹³⁰ Huang Yongjian agrees, and adds that the subjective position of prose poets were constantly open to political opposition and political attack because their practice involved internalizing and transforming an objective-leaning literary form — by extension, engaging with and affecting a putatively objective reality that was in the 50s and 60s most often supplied by the state.¹³¹ One can see this very directly in "Advice": the speaker of the poem has taken the responsibility and the great risk of telling all "beloved friends" how to think and act, and in the absence of a concrete situation for this lesson to apply to, it can only be open to interpretation by its readers. In the Communist period, to differing extents in different political climates, it was the party that possessed the license to listen, interpret and correct the people: "Advice" seizes that power, just for a moment, just for one poetic speaker.¹³²

All art, of course, claims a certain amount of interpretive power on behalf of the artist, and therefore represents a basic anxiety for ideological systems where materialism, objectivity, reason, and varying levels of central control are expected to be the basis of social and political

life. In the "Yan'an Talks on Literature and Art" in 1943, Mao Zedong said:

Rich deposits of literature and art actually exist in popular life itself: they are things in their natural forms, crude but also extremely lively, rich, and fundamental; they make all processed forms of literature pale in comparison, they are the sole and inexhaustible source of processed forms of literature and art.¹³³

Ambivalence about the role of the artist, the way in which the individual processes or transmutes the crude prosaic reality of the world around him or her, is also a basic literary concern of the early Communist critic. Bonnie McDougall points out the difference between Mao's 1943 talks and their revised publications in 1953 and 1966:

Rich deposits *of the raw materials* of literature and art actually exist in popular life itself: they are things in their natural forms, crude but also extremely lively, rich and fundamental; *in this respect*, they make all literature pale in comparison, they are the sole and inexhaustible source of processed forms of literature and art.¹³⁴

The difference is small, but clear: art's superiority over popular life, its power as a refined version of daily aesthetic activity, has been sharpened by Mao's revision, a movement perhaps similar to the transition from socialist realism, which was relatively descriptive, to revolutionary romanticism, which had a strong transformative impulse. Just as prose does not become poetry until imbued with the emotions and subjectivity of its author, so does popular life fail to become art unless directed through some form of artistic process. The increasing pressure placed on this process, the author's mounting license to subjectively internalize and reformulate phenomenological reality, as well as the increasingly unpredictable and harsh punishments for those who incorrectly subjectivized social policy and group values, helps illustrate why artists became more politicized as a result of the arts policy of the PRC. It also helps show the way in which the internalizing *neizai* 内在 quality of prose poetry was a reaction of the faithful to the demands of the party, while at the same time being a risky proposition for its authors.

This was Xu Chengmiao's experience. He wrote "Advice" during the Hundred Flowers

Movement, when Mao Zedong had promised a new permissiveness to those taking part in the arts and sciences, and true to his word, the poem was published and circulated in 1957. When the Hundred Flowers movement was ended, though, the poem was reinterpreted by party commentators as giving succor to rightists and counterrevolutionaries — as arguing, in effect, that the bourgeoisie should wait and hope for the future, when Communism would be defeated and they could regain control of society. Xu Chengmiao was convicted and jailed for over twenty years.¹³⁵ The reason this was possible may be in small part because the poem is abstract and open to multiple interpretations: who the "you" is, for example. But more dangerous is the poem's basic subjectivity: all things named in it, beauty, grief, where "forward" is — all these things are defined by the speaker rather than the party, science, socialist writings, or the common language of the people. The witch-hunt atmosphere of the Anti-Rightist Movement didn't need elaborate textual evidence to arrest an author, but the poem's basic subjectivity, its remaking of the "raw materials" of life and politics, placed it along with its author in a realm where political ideas were supported and defeated. Although prose poets criticized and jailed after the Hundred Flowers movement were generally accused of resisting the leadership or correctness of the party, it seems in hindsight that it was equally dangerous for poets to be reciting the truths of the party, to put the words or ideas of Mao Zedong Thought and Chinese socialism into their own mouths, to claim them and control them. Many poems of the period, like "Advice" above or "Snowy Ground" (translated in chapter one), take the pedantic, encouraging, admonishing voice of the party as their own, and it is in seizing this responsibility that they overlapped uneasily with state power. Ke Lan, too, was criticized by Yao Wen Yuan 姚文元 in the late 1950s, as were many other prose poets, and the general calamity of the Cultural Revolution led to Ke's arrest and imprisonment, although he was most roundly criticized by Jiang Qing for writing "middle

characters" in his novel *Strike the Gong* (打铜锣).¹³⁶ Many questions about the political role of prose poetry, however, can only be answered from examination of the works themselves: the small harvest of prose poetry collections and magazine publications that appeared during the Hundred Flowers period was not allowed to continue for long enough to create any kind of real critical literature. For example, the afterword to Ke Lan's 1958 edition of his collection *Short Flute of Morning Mist* calls it a collection of prose poetry, but puts far more time and energy into supporting the Hundred Flowers Movement and asserting the popularity of prose poetry among lesser-educated workers than it does defining, exactly, what is meant by prose poetry.¹³⁷

"Advice" is meaningfully different from the May Fourth era poems "Moonlit Night" and "Rain". "Moonlit Night" is nothing but subjective experience — a momentary, almost solipsistic truth of the spirit, an individual experience that could have and was likely intended to have larger social import, but which chose to transmit that import or affect through the aestheticized story alone. "Rain" is nearly the other extreme, a transcription, a reinforcement of the objectivity of prose and its ability to capture not the beauty of the mind, but the poetic beauty of experience when it is rendered as objectively and truthfully as possible. It is "Advice" that takes a structure from prose, the supposed objectivity and authority of the paternal voice, and transforms it. As mentioned in chapter one, the end result — and it seems highly debatable as to who, if anyone, "Advice" was intended to criticize or support — does not necessarily have to subvert or oppose authority. It can, instead, step into the place of authority, a maneuver that is obedient on its face, but for all that, not necessarily less threatening to authority.

The government's punishment of prose poets provoked acts of naming and critical definitions of prose poetry, initially as authorial self-defense. Ke Lan's reprint of his collection of prose poetry is quite explicit in rationalizing its existence and arguing its orthodoxy. The

following passage appears on the first page, before the preface or the table of contents, of a 1981 reprint of Ke Lan's 1957 prose poetry collection *Short Flute of Morning Mist*:

This book is a collection of prose poetry. The author has selected meaningful scenes from life, expressed his own emotion, and with deep feeling sung the praises of the party's leaders, the socialist system, the magnificence of labor, sincere friendship and pure love, etc.. Its language is elegant, and the poems' meanings are quite significant.¹³⁸

Besides the shrill and politically protective claim of Communist orthodoxy, which appropriately reflects the tone of much of the work's content and ideology, what is interesting about this brief publisher's note is its unequivocal categorization of the work. This practice of foregrounding the formal distinction between prose poetry and other literary art is one that remains standard today, when we have magazines called *Prose Poetry* and *The World of Prose Poetry*, as well as a proliferation of prose poetry anthologies and organizations that are specifically identified as such. This bright-line distinction differs from the way prose poetry was discussed in the May Fourth period: compare Ke Lan's language to Zhou Zuoren's rejection of the prose poetic label as "irrelevant." From the perspective of Ke Lan and his publishers, the categorization that appears at the start of *Short Flute* may serve a purpose similar to the political defense also made in the note, a disclaimer that this is aestheticized language and not, as Liu Bannong's poem seems to argue for itself, direct reportage. Contradictorily, however, the note indicates that the scenes of the book are drawn from life, "selected" (*xuan*) rather than created: the overall effect is a kind of tightrope-walk for a poet instructed to write realistically, but worried about making claims concerning the nature of reality. This uneasily simultaneous performance of the documentary nature of prose and the individual, invented quality of poetry,¹³⁹ is one that works of the 1950s encounter again and again, a particular instance of recitation and refusal that had an especially pointed political dimension during the upheavals after the Hundred Flowers Movement.

From the perspective of those reading prose poems outside of a Maoist context, it suffices

to say that critical definition, and acts of naming, were crucial defenses of prose poems, and one method by which authors gained the license to write and publish. Only by critically specifying what this poetic form was intended to do — by giving it rules and structure — did authors feel safe engaging in acts of prose poetry. After Xu Chengmiao and Ke Lan were punished in the late 1950s, this critical work became impossible: prose poetry was associated with jailed rightists, and even Wang Fuming's extremely complete timeline of prose poetic publications shows no activity between a Guo Feng collection published in 1961 and the first wave of works published after Mao's death. Along with those works, though, in the years after 1978, came a flood of critical conversations, definitions, and a swiftly established sense that prose poetry's boundaries were both knowable and important. This is Ke Lan, published in 1981:

To use simple language, [prose poetry] is poetry written through the use of prose, and not poetry created through the use of rhymed writing. Unrhymed poetry is called free verse, and prose poetry is a variant of free verse. First, it doesn't make stanzas by using poetic phrases that are lineated and arranged according to their length, but is instead a verse composition that uses prose in order to link together its parts, and please remember, no matter what the form, in the final analysis it should be a poem, it's only in a formal way that it is different from poems. So you can say that it is an artistic form born from the school of poetry.¹⁴⁰

用简明的话来说，它是用散文写成的诗，而不是用韵文写成的诗。不用韵文写成的诗叫自由体诗，散文诗是自由体诗的一种变体。首先，它不是用长短句排列分行而成段的诗句，而是用散文写成的连接起来的片断的诗篇，请注意，不管形式如何，它归根结底应该是诗，只是在形式上不同于诗而已。所以，可以说，它是从诗派生出来的一种艺术形式。

And here is the opening of Wang Guangming's encyclopedia entry on prose poetry:

PROSE POETRY. A lyrical literary style possessing special qualities of poetry and of prose. It joins the expressiveness of poetry to the various qualities of prose narrativity. With regards to its basic nature, it belongs to poetry, and has the emotion and fantasy of poetry, it gives readers a sense of beauty and imagination, but its content remains prosaic detail with poetic intent; where form is concerned, it has the exterior appearance of prose, and does not resemble poetry in regards to lineation and rhyme, although it does not lack the beauty of internal music and the feeling of rhythm.¹⁴¹

兼有诗与散文特点的一种现代抒情文学样式。它融合了诗的表现性和散文描写性的

某些特点。从本质上看，它属于诗，有诗的情绪和幻想，给读者美感和想象，但内容上保留了有诗意的散文性细节；从形式上看，它有散文的外观，不象诗歌那样分行和押韵，但不乏内在的音乐美和节奏感。散文诗一般表现作者基于社会和人生背景的小感触，注意描写客观生活触发下思想情感的波动和片断。这些特点决定了它题材上的丰富性，也决定它的形式短小灵活。

These writings — one by a poet, and one by a poet-critic — are definitional rather than polemic, a far cry from Guo Moruo and Zheng Zhenduo's typification of *sanwenshi* as a party in the debate between rhymed and rhymeless poetry. One of the technical advances that can be seen in these definitions, as well, is the attention to the importance and impact of lineation: apart from brevity, which we have seen is not wholly trustworthy when it comes to delineating the boundaries of prose poetry, the presence or absence of poetic lineation is one of the only formal qualities that consistently and dependably distinguishes contemporary prose poems from other kinds of contemporary poems.¹⁴² It is likely that what May Fourth authors lacked that the authors of the 50s and later had was not exposure to a foreign prose poetic tradition, but a strong Chinese tradition of lineated poetry, a visual way for poems to self-identify as poems that could then allow prose poems to announce themselves as something other than regular lineated poems. It seems even more certain that in the absence of an official critical apparatus, and in the absence of the threat of organized censure for the composition or publication of counter-revolutionary works, May Fourth authors seem not to have felt great urgency in defining and focusing the *name* of prose poetry, especially when compared to artists and critics after 1978.

It is these contemporary definitions, applied backwards to the literary production of the May Fourth movement, that are the tools by which critics and anthologists have created a tradition of prose poetry: without them, first applied in the 1950s and fully codified in the 1980s, there would be no occasion to see a common generic thread linking Shen Yinmo's "Moonlit Night," Liu Bannong's "Rain," and Xu Chengmiao's "Advice." Critics in the 1980s and after are

creating, not inheriting, a definition of prose poetry, and more often than not, they are themselves the poets who were writing prose poems in the 1940s and 1950s. Guo Feng has edited anthologies and written quite widely on prose poetry; Ke Lan is a poet, editor and critic; Xu Chengmiao wrote the almost esoterically genre-focused essay cited above, in which he distinguishes *sanwenshi* from *xiaopinwen*, prose poetry from the short artistic essay.¹⁴³ Once we accept that the name "prose poetry" has been defined twice, once by May Fourth intellectuals striking out at classical poetry, and once by the poet-scholars of the 1980s, we can see that a great deal of contemporary scholarship applies the most recent act of naming — the critical production of senior poets and scholars in the 1980s, based on the practices of the 1940s and 1950s — all the way back to the first use of the word *sanwenshi*, in a Liu Bannong translation of a *Vanity Fair* article in 1918, and to poetic works contemporary with that language, like Shen Yinmo's 1918 poem "Moonlit Night."¹⁴⁴

Here, then, is one possible way to look at the history of *sanwenshi*, and the history of the word *sanwenshi*, in the 20th century. Foreign prose poems, originally identified as short stories, enter China through Liu Bannong's translations, and he then begins to use the term critically in 1918. This term is often taken as a rough analogue for *wuyun shi*, or "rhymeless poetry"; among those who have direct experience with non-Chinese prose poetry, the difference between other language traditions' use of the term and Chinese use of the term is considered unremarkable or unimportant. This situation continues into the 1940s and 1950s, when an increase in the intensity of Communist orthodoxy requires a more explicit attention to genre and limits the kinds of works that can be published: in the late 1950s, with the end of the Hundred Flowers policy, prose poetry begins to be treated as a questionable genre and publication virtually ceases. When writers are permitted to once again publish with greater freedom, poet-critics and critics write definitions,

descriptions and defenses of prose poetry that are deeply influenced by the poetry of the 1950s. These definitions become the basis for complete literary histories, century-spanning anthologies (remember, Wang Fuming's two-volume work is called 中国散文诗 90 年, *90 Years of Chinese Prose Poetry*) and explicitly create the expectation, if not always the practice, that reading contemporary prose poems should have something to do with the reading of May Fourth prose poems.

A careful reading of Fang Wenzhu's poem "Kind of Like Pulling Out a Nail" can help illustrate the utility of the expectation that contemporary prose poems have something to do not with May Fourth writing but with the prose poems of the 1940s and 1950s. This is clearly a modern poem, challenging, variable, and wide-ranging; setting it next to "Moonlit Night" or "Rain" only increases a reader's feeling of dissociation and disorientation. Reading it, however, alongside "Advice" as a reaction to some kind of prose form, as somebody else's language act which has been recited and then passed through an individual, subjective process, makes the poem considerably more interpretable. If "Advice" subjectivizes and engages in, but refuses to be identical to, an official or parental advice-giving voice that would be recognizable to readers, the first question that presents itself when reading "Kind of Like Pulling Out a Nail" might be what, or whose voice, the poem is reciting. The refrain of this poem is almost exclusively used in one specific educational parable: although versions vary widely,¹⁴⁵ the basic story is that a father tells a young boy with uncontrollable anger that from now on, he is allowed to get into a fight only after he pounds a nail into a tree in the front yard. The boy discovers that after he pounds in a nail, he no longer feels the need to fight, at which point the father tells him he can pull out a nail every time he overcomes the urge to lash out at the people around him. Once all the nails are gone, the father shows the boy the holes that are left, and says that what he's done to his friends

will never go away. In this case, Fang's poem seems to have been written in tandem with a definition of prose poetry much like Wang Guangming's dictionary entry: the connection between the originary prose, the parable intended to morally educate children and parents, and the prose poem, the "emotion and fantasy" of a speaker trying to describe what it would be like for an individual to undergo the process that the parable simply reports, is the key to understanding the piece in full — just as understanding that "Advice" by Xu Chengmiao involves taking a public voice and making it more subjective, more personal.

From this perspective, several feelings and attitudes are visible in "Pulling Out a Nail." The first paragraph's images are tied together loosely by their futility: crabgrass, or more specifically barngrass, a species that ruins Chinese fields, returns almost as fast as it can be pulled out, and the "flower in the mirror" is an idiom for those things which seem to exist, but are in fact absent, like the moon reflected in water.¹⁴⁶ The phrase "dark specks" often refers to visual deficits from eye disease, something that can't be simply 'pulled out' like a piece of dirt. This futility will be later contradicted by the grain of sand in the fourth paragraph, which centers more fully around the satisfaction of ridding one's self of painful exterior stimuli. Nets can be pulled from water, much in the same way that excess paper and ink can be disposed of: there is an ominousness, however, about removing a submerged net from water, trapping or killing an unknown number of fish inside, and this matches somewhat the lost language, derided as 'excess' and summarily disposed of. The tone of the poem is one of ambivalence: the dictates of self-control are simultaneously impossible, frightening, satisfying, and self-destructive. The simple analogy of the original parable has been exploded into a messy, human, lyric experience: after reading this poem, it is hard to look at the original parable with an uncritical eye. At the same time, however, it does not answer the original's conclusion directly, or oppose it in the way that a

contradictory piece of prose might, instead transforming the original by bringing it into the subjectivity of the author. This upholds, in a way, what Wang Guangming considers the goal of Chinese prose poetry: "to make subjective thought and feeling correspond and mingle with objective image,"¹⁴⁷ except that in the modern absence of a belief in the "objective image," it is a piece of prose that claims a privileged position with regards to the truth. It is this piece of prose that is made to "correspond and mingle" with the author's subjectivity. Unlike May Fourth writing, this piece seems to display its identity as prose and as poetry in the foreground, and it seems fit to first compare it not to the earliest works called *sanwenshi*, but to those intentionally categorized as such by their poets in the 1950s and after.

At its heart, deconstructivist belief in the primacy of the signifier over the signified is an article of faith: while we can show that prose poetry was forged as a category in the 1980s, we cannot show that the poets of the May Fourth movement were not writing in response to some other, different act of generic naming, one which predated their creative output. In prose poetry, as in the rest of literature, there is no way to truly establish whether it is experience itself that provokes its own reflection in the word, or if it is the word that allows us to see the experience of life. Agamben is particularly apt in conceptualizing deconstructivist tradition as one that is ancient, unfalsifiable, and sometimes unexamined, and this chapter, like his work, attempts to attend to the importance of acts of generic and other naming without ignoring the concrete specificity of poems, poets and poetry criticism. It is important to remember, though, that the genre of prose poetry could be something created out of an undifferentiated body of poetic work by acts of naming and critical speech alone. Many qualities that we consider formal or procedural — integral to a poem itself, to its composition and reception — can in fact be a result

of acts of categorization and naming. Concretely, what "in the beginning there was the word" can teach us about prose poetry is that most of its materials, including anthologies, critical works, magazines and book series, operate from a set of definitions truly codified in the 1980s. It has never been new to simply create unrhymed paragraphs of heightened language: even Shang and Zhou bronzes have inscriptions that could, with some generosity, be called prose poems. All they lack is a person to hold them up and make a sincere argument that they are prose poems, and the critics and poets of the 1980s declined to make that argument. What we now consider May Fourth-period prose poetry has, however, been the subject of a great deal of critical acts of naming. These acts can obscure similarities between so-called prose poems and works not called prose poems, as in the case of "Moonlit Night" and early May Fourth free verse, or as Xu Chengmiao points out, between early *sanwenshi* and *xiaopinwen* essays, genres that were much more similar between the years of 1910-1930 than they are today. These acts of naming or categorization can also create the perception of similarities between poems that may be quite different, such as Liu Bannong's "Rain," which uses a prose form to try to capture an objective (albeit ultimately lyrical) slice of daily life, and Xu Chengmiao's "Advice," which claims an official and paternal prose voice as a tool for a poetic speaker.

These observations are not made in the attempt to provide some sort of real or true narrative superior to those that were constructed in the 1980s, and are extended today. They are instead meant to contextualize and deepen our understanding of how prose poetry came about, and to raise the possibility that its identity as a genre has been constructed through a layering process over time that is more analogous to the composition, revision, publication and reception of a poem than it is to the transcendental revelation of poetic truth. Most of all, though, I provide this historical narrative with the intent to use it to understand individual works and groups of

works. It leads me towards two possible sources of the contemporary prose poetic tradition, which will appear in the following sections: Lu Xun's *Wild Grass*, which has had a surprisingly limited effect on the name and the critical profile of prose poetry, and the works of Ke Lan and Guo Feng, which have been crucial to prose poetry's contemporary practice, and will be covered in the third part of this chapter.

***Wild Grass* as Prose Poetic Prehistory**

Here is Lu Xun's introduction, in my translation, to an unpublished English edition of his collection *Wild Grass*:

44 lines redacted

Huang Yongjian says, accurately, that there is wide scholarly agreement that every piece in *Wild Grass* (with the exception of "My Lost Love," discussed below) is a prose poem, but Lu Xun here declines to mention the words "prose poetry."¹⁴⁹ Sun Yushi claims that *Wild Grass* "opened up" (开拓) the form of prose poetry for later poets, but here Lu Xun argues that the time for this kind of work is done.¹⁵⁰ As the first part of this chapter has shown, in 1931, when this introduction was written, some contemporary critical commonplaces — in the case of *Wild Grass*, that it is prose poetry, and that it set the model for prose poets of the future — are nowhere to be found.

These two contemporary positions are not invented out of whole cloth: each has a complex array of evidence for and against it. Lu Xun did, in other instances, call *Wild Grass* "prose poetry." In an introduction to an anthology of his selected works, he wrote this: "I had some little emotional impressions, so I wrote short pieces, to exaggerate a bit they were *sanwen*

shi, and later they were printed into the book *Wild Grass*, had I more complete materials, I would have written short stories, but because all I could form was a band of straggling soldiers, they were scattered and disorganized.”¹⁵¹ (有了小感触，写点短文，夸大点说就是散文诗。以后印成一本《野草》，得到较整齐的材料就做短篇小说，只因成了游勇，布不成阵了。) Less ambivalently, in a 1929 bibliography of his own works that he either wrote himself or oversaw, he lists the genre of *Wild Grass* as "prose poetry" (散文诗). In the 1931 piece above, though, they are called *xiaopin* 小品, with a characteristic May Fourth-style disregard for rules of categorization. Similarly, in the above passage Lu Xun is more or less explicit that he does not intend, and in fact counsels against, the creation of a tradition of works inspired by *Wild Grass*. In a letter to the younger writer Xiao Jun, he is slightly more equivocal: “That book of mine *Wild Grass*, the technique certainly can't be considered bad, but its mood is too depressed because I wrote it after encountering many reversals. I hope you can distance yourself from the influence of this kind of depressive mood.”¹⁵² This leaves open the possibility that the form and the genre of the work may not be lost or irrelevant to future generations, and that there was an advance in craft represented by *Wild Grass*. This is a reasonable possibility, considering the strong overtone of surface-level humility ("they could obviously never be beautiful") of the above preface.¹⁵³ Again, when Lu Xun's statements are taken together — especially when we consider that these are scattered lines from introductions and letters, not writings specifically on genre or tradition — they seem ambivalent, and the conclusion can only be that he did not know and perhaps did not care whether or not he was creating a tradition, and either had not decided or did not care whether or not his works were prose poetry. It is later readers, especially literary critics who specialize in prose poetry, who have a vested interest in these topics.¹⁵⁴

What, then, did Lu Xun himself have to say about *Wild Grass*, and what was important to

him about the collection? What strikes a reader of his comments about the genre of *Wild Grass*, as well as readers of *Wild Grass* itself, is its wide range of genres. Lu Xun variously calls the pieces *xiaopin*, "short pieces," "little emotional impressions," and "prose poems." In the book's foreword, he calls them tufts of wild grass; in the preface to the English version, he calls them "white flowers." The book contains a short scripted drama called "The Passer-by," a satirical poem in rhymed heptasyllabics called "My Lost Love," an allegorical parable called "The Wise Man, the Fool, and the Slave," a satire of Baudelaire called "The Dog's Retort," a memoir-like piece of prose called "The Kite," several dream narratives, and even contains the full text of someone else's poem, which is then reflected upon in the piece "Hope."¹⁵⁵ The diversity of the book's genres has been a headache for critics: Huang Yongjian argues that the lineated, rhymed poem "My Lost Love" takes its syntax and morphology — i.e. the way the sentences are structured, and the way characters are combined to make compound words — from prose.¹⁵⁶ Although this seems true, to say so seems slightly beside the point in the light of Lu Xun's introduction and his letter to Xiao Jun. What connects the book in his description is not prose, but a particular attitude towards the events of the day, one that simultaneously feels deep depression at the prospects of the future, but finds a certain amount of hope in its own acts of criticism. "My Lost Love" satirizes the people who engage in highly affected, superficially romantic poetry, just as "The Wise Man, the Fool and the Slave" bitingly criticizes the learned helplessness and greed that binds Republican-era society into its ungainly shape. The two works' differing forms are not united by any particular attitude towards prose; it is their very difference that allows a careful reader, in comparing the two, to see through the sarcasm and misdirection.

This practice — the practice of having one set of political and social attitudes, and reflecting them through various disparate forms — contains within it a set of assumptions that

we can see today as contributing to prose poetic acts of recitation. There is an egalitarianism with respect to form: high and low, theater and monologue, rhymed verse and blank, there is no form that is preferred over any other as a means of expression, and no form that is evaluated as being particularly useful. Here art is, to use the idiom of the foreword, growing wild; all the different works of the book are equally beleaguered and equally worthy of the piece of abandoned dirt they occupy. This is different from the attitudes of many other important Chinese writers — Liang Qichao, for instance, who wrote that "if one intends to renovate the people of a nation, one must first renovate its fiction,"¹⁵⁷ or the writers and thinkers of the classical tradition, many of whom considered poetry to be the apex of artistic production.¹⁵⁸ This egalitarianism is, however, slightly unlike what we have been talking about as the process of recitation visible in later authors — it would be an exaggeration, as Lu Xun points out, to say that this is a collection of prose poetry. The most reasonable generic interpretation is not that this is a collection of prose poetry pretending to be other literary forms, but a collection of prose poetry *and* some other literary forms. This is particularly important in the case of a work like the memoir-style piece "Kite" or the parable-style "The Wise Man, the Fool and the Slave." Are they prose poems ventriloquizing memoir and parable? Or are they a memoir and a parable collected along with prose poems? The variety and profusion of *Wild Grass* makes the latter possible, even though contemporary critics are likely to argue the former: this is not a conundrum encountered in respects to the prose poetry of the 1950s, which announces itself strongly as such, engages in strong formal unity across different poems, and thereby removes all doubt.

Doubt about genre notwithstanding, however, one of the great similarities between *Wild Grass* in Lu Xun's description and later prose poetry is intense engagement in the process of hinting. The preface to the English edition spends much of its space ameliorating the necessarily

"vague and obscure" language of individual works. Pieces are connected back to the particular political and literary situations that originally provoked them, as if to recoup the losses suffered while writing during a period when "it was hard to speak forthrightly." The period in question was the early part of the ascendancy of Duan Qirui 段祺瑞, a warlord who became the chief executive in China in 1924. During this period, the ideals and organizations of the May Fourth movement were in full retreat; Sun Yat-sen died in 1925, and a co-founder of the Chinese Communist Party died in 1926 while protesting the Duan regime. Sun Yushi calls the period one of "darkness" (黑暗), and says that Lu Xun was disconnected from the youth movement, ineffective, and frustrated.¹⁵⁹ Publication was under tight control and direct opposition of the regime was dangerous; as he mentions, Lu Xun spent at least part of this period in hiding and in flight. In 1931, this is what Lu Xun wants to talk about in regards to *Wild Grass*: the way in which it reflects the events of the period, but through a kind of filter or mask made necessary by government suppression of literature.

We can see the presence, and the great success of this mask by examining the critical reception of poems in *Wild Grass*. In a close reading of the piece "Such a Fighter," Nicholas Kaldis cites the English preface only in footnotes, saying "...my allegorical reading does not invalidate the political allegory that Lu Xun claimed for his own poem, but puts it within the larger explanatory framework of the relationship between art and ideology."¹⁶⁰ Sun Yushi, on the other hand, begins by saying that the work is "absolutely a heartfelt paean to resolutely unbending fighters in the midst of real-life struggles." (完全对现实斗争中坚韧不屈的战士的热烈讴歌了), and goes on to record the date of the poem's completion, quote the English preface, and work out how the poem reflects and praises Lu Xun's attitudes towards different "fighters."¹⁶¹ This matches the position of the English preface, which attempts to provide a set of

contexts so that foreign readers can access the obscured messages and attitudes contained within the poems. The fact that the poem generates these two types of readings — each representing larger interpretative traditions¹⁶² — indicates that it is succeeding both as poetry, an overdetermined construction in language that expresses emotion, and as prose, a literary method that persuades, narrates, or communicates. The necessity that it does both at once comes in part from a regime of literary censorship in which it was acceptable to write self-expressive poems, but politically problematic to write descriptive prose. Lu Xun therefore had to fold one into the other, to hint at the prose through the poetry. His description of the history of the publication of *Wild Grass* in the English preface makes this seem like a process of increasingly bold prose statements, culminating in "An Awakening," after which he was forced to leave Beijing.

All of the critical receptions of "Such a Fighter," whether Sun Yushi's or that of Nicholas Kaldis, interrelate the poem's ideology with its structure and texture: my interpretation of the way in which the prose "message" of the poem is structured is simply one way to engage with the piece. Regardless of the individual reading, Lu Xun's provision of additional background to his "vague" poems in the English preface echoes what Huang Yongjian says about the hinting of contemporary prose poetry: "...it must correspond to an identically located modern spirit, and only then can it produce a sympathetic response in the reader."¹⁶³ The variety of sympathetic responses seems to argue for Sun's typification of Lu Xun during the composition of *Wild Grass*, that he was drifting, rootless, and disconnected from a possible "sympathetic reader."¹⁶⁴ In an age before poets clearly saw the possible beauties of indeterminacy, it is no wonder that Lu Xun felt like allusive, elusive works like these should no longer be necessary. It would take a much more restrictive literary environment, one in which monological political speech was the norm, for poets to begin to take great pleasure in the delimited space of interpretation, and the reader's

branching path through the poem. They would not simply engage in the profusion of forms, but a layering of forms; they would not simply hint out of necessity, but create a poetics of hinting in which the act of hinting itself becomes art. This work — movement from the crucial pre-history of *Wild Grass* into the history in deed and word of Chinese prose poetry — takes place in the late 1940s and 1950s in the poetry of artists like Ke Lan and Guo Feng.

Positions: Ke Lan and Guo Feng

Unavoidably, works by these two authors, contemporary to each other, must be presented in some sort of sequence: I choose to put selections from Guo Feng's *Leaf Flute Collection* 《叶笛集》 first, because I find his work to be more representative of May Fourth as well as early Communist writings, and Ke Lan's to more closely resemble prose poems which came later. It is, however, quite likely that Guo Feng took more influence from Ke Lan than vice versa, as will be discussed below. Here, then, are two poems from the 1959 *Leaf Flute Collection*:

44 lines redacted

165

22 lines redacted

And here are three poems from Ke Lan's 1957 collection *Short Flute of Morning Mist*:

39 lines redacted

27 lines redacted

168

25 lines redacted

One of the first very quotidian translation challenges in Guo Feng's first poem, above, indicates one of the major distinctions between his poems and Ke Lan's, which are superficially quite similar. What is *guxiang* 故乡? The term is one used by migrants to refer to the area where their ancestors lived: unlike a similar term, *laojia* 老家, though, it specifically refers to the countryside, and often indicates a kind of pastoral nostalgia in addition to the traditional Chinese attachment to the hometown or home lands. The question in Guo Feng's poem, though, is *whose guxiang* we are talking about. It is possible to speak of a *guxiang* in the abstract: one could write, for example, "the people of your *guxiang*" without knowing anything about where the person addressed is from. Guo Feng, to a certain extent, actually has this kind of implied "you" in the poem, hidden in the conditional *ba* 把, translated as "[if you] put it to your lips," and in the phrase "our ancestors," as well. In the context, however, of the other poems in the *Leaf Flute Collection*, the home that we are talking about is unequivocally Guo Feng's, and although we are invited to visit, perhaps, the poem is *not* intended to ventriloquize a rural origin for all readers.

Born in Fujian province to a literary family, Guo Feng spent most of his life in southern China, particularly around the Minnan 闽南 regions.¹⁷⁰ This is amply reflected by the *Leaf Flute Collection*: he has poems called "Impressions of Minnan," "Wives of Minnan Villages" and "Jiulong River," which runs through Minnan.¹⁷¹ When he talks, as most poets of the Hundred

Flowers period do, about economic production, he tends to talk about a candy factory, something that would most likely be found in sugar-producing regions in the south; when he talks about fauna, which he often does, the longan flower always takes pride of place, as it does in "Leaf Flute." My point is not that Guo Feng loved Minnan or that textual evidence can be shown linking him to the region; my point is that Guo Feng's writing in this collection comes from a single geographical place. He is *placed*, and that place changes only through physical transformations — different kinds of travel, like that in his poem "Hydroelectric Production Union" 水电联合加工厂,¹⁷² which begins with a long journey to the site of the subject of the poem. This kind of journey, even though it doesn't contribute much to the poem apart from arguing that Communist-generated electricity has spread to even the forgotten corners of the nation, is important because in poems where it does not appear, he is almost always talking about the same two or three places. A stonemason's level invented on page ten reappears on page eleven; all of the farmers in the book grow wheat, which is a crop of the region. Whether Guo Feng actually experienced these events, sights, and places or not, the structure of the *Leaf Flute Collection* is such that one person could easily have done and seen all the things in it — the collection in fact seems designed around the experiences of a single person. The leaf flute, even though we are invited to participate in its music by the poem's elided second-person pronouns, is a leaf flute belonging to a single person.

Beyond, however, Guo Feng's position with regards to latitude and longitude, the social and political position of his poetic speaker remains remarkably stable throughout the collection. "Leaf Flute" is a series of conditionals — slightly different from the imperatives we have seen before in poems like "Advice" above or "We Pledge Our Lives to Protect You" in chapter one. The reduced ambition of these conditionals to reengineer social and material life may come in

part from the fact that Guo Feng is speaking from the perspective, very intentionally, of the artist. Because art, and self-expression, is his field of work, he has considerably more license to comment on it and direct its progress. Just as a factory worker is given control over a machine, so has Guo Feng, according to socialist ideology, been given control over the poem, and he can describe the if/then relationships inside each poem with perfect authority. His particular identification with the artist is clearest in this excerpt from another poem:

22 lines redacted

The factory makes a thing for every rural worker; a flour-grinder, a water pump, a wheelbarrow. Likewise, the narrator is wishing for a telegraph. He does so because this narrator — not narrators in general but this specific narrator in this specific poem — is a member of the media whose job it is to spread the good news of socialism. This is an acknowledgment of the writer's place in socialist life, and though the consciousness of this place in the poetry wavers, at times, but it is never truly broken.

Using prose poetry to fulfill the responsibilities of the early communist cultural worker is an extremely difficult proposition; one might argue that almost any way to fulfill the responsibilities of the Communist cultural worker is difficult, but literature, and especially this genre of literature at this time, is particularly so. Guo Feng wrote essays, stories, childrens' literature, and free verse, had been active in the anti-Japanese movement during the war years, and entered the party in 1959, the year of the publication of the *Leaf Flute Collection*, when he became the Secretary-General of the Fujian Association of Literary and Art Workers (福建省文联秘书长). Even considering his background, though, he was *still* criticized for the form and contents of the *Leaf Flute Collection* in 1962, in an article by He Huai 何怀 called "The Shortness of a Foot, the Length of an Inch," which used "Leaf Flute," reproduced above, as the jumping-off point of its criticism.¹⁷⁴ The basic gist of the objection is that focus on the small, quotidian objects and activities of communist life, which He rightly points out is repeated throughout the *Leaf Flute Collection*, makes Guo Feng's poems unable to express the large struggles that are truly important, and in particular he has a limitation 局限 that prevents him from providing "concrete description of the front-line battle" 前线战斗生活的具体描写 of the communist revolution.¹⁷⁵ As is often true in communist literary criticism, this comment requires some unpacking. The power of the criticism is that it identifies a quality of the author's writing, its brief, romantic gaze at everyday people and things, and identifies it as a flaw not yet rectified in the author. If the author is a party ally, which is the idiom used in the article, then the author will rectify the flaw or stop writing; if, in fact, the author *intended* to create these tiny worlds, then he has ideas which contradict Party ideas and can be considered an "ideological opponent" fit for re-education. This is what Ke Lan is talking about in "Agreement," above, when he says "we will never part from friends who are willing to change their mistakes." A person who forgoes

or eludes re-education and persists in spreading anti-Party ideas, then, is an "organizational opponent" and must, for the Party's health, be eliminated.¹⁷⁶ This criticism, therefore, was no small event in Guo Feng's life, and He Huai likely did not consider it a small event, either, considering Guo Feng's status in the local party.

One reason, in my opinion, that the brevity and the quotidian, realist-landscape quality of Guo Feng's collection — which takes great pains to be positive and obedient to the party in all things — was considered worth criticizing by the Party literary critical apparatus was that brevity has a strong relationship to subjectivity and individuality. In her work *On Longing*, Susan Stewart identifies the "relation of the miniature to the invention of the personal" in Western European cultural history: once a small picture, the reproduction of the face of an uncontrollable, sovereign other, could be reproduced, it could be controlled, locked away in a cabinet, or worn intimately beneath the clothes.¹⁷⁷ "The miniature," she writes, "linked to nostalgic versions of childhood and history, presents a diminutive, and thereby manipulatable, version of experience, a version which is domesticated and protected from contamination."¹⁷⁸ This very directly gets at the heart of why readers would be interested in miniatures in the style in which we see them above: rather than the broad, epic sweep of the communist upsurge, a single leaf is perfectly pure, perfectly unworrisome, and can be held in the palm of the hand. What it also insinuates, however, is how Guo Feng, famous for his childrens' literature and whose poems are most often described with the phrase 童话, "children's stories," with all the purity, simplicity and directness that the metaphor implies, can be criticized for his subjectivity even though he is an orthodox Communist realist. No critic could claim that the things in his poems do not exist or were invented; none could claim that he records events or ideas counter to Party ideology. What he does, though, and what He Huai seems to identify as problematic, is exert control over the scope

of the poem, and make them historically and physically specific to the extent that what little is left inside the bounds of the poem is a region of Guo Feng's control. Instead of serving as the chronicle of the struggle of the brave men and women of Xiamen, He Huai writes, the topics of the poems are 零星, scattered, sparse, fragmentary.¹⁷⁹ Whether or not the content of those fragments is orthodox Marxism is irrelevant: there is an understanding that if an author looks at a tiny piece of the broad official narrative in careful detail, almost any effect can be created.

This point can perhaps be better understood with reference to photography. When taking a photograph of the Earth from a satellite, the photographer has made a certain number of decisions: which planet to photograph, whether to shoot the light side or the dark side, and which continent to focus on, for example. A portrait of a person is the result of more decisions, must be selected from one of the billions of people on earth, has been dressed or undressed in a certain way, has been shot at a moment in which they have a particular expression on their face. As the size of the frame of the photograph is decreased, the number of individual decisions increases. Concurrently, as the frame gets smaller, the communal quality of the resultant art, the role of the photograph as something that brings disparate elements together, diminishes. Most people can interpret a photograph of the Earth; many can appreciate a landscape, lots of people can be moved by what their own experience has in common with a portrait or a story. Andy Warhol's tomato soup, however, or a photograph of a taco stand parking lot taken by a non-artist for sentimental personal reasons alone, are harder to interpret by others: they are more "zoomed in." Guo Feng is not quite talking about idiosyncratically meaningful parking lots, but what He Huai has noticed, and what solves the translation challenge of choosing an English word for *guxiang*, is that he is more zoomed in on his family home, his region, and his intimates than are many other communist writers. This tendency actually increases over the course of the collection, until

in the final few poems he is just sketching out the sights and sounds of a place without applying them explicitly or methodically to party narratives. Although there are cannon in the collection's final poem, "Ah, the Blue Southern Sky," and those cannon are described as "protecting our peaceful morning," at least three-quarters of the poem is devoted to describing the morning, and not the state or the society underneath it.¹⁸⁰

The second poem reproduced above, "Impressions of a Fishing Port," is intended to underline, even after all this conversation about the subjectivity of brevity and the way in which he was considered subversive by communist party organs, Guo Feng's basic refusal to craft poetic speakers from any material other than his own experience. A great deal of what poetry does — experiment with and alter individual consciousness, personality, and position, creating not only a fictive world but the poetic speaker's position in that world — is left out of these poems. "Leaf Flute," which is on the topic of the arts, gives an exceptionally active role to the speaker in defining, evaluating and giving meaning to the poetic object. "Impressions of a Fishing Port" is more representative of the tenor of the collection as a whole: a description of a vista, and then an association with acceptable party-line thoughts or ideas. That association, which could be in the form of argument, or a discovery of natural law — that the victory of socialism is visible in the very atoms of the landscape — is instead artlessly bald, a kind of helpless association. This resolute prosaicness, as well as the fact that "Leaf Flute" is lineated in a manner reminiscent of Shen Yinmo's poems (like "Moonlit Night" above), raises the question as to what kind of poetry Guo Feng considered himself to be writing. In a piece on "Leaf Flute" and the *Leaf Flute Collection*, he repeats again and again that he didn't know what a prose poem was when he began to write these works:

When I started writing the *Leaf Flute Collection* I didn't know that our nation's literary territory had an independent form called prose poetry. *Leaf Flute Collection's* first

drafts were written with line breaks, based on common stylistic (formal) conventions for poetry. But they were really prose poems. So when I read the poems, the more I read them, the more they didn't resemble poetry. For this reason, just as I said in the afterword, "bluntly knitting together the sentences, dividing into paragraphs according to the piece's meaning, it became prose."¹⁸¹

我在写《叶笛》等时，还不知道我国文学领域内有一独立的文体，叫散文诗。《叶笛》初稿是分行写的，即按平素所谓诗的格调（形式）来写的。但它到底是散文诗。所以我看《叶笛》，越看，它越不像诗。于是，就像我在《叶笛》后记中所说的，“索性把句子连接起来，按文意分段，成为散文。”

This is an odd mix of May Fourth confusion and later ideas; he seems to insinuate that prose poems aren't entirely poems, and that he had never identified previous works that he had read, like Lu Xun's *Wild Grass*, or Bing Xin's poetry, as part of an "independent form." He basically eschews lineation — as in other ways, "Leaf Flute" is an outlier in the collection—but has no compunctions about calling lineated poems prose poems. In his critical writings, he talks about the inspiration he derives from Neruda and Whitman, without making it clear that he knows that they are both free verse poets; he points out China's rich heritage of prose poetry using the exact same examples from Qu Yuan that Guo Moruo does.¹⁸² This, however, *changes* at some point by the end of his composition of the collection. The tipping point isn't ever mentioned or explained, but it seems likely to be the moment of Guo Feng's encounter with Ke Lan's collection *Short Flute of Morning Mist*, published in 1958 right when Guo Feng says that he is beginning to put together his own collection, and appearing at the same Beijing publishing house that would eventually bring out Guo's collection as well.

The vicissitudes of literary influence are virtually impossible to argue with full confidence, and the attempt is rarely profitable; suffice it to say that, after comparing Guo Feng's poem "Impressions of a Fishing Port" with Ke Lan's "City on the Ocean," it becomes harder to see Guo's poem outside of its relationship to the earlier Ke Lan work. What is most interesting, though, are the differences: what is perhaps most immediately visible is that in Ke Lan's work,

the level of bombast and adulatory exaggeration is turned up to a much higher pitch. Guo Feng's more pedestrian "numberless" 无数, more or less an analogue for "too many to be counted," becomes Ke Lan's figural "tens of millions" 千万. The ships described are bigger than Guo Feng's humble fishing boats, and they mean more; instead of the speaker claiming that they "make me think" of brave hearts, as in Guo Feng's poem, they are transformed metaphorically into the site of an almost ecstatic life cycle of communist reproduction. It is almost as if, just as the shipyard workers somehow manage to "cultivate their own creativity" while performing what must be terrifically repetitive tasks, Ke Lan has used praise of the communist party and their technological achievements as a kind of fallow ground in which to plant aesthetic fruit. Praise of the Party was a necessity for many writers of the middle and late 1950s: writing in the more permissive 1980s, Guo Feng claims that he had been criticized in the 50s for failing to write a requisite "empty sentence of political speech" in a childrens' poem, and derides the practice of forcing artworks to "wear a hat" 戴帽子, or open with party-line Maoist assertions.¹⁸³ In Ke Lan's poem, however, the praise is the point, or at least the strong aestheticization of the speaker's paean to socialism. Whether intentional or not, this is a crucial development; whereas other authors, like Guo Feng, see party-line praise essentially as trading off with aesthetic pleasure, Ke Lan makes it a source of aesthetic pleasure in a way that is extremely difficult for the party to criticize. The first section of *Short Flute of Morning Mist* is called "My Praise" 我的赞美 — the party becomes the object of praise, and the artist, or the poetic speaker, the subject of the poem, its owner and its animating genius.

Ke Lan also frees the poetic speaker from Guo Feng's realist, arts-worker identity: "City on the Ocean," above, is marked as being "written to shipbuilding workers." This is odd, considering that the poem is written in the first-person plural, and "we" have built the ships: one

might think that the shipworkers would already know much about the contents of the poem, and that a writer's job would be to explain them to people outside the world of Shanghai shipbuilding. Further, the first sentence of paragraph three is in a kind of gentle imperative, one that hangs between "may it become the case that" and "we all should" in a way familiar from communist slogans, in which the party is simultaneously part of the people and rules over them. It bears pointing out, perhaps, that Ke Lan was just as much a cultural worker as Guo Feng was, and not a shipbuilder of any kind: even before 1949, Ke Lan had spent time at the Lu Xun academy in Yan'an, and seen his novel *The Story of Yang Tietong* published widely, translated into Japanese and Russian, and praised by Mao. This "we" is a fictive we, an ideological and imaginative we, and it is used over and over again in *Short Flute*, as Ke Lan's poetic speakers take on a variety of roles, from soldier to youth brigade member.¹⁸⁴ "City on the Ocean" is a particularly good example because it is written in the first person, but is part of the book's second section, called 旅途散歌, "Scattered Songs of the Journey." *San* or "scattered" here is the same character as in *sanwen*, creating the double reading "Prose Songs of the Journey." This gives "City on the Ocean" three layered occasions; it is an imagined shipbuilder writing about shipbuilding in a letter to a shipbuilder, taking place during some kind of journey, likely the author's. Keeping in mind that the tradition in which Ke Lan was writing had realist suppositions in which the position of the author — both politically and physically — could be very important, it is worthwhile to consider these layered occasions carefully. The most reasonable interpretation might be this: 1) a Communist Party cultural worker, in this case a poet, goes on a journey and visits the shipyards at Shanghai. 2) this writer is inspired by the work of the shipbuilders, and writes a poem *from their position*. 3) the writer sends them, or publishes, this letter as a way of encouraging and praising the shipbuilders. Guo Feng's poems have most of these qualities, as

well, except for the phrase in italics. That part is new in Ke Lan, and is the source both of the great ferocity of his poems, as well as their more energetic political role and concomitantly larger practice of political risk-taking.

The argument could be made that this kind of writing is simply the age-old persona poem — a poem in which a poet creates a fictional or fictionalized character who speaks the poem — and as such not significantly different in type from poems like Li Bai 李白's poem "Changgan Song" 长干行, which ventriloquizes the feelings of a wife left behind by her husband. As with Li Bai's persona poem, the idiom of "City on the Ocean" is not necessarily that of a shipyard worker — compare Liu Bannong's more focused attempt at creating or recording the idiom of a non-poet in "Rain," earlier in this chapter. Riveters are as unlikely to make sweeping metaphors about world socialism as merchants' wives are to speak in rhyme. What is unique, though, about Ke Lan's persona poems is that they often involve a call to action or the imperative voice, visible in "City on the Ocean" and especially clear in "Agreement," reproduced above. Like other Ke Lan poems, "Agreement" also creates a first-person plural speaker, but in this case the speaker's identity is less specified than that of "City on the Ocean," and with a much stronger prescriptive voice, like Xu Chengmiao's "Advice." Were one person on the street to walk up to another and say, "every time we meet, we come to an agreement" that we will be "wolfish towards the enemy," it would be considered laughably inappropriate.¹⁸⁵ This kind of speech, in the period in which Ke Lan writes these poems, is communist party speech; for it to be spoken by a group or individual speaker who is not quoting party ideas or writings is an appropriation. In "Agreement," this particular appropriation seems to have been undertaken with the intent of actually broadening and intensifying the reach of fairly standard communist principles — it is, however, ambiguously "given to the party," one of a group of seven poems marked with this

occasion. The particular word "dedicated" 献给 here has the connotation of a gift or tribute, which would suggest that the poem is intended to be an encouragement and a support; at the same time, though, it could be easy to interpret the "we" as "me and you," or the individual poetic speaker in its relationship to the party. This would be a much more radical and dangerous shift in the relationship: under this interpretation, the poem would subject a party which has enjoyed extremely wide powers to a kind of contractual obligation to the individual. The fact that the poem cannot be pinned down on this matter is part of its charm: rather than simply create a double-entendre of opposition for the government, it takes into itself the disorientation of unity, the group ethic whose source is unknowable and whose power is simultaneously diffuse, untenable, and strong.

Unfortunately, there are risks involved in taking individual aesthetic and ideological responsibility for crafting political statements intended to be beautiful and correct at the same time. Most unavoidably, the CCP is constantly in flux, while the individual artist remains personally responsible for the ideas and feelings of their work. This is much what happened to Ke Lan at the end of the Hundred Flowers period. Unlike Guo Feng, who was criticized more gently, Ke Lan was formally punished. Like many intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution, he was assigned to hard labor, his family members were beaten and imprisoned, and he spent time under house arrest.¹⁸⁶ As he writes in a later critical work, it was this period that transformed attitudes towards prose poetry as a genre: he says that the Cultural Revolution period "made prose poetry writers clearly understand that Chinese prose poetry had to break through the weak points of the siege and fight for a position of independence in literary circles. Authors had to join together to form teams, creating Chinese prose poetry study groups, and undertake systematic compositional practice and theoretical research to guide it."¹⁸⁷ (使散文诗作家清醒地认识到,

中国散文诗要审势突围，在文坛上争取独立地位，必须团结成一支队伍，成立专门的中国散文诗学会，进行系统的创作实践和理论研究指导。) The response was not individual but communal; not artistic, but political. This is especially true of the admonition to form "study groups" (学会) in the style of the innumerable political study groups of the early 20th century, especially Chen Duxiu's Communist study groups of the 1920s. To survive in the midst of the PRC, prose poets would organize according to the communist models of the government under which they labored, and demand what the PRC itself demanded: independence founded on an ideological (in this case theoretical) basis.

When Ke Lan says that "prose poets" realized the need for these structures, he means in part that he himself, as China's most popular pre-Cultural Revolution prose poet, precisely followed the plan of attack that he describes above. In addressing a group of prose poetry theorists, he once said,

I am a cadre, but people still give me the gift of many hats, like "author." I've achieved what most people would call the goals of life, but I'm still running around endlessly. It's not for fame or status, and it's certainly not for money! Why, then? All I do is in order to publicize and spread prose poetry in the hopes that it can bring happiness to more people, can bring more people an enlightenment in thought, can rally them together, educate them, concentrate their function, can enhance education in the Chinese national language, and in order to contribute by strengthening the country and bringing peace to the people.¹⁸⁸

我是个干部，人们还送我作家等多顶桂冠，一般人所说的所谓人生目标我都实现了，可我还这样一直马不停蹄地跑个不停。不是为了名誉，地位，更不是为了金钱！为什那么呢？我一切都是为了宣传推广散文诗，希望散文诗能给更多的人带来快乐，能给更多的人带来思想上的启迪，能起到团结人，教育人，凝聚人的作用，能为弘扬国文教育，国强民安做出贡献。

Compare this to Liu Bannong, who claimed "I am not a poet," a revolutionary denial of previous values. For Ke Lan to say that "I am a cadre" is a positive construction of identity. This construction does not prevent him from being a poet, but instead makes the point that in addition to being a Communist cadre, he is a cadre of and for prose poetry, that he serves it as he serves

the nation, because the two have identical goals. Ke Lan worked to give prose poetry the outer trappings of socialist organization — study groups, theoretical underpinnings, the goal of strengthening the nation — in an attempt to ensure its survival. The way in which he did this is fully representative of the poetic process of contemporary Chinese prose poetry: in the case of a conflict, *claim to be identical to your opposition*.

This was a moment of key importance in the history of prose poetry: the point at which the debate over communist orthodoxy in content becomes a debate over the orthodoxy of the particular literary form of prose poetry is one originary location of the practice of the prose poetry that would become popular in the 1980s. The form, tentatively used by authors of the 50s to advance certain individual and aesthetic goals and ideas, becomes more strongly defined in relationship to communist orthodoxy, whether that relationship is oppositional or cooperative. While the opposition of the communist literary apparatus to prose poetry caused a great deal of suffering among poets in the 1960s and 1970s, it gave the form credibility and cachet in the early Deng era, and the Deng regime's support was a key ingredient in the "prose poetry fever" 散文诗热 of the 1980s. Today, although Guo Feng's prose poems can be difficult to find in contemporary bookstores, Ke Lan's work has remained in print almost continuously since the end of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁸⁹ Ke Lan is the chairman of the Chinese Association for Prose Poetry, and he and Guo Feng have both edited numerous anthologies.¹⁹⁰ As we've seen, the qualities that they share as artists, editors and writers have a couple of clear standards: first, brevity, one of the main thrusts of the criticism of both Guo Feng and Ke Lan; second, unlineated prose style, indicated by Guo Feng's epiphany in 1958 that what he was writing were not free verse poems, and needed to be "bluntly knitted together."

Finally, though, one of the crucial elements in Ke Lan's work, one that appears much

more strongly than in Guo Feng's, is the fluidity in and exchange of position. The individual speaks for the collective; the collective speaks in the voice of an individual; the illiterate or undereducated speak in lofty tones; the poet becomes a shipbuilder. Of the two hundred poems in the 1958 version of Ke Lan's *Short Flute*, only two are excised for the 1981 version. One was written for a visit to Shanghai by Soviet Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, and was almost certainly made unpalatable to readers and political overseers alike by the split between the CCP and the CCCP that took place in the late 1950s. The other is "Sharpener," reproduced above, which appears as the final poem in "My Praise," the first section of *Short Flute*. At first glance, this poem seems as orthodox as any in the collection: it celebrates labor, features the kind of rabid desire for production that was common to literary characters during and after the Great Leap Forward, has a strong interest in new technologies, and ends in the intimacy of workers with the means of production, a classic Marxist desideratum. It might seem an odd choice as a poem to remove from the collection — especially when other poems, like "Agreement," are much more prescriptive about what communism means, and are much more pointed about asserting that prescription.

What is unique about "Sharpener," however, is the extent to which it specifically describes and praises the malleability of position. What is cutting, what is being cut? Who is the sharpener, and who is the steel? The boundary between a tool and its wielder is effaced in the smoke and fire of creation. This could be interpreted as making a sensitive political insinuation: that the division between the party and the people will be, already has been, or should be effaced in a similar way. Even though official descriptions of the party/citizen relationship vary widely, management of the shape of the division itself is an origin of authority for the party, and threats to party authority, even those that are extrapolated from a poem about a metal sharpener, have

historically been treated harshly in the course of communist control over literature and culture. This is the factor that most likely led to Ke Lan's decision to suppress this poem, and not others: even in the more permissive 1980s, to say that the party was equal to or fully contiguous with the people was not particularly prudent. What is more interesting for contemporary readers of this poem, though, is the aesthetic importance of the blurring of boundaries between tool and user, between subject and object.

Let us for a moment return to "Kind of Like Pulling Out a Nail" by Fang Wenzhu, which appears at the beginning of this chapter. If we consider literary style, in Fang's case the prose style of educational parables intended for children, to be a kind of tool, and if we consider the writer of a poem to be the wielder of that tool, then the poem is mysterious, and distant. It is not clear why any author interested in producing a reaction in readers similar to that experienced when reading poetry would choose to refer to a prose style like that of educational parables, and then write his poem in a style that was so much more challenging and complex. Shen Yinmo's reasons for creating the visually rhymed quatrain he does in "Moonlit Night" and Liu Bannong's reasons for choosing a child's voice in "Rain" are much clearer: the former wants to break the sway of rhyme in order to allow a freer, more colloquial poetry, and the latter wants to draw our attention to the poetry in everyday life. Both have positions, those positions have goals, and in the service of those goals, tools are applied — the tools that Liu Bannong calls "fresh tricks," the ones that Zhou Zuoren muses on, but essentially decides are not as important as the ideological, social or aesthetic goal. After the melting of positions, though, after the distinction between the poet and his own tools becomes fluid, and then melts away, the world of prose poetry changes dramatically. We enter a period in which new relationships emerge: poets can affect or alter their own tools inside the poem; poets become cognizant of the effects their tools have on them,

whether ideologically, aesthetically, or personally; readers become increasingly aware of poetic technique not as a series of variations of basic rules, but as a composition on blank canvas. Poets move away from the concept of the poet wielding a tool to make a poem; they move towards the concept that the poem is itself a tool, and the poet as represented in the poem is a part of that tool, and that the goal of the artist as well as the poem is to make an experience for a reader. This is why a focus on processes — the processes of reading and the processes of writing — is so much more useful in reading poems after Ke Lan than it is in reading those that came before.

To put this transition in terms of a comparison with Guo Feng: instead of asking, and then answering, whose *guxiang* we are talking about in "Leaf Flute," one of the things we are challenged to ask in Ke Lan's poem "Sharpener" is who is 我, "I." More importantly, though, this question of "I" is not a means by which we can get to "the bottom" of the poem: it *is* the poem. Trying to unravel whether the "worker" whose words have been recorded in the occasion for the poem is a real person, or an invented/edited fiction, whether the hand holds the tool or the tool is a part of the hand, whether the speakers of poems can speak for the party, whether a lone voice can represent the party — this process that a reader undergoes while reading "Sharpener," regardless of the conclusions that reader might come to, is the experience that is at the heart of the poem's design. Many kinds of modern poetry hinge on this kind of ambivalence, indeterminacy (in Marjorie Perloff's formulation), or mystery: what is specific to this particular transition in prose poetry, however, and I would argue the originary moment of some of the similarities between many prose poems that come later, is that this ambivalence is created through an individual poetic sensibility inhabiting a piece or a style of prose.

That this formal and aesthetic poetic project is carried out in and on prose makes it politically sensitive in a way far more subtle than the overt position-switching that is the topic of

"Sharpener"; if prose holds the simultaneous position as the voice of the party and a form privileged in its relationship to reality, then poetry masquerading as or ventriloquizing prose (in the form of news, party dictates, official speeches, communist theory and realist or romantic realist fiction) has an impact on concepts of that reality. When the attitudes that poets, sincerely or manipulatively, choose to project are precisely identical to those of the party, the seams in this costume are invisible — they count, and should count, in fact, as enthusiastic participation in the communist future on the part of loyal poets, as Ke Lan repeatedly points out. They simply appropriate prose language so that they can personally express what the party desires; the tradition of this, visible in almost all prose poetry between 1949 and the upswing of the Cultural Revolution, likely protected these poems to a greater or lesser degree. This perfect identity between the poet's position and the party's, though, is impossible to maintain, and even reasonably orthodox poets like Guo Feng came up for some form of official criticism during the near outlawing of literature that attended the height of the Cultural Revolution.

After the Cultural Revolution, however, it was this tradition of subjectivity, positional exchange, individual influence over supposedly realist prose forms, and the third road between orthodoxy and rebellion — the choice to be similar to the party, but not identical to it — that made prose poetry increasingly popular among practitioners and readers alike. On face, it may seem that the difference between May Fourth and post-PRC prose poetry matches movements experienced in the West towards postmodern reconsiderations of unitary selves and the impossibility of simple objectivity; while these similarities are real, prose poetry in China arrived at this increased level of subjectivity during very different historical conditions and with very different goals. It is these conditions and these goals — for Ke Lan and Guo Feng, a desire to individually participate in government, and a set of attempts to engage in the individual

production of the mass voice — that will echo in later Chinese work much more strongly than the West's philosophical and academic revolutions.

CHAPTER THREE

LIU ZAIFU: A FAREWELL TO PROSE POETRY

刘再复：告别散文诗

Certainly the poem, the poem today shows...the poem unmistakably
shows a strong bent toward falling silent.

— Paul Celan, "The Meridian"¹⁹¹

Subjectivizing Socialism

Liu Zaifu, born in 1941 in Fujian province, is a prolific poet, essayist and literary critic.

The following poem was published in 1983, in one of Liu's first collections of poetry:

29 lines redacted

This second poem is Liu's most famous and well-respected work,¹⁹³ and is therefore translated here in its entirety:

173 lines redacted

173 lines redacted

173 lines redacted

173 lines redacted

Liu Zaifu's poems, especially his meditations on self and society like "If I Made a Hell," are inextricable from his political, literary-political, and historical milieu. His work centers, persistently, patiently, on a specific set of political and philosophical values that inform not only his poetry, but also his literary criticism and essay writing, values that form a nexus around his shifting understanding of subjectivity (主体性). This chapter aims to examine those values through Liu's prose poetry, and in so doing come to understand his particular iteration of the Chinese prose poem, as well as the reasons that he wrote far less prose poetry after his exile from mainland China began in 1989. Because of Liu Zaifu's intimate relationship to national Chinese politics, however, readings of his poems will be particularly well served by an understanding of the political, ideological, and aesthetic struggles in which he has taken part.

The 1980s in Mainland China are often touted as a period of great freedom in which art, philosophy and academics were renewed after the long, dry period of the Cultural Revolution. Huang Yongjian entitles his chapter on prose poetry in the 1980s with the characters 回归, "return"¹⁹⁵ and return is a common theme: return to normalcy, return to the creative capabilities of the May Fourth movement, return to the senses. This narrative, though, competes with that of critics like Huang Yibing, who see the literature of the 1980s as fundamentally contiguous with that of the 70s and 60s.¹⁹⁶ Seen from the first perspective, the literature of the 80s no longer had to fulfill positive revolutionary goals in order to be allowed publication and the chance to reach readers; seen from the second, literary works and movements were carefully channeled in order to criticize the old regime (Mao and his inner circle) and support the Deng government in exactly the way that the CCP had been designing and encouraging mass movements since before 1949.

The Tiananmen poems discussed in chapter one make a good example of this phenomenon: they were, at least in part, a popular movement to honor a very popular politician, but they were simultaneously, whether intended as such or not, a show of force in the succession struggle that put Deng Xiaoping into power, and one of the first appearances of the kind of rhetoric that would later be associated with the government-led movement against the Gang of Four.

What level of continuity with previous politics, then, should we read in "If I Made a Hell"? A part of Liu's collection 《告别》 (*Farewell*), it seems fair to identify the "grotesque age" and the "rushing to and fro" as descriptions of the struggles of the Cultural Revolution. *Farewell* is full of emotional and concrete references to the political unrest that had just ended: guilt, regret for sins, regret for lost time, imprisonment,¹⁹⁷ as well as a sense of new opportunities arriving that seems figural for the end of the Mao period and the beginning of a better future. Later, outside of the boundaries of PRC restrictions, Liu would publish a book with Li Zehou 李泽厚 called *Farewell to Revolution* (《告别革命》).¹⁹⁸ One of the liberalizations of the early Deng period was the license to criticize those who acted in the name of the Communist Party, especially for acts perpetrated during the Cultural Revolution; simultaneously, the praise-poem to the glories of the future came (or was brought) back into fashion. While Xu Chengmiao's poem "Advice" was criticized at the end of the 1950s, positive sentiments about development, progress, and the future were far more acceptable to the Deng government in the 1980s — such that end of the title poem of Liu's collection, "Farewell," strikes a note that is much repeated: "The spring of my youth has ripened. My farewell has become ripe. I will no longer be treated as a child."¹⁹⁹ The retelling of suffering experienced during the Cultural Revolution, as well as a strong hope in the future, are both attributes that Liu Zaifu's early works share with "scar" literature (伤痕文学), one of the first literary movements after the death of Mao Zedong.

"If I Made a Hell" at least partially participates, then, in some of the dominant, government-sanctioned themes of political poetry in the early 1980s: it records one of the many scars left by the Cultural Revolution, and looks towards the near future with the anticipation of improvements. Liu Zaifu himself, in an interview conducted long after his exile, claims to have filled a mainstream role in the 1980s. "In the wave of transformations of the eighties, I admit I was part of the trend. I have friends who said I was 'riding the tide,' and I don't disagree with that." (在八十年代的变革大潮中, 我承认自己是潮流中人, 有朋友说我是‘弄潮儿’, 我也默认.)²⁰⁰ His concept, however, of the "tide" (*chao*) is dependent on his particular place in the Communist Party, which was by no means a monolithic entity. Liu was a member of the party's progressive wing: in the middle 80s, he served as the director of the Literature Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a center of political, philosophical and literary innovation that broadly shared political affiliations with reformers Hu Yaobang 胡耀邦 and Zhao Ziyang 赵紫阳, but were often opposed to the older Communist power structure represented by Hu Qiaomu 胡乔木 and others.²⁰¹

Liu's specific political experience helps us see the ways in which the attitude of the speaker in "If I Built a Hell" differs from those in much of scar literature. For example, the narrator in Lu Xinhua's 卢新华 story "Scar" 《伤痕》 focuses on the injustices experienced by the protagonist Xiao Su's mother during the Cultural Revolution, compounded both by the mother's absolute goodness and the selfishness of the world around her. Xiao Su's guilt, sorrow, loss and inability to forget are all heightened to a cathartic pitch, and that anger is directed very cleanly at the Gang of Four. Liu's poem refers to many of these themes: the sorrowful mother, for example, appears, as does the flood of tears that is a hallmark of stories like "Scar." The culprit in "Hell," though, is not the Gang of Four: it is naivete (幼稚), a part of the self, and that inward

turn has political import. Compare this sense of individual responsibility to the way that Ke Lan, in his 1981 introduction to *Short Flute of Morning Mist*, puts blame for his experience at the feet of Zhang Chunqiao 张春桥, a member of the Gang of Four. In his afterword, Ke moves into the future, asking the question: "How can an individual national character be established? How can the language of the masses be used creatively?" (如何树立独特的民族风格? 如何创造性的运用群众语言?)²⁰² Even the sentences lack a subject; the goal is effective communal action, and the crimes of the Gang of Four were to intentionally, selfishly lead the nation in the wrong direction. "If I Built a Hell," on the other hand, seems to focus on the crime the individual commits in naively *being led*: the ugliness of the Cultural Revolution has to do with a body emptied of individual will that chases the human tide around, with weak hands waving in grand unison.

This attitude is echoed in other parts of *Farewell*, most clearly in the story-parable "I Won't Be That Stupid Again," in which a schoolboy describes how he idolized, followed, and imitated a taller boy, "like when I was very young and I worshiped the big tree behind our house, not knowing that the world also contained green oceans of forests." (就象儿时我崇拜屋后的那棵大树, 不知道人间还有森林的绿海.)²⁰³ Under the older boy's direction, the speaker breaks two windows in the schoolhouse, and the teacher who catches him says this: "You are a person. You are not a shadow" (你是人, 不是影子). When the boy learns this lesson, and promises never to repeat his infraction, he says "A shadow is not a soul" (影子不是灵魂).²⁰⁴ Again, the sin is not about taking the wrong advice or following the wrong leaders, it is the act of following itself. Blindly following others decreases the individual's humanity, makes them weak, spiritless, deformed. The scar narrative is that bad people misled the citizens of the nation into doing bad things, but were apprehended and punished, freeing the nation to rebuild itself; Liu Zaifu's poem

makes that scar narrative seem like a Marxist apology for naivete, and hangs the promise of the future on the individual's ability to throw off childish servility to authority and make ethical choices for themselves.

This position, philosophical in the sense that Marxism itself is philosophical, appears again and again in the work of Liu Zaifu, including in his philosophy and literary criticism. In addition to his eight collections of prose poetry and ten collections of prose,²⁰⁵ some of Liu's most well-read works are critical: his essay "On the Subjectivity of Literature"²⁰⁶ was a seminal and much-debated piece whose echoes persist today. The debate over the subjectivity of literature engendered by this and other critical works provoked some of the only English-language scholarship on Liu Zaifu to date, one thread of a wide-ranging, spirited exchange between Liu Kang 刘康, Michael Duke, Zhang Longxi 张隆溪 and Perry Link on "Ideology and Theory in the Study of Modern Chinese Literature."²⁰⁷ Liu Kang describes Liu Zaifu's literary position in this way: "By invoking the romantic and humanist claims in Marxian aesthetical thinking, Liu Zaifu's ambition is to reconstruct a human-centered literary theory against Mao's terrorist assaults on the aesthetic function of the arts and on human individual subjectivity."²⁰⁸ He goes on to lightly criticize Liu Zaifu's apolitical stance by saying that "Maoist guardians are vehemently assaulting Liu Zaifu's theory on political grounds; staying above politics cannot defuse these attacks, nor can it clear the way for aesthetic contemplations or cultural studies above and beyond politics."²⁰⁹ Liu Kang's solution to this conundrum, namely for Liu Zaifu to accept his engagement in a Foucaultian power struggle with the "Maoist guardians," seems to ignore one of the key parts of the content of his ideology — his almost idiosyncratically intense engagement with individualism and subjectivity. He is not above politics: he is below it, examining the individual, starting from the atoms of political organization. While Liu Zaifu's

humanism and individualism can be considered political values (and while this chapter has no interest in taking up the question of the fundamental unavoidability of power politics), the intensity of Liu Zaifu's individualism is the main factor that limits the direct role of politics in his poetry.

The same observation arises when the politics of "If I Made a Hell" are pursued to their logical ends. The critical part of the poem's message, if we assume it to have a message, is quite clear: it is a kind of sin to blindly follow others, doing so is childish, and childish obedience was the reason for recent violence. The prescriptive part of the message, though, is considerably less clear: the speaker will put his naivete into a hell, and punish it — in its suffering, it will give the speaker some access to a "feasible heaven" that is every bit as much an ideal as end-stage communism or Walden Pond. What is missing, though, and what seems to be left out intentionally, are instructions for the rest of us as to what to do. We are not instructed to follow the speaker's example; the speaker seems to have no interest in putting others into its created hell, and we are in fact warned against making ourselves followers. To use the idiom of "I Won't Be That Stupid Again," Liu Zaifu's poetic speaker in "Hell" is not the tall boy who fills the role of leader, and we are people, not shadows.

Liu's insistence on an individualism that borders on solipsism seems to sharpen and refine over the course of the 1980s, as shown in this passage from his 1988 book *The Search's Lament*: "I do not now wish my search to be disturbed. I refuse solicitude, refuse friendship, refuse devotion shown towards me. It is all superfluous." (不要在此刻扰乱我的寻找，我拒绝关怀，拒绝友情，拒绝给予我的奉献。一切都是累赘。)²¹⁰ Over the course of this section of the book-length poem series, the speaker becomes increasingly isolate (孤独) until experiencing a kind of transcendental release in which "heaven and human are united, objects and the self blur

together" (天人合一，物我难分).²¹¹ Though the poems are often political, they refuse, at some level, the prospect of community. They advocate a world where we no longer weigh so heavily the opinions and ideas of others, and just as Marxism idealizes an end-state in which equality and cooperation cause radical individual fulfillment, the isolation and self-reliance of these poems, when taken to an idealistic extreme, causes blinding unity between people and people, as well as people and nature.

Subjectivity — specifically, the way in which a poetic speaker can channel the thoughts and ideas of a group into a single voice, simultaneously representing (or reciting) group values while claiming individual license to personalize them (refusing to be identical to the group) — is a value that should be familiar from the discussion of Ke Lan and Guo Feng in chapter two. The major expression of subjectivity in "If I Made a Hell," however, does not primarily operate on the level of the relationship between the poem's speaker and its idiom, as did the examples from Ke and Guo. Here, the speaker's role as subject is the point: the seizure of moral responsibility and individual power to make change is overt. Liu's speaker goes much further than Ke Lan's "Agreement," in which the speaker invents his own Communist-style pledge instead of acceding to a pledge required by the Party. In "If I Made a Hell" and "I Won't Be So Stupid Again," the pledge that Liu's speakers make is specifically to rely upon their own individual spirit, and to dispense with all behaviors that naively follow others.

Liu Zaifu is quite explicit about the influence of Ke Lan and especially Guo Feng on his work. Surely in part because they come from the same part of South China, Liu's poetry often refers to Guo, like his poem "A Man Nailed to the Cross of Prose Poetry" which is dedicated to Guo Feng and which ends with the line "Oh poet raised by the Mulan River, your person and your poems are equally rich with fascinations, they force me to study you in secret, to shoulder

my own cross as well..." (你这木兰溪养大的诗人，人和诗一样富有魅力，叫我不能不悄悄学着你，也背起一个十字架...) ²¹². The speaker of an earlier poem called "I Play My Leaf Flute" is released from (metaphorical or real) prison and writes, "I can sing my song freely, as in the hills and fields of childhood when I played my leaf flute. Life should have what people should: a cosmos in the heart, in the cosmos a series of selves, and the self's radiated skylight and earthlight" (我可以自由地唱着我的歌，象儿时自由地在山野里吹着我的叶笛。生活应当象人该有的那样：心里也有自己的宇宙，宇宙里也有自己的排列，和自己放射的天光与地光)。 ²¹³ The freedom of the child playing the leaf flute is a double reference to Guo Feng: not only was his most important book of poetry called *Leaf Flute Collection* (《叶笛集》), but he was a writer of stories for children and often described as having a "childlike heart" (童心)。 ²¹⁴ When compared to Guo's poems in chapter two, though, it seems clear that Liu Zaifu's work is fundamentally different: even though he claims to be playing the simple leaf flute of his home town, the poem also contains a metaphysical, speculative turn. The way in which it burrows into the human heart, there to find the breadth of deep space, would be conceptually and aesthetically alien to a poet like Guo Feng. In fact, in the preface to *Farewell*, Liu writes: "I'm a person who seeks out life through books, and I don't often have time to carefully examine the natural world. Most of what I write is about the feeling of the age, the emotions of life. My sensitivity to the world of people seems to exceed my sensitivity to the world of nature, and my ability to 'explain' exceeds my ability to 'describe'..." (我是从书本上讨生活的人，很少有时间细致地观察自然界，写的东西大半只是一些时代的情绪，人生的情绪。我对人界的敏感似乎超过对自然界的敏感，‘说明’的力量似乎超过‘描述’的力量.....) ²¹⁵ This is palpably distant from the pastoral, realist work of Guo Feng and only slightly less far from the idealist realism of Ke Lan: even though, as Wang Guangming agrees, Liu Zaifu is one of the most direct inheritors of Ke

and Guo's influence, that influence seems to be ideological and spiritual rather than a function of tone, setting, idiom, or *technē*.

There is another clear potential source of influence for the poetry of Liu Zaifu: his first work of literary criticism was *A Draft Discussion of Lu Xun's Aesthetic Thought* 《鲁迅美学思想论稿》, and he has read and written about Lu Xun throughout his career as an intellectual.²¹⁶ The question, however, of the influence of Lu Xun in general, which is undoubtedly deep and thoroughgoing, is different from that of the influence of Lu Xun on Liu Zaifu's prose poetry via *Wild Grass*. Unlike the leaf flute, "wild grass" or other direct references to Lu Xun's book of prose poetry almost never appear in Liu Zaifu's *Collected Prose Poems*: in such a large corpus, he actually has several poems that take grass as their subject, but they are almost always lawns, as in the poem "I Once Betrayed a Patch of Grass," in which the speaker's mother gives the speaker a piece of lawn to tend, and that lawn gets destroyed during endless childhood war games — another recapitulation of the guilt that drives "If I Made a Hell."²¹⁷ In his book *The Search's Lament*, he spends two sections of the poem "Lonely Moment" (寂寞时刻) talking about Lu Xun, focusing not on his art, but on his biography: his loneliness, his wandering, his struggle, his enemies.²¹⁸ For a scholar who has studied Lu Xun so carefully, Liu Zaifu's poetry seems particularly concerned with Lu Xun the person. The poem on Lu Xun in Liu's book *Sun, Earth, Man* 《太阳*土地*人》 is called "Under a Statue of Lu Xun" and focuses on him as a motivation, a guiding spirit, a challenge to be honest and kind — everything *but* an artist.²¹⁹ While some of Liu Zaifu's other poems on famous deceased figures seem like occasions for conceptual exercises, Lu Xun feels physically present in "Under a Statue" — meanwhile, his actual prose poems seem never to come up. They do appear in a short history of the form he writes as a postscript for his *Collected Prose Poems*: he calls *Wild Grass* a "monument to its

times" (时代纪念碑) but spends most of his analytical energy asking why it hasn't been matched since, and is much more specific about comparing 1950s prose poets to those of the 1980s.²²⁰ In his essays written after 1989, *Wild Grass* comes up only rarely: mentioning it in passing in 1996, Liu calls it prose (散文), and in a later interview about Lu Xun generally, only mentions *Wild Grass* to say that it proves Lu Xun's status as "the only avant-garde writer who made inquiries into the meaning of life."²²¹ When these scattered, disorganized references are compared to, for example, Liu's series of nine essays on "The True Story of Ah Q" (阿 Q 正传),²²² or his almost uncountably large number of references to and meditations on *Dream of the Red Chamber*, it seems clear that of the many ways in which Liu Zaifu is involved with the works and legacy of Lu Xun, they do not necessarily include attending to *Wild Grass* as a collection of prose poetry or even analyzing it as poetry.

This relationship — one in which Liu Zaifu seems to identify at least in part as a serious student of Lu Xun, but doesn't treat *Wild Grass* as a specific source text — might be what Wang Guangming is describing when he examines Liu Zaifu's relationship to Lu Xun. He writes that Liu is "a kind of inheritor" (一种继承) of the tradition of Lu Xun's work, but adds it is "an inheritance that is spiritual, conceptual and of artistic vision, and not simple modeling or the use of source material." (精神上，思想和艺术气魄上的继承，而不是简单的模仿和借鉴。)²²³ Apart from claiming that their styles are different — Lu Xun reserved and distant, Liu Zaifu intense and passionate — Wang points out that they are of different ages, different settings and surroundings, and must therefore write different poetry. His conclusion, as well as the evidence presented above, supports two important interpretations of Liu's work. First, Liu Zaifu's emphasis on subjectivity is not just a message or lesson in his poems, but also makes up a lived, enacted part of the writing process: although familiar with conversations started by Guo Feng

and Ke Lan and Lu Xun in *Wild Grass*, Liu's goal seems not to be to write prose poetry in their manner but to write an art that is unique to himself, one which may start in prose poetic tradition but does not remain circumscribed by it. Similarly, his poems participate in received Marxist tradition, but their individually-based, humanist version of Marxism and his poetics, which "explain" rather than "describe," are different enough from the mainstream of that tradition that they deserve to be seen as quiet revolutions.

If Liu Zaifu is as I describe him above — a participant in the mainstream political discussions of the 1980s, but not a fundamentally orthodox one, and a careful reader of earlier prose poems, but not a writer who strongly models his work on that of his forerunners — then the question becomes what we can read from his poems directly, as individual works struggling inside and against their context. "Reading the Sea," as is common practice since the time of Ke Lan, is separated into parts: unlike Ke Lan's work, though, these parts are untitled and numbered, communicating to the reader that the parts have sequence, but without indicating how to read that sequence. The interaction among the three parts can be read on the level of image, with section one generally touching on the surface of the sea, section two examining its depths, and section three covering the sea floor; this is complicated somewhat by the fact that section three is equally about an *inability* to see into the sea floor, into the mysteries of the past, and the hope that these occluded images will one day become clear. Another way to read the relationship between these numbered sections as a temporal progression, like a narrative. In section one, "I have come...again" (我又来到) to the sea, in section two, "I am reading" (我读着), and in section three, "I am reading the sea...but I feel weary" (我读着海....但我困惑了...).²²⁴ Narrative time, the structure of most stories, is perhaps one of the most recognizable qualities that all poets, prose

poets included, can take from prose fiction. Looking closer, though, there are some significant differences between the way that "Reading the Sea" unfolds and the way a story is told. The fatigue and confusion of part three is introduced two-thirds of the way into the poem, and resolved two paragraphs later, at "today, I understand: because you are strong in yourself...." This is a much diminished treatment when compared to the way that stories treat their central conflicts and driving intriguants. What's more, as a story the piece is deeply unsatisfying. From the beginning, we are told that this is all happening "again," and each section ends with a return to the same concept, like a refrain: the sea is to be pursued, almost worshiped. The poem does have several locations of cause-and-effect logic, for example in the space between the end of section two and the start of section three: the speaker reads "down to the book's soul," and there finds "self-conquering, its self-defeat," triggering the weariness cited above, where the self-defeat inherent in the book's soul is recast as a physical inability to see beyond the sea floor. This cause-and-effect, though, proceeds on the level of human thought, simultaneous, recurring, similar to fiction only in the kind of expanded sense that would consider the internal monologues of Joyce, Woolf or Beckett to be "stories."

That refrain, though, the way in which each section heightens towards the use of rhapsodic, lyric exclamations — "how much it deserves my love!" "splendid, undecaying literature!" "Sea!" — are strongly reminiscent of the professions of faith and idealist encomiums of the Mao era. Examples abound, but this from the 1968 *People's Daily* is more or less representative:

We are profoundly aware that if we truly want to succeed in complying with Chairman Mao's great strategic deployment, remaining eternally loyal to a proletarian headquarters that takes Chairman Mao as our leader and Vice Chairman Lin as our vice-leader, then we must live the study and live the use of Mao Zedong Thought....penetratingly and thoroughly carry out the great revolutionary criticism, use criticism to overturn and humiliate the counterrevolutionary revisionism of China's Khrushchevs, criticize them

deeply and thoroughly, do good work of education through struggle, and seize complete victory in the Proletarian Cultural Revolution!

我们深深体会到，要真正做到紧跟毛主席的伟大战略部署，永远忠于以毛主席为首、林副主席为副的无产阶级司令部，就必须活学活用毛泽东思想...深入持久地开展革命的大批判，把中国赫鲁晓夫的反革命修正主义路线批倒批臭，批深批透，搞好斗批改，夺取无产阶级文化大革命的全面胜利！²²⁵

Although Liu Zaifu's piece is obviously of higher literary quality, and of a wholly different political orientation, there are concepts, words and attitudes that the two share, like repeated reference to superlatives, "eternal" (永远), "complete" (全面), and a conceptual reliance on depth and the fathoming of depth — compare the way that the speaker of Liu's poem mentally enters the ocean down to the sea floor, and then struggles to see through it to the way that the newspaper editorial calls on readers to "penetratingly" (深入, literally "enter deeply") and "deeply" (also 深, in 批深批透) criticize the enemy. The editorial and the poem also share an ideological singlemindedness: almost the whole paragraph in the editorial above, even at the level of its grammar, is subordinated to the question of what must happen in order to oppose the "multiple headquarters" theory that threatened the power of Mao Zedong. If one takes the poem at face value, the sea in this poem is a kind of aestheticized echo to the headquarters, much to be desired and supported, all-encompassing, idealized, transcendent. Part of the pleasure of the excesses in the poem's language come from this attitude of adoration, and the romantic idealism of the speaker's sea-worship also has a resemblance to that of the editorialist Qiu Shaoyun, who assumes "loyalty" without feeling the need to explain why or how. The individual in the poem is someone who has determined to pay the price necessary to pursue this line of thinking about the ocean to its greatest degree, and so it is with those being addressed in the *People's Daily*: in neither case is it particularly important to give any narrative of how or why this determination was made. These are the elisions of faith, and of transcendence. Belief in Mao Zedong Thought

comes at you all at once, in a lyric moment of passion and courage: an elaborate justification of its truth would require testing the possibility that it is not true, and that is outside the power of the editorial, or we could say, outside the bounds of this particular poem.

In another sense, however, the speaker's fascination with the sea is grander than any possible admiration for the party, the state, or the future: it includes not only infinite beauty and happiness, but "limitless abyss," "brutality," "tragedy," "farce," "blur," "murk" and "death." The poem is an ode, but an ode to a harsh master. The structures of orthodox Communist praise that Ke Lan and Guo Feng borrow lack the "double image" that Liu Zaifu and Victor Hugo find in nature, its simultaneous offer of comfort and threat, of infinite readability and fundamental unknowability. Victor Hugo's most explicit commentary on the sublimity of the ocean may appear in his poem "Chanson," the fourth section of the sixth book of *Castigations* (Les Châtiments), which in its entirety is a satirical screed against the government of Napoleon III. "Chanson" has the following lines: "O Ocean vast! We heard thy song with wonder, / The waves kept time, / 'Appear, O Truth,' thou sang'st with voice of thunder, / 'And shine sublime.'"²²⁶ In Hugo's poem, the ocean is a revolutionary ocean, directed against Napoleon, a surging chaos of thought and action that is invoked with a desire to tear the emperor's state apart: "Be born; arise; — o'er earth and wild waves bounding / Peoples and suns! / Let darkness vanish; — tocsins be resounding, / And flashing, guns!"²²⁷ Romanticism of the middle and late eighteenth century is certainly an influence in modern Chinese literature — the popularity of the Byronic hero attests to that — but this imagination of nature as a transcendent and unstoppable revolutionary is an interesting variation on the romantic hero, and the direction of that revolution is even more so. In "Reading the Sea," in addition to being "strong," "eternal," "boundless" and "limitless," the ocean is also "constantly renewing, enriching, evolving." It surges up not in an attempt to overturn, or

to replace the empire with a new, modern state, but to "enrich my life," to "renew my spirit" — not *freedom from*, as in the case of Hugo and Napoleon, but *freedom to* "dive," "drown," "cross," "dig," or any of the other possible responses to the ocean that Liu lists in part two.

The invocation of Victor Hugo, however, is just the tip of the truly exceptional amount of reference in the poem. Section one has a list of closely packed, varied references: among them, the Jingwei bird, the resurrected spirit of a daughter of the legendary emperor Yan (炎帝, also called *Shennong* 神农),²²⁸ as well as the horses of Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿), who was an influential painter and president of the Chinese Artists Association (中华全国美术工作者协会) most famous for his figures of galloping horses. These references to art and artists in part one, in addition to the mention of Hans Christian Andersen, Schubert, and Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*, have only a tenuous conceptual relationship to each other on the level of content. There seems to be no more reason to put Andersen's fairy tale next to Schubert than there would be to put it next to Mozart; the references seem instead to be critical to the poem in that they refer specifically to the world outside of the poem, broadening it, pulling the whole world of culture and art into the poem — and into the poem's concept of the ocean. The specific content of the list seems to advance only a few ideas: one, that nature (the sea) is reflected in art (the artists and their works), and vice versa; two, that Chinese and non-Chinese artists are related to the point of interchangeability, as are older and newer artists, and communists (Xu Beihong) and non-communists (the *Shan Hai Jing* 山海经, a compendium that includes the sort of classical superstition and legend that Mao-era China often fought against). Past, however, what we can learn from the fact of the list's inclusiveness, or from the particular pieces that are included in it, the very fact of listing a series of references seems a rare and strange aesthetic decision for a work of poetry. Lyricized lists appear in many poems and prose poems, but it is rare to see a list

of authors and works, and even rarer to see, as appears in section three, a list of questions about different geological eras. These are writing methods more suited to the essay than any other form, and direct us, as readers interested in prose poetry's recitation of prose forms, to look into the connections between Liu Zaifu's work and the academic and non-academic essay.

Such an examination may, first of all, provide a third (apart from the figure of ocean depth and narrative time, mentioned above) interpretation of the organization of the poem's three sections. One extremely common form for Chinese essays, especially academic essays, is tripartite just like "Reading the Sea." Made up of introduction (绪论), body (本论) and conclusion (结论), the structure of some Chinese essays opens not with an outline of the argument, as is common in English-language academic work, but with context and background intended to "initiate and foster" (缘起及提挈) the essay's key questions.²²⁹ The argument appears step by step in the central section, and the final section presents the "gestalt" (完形) of the essay, and the answer to any questions posed in the introduction. "Reading the Sea" can be read in a similar way, with section one introducing the approach to and opening of the book of the sea, and section two describing the sea's double nature. It is section three, then, where we should look for the most important act of self-expression in the essay, and the one which synthesizes what comes before it. The limitlessness and breadth of the ocean in part one, its threat and promise in part two, are made meaningful in part three by their reconceptualization as influences on the self — at the poem's end, in a way, the most important part of the title is not "sea," but "reading," as it is through reading that the ocean's self-contradiction, its "renewing" is offered to a self willing to "follow" it, to "search out" its vitality. The belief that an ocean, or a book, or an idea can be brought into the self and thereby increase the self — that the self is like a terrain, which can be desiccated, narrow, lush or wide, and that it can be broadened and cultivated — ties deeply into

Liu Zaifu's project to understand, atone for, and prevent the repetition of the Cultural Revolution. In "I Made a Hell" and in many other poems, his speakers admit to having been weakened and emptied out by the period of chaos. The boy in "I Won't Be That Stupid Again" undergoes a similar emptying-out: obedient, he is a shadow, but independent, he is a three-dimensional person. The filling and enriching process that counteracts this is revealed, in "Reading the Sea," to be a reading process, a process of education.

In the abstract, the belief in education in "Reading the Sea" borders on Confucian logic, as well as the assumptions of the essay form that he uses: study the texts and through them, cultivate wisdom in the self. In practice, however, Liu's patterns of reference are not intensive, as a Confucian studying the *Classic of Poetry* might memorize the whole text and read its commentaries, but extensive. The "double image" of nature in part two demonstrates, in an abstract way, the range of the ocean, which contains not only each thing but its opposite. Section three then enacts this grandeur: as it proceeds, it ranges further into the future, into the past, and its images become larger and larger. Unlike section two, which centers around the single idea of nature's double image, section three flits from question to question, until seemingly any individual experience or idea can be said to be contained by the ocean. This creates a curious kind of balance in the poem: unlike "If I Made a Hell," which is an entirely internal monologue, a self-told hypothetical, "Reading the Sea" reaches out for its imagery — still with the intent of pursuing the renewal of the individual spirit — away from solipsism, towards the people and things of the world.

Many other Liu Zaifu poems feature this kind of travel: in his book *Sun, Earth, Man*, in addition to the much more personal poem "Under a Statue of Lu Xun," there are a host of poems about world figures that span from eccentric Confucian scholar Gu Hongming 辜鸿铭 to

translator Lin Shu 林纾, to Beethoven and Einstein.²³⁰ This last is another one of Liu Zaifu's more prominent works, running to twelve pages and thirteen sections, titled "His Thoughts Like Satellites Travel Through Space." This poem is perhaps the best example of the essay-like spread of some of Liu Zaifu's poems: it touches on Einstein's scientific theories (sections one and seven), his hobbies (section three), his religious attitudes (section six), his humanism and his concern for China (section eight), and even his hair (section one). In this poem, Einstein is a sort of boundless shape inside which almost infinite explorations can be made: addressing him, Liu's speaker speaks very directly of "the sea in your heart" (你心中的沧海) using exactly the same formulation that titles "Reading the Sea" (读沧海). "His Thoughts" also ends in precisely the kind of expansive list that we see in sections one and three of "Reading the Sea," as it gives far-flung examples of the places where Einstein's traveling essence coalesces, including rivers all over China, the Himalayas, and the Great Wall.

The hunger for expansion, for the broadening of the self that Liu Zaifu expresses through his admiration for Einstein's cosmos-spanning theories shows itself in the essay qualities of his poems. Their lists, their specificity, and their practice of accumulation all open the poem outwards, and counteract the individualist, lyric, internal emphasis provided by the tradition both of free verse poetry and of prose poetry. Liu's poem on Einstein touches very directly on the conflicting impulses towards constructing the self in isolation from others, and constructing the self from exploration of others:

Other people in profusion, a profusion of other people. Sometimes other people really are the hell of the self. The models of others, the idols of others, others' habits and biases, so often they cage the lively self, bury the wondrous talent. But other people are also the mother of the self, the self's cradle, its heaven. Without others, the self could never be lively....²³¹

他人纷纷，纷纷他人。他人有时确实是自我的地狱。他人的模式，

他人的偶像，他人的习惯与 偏见，常常会把活泼的自我羈囚，把
 茂美的风华埋葬。但他人也是自我的母亲，自我的摇篮，自我的
 天堂。没有他人，自我决不会活泼...

Just as the ideology of Liu Zaifu's prose poetry wavers between these two extremes, so does his prose poetic technique: his work can be seen on a spectrum between his short, lyric prose poems, influenced by political speech, and his long, outward-reaching prose poetry that shares its form with academic, expository, and persuasive essays. In Liu's poetics, the former is intense, self-contained and pure; the latter is energetic, extensive, and sublime.

As is so often true with dialectics, however, this binary was fated to collapse, or more specifically, to be revealed as partially fictive and insufficient as its context changed, creating new stresses and new goals. In the work of Liu Zaifu, the most dramatic change of context came in 1989, after the poet's exile in the wake of the massacre at Tiananmen Square.

Farewell and Farewell

Here is one of Liu Zaifu's earliest prose poems, written before 1980:

10 lines redacted

and here is a prose piece from 1994, written on the same topic:

108 lines redacted

108 lines redacted

These two works are written on opposite sides of a great change in the life and art of Liu Zaifu: in 1989, when Deng Xiaoping gave the order to use military force to end peaceful demonstrations in Beijing, and began to arrest, execute and exile those involved with the protests, Liu Zaifu left the part of the liberalizing spectrum that operated inside socialist power structures and became a writer who lived outside them. As his political allies and coworkers at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences were arrested or otherwise silenced, he called publicly for the end to military hostilities in Beijing, what he would later describe with language from Lu Xun's "Diary of a Madman": he "sent out a call to 'save the children'" (发出了一声‘救救孩子’) trapped in Tiananmen Square — including Liu's own child, Liu Jianmei 刘剑梅.²³⁴ This prompted his exile, and began what he calls a period of international "drifting" (漂流) that would later give the title to his series of volumes of short prose, *Drift Notebooks* (《漂流手记》). Poem #85 was written long before the period of "drifting," during the heady transition between Cultural Revolution strictures and early reform-era freedoms: it makes up part of a sequence of extremely short, aphoristic prose poems culled from Liu Zaifu's work before 1980 and revised to appear in his *Collected Prose Poems*. "I Won't Dress Up Anymore" was published in Hong Kong in 1994 in the second volume of the *Drift Notebooks*, after the limits of freedom in the 1980s had become terribly clear. Although exile did not immediately or unequivocally transform Liu Zaifu's

writing, 1989 marked what his daughter and editor Liu Jianmei called a "huge" transformation in his writing: "...works written before he left the country belong to the category of prose poetry, poetic and abstract, full of the passions of life; the work written after he left were more narrative, and in their consideration of human life they reveal a bleakness and a loneliness..."²³⁵ (出国前的作品属于散文诗类，既诗化又抽象，而且充满了生命的激情；出国后的作品增加了叙事的因素，在对人生的思索上流露一种苍凉感和孤寂感...). But exile was only one of the many repeated experiences of "farewell" (告别) that punctuate the work of this prolific author: his farewell to prose poetry was much slower, and requires a narrative focused around evolution and development rather than one based on sudden violence. This section will attempt to write that narrative, as well as reflect on what it means for the larger tradition of prose poetry.

The elements shared by these two pieces indicate one of Liu Zaifu's career-long themes, the need for authenticity, the desire for accurate knowledge of the world and the self, and the estimation of truth above other values. Their difference in form is exemplary of a general trend in Liu Zaifu's work between 1980 and the present: the movement from prose poetry to prose essays, lyric and otherwise. Poem #85 is part of a group of three thematically related prose poems that discuss truth (真理): it is flanked by a poem that says that truth is worth the highest price (#84), and one that criticizes the betrayers of truth (#86). In #85, truth shines through regardless of its literary or physical form: contingencies required to make a literary work palatable to publishers and the government are possible because they fail to harm its truth content. This means, however, that literary or physical form is extraneous to its content, and can be abandoned when it is not useful. This is slightly different from the relationship between truth and costume in "I Won't Dress Up Anymore," in which dressing up has the power to harm the individual by preventing an "acceptance" of the natural self. What the two share, however, is a belief that has an effect on

ethics, aesthetics, and even politics: that there is a set of truths that underlie reality, and that those truths have little relationship to the world of sense apprehension or external stimuli. In Liu's language, how we dress up does not represent who we are — if we do show a face related to our natural selves, we do so because we choose to. Ethically, we should choose not to lie to ourselves and others; politically, we should avoid the pollution of totalizing ideologies and -isms; aesthetically, form and substance are fundamentally distinct.

This distinction between form and substance, however, does not mean that form ceases to exist. It seems clear that although the motive center of poem #85 is deeply similar to that of "I Won't Dress Up Anymore," they are at opposite ends of the prose spectrum. Poem #85 is, if anything, almost too short to sit easily with the other prose poems we've read so far: it is a position statement like that of Ke Lan's poem "Agreement," in chapter two, but without that poem's lyric repetition or its unexplained, floating "we." In poem #85, the authoritative voice is slimmed down to its basic gesture, a monologic assertion of truth. "I Won't Dress Up Anymore" is quite different. The pieces that accompany it in the ten-volume series called *Drift Notebooks* are generally longer than the average Liu Zaifu prose poem, but they are not a world apart. They include more context than the prose poems he wrote in the 1980s, and are more likely to be on a specific, rather than an abstract topic: Shen Congwen 沈从文's short story "Cow" (《牛》), for example, or the aforementioned nine pieces on the character of Lu Xun's Ah Q (阿 Q).²³⁶ Generally — and it is difficult to generalize about the series, whose individual volumes were published serially, and whose content differs from volume to volume — they are largely tipped towards prose writing with an essay form and a persuasive or narrative intent coupled with strong lyrical moments and some structuring metaphors.²³⁷ Although held together by the metaphoric trope of "dressing up" (打扮), "I Won't Dress Up Anymore" has concrete detail that

would never appear in a prose poem, something that becomes particularly apparent when it is placed next to poem #85, which contains practically nothing but abstractions. What we would call the "poetic speaker" of a prose poem is more or less identified as the protagonist of a memoir by the realist personal detail of "I Won't Dress Up." There is no need for a fictional abstraction to have been in Guangdong in any particular year, and the titles and contents of books are related specifically, with authors and titles — although, unlike Liu's critical work, the references in his short essays don't have to be complete. Finally, though "I Won't Dress Up" is not considerably longer than "Reading the Sea," it is undivided, creating a bigger, less poem-like block of text than the briefer sections of Liu's prose poetry.

If we create a larger spectrum than that established in the first half of the chapter, with extremely brief, aphoristic prose poetry like #85 at one end, long essay-style prose poems like "Reading the Sea" in the middle, and the lyric essay or literary prose like "I Won't Dress Up Again" at the far end, we are now able to place Liu Zaifu's other works on a trajectory that generally moves towards prose. This helps identify some of the methods that are particular to prose poetry, at least in Liu Zaifu's work. Slightly longer and more discursive than poem #85, Liu's short poems like "If I Made a Hell" are the works that most closely resemble previous prose poetry, and like the work of Ke Lan or Guo Feng, they often resemble oaths or parables.²³⁸ Past those are his essay-style poems, like "Reading the Sea," "His Thoughts Like Satellites Travel Through Space," or "The Great River, Eternally Rushing."²³⁹ "Reading the Sea" runs to over 2,200 characters; "The Great River" is over 1,800. Even considering the practice of dividing long prose poems into shorter sections, which both poems do, their divided sections average out to about 580 characters; by comparison, the more contemporary prose poem "Say Wither, and the Peach Blossoms Wither" in chapter one is around 300 characters. This has, as mentioned above,

a great deal to do with the essay form that Liu's prose poems borrow, but the extra length is also the result of a compositional process that becomes more visible as his works move along the spectrum away from prose poetry and towards prose — namely, the way in which the poet adds flesh to his metaphors and allegories.

Here is a brief excerpt from the first section of "The Great River, Eternally Rushing":

Great river, since the day you bid your high-mountain mother farewell, you have been determined that the ocean is your ambition, your destination, your love. To kiss the soft blue that bears the sun, to join your turbulent feelings to that eternal existence, to mix into the Pacific and the Atlantic's peerlessly vast, azure undertaking, you will rush along countless roads, sing a million tireless love songs. The days stretch on and on, the mountains and outposts one after the next, all the life and death, wax and wane of the landslides and crevasses, all the coiled dragons and crouching tigers of the crazed stones and jutting shoals, none of them can stop your torrent towards the east, your flood forward.

Many lakes, graceful as young girls, have seen their youth dry up, many streams slender as strings have lost their serenades; many inland rivers like vagabonds have been buried in their last wanderings. Only you, still rushing, still rushing, still chase your unchanging aspiration, your unchanging lover.

大河，自从你告别高山之母的那一天起，你就认定大海是你的抱负，你的归宿，你的所爱。为了亲吻拥戴太阳的那一派柔蓝，为了把自己汹涌的情思连结那永恒的存在，为了加入太平洋与大西洋那无比壮阔的蔚蓝色的事业，你竟奔走了数不清的路程，唱了千万载不倦的恋歌。日月悠悠，关山叠叠，岸上一切山崩地裂的生死兴亡，水中一切龙蟠虎踞的怪石险滩，都未能阻止你的滔滔东去，浩浩前行。

许多少女般秀美的湖泊乾涸了她的青春，许多琴弦似的小溪失去了她的小夜曲；许多浪子般的内陆河被埋葬了最后的徘徊。唯有你，还在奔流，还在奔流，还在追求着你不朽的抱负和不朽的情侣。²⁴⁰

In this case, and even more strongly than in "Reading the Sea," the poem uses elaborate personification that includes comparisons to vagabonds and girls and metaphoric description of river water as a kind of blood. These tropes help establish that the river can be an analogue for a self, or the nation as self, and its rushing forward can therefore be seen as the work towards progress. It goes a great deal further in its third section by carefully lining up different parts of the river with possible metaphoric interpretations. The banks, the silt, the ocean: all have

"meanings" in the extended metaphor. "His Thoughts Like Satellites" does the same, with Einstein's influence touching a great many parts of our experience, metaphorically represented by a voyaging spacecraft. "Reading the Sea" engages in this kind of logic, as well, except to a much broader and more mystical degree: it makes the sea a representation of practically all human experience, a sublime figure of the very spirit of life itself.

Most poetry, though, uses metaphor, and Liu Zaifu's essays like "I Won't Dress Up Again" use metaphor as well — he is, obviously, not talking about adorning the physical body, which is the standard use of "dress up" (打扮). What is special about the metaphors in the more prosaic works is that they can be connected with the things that they describe in increasing detail and with much greater confidence. Poem #85 uses metaphor to create a large, inclusive, conceptual group: the forms of communication it refers to (silver plates, gold vessels) are intended to stand in for the finest of forms, and do not indicate any particular forms, or any particular errors or truths. This is a good example of the poetics of hinting described in chapter one: by withholding particular experiences, Liu creates *gongming*, sympathetic response, a crying out in unison that results from the capability of some readers to enter into the poem's way of thinking. Politically — and it is crucial to remember that poem #85 was written in a period during which restrictions on literature presented a real danger to authors, and were constantly shifting — reading this piece does not encourage the reader to take any kind of sensitive position. The easiest interpretation might actually be an orthodox socialist reading in which the putative "truths" of Buddhist scripture and of ancient ceremony are seen as errors that have been dressed up by elaborate form, and they are both opiates for the masses.

Who is being dressed up, and what that dress entails, is made far clearer in "I Won't Dress Up Again." The costume was forced upon Liu Zaifu by society: it is fake proletarianism, fake

Red Army, fake revolution, fake -isms. These are, in many ways, fighting words, and certainly would have been grounds for punishment if they had been published on the mainland in the 1980s. The increased specificity, the increased length, and the stronger identification with the author that Liu's post-1989 essays feature are all political weaknesses: if Mao-era prose poets like Ke Lan, in chapter two, walk a fine line between instructions to write realist literary works and a fear of making claims about reality, essay writers are considerably closer to journalists in their power and responsibility to report the "truth," whatever that might mean to the arbiters of such words. If an author wants, however, to make a claim on the truth unsupported or opposed by the government or the Party, perhaps prose poetry might seem the best possible choice, with its lighter claim on reality, its fictive distance from its author, and its propensity to compress itself into what Ke Lan called a "tiny little thing...that the Great Sirs [have] no respect for."²⁴¹

While the composition of prose poetry in the 1950s needed specific critical support to ensure its acceptance as a Communist-friendly art form, by the time it had been criticized by Maoists and rehabilitated by Deng, it was an extremely widespread and popular form, one that was much less controversial than Obscure poetry (朦胧诗) or the "hooligan literature" (流氓文学) that was nascent in the late 1980s. Were it true that prose poetry allowed for the softening of non-standard political, philosophical and cultural views, once Liu exited the reach of the government's punishment, his rationale for writing prose poems might have been diminished significantly.

Although Liu wrote prose poems after he left mainland China, in his exile he gained the ability to publish works like "I Won't Dress Up Again," which likely would have been considered sensitive in mainland China. A big part of what causes the essay's political problem (or perhaps one should say, the way in which it causes problems for politicians) is that it makes its metaphors far more legible than Liu's earlier work.²⁴²

What both the pieces reproduced above make clear in terms of content is that there is an ethical and moral imperative to bring about this legibility: that attitude is reproduced in Liu's few writings about the craft of prose and prose poetry. In the foreword to a 2004 essay collection called *Feelings About Vicissitudes*, he responds to a question about the nature of prose (散文) by dividing it into three parts: narrative prose (叙事性散文), which is connected to reportage literature (报告文学), expository prose (论说性散文), which has its roots in the *zawen* (杂文), and lyric prose (抒情性散文), which "if it is written a bit more abstractly, concentratedly, and poetically, becomes prose poetry" (倘若写得抽象、浓缩、诗化一些, 就变成散文诗).²⁴³ The difference between prose poetry and prose is that "poetry more often uses deliberately indirect language, which is to say that it uses more methods like metaphor, symbol, figure, and synesthesia, while prose prefers direct communication, which is to say taking the author's own spirit and...expressing it." (更多地使用曲笔, 即更多地使用隐喻、象征、比兴、通感等手段, 而散文则喜欢用直笔, 即直接把作家自身的人格精神...表达出来).²⁴⁴ The important difference here is between 曲笔, overliterally a "crooked pen," translated as "deliberately indirect language," and 直笔, a "straight pen," translated as "direct communication." This means that, according to this analysis, which admittedly was published fifteen years after Liu Zaifu was exiled from mainland China, the transition undergone by Liu's work was from indirect to direct, from crooked to straight. This matches the ideological difference between poem #85 and "I Won't Dress Up Again": the former sees truth as unstoppable, whether written crookedly or straight, while the latter exposes the harm caused by crooked, dressed-up representations of the self. A person who believed what is written in poem #85 could write in any number of forms, with any level of insinuation or misdirection; someone who believed the ideas of "I Won't Dress Up Again" would have a responsibility to be as direct as possible.²⁴⁵

As noted above, however, the transition between these two positions was not immediate: although the fundamental concepts that would determine his relationship to form appear clearly in poem #85 and other works like it, "dressing up" is rooted out of Liu Zaifu's work in a series of repudiations and "farewells." Liu tends to describe his past work as naïve: in the foreword to his *Collected Prose Poems*, written in 1988, he divides his work in the 80s into three periods, and describes two of those periods as "innocent" or "naïve" (天真). This kind of judgment of past naivete exists, however, even in poems written during periods that Liu would later also call naïve. This is visible in the 1983 work "I Won't Be That Stupid Again" that is discussed earlier in this chapter: the boy in the poem makes a mistake, learns, and repents, but that story of repentance is itself then seen as naïve in the 1988 preface. About his first collection, Liu writes that he "had not yet been able to break away from previous conceptual models and artistic models" (未能摆脱原来的思想模式和艺术模式).²⁴⁶ This of course includes the strictures and structures of the Mao period, but is importantly broader than that: artistic models and conceptual models, which include language models and formal models, are to be escaped, thrown off (摆脱). To do otherwise is naïve, and as we saw in "If I Made a Hell," naivete puts individuals at the mercy of groups. This is a way of imagining influence on an artist that is completely different from the intentional process of internalizing and transforming prior art that we have become used to in our reading of prose poetry.

The goal of throwing off all literary influence on the level of language and form is an impossible one: we are, in some unmeasurable, unverifiable way, our influences, and we are powerless to undo history or even memory. What Liu does instead is continually identify and bid farewell to his influences in a way that almost resembles Freud's beliefs about psychoanalysis. Once the subliminal influences are brought out into the light, once they can be admitted, they can

be consciously repudiated. This process informs a great deal of Liu's work: not just the 1983 collection *Farewell* (《告别》) or the 1995 book of prose *Farewell to the Revolution* (《告别革命》), but also the 2000 literary-critical essay "Farewell to the Gods," in which he describes the three "fatal flaws in modern Chinese literary theory":

- (1) the lack of a fundamental proposition that was original, not pilfered;
- (2) the lack of a system of categorical conceptions that was original, not borrowed;
- (3) the lack of a philosophical position that was original, not transplanted..."²⁴⁷

These three items are, for our purposes, identical: all qualities of Chinese literary theory should be *of itself*, not borrowed from elsewhere, not put on like a new set of clothes.

It is perhaps clear from these exhortations that one of the things that Liu Zaifu is saying farewell to can be called the practice of recitation. Do not "shout revolutionary slogans"; do not mimic the older boys; do not dress up the truth; do not wear a fake Red Army uniform; do not copy ideas from abroad. Prose poetry itself is a form copied, in its infancy, from abroad; as we have seen, it dresses itself up in all manner of costumes, including that of Communist orthodoxy, including that of religious truth; as we shall see, it even imitates the poets and sages of ancient Chinese history. A prose poetry that did not dress up would be one that was not particularly similar to contemporary Chinese prose poetry — it might have the same visual shape on the page, but it would lack the reproductive, recitative process that underlies the composition of the poems we have studied. Rather than a masque of forms in which the poet engages in the reproduction of the language of others, Liu Zaifu's process in the poems we've read above is something closer to a continuous process of self-examination, carried out in order to bid farewell to what is external and unnatural. The extent to which his poems mimic other forms — and they do, often, as we have seen — is, to his later self, the extent to which they are records of naïve youth. The process at work over time can instead be described in the terms of the commanding

metaphor of "Reading the Sea": a voyage down and away from others, away from the echoes of the surface, towards true depth.

If the rejection of recitation and "dressing up" was the only way in which Liu Zaifu bid farewell to prose poetry, however, he would likely still be using the name prose poetry for the work he writes. After all, recitation and refusal are processes specific to this study, and as we saw during the May Fourth period, it is possible to call almost anything a prose poem. Additionally, even though we have metaphorically defined contemporary prose poetry as the product of these twin, contradictory processes, those two processes do not have to be identical in intensity. Sometimes the author of a work simply prefers to emphasize their creativity, rather than the provenance of their language. At the other extreme, it would be possible to write short essays and, in the act of calling them prose poetry, instruct readers to encounter them as somehow different from or better than other writers' essay compositions. In Liu's work, however, there was to be another farewell that would take him away from prose poetry, this time to his long fascination with the self. This is an excerpt from an essay that appears in the first volume of Liu Zaifu's *Drift Notebooks*, published in 1992:

95 lines redacted

Liu's critical writings on subjectivity, and many of his early poems contain an expectation that the process of saying farewell to unnatural, outside influences on the self will end in positive transformations of the self: as the speaker in "Reading the Sea" plumbs the ocean depths, a realization of the self's weakness and insufficiency takes place, but also a determination to "enrich my life...make matter of my dust...enrich my spirit!" To reject "dressing up" is to implicitly accept the way that one is, and the way that one looks: it is to prefer a natural self. This is what the essay describes as "looking in the mirror" — the natural self being, of course, an ideological construct, a product of the mind. The self that we see is materially separate from us (even though we take it with us wherever we go) and is therefore identical to the other torments and traps represented by the exterior world. It can be idolized and fetishized in much the same way as Mao, or Lu Xun.

The farewell to the self described in "The Last Idol" is a process contradictory and

simultaneous to the process described in "I Won't Dress Up Anymore," which bids farewell to the influence of others. Throwing off the influence of others is a kind of search for the self, for that inside the self which is unique, untrammelled by others, original: this is contradictory to the idea that the self is also an unnatural, limiting other.²⁴⁹ This is made concrete in "The Last Idol" by Liu's reference to his own work: over the course of his career, he writes, he has accumulated literary works, a reputation, and has been considered to have established an ideological system, one perhaps based on his most famous critical work, "On the Subjectivity of Literature."²⁵⁰ If anything can be seen as uniquely belonging to Liu Zaifu, rather than an effect of a life lived under the PRC government, or mainland Chinese or Hong Kong society, it is perhaps this history of searching for the self, of the particular way in which he has responded to, and in many cases fought against the context into which he was born. When he turns on that history in "The Last Idol," describing it as the wall around the hell of the self, he is denying the validity of what this discussion would call his acts of *refusal*.

This denunciation happens for perfectly sensible reasons. Resistance and refusal are processes that produce a work of art, a little record of the moment of negotiation between the world that is context and the specificity of the individual writer. Liu Zaifu's project is a grand one, and it takes place on a field much larger than that of the individual artwork: he is undertaking an endless escape, a ceaseless search, a physical and spiritual wander through the edges of possibility. The art that is made in the course of this search, the essays, the position statements, the literary criticism, can only ever be a frozen, subjective moment in the long escape. When that art stops being a process and becomes a product, it stops being the practice of escape and joins the world of things and ideas from which it is necessary to escape. This is why his own assessments of his past work are never satisfactory, why his poetic persona (and his

memoir-style essays, and his literary criticism) is constantly looking backwards at the past as an age of naivete and misunderstanding. And it is finally this, the rejection of *both* the processes of recitation and refusal, rejection of society's influence and rejection of self-identity, that is an ideological exit from the genre of prose poetry: not the strong preference for one or another of prose poetry's processes, but an escape from them both.

As we have noted before, though, there is no escape from form, and even though an author's writing may be a genre unto itself, it can still be meaningfully compared to other works on the level of form. In the absence of self and other, and in the absence of resistance and refusal, Liu's short essays come to be dominated by a different set of ideas about form. In his book of essays *Slowly Across the High Plains* (《漫步高原》), he reprints a 1997 essay in which he decries the fact that in modern poetry, "the practice of playing with language and playing with technique is in ascendance. Writers and artists have their hearts set on pursuing fashions and using stratagems to take the place of creations invested with the force of life." (玩语言，玩技巧的风气很盛，作家艺术家刻意追逐时髦，以策略与手段代替生命投入的创作...).²⁵¹ This is a view that dismisses literary *technē* as artificial, lifeless, and strategized. Form, whether it be the form of the living self as glimpsed in the mirror, or the forms created by humans in interaction with each other, is a kind of toy, the opposite of life — there is something empty about the vacant-eyed sculpture, and about the play on words. To describe one's self, as Liu Bannong did, as a writer "most capable of playing fresh tricks" would, to Liu Zaifu, be an abandonment of some of art's integrity, its honesty, and its humanity.²⁵² At the end of his 2000 essay "Farewell to the Revolution in Art," (告别艺术革命), Liu strengthens the point:

I know that literary artists have a certain sensitivity towards form and modes of expression, and I know how important language, technique, and form are to literary art, but I believe that literary artistic production is not just a revolution of refurbished style. To those who only know denial and do not know how to build revolution, to those who

only know little tricks and don't understand the great sympathies in literary art, to those most fashionable avant-garde performers, its best that we say: no, don't pass with us through the door to the new century.

我知道文学艺术家对形势对表述方式天生有一种敏感，也知道语言，技巧，形式对文学艺术是何等重要，但是，我相信，文学艺术创造不等于形式翻新的革命，对于那种只知否定，不知建设的革命，对于那些只知小策略不知大关怀的文学艺术，对于时装式的前卫表演，我们最好还是对他们说：别了，请你们不要和我们一起走进新世纪之门。²⁵³

Technē should by all rights be completely unavoidable: it is the means by which the writer contacts the reader, the way in which an artist makes an artwork appear. Save for works created by direct, inhuman intervention by celestial or otherwise mysterious forces, *every* artwork must have been made to appear in one way or another, and even "great sympathies" require some number of constituent "tricks," whether they be deft, individual passes with a chisel, tonal balancing in classical poetry, or a well-made metaphor. To deny the utility of "language, technique and form" in the production of art would be to intentionally put on naivete where form is concerned, and pretend not to be able to stir a reader or make an argument through facility with language and style.

This is, in fact, Liu's position in one of his literary critical meditations, a type of work which peppers his prose collections after 1989. The topic, as is often the case, is *Dream of the Red Chamber*, specifically a lesson that Jia Baoyu 贾宝玉's teacher Jia Dairu 贾代儒 gives about poetry: that you are best to study it after you have made great advancements in your career and have studied classical essay-writing, which Liu equates to modern and contemporary literary theory. Liu Zaifu disagrees: staying out of a job with power (Liu and Jia Dairu both give examples in government, but leave the question quite open), he argues, maintains artists' connections with regular people, and allows them to feel what their readers feel. To Liu, advancement and study — above, we saw how Liu's ethics in "Reading the Sea" and "The Great

River" require continuous study and development — end an individual's life in poetry. He writes: "Some of our young contemporary poets have fortunately ignored old Mr. Jia Dairu's instruction, and so they did not first study the eight-legged essay or read large amounts of literary theory; they have also not thought about 'development' and continuing to write after 'development'. Otherwise, they would not be poets." (我们当代的一些年轻诗人，幸而也没注意到贾代儒老先生的教导，所以也没有先攻八股或先读许多文学理论，也没想到“发达”和“发达”之后再写，否则，他们就不是诗人了。)²⁵⁴ A poet is defined not necessarily by his or her skill and technique, but by an ability to *stay blank* and free of not only of polluting influences, but also of excessive self-regard. Liu's belief in this theory of the artist extends to his own life: he repeatedly describes his early poetry as naïve, and as his belief in the hypocrisy and double-dealing of literary technique has increased, he has come to write almost exclusively in prose.

The aesthetics of Liu's literary career after his farewell to prose poetry are, strictly speaking, beyond the scope of this discussion — he has, from a critic's perspective, several careers worth of influential literary, literary-critical, philosophical and political writings and he has written in almost all of these forms from the 1970s to today — but one part of his transition away from the composition of prose poetry bears examination. In *Understanding Life Together*, a series of letters between Liu and his daughter Liu Jianmei, there is a 1999 exchange "On Individual Ontology" (论个体本体论) that contains this section: "I write prose. The central role in prose is always played by the self. The good thing about prose is that it can directly (not crookedly) undertake communication of the self's difficulty in surviving and the meaning of its survival." (我写的是散文。自我始终是散文主角。散文的好处是可以对自我的存在困境和存在意义进行直说（不是曲说）。)²⁵⁵ He immediately goes on to explain the great problems that he personally has had in expressing the self directly: 1) that he has lived a life of "singing in

unison" with others and must find a voice that belongs to him alone, 2) that his individuality has been overwhelmed by the collective, and that he must work to make the survival of his individuality a primary objective, and 3) that in his individual experience, his self has been possessed by the force of class struggle. This essentializes the conflict that has resulted in Liu Zaifu's increasing recourse to non-poetic prose. Believing in the existence of an honest and natural self, he turns to prose to express that self; when finding it to be polluted by personal history, bad education, and destructive ideologies, it is in prose that these obstacles are identified and overcome.

Liu Zaifu's focus on class struggle, the effects of indoctrination, and the communalization of self-expression remind us that we are not talking about prose poetry as a genre abstraction, but contemporary Chinese prose poetry, which exists in an intellectual, historical, and political context. Liu found publication in the early 1980s for prose poetry written in the 1970s, then went on to substantial official and semi-official success with his poetry in the 1980s, before being forcibly disengaged from the world of mainland Chinese art and voluntarily changing his aesthetics after Tiananmen — this writing life is not only heavily influenced by social, political, and physical contexts, it is metonymic for the literary history of prose poetry in the 1980s.

Because prose poetry had been published during the Hundred Flowers Movement, and because it was part of the demonstration in honor of Zhou Enlai at Tiananmen Square in 1976, in the late 1970s and early 1980s it was a widely acceptable literary form. Ke Lan and Guo Feng republished books and started magazines; prose poetry associations were founded; prose poems like those of Liu Zaifu won national prizes and saw publication in official journals of record like *People's Literature* (《人民文学》).²⁵⁶ By the mid-to-late 1980s, there was talk of a "prose

poetry fever" (散文诗热) that promised not only to establish prose poetry as a literary genre whose tradition was clear to general readers, but to make it a fashionable literary genre. This putative "fever" involved avant-garde artists like Ouyang Jianghe, who will be discussed in chapter five, as well as intellectuals like Liu Zaifu who were taking advantage of Deng-era freedoms in order to exert gentle, loyal, liberalizing pressure on the party and the polity. It also, much in the tradition of the mass poetry movements of the Great Leap Forward, became an occasion for large numbers of imitators and enthusiasts who brought socialist organizational strategies to the composition of prose poetry.²⁵⁷ In his introduction to Huang Yongjian's literary history, Liang Xinrong writes:

Starting in the 1980s, there was a sudden craze for prose poetry (散文诗的热潮) in China that made it fashionable all over the country. This kind of artificial, external force created a "high-speed road" linking all corners of the country, and the speed of its development was many times faster than that of the early Republican period. The literary form grabbed the power to be heard that is provided by print publication media. Although this made them able to create the false facade of a flourishing, noisy literary scene, and caused many confused prose poets no end of joy, history judges with gravity...

80年代伊始，国内忽而冒出一股散文诗的热潮，风靡全国。这种人为的外力把散文诗推上了一条贯通南东北西的“驰道”，其发展速度数倍于民初。文体抢占了“刊物媒介”的发言权，固然可以做成一种繁华喧闹的假象，令许多迷失的散文诗人沾沾自喜。但历史却是严肃的.....²⁵⁸

In 1989, the license to experiment and differ that had been granted to writers affiliated with the Party was summarily removed, with some like Liu Zaifu entering exile, and others lapsing into silence or turning to more normative, less risky work — whether in the form of prose poetry or out of it. At the same time, the events of the Tiananmen Massacre created a crisis of faith among writers who published on the mainland, one that has been described to me in anonymous conversations as something similar to that experienced in German letters after Auschwitz. In both cases, artists struggled with the feeling that their literary culture was not *worth* transforming from the inside. The official and semi-official publishing apparatus built in the 1980s in China,

however, remained, and publication of prose poetry did not decrease substantially in number. The difference was that avant-garde poets, even those who were writing in prose, denied that they were writing prose poems in part because there was no profit in associating oneself with a literary scene dominated by the most obedient remnant of what had once been a diverse group of writers.²⁵⁹

Liu Zaifu's critical reception is a good example of this effect. Liu Zaifu's poetry, and his essays, are fundamentally occupied with the end of the Cultural Revolution, and most often speak in terms of the late 1970s; in thousands of pages of literary production, he mentions Tiananmen only a few times, and almost always in regards to his own life history and the way in which it brought about his exile. That exile has caused his work to be grossly neglected, a neglect that is only now starting to thaw.²⁶⁰ Writing in 1987, before Liu was exiled, Wang Guangming gave Liu Zaifu prominence in his history of prose poetry with a lavish, twelve-page analysis and appreciation of Liu's poetry, his most famous works, and his aesthetics; in 2004, Li Biaojing 李标晶, writing a similar literary history, wrote only a two-and-a-half page piece that was substantially plagiarized from Wang Guangming's book.²⁶¹ The poets and critics of the 1950s risked punishment for the way in which they wrote, and were received as nationally important contributors to arts and letters; by 1990, those writers had largely been filtered out of prose poetry communities, and those that remained were more conservative and more oriented towards the construction and maintenance of communities than they were the genesis of new art. In these communities, which persist today, it would be editors, not artists, who held pride of place; it is to their role, and their impact on the genre of prose poetry, that we will now turn.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX PROSE POETRY

当代半官方散文诗

"That's it. The lover writes, the believer hears,
The Poet mumbles and the painter sees,
Each one, his fated eccentricity,
As a part, but part, but tenacious particle,
Of the skeleton of the ether..."

– Wallace Stevens, "A Primitive Like an Orb"

Editors as Authors: Contemporary Prose Poetry Magazines

Image redacted

We are perhaps experienced enough as readers, in the twenty-first century, to know that an author is something other than a conduit for divine inspiration.²⁶² We have been reading prose poetry so far in this discussion as a process undertaken by a writer and a reader: a writer starts with some source material, often a piece of prose, condenses it, performs it anew in a way we have been calling *recitation*, and alters it fundamentally in a way we have been calling *refusal*. The reader then undertakes a mirrored process, piecing together what is new, what is old, and what is meaningful about the interaction between the two. The author has not died: his or her role has been distributed, the work of the isolate genius spread out among writer and reader both, who cooperate in a collaborative process. A particular focus on this collaborative process is something that is special about, and common to, most prose poetry: when we see a piece of literature as a part of a series of processes, as prose poets do, that also gives us license to distribute the role of author and creator past the writer/reader dyad. In addition to being important players in the history of prose poetry Guo Feng, Ke Lan, Xu Chengmiao and many other important prose poets have also served as editors, who position, contextualize, select and judge poetic works, all of which make up important parts of the way that poems are composed and read. Editorial identity and editorial decision-making do not, however, only have an effect on poems as they are solicited, edited, and presented in magazines; the role of editor also inscribes itself into the poetry of contemporary prose poets such as Zou Yuehan. This chapter will try to outline the way in which editors cooperate in creating individual poems, the way they author the genre of prose poetry, as well as the relationship between the editorial process and the composition process — the way in which authors use editorial intelligence to create prose poems.

The following is "Kind of Like Pulling Out a Nail," which was translated in Chapter Two, as it appeared in *Stars Poetry Journal* (星星诗刊) in 2004. The text is identical to the anthology

from which the translation in Chapter Two is drawn, and it is identified as a prose poem by the magazine's editors, who often publish a section in *Stars* that contains new prose poems. This version of "Pulling Out a Nail" looks, however, very different from other prose poems. Its margins have been slimmed down to the point that it looks less like the translation in Chapter Two, and more like this:

18 lines redacted

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These lines *look* like free verse poetry, they're the length of most free verse poetry, but close inspection reveals that they are still printed in the form of prose. Each line in the original Chinese is nine characters wide, including punctuation and indentation, and they are justified to give straight margins on each side even when differences in punctuation or indentation width should produce a more uneven margin. Additionally, the lines are not broken according to any recognizable free verse practice, but always at the nine-character boundary, for example in between *ding* and *zi*, which together mean "nail" but are incoherent when taken separately. For a free verse poet, "Kind of like pulling out a na- / il, pulling..." would be a dissonant and confusing

place to break a poetic line, distracting from the poem's comprehensibility for no benefit to reader or author. The author of the poem, however, did not choose the location of his own line breaks: his editor did.

Stars Monthly is a Chengdu-based, semi-official poetry magazine that features mostly free verse.²⁶⁴ Its design is comparatively sober when put next to more commercial magazines, which use art, graphics, and obtrusive typefaces in order to give visual energy to the look and feel of their pages, but *Stars Monthly* is still carefully designed to avoid the appearance of large blocks of text while providing a maximum amount of poetry.²⁶⁵ Several of Fang Wenzhu's poems — but not all of them — in *Stars* have compressed margins, and it seems clear that the decision was made for graphic purposes, rather than to emphasize a more or less prosaic quality in individual poems, or to speed up or slow down the reader in any intentional way. The editors and designers of the magazine, faced with poetry they wanted to publish but which would look strange in the magazine in large quantities, intervened in the poem for their own purposes.

Or did they? The margins of prose, after all, are not ever chosen by literary authors, but by editors and typesetters: the most fundamental formal distinction between prose poetry and poetry is that "First, it doesn't make stanzas by using poetic phrases that are lineated and arranged according to their length..."²⁶⁶ (首先, 它不是用长短句排列分行而成段的诗句, 而是用散文写成的连接起来的片断的诗篇...) The poem's author, in the case of prose poetry, has a *negative* instruction: do not cut your poem into lines and arrange it according to the length of those lines. The poem's editor, on the other hand, has the positive responsibility to determine where lines of prose end, with the understanding that once the margin is set, it will remain fixed throughout the piece.²⁶⁷ Fang Wenzhu's piece as it is printed in *Stars* is exactly what the author wrote: to set the piece's margins is a responsibility that editors have always had. What illustrates

the power of editors in this case is that the margins are set so thin, and so many prose poems are placed on a page (three apiece on facing pages that are each half of a letter-sized sheet), that they stop looking like prose poems and start looking like free verse.

When editors affect the appearance of poems through visual design, then, they are not necessarily crossing a boundary into the territory of the author: sometimes, as with *Stars*, they are simply fulfilling their responsibility to take a poem in manuscript and fit it physically into a magazine. The implicit assumptions of the word *intervention* can make it seem as if the only role of the editor is to select a poem, which is a unified whole, and transport it in its entirety to the readers. From such a perspective, anything else is meddling. In the case of prose poetry, however, the editor's job includes a significant responsibility to physically shape the poem, and this has made prose poetry magazine editors particularly willing to perform tasks other than "select and convey." Let's look carefully at page 34 from a 2009 issue of *Prose Poetry* magazine, the Chinese prose poetry journal with the widest circulation.²⁶⁸

Image redacted

At first blush, this page looks editorially unremarkable: unlike the *Stars* page, it puts its poems into a standard prose line of about twenty-one characters, the most that can fit into the magazine's pocket-sized format. As a baseline for what I am provisionally calling "editorial intervention," though, it shows the intimate effect of the editorial role in modern poetic publications. First is the striking white-on-black text at the top of each margin, reading 女性世界, "World of Women": these poems, by a Beijing poet with the pen name Qin Yu 琴语, have been included in the issue's nine-page section of women's poetry. Mass-market literary magazines in China are often divided into sections that are named after some quality that their pieces share:

some examples from prose poetry magazines include "Special Recommendation" 特别推荐, "New Work from Famous Authors" 名家新作, "The Hall of Characters," 人物长廊, and "The Sky Over the City" 城市天空.²⁶⁹ The three most common types of divisions are that of the quality of the work (its fame or the fame of its author, its level of recommendation), the identity of the poet (especially with regards to age, gender, and ethnicity groups that are underrepresented in print), and the subject matter of the poems (urban/rural topics, travel, family, etc.). Additionally, these divisions often appear in the magazine in that order, such that "Special Recommendation" works would never appear after a section devoted to farm life, and a section like "World of Women" would generally be placed between the recommended poems in the front, and the poems arranged according to their topic in the back.²⁷⁰

By seeing, then, that this poem is in the "World of Women" section, we know much more than that it was written by a woman. We suspect first, that it is *not as good* by some editorial estimation as the poems in the front sections: if the editor believed that this was among the best poems of the issue, it would appear not in the specialty sections in the second half of the magazine, but in the "recommended works" sections nearer the front, which also contain women authors. Second, if we follow literary magazines and know that underrepresented groups are more likely to appear in their own separate section, we might conclude that comparatively fewer women write prose poems than men, and that poems by women are therefore notable and desirable, because one of the common values of prose poetry publications since the 1980s has been their dedication to egalitarianism and a broad definition of "the masses" as people of many different backgrounds and regions.²⁷¹ Finally, we might expect that the poem has something to do with gender or with gender roles — or that this expectation could be meaningfully upended. All of this information is communicated without the author's involvement, and because section

headings make up an important part of a magazine's table of contents, all of this information comes to the reader *prior to* the reader's encounter with the poem.

To really read the rest of the page, it helps to take a look at the Qin Yu poem, which like the vast majority of poems in prose poetry magazines (one might say, in many "contemporary" magazines of all kinds, before the winnowing process of time separates out exceptional works), is extremely similar to other poems that appear in prose poetry magazines:

39 lines redacted

The poem is reasonably clear without much explication: wintersweet are evergreen shrubs that

produce flowers in late winter or early spring, and the poem is a simple, metaphoric musing on the passage of time. The poem's most complex paragraph is the second, which uses a lightly oppositional reference to Li Bai's poem "Thoughts on a Still Night" 《静夜思》 to describe an extreme winter in which there is no possibility of the kinds of escape, or thoughts of home that Li Bai's speaker experiences, and a transition to a moment where light is present in a supersymbolic way: not a symbol for the distant and unattainable, but present and real. In this chapter, though, we are less interested in the work of the author than in the work of the editor, and the page has one more piece of non-authorial text, attributed to Zhu Yuanbin 朱远斌, running vertically down the left margin: "You are an enduring petal of wintersweet in my heart, perfuming the cold days." (你是一瓣傲然在我心中的腊梅，芬芳寒冷的日子。) Zhu Yuanbin is not an editor, but a poet: he submitted his work to *Prose Poetry* magazine, and from it the editors selected this one sentence, placing it next to Qin Yu's poem. The editorial work is therefore not the sentence itself, but the juxtaposition of the sentence and the poem, which are intended by the editorial staff to work in concert. Read with an attention to that point of contact, the obvious connection is the wintersweet, reflecting an interest in the poem on an imagistic, material level, rather than as a conduit for some other conversation. Read in concert with the "World of Women" category, the result is romantic, woman-as-flower, rather than the more abstract and less gendered meditation on time and loss that is also legible in the poem. Regardless, however, of the particular effect of this interaction, it seems clear that the selection of a single sentence from the tens of thousands of sentences in the thousands of poems that *Prose Poetry* rejects every month,²⁷² and the intentional pairing of that line with the accepted poems, is not a standard editorial intervention into an author's manuscript, but a strategically arrayed set of inventions, a specially crafted context for the poem that expresses thoughts and ideas that

originate with an editor, rather than a poet.

An editor is an originator, then, of something that includes the poem—a magazine, or a reading experience. In the case of prose poetry, however, and in many situations where poets are first published in multiple-author, edited works, an editor can also serve as the partial originator of the poem itself. Neither *Prose Poetry* nor *World of Prose Poetry* often print specific instructions as to how and what poets should submit for inclusion, but the magazines themselves can be seen as a kind of education in what kinds of prose poems are preferable. This is helped by a remarkable consistency, in the case of both magazines, as to what kinds of works are included, as well as their habit of printing critical articles which are often best read as instructions to poets. One example, a short essay in the *World of Prose Poetry* called "Hoping that Prose Poetry Will Join the Great Wave of Contemporary Poetry Reform" (希望散文诗加入当代诗政大潮) not only gives poets a quite detailed set of instructions as to how to compose prose poetry, but establishes its authority up front by describing a conversation between the piece's author and the general editor of the magazine, Hai Meng 海梦.²⁷³ It outlines a poetic form that it argues is useful to prose poets, the "free song" (自由曲), and gives a series of examples as models. Although other types of critical pieces are published in prose poetry magazines, such as those that describe prose poetry's literary history and those that attempt to publicize the form, directive critical essays make up a strong part of the critical material that appears in each issue. This is not to say that poets' art is dominated by instruction that they read in magazines, or that non-directive critical essays have no impact on poets as they conceptualize and compose poems, but there are innumerable examples of prose poetry editors choosing critical works for their magazines that argue that writers should write this or that way, using this or that convention.

There are, however, yet clearer examples of editorial work preceding the work of the

poet. This is an advertisement that was run immediately adjacent to the masthead of the *Prose Poetry Newspaper* in 1987:

Image redacted

The *Newspaper's* editor, Ke Lan, whose Hundred Flowers-era work is discussed in the first and second chapter, began a correspondence course for prospective writers of prose poetry. For the price of thirty-five yuan, they would receive a six-month subscription to the newspaper, a set of "teaching materials on basic information" (基础知识讲义), the right to submit one practice work to the newspaper per month with the best appearing in the *Newspaper*, and at the end of the course, the finest ten students would be brought to Zhuhai, Shenzhen, and Shatou to "experience life" and attend a meeting of prose poets. This is an undertaking in which the editor is of utmost prominence: they arrange the teaching materials, instruct the students, choose which of their works are best, and then hand-pick those who they want to stay involved. Although the way in which the *Prose Poetry Newspaper* performs the whole process in-house — education, selection, publishing, networking — is an extreme example, literary magazines around the world host and have hosted conferences, workshops and for-profit revision services which purport to prepare

writers for publication.²⁷⁴

Editors, then, select works and choose the order in which they are published; they are the last level of responsibility for page design and the setting of margins; they directly solicit work from famous or otherwise desirable writers; they choose critical essays that outline boundaries and frontiers for future work; and in some cases, they directly instruct writers in the craft and art of writing. This is end to end participation in the writing process, and it's what Harriet Monroe, editor of the early American modernist magazine *Poetry: A Magazine in Verse*, meant when she said that the "masterpiece of art" was less "a miracle of individual genius so much as the expression of a reciprocal relation between the artist and his public."²⁷⁵ Monroe, embroiled in a debate over whether or not poets should be paid by the magazines that feature them, points out that a Shakespeare-like genius in an environment with no audience and no support will not only never reach an audience, but will likely never produce work in the first place. Therefore, the success of the editor in arranging and attracting an audience is crucial in getting writers to begin composition: in many cases, editorial work takes place *before* the creation of the artwork. Even in contemporary China, where poets are as likely to pay literary magazines as they are to be paid by them, the editor's role — his or her construction of a community of writers and readers who are united by means of a publication — has long been a necessary precondition for writers to make works.

So we have seen, on an abstract level with some examples, that editors author prose poems in several different ways. They educate potential poets; they call for submissions; they select poems to appear together; they physically design the poems; they use diverse methods to describe what it is that readers are reading; they categorize and subcategorize work; and they

educate readers. This participation in the literary process impacts individual poems from before composition to after publication. What we are missing, so far, is a discussion of the particular ways in which the editorial influence of the three major prose poetry journals has affected prose poems, both singly and in regards to the genre. My survey of the three most influential prose poetry periodicals — *Prose Poetry* magazine, *World of Prose Poetry*, and to a lesser extent their shared precursor *Prose Poetry Newspaper* — shows that they share certain qualities, and that these qualities are most conveniently conceptualized as the results of editorial authorship. This is reasonable, considering that the the three publications are tightly linked by particularly powerful and well-known editors: with Ke Lan as senior editor, Hunan writer Zou Yuehan 邹岳汉 and Sichuan writer Hai Meng 海梦 both participated in the publication of the short-lived *Prose Poetry Newspaper*, and then became the editors-in-chief of *Prose Poetry* and *World of Prose Poetry* magazines, respectively.²⁷⁶ What these publications all have in common is a clear desire to educate readers, rather than attract readers who already have high literacy; a use of classical culture and reference that is far greater than that found in prose poetry outside of these publications; and a focus on local and regional organizations and communities.

The educational bent of prose poetry magazines is visible in the correspondence course offered by *Prose Poetry Newspaper* and reproduced above; they also took great pains to feature the poetry of students and teachers, and offered special group discount rates that seemed designed for use in the classroom.²⁷⁷ *Prose Poetry* magazine, however, takes the *Newspaper's* attention to encouraging, publishing and shaping the work of young people a step further: each month they publish a separate edition of the magazine called the late-month (下半月) edition or campus literature (校园文学) edition. The design of the magazine is nearly identical to the early-month edition, except that sections near the front identified as excellent works (佳作) are usually

made up of teachers, and the back sections are far more likely to be made up of students. This bifurcation sheds some light on the way that the front-to-back hierarchy of prose poetry journals can be seen as pedagogical: the front of the magazine is full of models to imitate, and the back is where readers send in their versions of those models. This may explain, to a certain extent, why both the editors of *Prose Poetry* (Feng Mingde 冯明德) and *World of Prose Poetry* (Hai Meng 海梦) mentioned, in separate interviews, that there were only a few sections of the magazine (always in the front) in which they used artistic or individual taste in organizing. The rest are either delegated to sub-editors or formulated according to non-aesthetic concerns, such as the publication of poems by party officials, institutional and individual supporters of the magazine, or works that satisfy the (increasingly rare) ideological dictates of government. The categories listed in the front of the magazine are the "teaching" sections of the magazine, the ones that determine its direction; the rest, even in non-campus editions, can be seen as the "student" sections of the magazine, or a place to drum up institutional and financial support.

The relationship between prose poetry and education is a long one, and has a strong relationship with prose poetry's roots in the Hundred Flowers era. Guo Feng, who is often described as a man with a "childlike heart" (童心),²⁷⁸ wrote more children's books than he ever did works of prose poetry, and served as editor of *Modern Children* magazine (现代儿童) in the early 1950s. As Mao wrote in his "Talks at Yan'an," the first job of the Communist artist

...is not a question of "pinning flowers on brocade" but "sending charcoal in the snow." The most serious and central task in regard to the people, therefore, is initially the work of reaching a wider audience rather than raising standards. The attitude of despising or ignoring the work of reaching a wider audience is a mistaken one.²⁷⁹

"Sending charcoal in the snow" is a traditional idiom for giving timely, practical help: for Mao to use the phrase in regards to literature was to argue that it needed to serve a specific purpose, and his preferred purpose was bringing the disparate nation into one mass, socialist literary and

cultural conversation. This was often carried out by writers and publishers who saw themselves primarily as educators: Hai Meng, editor of *World of Prose Poetry*, said in an interview in 2010 that prose poetry is a more easily comprehensible version of poetry, and its accessibility can bring in people who read little or no literature, including young students. The editor of *Prose Poetry* magazine, Feng Mingde, continues this tradition today: he is the author of the historical prose poem *National Anthem* (国歌), which recounts the history of the PRC and is released in a cheap, paperback "middle school edition" (中学版) intended for use as a textbook.²⁸⁰

That prose poetry editors see themselves in part as educators affects individual poems in two ways. One is that it presupposes the existence of some "information" which needs to be delivered to readers, something that will benefit them. For Mao, it was Marxism-Leninism; in the *Prose Poetry Newspaper*, it is the form and style of prose poetry itself, its strictures and methods. Where contemporary prose poetry is concerned, the continuation of these two traditions is clear — cult-of-personality-style poems still appear in prose poetry magazines, and how-to essays about writing prose poetry are also quite common²⁸¹ — but as time has progressed, the educational content, or at least the claim to it, is increasingly that of aesthetic value. Ironically, it is precisely because these magazines are so prosaic and so fixated on "charcoal in the snow" that they make such high claims to bring art into the lives of regular people in the city and country, as a perusal of their covers indicates. *World of Prose Poetry* claims to be "pure literature" 纯文学, as noted above, and also runs a headline over their title that reads: "Envoys of beauty...kindred spirits of love...musical harmony for feelings...resonance of the heart." Text on the cover of the early-month edition of *Prose Poetry* magazine reads, "A pure land of life....a clear spring of the spirit," and the campus edition "A seedbed of campus literature....the cradle of future writers."²⁸²

The posture of these magazines — the mission to bring the spiritually heightening effect

of "pure literature" to wide audiences — is visible in the way that the magazines select and arrange the writing they contain. One practice that is common to all Chinese literature, but particularly frequent in prose poetry magazines, is the publication of poems alongside explications and commentary. Take, for example, this poem by Geng Linmang 耿林莽, which was reprinted with an "appreciation" (赏析) by prose poet Qin Zhaoji 秦兆基:

76 lines redacted

Like "Wintersweet," above, this is not a particularly complex or challenging piece of work: also like "Wintersweet," it contains a significant debt to classical letters. Commentator Qin Zhaoji identifies the poem as a part of the tradition of "remembering the ancient" (*huaigu*, 怀古) poetry, in which a poet meditates on past times. The past events in question appear in the form of two opera stories: the first is sometimes called "Redressing a Grievance" but more accurately translated "Story of the Black Pot," 《乌盆记》 and its plot informs sections two and three. The other is the famous "Farewell, My Concubine" 《霸王别姬》 which is the source of section

four's references to the last battle of Xiang Yu at Gaixia. Qin's argument about the poem is a bit counterintuitive, but telling: he claims that *huaigu* poetry is extremely rare in prose poetry, and that this poem is an "attempt" (尝试) to use "post-modern methods" to write *huaigu* poetry. Qin says that the obstacle of contemporary pleasures — the "pretty paint" that covers the ancient, sorrowful ocarina — is overcome by the suffering of the ancients, and surface-level modern pleasures are defeated by the cathartic mourning of the *huaigu* tradition. This matches the terms which we have been using to describe the process of writing prose poetry in the 20th century: the recitation of a classical tradition, with a much-needed difference provided by modern thinking, prose form, and contemporary language.

Contrary to Qin's claim that Geng Linmang's poem somehow expands the territory of prose poetry, classical occasions, genres and references are extremely common in contemporary prose poetry magazines. In the same issue that features Geng Linmang's poem, there is also a five-poem series about the lives of classical poets, a three-poem series about temporal divisions from the pre-modern lunar Chinese calendar, a prose poem that ends with the direct citation of a Han-dynasty song lyric, and a two-poem series called "Restructured Tang Poems" (唐诗重构).²⁸⁴ Were we to also count poems that use common classical tropes, like thoughts of home from a distance, or revelations caused by viewing famous scenery, classically-influenced poems would probably make up half or more of the January 2006 issue. This is not a theme issue on classical work, but a constant quality of contemporary prose poetry magazines — "Wintersweet" above, from *Prose Poetry* magazine, can be seen as a version of the classical *yongwu* (咏物) poem, in which an emotional and sensual relationship is created between a poet and an object.²⁸⁵

Classical-themed or classically influenced poetry makes a natural choice for editors who consider themselves educators. Although early Cultural Revolution-era literary strictures were

occasionally quite strict about rejecting classical ideologies and leaving behind classical poetics, the contemporary period has no such preferences: this has produced an ironic situation in which classical knowledge and classical literacy become the "charcoal" that Mao instructs artists to carry, in part because classically-themed poems are politically safer to write and publish. Chinese authors have long used history as a veil for the discussion of contemporary issues, but the process of encoding contemporary events into historical terms requires experience with the stories and legends of Chinese history. This means that poems and other works of art that lack strong relationships to contemporary issues can serve a purpose: they help educate readers in the stories and ideas that provide the variety of codes and other shibboleths in which contemporary conversations are held. "About an Ocarina" reproduces and dramatizes several pieces of classical literature, and the commentary helps to both identify its source material and make its allusions legible. Under contemporary literary controls, if a strong parallel existed between this poem and current events, there could be no explanatory essay showing how that parallel works: there is therefore a role to be played by ideologically orthodox or neutral work that can serve as an introduction to and explication of the system of referential parallels.²⁸⁶

Classical culture — the elite culture of the millennia before the fall of the Qing and the May Fourth movement — has, of course, a value to the readers of prose poetry that goes far beyond its utility as a source of commonly known stories and cultural codes. Circumstantially, we see that orthodox prose poetry is most common in regions of heavily differentiated, small-population dialects of Chinese. Jerry Norman, in his survey of Chinese dialects, identifies southern Hunan as well as Fujian province as those with the largest number of mutually unintelligible, diverse dialects: surveying the most important locations of prose poetic culture, a surprising number come from these regions.²⁸⁷ *Prose Poetry* magazine is printed in Yiyang,

Hunan, and Ke Lan, discussed in chapters one and two, is from neighboring Changsha; Guo Feng was raised among the Min and Hakka dialects of Fujian province, and Liu Zaifu comes from nearby Nan'an county. Zhuhai, the city in Guangdong where the *Prose Poetry Newspaper* was published, is a Cantonese-speaking city, but it is closely linked with Hainan, where residents speak a Min dialect. Hai Meng, editor of Chengdu's *World of Prose Poetry*, was born in western Sichuan, on the border between central Chinese and Tibetan dialects. Prose poetry exists, of course, all over China, but after the passing of the poetry fever of the 1980s, it took root and survived in communities with strong local dialects.²⁸⁸

In these communities, classical Chinese and traditional culture are connected intimately to locality and local culture, for a complex of reasons. Provincial governments promote, and sometimes invent local traditions as a means of competition for tourist and development dollars: the offices of *World of Prose Poetry* are quite close to Du Fu's Thatched Cottage (杜甫草堂), a poetry-themed tourist attraction that uses Du Fu's exile to Sichuan as a means to site the poet, and his cultural cachet, in urban Chengdu where it can be used for economic purposes. *Prose Poetry* magazine ran a contest in 2008 with the theme "poetry and tea," the grand prize for which was a thousand *liang* of Yiyang black tea, the export of which was the city's major industry in earlier times.²⁸⁹ Even on Hainan Island, where many minorities overlap and local culture exists in an uneasy relationship to Han identity, there have been strong attempts to resuscitate regional Ming-Qing opera and publicize the histories of famous imperial bureaucrats from Hainan.²⁹⁰ Regional governments, and regional economies, are in competition with other regions, and must use anti-nationalist, regionalist narratives in order to argue that their products, practices and environments are distinct from and superior to the national standard.²⁹¹

Regional identity's dependence on imperial and pre-imperial China is as true in the

cultural field as it is in the economic field. In many cases, especially in the linguistically diverse south, poets reciting classical verse prefer to read in their own dialects, considering them more "authentic," more connected to ancient culture, than northern Mandarin; local identity is often related to, and spoken in terms of, classical heritage.²⁹² This reflects the fact that Chinese dialects, especially in literate cultures of the South, developed for thousands of years in parallel with classical culture, and that for most low-income internal Chinese regions, the apex of their importance and comparative wealth came at some point during the imperial period. With reference to "About an Ocarina," it is important, perhaps, to know that Geng Linmang is from the small town of Rugao (如皋) in southern Jiangsu, and that thousands of years ago, Rugao was a part of the state of Chu that appears in "Ocarina" — for people in Geng's locality, this aligns the reader even more strongly with Xiang Yu, the doomed hero of Chu, and helps personalize the struggle against nostalgia that the poem describes. The author and the publication are part of a broader national market, and the poem is designed for that market: reference to the world of classical letters, though, is often reference to a China with a pre-modern central cultural authority and whose many parts had strong local traditions.

The heavy representation of classical culture in contemporary prose poetry magazines therefore helps express locality. Locality is a crucial element in prose poetry magazines: local subscribers are the economic and social backbone of magazine publishers, and local distribution is a key element in producing the kind of social capital with which magazine publishers repay their official sponsors.²⁹³ For example, there is a biography of a prominent Chengdu businessman on the inner cover of the first issue of *World of Prose Poetry* in 2010.²⁹⁴ On the facing page, his poem "Through the Winter" appears, an ode to his business concern, the Eleventh Design and Research Institute of IT Co. Ltd. (EDRI). This poem, prominently accompanied by a full-color

photo of its author, takes up the most eyecatching, desirable real estate in the issue. This happens even though the poem has practically no intentional art value, although its personification of EDRI in the way that previous official poets personified the motherland does insinuate an interesting transition of power and influence in modern China. Rather than being a piece intended to interest readers, or accumulate social capital, it is instead a fairly clear example of a piece printed with the hopes of cementing a relationship with a rich and powerful supporter.²⁹⁵

The things that such a supporter hopes to get — free publicity for a business and the ability to self-represent as an important poet — are mainly local. A magazine with a strong commitment to its region, then, will provide more in the way of access to regional business and will concentrate its accumulation of social capital more fully on a locality. It makes sense, then, that a man from Chengdu running a Chengdu-based business would choose a magazine based in, and at least partially focused on, Chengdu. This reasoning is nearly identical for sponsors and supporters who are cadres in the Communist Party: *Prose Poetry* magazine occupies spacious public-funded offices above the Yiyang City Museum, and the power structure that allocates those resources is local. Apart from its aesthetic qualities or positive social impact, the magazine can serve its official constituency by representing, and keeping close ties with, the city of Yiyang.²⁹⁶

These similarities represent a nascent trend in the world of prose poetry, one that moves away from the practices of resistance and refusal and towards the establishment of prose poetry as a literary genre which is not based on a process, but instead has identifiable form and content inside reasonably strict generic bounds. Its acts of recitation increasingly look like allusion or citation — a way to direct readers towards classical culture, as in "About an Ocarina" — and the work found in contemporary magazines generally shows a trend away from the attitude of refusal. This transformation, still in progress, becomes more sensical when one views magazines

as products, in part, of their editors. Prose poetry editors are mostly *not* looking for work that undertakes a particular process, such as expanding the boundaries of art, rethinking old assumptions, or revolutionizing the use of prose. Instead they are looking for work-as-commodity that possesses particular qualities, namely educational value, classical elegance, and service to the local community.

Of these, the use of classical reference and classical tropes is perhaps the best example. Many prose poems use occasions and language from classical poetry in order to produce a context in which prose poetic refusal can take place: the very practice of recitation is rooted in modern experiences of ancient Chinese, and it seems necessary that modern Chinese writers would found themselves as individuals and express their uniqueness using the springboard of classical letters. We saw an example of this process in "After Wang Ximeng" by Xi Chuan in chapter one. In the magazine poems above, however, classical tropes fulfill their promise: they give readers what they always have. The *yongwu* elicits a feeling from an object, and the *huaigu* mourns the tragedies of the past. The reason for this is that classical tropes are useful to prose poetic editors in very particular ways having to do with reaching their audience — classical culture provides a rarefied "charcoal" that the magazine can bring to readers, a product different from Ke Lan's quotidian factory poems, something that shows erudition and has value as a commodity. Prose poetry in these cases is not a process or a *technē*, but a tool to bring about a particular purpose. What appears in prose poetry magazines today is a literary form in transition: over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, the internal, unstable tension of early prose poems have seen their external qualities imitated time and time again, with the results selected, polished, curated and contextualized by magazine editors. Their institutional and economic concerns provide a kind of Darwinian environment in which each generation of poetry fits better into the

niches that can sustain it. The way that the editors of the *Prose Poetry Newspaper* began to use education to balance the demands of the market with the demands of the party, and then handed down those skills to *Prose Poetry* and *World of Prose Poetry*, is the history of a literary form reacting to, and producing, its consumers. From a genre perspective, as well as from the perspective of individual works, it very well might be editors who are the most important authors of the kind of prose poetry that appears in magazines and official anthologies today.

The distribution of roles in contemporary prose poetry that has given new responsibilities in the composition process to readers and editors has also transformed the work of authors themselves. Many seminal prose poets are, as we have seen, literally editors: additionally, however, the work of official prose poets is deeply influenced by the primacy of editors and the skills that are demanded of those editors. There is no clearer example of this process than the work of former *Prose Poetry* magazine editor Zou Yuehan: to discover the way that authors act as editors, we will now turn to his work *Under Young Trees*.

Author as Editor: Zou Yuehan's *Under Young Trees*

The following are all from a collection by Zou Yuehan, the former editor of *Prose Poetry* magazine, whose pieces were written between 1983 and 1992. Although it looks like the second half of each piece is a commentary written by another author, they are actually Zou's work as well:

90 lines redacted

297

67 lines redacted

58 lines redacted

Much contemporary prose poetry, especially that found in the publications examined above, is very similar: once you have read a few issues of *World of Prose Poetry*, subsequent issues will offer little by way of surprise. That standardization, however, and the strong sense in contemporary publications of genre-as-product rather than genre-as-process, provides a text for

more adventurous official authors to recite. The poems of *Under Young Trees* look, and in many cases act, like a lot of the poetry discussed in the first half of this chapter. The poems' topics are either topics from traditional Chinese poetry — the passage of time, visiting a famous site, reflections on a season — or are drawn from the history of Chinese prose poetry, including imperative-voiced poems similar to Xu Chengmiao's "Advice" or Ke Lan's "Agreement," and encomiums to workers comparable to Guo Feng's "Sharpener." They largely fall within traditional conventions with regards to length and prose style, which is a logical conservatism once the background of the poems' author is taken into consideration. Born in 1937, Zou Yuehan founded *Prose Poetry* magazine in 1985, and was then temporarily transferred to Guangzhou to join the editorial staff of the *Prose Poetry Newspaper* with Ke Lan and Hai Meng. He continued as the editor of *Prose Poetry* until 2001, and retired not long after he started editing the yearly anthology called *The Year in Chinese Prose Poetry*.³⁰⁰ He is a member of the Chinese Writers' Association and the vice-chair of the China-International Prose Poetry Association: where this genre is concerned, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, Zou Yuehan is a consummate insider, and an editor who has had a strong and persistent effect on the genre.

Zou's editorial experience, and his role as not only an author of individual poems, but an author of the genre of prose poetry itself, is clear from the choice of form in *Under Young Trees*. In an interview, he said that the practice of including commentarial "appreciations" after each poem was born of his responsibility as editor to write explications and analyses after poems that appeared in *Prose Poetry* magazine, much as Qin Zhaoji did for Geng Linmang's "About an Ocarina." On reading "Night Song," however, it becomes clear that there is a shifting distance between the persona that speaks the poem, and the persona that comments on it. The commentary has three different approaches to the original. The first is a gloss of the poem's situation and

intent, "from a quiet summer's night, discerning a quiet song." This information is available in the poem, but given here in a more direct and legible way appropriate to the editor-as-educator: we are being shown a shortcut into the interests of the poem. The second aspect of the commentary is the way in which it gives background for the poem, and extends it. The necessity of the quietude of the poet is something that is *not* in the text of the poem proper: the poem says only that it's "too quiet" (太寂静). The quiet that the speaker of the poem refers to could be any number of things, including a quieting of human voices, or of any background noise other than the wind and insects on which the speaker is focused. The newness of the commentary's angle of interpretation here is underlined by the way in which it glosses "the silence of ten thousand pipes" (万籁俱寂), which is not from the text of the poem but introduced for the first time in the commentary: it is as if the commentary treats this phrase as if it does, or could, or should appear in the original text, and then assumes an explanatory posture to clarify its own language. The final method of approach is recreation of the poem itself: as if triggered by *dongting* (动听), the phrase I translate as "sweet to the ear," the last two lines of the commentary begin to participate in the poetic structures of the poem, repeating *yushi* (于是) and using the paragraph-ending semicolon in an unprosaic way, just like the poem's paragraphs two through four.

The question of the position of the commentator — whether or not Zou writes the commentary in the voice of a persona separate from that of the poems they discuss — becomes more complex when we survey the way in which the commentary refers to the poems and their poet. "Night Song" addresses the poet in the third person, which would indicate two separate personae, except for the Chinese convention of authors referring to themselves in the third person as "the writer" (笔者) or with other third-person self-address. In the commentary to the poem "Leaf," which draws its subject matter from Zou's experience as a forester and tree-planter,

Zou writes "This is a poem given to foresters and all who educate later generations..." (这是一曲献给育林员和一切为哺育后代...) ³⁰¹ in a gestural act that would be difficult for anyone other than the poet to undertake — the verbal quality of the phrase makes it seem more like a dedication in the tradition of poems like Ke Lan's "Sharpener," and less like a description by a critic. Similarly, intimate information known only to the poet appears in multiple commentaries, as in "Impression of a Mountain Town," where the commentary reads "little town on the mountain, a symbol for the poet's ideal kingdom" (小小山城，诗人理想王国的象征). ³⁰² In the commentary to the book's title poem, however, we see the line "The gaze of the poem is on the last things, we and the poet are experiencing them together" (诗眼在末段，诗人与我们共同地体验着), ³⁰³ placing the commentator in the position of the reader. It seems unlikely that the poet Zou Yuehan would describe one of his works as a *xiaopin* (short essay), as takes place in the commentary to "Raising Seedlings" above — such an observation seems the work of a writer who is introducing prose poetry to an unfamiliar audience. The commentary of "Raising Seedlings" also praises the poem that it explicates when it says that the "images are likely, and feel convincing" — for many of the poems of this book, the "appreciation" is as much advertisement as evaluation. The fact that the commentarial speaker praises the poetic speaker leads us to believe that the two personae are different; the fact that the commentarial speaker *never* criticizes the poetry insinuates that they are in collusion. On the level of the entire work, the effect is something like that which we know to be literally true: this book has one author who sometimes assumes the identity of a writer of commentary, and sometimes becomes a poet.

Even in a poem as simple as "Night Song," the position and persona of the poet and commentator are crucial in understanding the piece. The poem is made up of realist description: apart from the light personification of the treetops and the insects, the poem when taken alone is

similar in style and intent to that which could be found in a realist novel or a piece of nature writing. The commentary, on the other hand, pulls towards the subjective, conceptualizing the scene of the poem as something that can exist only in the mind of the poet. From the commentary's perspective, the vision that makes up the poem is determined by the state of the mind that sees it, not the context in which the mind finds itself. When we interpret the piece as the product of one person who plays two roles, the result is a situation familiar to much of prose poetry: the performance of two competing, even mutually exclusive, ideas and concepts. The poet pretends to give commentary as if he is not a poet; the commentator holds forth on the poem as if it were not written to be the subject of a commentary. The two different roles necessarily produce different attitudes and ideas — the commentary points out a concept or piece of background that most poets would simply revise into the poem, or as in "Night Song," the commentary works at cross purposes to the poem.

The temptation, especially in Western literary critical circles, might be to interpret this internally contradictory, obviously fictive dual structure as a means to reveal the plasticity of personae, the arbitrariness of the metafictional structures that dominate our encounters with artistic texts, and the death of the author as a trustworthy identity. It is not fully convincing, however, that these concepts and ideas are explicitly at play in *Under Young Trees*. The book sits so clearly in the heritage of its prose poetic predecessors in the Hundred Flowers Movement, and is so intimately tied to the history of Chinese prose poetry and literary currents among state-sponsored writers in the 1980s and 1990s that an appeal to the ontology of reading seems unlikely. I propose instead that this book displays what I will call *editorial intelligence*: consensus-building, audience-oriented, crucial to all published art, the skills of the editor are particularly important in Chinese letters, and especially crucial to Chinese prose poetry. In "Night Song," editorial

intelligence is what guides the decision to pair this particular poem — a product of the writer-as-observer, a pastoral, a piece that is simple and focused on external senses — with an analysis that speaks in almost spiritual terms about inner peace, subjective silence, and the practice of receptivity. The two postures differ, obviously, but also cooperate to reinforce the "depth" of the experience and the "sweetness to the ear" of the ambient music — even though the commentary focuses on the *appearance* of depth and foregrounds the "ear," rather than the "sweetness."³⁰⁴ The practice of matching these two parts, fitting them into and against one another, can of course be seen as a craft of making, but it is also instructive to see it as a craft of choosing, a process of selection from the wide variety of familiar postures and attitudes. This process is a crucial part of prose poetic recitation: when one wants to ventriloquize a past form, choosing which kind of language to inhabit is easily as important as the skill with which that language is reproduced. The dual identity of *Under Spring Trees* makes that practice uniquely legible, and so the remainder of this chapter will examine the uses of editorial intelligence through reference to Zou's work.

"Raising Seedlings" is perhaps the most straightforward example of the way in which editorial intelligence aids in the achievement of the poetics of hinting. Many readers might be able to intuit that the intended connotation of the poem goes beyond the personified interaction with plants that is its literal text: it is a reasonably straightforward allegory whose sentiment makes up an almost predictable part of a collection centered around youth and the passage of time. The baldness of the commentary, which lays out the parallel and then comments on the need to produce and interpret hints when writing and reading poetry, verges on overkill — unless one takes into account the educational impetus that drives many prose poets and prose poetry editors, a desire to bring new readers into the hidden parts of an existing literary conversation. In fact, this poem and the instruction of its commentary is the third poem of the collection,

reminding the reader to read associatively in the book's later, more subtle poems (like "Guling"). Editorial intelligence is the faculty of judgment that estimates the probable capabilities of the reader, and then chooses to gloss this particular poem, early in the book, as a way to educate that reader in the book's communicative strategies. In this book, it is in part the way that poems are ordered and organized that brings readers to the realizations or thoughts that the author desires.

Arrangement in series is, as we have mentioned, a common structural element of prose poetry: from Ke Lan's narrative series "The Childrens' Travel Team" (《少年旅行对》),³⁰⁵ to the numbered sections of Liu Zaifu's "Reading the Sea,"³⁰⁶ to Xi Chuan's linked poems called "Ill Fortune" (厄运),³⁰⁷ the poetic series is a mainstay of the genre and a test of the editor/author's ability to arrange discrete experiences in a way that is sensical to the reader. Ke Lan's challenge in this respect was relatively small: telling the story of a group of children traveling on a school field trip, he begins with a poem called "Setting Out" and establishes an extremely familiar narrative structure. Zou Yuehan also begins with a structure familiar to some readers of Chinese poetry, the interplay of text and commentary, although he alters it greatly by acting as both author and commentator. The occasion of Xi Chuan's poem series is much more alien — each is a kind of lyric case file for an unfortunate person, identified by bureaucratic alphanumeric codes. As the distance between the world of the poem and the world familiar to the reader increases, the need for editorial intelligence to arrange works in a meaningful order, one that reveals the works' structure, also increases. This observation echoes editor Harriet Monroe's idea about the masterpiece of art as cited above: it depends on "a reciprocal relation between the artist and his public." Mediating that relationship often falls, of course, within the provenance of the author, but it is the specialty of the editor, and that relationship is especially important in a genre which is both committed to the poetics of hinting *and* commonly engages in education, outreach and

"carrying charcoal in the snow." It is no accident that the allegorical content of "Raising Seedlings" speaks, as the commentary informs us, to the educator: a challenge to educate students to be bold, even as the form instructs them to be able to listen to the unspoken subtleties of poetic language.

"Seedling's" emphasis on the educator reveals one of the engines at the heart of the poetics of hinting: its reliance on a "reciprocal relation" that allows the interpretation of insinuation. For a hint to be more than simply a failure to communicate, the hincer and the interpreter need to have some common language, shared experience, mutual assumption, or social understanding — some overlap in context that can be applied to communicate without denotative speech. If "Raising Seedlings" had no commentary, we might say that the shared context on which its hint (in this case, its unstated allegory) rests is the history of socialist imperative, the particular way in which the CCP disseminates moral instruction. Specifically, this means a vague imperative — "make them go out" — attached to moral abstractions like bravery, steadfastness, and happiness, as well as the use of representative extremity like the "front lines" or the tops of the hills. This is the same kind of idiom, more or less, that provides the basis for acts of recitation by Ke Lan and Guo Feng in poems like Ke Lan's "Agreement." As readers, we can tell that the language and situation are ill matched to the life and work of the forester, and if we have encountered the language of the poem in other contexts, specifically if we have been primed to look for it, we may catch the subtext. Editorial intelligence performs this priming: it arranges context such that it indicates subtext. Even a book editor, who often does not have the ability to select works that a magazine editor does, has at his or her disposal a variety of ways to arrange context, including but not limited to the use of cover art, the tone and character of a book's graphic design, and the introductions and blurbs that appear on the back or interior flap.

The nature of a publishing house itself — whether it specializes in popular or elite literature and its willingness to take political or aesthetic risks — can indicate a great deal about an artwork before its readers even begin to read. Prose poets, too, select, recite and arrange contexts: this part of their craft is related to the work of the editor. As Nikki Santilli says about the English prose poem, it has the power to act "as a kind of transparent container that, while it possesses certain constant attributes (prose sentences, brevity, and collective presentation, let's say), acquires its immediate effects from current literary moods that it absorbs or subverts."³⁰⁸ The ear for those moods, the selection of texts to reflect or oppose them, and the understanding about what a particular audience can or cannot interpret and enjoy; these are all the purview of the editor as much as they are the author.

"Raising Seedlings," however, does not require us to interpret its hints ourselves: it happily lifts the curtain. Instead of relying on editorial priming to ensure that its readers understand its insinuations, the poem itself is an act of priming for the rest of *Under Spring Trees*. That preparation is capitalized upon most directly in "Guling," which appears in the book's fourth chapter alongside several other poems which recount journeys to famous places. Guling is the site of the 8th Plenum of the Eighth CCCPC, a particularly pivotal meeting during which General Peng Dehuai 彭德怀 sent a private letter to Mao warning of the excesses and dangers of the Great Leap Forward. Mao shared the letter with all present, and spent ten days criticizing Peng, finally arresting him as a rightist. Guling was where the ideology of class struggle entered the top leadership, and triggered a renewed vigor in hunting down and arresting rightists in and out of the Party.³⁰⁹ This incident, almost thirty years past by the time "Guling" was written, clearly serves as the subtext for the poem. The meeting that takes place in paragraph four, and the "irreconcilable struggle" that concludes it, both refer to the 1959 conference: by extension,

the fog might represent the way in which the story of Guling has been forgotten and occluded — specifically the injustice shown by Mao toward Peng Dehuai, and the way in which Mao's decision to treat Peng's criticisms as counterrevolutionary prevented the CCP from addressing the failures of the Great Leap Forward. The personification of the sad, ruined villa, which looks wearily towards "something new," reflects the same attitude that got Xu Chengmiao arrested during the Anti-Rightist Campaign: a hope for future change that leadership saw as contradictory to the socialist struggle.³¹⁰ The hint is given an exclamation point by the ensuing paragraphs: "It seems to understand, but doesn't understand. // Unrelated? And yet it seems to be related."

What is special about this superficially hidden allegory is that in a book with an elaborate commentarial apparatus, the notes to the poem say nothing about it, and that they in fact misdirect readers of the poem towards realist detail about the city's architecture. A critic who concluded that this poem was intended to give "artistic life" to "buildings with unique styles" would be a very shoddy critic indeed, and it is only possible to conclude that the artist-critic has chosen to use this poem's commentary to gently discourage access to the hint of the piece. From one perspective, this is a classic act of refusal: instead of faithfully elucidating all that is knowable about the poem, as commentary often promises to do, the appreciation of "Guling" conspires with the piece's obscurity, acting as an extension of the poem rather than its explication. From another perspective, though, it may be the result of an editorial decision: unlike "Raising Seedlings," "Guling" covers material that could be considered politically sensitive. Also unlike "Seedlings," there is a likely hook to unlock the connotations of "Guling": the juxtaposition of Lushan (Mount Lu, mentioned in the commentary) and "meeting," which in many readers will automatically bring to mind the particular meeting for which Lushan is most famous. Finally, the reader has already been primed to look for hints and allegorical parallels by

poems like "Raising Seedlings." So "Guling" is an easier leap to make for many readers, and the commentary can be used to throttle down the prominence of the poem's subtext. This logic is editorial: it focuses not on what to say or how to say it, but how much is appropriate, how much is too much, what is permissible and what is effective. In the mainland Chinese literary community, where lyric poets often self-represent as Romantic heroes of the imagination, prose poets are far more likely to pay this level of attention to reader-writer communication.³¹¹

"Guling" is one of the most straightforward comments on political history in *Under Young Trees*, but it is by no means the only one. The sentiment represented by the villa as it looks forward to something new is echoed many times in the book: in the poem "Old Tower," the titular ruin is described as a crumbling edifice built by a now-abandoned faith, and is contrasted with the clouds and the birds, which remain eternally young.³¹² "Spring Riders" describes a suspiciously military victory of the forces of spring over retreating winter, which is given a thoroughly negative connotation throughout the book. However, even though many of the book's allegories are generally oriented towards reform and change, and this position seems easily identifiable as a pattern, most works committed to hinting will produce at least some allegory that can be applied to politics. The deeper, more thoroughgoing political effect is the way that editorial intelligence can manage and manipulate the socialist mass voice. In the conclusion to his book *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period*, Marston Anderson writes:

In calling for mass fiction and socialist realism, Chinese writers acknowledged a new imperative: they began erasing the distinction between 'I' and 'they' — between the self and society—that had been an indispensable basis for the practice of critical realism, subsuming both in a collective 'we.'³¹³

Editorial intelligence makes that collective "we" much more than the claim of an individual poem: it matches works to readers, educates readers to understand the codes and hints of the

works they're given, puts works in conversation with each other, self-censors and moderates so that the community can exist in the open, and creates standards of success and failure. Because prose poetry is often built on a set of processes, the genre often makes the construction of that "we" uniquely legible. An object or product can be experienced in isolation from its maker; a verbal process such as that found in more inventive prose poetry requires at the very least an implied verbal subject, the construction of an "I" or a "we" that undertakes the process of the poem. It would have been easy for Zou Yuehan to hire a student or assistant editor to be the putative "commentator" of his works in *Under Spring Trees*, and then feed that person information and analysis, and it would have been equally easy to create an internally consistent fictive commentator for the poems. Instead, readers are pulled through a long, multi-layered decision process about the distance between the commentary and the poem, encouraged to participate themselves in determinations of the objectivity and subjectivity of the writing in the book. This is a project that has deep sympathies with the subjectivist theories and poems of Liu Zaifu, but also one that has significant differences: rather than breaking the "we" apart into self-sufficient and independent individuals, Zou's book works to establish a new "we."³¹⁴ This "we" is internal to the book, and internal to Zou — himself commenting on himself — but it models the work he and editors like him do in the world of media.

Under Spring Trees poses a set of conundrums that are practical, theoretical, and political: practically, it is simultaneously introspective (in its self-commentary) but also heavily focused on reader experience. Theoretically, it seeks to express individual experience through the use of borrowed mass voices, and shared generic traditions. Politically, it is a piece of reasonably official, obedient literature that has at heart a program to encourage reform and subjectivity. In this study, we can interpret the shared quality of these contradictions as the simultaneous

processes of recitation and refusal. Recitation re-performs elements of shared context as a way to gather readers into a text; refusal puts that context under the lens of individual sensibility.

Recitation ventriloquizes the voices of others; refusal foregrounds individual experience.

Recitation is the command of the state apparatus at its most restrictive; refusal intentionally differs from that state apparatus, whether the engine of that difference is subversion, rebellion, or even just a lack of interest.

These are simply prose poetry-specific terms, though, for a mediation that many Chinese writers have undertaken and continue to undertake since 1949, namely the examination of the role of the individual in his or her community. What is particular about Zou Yuehan, and about a great deal of contemporary prose poetry as it appears in official magazines, is that the poems do not treat the simultaneity of resistance and refusal as an internal conflict. *Under Spring Trees* does not contain the grinding revision, repetition and self criticism that Liu Zaifu engages in as he labors for "the endless occurrence of spiritual escape" from the artist's position, trapped between the hell of other people and the hell of the self.³¹⁵ Zou's poems engage in self-contradictory processes, but there is no sense that these inconsistencies are tragic. In *Under Spring Trees*, the community's limits on the self and the self's rebellion against the community are written into the flow of nature, with ideological seasons passing, edifices crumbling and being built, and the future arriving inexorably, even if that arrival is sometimes violent. These attitudes, especially in the mid-1990s when the book finally achieved publication, fit well with the CCP ideology of the period, which was touted as one of gradual, evolutionary change driven by free-market economic processes. In a bigger sense, the passivity of reformist belief in *Under Spring Trees*, as well as the way it foregrounds its conventionality and only hints at its individuality, is broadly representative of the way in which official poetry has attempted to

provide work minimally interesting enough to command a readership, but stay free of problematic and dangerous interactions with government censors.

In the 1950s, prose poetry was at the edge of conceptual and political possibility; in the 1980s, it was one of the forms popular among newly empowered, reformist socialists; after 1989, its relevance has waned, as poetry from more dynamic unofficial and avant-garde traditions has become available. This is the result of attrition coming from several sources: first, the generation of writers and thinkers who originally advocated for prose poetry have passed on, including Ke Lan (2006) and Guo Feng (2010). Concurrently, as a result of the relaxation of publication controls, book publication is no longer as difficult as it once was. Prose poetry books and magazines, which once struggled to get permission to publish, now attain it with ease — but they must compete with a whole world of avant-garde and unofficial art that was formerly impossible to publish.³¹⁶ The national publishing industry has moved on, leaving prose poetry in a position that is largely regional.³¹⁷

Most importantly, perhaps, the delicate balance struck by the mainland Chinese prose poetry community in order to remain official has prevented experimentation and led to a product that is in some ways remarkably closely connected to the genre's roots in the Hundred Flowers period. The stasis of official prose poetry in the late 1980s and early 1990s is, when viewed through a certain lens, visible in Zou Yuehan's work itself: the image of the villa in "Guling," for example, quietly disobedient, hungry for fresh air, youth, and newness — or the walk through the ruins in the poem "Old Tower," where pieces of the edifice remain, but the driving faith that built them is gone. For all its mediation and reconceptualization of socialist text, official prose poetry is still a part of the PRC literary establishment, and as that establishment has been dismantled

and lost credibility, interest in official prose poetry, as well, has begun to wane.³¹⁸ This does not mean, however, that avant-garde poets with devoted readerships never write short lyric prose that they collect in volumes of poetry; it simply means that in the last twenty years in China, poets who write prose do not call themselves prose poets, associate with poets or publications that identify with prose poetry, or theorize on the practice of writing poems using prose. Likewise, contemporary theorists and literary historians of prose poetry in China generally do not write about these unofficial and avant-garde works.³¹⁹ In the following chapter, we'll look at some avant-garde and unofficial poetry that is written in prose; as we do so, it will be instructive to remember that these writers are often attempting to distinguish themselves from an official genre that they see as moribund.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHAT ISN'T PROSE POETRY

非散文诗

"The name that can be named is not an enduring name."

-- *Daode Jing*

The Long Poem

Appendix B is an annotated translation of "Hanging Coffin" 《悬棺》, a poem written and published in installments between 1984 and 1986 by Ouyang Jianghe 欧阳江河, a poet from Sichuan province. "Hanging Coffin" is too big to comfortably fit at the start of this chapter, for reasons that will soon become clear: in its place, I'll reproduce a small fraction of the opening section.

20 lines redacted

This chapter will consider two kinds of poetry that cannot, strictly speaking, be called prose poetry: the long poem, a nascent genre encompassing lineated and unlineated poetry of extreme length, and the work of avant-garde poet Xi Chuan, which is formally similar to many prose poems, but which the poet himself intentionally distinguishes from the tradition of 20th century Chinese prose poetry. At over 6,200 characters, a single one of the three sections of "Hanging Coffin" is longer than the entirety of Liu Zaifu's "Reading the Sea," which has been our benchmark for an exceptionally long prose poem, one whose length pushes it towards prose.³²¹ The poem in total is six times as long as Ke Lan's most generous limit for prose poetry, and twenty times as long as the vast majority of Ke's own poems.³²² Past its size, however, what makes "Hanging Coffin" so remarkable is its continuous intricacy: it maintains a level of allusion, image and layered poetic hinting that never allows the high velocity reading that we might experience when encountering a narrative or other familiar, highly organized prose. Put simply, there is not just a quantitatively large number of characters in "Hanging Coffin," but a qualitatively large amount of *poetry* in the piece. Its intricacies and challenges make it much slower to read than something like "Reading the Sea": not a single sitting's transcendental experience, but a long-term project to be subdivided. Perhaps accordingly, "Hanging Coffin" is rarely printed as a complete poem. The version transcribed and translated in Appendix B is taken from two different sources, and even when anthologized the poem appears only in part.³²³

In addition to its concrete length and density, "Hanging Coffin" is conceptually grand. Statements are superlative and cosmological — the poem's first line is "all moments are the same moment" — and historical reference centers around (but is by no means limited to) the *Book of Changes* (易经) and the *Chu Ci* (楚辞), some of the oldest and most fundamental texts of the Chinese tradition. Ouyang Jianghe, especially during this period, could be easily mistaken as intentionally engaging in "root-seeking" (寻根) literary activities, which took advantage of post-Cultural Revolution freedoms to engage directly with the legacy of Chinese history, and all that modern Chinese people had inherited from their ancestors. Ouyang, however, began "Hanging Coffin" in 1984, a year before Han Shaogong (韩少功) gave a name to the varied interactions with and interventions into history, ancient myth, and classic literature that we now call "root-seeking."³²⁴ At the time, Ouyang Jianghe instead called himself a member of the "new traditionalist" group (新传统主义): along with Liao Yiwu.³²⁵ Their self-written manifesto associates the group with classical poetic identity, such as the responsibility to "worry about the people and the state" (忧民忧国). The manifesto, however, emphasizes the "new" as much as it does the "tradition": "Apart from obeying individual feeling and the dark music that leads humanity towards the deep places of the cosmos, new traditional poets do not surrender to any external, anti-artistic values, habits, orders or pressures arising from the apathy of the people."³²⁶ (除了屈服于自己的内心情感和引导人类向宇宙深处遁去的冥冥之声, 新传统主义诗人不屈服于任何外在的, 非艺术的道德, 习惯, 指令和民族惰性的压力。) Tradition here is conceptualized as the cosmological long view, an attention to the generations upon generations of people and artists whose rise and fall has led to the present situation. It is not an academic classicism — not a reproduction of classical methods — but a sense that the thousands of years before the twentieth century are deeper and grander than the geometric structures of the

industrial period. Put another way, Ouyang and Liao have an idiosyncratic respect for what the spirit of the past can do for the present, but little use for the particular forms of that past.

Accordingly, for all its historical reference, "Hanging Coffin" is quite modern with regards to its form. As with the prose poems of previous chapters, however, only part of that form is visible as the tangible product of the poem on the page: a great deal of it is internal and procedural, and we must therefore read the poem and engage with its process before we can speak fully about its external form, the importance of its length, or the ways in which it is and is not a Chinese prose poem.

Hanging coffins are a southeast Asian burial practice in which wooden coffins are attached to, or inserted into cracks in the faces of, sheer cliffs. Because these burials were performed by illiterate minority cultures, the specific details of the practice have been lost to history: we know little about the peoples who buried their dead in hanging coffins, how they did it, or why.³²⁷ To use such a burial practice as the centerpiece of a poem that is so deeply invested in history suggests an emptiness and mystery at the center of the experience of the past. This emptiness is made of death both metaphorically and literally, because memory becomes history only after its subjects pass away. In a more complete death, the histories of the coffin-builders have also passed away, and are now unknown: "Real death is what the roc looks down over from outside the sky, a perspective no height can attain. Each death pushes away a gradually deepening, gradually receding backdrop, it is unreachable yet remembered vividly, as if present."³²⁸ The hanging coffin's multiple valences are visible in the excerpt reproduced above: it is the space in which "no soul can be summoned," a reference to shamanistic poems on summoning dead souls found in the *Songs of the South* (楚辞).³²⁹ The magical efficacy of ancient

beliefs in returning China to the august rulership of the past — especially the magic of the shamanistic tradition, which inspired a great many "root-seeking" writers — fails to operate inside the blankness and mystery of the hanging coffin. That blank region is then expanded greatly by the line that finishes the excerpt: "...the king over kings, with no crown and no country: who is it?" The answer to that question in the classical tradition is most likely Confucius, who rules over all the states and empires of China through his philosophy but administers none of them.³³⁰ The simultaneously possible answer, though, is death, the way in which all human order is dominated by its necessary passage away from life, and the impossibility of return.

The three layers of the image of the hanging coffin — an ancestral practice, a physical remnant of the past, and a conceptual space in which no knowledge can survive — become easier to understand when we take the poem's systematic insistence on simultaneity into account. The first section begins with "All moments are the same moment"; the second with "Each return home returns to the same home"; the third, "All revelations are the same revelation." It is, in this poem, the same thing to realize that Confucius lords over the temporal order of China without ever signing a royal decree as it is to realize that death lords over all of us invisibly. The implicit criticism of the imperial order represented by "Hanging Coffin's" frequent reference to pre-Qin spiritual works, primarily the *Songs of the South* and the *Book of Changes*, are themselves criticized and disoriented by the spectre of an older, forgotten order represented by the hanging coffins. The apex of this kind of thinking appears in section three, "The Pocket Garden," in which the empty space of the womb and the fallow dirt of the garden come full circle in a comparison with the empty space of the abandoned coffin and the dusty ruins of ancient societies. Ouyang writes, "Those who bury flowers are burying themselves, to plant one's self in

the garden is to plant the self in the hanging coffin. The boundaries do not exist."³³¹ The critique is totalizing: the coffin is empty of all but ruins and corpses, and the world of life from which we criticize the past — the location from which we decide that the coffin is empty — is itself contained by the coffin.

This ambivalence, this almost mystically simultaneous acceptance of contradictory texts, contradictory ideas, and contradictory cosmologies, is the basis upon which "Hanging Coffin" engages with 1980s China. The poem's own historical moment is identified in its second paragraph and the poem never strays too far from it: we are concerned with "the silence *currently* heard," and "the Book of Heaven that is read *today*" (my emphasis). The interpretative overlay of mid-1980s conversations about political freedom, authoritarian government and the legacy of the Cultural Revolution is consistently meaningful in "Hanging Coffin," but its conclusions, if they can be said to exist, are subtle. Here is a passage from the end of the poem's second section, "The Five-Element Art of Escape":

Go on, depart from the way things are now. Leave the others, leave the self. Because the heart is the last result handed down after the harvest, if it loses its color the hopes of the ages will turn to dust. Because cupped hands hold up a moon whose form is like water, hanging alone in mid-air, plotting out darkness with no end.

Nostalgia is as thick and viscous as disease. *Nowhere* is not a foreign place, *no direction* is not exile. You need to leave, but you will never arrive. The lucky fluke of your departure has been seized by roots, the far-reaching escape of water, the escape of fire, the escape of light or wind or dust, you escape into the thickly woven roots of the ancestors, which weave a vast, celestial net over the way things are now. The here and now does not exist.

In section two, the topic is how to escape from the all-watching eyes of the Book of Heaven "that is read today" described in the poem's first section — eyes that are associated with tyrants, famines, and unnecessary sacrifice. The five elements of ancient China are presented as a potential way out of such a present, a series of elemental funerals that allow one to kill or otherwise let go of the self that is subject to contemporary order: "Sky burial. Burial in earth.

Burial at sea. Cremation. Wind burial."³³² That escape, however, is an "escape into the thickly woven roots of the ancestors," it is also closed off, containing, a coffin. Outside the false and punishing order of the present day, there is chaos; underpinning that chaos, a greater order that itself punishes us with suffering and death. The poem argues that "all authority escapes from the alternation between yin and yang, the alternation between flesh and spirit, alternation between the annihilated face and the mask. Outside this exchange there is no morning and no night..."³³³ The suggestion at the close of section two is therefore that we must endlessly be departing: "you need to leave, but you will never arrive" at some end stage, or some superior order. This maps onto the political considerations of the 1980s, which often included the sense that each epochal change — from the dying Qing to the Republic, from the Republic to Mao, and from Mao to Deng — brought a new and different set of problems whether or not it claimed to be the path to an enlightened ideal.³³⁴ What is celebrated is not a revolutionary change in the structure of the nation but a single moment that is static, indivisible, free and loose from external control: "In this moment nobody is saved and no one dies. // The lifespan like a force will always be this single moment."³³⁵

The ambivalence expressed in "Hanging Coffin" about the ancient order represented by Chinese traditional cosmology and shamanistic tradition is visible in the piece's poetic influences. Michael Day, who was Ouyang's first translator into English and deeply involved with the poetry scene in Sichuan, sees T. S. Eliot and Saint-John Perse's *Anabasis* in "Hanging Coffin" in both its style and its vision of China as a series of ruins.³³⁶ However, in an interview conducted years after Day's book was released, Ouyang admits to having read only one or two pages in a translation from Taiwan, and having been impressed mainly with Perse's antique diction, and the difficulty of his work.³³⁷ "Hanging Coffin" lacks the heroic central character of

Anabasis, it lacks the French poem's idiosyncratic line breaks, and it lacks the narrative structure — the titular journey — that many critics see as the underlying structure of Perse's poem.³³⁸ Still, however, the fact that a root-seeking writer would take even partial inspiration from a work of internationally recognized, French modernist poetry reinforces powerfully the procedural truth behind Ouyang's choice to describe himself as a *new* traditionalist.

As Day also points out, "Hanging Coffin" is powerfully informed by a closer progenitor, Yang Lian's 杨炼 long free-verse poem "Norlang," which was written during a trip that Ouyang Jianghe and Yang Lian took together to Sichuan's Jiuzhaigou not long before Ouyang began "Hanging Coffin."³³⁹ "Hanging Coffin" shares much with "Norlang," as is clear from Yang Lian's own description of his piece:

In its structure, 'Norlang' stands in the tradition of *The Songs of the South*. Myth, shamanistic rites, history and reality are fused to recreate an authentic living impulse, a real human experience, a space in which transcendent aspirations and cosmic consciousness can intermingle.³⁴⁰

This is a reasonable description of "Hanging Coffin" except for the words "recreate" and "authentic." Ouyang's poem mingles myth, magic and history, but instead of the individual prime mover who is the lyric speaker of "Norlang," a resurrected god commanding resurrection, "Hanging Coffin" gives a more distanced, cosmological description of the mystical underpinnings of reality. Additionally, there is no strong conviction that these underpinnings are reliably "authentic" or real; the poem leaves us with the "sole realization" that the "boundaries do not exist" among present, past and future, between power and submission, between *yin* and *yang*.³⁴¹ All this having been said, however, the two clearly come from a similar moment, and a similar aesthetic drive. "Norlang," most of which is a free-verse poem, has a prose section "based on a folk-elegy of Sichuan."³⁴² Both poems evince a belief in "natural" heterosexual congress to restore or revitalize individual life — in "Hanging Coffin," procreation and sexual fertility often

serve simply as images of vitality.³⁴³ Both revel in the mystery and breadth of the gnomic cosmological statement, and take full advantage of the way those statements release their poems from expectations about logic, narrative, and internal consistency. The complete list of influences that helped generate "Hanging Coffin" — classical culture, preclassical culture, Western primitivism, and Sichuanese mysticism — move through the past and present, inside and outside of Chinese culture in a way that indicates that our categorical structures to distinguish inside from outside are made up of largely fictitious boundaries.

Even as it clearly draws on diction, imagery and ideas from other poems, it is the underlying difference between "Hanging Coffin" and the poetry that inspired it that indicates its most crucial generic element. "Norlang" and *Anabasis* are attempts by individuals to transform, change, reawaken or simply move through the ruins of the world; although it is hard to call them stories in the traditional sense, they each contain narrative logics through which poems call to the world, and the world responds, if only in the guise of the reader. The speaker of "Norlang" says "partake of my purity," he says "rise up from within death," and he says "live on."³⁴⁴ The speaker of *Anabasis* claims that "with salt shall I revive the dead mouths of desire!"³⁴⁵ "Hanging Coffin," by contrast, directs no such speech towards the world, nor does it directly address transcendence in the idiom of "Reading the Sea"³⁴⁶ — as something that can be reached out for or traveled to by a poetic subject. The coffin is *around* us; we are encompassed by it, and the poem is the process of coming to an understanding of that fact. But any understanding the poet, speaker and reader might come to changes little, perhaps nothing about life or truth: the "sole realization" of the poem's final line "is innate from the day of birth, and it waits for the last days to depart alone."³⁴⁷

This returns us to the bigness of "Hanging Coffin," the way in which it is in fact bigger than the classical and shamanistic material it recites. Whereas Yang Lian saw "Norlang" as a way

to "recreate...a space," the space of "Hanging Coffin" encompasses all things. Its king is the "king over kings," its disintegrations take place "from the core to the border," its quietude is "outside quietude."³⁴⁸ By the standards of the lyric poem, the scope of the order (or disorder) outlined by the poem is truly gargantuan, even extending to the poem's final realization. If the past moment and the present moment are identical, divided by no boundary, then the project to escape from or transform the present using the idiom of the past is a futile one. The poem comes to fulfill the prophecy of the quote that precedes it, from Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste*: "They walked towards an immense castle. On the facade was inscribed: 'I belong to no man, and I belong to all men. Before you entered, you were already here, and when you leave, you will still be here.'" The recited materials — the classical and preclassical texts from which parts of "Hanging Coffin" are drawn, the stones of the immense castle — fade into the background, an instrument to make a discovery about time which can be discarded once the discovery is made. After "Hanging Coffin," Ouyang Jianghe's poetry quickly stopped resembling his self-description as a member of the "New Traditionalist" group. In an interview, he lays it out in the most physical terms possible: "For me, writing 'Hanging Coffin' was a means to complete this transformation [away from fascination with the classical]. In more unpleasant terms, if you want to eat chocolate, first you have to finish shitting out all the yams you've had."³⁴⁹ (写《悬棺》对于我来说, 是为了完成这种转换, 说句不好听的话, 就是开始吃巧克力之前, 先要把红苕屎拉完.)

The act of recitation we have been tracing through the history of prose poetry involves a poetic speaker re-performing speech from elsewhere, ventriloquizing that speech and entering it, for example when Ke Lan takes the posture of a machine operator, and then performs the speech

of a hunter.³⁵⁰ "Hanging Coffin," however, *contains* the speech it repeats, whether in the title's encompassing coffin, Diderot's immense castle, the pocket garden of the poem's third section, or Ouyang's metaphor about the consuming, digestive, excretory process of writing the poem. Ouyang himself rarely speaks of "Hanging Coffin" as a prose poem: its gargantuan size and all-consuming ambition make it different from normative prose poetry.³⁵¹ This bigness is an externally visible formal quality, but it is also a hallmark of what Chapter One called an "internal" (内在) structure, the poem's poetic process: rather than a subjective, individual intervention into a pre-existing system of thinking and speaking, it is an attempt to construct or identify a new or different system, to use language in a way that contains experience in a new shape or structure. Susan Stewart, speaking about size as it relates to art from the European tradition, sounds very much like she is explaining the difference between short prose poems and "Hanging Coffin": "Whereas the miniature represents closure, interiority, the domestic, and the overly cultural, the gigantic represents infinity, exteriority, the public, and the overly natural."³⁵² Instead of bringing outside texts into individual, subjective control as we have seen in chapters one through four, "Hanging Coffin" attempts an escape from that social world into a primordial (or at the very least, prehistoric) natural cosmological order. Rather than inserting the individual into purportedly objective prose, "Hanging Coffin" binds the individual into a web of ineluctable exterior structures.

Stewart's work on the gargantuan in *On Longing*, which attempts to understand the relationships between descriptions and objects that underpin Western literary production, also does much to explain some of the hallmark qualities of "Hanging Coffin." Her writing can help us understand why it is that the poem is generally only experienced in excerpt: as when a normal-sized human encounters a giant, we can only see part of the whole at any given time.

Stewart says that "our most fundamental relation to the gigantic is articulated in our relation to landscape, our immediate and lived relation to nature as it 'surrounds' us....Whereas we know the miniature as a spatial whole or as temporal parts, we know the gigantic only partially."³⁵³ Seeing "Hanging Coffin" as a gargantuan work in Stewart's sense also reveals the particular suitability of historically oriented writing to the gargantuan form: as in Blake's work, and Goya's, giants can represent the preindustrial sweep of history as a natural force that will devour and destroy the industrial world.³⁵⁴ Stewart places the giants of these Western artists against their own economic order: the economic commodity that is the miniature is swallowed up by unstoppable, prior systems, and the artifice of industrialization must submit to something older and more natural. In "Hanging Coffin," as well, modernity must submit to something older and more natural, but rather than simply being represented in an object — a miniature, a giant, a coffin — these warring orders are also represented in and by language. Ouyang writes that "the Book of Heaven that is read today uses eyes as its script: each eye is the disappearance of a language or the shattering of a landscape," and the desiccated skull of classical letters is made into a gruesome writing brush.³⁵⁵ In addition to being a physical and conceptual coffin, the "hanging coffin" 悬棺 of the title is a set of characters which reappear over and over again in the poem, pinning the poem to its central concept in a way that prevents or perverts any attempt at forward motion, progress, and problem-solving.

The public nature of the gargantuan arises from its role as what Stewart calls a "container" — a metaphoric encompassing of normally unencompassable abstractions, something that representationally stands in for many different objects or experiences.³⁵⁶ Objects of heroic scope can represent unbounded and heterogeneous groups of things: the Eiffel Tower represents Paris and the Great Wall represents all of China in a way that no miniature or human-

sized object truly could. In this way, they allow totalizing conversations to use language that we might recognize from discourse on landscapes or societies: to say that an individual *stands in for Paris* in the way that the Eiffel Tower now does would mean that we consider that individual to be a kind of giant, capable of representing an infinitely detailed physical and social landscape. This observation helps us understand why "Hanging Coffin" fits so poorly with official and semi-official prose poetry. Although it was written at a time in which prose poems, even those of considerable length and palpable heterodoxy, were generally publishable, official and semi-official prose poets in the tradition of Ke Lan and Guo Feng seem to have been unwilling to read, discuss or reprint Ouyang's poem.³⁵⁷ Whereas the smallness and the focus of Guo Feng's work could only be criticized in terms of its "limitations," and taken to task by He Huai for failing to appropriately represent and uphold the sweep of China's socialist revolution, "Hanging Coffin" must exist in contradictory and paradoxical relationships to CCP order, even in the considerably more freewheeling days of the early Deng era.³⁵⁸ As Stewart explains, "the gigantic, occurring in a transcendent space, a space above, analogously mirrors the abstractions of institutions — either those of religion, the state, or, as is increasingly the case, the abstractions of technology..."³⁵⁹ The sameness of all moments outlined in section one of "Hanging Coffin" necessarily opposes the orderly temporal progression of Hegelian and Marxist historiography; if all moments are the same, then we cannot be moving towards end-stage communism or the perfection of human society. Likewise, "each return home returns to the same home" opposes the "homeness" of the nation (国家), and makes it difficult to place one nation into conflict with another. Finally, the sameness of all revelations that ends section three cannot exist comfortably in the same ideological system as the Communist Party's belief that the words of Marx and Mao are truer and better than any other revelation. The gargantuan ambition of "Hanging Coffin" puts it into

conflict with the dominant order in a way that is not necessary for small poems, local poems, and subtle poems.

We have been speaking of the genre of prose poetry as a metaphor that helps us to explain individual poems, and have engineered a specific version of that metaphor intended to elucidate contemporary Chinese prose poetry. Seeing genre as a metaphor, a figure that represents a group of poems by representing some of their shared qualities, is different from seeing genre as a category. Categories have fixed, or partially fixed boundaries; we judge them in binaries, according to whether items "fit" or "count" as members of the category, but we judge metaphors in limited and qualitative ways, estimating how "apt" metaphors are in representing particular qualities of the objects to which they are assigned. We have been describing prose poetry through the metaphor of the process of recitation and refusal, and this process certainly takes place in "Hanging Coffin," which repeats language from the *Songs of the South* and the *I Ching* and self-consciously attempts to put that language to new uses.³⁶⁰ But describing the poem as a prose poem, especially as a contemporary Chinese prose poem, is not particularly apt. Especially after the grand unities of the "Pocket Garden" are revealed in part three, it seems that the particular application of ancient mystic, philosophical and poetic language is not a constitutive or fundamental part of the poem; because the revelation of the last line is so broad, and because it is explicitly meant to describe all human experience, all language whether recited or created must exist inside that revelation. Ouyang's own attitude towards the idiom of the poem — that archaic language was something that had to be shat out of a poet who contained it, rather than raw material which the poet worked into a new shape — reinforces the sense that although recitation of older writings may exist inside "Hanging Coffin," they are not the heart of the poem.

I submit that although "Hanging Coffin" can be meaningfully interpreted as a prose poem, has been called such by its author,³⁶¹ and engages in some of the processes of prose poetry, it is more aptly described as a part of another generic tradition, the long poem or *changshi* (长诗). Like prose poetry during the May Fourth movement, the identity and nature of the *changshi* is in flux today and was even more so in 1984 when Ouyang was writing "Hanging Coffin." At least part of the inchoate nature of the genre arises from its name: because the characters of the genre's name make up a simple, useful description for poetry, it is sometimes unclear as to whether calling a poem *changshi* is intended to identify it as part of an aesthetic, formal, and historical group of poems, or whether it is intended to simply point out the length of an individual poem.³⁶² Unlike the term *sanwenshi* or prose poetry, which entered Chinese in 1918, many different types of poems have been called *changshi* over the course of hundreds of years.³⁶³ This leads to challenges in using the *changshi* genre to understand individual works. Are multi-page poems better read in dialogue with each other, rather than as independent and individual literary experiments? Were individual pieces composed with the self-conscious intent to be placed in dialogue with other *changshi*? Are possible generic qualities inherent in works of a particular length, or do these norms have to be learned from reading?

Fortunately, there is a tradition of Chinese scholarship on the long poem, and a tradition of setting certain long poems with certain qualities apart as a group: additionally, because of the long history of the appellation, Chinese poets themselves are familiar with certain ideas about the *changshi*, and that familiarity is visible in both their poetry and in their prose. In 1993, Tang Xiaodu and Xie Mian edited an anthology of *changshi* and *zushi* (组诗, poems in series), and in its introduction, Tang begins by describing the *changshi*:

From a standard formalist perspective, there is perhaps no other form that better symbolizes its age; when compared to short verse, the basis of its existence and its

meaning lie in its greater ability to *completely* display the way poetry forms an independent world unto itself, its greater ability to *fully* exhibit the varying capabilities of poetic language, and its greater ability to *comprehensively* embody the value and difficulty of the labor of the creative spirit that is undertaken through poetic composition.

从典型的文体角度说，或许没有比长诗更适合作为一个时代是个标志的了；因为它存在的依据及其意义就在于，较之短诗，它更能完整地揭示诗自成一个世界的独立本性，更能充分地发挥诗歌语言的种种可能，更能综合地体现诗歌写作作为一种创造性精神劳动所具有的难度和价值。³⁶⁴

The emphasis above, reprinted from the original, underlines the totalizing and enclosing spirit of the long poem. Additionally, the description underlines the world-creating power of the long poem: the form's ability to create broad expanses of space, in addition to its totalizing qualities, reveal that the long poem is in a conceptual relationship both with Stewart's concept of the gargantuan as well with "Hanging Coffin."³⁶⁵ In a prose essay in the same series as the Tang introduction above, Ouyang Jianghe agrees. He calls "Hanging Coffin" a *changshi* alongside works by Yang Lian, Haizi, and Zhou Lunyou.³⁶⁶ About the form, he says that "The great harvest of long poetry is a spiritual and linguistic home of spirit and speech: enormity, calm, self-sufficiency. Simple little poems and extemporaneous colloquialisms are by contrast casual and free." (长诗的盛大的收获，是精神和语言的家园：庞大，沉稳，自足。浅白小诗，即兴口语则是随随便便的自由自在的。)³⁶⁷ Again, we have *changshi* seen as an instance of a detached totality, an enclosure, and contrasted against the free subjectivity of miniature "little poems" (小诗).

Just as Stewart argues that "the gigantic represents infinity, exteriority, the public, and the overly natural," Tang Xiaodu conceptualizes the long poem as something that can "see the cosmos, nature, humanity and the individual poet as existing inside the same structure" 把宇宙，自然，人类和个别的诗人看作同构的存在。³⁶⁸ To him, this is visible in the liberal use that long poets make of Daoist five elements theory and the *I Ching*, especially in the work of Yang Lian.

Tang identifies these books as providing universal structures and a philosophy of unity in diversity, the demonstration of which is one of the underlying drives in the creation of poetry. It seems true, as well, that these are the giants of Chinese writing, texts of mysterious provenance that are prior to the historical record, that somehow predict and encompass that record. For a literary tradition deeply interested in origins and history, the further a work goes back into the past, the more it can be considered a source, a literary Pangu from which later works are drawn.³⁶⁹ In fact, Tang identifies the origin of the long poem itself in China's earliest literature, starting with Qu Yuan's *Li Sao* 《离骚》 and *Tian Wen* 《天问》. Guo Moruo's argument that prose poetry was an innovation of classical literature is not reflected in contemporary prose poetry, which only occasionally speaks of pre-modern works;³⁷⁰ by contrast, "Hanging Coffin" and Yang Lian's "Norlang" explicitly comment on precisely the classical poems that Tang identifies as the source of the tradition.

Scholar Xie Mian offers an alternative narrative of the long poem, accepting its ancient pedigree but also emphasizing its more recent influences. Discussing a long poem by Tan Zhongchi 谭仲池, he writes that "the poetic form of Chinese long, political, lyrical poetry" 中国长篇政治抒情诗这一诗体 hit its height during the 1950s but became unfashionable after the political shifts of the 1970s.³⁷¹ He doesn't name the poems he describes, but one might surmise that they could include work like Hu Feng's 胡风 poem "Time Has Begun" 《时间开始了》, an encomium to the CCP that was criticized in the run-up to the campaign that saw Hu and his students arrested.³⁷² At the heart of Xie and Tang's differing emphases, however, there is a single observation: from the *Li Sao* onward, the long poem has been associated at different levels with the polity and its government. As seems clear in regards to "Hanging Coffin," it is difficult for the system of governance as structured by the Party to coexist with the totalizing systems of the

poem. Hu Feng's piece shows that even politically obedient long poems can overlap and compete with state systems — though it helped cause Hu's arrest, "Time Has Begun" was written not with the avant-garde and freethinking intentions ascribable to Ouyang Jianghe, but as a praise-song to Mao Zedong. All the qualities that Stewart ascribes to the gigantic can be used in support of a strong central government, especially considering the utopian and totalizing systems that often accompany Marxist historiography. Class consciousness and the drive towards end-stage Communism can certainly be interpreted as representing "infinity, exteriority, the public, and the overly natural."³⁷³

This double origin — ancient, shamanistic poetry and modern Communist encomium — helps explain the particular forms that contemporary long poems often take, and goes a long way towards elucidating why they are sometimes written in prose. The *Li Sao*, the *Classic of Poetry*, the *Han fu* and other literary works about politics in premodern China engaged with a state that expressed itself in verse and song; when songs were created to praise the emperor, it seems only reasonable that they would also be created to blame the emperor, and verse was a form in which this discourse often took place. As we have discussed in chapter two, during the twentieth century the rituals of public life have overwhelmingly been carried out in prose, and prose poetry is a way to participate in or transform those ritual acts of language. Haizi, whose work "Earth" (土地) appears in Tang and Xie's anthology, describes his relationship to the long poem in the companion volume of essays: "The single reason I write long poems is because I have no choice, they come out of an enormous, elemental call to me, and also because I have too much to say. These elements, along with grand materials, can burst the outer shell of my poetry." 我写长诗总是迫不得已，出于某种巨大的元素对我的召唤，也是因为我有太多的话要说。这些元素和伟大材料的东西总会涨破我的诗歌外壳。³⁷⁴ Haizi's long poem "Earth" is in verse, as are the

vast majority of his poems whether long or short, but his observation shows the need long poems have to import — and transform — materials from other parts of the public sphere. Because those who see giants only ever see them partially, giants in art are modeled on familiar human or animal forms: this gives us the ability to conceptualize their size. In the same way, the long poem borrows from the world of public language in order to give readers the feeling of the broad sweep of modern life and modern community. Practically, this means that Qu Yuan's "Li Sao" is a kind of encyclopedia of flowers and plants, and "Hanging Coffin" spans the breadth of the canon of classical Chinese thought and literature. In both cases the poems use the pre-existence of some category or concept in order to encompass a totality, to figure completion and hugeness — in this way, even without the word count of a novel, they can produce the sensation of hugeness and grandeur to which Haizi refers. For some poets, that pre-existing language, those ready materials, were originally in prose.

There is a second way to think of the overlap between the metaphoric description of a piece as a "long poem" and describing it as a prose poem. We have been discussing the tradition of Chinese prose poetry that has its precursors in the experiments of the May Fourth Movement, then gained a more fixed shape and character during the Hundred Flowers Period, and rose to prominence in the 1980s. With regards, however, to foreign influence, the tradition of prose poetry experienced a kind of suspended animation: although foreign work was widely available to poets between 1910-1930, as Communist, Nationalist and warlord governments established literary controls, access to foreign work decreased. The translated prose poetry of greatest influence in the 1930s — Tagore, Turgenev, Gibran and to a lesser extent Baudelaire — remained influential all the way through the late 1970s, even as a transformation in the use of the form took place abroad.³⁷⁵ Once the 1980s arrived, and foreign literature was again allowed into

China, new types of prose poetry appeared: the inheritors of the form of Baudelaire in China had shaped it in a very different way than the poets of other nations. Saint-John Perse and John Ashbery had written poems that were book-length, experimental epics; meanwhile, James Tate, Charles Simic, as well as Taiwanese poets Ya Xian 痲弦 and Shang Qin 商禽 had written poems that were short, and often darkly comic. Neither type of imported poetry fit well with the romantic, socialist-influenced verse of poets like Ke Lan, or even Liu Zaifu, and in the 1980s it was they who had claim to the title of "prose poets." This has led to a search for other ways to describe prose poems that were *not* written in relationship to the Chinese tradition that took shape in the 1950s. For those inspired in part by books like *Anabasis* and Ashbery's *Three Poems*, the long poem provides a convenient and flexible way to name their works. Long poems are typified by their size, their totalizing impulse, their public quality, and often include an appeal to a natural order. Because this particular generic metaphor does not insist on the difference between prose and lineated verse, it includes verse (like Bei Dao's "Daydream" and T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land"), prose (like "Hanging Coffin" and Xi Chuan 西川's poem "Salute"), and verse-prose hybrids or pieces that are otherwise difficult to classify (like Yang Lian's "Norlang" and Yu Jian's "File 0," or Ginsburg's "Howl").³⁷⁶

Reading poems by means of the genre of long poetry or *changshi* solves a certain set of critical and interpretive conundrums encountered by readers of contemporary poetry, especially avant-garde work. In the sixth chapter of his pathbreaking book *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem, and Money*, Maghiel van Crevel reads Xi Chuan's "Salute" and Yu Jian's "File 0" by asking the question "whether calling the one poetry means calling the other prose."³⁷⁷ The title of the chapter is the answer to the question: "Fringe Poetry — But Not Prose." Van Crevel's

argument that these two works are poems is compelling, and matches precisely the way in which both authors talk about their works: his description of them as prose poems is less useful, and considerably less useful than the overt identification that Yu Jian 于坚 and Xi Chuan make of their pieces as long poems.³⁷⁸ "File 0" is a lineated poem of more than 6,000 characters that uses a flat, bureaucratic idiom to describe what seems like the entirety of an unnamed individual's experience from birth to the present, the contents of a faux-mythic dossier kept under lock and key in a storeroom off the halls of power. The level of detail about the file's subject is clearly totalizing and enclosing in a way we might recognize from "Hanging Coffin": the individual is contained within the lists, summaries, and property manifests that make up the file, which in turn makes up the poem. The completeness of the file makes for a poem that is physically gargantuan, and one that defines a public life: "on these grounds people view him as a comrade issue him Ids a salary acknowledge his sex..."³⁷⁹

Van Crevel's work to place "File 0" on a prose/poetry spectrum — he concludes by saying that Yu Jian and Xi Chuan's works are "fringe texts within the overall scope of poetry" and that they "should be considered prose poems"³⁸⁰ — strongly indicates the existence of the genre of long poetry. It does so, however, due to his careful accounting of the challenges and limitations of his exploration of these works' identity as prose poetry. He writes that "...it is difficult to close-read a text of over 3200 words with the intensity, constancy and purposefulness of the immediate encounter with the full text that is enabled by short poems..."³⁸¹ and that "from this reader's point of view, the very size of the two texts makes them not prose, but poetry with a problem."³⁸² Van Crevel knows that their length makes these poems special from a reader's point of view, and that they require a different kind of reading than short poems do. However, because much of his writing on Yu Jian and Xi Chuan centers on the limits of contemporary Chinese poetry broadly

defined, he asks whether or not these pieces are poetry, rather than asking *what kind* of poetry they are. As he says, "What lies at the root of the sheer size of many poems from China is not the focus of this chapter."³⁸³ The "problem" he experiences in reading, however, is not with these two texts, which can be read, interpreted and enjoyed regardless of their genre: the problem is that the metaphor that is prose poetry is not apt in describing these works by Yu Jian and Xi Chuan. What lies at the root of the sheer size of many poems from China today is the nascent genre of *changshi* or long poetry.

On the printed page, "File 0" breaks the rules of prose in many ways. It uses negative space between phrases and words in a way that violates printers' conventions, it has line breaks, it lacks punctuation, and it fluidly engages in and ignores the construction of grammatical sentences. Its language is far more prosaic — used in the adjectival sense, not the generic — than many poems, but its design on the page is firmly in the hands of the poet, rather than the editor.³⁸⁴ "Salute," meanwhile, almost universally obeys the rules of prose. Except for numbered sections — rare but not unheard-of in non-poetic prose — there is little large-scale formal difference between Xi Chuan's piece and a piece of highly experimental, nonlinear prose.³⁸⁵ In the absence of a concept of the long poem, there is no clear formal reason to put these two poems together: however, now that we have looked carefully at the connections between "Hanging Coffin" and "Norlang," which mixes lineated verse with prose sections, we can see that "Salute" and "File 0" have a similar relationship. Although they look different on the printed page, sound terrifically different,³⁸⁶ and are written by poets with very different intellectual and aesthetic habits, they both have a totalizing broadness to them, an all-encompassing ambition. If Xi Chuan's titular "Salute" has an object — if there is something being saluted in the poem — it must be all things, or as many things as can be fit into the space allotted. Xi writes: "Too many desires, too little

seawater."³⁸⁷

As a generic category, the long poem allows us to understand some of the relationships between "File 0," "Salute," "Norlang," and "Hanging Coffin." Tentative identification as a long poem allows us to see the maxims, miniature narratives, and observations in Xi Chuan's "Salute" not as postmodern experiments in collage or montage, but as contemporary ideas and experiences given the bigness and sweep of ancient wisdom. When Xi writes, "Memory: my textbook," we can see the sentence either as hanging indeterminately in the space between poetry and prose (as Van Crevel might recommend), or we can see it as a recitation of ancient literature's habit of making its argument by definition, as in the preface to the *Classic of Poetry* (as I would recommend reading prose poetry).³⁸⁸ We are perhaps better off, though, reading this line as part of a long poem. That reading would involve seeing that recitation as instrumental, a means by which to make "Salute" grand and encompassing. There is no more complete way to encompass a thing than to define it, and whether or not the recitation intentionally draws from particular classical or ancient texts, it adapts their strategies — sentences made of broad statements in which the objects are drawn from the world of allegory. Xi Chuan, speaking of his turn toward the long poem in 1992, puts it this way: "at the time I had a deep need for a kind of thing that could simultaneously adapt to history, and could powerfully prove that I would not be swallowed up by the waves of my life in history." 我当时从内心深处需要一种东西，它应该既能与历史相适应，又能强大到保证我不会被历史生活的波涛所吞噬。³⁸⁹ The result of that search for form ends, in "Salute," by producing timeless, broad statements: "Trees listen to trees, birds listen to birds; when poisonous snakes raise their bodies upright to attack people passing, they become people themselves."³⁹⁰ The elemental and mythic nature of sentences like these, their broad representative sweep, is similar to that which we see in Ouyang Jianghe and

"Norlang," but it is different from the short works of Ke Lan, Guo Feng, Zou Yuehan, Liu Zaifu — as we will see in a moment, it is even different from shorter prose works by Xi Chuan. Additionally, because it does not refer to particular narrative, prosodic or other structural qualities, the category of the long poem accepts and even encourages mixed works: just as "Norlang" switches from verse to prose and back again, so does "Salute" move between mythic pronouncement and more first-person, expressive language.

By this standard, it is "File 0" that is particularly special. The way that it grapples with totality eschews the search for a unitary origin that provides many other long poems their sense of completeness, fullness and comprehensiveness. It also largely forgoes the broadness and inclusiveness of philosophical abstraction, whether it be that of classical China or modern surrealism. Its totalizing structure is instead a vision of an encompassing bureaucratic and national power that is powerfully paranoid and almost painfully intimate: instead of using Ouyang Jianghe's technique of beginning or ending sections with an expansive philosophical gesture, "File 0" makes each section a page in a seemingly endless bureaucratic file, trailing off into details that embody the hysterical panopticon of modern Chinese politics and modern epistemology. The file contains so much about the protagonist of the poem that its data exceeds what any lover or family member could possibly know, from his early masturbatory experiences to the number of coins on the floor of his room. The poem comments on, or at least reacts to, the propensity of the state to accumulate data, but the outsized scope of the piece also raises the more general question as to whether identity can be expressed in language — and whether it can be expressed in anything *other* than language. The opening section called "The File Room" indicates that the words of the file are inert, nouns rather than verbs; in Chapter One, it is said that "his origins have nothing to do with writing" but then after describing the scene of the

protagonist's birth, the section ends with this line: "these living things that come from countless verbs are named in a notional word 0."³⁹¹ That the 0 is 'notional' opens the possibility that it may be one or more of many kinds of speech, noun, pronoun, or verb. Writing here is simultaneously a kind of trap — a file inside which a life is locked and its motion canceled — as well as an origin, a set of verbs from which living things are born. For all its contemporaneity, and its bold interaction with daily life, this question that is at the heart of "File 0" is surprisingly similar to that at the heart of "Hanging Coffin." Does language contain experience? Or does it murder experience? Are we inside a coffin, or are we containers for a pocket garden? Do we possess the written record, or does the written record contain us? These are questions of the gargantuan: they are questions of the long poem.

There are three reasons that this discussion of the long poem is salient in a work on Chinese prose poetry. First, the two share considerable DNA with regards to their form and tradition. Many of the above poems engage in what I consider prose poetic recitation: "File 0" parrots and adapts the language of the bureaucrat, "Salute" speaks in the definitional abstractions of the philosopher, and "Hanging Coffin" repeats early shamanistic formulations with the real intent, even if eventually unfulfilled, to apply them to the conceptual and practical contradictions of modern life. In the course of their pursuit of the enormous and the public, all three poems self-consciously adapt language from other sources, even though that adaptation is not necessarily a central or constitutive process of the genre of long poetry. As often accompanies acts of recitation and refusal, long poems often (but not exclusively) take the form of prose, and use other techniques common to prose poetry such as the use of numbered sections. The second reason to read long poetry in a book about prose poetry is that it is a prime example of the way in

which genres dominated by processes can evolve or transform into other genres. We've seen the way in which prose poetry has produced a standard, internally inert type of writing in the back pages of orthodox magazines; we have also seen Liu Zaifu's poetic practice change according to his context. Long poetry — from "Hanging Coffin" to "Salute" to "File 0" — has profited significantly from cross-pollination with prose poetry, and experiences of generic transformation like this are likely to persist into the future. The third reason that the long poem is a salient topic of conversation in this work is that its existence helps us remember that generic identification is, among many other things, a choice. Artists could easily — and very occasionally do — identify the works above as prose poems. However, they overwhelmingly choose not to. For Yu Jian, Xi Chuan, and Ouyang Jianghe, there is either something desirable about the category of long poetry, or something undesirable about self-identification as a writer of prose poetry. Both of these things are likely at work, but the aesthetic and literary-political disincentive many contemporary avant-garde writers have towards engaging in the form is deeply instructive, both with regards to what prose poetry is and means in China today, and with regards to the shape and organization of Chinese literary practice as a whole. Of the avant-garde writers writing today, the one whose work is closest in form and process to prose poetry is Xi Chuan, which makes his disavowals of the form the best case study for the way in which prose poetry is encountered by the Chinese avant-garde. It is to his work that we will now turn.

Xi Chuan: Prose Poetry Confronts Itself

We have seen Xi Chuan's poem "After Wang Ximeng's Blue and Green Horizontal Landscape Scroll" in chapter one, and just spoke of his long poem "Salute." Unlike many

contemporary Chinese avant-garde poets, Xi Chuan writes short prose that he calls poems.

Although the following piece is not perfectly representative — it is part of a series called "Sense of Reality" (实现感) that is tipped much further towards prose simplicity than the rest of his work — this poem will help us test whether or not the short poems in prose of an avant-garde writer like Xi Chuan can be seen to overlap significantly with orthodox prose poetry.

18 lines redacted

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It is easily possible to read this piece as a Chinese prose poem as we have in chapters one through four. "Sense of Reality" is less than four hundred characters long in the original, is made of punctuated, regular sentences, and has no poetic lineation; it is also part of a sixteen-part numbered series, and we know that numbered series are common to many prose poets.³⁹³ What's more, it repeats and then twists an extremely familiar conversation from Chinese prose.

Identification and evaluation of the delinquent or hoodlum (*liumang* 流氓) in Chinese society has been the occasion for innumerable prose expositions, arguments, ethical appeals, and calls to arms. As Geremie Barmé points out, as far back as 1920 Zhou Zuoren claimed to be torn between two natures: that of a gentleman and that of a hoodlum.³⁹⁴ For years since, the treatment

of the term has been a self-consciously understood measure for the attitude of young Chinese towards their national and social order, and of the health of that order. Xi Chuan performs that conversation — excoriating the yellow-haired teenagers as "boys of idle, roaming hands...reprobates" but he also transforms the boys into emblems of progress, bodies with light reflecting from their hair, as well as targets of empathy: as Xi pointed out in a public conversation in Seattle, it is not easy to be a hooligan in a small Chinese town.³⁹⁵ This can be interpreted as recitation and refusal — a piece of short prose that might perhaps be expected to reflect yet again on what hooligans mean in Chinese society, and which in fact does so, but also works to summon them to the attention as children, as objects of empathy, aesthetic subjects (who make art of their dress and behavior) and as aesthetic objects, to be looked at and enjoyed by the speaker of the poem.

At the same time, there are important ways in which it is *not* meaningful to read this poem as prose poetry. Zhou Zuoren's "Essay on Two Ghosts," in which he discusses his drive towards being a hooligan, is about 3,200 characters, or two pages: while considerably longer than "Manes of Yellow," both pieces are shorter than most long poems and most other kinds of prose.³⁹⁶ When placed next to each other, they have other strong generic similarities. Zhou's piece is an analysis of the two animating daemons of his prose work, the fight to improve national character and the pastimes of the man of leisure. He compares and contrasts them, and points out that while the linguistic contribution of classical letters is a welter of philosophies, its practical inheritance is opium, bound feet, and the eight-legged essay. Zhou creates the inventive argument that rather than a failure of character, hooligan writings about tea and liquor might be part of being a gentleman. In many ways, what Xi Chuan's piece is doing is quite similar: rather than reciting specific forms and language from the past, the poem might simply be accepting,

contextualizing, and transforming expectations. Neither piece has the scrim of fictionalization or personae about it — there is no ersatz worker's voice, as we find in Ke Lan,³⁹⁷ no split call-and-response, as in the work of Zou Yuehan, and no echo of the language of the socialist romantic that Liu Zaifu identifies in his 1980s work. Finally, the series in which "Manes" appears includes one other prose piece, but is mostly made up of lineated poems which do not resemble prose — something that the prose poets we've studied so far would rarely do.

These similarities with short essays, and differences with prose poems, are the kind that might lead us to question whether or not Xi Chuan's poems are generically similar with those of Ke Lan, Guo Feng, Zou Yuehan and Liu Zaifu. The question of prose poetic identity is further complicated after reading Xi Chuan's own commentary on the form and style of his poetry. As a literary-critical essayist and a frequent interviewee, Xi Chuan has produced a great deal of critical writing about his own poetry and the poetry of others — what Van Crevel calls "explicit poetics" — and some of his statements about his works seem similar to ideas expressed by contemporary Chinese prose poets. He writes that since he turned away from writing highly lyric free verse in 1992, "the formal demands I make on myself are more internal," (现在对自己形式上的要求更内一些), using the process-oriented *neizai* language that prose poetry critics Huang Yongjian and Wang Fuming use to describe prose poetry in Chapter One.³⁹⁸ Xi also seems to take an certain level of interest in the possibilities of poetic recitation. He writes, "the poetry of the 1990s wanted to express its own voice, but in reality what it was expressing was the voices of others. This is a contradiction; perhaps it is under the grinding pressure of this kind of contradiction that good poetry can be created." 九十年代诗歌想要表达自己的声音，但实际上表达的仍然是别人的声音。这是一种矛盾；也许好的诗歌便在这种矛盾的挤压下产生出来。

³⁹⁹ Xi Chuan often speaks of the need to oppose, end or avoid the May Fourth movement's "new

poetry" 新诗, and is unequivocal in his praise of Lu Xun's *Wild Grass*.⁴⁰⁰ Although they do not refer to the tradition of prose poetry that we have discussed so far, these views fall broadly in line with attitudes towards form and aesthetics that are shared by many Chinese prose poets.

However, in regards to the tradition of official and semi-official prose poetry that started during the Hundred Flowers period, and reached a crest during the "prose poetry fever" of the late 1980s, Xi Chuan is either silent or in opposition. Little to no mention of Baudelaire, Ke Lan, Liu Zaifu, or other prose poets who have been canonized as such in China appears in Xi Chuan's essays or interviews on poetry.⁴⁰¹ What does appear, by contrast, is this description of Xi's relationship to prose poetry:

I have never paid a bit of attention to the play with "form" undertaken by people like Wen Yiduo, He Qifang, and Bian Zhilin. I take my nourishment from prose, but I compose the part of my writing that is so-called poetry in a much different way than the normal understanding of prose, and it also has an enormous difference with the prose poetry of pretty literature.

我对于闻一多、何其芳、卞之琳等人所玩的“形式”从来没上过心。我从散文借来了滋养，但我写下的所谓“诗歌”的部分与一般意义上的散文迥然有别，与美文学的散文诗也有巨大的不同。⁴⁰²

To Xi Chuan, "pretty literature" is anathema to real art: Van Crevel cites and translates the following broadside by Xi that defines pretty literature as "opposed to creativity, imagination, irony, metaphor, the spirit of experiment and doubt, it is opposed to the difficulty of writing..."⁴⁰³ This is extremely strong language — Xi's essay categorizes prose poetry as taking part in a literary tradition that embodies a host of negative values. Accordingly, Xi Chuan often takes great pains to avoid description of his own work as prose poetry: he writes that the formal transition he made in 1992 ended in a "prosified sentence style" 散文文化的句式.⁴⁰⁴ In English, which he speaks fluently, Xi Chuan has no compunctions about calling his work prose poetry; it is the practice of the contemporary Chinese prose poetic tradition that he specifically opposes, an

opposition made perhaps all the sharper by his own work's arguable affinity with some Chinese prose poetic practices.⁴⁰⁵

One engine of this attitude is aesthetic preference. Xi Chuan, like every reader and writer in the world, likes certain kinds of works and dislikes others. Van Crevel's work is excellent in its description of Xi Chuan's aesthetics: by contrast, what we are interested in here is the way in which Xi Chuan's position outside the orthodox Chinese prose poetic tradition reflects on that tradition, as well as the way in which it helps us look towards the future of Chinese prose poetry. One of the crucial divisions that seems to be at play in Xi Chuan's self-categorization as a writer of prosified sentences in poetry rather than a prose poet is his identity as a member of the avant-garde. Unlike the poets of *Prose Poetry* magazine and those featured in, for example, Wang Fuming's two-volume anthology, Xi Chuan traces his intellectual and aesthetic heritage from the Obscure poets of the late 1970s and early 1980s: it is in rereading, and ultimately transforming an inheritance from them that allowed Xi to elucidate his early poetics.⁴⁰⁶ Poets of this lineage, even though they publish in official journals, win national prizes and work for state-sponsored universities, often conceptualize themselves outside orthodox literature, and Xi Chuan is no exception.⁴⁰⁷ In one interview, he narrated his loss of faith in artistic models and forebears in this way:

You discover there are no models, you can't depend on anyone at all, and so when you raise your head to look around you're all that's left, walking through no-man's land, the safe feeling of literature is completely lost. Then I asked myself: is it still worth it to make literature? If it's worth it, then what does literature mean to you? And all of a sudden I thought that I would make something new, and if it wasn't new, then I wouldn't write it.

你发现没榜样了，靠不上任何人，举头一看，就剩自己，走到了“无人之境”，丧失了文学上的安全感。我马上问自己：文学还值得做下去么？如果还值得，文学对你意味着什么？我忽然意识到要创新，不创新，就别写了。⁴⁰⁸

This is deeply different than the way in which many Chinese prose poets discuss their genre.

They may speak of attempting to establish an independent genre, or talk about refreshing or advancing the form, but they rarely claim that their work is the creation of something brand new, even on occasions where such an argument would be easy to make, as it would have been in the Hundred Flowers period.

There are a large number of other poets who conceptualize at least parts of their careers in terms of the Obscure poets, whether or not that means supporting Obscure poetry: of the writers we have discussed, Ouyang Jianghe might be one, as well as Yang Lian, and Yu Jian. While accepting that many of them either reject the idea of large poetic grouping, or would reject being grouped with other particular members of this organization, these poets can and have been thought of broadly as the "avant-garde" in China, and seem to be what Van Crevel means when he says that "All avant-garde poetry since the groundbreaking unofficial journal *Today* continues to stand more or less in opposition to orthodoxy...but to say so has become flogging a dead horse since the avant-garde began to outshine the establishment in the mid-1980s."⁴⁰⁹ To the extent that these broad categories are true, and to the extent that readers share Van Crevel's attitude, most prose poets are in the establishment, and Xi Chuan is a leading figure in the avant-garde. This creates a problem in terms of genre. Prose poetry is, at least domestically, an establishment genre, born from a negotiation with the state about what literature should be allowed, dominated by Communist-style study groups, published in state-funded magazines, and used in textbooks for schoolchildren. If we visualize literature momentarily as a field of cultural production, orthodoxy dominates the region that is prose poetry, and non-orthodox or anti-orthodox poets who want to also be prose poets must, as Bourdieu puts it, "engage in competition for control of the interests or resources which are specific to the field in question."⁴¹⁰ The resource of the most value is the definition and connotation of the term "prose poetry," and identification of the prose

poetic tradition with particular political, social and aesthetic values.

Xi Chuan's desire to write free, prose-like sentences, and to use prose as a way out of or around the tradition of "new poetry" therefore puts him in the territory of the large, well-organized group of establishment and semi-establishment authors who have already put decades into writing, defining and publicizing Chinese prose poetry. His solution is to cede the term, to define an idiosyncratic, prose-based poetic form that has as many qualities of the prose poem as he wants it to, but which is not called prose poetry. His criticism of prose poetry, and the pointed way in which he ignores its specific authors, serves to draw a sharper distinction between his work and the prose poetic establishment. This silence on Xi Chuan's part is not mirrored by the disinterest of more orthodox prose poetry critics; *Prose Poetry* magazine has published an article on Xi Chuan by the highly orthodox poet Geng Linmang 耿林莽, and Huang Yongjian has mentioned him both in his literary history as well as in an article in *Prose Poetry* magazine.⁴¹¹ The equation, from an attitude of Machiavellian (or Bourdieuan) literary politics, is like so: Xi Chuan's erudition and rarefied Beijing intellectualism give him a kind of literary cachet that is missing from the provincial, socialist, mass-oriented world of orthodox prose poets. To protect that cachet, he tries to sever, argue against or obscure any ties with the prose poetry establishment: meanwhile, in order to share that cachet, the world of prose poetry is eager to number him among their ranks.

When described in the admittedly reductive manner above, this position-taking is a familiar, natural part of poetic practice. Many individuals want to be associated with what is respectable, fashionable, beautiful, valuable, new or interesting, and comparatively few contemporary Chinese care to be associated with recent socialist history. Complications arise mainly from the fact that these poets are also literary critics, literary historians, and public

intellectuals who have the capability to spread their narrative as authoritative. Every single one of the Chinese critics listed in this chapter, including Huang Yongjian, Tang Xiaodu, and Xie Mian, is a poet, and each of these poets also publishes prose essays. Each publishes in their particular market, directing their work at their particular audience. Criticism serves poetry, and vice versa. This can lead to difficulties in perceiving and conceptualizing genres, communities or literary scenes with breadth. Here is Maghiel van Crevel's history of the Chinese prose poem, which claims that between the 1940s and the mid-1980s, only Taiwanese authors wrote prose poetry:

In Chinese literature from the Republican era, two names associated with prose poetry are those of Liu Bannong...and Lu Xun.... In the second half of the twentieth century, the genre has been robustly alive since the early 1960s, with Shang Qin, Su Shaolian and Liu Kexiang as some of its most important authors. By contrast, prose poetry doesn't manifest itself in literature from the People's Republic until the mid-1980s. Orthodox traditions in PRC literature contain many examples of poems that could be called prosaic...but the features that lead one to do so—length: tens and indeed hundreds of pages of more or less linear narrative, lack of original metaphor and ambiguity — are not those that characterize prose poetry in the broad Baudelarian tradition.⁴¹²

The major factual difference between the above narrative and Chapter Two is driven by Van Crevel's almost exclusive interest in avant-garde work: the poems of Ke Lan, Guo Feng or Xu Chengmiao during the Hundred Flowers movement, or the political verse of the *Tiananmen Poems*, would likely not strike him as sufficiently "original" or "ambiguous." This is, however, an external distinction, and not necessarily organic to Chinese poetry as it is experienced by readers. As we saw in Chapter Three, the influence of Guo Feng is easily visible in Liu Zaifu's first collection of prose poetry, published in 1979, and the republication of Ke Lan's work in 1981 was the beginning of a swift expansion of prose poetic practice in China. To Van Crevel's mind, these examples might be official poetry and therefore less worthwhile as objects of inquiry, but they were short, pointed lyrics, and many eschewed narrative entirely.⁴¹³ What

created Van Crevel's account above — the reason that it lists only Taiwanese examples of short, lyric prose poetry between the years of 1949 and 1985 — is that the sources he draws from are, like him, almost exclusively interested in avant-garde work. Today, the study of Chinese poetry lacks a certain amount of cross-pollination: literary study tends to proceed scene by scene, cell by cell, with individual scholars (both Chinese and Western) affiliated with a particular group, and therefore theorizing in a manner whose givens are drawn from that group.⁴¹⁴

It seems clear, however, that establishment prose poetry intimately affects avant-garde poetic practice. It does so in two ways: first, by its ubiquity. Ke Lan's prose poetry series "The Youth Travel Team" "少年旅行队" has long been, and still is, included in elementary school textbooks;⁴¹⁵ even the new generation of post-1990 prose poets, who have comparatively smaller stature, write poems that are used as lesson texts.⁴¹⁶ Although *Prose Poetry* magazine is not available at many newsstands in China, works originally published there are reprinted in China's biggest, most general-circulation magazines, including *Duzhe* (读者) and *Qingnian Wenzhai* (青年文摘).⁴¹⁷ The most widespread book of contemporary prose poetry in China at any given time today is probably the Zou Yuehan-edited *Chinese Year in Prose Poetry* series 《中国年度散文诗》, or its competitor the *Yearly Selection of Chinese Prose Poetry* 《中国散文诗年选》: in my experience, one or the other of these are available at most book stores with a poetry section. None of this is to argue that Xi Chuan specifically, or any other avant-garde poet, has read any particular poems or poets from the prose poetic establishment, or that they could name a single author, or that they appreciate or enjoy any orthodox prose poetry. It is instead to point out that most widely-read Chinese have encountered orthodox prose poetry at one time or another, even if it was a required text in school, even if the work is not considered to have the literary value of more avant-garde authors. This encounter is a quality of the literary field of contemporary China,

and authors are cognizant of that fact.

The second way in which the establishment affects the avant-garde is in its near-monopoly over normativity. Although Maghiel van Crevel focuses on the avant-garde, when he needs a starting point in an attempt to define prose poetry, he cites an encyclopedia entry by Wang Guangming, whose view of Chinese prose poetry is certainly dominated by official poets.⁴¹⁸ Even though Van Crevel disagrees with Wang's description of the genre, and meaningfully opens it to more diverse works, he never provides an encyclopedia-style definition of prose poetry himself: further destabilizations will also have to start from the same normative point, and the only group of thinkers interested in producing that starting place today are orthodox writers. This critical difference between Wang and Van Crevel reflects the beliefs and practices of the different artists who they study. Avant-garde writers do write poems in prose, but they are ideologically disinterested in pursuing categorization or organization of those works. As Xi Chuan says, "I am a poet, a writer of formal and informal prose, the author of a play in verse, and the translator of two books. I represent nobody." 我是西川，诗人、散文和随笔作家、一出诗剧的作者、两本书的翻译者。我不代表任何人。⁴¹⁹ Not representing anybody means, of course, not serving as the representative of any group, but it also means a desire to avoid the creation of group representation, whether that be in the form of a category, a generalization, or an aesthetic or ideological school (学派). Generalization is never wholly avoidable, of course, but in Xi Chuan's prose essays generalizations are highly likely to be made in the service of self-expression, rather than the creation of structures for a community — a sensible habit for an author highly invested in ideas of individuality, and who is committed to either making new art, or no art at all. What this means in context, however, is that the raw materials from which these experiments are made will nearly always be drawn from some establishment narrative, some

group of scholars or poets who are ideologically inclined towards the organization of communities through generalization. This is particularly visible in the way that orthodox prose poetry focuses on education — from the mail-in workshops offered by the *Prose Poetry Newspaper* to Ke Lan's selection for textbooks to *Prose Poetry* magazine's creation of a campus edition aimed at high school students. These are engines of norm creation, and they are the provenance of official and semi-official prose poets.

The presence of these influences shows the way in which study of the avant-garde requires an understanding or intervention into the practice of orthodox literature: any avant-garde is always already in relationship to the establishment. As Bourdieu puts it, "a position-taking changes, even when the position remains identical, whenever there is change in the universe of options that are simultaneously offered for producers and consumers to choose from."⁴²⁰ As a community and as an ongoing discussion, Chinese literature is constantly changing, and changes in community context can have significant effects. Obscure poetry went from a production of semi-illegal underground groups during the late Mao period to tentative canonization by mainland literary establishments during the reforms of the 1980s, and then many of them disappeared (from a mainland perspective) into exile after 1989. The poems did not necessarily undergo enormous changes: it was the world around them, the audience they reached, and the galaxy of literary options that changed around the poems. This is why it is acceptable, to an avant-garde poet like Xi Chuan, to call a work a "prose poem" in English: in an English language literary context, the composition of a prose poem puts a poet in the tradition of Baudelaire and John Ashbery, authors who are less objectionable than the practitioners of Chinese "pretty literature." In Chinese, another term — sometimes "long poem" as with "Salute," sometimes a poem with a "prosified sentence style" — better expresses Xi's position, and creates more

desirable connotations. Without an understanding of the establishment, it is hard to know what it is that the avant-garde is trying to accomplish: as a correction, an innovation, or an act of faith in the forward march of progress, official literature and mainstream literary expectations are what the avant-garde transforms, subverts, evades, or improves upon.

With all this in mind — that is to say, with a cognizance of the importance of official literature as part of the literary field in which Xi Chuan stakes out his position, and with an understanding that the avant-garde is fundamentally marked by the literature it leaves behind — we can perhaps return to a reading of "Manes of Yellow" and ask what its situation as avant-garde poetry means in context. As a stand-in for the kind of poetry "Manes" might be considered to be improving upon or opposing, here is a poem on a similar occasion written by Ke Lan:

26 lines redacted

These poems are both first-person descriptions of young people from an adult perspective, and each reflects on the manner in which those young people represent progress. One can see, in comparison between the two poems, what it is that Xi Chuan is dismissing as "prettiness": Ke Lan's poem engages in lyric sighs, high-sounding language about dew and tears, and much of what we might now consider aesthetic cliché. Even though this poem was originally published in 1956, one wonders how much challenging work of the period used rainbows as a symbol for the beautiful. In "Dawn Mist," that prettiness distracts attention from the poem's comment on progress: that the correct outcome of the "tears of the martyrs" is the play of children in the early morning. One can either interpret the play of imagery as insinuating that the time of martyrs is now past, and China has progressed to the time of schoolchildren, or as insinuating that the children, who also become the morning dew, will be the martyrs of the next generation. This is what we identified in chapter two as a poetics of hinting: one feels, perhaps, a sense of joy at the prospective end to the strife of the first half of China's twentieth century, but when it comes down to concrete textual evidence, the presence of such an attitude is hard to prove. By contrast, Xi Chuan's poem is quite straightforward: "'Progress' and 'Civilization' appear even on the scalps of delinquents."⁴²² Even the poem's visual texture is more direct — although one could say that there is a similar gesture being made in the two poems with regards to the sun shining on the young people as they play, Xi Chuan simply points it out as "radiant sunlight" rather than engage in the kind of imaginative transformations that Ke Lan does.

Part of the difference between these two poems is not in the idiom, but the content of the poems: what kind of young person represents progress, and what progress those young people represent. Rather than a formal or aesthetic difference from orthodox work, what would likely seem most problematic to the editors of establishment literary magazines would be Xi Chuan's

ambivalent embrace of the delinquency of small-town hoodlums. Describing progress as an alienation from the present, driven by dissatisfaction and rebellion against the values of the present, is not the same as the socialist progress Ke describes, in which the revolution leads to a moment of pleasure that is inert and endless as gold. What might be more sensitive to readers, rather than to public figures, is the poem's mention of the foreign origins of this instance of Chinese aesthetic "progress," as well as the frankness about sex, which is common (and in many cases, far more extreme) in avant-garde poetry but extremely rare in the poetry of the establishment. Still, however, we do see politically and even sexually sensitive ideas in orthodox prose poetry — think of the complex relationship with Hong Kong described in Janet Yeung's "Once" (where the snow is "piercing twin petals of the injured Hong Kong orchid") or the romanticized sensuality of Qin Yu's "Wintersweet" ("After the first shudder and throb fades away, a deep, warm feeling pervades.")⁴²³ — but those sensitive topics are treated with a light touch and a heavy layer of imagery and insinuation. In many ways, even when we try to read their content, we come back to the fact that the major difference between Xi Chuan's work and Ke Lan's is that "Manes of Yellow" says and "Dawn Mist" hints.

The speaking/hinting difference between the two poems obscures their underlying procedural similarities. Both are acts of exposition that feel much like those which often begin narratives. Both claim to be "real" in one way or another — Ke Lan, by identifying the place where the poem was written, and Xi Chuan by placing the poem in a series titled "Sense of Reality."⁴²⁴ At the same time, however, each poem contains types of language that are not often part of prose exposition. Ke Lan's poem has its lyric ejaculations and dramatic ellipses that seem to indicate the need for a long, trailing pause, tipping the poem away from the written toward the verbal; Xi Chuan's poem accomplishes defamiliarization through orphaned details, like the

butchering of the white goose, as well as through what appears to be a truism in the poem's last lines. It seems obvious that delinquency would have its own delights and difficulties, such a thing would be unnecessary to point out in workmanlike prose: on rereading, though, the sentence has a second simultaneous valence. "Delinquents possess their own delinquent delights. Delinquents possess their own delinquent difficulties." (小流氓自有小流氓的福气呵。小流氓自有小流氓的难处。) That sense of self-possession matches well with the alienated teenager, who either rejects or pretends to reject community standards. The tiny nod towards oral language — the exhalation of breath 'ah' (呵) that follows the assertion of the pleasures of delinquency — tips the tone subtly towards praise, and pushes the whole poem gently towards lyric self-expression (抒情) on the part of the narrator. Each poem recites the language and assumes the attitude of prose description, and then uses those processes to perform self-expression: these are the methods of prose poetry.

Xi Chuan's work, however, is not contemporary Chinese prose poetry according to the definition established in this volume. Genre, as discussed in Chapter Two, is as much a tradition as it is a set of rules and practices, and Xi Chuan does not identify himself as part of the contemporary Chinese prose poetic tradition. In this, he is more or less representative of many avant-garde poets after 1990.⁴²⁵ This puts Chinese prose poetry today in an unstable position. Some of the most energetic and well-received poets who write in prose forms — certainly those who have the strongest international profile — are intentional non-participants in the tradition. Whether they call their work long poetry or call it by some other name, the future of prose poetry increasingly looks as if it will be dominated by poets who feel, and claim, no relationship to much of the 20th century prose poetic tradition.

There are a few likely outcomes that this instability may bring. One is that avant-garde writers seize on a genre description for their prose poetic practice that obscures its connection to the literature of the prose poetic establishment — a "short poem" to match what has been done with the "long poem." They will then be free to determine themselves what the literary historical heritage of this genre will be: as the creators and namers of the form, they will be able to assert the precursors of its tradition by fiat. A second possibility is that avant-garde work, by having more lasting appeal and reaching an ever-wider audience, might come to occupy the term "prose poetry" in the minds of readers, and the semi-official and official traditions will fade as a new generation of writers and critics reselects the prose poetic canon. An avant-garde canon would likely still include May Fourth writers — Xi Chuan is a strong advocate of Lu Xun's *Wild Grass*, and Van Crevel cites Liu Bannong as a creator of the genre — but also grow to include non-PRC authors like Segalen, Ashbery, and Shang Qin 商禽. The view contained in this book, namely that establishment prose poetry and avant-garde prose poetic practice are mutually constitutive and meaningfully interpenetrative, is comparatively unlikely to take root as an important part of Chinese poetics. Unlike other differences between literary groups such as the Obscure poets and post-Obscure poets, the division between Xi Chuan and establishment prose poets is marked by a kind of silence that is much more complete than the ardor of literary disagreement, and which prevents ideas from overtly and traceably passing from one group to the other. If the avant-garde does, however, end up in ideological and aesthetic control of the Chinese prose poetry of the future, the shape of that genre will at least partially be determined by the need to draw distinctions between avant-garde and establishment prose poetry.

AFTERWORD

GROUNDS FOR FUTURE STUDY

To categorize, even metaphorically, is to exclude; to narrativize is to select details; to create a lens is to create a visual lacuna outside its purview. Accordingly, each analytical tool of the preceding discussion indicates a blank region immediately outside my text, and many of these are grounds for much-needed future study.

The restriction of this book to *contemporary prose poetry* excludes, by design, several works that are on the border of definition both as prose poetry and as contemporary works. Like Liu Zaifu in chapter three, many prose poets were inspired by the early *meiwen* work of Bing Xin 冰心, and her example may have contributed to the propensity of Hundred Flowers prose poets to write literature for children. Another author active in the 1930s who wrote highly lyricized prose was He Qifang 何其芳, whose work resembles *Wild Grass* more than it does later prose poetry, but could be considered a liminal or transitional figure between the experimental work of the pre-contemporary period and the more generically stable prose poetry of the 1950s.

The fact that this book studies *Chinese prose poetry* excludes several crucial cross-cultural, international, and intra-regional currents that would help create a more comprehensive picture of prose poetic practice. The foreign prose poet most widely translated, read and imitated in China is not Baudelaire but Rabindrananth Tagore (usually in the translation of Bing Xin). Tagore's popularity stems in part from the level of transformation that his poems underwent from their original, into English, and eventually into Chinese — in some cases, beginning as lineated works, and ending as prose poems.

There also exists an untold story about the influence of Taiwanese poets on the mainland

artists of the 1980s. We know from chapter five that Ouyang Jianghe had access to Taiwanese translations of French works, but much research remains to be done about the interaction between Taiwan's burgeoning prose poetry scene and the work of mainland authors. Luckily, several high-quality translations of Taiwanese prose poets are available to English readers, as well as some critical discussions.⁴²⁶ This study omits discussion of Taiwanese prose poetry itself, as well as its part in the story of Chinese prose poetry generally, and both are rich grounds for study.

Finally, my insistence on the study of *poetry* has restricted the way in which prose poetic texts are now appearing in other forms that are not identified as poems. Chinese popular magazines like *Duzhe* 《读者》, *Qingnian Wenzhai* 《青年文摘》 and *Yilin* 《意林》 reprint works from *Prose Poetry* magazine as described in chapter three: one of the reasons they do this is because prose poetry resembles their standard article, designed perhaps to be read in a short period of time by a working person at rest or on public transit. This means that some of their publications which are not reprints from prose poetry magazines also have qualities in common with orthodox prose poetry: reliance on familiarity, the presence of a destabilizing twist, experiments with extremely short narratives or impressionistic scene-making. Chinese microblogs or *weibo* 微博 carry a 140 character limit, and as such are a highly condensed prose form that could be meaningfully compared and contrasted to prose poetry as well.

These structural omissions — artifacts of the project of using metaphorical categories as a way to understand individual poems — should be placed next to the more subjective, less organized omissions that came from my encounter with a truly enormous body of literature. The Wang Fuming anthology *90 Years of Chinese Prose Poetry* is almost 1,500 pages long; an anthology edited by Feng Yi 冯艺 runs to eleven volumes, and one or two new yearly

anthologies are published annually. My selection of works and artists necessarily represents only a tiny fraction of this inestimably rich, widely spread poetic practice, and much work remains left to be done.

APPENDIX ONE

A LIST OF WORKS BY LIU ZAIFU

刘再复著作出版图表

(不包括外文版)

序	类别	书名	出版社	出版日期	备注
1	文学理论与批评	《性格组合论》	上海文艺出版社	1986.7	
2			台北新地出版社	1988	
3			安徽文艺出版社	1999	
4			中国人民大学出版社	2009.11	
5		《文学的反思》	人民文学出版社	1986.11	
6			台北明镜出版社	1990	
7			福建教育出版社	2010.1	
8		《放逐诸神》	香港天地图书公司	1994	
9			台北时代风云出版社	1995	
10		《罪与文学》	牛津大学出版社	2002.5	与林岗合著
11			中信出版社	2011.8	
12	中国古代文化与 古代文学	《传统与中国人》	北京三联书店	1988	与林岗合著
13			香港三联出版社	1989	
14			台北人间出版社	1988	
15			安徽文艺出版社	1999	
16			牛津大学出版社	2002	
17			中信出版社	2010.12	
18		《论中国文化对人的设计》	湖南人民出版社	1988.3	与林岗合著
19		《双典批判》	北京三联书店	2010.7	
20		红楼四书	香港三联出版社	2006.2	
21			北京三联书店	2006.10	
22			香港三联出版社	2008.4	增订版
23			北京三联书店	2009.1	增订版
24			香港三联出版社	2008.10	与刘剑梅合著
25			北京三联书店	2009.1	
26			北京、香港三联出版社	2009.6	
27			北京、香港三联出版社	2009.6	
28	中国现当代文学	《鲁迅与自然科学》	科学出版社	1976.10	与金秋鹏、汪子春合著
29			台北尔雅出版社	1980	
30		《鲁迅美学思想论稿》	中国社会科学出版社	1981.6	
31			台湾明镜出版社	1990	
32		《鲁迅传》	中国社会科学出版社	1981.7	与林非合著
33			福建教育出版社	2010.1	与林非合著
34		《论中国文学》	中国作家出版社	1998	
35		《李泽厚美学概论》	北京三联书店	2009.11	

36		《论高行健状态》	香港明报出版社	2000.11	
37		《书园思绪》	香港天地图书公司	2002	杨春时 编选
38		《高行健论》	台北联经出版公司	2004.12	
39		《现代文学诸子论》	牛津大学出版社	2004	
40		《横眉集》	天津人民出版社	1978	与杨志杰合著
41			香港天地图书公司	1995	
42			台北麦田出版社	1999	与李泽厚合著
43		《告别革命》	香港天地图书公司	2004.2	
44	思想与思想史		香港天地图书公司	2011.7	第六版
45		《思想者十八题》	香港明报出版社	2007.6	繁体版
46			中信出版社	2010.12	大陆版
47		《共鉴“五四”》	香港三联出版社	2009.8	
48			福建教育出版社	2010.1	
49	散文与散文诗	《人论二十五种》	牛津大学出版社	1992	
50			中信出版社	2010.12	
51		《漂流手记》	香港天地图书公司	1993	漂流手记第1卷
52			台北时代风云出版社	1995	
53		《远游岁月》	香港天地图书公司	1994	漂流手记第2卷
54		《西寻故乡》	香港天地图书公司	1997	漂流手记第3卷
55		《独语天涯》	香港天地图书公司	1999	漂流手记第4卷
56			上海文艺出版社	2001.3	
57		《漫步高原》	香港天地图书公司	2000	漂流手记第5卷
58			香港天地图书公司	2000	漂流手记第6卷
59		《共悟人间》	上海文艺出版社	2001.3	
60			台湾九歌出版社	2004	与刘剑梅合著
61		《阅读美国》	香港明报出版社	2002.6	漂流手记第7卷
62			福建教育出版社	2009.11	
63		《沧桑百感》	香港天地图书公司	2004	漂流手记第8卷
64		《面壁沉思录》	香港天地图书公司	2004	漂流手记第9卷
65		《大观心得》	香港天地图书公司	2010.1	漂流手记第10卷
66		《雨丝集》	上海文艺出版社	1979.9	
67		《深海的追寻》	湖南人民出版社	1983.5	
68			台北新地出版社	1988	
69		《告别》	福建人民出版社	1983.7	
70		《太阳·土地·人》	天津百花文艺出版社	1984.1	
71			台北新地出版社	1988	
72		《洁白的灯心草》	香港天地图书公司	1985	
73		《人间·慈母·爱》	人民文学出版社	1988	
74		《寻找的悲歌》	香港天地图书公司	1988	

75			《读沧海》	安徽文艺出版社	1999	
76				福建教育出版社	2009.11	
77	学术选本与散文 选本		《刘再复论文集》	香港大地图书公司	1986.7	
78			《刘再复集》	黑龙江教育出版社	1988.9	
79			《刘再复散文诗合集》	华夏出版社	1988.10	
80			《刘再复——2000 年文库》	香港明报出版社	1999.9	
81			《刘再复精选集》	九歌出版社	2002.11	
82			《我对命运这样说》	香港三联出版社	2003.12	舒非 编选
83			《漂泊传》（海外散文选）	新加坡青年书局、香港 明报月刊出版社联合出 版	2009.2	
84			《生命精神与文学道路》	台湾风云时代出版公司	1989	
85			《寻找与呼唤》	台湾风云时代出版公司	1989.11	
86			《远逝岁月——刘再复海外 散文选》	广东省花城出版社	2009.8	
87			《刘再复文论精选》上	台湾新地出版社	2010.4	
88			《刘再复文论精选》下	台湾新地出版社	2010.4	
89			《人文十三步》	中信出版社	2010.11	
90			《走向人生深处》	中信出版社	2010.12	
91			《鲁迅论》	中信出版社	2010.12	
93			《文学十八题》	中信出版社	2011.2	
94			《师友纪事》	北京三联书店	2010.12	
95			《人性诸相》	北京三联书店	2010.12	
96			《感悟中国，感悟我的人 间》	人民日报出版社	2011.1	对话集
97			《回归古典，回归我的六 经》	人民日报出版社	2011.3	讲演集
98	新著		《高行健引论》	香港大山出版社	2011.9	
99						
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APPENDIX TWO**HANGING COFFIN BY OUYANG JIANGHE**

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NOTES

- 1 Lu Xun 鲁迅, tr. Gladys Yang and Yang Xianyi. *Wild Grass*. Beijing: Waiwen Chubanshe, 2000, p. 149.
- 2 The editor of just one publication, the Chinese magazine *Prose Poetry* (《散文诗》) lists its paper distribution at 70,000 copies a month. Additionally, *Prose Poetry* is fully available, for a fee, online, where readers pay by the individual poem and statistics are harder to gather. It is, however, only the larger of two national magazines devoted exclusively to prose poetry, and runs only one of the many websites in its field. When school texts (see chapter two) and anthologies (see chapter four) are included, the number must certainly be much higher. The full interview can be found at <http://cn.qikan.com/KanSheNewDisplay.aspx?pid=265>.
- 3 For those primarily interested in literary form, I recommend chapters one, two, and the first half of chapter four, each of which touches in part on the visual and aural shapes of prose poetry, specifically their length (chapter one), their lineation (chapter two) and the way in which the form of prose poems is determined by magazine editors (chapter four). I believe, and the ensuing pages will reflect, that the genre of prose poetry is more fully constitutive of the category than its form.
- 4 Rosmarin, Adena. *Power of Genre*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986, p. 21.
- 5 Ibid., p. 33.
- 6 With respect to prose poetry, this brings my ideas on the matter quite close to those of Steven Monte, who writes that "...genre is much more an interpretive framework than a category of classification." *Invisible Fences: Prose Poetry as a Genre in French and American Literature*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000, p. 24.
- 7 Rosmarin, p. 50.
- 8 Paul De Man, for example, says that the difference between criticism and literature is "delusive" in *Allegories of Literature*, p. 19. I interpret the title of Derrida's *Acts of Literature* as a kind of double-meaning perpetrated by Derrida and Attridge together: the book's subject is acts of literature (stories, poems) and the book is comprised of acts of literature (critical essays).
- 9 Rosmarin p. 51.
- 10 Prince, Michael. "Mauvais Genres." *New Literary History*, vol 34 no. 3, Summer, 2003, p. 453.
- 11 I relied most heavily on Huang Yongjian 黄永健, 《中国散文诗研究》. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2006, Wang Guangming 王光明. 《散文诗的世界》. Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987, as well as the following historically-structured anthology of prose poetry and prose about prose poetry: Wang Fuming 王幅明, ed. 《中国散文诗 90 年(1918-2007)》. Zhengzhou: Henan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2008.
- 12 Terdiman, Richard. *Discourse / Counter-Discourse*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985, p. 73. De Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1982, p. 76. I don't consider Derrida, especially in "The Law of Genre," to be establishing atemporality in his theories in the same way, as will be discussed later.
- 13 My basic text on the literary field is Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Oxford: Polity Press, 1993, but I take much from the China-specific works below as well.
- 14 The tradition was founded with the volume edited by Hockx, Michel. *The Literary Field of Twentieth-century China*. U of Hawaii P, 1999. Works focusing on contemporary poetry include Day, Michael. *China's Second World of Poetry: the Sichuan Avant-Garde*. Leiden: DACHS, 2005, and Van Crevel, Maghiel. *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- 15 The exception is Marja Kaikkonen's essay "Stories and Legends: China's largest contemporary popular literature journals" in Hockx, ed., p. 134-160. Some of the journals she mentions are semi-official, even though her analysis focuses on their popularity.
- 16 The exception to this practice is when poems are intended to illustrate the critical discussion, rather than vice versa, as happens in the first half of chapter three.
- 17 Although they are rarely discussed in literary criticism, these last two poets both have significant, high-quality translations into English forthcoming: a book of Ouyang Jianghe's called *Doubled Shadows* from Zephyr Press, translated by Austin Woerner, and *Notes on the Mosquito* from New Directions, translated by Lucas Klein.
- 18 Benjamin, Walter, tr. Hannah Arendt. "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" in *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. Page 155-194.
- 19 For a more specific discussion of these thinkers, see chapter one.
- 20 See chapter one.
- 21 Zhou Genhong 周根红 in Wang Fuming 王幅明, ed. 《中国散文诗 90 年(1918-2007)》. Zhengzhou: Henan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2008, p. 1190.
- 22 David Attridge, "Introduction," in Derrida, Jacques, David Attridge, ed. *Acts of Literature*. New York:

- Routledge, 1992, p. 14-15.
- 23 See Derrida, Jacques, "Before the Law" in David Attridge, ed. *Acts of Literature*. New York: Routledge, 1992, pages 187-252, as well as "The Law of Genre," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, no. 1, Autumn 1980, p. 55-80. I mix terminology from the two essays because I find them to operate in the same ideological superstructure. Law, and the specific set of laws that make up genre, are necessary: in "Law of Genre" Derrida writes that "One cannot conceive of truth without the madness of the law" (80), and in "Before the Law" he writes that literature performs the law at the same time as it forbids any self-identity to the law, so that we have laws which clearly exist, but are fundamentally ungraspable (216).
- 24 Zhou Genhong's blog appears at <http://blog.sina.com.cn/zhougenhong>, and the page cited is http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_49d608c1010009p7.html, where one reader writes "好诗，好思，好心，好表达" and another says that "这样的散文诗句很有特色." The system of assessments and conversations that takes place in selecting prose poems for publication and inclusion in magazines and anthologies is itself a complex and rewarding topic for study, and will be touched on in chapters two and four.
- 25 "Before the Law," p. 216.
- 26 This is an adapted form of the reaction to New Criticism made by Paul Fussell in *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979, p. 109: "John Crowe Ransom set forth a useful distinction between the texture and the structure of a poem. The texture, he found, is 'local,' unique to a given poem, while the structure involves the larger elements of form which ally the poem with a tradition or with history or with a wide world of recurring shapes." Fussell uses this distinction to better focus on metrical and formal qualities of individual pieces of verse: dealing with the prose poem, I will use a similar distinction in order to argue that little about Chinese prose poetry is literally or figuratively "local".
- 27 Habits and practices of definition were very different in prose poetry's most formative years, especially where formal matters were concerned, leading to lineated many different kinds of literary works being considered prose poetry, including lineated free verse, well-written *xiaopin* 小品 or *zawen* 杂文 essays, and even foreign prose. This categorical melting, although considerably less prevalent today, is historically significant and a topic in its own right, and will be treated in the first part of chapter two.
- 28 It may be worth pointing out that unlike in other poetry traditions, early Chinese poetry was sometimes written without any indication of the end of one rhyme or rhyme group and the beginning of another: one could not identify a phrase boundary (now we would call it the end of a poetic line) without being able to hear the rhymes. In this way, some very early Chinese poetry was visually indistinguishable from very early Chinese prose. For a brief history of manuscript conventions, see Cherniak, Susan. "Book Culture and Textual Transmission in Sung China." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 54.1, 1994, p. 5-102.
- 29 By way of example, the shortest essays in anthologies like *Best-Selling Contemporary Chinese Prose* 《中国当代散文排行榜》 are over a thousand characters, while Bei Dao's seminal free verse poem "The Answer" is about two hundred characters long.
- 30 Ke Lan 柯蓝, "Mixed Observations on Prose Poetry" "散文诗的杂感," 1981, in Wang Fuming 王幅明, ed. *90 Years of Chinese Prose Poetry* 《中国散文诗90年》. Zhengzhou: Henan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2008, p. 1222.
- 31 Bernard, Suzanne. *Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours*. Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1959, p. 15.
- 32 My translation. The original couplet is 舉頭望明(山)月 / 低頭思故鄉.
- 33 Huang Yongjian 黄永健, 《中国散文诗研究》. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2006, p. 160. Hereafter abbreviated simply to "Huang."
- 34 Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Poetic Principle." *Literary Criticism of Edgar Allan Poe*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1965, p. 33 and 36, respectively. Poe's assessments are cited in Bernard 15, and in Santilli, Nikki. *Such Rare Citings: the Prose Poem in English Literature*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002, p. 101.
- 35 Huang p. 161-162.
- 36 Perloff, Marjorie. *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981, p. 33. She and Roger Cardinal, to whom she is responding, also make a parallel distinction between "surface and depth," and "the gestures of mystery" as opposed to "clarification of the content of that mystery." I avoid this language in part because I think it gives itself too easily to value judgment — in the general sense (and this is not, it seems, Perloff's intent), it seems clear that Chinese prose poems as well as those Perloff talks about have "depth" and "content" — but also because I find the language above subjective in the same way that "brevity" is subjective. Even the examination of a surface interacts with its depth, even if the surface is polished steel and the depth is a few microns; it is almost an oxymoron to talk about the "content" of mystery.
- 37 "Shi," "詩" Hanyu Da Zidian Bianji Weihui 汉语大字典编辑委员会, ed. 《汉语大字典》. Chengdu: Sichuan ci

- shu chu ban she, 1986-1990, p. 3961.
- 38 Huang, p. 149.
- 39 Visible in his 1982 essay "On the Special Features of Prose Poetry" "关于散文诗的特征" in Wang Fuming 王幅明, ed. *90 Years of Chinese Prose Poetry* 《中国散文诗 90 年》. Zhengzhou: Henan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2008, p. 1247-1251.
- 40 Lee, Leo Ou-fan. *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1973, p. 280. See also Bonnie McDougall's monograph *The Introduction of Western Literary Theories into Modern China, 1919-1925*. Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Studies, 1971.
- 41 With this crude term, I mean to include all critics influenced by the Anglophone critical tradition, as well as those who are native English speakers.
- 42 Where Western scholars are concerned, Hermine Riffaterre's essay "Reading Constants: the Practice of the Prose Poem" is the most specific representation of this view: "In the prose poem...the formal framework is ad hoc, built out of the content put into it and coextensive with it, just as the content is coextensive with the verse in the verse poem. It is the ad hoc constant that replaces versification. The constant is not prefabricated the way verse is. It does not antedate the text the way prosody does....it is created by the text's own internal organization. The constant remains the same from start to finish of the text, just as verse remains the same, always recognizable, no matter what words may give it its concrete reality." The essay appears in Caws, Mary Ann, and Riffaterre, Hermine, eds. *The Prose Poem in France*. New York: Columbia UP, 1983, p. 98-119, and the citation above is from p. 115. My reading of Chinese prose poetry differs from her reading of French prose poetry mainly in our differing attitudes towards the necessity of "revolution" in prose poetry, as I will discuss below in the section on subversion.
- 43 Wang Fuming 王幅明, "散文诗短论四蹄" in Wang Fuming, ed. 《中国散文诗 90 年(1918-2007)》. Zhengzhou: Henan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2008, p. 1319.
- 44 Huang 160.
- 45 Perloff, page 22. Her distinction falls neatly between modernists (who talked about indeterminacy) and the postmodernists (who created indeterminate forms); because of the strong tradition of Chinese romanticism, the situation seems quite different in Sinophone countries.
- 46 See as an example poems like "Life is Happy," "生命是快乐的" in Guo Feng, ed. 《散文诗选》. Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1987, p. 92-93. One could make the argument that this poem has a certain note of ambivalence about whether or not life is happy, but it would be virtually impossible to claim that the piece is not about life's happiness in the absolutely most straightforward way: the poem uses an indeterminate form, arguing for happiness by examining some of those who suffer particularly harsh burdens in Chinese society, but does not in any way take indeterminacy or ambivalence as its subjects, and enacts Perloff's distinction as it is reproduced above.
- 47 Heidegger, Martin. "Building Dwelling Thinking," tr. Martin Hofstadter, in David Krell, ed. *Basic Writings*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993, p. 361.
- 48 See for example Nicholas Kaldis in the *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* who sees prose poetry's form "playing a secondary role", or Huang 18, where he says that prose poetry is made in the bone, not the skin, and is free of arbitrary formal rules.
- 49 Huang 3.
- 50 For a brief introduction to Gao's attitudes towards technique, see Tam, Kwok-Kan. "Language as Subjectivity in *One Man's Bible*" in Kwok-Kan Tam, ed. *Soul of Chaos: Critical Perspectives on Gao Xingjian*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2001, p. 295.
- 51 In the preface to Gao Xingjian 高行健. 《现代小说技巧初探》. Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 1981.
- 52 Leo Ou-fan Lee makes the argument that the study of technique during this period is inherently political in "The Politics of Technique: Perspectives of Literary Dissidence in Modern Chinese Fiction," in Kinkley, Jeffrey, ed. *After Mao: Chinese Literature and Society 1978-1981*. Cambridge: Harvard University, 1985, p. 159-190. I would argue that even though the politicization of the study of literary technique was very real, and even though technique had a necessary political dimension, this does not necessarily diminish their value as investigations into craft.
- 53 Celan, Paul, tr. Rosemarie Waldrop. "The Meridian." *Collected Prose*. Manchester: Fyfield Books, 2003, p. 55.
- 54 Ibid., p. 49.
- 55 Ibid., p. 47.
- 56 Celan, Paul, tr. Rosemarie Waldrop. "Edgar Jené and The Dream About The Dream." *Collected Prose*.

- Manchester: Fyfield Books, 2003, p. 3.
- 57 Ibid., p. 6-7.
- 58 Translated by Arthur Sze in the *Boston Review*, May/June 2009, accessed at <http://bostonreview.net/BR34.3/xi.php>; originally published in the *Oriental Morning Post*, February 11, 2008, p. 7.
- 59 Translated from Tong Huaizhou 童怀周, ed. *Tiananmen Poetry Anthology* 《天安门诗抄》. Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1978, p. 329.
- 60 Zhang Jiawen 张稼文, "卖柴人" in Wang Fuming, ed. 《中国散文诗 90 年(1918-2007)》. Zhengzhou: Henan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2008, p. 964.
- 61 Monroe, Jonathan. *A Poverty of Objects: The Prose Poem and the Politics of Genre*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987, page 15.
- 62 This upending can, however, also be seen as a backhanded fulfillment of the promises made by the suite's title: as opposed to the normal use of 鉴史 *jianshi*, a verbal reorganization of *shijian* 史鉴 that refers to a work of history like the *Shi Ji* 《史记》 and therefore means approximately "examining history in the way that classical historical texts do," it may be intended as the nominative "reflections in history," since the most ancient meaning of *jian* is a kind of bronze mirror and the term is also used to mean "to reflect."
- 63 Spence, Jonathan. *The Search for Modern China*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1991, p. 611-612.
- 64 Qi Benyu 戚本禹, "Patriotism or Treason?" "爱国主义还是卖国主义?" 《红旗》, February 18, 1967.
- 65 A similar grammatical ambivalence appears in Hu Jintao's "Eight Honors and Eight Shames," which take the form 以(something good)为(honor), 以(something bad)为(shame), and elides each item's actor. The first honor, 以热爱祖国为荣, could therefore be translated variously as "We consider sincere love for the country to be honorable," or "You [should] consider sincere love for the country to be honorable." It is reasonably clear that this is some kind of instruction — the government's official English translation, via the Xinhua news service at http://news3.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-10/18/content_5220576.htm, is simply "Love the country" — but in contexts familiar to Marxism in which an end is both *unavoidable* and *to be pursued*, the elision of pronouns serves an invaluable ideological purpose, allowing sloganeers to both exhort and argue that victory is certain.
- 66 Tong Huaizhou 童怀周, ed. *Tiananmen Poetry Transcriptions* 《天安门诗抄》. Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1978, p. 4. Hong Zicheng 洪子诚 says that "Some of what can be found in *Poetry Transcriptions* is not poetry (such as rhymed-couplets, eulogies, and memorials)" but also gives no clear guidelines as to which pieces are which or how to decide. *History of Contemporary Chinese Literature* 《中国当代文学史》, tr. Michael Day. Leiden: Brill, 2007, p. 254.
- 67 This is perhaps to be expected considering the editorial context: coming at the edge of a period when little scholarship, especially with relationship to literature, was allowed, it seems reasonable that the editors of the *Tiananmen Poetry Transcriptions* would be more interested in a poem's content than its form, and mix the two at will. Later versions of the anthology, especially those printed in Taiwan and Hong Kong, break the traditional verse up into its canonically accepted categories by syllable number. One Hong Kong version, published by the 文化资料供应社 in 1978, puts all the prose works in an appendix (附录), neatly avoiding the question of their nature as poems that is examined above.
- 68 Huang 125-6.
- 69 Huang 127.
- 70 Wang Fuming 王幅明, "寂寞而又美丽的九十年" in Wang Fuming, ed. 《中国散文诗 90 年(1918-2007)》. Zhengzhou: Henan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2008, p. 18.
- 71 Li Hualan 李华岚. 《吹笛集》. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1978. The way in which this collection echoes those by Ke Lan and Guo Feng's 1950s collections indicates the importance of those works: see chapter two.
- 72 Wang Shuo 朔望, "只因 —— 关于一个女共产党员的断想" in *People's Daily* 《人民日报》, July 14, 1979, sixth edition.
- 73 In this sense, the translated title "after" is regrettable, if understandable: the Chinese reads *ti* (题), "regarding" or "on the topic of," leaving the option open that we are to read the poem *during* an encounter with the painting.
- 74 Lattimore, David, "Allusion and T'ang Poetry" in *Perspectives on the T'ang*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1973, p. 405.
- 75 This term "recitation" is influenced in part by Richard Terdiman's use of the term *re/citation* in *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: the Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France*.

- Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985, page 279: "Re/citation seeks [to subvert the dominant] by radically *reappropriating* the dominant, by framing, forcing, and thereby estranging its inanity. On the other hand the strategy of the prose poem might be termed "*de/citation*." It seeks a total *exclusion* of dominant discourse." I have, however, myself reappropriated his term, and intend to use it in a way much closer to its common usage, less colored by Foucaultian narratives of the struggle to power. At this point, the term can be understood as any new performance of any received text.
- 76 In the translation of Gladys Yang, from *Masterpieces by Modern Chinese Fiction Writers*. Beijing: Waiwen Chubanshe, 2002, p. 535. This is not to say that this story is the source of "Firewood Seller," just that the traveling peasant selling rural goods is a common and familiar trope, especially for May Fourth writers.
- 77 Feuerwerker, Yi-tsi Mei. *Ideology, Power, Text: Self-Representation and the Peasant "Other" in Modern Chinese Literature*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998, p. 9. She discusses "Xianglin Sao" on p. 86-94 and Gao Xiaosheng on p. 173.
- 78 In Luo Kuang 罗旷, ed. 《现代散文诗选》. Changsha: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1986, p. 156. This is a reselection of the poem as it appears in *Selected Poems* 《诗选》, 诗刊社, ed. Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1981. That magazine, currently unavailable, is a reselection of the poem as it appears in another, unknown source. This is a reasonably common situation with regards to the poetry of this period: because poetry was ideologically dangerous and ideologies changed, large print runs and reprints were rare. For more on limitations on publication in the 1960s and 1970s, see Perry Link, *The Uses of Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000. For example, p. 132 discusses the end of significant payments to writers in the 1960s and early 1970s, and points out that publishers of the period mostly lost money per copy.
- 79 In Wang Fuming, p. 1064.
- 80 Murphy, Marguerite. *A Tradition of Subversion: the Prose Poem in English from Wilde to Ashbery*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1992, p. 3.
- 81 Terdiman, Richard. *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: the Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985, and Monroe, Jonathan. *A Poverty of Objects: The Prose Poem and the Politics of Genre*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987.
- 82 Terdiman 40, citing Michel Foucault, Colin Gordon, ed. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. New York: Pantheon, 1980, p. 114.
- 83 *Quotations of Mao Zedong*, 《毛泽东语录》, chapter one, quotation number eight, in my translation so as to reinforce the grammatical similarity to Ke's poem. Also consider chapter five, quotation six: "Each Communist Party member should understand this truth: 'Political power comes from the barrel of a gun.'"
- 84 Ke Lan 柯蓝. 《拾到的纪念册》. Changsha: Hunan Renmin Chubanshe, 1983, p. 51.
- 85 Murphy only vaguely and ambivalently insinuates that her critical system is appropriate for other national literatures: she follows the quoted sentence above with "This model should be as applicable to recent American experiments in the genre as it is to nineteenth-century French prose poems." *Tradition of Subversion*, p. 2.
- 86 Wanner, Adrian. "From Subversion to Affirmation: The Prose Poem as a Russian Genre." *Slavic Review*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Autumn, 1997). He discusses Monroe, Terdiman and Murphy on p. 522, and Solzhenitsyn on p. 536.
- 87 Human and animal tracks have an ancient connection to literature in the Chinese tradition: one story teaches that the mythical inventor of writing, Cang Jie, was inspired by a hunter's ability to 'read' the tracks of animals, and decided to make a series of written 'tracks'. See Zhang Shudong 张树栋, 《中华印刷通史》. Taipei: Caituan Faren Yinshua Chuanbo Xingtai Wenjiao Jijinhui, 1998, chapter three, section one.
- 88 It is interesting that the two more explicitly Marxist studies I cite, Terdiman and Monroe, were written before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. Marguerite Murphy's study, printed immediately after that transition, specifically eschews formal Marxism.
- 89 Murphy, p. 35.
- 90 The argument that Tagore and Gibran use Biblical idiom in their writing is outside the scope of this discussion, but it is worth noting that Gibran was a Maronite-educated Lebanese-American who wrote exclusively in English, and that Tagore, who translated some of his own works, had received at least a brief religious education at St. Xavier's College near Calcutta.
- 91 Monte, Steven. *Invisible Fences: Prose Poetry as a Genre in French and American Literature*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000, p. 8.
- 92 Ibid., p. 14.
- 93 Terdiman, Richard. *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: the Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985, p. 12.

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- 94 Murphy, p. 65.
- 95 Murphy, p. 117.
- 96 Huang, p. 78.
- 97 Huang, p. 154-5.
- 98 Murphy, p. 3.
- 99 For instance, Zou Yuehan 邹岳汉 identifies "Moonlit Night" by name in the introduction to Wang Fuming, ed. 《中国散文诗 90 年(1918-2007)》. Zhengzhou: Henan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2008, p. 12, in a large two-volume anthology hereafter called "Wang." Another among the many critics who make the same assessment is Huang Yongjian 黄永健, 《中国散文诗研究》. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2006, page 10, whose work will hereafter be called "Huang." Liu Bannong is considered the first translator of prose poetry into Chinese (Huang p. 2), and Michel Hockx considers him an early adopter of the form, even though his original prose poems weren't published until 1926. See Hockx, Michel. *Questions of Style: Literary Societies and Literary Journals in Modern China, 1911-1937*. Leiden: Brill, 1993, p. 177.
- 100 Zhang Baoming 张宝明. 《回眸《新青年》语言文学卷》 Zhengzhou: Henan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1998, p. 77.
- 101 Wang, p. 20. This work, like "Moonlit Night," is so widely anthologized that dozens and dozens of sources for it exist.
- 102 Wang 401.
- 103 Wang 867.
- 104 Gass, William. *The Tunnel*. Urbana-Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 1999. On the communist use of *qiyan*, see Link, Perry. "The Secret History of Classical Rhythms in Modern Chinese," in *The Scholar's Mind: Essays in Honor of F. W. Mote*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2009, p. 256.
- 105 Agamben, Giorgio, tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen. "The Dictation of Poetry." *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996.
- 106 Guo Moruo 郭沫若, 《论诗》, 1921, reprinted in Wang 1243-1246. Besides Guo Moruo, another iconoclastic voice on the history of prose poetry is Wang Guangming, who sees a prehistory/early history for Chinese prose poetry in the works of the Yuan 袁 brothers of the late Ming Gong'an School 公安, mainly because of their belief in writing's relationship to sincerity and their insistence on the truth in daily life. This is an interesting argument — that there can be a literary form or genre that is more or less sincere than others — but even Wang seems to believe the idea to be particular to himself, and leaves it out of his encyclopedia entries on prose poetry. Wang Guangming 王光明. 《散文诗的世界》. Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987, p. 8.
- 107 Huang 1.
- 108 Che Zhenxian 车镇宪. 《中国现代散文诗的产生发展及其对小说文体的影响》. Beijing: Zuojia Chubanshe, 1999, p. 1. This is Che's English translation of the start of his own abstract, which appears in both English and Chinese.
- 109 Agamben, p. 96.
- 110 Zou's introduction is in the preface to Wang, p. 12; the poem appears in the anthology section, p. 13, first after Lu Xun's work, which seems to have been reprinted first not because his work came first chronologically, but because of his stature. Absent Lu Xun, "Moonlit Night" is the first poem in Wang's anthology. Huang Yongjian's quote is from Huang 10.
- 111 In fact, all of Shen Yinmo's poems that were originally printed in *Xin Qingnian* had idiosyncratic, almost haphazard lineation: the poems' lines, like classical poems, are always endstopped (there is punctuation after the last word in the line, creating a pause), but treat all punctuation equally, including commas. See for example his poem "Naked" (*Chiluoluo*) in *Xin Qingnian* 1918: juan 6, no. 4. Its first line is short and ends in a comma, and the second is extremely long, including two sentences, stretching down to one character's space from the bottom margin, and then breaking on another comma. Line three is just four characters long and seems almost to be the overflow from line two; both it and the final line end on rhetorical questions. None of the techniques from Chinese free verse appear — enjambment, use of the line break as a kind of unstated punctuation, dramatic control over the impressions that can be made by long and short lines — but the poems cannot be called prose, in letter or spirit. They seem instead to be classical poems rendered in *baihua*, with an attendant rejection of all metrical and rhyme expectations that classical poetry entailed.
- 112 Wang 1197.
- 113 Carpenter possibly refers to Edward Carpenter (1844-1929), and Henley is most likely William Ernest Henley (1849-1903)
- 114 Parts of the *Dao de Jing* 道德经, the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 and the *Guanzi* 管子 are written in rhyme; in the Six

- Dynasties *Wenxin Diaolong* 文心雕龙, Liu Xie 刘勰 divides literature into seventeen rhyming types (which he calls *wen* 文, literature), and seventeen non-rhyming types (which he calls *bi* 笔, writings). While not all the rhyming types are obviously poems, most of those types which are considered poems or songs do rhyme — this is the traditional stricture against which Zheng and Guo are pitting their energy.
- 115 Denton, Kirk, ed. tr. *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, chapter 18, 1996, p. 204-205.
- 116 Michel Hockx makes this argument as well in Hockx, Michel. *A Snowy Morning: Eight Chinese Poets on the Road to Modernity*. Leiden: CNWS, 1994, page 66, and Huang Yongjian in Huang page 43. Huang's self-consciousness about the changing definition of prose poetry makes it all the more interesting that he more or less follows the conventional literary history of the genre.
- 117 "Brightness" appears in the Collected Works here: Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎. 《郑振铎全集》. Shijiazhuang: Huashan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1998, volume 1, p. 382. It appears in his Selected Works here: Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎. 《郑振铎选集》. Chengdu: Sichuan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1990, volume 2, p. 249.
- 118 For a good typification of period attitudes, see Leo Ou-fan Lee's *The Romantic Generation of Chinese Writers*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973. He talks about romantic May Fourth writers like Guo Moruo as alienated "superfluous men," p. 250, and says that they "never seriously pondered the problem of modern China's cultural identity" (296): instead, they write and act from a romantic heart, one that is not analytical or categorizable, but spiritual and transcendent, as in Xu Zhimo's 徐志摩 command "spiritualize your life and art will come of itself" (157) or Guo Moruo's opinion that "Poems are written, not wrought" (188).
- 119 As additional circumstantial evidence, Liu Bannong's daughter was named Xiaohui. She later went on to write a book about her father: Liu Xiaohui 刘小慧, 《父亲刘半农》. Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2000.
- 120 Liu Bannong, 《扬鞭集》自序, in 《刘半农书话》, p. six. Accessed at <http://www.pjedu.com/pdf/%CE%C4%D1%A7%C0%FA%CA%B7%C0%E016/ts032049.pdf>.
- 121 Although it appears as a prose poem in Wang 20, and in Luo Kuang 珞旷, ed. 《现代散文诗选》 Changsha: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, p. 15, it is collected in Liu Bannong, 刘半农. Zhang Jun 章军, ed. 《刘半农作品精选》. Guilin: Guangxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 1995, p. 9, as a 精到小品, a "penetrating sketch."
- 122 Zhou Zuoren in Jia Zhifang 贾植芳, ed. *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Zuopin Xuan* 《中国现代文学作品选》. Vol. 1. (Fudan: Fudan Daxue Chubanshe, 1986) p. 443.
- 123 Lu Xun 鲁迅. 《鲁迅全集》. Beijing Shi : Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 2005, volume 13. p. 469. He would later categorize *Wild Grass* as prose poetry in a 1929 description of his own works titled 《鲁迅著译目录》: see below. In comparison, there exists a contemporary work called *Scattered Flowers and Wild Grass* that is written by a prose poet and editor of prose poetry, but is in fact a mix of short articles, critical reviews, prefaces and editorials: it is not a collection of prose poetry like the author's other collections. See Hai Meng 海梦. 《杂花野草集》. Beijing: Zuoja Chubanshe, 2008.
- 124 See for example Michel Hockx on Liu Bannong's early use of the term in chapter five of his book *Questions of Style: Literary Societies and Literary Journals in Modern China, 1911-1937*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. Liu originally published Turgenev's prose poetry as short stories, and misidentified a song by an Indian singer as a prose poem because he mistranslated an appreciation of the song in *Vanity Fair*.
- 125 Surprisingly, however, pieces from *Wild Grass* are rarely represented in large numbers in prose poetry anthologies; the most liminal pieces, like the rhymed poem "My Lost Love," the dramatic scene "The Passer-by," or parables like "The Wise Man, the Fool and the Slave" never appear in prose poetry anthologies, which, if they select from *Wild Grass* at all, choose pieces like "Autumn Night" and "Dead Fire."
- 126 Monte, Steven. *Invisible Fences: Prose Poetry as a Genre in French and American Literature*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000, p. 22-23.
- 127 Ou Mingjun 欧明俊, 《小品与散文诗》, in Wang, vol. 2 p. 1377. See also Sun Yushi, 孙玉石. 《《野草》研究》. Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2007, p. 299, which says flat out that Shen Yinmo's work was not prose poetry, but early *baihua* free verse.
- 128 See for example Mao Zedong's essay "On the Purely Military Viewpoint," in which he summarizes and then responds to the attitudes of those he sees as opponents. Like Xu Chengmiao, he never names the opponents he addresses. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. 1. New York: International Publishers, 1954, p. 106-107.
- 129 Wang 1269.
- 130 Ke Lan 柯蓝. "散文诗杂感," in Wang 1221-1222.
- 131 Huang 99-100.

- 132 Compare, as well, the Tiananmen Square poem from chapter one: the tone and tenor of the poem is that of the party — the excoriation of the enemy familiar from Cultural Revolution denouncements of Lin Biao and others — but the poem, and not the party, is speaking on behalf of the people.
- 133 McDougall, Bonnie, tr. *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*. Ann Arbor: Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies, 1980, p. 69.
- 134 Ibid., p. 93.
- 135 Wang Guangming 王光明. 《散文诗的世界》. Wuhan: Sichuan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987, p. 124.
- 136 Huang 100. During the Cultural Revolution, Ke Lan was separated from his family and punished with hard labor; his son, also imprisoned, died from an illness contracted while serving a sentence as a political prisoner. For eyewitness accounts of these experiences, see Ke's festschrift, edited by the China Prose Poetry Study Society (中国散文诗学会): 《永远的柯蓝》. Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 2007, p. 4, 33-34. and the timeline of his life on p. 364-385. The short memorial essays of this volume are, of course, highly subjective accounts, but taken in context they provide some biographical details that are missing from other discussions of Ke's life.
- 137 Ke Lan 柯蓝. 《早霞短笛》. Beijing: Beijing Zuojia Chubanshe, 1958, p. 236.
- 138 Ke Lan 柯蓝. 《早霞短笛》. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1981, no page.
- 139 The objective or documentary nature of prose in the eyes of post-1949 authors and readers may also be visible in the period's fiction, which always claims to tell a basic truth, even if the details are fabricated. Postmodern objections to unexamined assertions about objectivity and the truth are then borne up over the course of the latter half of the century, as the government takes a significant stake in alternately constructing, encouraging and limiting certain kinds of "truth" that can be spoken in fiction, thereby attempting to affect China's material, social and political world.
- 140 Wang 1221.
- 141 Wang Guangming 王光明. 《散文诗的世界》. Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987, p. 82.
- 142 In the anthology edited by Wang Fuming, or the one by Luo Kuang 珞旷 ed. 《现代散文诗选》. Changsha: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1986, or Guo Feng 郭风, ed. 《散文诗选》. Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1987, or others, there are many works included as prose poems that others would call essays, or simply prose; there are almost *never* lineated poems, even if as in Wang Fuming's case, a lineated poem like "Moonlit Night" has to be edited to be placed into the anthology.
- 143 For Guo Feng's anthology, see note 39; much of his critical work is collected in Wang Yuzhi 王玉芝, ed. 《郭风研究专集》. Haixia Wenyi Chubanshe, 1990. Ke Lan was the editor with Guo Feng of the curated poetry collection 《黎明散文诗丛书合集》. Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 1984; his books often include a foreword and afterword which feature what we would consider critical essays, and his critical work is also featured in Wang 1221. Xu Chengmiao's essay appears in Wang 1263, as noted above.
- 144 For Liu Bannong's first use of the term "prose poetry," see Hockx, Michel. *A Snowy Morning: Eight Chinese Poets on the Road to Modernity*. Leiden: CNWS, 1994, chapter five. Liu Bannong seems to have had an unsteady relationship with the term at first, a reflection perhaps of his foreign language abilities as a young man: in the first article that used the term *sanwenshi*, he missed the fact that *Vanity Fair* was using the phrase "prose poetry" as an admiration of a song sung by Indian singer Ratan Devi. Liu identified her as the author of the poem 我行雪中, instead of merely the singer of the song. Ratan Devi is still identified as a prose poet by some Chinese scholars, including Huang p. 10.
- 145 The best way to find versions of this story is to search Baidu for "pull out a nail," or *bodiaoyi ke dingzi* 剥掉一颗钉子, but examples can be found in the following blogs:
http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4d970ac70100dtpq.html,
<http://12883015.blog.163.com/blog/static/3176092920078811518953/>,
http://wangyifeng888.blog.hexun.com/24885932_d.html, and
http://hi.baidu.com/www_ysping1_com/blog/item/4eb791013af8ea0f1c95834d.html. The examples are each quite different: sometimes the protagonist is an American boy, sometimes Chinese; sometimes the nailing takes place in a tree in the courtyard, sometimes in the family's wooden doorstep. The story changes, as well: sometimes the boy is allowed to remove a nail every time he helps a classmate, but more often simply when he is successful in controlling his anger.
- 146 The locus classicus for this idiom is a stone inscription from the Tang dynasty, and can be found in any suitably large dictionary under *jing zhong hua*.
- 147 Wang 1250.

- 148 Wang Guangming 王光明. 《散文诗的世界》. Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987, p. 99. An English translation of this passage by Y. S. Feng may exist, but because it is so difficult to locate (the volume in question was never published), this translation is mine.
- 149 Huang 64-5. This attitude is not limited to Chinese scholars: Nicholas Kaldis treats the "Preface" to *Wild Grass* as a poem in his essay "The Prose Poem as Aesthetic Cognition." in the *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese*, vol. 3, no. 2 (January), 2000.
- 150 Sun Yushi 孙玉石. *Ye Cao Yanjiu* 《野草》研究 (Research into *Wild Grass*). Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2006, p. 258. The description of *Wild Grass* as an act of almost agricultural 'opening' of a metaphoric land is everywhere in Sun's book, though, and as a result of his wide influence, is repeated in most histories of prose poetry.
- 151 *Lu Xun Quan Ji* 《鲁迅全集》, volume 13. Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 2005, p. 469.
- 152 *Lu Xun Quan Ji* 《鲁迅全集》, volume 4. Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 2005, p. 224.
- 153 I believe, in fact, that aesthetics and the beautiful are deeply important to *Wild Grass*. See Admussen, Nick. "A Music for Baihua: Lu Xun's *Wild Grass* and 'A Good Story.'" *CLEAR* 31, Dec. 2009.
- 154 An example of this appears in Sun Yushi's study, which claims that Lu Xun used the phrase *sanwen xiaoshi* (散文小诗) when speaking of prose poetry, even though Lu Xun never used such a phrase. Because he conceptualizes Lu Xun (correctly) as a linkage between Baudelaire and Chinese practice, Sun uses a translation of Baudelaire's phrase *petits poemes en prose* and inserts it into Lu Xun's discussion. See Sun Yushi 孙玉石. *Ye Cao Yanjiu* 《野草》研究 (Research into *Wild Grass*). Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2006, p. 223. For more on the way that readings of *Wild Grass* reflect modern critical concerns, see Admussen, Nick. "Trading Metaphors: Chinese Prose Poetry and the Reperiodization of the Twentieth Century." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 22, 2, Fall 2010, p. 99-101.
- 155 All in Lu Xun, tr. Gladys Yang and Yang Xianyi. *Wild Grass*. Beijing: Waiwen Chubanshe, 2000. Sun Yushi treats "The Kite" as an actual piece of memoir, pointing out that Lu Xun had previously written the same remembered story with the same details. Sun Yushi 孙玉石. *Ye Cao Yanjiu* 《野草》研究 (Research into *Wild Grass*). Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2006, p. 65-66. For our purposes, it is enough to say that it is clearly in the form of a memoir.
- 156 Huang 65.
- 157 Liang Qichao, Gek Nai Chang, tr., in Kirk Denton, ed. *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, p. 74.
- 158 This attitude is omnipresent in classical letters, but a concrete example is the way in which poetic forms appear in the front of anthologies like the *Wen Xuan* and take pride of place in Liu Xie's *Wenxin Diaolong*, relegating more prosaic forms like history, tomb inscription, edicts, prefaces etc. to late in their anthologies. Works are not mixed, and not arranged by individual fame or quality; 'better' genres appear in the front, and 'worse' genres appear in the back.
- 159 Sun Yushi 孙玉石. *Ye Cao Yanjiu* 《野草》研究 (Research into *Wild Grass*). Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2006, p. 1-16.
- 160 Kaldis, Nicholas. *The Prose Poem and Aesthetic Insight: Lu Xun's Yecao*. Dissertation for the Ohio State University, Kirk Denton, advisor, 1998, p. 274.
- 161 Sun Yushi 孙玉石. *Ye Cao Yanjiu* 《野草》研究 (Research into *Wild Grass*). Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2006, p. 31-35
- 162 Psychologizing and philosophizing traditions are represented by Lee, Leo Ou-fan. *Voices from the Iron House: a Study of Lu Xun*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987, p. 89-90. Also Ng Mau-sang. "Symbols of Anxiety in *Wild Grass*." *Renditions* 26, 1986, p. 155-164. Sun Yushi's historicizing tradition is visible in many Chinese discussions of *Wild Grass*, including Wang Guangming 王光明. 《散文诗的世界》. Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987, p. 46.
- 163 Huang 155.
- 164 Sun Yushi 孙玉石. *Ye Cao Yanjiu* 《野草》研究 (Research into *Wild Grass*). Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2006, p 33: "'Such a Fighter' also clearly exposes the loneliness and emptiness of the writer's thinking, which is an expression of Lu Xun's feelings of inability to find new conceptual directions and collectives for struggle."
- 165 Guo Feng 郭风. 《叶笛集》. Beijing: Zuojia Chubanshe, 1959, p. 34.
- 166 Ibid., p. 51.
- 167 Ke Lan 柯蓝. 《早霞短笛》. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1981, p. 131-2. This version is updated slightly with more contemporary usage from page 119 of the 1958 Zuojia Chubanshe edition, and the newer

- version has been used here for its preferable clarity.
- 168 This poem is identical in the 1958 and the 1981 versions of 《早霞短笛》, and appears on pages 217 and 231, respectively.
- 169 This appears only in Ke Lan 柯蓝. 《早霞短笛》. Beijing: Zuoja Chubanshe, 1958, p., 38.
- 170 A more complete biography can be found in Wang Yuzhi 王玉芝, ed. 《郭风研究专集》. Fuzhou: Shanxia Wenyi Chubanshe, 1990, p. 3-9.
- 171 Guo Feng 郭风. 《叶笛集》. Beijing: Zuoja Chubanshe, 1959, p. 44, 50, and 52, respectively.
- 172 Ibid., p. 13.
- 173 Ibid., p. 5-6. The double ellipsis in line eight replaces a list of things that the tool factory makes for village workers, and an appreciation of the way that workers' needs are filled by the factory; because it's quite long, and of dubious aesthetic value, it is elided here.
- 174 Originally appearing in the 《福建日报》, March 4, 1962, reprinted in Wang Yuzhi 王玉芝, 《郭风研究专集》. Fuzhou: Shanxia Wenyi Chubanshe, 1990, p. 227-234.
- 175 Ibid., p. 230.
- 176 My understanding of this system comes largely from Dai Qing. *Wang Shiwei and "Wild Lilies": Rectification and Purges in the Chinese Communist Party 1942-1944*. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1993. None of these structures or threats are made explicit in the critical essay I discuss, but her pathbreaking work is the basis of my interpretation of the situation in which this rather picky and small-minded criticism in a provincial newspaper resulted in Guo Feng ceasing all publication of all creative work until 1978.
- 177 Stewart, Susan. *On Longing*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984, p. 172.
- 178 Ibid., p. 69.
- 179 He Huai 何怀 in Wang Yuzhi 王玉芝, 《郭风研究专集》. Fuzhou: Shanxia Wenyi Chubanshe, 1990, pg 227.
- 180 Guo Feng 郭风. 《叶笛集》. Beijing: Zuoja Chubanshe, 1959, p. 58.
- 181 Guo Feng in Wang Yuzhi 王玉芝, ed. 《郭风研究专集》. Fuzhou: Shanxia Wenyi Chubanshe, 1990, p. 53.
- 182 Guo Feng in ibid., pages 54 and 51, respectively.
- 183 Ibid., page 22.
- 184 Ke Lan 柯蓝. 《早霞短笛》. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1981. "Stopping at Night" 夜宿, p. 146, is a first-person poem from a soldier's perspective, and his series of poems "Youth Travel Brigade" 少年旅行队, p. 165-176 moves in and out of the first-person speech of young students on an extensive field trip. This set of poems is particularly important both because it was taken up by school curricula across the country and because it was an early and popular example of 组诗, a series of poems linked by a narrative or an occasion. The practice of 组诗, as we will see in later chapters, is extremely common after 1978.
- 185 It would have been inappropriate even for the Cultural Revolution period, after Ke Lan wrote *Short Flute*, when high-concept political speech was traded between regular people in the course of regular daily business: by contrast, those slogans were drawn from a set of pre-approved quotations, and were not personalized or unique, as in "Agreement." The difference is similar to that between an ultra-patriot of the United States ending a conversation with the phrase "In God we trust," and coming up to someone on the street and saying, "we have agreed that the United States is ultimately a deist nation, founded on belief in a transcendental power."
- 186 See Zhongguo Sanwenshi Xuehui (中国散文诗学会), eds. 《永远的柯蓝》. Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 2007, p. 4, 33-35. These are non-objective sources who were close to Ke, and should be taken with a certain amount of healthy skepticism, but it seems incontrovertible that he and his family suffered during the Cultural Revolution, as did many others.
- 187 Ke Lan 柯蓝. 《中国散文诗创作概论》. Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 2006, p. 19.
- 188 Zhongguo Sanwenshi Xuehui (中国散文诗学会), eds. 《永远的柯蓝》. Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 2007, p. 191.
- 189 Most recently, poems from *Short Flute* were reprinted as part of a volume of selections from Ke Lan's complete works. Ke Lan 柯蓝. 《柯蓝朗诵散文诗自选集》. Yangcheng: Yangcheng Wanbao Chubanshe, 2006.
- 190 Much more about Ke Lan is available in his six-volume complete works: 《柯蓝文集》. Wuhan: Hebei Renmin Chubanshe, 1996.
- 191 Celan, Paul. "The Meridian," *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, tr. John Felstiner. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001, p. 409.
- 192 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988, p. 12.
- 193 For instance, it is selected first among the original poems in the 《刘再复集》. Harbin: Heilongjiang Jiaoyu

- Chubanshe, 1998, and makes the title of Liu's volume of selected poetry, 《读沧海》. Xiamen: Fujian Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1999. Even Huang Yongjian, who thinks that Liu's works are too long to be discussed as prose poetry, writes that "Reading the Sea" is Liu's only good poem (Huang 161).
- 194 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988, 107-111. The "Crystal Palace" (水晶宫) was the palace of the Dragon King in the *Journey to the West*; also, the Chinese name of the building that housed the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, where the latest technology of the Industrial Revolution was put on display. It seems likely, but not certain, that the reference here is to the former and not the latter.
- 195 Huang 133. Wang Guangming names his chapter on Liu Zaifu "理想和激情的回归"; it is unclear, however, whether he means that these values were originally found in pre-Cultural Revolution times (which is likely, because the phrase is a kind of trope in many different literary histories written in and covering the early eighties), or in the Cultural Revolution itself (which is possible, as he is quite explicit that Liu Zaifu is more passionate and 激情 than Lu Xun). 王光明. 《散文诗的世界》. Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987, p. 184-195.
- 196 Huang Yibing. *Contemporary Chinese Literature: From the Cultural Revolution to the Future*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- 197 In order, I am referring to "I Can't Forget that Dark, Bleak Night" 《忘不了那个幽黑的夜晚》 (6) "I Won't Be That Stupid Again" 《我再也不会那么傻》 (7), "Dead Days" 《死的日子》 (47), and "In the Place of the Lost Lush Landscape" 《在失去青山绿水的地方》 (41), all from Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988.
- 198 Liu Zaifu 刘再复 and Li Zehou 李泽厚. 《告别革命》. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1996.
- 199 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. "Farewell" "告别" 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988, p. 3.
- 200 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《思想者十八题——海外访谈录》. Hong Kong: Ming Pao Chubanshe, 2007, p. 185.
- 201 The politics of the middle and late 1980s are far too complex to examine in detail here; suffice it to say that CASS and Liu Zaifu's political allies were mainly Communist Party members with a broadly defined interest in representative government and civil liberties. For a government-oriented narrative of the Deng years between Mao's death and Tiananmen, see Goldman, Merle. *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy in China: Political Reform in the Deng Xiaoping Era*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1994. For a study of the official structures and strictures that writers and other intellectuals faced in the period, see Link, Perry. *The Uses of Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, and his *Evening Chats in Beijing*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1993. For a study of CASS specifically, see Sleeboom-Faulkner, Margaret. *The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences: Shaping the Reforms, Academia, and China 1977-2003*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- 202 Ke Lan 柯蓝. 《早霞短笛》. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1981, pg 285. For Ke on Zhang Chunqiao, see chapter two.
- 203 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988, p. 7.
- 204 Ibid.
- 205 Zaifu.org, a nearly complete repository of information and works by Liu Zaifu, has a complete bibliography prepared by Ye Hongji 叶鸿基 and divided by generic category: it is reproduced, with permission, in its entirety in Appendix One.
- 206 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. "论文学的主体性". 《文学评论》, no 6, 1985, pgs 11-29 (first half) and no. 7, 1985, p. 3-19 (second half).
- 207 *Modern China*, Vol. 19, no. 1, January, 1993. A reaction to Liu's critical work also appears in Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p. 202-206.
- 208 Liu Kang 刘康. "Politics, Critical Paradigms: Reflections on Modern Chinese Literature Studies." *Modern China*, Vol. 19, no. 1, January, 1993, p. 32.
- 209 Ibid., p. 35.
- 210 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988, p. 285.
- 211 Ibid., p. 286.
- 212 Ibid., p. 180.
- 213 Ibid., p. 18.
- 214 For instance in Wang Guangming 王光明. 《散文诗的世界》. Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987, p. 180. Liu Jianmei talks about the way in which returning to this "childlike heart" makes up an important part of Liu Zaifu's life and work in her introduction to 《共悟人间》. Fuzhou: Fujian Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2010, p. 8-16.
- 215 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. "序言". 《告别》. Fujian Renmin Chubanshe, 1983. Reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 193.

- 216 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《鲁迅美学思想论稿》. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1981. In a 1998 introduction to his selected works, he called the book "flat" (平面) due to the limitations of an unspecified political situation. See Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《刘再复集》. Harbin: Heilongjiang Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1988, p. 4. Later, he would write a long essay criticizing the work as being unduly influenced by revolutionary Communism, Communist critic Qu Qiubai (瞿秋白) and his own idolization of Lu Xun: see "鲁迅研究自我批判", accessed at http://www.zaifu.org/z_views.asp?n_id=597&b_id=22.
- 217 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988, p. 128. Liu also wrote two short pieces on lawns, both after moving abroad: Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《漂流手记》. Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu Youxian Gongsì, 1991, p. 16, 113-114.
- 218 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988, p. 293.
- 219 Ibid., p. 198.
- 220 Ibid., The quote comes from page 425, and the discussion of the unmatchability of *Wild Grass* continues on p. 428, with the intervening pages basically devoted to distinguishing Hundred Flowers prose poets (which he calls the 散文诗队伍, the 'prose poetry team' and eventually identifies as Ke Lan and Guo Feng on p. 425) from the poets of the 1980s, including himself.
- 221 Liu only calls *Wild Grass* a prose work once, in Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《告别革命》. Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu Youxian Gongsì, 1996, p. 216, where he very oddly compares it to Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*. In the introduction to his prose poetry mentioned above, he categorizes *Wild Grass* as prose poetry much in the way other critics do. The second passage is reprinted in Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《思想者十八题》. Hong Kong: Ming Bao Chubanshe, 2007, p. 340.
- 222 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《漂流手记》. Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu Youxian Gongsì, 1991, p. 278-297.
- 223 Wang Guangming 王光明. 《散文诗的世界》. Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987, p. 193.
- 224 "Feel" is here inserted into the translation, even though there is rightly no separate verb other than "weary," as in "I weary," meaning "I grow weary," both of which were rejected because they insinuate that the fatigue is in process, and the Chinese is much more explicit. The original sentence means something like "I became and now am weary."
- 225 Qiu Shaoyun 邱少云. 紧跟毛主席的伟大战略部署 彻底埋葬反动的“多中心论” 《人民日报》, August 8, 1968.
- 226 Hugo, Victor. "Chanson," Toru Dutt, tr. *A Sheaf Gleaned from French Fields*. Bhowanipore: B. M. Bose, 1876, p. 112.
- 227 Ibid., p. 111.
- 228 For her legend in its original form, see the third *juan* of the 《山海经》, in the section entitled 《北次三》.
- 229 The terminology here is taken from Hong Weilei 洪威雷 and Mao Zhengtian 毛正天, 《应用文写作学新编》. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2005, p. 577-579. This work is intended as an example, rather than as an authority; little consensus exists as to how to structure an essay in the Chinese academy, and practices range widely between Western structures, these practices, and experimental or iconoclastic essay forms.
- 230 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988, p. 171-2, 158-9, 183-4, 185-197.
- 231 Ibid., p. 187.
- 232 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988, p. 229.
- 233 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《远游岁月》. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1994, p. 77-78. 《人性的弱点》(*The Weakness of Humanity*) is a title given to multiple versions of Dale Carnegie's works *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*. Qing Wen is an earthy but well-loved female servant in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.
- 234 From the introduction to 《沧桑有感》 accessed at http://www.zaifu.org/z_views.asp?n_id=560&b_id=21.
- 235 Liu Jianmei 刘剑梅, in Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《读沧海》. Fuzhou: Fujian Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2010, p. 2.
- 236 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《漂流手记》. Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu Youxian Gongsì, 1991, p. 160, 278-297.
- 237 An important exception is volume four, 1999's *Soliloquy on the Horizon: 1001 Nights of Disconnected Reflection* 《独语天涯: 1001 夜不连贯的思索》. It was the first work after 1989 that Liu was allowed to reprint from its original Hong Kong edition and market in mainland China. The book is a series of 1001 short prose pieces, most the size of a single paragraph: if it resembles any other writing, in form it is most strongly similar to works like poem #85 above. It is, however, called prose in Liu's bibliography; in a later essay on the book, he writes that *Soliloquy on the Horizon* contains "records of passing thoughts, reading notes, prose poems, epiphanies, etc." (随想录, 读书笔记, 散文诗, 悟语等), but in the introduction to *Soliloquy* itself,

- he repeatedly calls it prose. This ambivalence, both formal and categorical, is not something that happens with his pre-1989 prose poems; additionally, the title makes clear that what might have been considered complete prose poems before 1989 are now considered "disconnected," something special and separate from his newly standard "reflections." For the description of *Soliloquy*, see Liu Zaifu 刘再复. "一千零一不连贯的情思". 《漫步高原》. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 2000, p. 49. The mainland Chinese version is Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《独语天涯·1001 夜不连贯的思索》. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 2001.
- 238 Many of the poems of this length appear, like "If I Made a Hell," in his 1983 book *Farewell*, reprinted in the 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988, p. 3-53.
- 239 "The Great River, Endlessly Rushing" (大河, 永远的奔流) appears in Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988, p. 344-346.
- 240 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988, p. 344-346.
- 241 Ke Lan 柯蓝. 《早霞短笛》. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1981, p. 3.
- 242 There is an interesting parallel here with the work of Lu Xun, who began to write literary essays called *zawen* after he published *Wild Grass*: in his English introduction to a later edition of *Wild Grass*, reproduced in chapter two, he says: "Because it was hard to speak forthrightly during those times, the language was sometimes quite vague and obscure.... Later, I no longer wrote these kinds of works. The days of our age are changing, and this kind of writing is already unnecessary, even including the existence of these kinds of feelings. I think that this is probably for the best in the end." Wang Guangming 王光明. 《散文诗的世界》. Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987, p. 99. The insinuation is that once the difficulty in "speaking forthrightly" (直说) was removed, part of the reason for the form and content of *Wild Grass* was also removed, and Lu Xun could write the comparatively more direct *zawen* of his later career.
- 243 From the introduction to 《沧桑有感》 accessed at http://www.zaifu.org/z_views.asp?n_id=560&b_id=21. Notably, he also claims that narrative prose cannot draw near to fiction, because *sanwen* itself does not allow for the invention of stories, and must narrate true events.
- 244 From the introduction to 《沧桑有感》 accessed at http://www.zaifu.org/z_views.asp?n_id=560&b_id=21.
- 245 It is worth mentioning at this point that many writers and critics, myself included, consider the essay form to be just another genre that has no greater or lesser truth claim than poetry; it simply operates according to a different set of genre conventions, which can be misused, ironized, or exploited just as easily as poetry can. I would point out, though, that the very act of selecting a form, which all writers must do, is an act of faith that one form is somehow more appropriate, more palatable, more expressive, or more effective than another: even deconstructionists hardly ever write popular music.
- 246 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988, p. 2.
- 247 Liu Zaifu 刘再复, tr. Michael Day. "Farewell to the Gods," in *Chinese Literature in the Second Half of a Modern Century*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000, p. 3. For *Farewell*, see note 7. *Farewell to the Revolution* was written with Li Zehou 李泽厚. 《告别革命》. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1995.
- 248 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《漂流手记》. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1992, p. 29.
- 249 In terms of Western literary criticism, we can see Liu's process of rejecting recitation (saying farewell to dressing up) in *The Anxiety of Influence*, which claims that "strong poets" have "the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death." Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 5. We can see his rejection of the self in the writings of Deleuze, who conceptualizes the self as something that the pronomial I synthesizes in time, and which is one of many similar forms. Deleuze, Giles, tr. Daniel W. Smith. "The Greatest Irish Film (Beckett's 'Film')." *Essays Critical and Clinical*. London: Verso Books, 1998, p. 30.
- 250 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. "论文学的主体性". 《文学评论》, no 6, 1985, pgs 11-29 (first half) and no. 7, 1985, p. 3-19 (second half).
- 251 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《漫步高原》. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 2000, p. 169.
- 252 For Liu Bannong and his tricks, see chapter two.
- 253 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. "告别艺术革命". 《漫步高原》. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 2000, p. 169.
- 254 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. "贾代儒论诗不可作于‘发达’之前". 《漂流手记》. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1991, p. 248.
- 255 Liu Zaifu and Liu Jianmei, 刘再复和刘剑梅. 《共悟人间》. Fuzhou: Fujian Chubanshe, 2010, p. 256.
- 256 *People's Literature* published, for example, "Reading the Sea" in its 1984 no. 2 issue; the People's Literature Publishing House printed his collection of prose poetry called *Humanity * Kind Mother * Love* 《人间·慈母·爱》 in 1988.

- 257 A prime example of this kind of production is Feng Yi 冯艺, ed. 《中国散文诗大系》. Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, 1992. It is a massive eleven-volume anthology of prose poetry divided by province. Although it contains poets who published elsewhere, its geographical organization and the spotty quality of its works gives the sense of a production quota determined by political criteria, with sparsely populated Inner Mongolia represented to the same extent as Fujian and Guangdong, where prose poetry was far more popular and where larger numbers of famous prose poets lived.
- 258 Liang Xinrong 梁新荣 in Huang 10.
- 259 Xi Chuan, studied in chapter five, is the best example of this phenomenon.
- 260 Fortunately for all, many of Liu's works have been reissued on the mainland in fine, contemporary editions by the Fujian Educational Press 福建教育出版社.
- 261 Wang Guangming 王光明. 《散文诗的世界》. Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987, and Li Biaoqing 李标晶, 《二十世纪中国散文诗论》. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2004. One instance of precise plagiarism appears on Wang p. 185 and Li 259 (the section that begins with the passage from 《我突然想起来》 and ends with "人格的力量"), but the two pieces have stronger affinities: first, that Li's historical account only includes books published before 1987, and does not include anything Liu published on the mainland between 1987 and 2004 (which includes the *Collected Prose Poetry* that makes up the main text for my study above). Second, Wang's particular interest in Liu's poems about historical figures (like the Einstein poem) instead of "Reading the Sea", which is Liu's most famous poem today, is described as a fundamental quality of the author on Li 260. Like Wang, Li considers these poems "history poems" and not funereal, commemorative, or political poems, but unlike Wang, Li takes Liu as a poet whose work "comes from his reading of history." Finally, Li Biaoqing repeatedly uses concepts related to "fervor" 激情 in describing Liu, which likely stems from the title of Wang's piece, "A Return of the Rational and the Fervent" 理性和激情的回归. I am under the opinion that this plagiarism was, in part, lazy, but in part self-protective, as it is safer to repeat what is already on the record than it is to strike out towards new interpretations. Huang Yongjian only briefly mentions Liu (Huang 161) with regards to brevity; other histories leave him out, like Zhang Yanjia 张彦加 《散文诗新论》. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2002.
- 262 As in, for example, Plato's *Ion*, the writings of European Romantics, or the ancient Chinese story that the Trigrams of the *Book of Changes* came directly from the Yellow River, perhaps carried in the clutches of a dragon. One version of this story appears in the *Wenxin Diaolong* 文心雕龙 by Liu Xie 刘勰.
- 263 《星星诗刊》, 2004, no. 8, p. 48. The English is relineated to give the sense of the Chinese: the margins in the Chinese quotation are identical to the original.
- 264 The phrase "semi-official" gets to one of the great difficulties in describing or researching Chinese poetry journals. *Stars* was founded in 1957, and it is certainly impossible for a magazine to survive in China during the whole of the last fifty years without being, essentially, a government publication: at the very least, this kind of longevity indicates careful cooperation with CCP ideological and content control, and that cooperation is visible in the magazine. This does, however, overlook the likelihood that *Stars* funds itself in large part through its circulation, and is therefore financially independent, at least to some degree, from the government. All of the little magazines in this section, prose poetry magazines definitely included, are 'semi-official' (and the ensuing discussion will sometimes simply call these magazines 'official,' meaning legally sanctioned by the CCP): they survive through some combination of access to government resources and circulation, and must therefore remain politically orthodox to a greater degree than comparable Western magazines. Unfortunately, they all have strong incentive to claim that they support themselves through the service of their readers, and hard numbers are difficult to come by. In general, this chapter is *not* talking about avant-garde work and *not* talking about opposition to orthodoxy, but different, lightly controlled parts of orthodoxy. For the identities and oppositions that exist between contemporary prose poetry and the avant-garde, see chapter five.
- 265 See, for example, 2009 no. 11, p. 11. One long poem is divided into two columns, and then a new author is introduced by a large, vertically printed title, a single-columned short poem, and then a second poem and title which continues on page 12. Following which part of which poem continues in which place is a bit difficult, but taken as a whole, the page looks diverse and balanced without wasting too much space.
- 266 Ke Lan 柯蓝. "散文诗杂感", in Wang Fuming 王福明, ed. 《中国散文诗 90 年》 Zhengzhou: Henan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2008, p. 1221. See chapter two.
- 267 Consider the difference between a novel printed in one single block of text per page, and textbooks which are divided into two columns: this is an editorial decision. American readers might also think of the difference between the look and feel of the New York Times, which has standard newspaper margins, and the extra-thin

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- columns of the Wall Street Journal.
- 268 《散文诗》, 上半月, 2009, no. 7, p. 34-35.
- 269 The first was described by Zou Yuehan 邹岳汉 in an interview about *Prose Poetry* magazine in the 1990s: "Famous Authors" appears in 《散文诗世界》, 2010, no. 1, (and is a common section in that magazine). "Hall of Characters" appears in the same issue of *Prose Poetry* that contains the page reproduced above, 2009 上半月 no. 7, and "Sky Over the City" appears in 2008 上半月 no. 4. The *Prose Poetry Newspaper* in the 1980s was also quite energetic in categorizing its work, separating prose poetry into groups such as "Reportage Form" (报告体散文诗), "Satirical Fable Form" (寓言讽刺体散文诗), and "Narrative Form" (叙事体散文诗). These categories are no longer current, but as a sign of the impact that editorial divisions of this nature can have, these types of categories, including the above examples, make up a significant part of the way that Huang Yongjian typifies 1980s poetry in Huang 175-6.
- 270 Criticism and advertisements appear, generally, after the poetry, in the back. *Prose Poetry Newspaper* was slightly different: like many newspapers, it generally placed its more eye-catching topics and poetry above the fold, having to do for example with youth sports (1987 #10), parties (1987 #6), or beer (1987 #11). This literary newspaper, though, is more or less a *sui generis* publication, and will be treated separately.
- 271 This egalitarian ethic in the selection of prose poems is represented by the aforementioned anthology Feng Yi 冯艺, ed. 《中国散文诗大系》. Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, 1992. Its twelve volumes are divided by province. Contemporary magazines often list the hometowns of the poets they publish, and those from border areas like Qinghai, Tibet, Xinjiang and Mongolia are featured in special sections. The older *Prose Poetry Newspaper* is even more explicit about seeking out laborers and agricultural workers as poets, featuring a set of poems on the front page of 1987 #6 that is introduced as being poetry "coming from the rural social class...out of the pen of a young wife in the countryside." (来自农村底层...它出自一位农村年轻妇女的手笔.)
- 272 Managing editor Chen Xuming 陈旭明 estimated in an interview with me in 2010 that *Prose Poetry* magazine accepts about 1% of its submissions, which would put the number of submissions in the thousands.
- 273 Jia Shijun 贾士君, 《散文诗世界》, 2010 no. 1, p. 77-80.
- 274 In the United States, for example, the *Mid-American Review* holds a yearly set of readings and discussions, including publication advice, called "Winter Wheat"; the *Comstock Review* offers a consultation service for unsuccessful poets, wherein they can have their work carefully examined by an experienced editor. They also offer, free of charge, the "Guide to Submitting, Publishing, and Living Poetry" on their website at <http://www.comstockreview.org/handbook/index.html>.
- 275 Monroe, Harriet. "The Poet's Bread and Butter," *Poetry* 4 (1914):197-98, as cited in Newcomb, John Timberman. "Poetry's Opening Door: Harriet Monroe and American Modernism." *American Periodicals*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2005, p. 6-22.
- 276 They participated, moreover, in the *Prose Poetry Newspaper* at all levels: advertisements for businesses in Zou Yuehan's hometown of Yiyang, Hunan appear in the 1987, #6 issue of the *Newspaper*. Although he has retired as editor of *Prose Poetry*, replaced by Feng Mingde 冯明德, Zou had a long essay on the history of prose poetry featured in the 2006, #1 issue of *World of Prose Poetry*, p. 60-74. This is notable because *Prose Poetry* and *World of Prose Poetry* are market rivals: *World of Prose Poetry* bills itself as "China's only full-sized, purely literary magazine specializing in prose poetry." (全国唯一一本专登散文诗的大型纯文学刊物), an obvious jab at *Prose Poetry* magazine, which also fits all those categories, but has considerably smaller pages.
- 277 The 1987 #6 issue that contains the correspondence course announcement devotes two of its four pages to poems from the educational system of Haining 海宁 City in Zhejiang: the introduction explains that every middle school in the city had instructed its students to practice prose poetry, and that their students had purchased more than 10,000 issues of the newspaper. In the same issue, Ke Lan and his staff also advertised an incentives program for group subscribers that gave group subscribers that ordered over 50 copies a set of free trips to Zhuhai. The appeal to teachers — Zhuhai was and is a popular vacation spot — must have been immense. A similar two-pronged sales pitch to teachers and students continues today in *Prose Poetry* magazine, as will be discussed below.
- 278 Huang 95, also Wang Guangming 王光明. 《散文诗的世界》. Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987, p. 180.
- 279 McDougall, Bonnie S., tr. *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": a Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, 1980, p. 71.
- 280 Feng Mingde 冯明德. 《国歌》. Changsha: Hunan Shifan Daxue, 2009. Although the book's promotional

- materials are rarely explicit about its marketing, the fact that it is directed towards students is fairly clear, as its associated audiovisual materials are published by the Hunan Educational Audiovisual Materials Press (湖南教育音像出版社), also in Changsha.
- 281 For example, the poem "Hu Jintao Smiles Over Tiananmen," in *World of Prose Poetry*, 2010 #2, which is a fairly classic political encomium, or the 2009 #11 issue of *Prose Poetry*, in which every author writes a definition of or reflection on prose poetry (or occasionally, just poetry in general) before the start of their poems.
- 282 These cover texts are all the standard 2010 cover templates, and appear every month. The *World of Prose Poetry* cover text has been used since the magazine's start in 2006; *Prose Poetry* magazine's cover text has appeared since at least 2008.
- 283 耿林莽. "垓语". 《散文诗世界》, 2006 no. 1, p. 51-52. Pangu 盘古 in section two is a mythical giant: the hair, sweat, and fleas from his corpse supplied all creation. Section two and section three recount some of the events of the opera *Story of the Black Pot*, in which a murder victim haunts a black pot possessed by his murderer. Like Pangu, whose sweat makes mud from which humans are formed, it is revealed that the blood of the murder victim in *Story of the Black Pot* ended up in the mud with which the murderer cast the pot. The victim gains the ability to speak through the pot after death, an image that those of us reading this poem can extend to the clay ocarina as well. The story of *Farewell My Concubine* records a battle in 202 BCE between the Chu army led by Xiang Yu 项羽 and the Han army of Liu Bang 刘邦. Liu Bang instructs his soldiers to play tunes from the state of Chu: Xiang Yu's army assumes that their homeland has been captured and, despondent, they surrender in large numbers. Xiang Yu's favorite concubine, worried that she will slow his escape, commits suicide after one final sword dance, which features prominently in the opera. The *Shu Li* is a song from the *Classic of Poetry* purported to describe — and cause — homesickness.
- 284 《散文诗世界》, 2006 no. 1, p. 11-12, 20, 35 (the poem is the Han *yuefu* 乐府 called "Shang Ye" 上邪), 53
- 285 On *yongwu*, see Rouzer, Paul F. "Watching the Voyeurs: Palace Poetry and the Yuefu of Wen Tingyun." *Chinese Literature: Essays Articles Reviews* no. 11, Dec. 1989, p. 13-31. Interestingly, *yongwu* were often associated with the pleasures of the palace, and were sometimes written about women or in the voices of women, which reinforces the poem's selection for the "World of Women" section in the magazine, and the editors' attitudes towards the poem.
- 286 This could be one of the attractions of period dramas on Chinese television, as well; without the programs containing any ideologically or conceptually challenging content, parents and students alike feel that there is something useful about easy familiarity with the plot of *Journey to the West* or the intrigues of the imperial Qing court: it is entertainment, but at the same time, an education in a long-standing, common language.
- 287 Norman, Jerry. *Chinese*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 188.
- 288 It is meaningful here to point out that the staff of *Prose Poetry* magazine is made up largely of dialect-speakers who can understand but not pronounce modern standard Chinese, with the exception of editor-in-chief Feng Mingde, who has traveled to Beijing and other big cities, and the managing editor of the campus edition, who was a primary schoolteacher before coming to work at *Prose Poetry*. Although none of them has a four year post-secondary education, they read widely in foreign and domestic literature: in conversation on these books, though, the language of discussion is always Yiyang dialect. *World of Prose Poetry*, located in far more cosmopolitan Chengdu, is much closer to using modern standard Chinese as its lingua franca, although some editors and staffmembers do have strong Sichuan accents.
- 289 《散文诗》, 上半月, 2008, no. 4, p. 80. This kind of project, which emphasizes Yiyang's role as an originary location in the ancient tea trade, is very similar to the intentional publicization of the skills of Huizhou merchants by Anhui provincial government: see Oakes, Tim. "China's Provincial Identities: Reviving Regionalism and Reinventing 'Chineseness'". *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 59, no. 3, August 2000, p. 678. In both cases, the contemporary government sees trade as the best way to enrich the province, and therefore attempts to create or popularize narratives about ancient trade in the region.
- 290 See Feng Chongyi. "Seeking Lost Codes in the Wilderness: the Search for Hainanese Culture," *China Quarterly*, no. 160, December 1999, p. 1045-6, 1048. Feng's article is largely about inter-group competition, the effects of modernization, and the impact of central planning on culture, but when he turns to the contributions of scholars and other intellectuals, he describes them as supporting regional identity through Hainanese history.
- 291 In Oakes' idiom, regionalist and localist cultural texts "serve to both repudiate the spatially homogenizing project of state socialism and recover ancient cultural continuities that are regionally distinct and place-

- specific. In this regard, they seek to convey a message about the 'spirit' of Chineseness as distinct from the West, a spirit that is equally distant from China's own revolutionary Marxist heritage." Oakes, Tim. "China's Provincial Identities: Reviving Regionalism and Reinventing 'Chineseness'". *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 59, no. 3, August 2000, p. 674.
- 292 Consider the popularity of Bashu culture, 巴蜀文化, in modern-day Chengdu (Ba and Shu were two kingdoms in the region before Qin unification; the regional power after the collapse of the Han was also called Shu), or even the way in which ancient state names persist in contemporary times: Yanjing (燕京) for Beijing, or the many historically determined license plate abbreviations like 皖 (Wan, the name of an ancient state) for Anhui.
- 293 By "social capital," I mean something akin to what Pierre Bourdieu calls "symbolic capital": publicity and prestige. See, for example, Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Oxford: Polity Press, 1993. I prefer not to use Bourdieu's terminology here, however, because in his conception, symbolic capital is a power source contrasted to economic capital. Where economic capital can be earned through exchange, symbolic capital is more often produced by position-taking, i.e. by an author or publisher who forgoes commercial success for some higher calling. In the case of Chinese prose poetry, as we shall see, my perception is that there exists a more settled rate of exchange between prestige and economic capital — that you really can pay cash for a certain kind of prestige in Chinese prose poetry magazines.
- 294 《散文诗世界》, 2010 no. 1, p. 1-2. The translation of the business' title is from their website, <http://www.edri.net.cn/>. The poem refers to the company by its English acronym.
- 295 This particular poem was not part of my interviews with Hai Meng, editor of *World of Prose Poetry*, although he and Feng Mingde of *Prose Poetry* magazine both described the necessity of printing poems by officials and donors. My identification of this particular poem as being motivated by non-aesthetic qualities is my personal conclusion upon reading the piece. This kind of corporate paean is not limited to *World of Prose Poetry*: the *Prose Poetry Newspaper* published these kinds of pieces with particular frequency, perhaps due to Zhuhai's status as an early Special Economic Development Zone. The 1987 #6 issue has a series called "Remembering the Jinli Interior Lighting Company," and 1987 #11 starts with a large set of poems on the Qiangli Beer Factory. The socialist worksongs of the 1950s became the promise of economic reform in 1980, and today are simply advertisements.
- 296 During my trip to Yiyang, the extremely gracious staff of *Prose Poetry* made a special point of introducing the city of Yiyang to me — teahouses that specialize in the sale of local black tea, the city museum, the homes of local literary figures — and also of introducing me to the city, through a television interview and an appearance at a school, both of which ran in local-only media.
- 297 Zou Yuehan 邹岳汉. 《青春树下》. Changsha: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1997, p. 158.
- 298 Ibid., p. 6.
- 299 Ibid., p. 100.
- 300 Much of the above is taken from an interview that appears in the back of the 2006 anthology, with biographical details added by Zou in an interview. See Zou Yuehan 邹岳汉, ed. 《2006 中国年度散文诗》 Lijiang: Lijiang Chubanshe, 2006, p. 381-385.
- 301 Zou Yuehan 邹岳汉. 《青春树下》. Changsha: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1997, p. 21.
- 302 Ibid., p. 74.
- 303 Ibid., p. 23.
- 304 This is, of course, in terms of the translation: in the original Chinese, we can see 显得 all over the commentary, and we might say that while the poem emphasizes 动, the way that the scene moves the listener, the commentary emphasizes 听, the way the listener encounters the scene.
- 305 Ke Lan 柯蓝. 《早霞短笛》. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1981, p. 163-176. Note that this series was originally published in book form in 1958.
- 306 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《刘再复散文诗合集》. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1988, 107-111. See chapter 3.
- 307 Xi Chuan 西川. 《深浅》. Beijing: Zhongguo Heping Chubanshe, 2006, p. 22-33.
- 308 Santilli, Nikki. *Such Rare Citings: the Prose Poem in English Literature*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002, p. 20. The Chinese prose poem, as we have seen, is considerably more flexible about internalizing past literary moods as well as current ones.
- 309 See Spence, Jonathan. *The Search for Modern China*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1991, p. 581-583.
- 310 Specifically, his poem "Advice," which ended with the line "My beloved friends, let your eyes look ever forward!" See chapter two.
- 311 The Chinese romantic tradition started before 1900, as outlined in Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation*

- of *Modern Chinese Writers*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1973. When literary activity resumed in the late 1970s, so did romantic ideologies of art: Maghiel van Crevel sees the aesthetics of the early 1980s as a direct descendent of "Revolutionary Romanticism" in *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 4.
- 312 Zou Yuehan 邹岳汉. 《青春树下》. Changsha: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1997, p. 97.
- 313 Anderson, Marston. *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, p. 202.
- 314 The "we" that Zou builds is made up, though, of individual subjectivities: in his poem "Sunset Glow over an Ocean of Trees," the commentary claims that the poem's central image "symbolizes the eternity of the spirit of human subjectivity" (象征着人类主体精神之永存). 《青春树下》. Changsha: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1997, p. 134.
- 315 Liu Zaifu 刘再复. 《漂流手记》. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1992, p. 29.
- 316 *World of Prose Poetry* editor Hai Meng (海梦) told me in an interview that his magazine, which takes pains to be palatable to the CCP, was forced to individually purchase book numbers (书号) each issue for several years, an arrangement that could be canceled at any time and which put every individual issue under scrutiny. It was only a few years ago that they were given the more stable, and more desirable magazine number (刊号) that allows for continuous publication, costs less money and requires less oversight of individual issues.
- 317 Anecdotaly, in 2010, I could not find *Prose Poetry* or *World of Prose Poetry* newsstands in Beijing, Shanghai or Shenzhen; however, on a train through southern Hunan, not far from Yiyang city where *Prose Poetry* is published, a stranger asked to borrow the copy I was reading when I was finished with it because "she had liked it when she was in school."
- 318 For the victory of avant-garde and unofficial poetry over official poetry, see the work of Maghiel van Crevel, including *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 65, discussed in more detail in chapter five. Although he is quite clear on the shades of gray that exist between official and unofficial art, he is unequivocal about the fact that the official poetry of the 1990s and beyond is considerably less relevant than avant-garde work.
- 319 Huang Yongjian does mention avant-garde poet Xi Chuan in passing, but in a way that distinguishes his "long poems" 长诗 from prose poetry. Other Mainland critics tend to overlook him entirely. See Huang 127.
- 320 Ouyang Jianghe 欧阳江河 in Ping Xi 溪萍, ed. 《第三代诗人探索诗选》. Beijing: Zhongguo Wenlian Chubangongsi, 1988, p. 55. Translations of the beginning and end of this long poem, including the above, also appear in Day, Michael. *China's Second World of Poetry: the Sichuan Avant-Garde*. Leiden: DACHS, 2005, p. 137, 209-210.
- 321 See chapter three.
- 322 See chapter one.
- 323 The Ping Xi anthology listed above reproduces only parts one and three of "Hanging Coffin"; they were originally published in *Han Poetry* 《汉诗》, an unofficial, avant-garde Sichuan magazine. For more on the magazine and its contents, see Day, Michael. *China's Second World of Poetry: The Sichuan Avant-Garde, 1982-1992*. Leiden: Digital Archive for Chinese Studies, 1992, Chapter 9. Part two was originally published in the official journal *China Literary Monthly* 《中国文学月刊》. Beijing: Wenhua Yishu Chubanshe, no. 10, 1986.
- 324 For more on *xungen* history and practice, see Leenhouts, Mark. *Leaving the World to Enter the World. Han Shaogong and Chinese Root-Seeking Literature*. Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2005. The first use of the phrase "Root-Seeking Literature" was in a Han Shaogong article in *Writer* magazine: 《作家》. Changchun: Zuoja Zazhishe, 1985, no. 4, p. 2-5.
- 325 For third-party introductions to New Traditionalism and lists of its key works and publications, see Hong Zicheng 洪子诚, tr. Michael Day. *History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*. Leiden: Brill, 1999, p. 354. See also Day, Michael. *China's Second World of Poetry: the Sichuan Avant-Garde*. Leiden: DACHS, 2005, p. 200. The majority of these accounts, however, are taken from the self-description reprinted in Xu Jingya's volume below.
- 326 Xu Jingya 徐敬亚, ed. 《中国现代主义诗群大观》. Shanghai: Tongji Daxue Chubanshe, 1988, p. 144-145.
- 327 Hanging coffins appeared in many regions in Southeast Asia, but their study is largely limited to national accounts. For more, see Chen Mingfang 陳明芳, ed. 《中国悬棺葬》. Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe, 1992. Video images of Sichuanese coffins like those Ouyang refers to are available in the documentary *Mysterious Hanging Coffins of China*. Toby Macdonald, dir. Bang Productions, CERS, Discovery HD and

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- NHK, 2003. Even these tentative theses about the lives and acts of the coffin-builders, however, were unavailable when Ouyang Jianghe wrote "Hanging Coffin."
- 328 "Hanging Coffin," section one. The roc is a reference to the mythical bird that is described in the opening of the *Zhuangzi*: it flies outside the sky, impossibly high, and when it looks down towards the earth, it sees only blue, the inverse of what humanity sees when it looks upwards.
- 329 The two poems that "Hanging Coffin" most specifically references here are "Summoning the Soul" 招魂 and the "Greater Summoning" 大招. For translations and a discussion of the poems, see Hawkes, David, tr. *The Songs of the South*. New York: Penguin Books, 1985, p. 219-238.
- 330 Starting in the Han, it was common to call Confucius the "plain King" 素王, and to point out the fact that his exceptional virtue was not rewarded during his lifetime with an official position.
- 331 "Hanging Coffin," section three.
- 332 "Hanging Coffin," section two. Interestingly, one element has been replaced, here — metal (金). Burial by metal has been replaced by "sky burial," which insinuates a relationship between metal and 天, sky or heaven, which is the commanding character of the first section, and which represents the unknowable, powerful contemporary order. Alternatively, this substitution could have taken place because there is no traditional method of burying a person in metal. Much of "Hanging Coffin" encourages, but rarely guides, this kind of speculation.
- 333 "Hanging Coffin," section two.
- 334 This is visible, for example, in the fourth installment of the acclaimed television series *Deathsong of the River* (河殇). Although the episode ends with a call to "press forward," the historiography outlined in the body of the episode is a litany of challenges and mistakes: failure to industrialize, insistence on population economics/Great Leap Forward excesses, and now the challenge of "reforming the system of ownership." See Su Xiaokang 苏晓康 and Wang Luxiang 王鲁湘, *Deathsong of the River*, Richard W. Bodman and Pin P Wan, tr. Cornell: Cornell East Asia Series, 1991 p. 159-182, 177.
- 335 "Hanging Coffin," section two.
- 336 Strangely, although Perse was an envoy to Peking for the French and lived there for an extended period, the imagery of *Anabasis* is clearly that of the Orientalist East, which is to say the present-day Middle East. It refers to palm trees, the Seleucid Empire, and other regionally specific objects and concepts, but omits mention of China, Chinese language, or Chinese culture. See Perse, Saint-John. *Anabasis*, tr. T. S. Eliot. London: Faber and Faber, 1985, p. 61, 51, *et passim*.
- 337 From an unpublished, recorded interview with Austin Woerner, in my translation and paraphrase. The version of *Anabasis* that Ouyang Jianghe read was probably a 1981 reprint of the collected works of Nobel winners. 《诺贝尔文学奖全集》, volume 36 (1959-60). Taipei: Yuanjing Chuban Shiye Gongsi, 1981. The translations of Perse in that volume were by Mo Yu 莫渝, Ye Weilian 叶维廉, and Dai Qinzhi 戴钦之. What is fascinating about this is that the original French poem, *Anabase*, is less complex and archaic in terms of diction than T. S. Eliot's translation: compare the poem's second sentence, "Les armes au matin sont belles et la mer," slightly ungrammatical but simple, with Eliot's grammatical, archaic translation: "Beautiful are bright weapons in the morning and behind us the sea is fair." Perse, Saint-John, tr. T. S. Eliot. *Anabasis*. London: Faber and Faber, 1985, p. 22-23. Assuming a similar move towards archaism in the Taiwanese translation, this would mean that what inspired Ouyang was in part, an artifact of the poem's translation, rather than the original.
- 338 For the narrative structure of *Anabasis*, see the explanatory note by Lucien Fabre in *ibid.*, p. 89.
- 339 "Norlang" 《诺日朗》 was originally published in *Shanghai Literature* 《上海文学》, no. 5, 1983, p. 54-57. The translation that will appear here will be from *Renditions* no. 23, Spring 1985, p. 153-161. For the journey to Jiuzhaigou, see Day, Michael. *China's Second World of Poetry: The Sichuan Avant-Garde, 1982-1992*. Leiden: Digital Archive for Chinese Studies, 1992, p. 139. Ouyang Jianghe talks about the influence of "Norlang" on "Hanging Coffin" in the *Beijing News* 《新京报》, February 23, 2006, accessed at news.sohu.com/20060223/n241974818.shtml.
- 340 Yang Lian 杨炼. "Concerning "Norlang,"" tr. Alisa Joyce and John Minford. *Renditions* no. 23, Spring 1985, p. 162-163.
- 341 "Hanging Coffin," section three.
- 342 Yang Lian 杨炼, tr. Alisa Joyce and John Minford. "Norlang" 《诺日朗》. *Renditions* no. 23, Spring 1985, p. 156. It seems notable that whereas "Hanging Coffin" physically resembles Perse's work and other prose poetry, Yang Lian's "Norlang" shares much more with Eliot's "The Waste Land" with regards to its shape, pacing, as well as in the way it assembles many different poetic forms and occasions into a kind of collage.

- 343 In section three. This is a quality that many primitivist and prehistorically-minded artworks share, including *Anabasis*. "Norlang" is, however, particularly extreme in its male-centeredness: the implicit imagery of mankind mastering the land and making it fertile that undergirds many narratives of progress from the 19th and early 20th centuries is here made completely explicit, and explicitly celebrated.
- 344 Yang Lian 杨炼, tr. Alisa Joyce and John Minford. "Norlang" 《诺日朗》. *Renditions* no. 23, Spring 1985, p.157, 158, 158 respectively.
- 345 Perse, Saint-John, tr. T. S. Eliot. *Anabasis*. London: Faber and Faber, 1985, p. 23.
- 346 See chapter three, particularly the moments of romantic lyric address: "You, great double-structured life..."
- 347 "Hanging Coffin," section three.
- 348 All from "Hanging Coffin," section one. In his interview with Austin Woerner, Ouyang describes the poem as "encyclopedic."
- 349 *Beijing News* 《新京报》, February 23, 2006, accessed at news.sohu.com/20060223/n241974818.shtml.
- 350 See chapter two.
- 351 Ouyang does not speak of "Hanging Coffin" in terms of prose poetry in his interview with Austin Woerner, or in the *Beijing News* interview above; additionally, it is in my experience never anthologized in prose poetry anthologies like those of Wang Fuming, Luo Kuang, Sun Yushi, Ke Lan, or others.
- 352 Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993, p. 70.
- 353 Ibid., p. 71.
- 354 Ibid., p. 86.
- 355 Both from "Hanging Coffin," section one.
- 356 Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993, p. 71.
- 357 Ouyang does not appear, for example, in Huang, and no mentions of his name in Chinese periodical databases come from *Prose Poetry* magazine or *World of Prose Poetry*.
- 358 For more on the debate between He Huai and Guo Feng's poetry, see chapter 2.
- 359 Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993, p. 102.
- 360 It is worthwhile to point out, however, that in addition to recitation, "Hanging Coffin" emphasizes citation, as well: he is not simply speaking with the language of the *Songs of the South*, he is speaking *about* them as well, pointing out of his own poem towards the past rather than exclusively re-performing the past in the present.
- 361 Upon hearing that the genre was the topic of my research, Ouyang Jianghe called the piece a "prose poem" 散文诗 to me personally after a poetry reading at Shenzhen University on November 30, 2009.
- 362 See, for example, Niu Dianqing 牛殿庆. "心灵的归宿——解读北岛的长诗《白日梦》." 《作家》, 2010, no. 4, p. 7-9. Professor Niu calls Bei Dao's poem a "long poem" several times, even saying once that the piece is "Bei Dao's only long poem" (different from saying that it is his "longest poem"), but no references to other poems in the tradition, or descriptions of the *changshi* as a genre appear.
- 363 As just one of many examples, the Qing scholar Shen Deqian 沈德潜 wrote that the Eastern Han narrative poem "The Peacock Flies Southeast" was China's first long poem. See Shen Deqian, 《古诗源》, fourth *juan*.
- 364 Tang Xiaodu 唐晓渡. "编选者序：从死亡的方向看" in Xie Mian 谢冕 and Tang Xiaodu, eds. 《与死亡对称》. Beijing: Beijing Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 1993, p. 1.
- 365 "Hanging Coffin" does not appear in the Tang and Mian-edited anthology, but another poem by Ouyang Jianghe does, a poetic series called "The Last Illusion" 最后的幻象. Ibid., p. 146-157.
- 366 Ouyang Jianghe 欧阳江河. "对抗与对称：中国当代实验诗歌". In Xie Mian 谢冕, ed. 《磁场与魔方》. Beijing: Beijing Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 1993, p. 259.
- 367 Ibid., p. 268.
- 368 Tang Xiaodu 唐晓渡. "编选者序：从死亡的方向看" in Xie Mian 谢冕 and Tang Xiaodu, eds. 《与死亡对称》. Beijing: Beijing Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 1993, p. 11.
- 369 "Hanging Coffin" refers to Pangu, the mythical, world-creating giant whose corpse furnished the material of nature and life, late in section three.
- 370 See chapter two.
- 371 Xie Mian 谢冕. "岁月中那些花瓣——谭仲池长诗《东方的太阳》读感." 《文学界(原创版)》, 2011, no. 7, np.
- 372 For a brief note on this, see Hong Zicheng 洪子诚, tr. Michael Day. *History of Contemporary Chinese*

- Literature*. Leiden: Brill, 1999, p. 157.
- 373 Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993, p. 70.
- 374 Haizi 海子. 《诗学：一份提纲》，in Xie Mian 谢冕 and Tang Xiaodu 唐晓渡, eds. 《磁场与魔方：新潮诗论卷》. Beijing: Beijing Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 1993, p. 186.
- 375 Specifically, this is the list of authors that Wang Guangming points to, along with Lu Xun, as the most important poets in the form. Wang Guangming 王光明. 《散文诗的世界》. Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987, p. 4.
- 376 Ouyang Jianghe compares "The Waste Land" to Chinese long poems in “对抗与对称：中国当代实验诗歌”. In Xie Mian 谢冕, ed. 《磁场与魔方》 Beijing: Beijing Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 1993, p. 259. For Yu Jian and Xi Chuan, see below.
- 377 van Crevel, Maghiel. *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 224, 198-9. In Xi Chuan's case, van Crevel says that "although he did once call it a long poem (长诗)--there are good reasons for calling it a prose poem..."
- 378 As van Crevel points out in *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- 379 Yu Jian 于坚, tr. Maghiel van Crevel. "File 0." *Renditions* #56, 2001, p. 24-57.
- 380 van Crevel, Maghiel. *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 244, 245.
- 381 *Ibid.*, p. 239.
- 382 *Ibid.*, p. 239.
- 383 *Ibid.*, p. 245.
- 384 See chapter four.
- 385 Van Crevel rightly points out the level of rhyme, parallelism, sonic play, and other audible patterns in Xi Chuan's work: these certainly make up part of the rationale for calling these pieces poems, but do not conclusively identify whether they are verse or prose (because of the lyric potential in prose).
- 386 Their difference in sound is particularly clear during the long lists of "File 0," like this one from the section "History of Growing Up": "**appraisal**: respects teachers cares for classmates opposes individualism never comes late / observes the rules delights in hard work..." (鉴定：尊敬老师 关心同学 反对个人主义 不迟到 遵守纪律 热爱劳动....) This goes on for four more lines, and the whole section is shot through with this kind of bureaucratese, clearly distinguishing it from the "prose with poetic language" that is a common shorthand categorization of prose poetry. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
- 387 Xi Chuan, tr. Maghiel van Crevel. "Salute." *Renditions*, Spring 1999, p. 93.
- 388 *Ibid.*, p. 93. One rendition of the phrase from the *Classic of Poetry* I have in mind here might be "An ode is a telling, it is to teach."
- 389 Xi Chuan 西川. "答谭克修问." 《深浅：西川诗文集》. Beijing: Zhongguo Heping Chubanshe, 2006, p. 298.
- 390 *Ibid.*, p. 97.
- 391 Adapted from van Crevel's translation in Yu Jian 于坚, tr. Maghiel van Crevel. "File 0." *Renditions* #56, 2001, p. 24-57. I choose to avoid van Crevel's translation of 动词 and 名词 as "words-that-move" and "words-that-name," as my point here is about the centrality of language in the piece, rather than the particular nature of that language.
- 392 Xi Chuan 西川, tr. Lucas Klein. *A Song of the Corner*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011, p. 27.
- 393 For the whole series, see Xi Chuan 西川. 《深浅：西川诗文集》. Beijing: Zhongguo Heping Chubanshe, 2006, p. 122-127.
- 394 Barmé, Geremie. "Wang Shuo and *Liumang* ('Hooligan') Culture." *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 28, Summer 1992, p. 29. Barmé's article generally is a good introduction to the shape of the conversation about *liumang* culture and the use of "hooligan" variously as an epithet, a cultural critique and a proud self-identification.
- 395 At the "Critical Conversation with Xi Chuan" with Christopher Lupke, at the Modern Language Association Seattle meeting, January 6, 2012.
- 396 Zhou Zuoren 周作人. "两个鬼的文章." 《周作人早期散文选》. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1994, p. 98-9.
- 397 In fact, at the public conversation in Seattle, Xi Chuan mentioned the actual small town where he had encountered these hooligans, verifying the poem as more or less a first-person account.
- 398 Xi Chuan 西川. 《深浅：西川诗文集》. Beijing: Zhongguo Heping Chubanshe, 2006, p. 298.

- 399 From an interview of Xi Chuan by Pu Su 朴素 for Tianya.com, accessed at <http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/poem/1/125445.shtml>.
- 400 For opposition to "new poetry," see the interview "Intellectuals are Part of the People" 《知识分子是“民间”的一部分》, posted on 3/27/2006 to the online version of the Economic Observer 经济观察网, accessed at <http://www.eeo.com.cn/2006/0327/36586.shtml>. For praise of *Wild Grass*, see Xi Chuan 西川. 《深浅: 西川诗文集》. Beijing: Zhongguo Heping Chubanshe, 2006, p. 221, 267, and page 303, where Xi Chuan reveals that *Wild Grass* was an early model, the "road" he most respected before he came to reject the idea of sharing a poetics with any other author.
- 401 It is difficult to prove a negative for such a prolific author, but one or more mentions might be expected, especially of Liu Zaifu, who presented Xi Chuan with an award at the tenth anniversary of the "Cultural China" 文化中国 prize. Additionally, although Xi Chuan's voracious reading into world literature must have put him into contact with Baudelaire, when asked about foreign influences he identifies William Blake. See *ibid.*, p. 292. One exception is that he writes about reading Victor Segalen's book *Steles*, a work of prose poetry that goes largely unremarked-upon in the writings of more orthodox prose poets and critics.
- 402 Xi Chuan, "Intellectuals are Part of the People" 《知识分子是“民间”的一部分》, posted on 3/27/2006 to the online version of the Economic Observer 经济观察网, accessed at <http://www.eeo.com.cn/2006/0327/36586.shtml>.
- 403 van Crevel, Maghiel. *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 190.
- 404 Xi Chuan 西川. 《深浅: 西川诗文集》. Beijing: Zhongguo Heping Chubanshe, 2006, p. 280.
- 405 Xi Chuan called one of his works "prose poetry" by name in English during a reading at New York's 92nd Street Y on October 10, 2011. However, in response to the half-dozen questions asked him about his poetic form in Chinese that have been printed in interviews, he never identifies it as *sanwenshi* (散文诗).
- 406 Mainly by responding to the "post-Obscure" poets who criticized the *Today* group, but later by making a defense of "intellectual" and difficult poetry that has its roots in the complexity of Obscure writing: see van Crevel, Maghiel. *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 189-90 *et passim*.
- 407 Xi Chuan in particular has been published in China's *Poetry* (诗刊) magazine, won the abovementioned "Cultural China" prize in 2006 and the national Lu Xun prize for literature (given by the state-run Chinese Writers' Association) in 2001, and now serves as a professor of Classical Chinese literature at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing.
- 408 From the interview "Xi Chuan: We Live in the Midst of Great 'Contradictory Rhetoric'". "西川我们生活在巨大的“矛盾修辞”中” 《生活月刊》, no. 1347 (January 4-10, 2011), accessed at <http://www.why.com.cn/epublish/node32682/node32804/userobject7ai252579.html>.
- 409 van Crevel, Maghiel. *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 65.
- 410 Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Oxford: Polity Press, 1993, p. 6.
- 411 Geng Linmang 耿林莽. "Depth in Simplicity — an Analysis of Selections from Xi Chuan's *Near and Distant Scenes*." "质朴之中有深邃——西川《近景与远景》选析." 《散文诗》, April 2004, p. 72-3. For a Geng Linmang poem, see chapter four. Huang Yongjian 黄永健. "Prose Poetry—the Literary Darling of a Multicultural Age." "散文诗——多元文化时代的文学宠儿." 《散文诗》, November 2011, np. Huang 127 mentions Xi briefly in his literary history, seeing his work as evidence that free verse is evolving into more proselike writing.
- 412 Van Crevel, Maghiel. *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 229-30.
- 413 It may also be valuable to question whether Baudelaire makes an ideal precursor for modern poets who engage primarily in ambiguous, ambivalent, process-oriented verse: some of his poems, like "The Dog and the Scent-Bottle" or "The Bad Glazier" are narrative parables, and do not necessarily require the kind of line-by-line interpretation that is valuable in reading work by Xi Chuan.
- 414 This is true for me, as well: I have institutional relationships with official prose poets and editors, but also a certain amount of interaction with avant-garde poets. What I do not have is an interaction with large national poetry journals like *Poetry Magazine* 《诗刊》 and *Stars Monthly* 《星星》 (cited in chapter four), the kind that reprint prose poetry from both avant-garde and well-respected official magazines. Their experience would add yet another layer of complexity to this and other critical conversations.
- 415 For example, this language and literature textbook produced for fifth-year students in elementary school: 《新课标同步单元练习 语文 (五年级下册) 》. Beijing: Beijing Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 2006.

- 416 As in the case of Feng Mingde: see chapter four.
- 417 According to an interview with the *Prose Poetry* editorial board.
- 418 Van Crevel, Maghiel. *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 226. Wang's complete history of prose poetry appears in Wang Guangming 王光明. 《散文诗的世界》. Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987. It is notable that by writing the 1982 essay "On the Special Features of Prose Poetry" "关于散文诗的特征" collected in Wang Fuming 王幅明, ed. *90 Years of Chinese Prose Poetry* 《中国散文诗 90 年》. Zhengzhou: Henan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2008, page 1247-1251, Wang himself disproves van Crevel's assertion that prose poetry was dormant after May Fourth and before the mid-1980s.
- 419 "Intellectuals are Part of the People" 《知识分子是“民间”的一部分》, posted on 3/27/2006 to the online version of the Economic Observer 经济观察网, accessed at <http://www.eeo.com.cn/2006/0327/36586.shtml>.
- 420 Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Oxford: Polity Press, 1993, p. 30.
- 421 Ke Lan 柯蓝. 《早霞短笛》. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1981, p. 209.
- 422 It is worth remembering, however, that the majority of Xi Chuan's work is considerably more intricate than "Manes of Yellow" — most of his writing is closer in complexity to his poem "After Wang Ximeng's Blue and Green Horizontal Landscape Scroll," reprinted in chapter one. He points this out himself in the interview "Intellectuals are Part of the People" 《知识分子是“民间”的一部分》, posted on 3/27/2006 to the online version of the Economic Observer 经济观察网, accessed at <http://www.eeo.com.cn/2006/0327/36586.shtml>.
- 423 See chapters one and four, respectively.
- 424 In *ibid.*, he also points out that the poems were all written during and about his travels through Henan and Guangxi provinces, supplying verifying details in much the same way that Ke Lan does in his poem.
- 425 It is difficult to get an authoritative list of avant-garde poets — both because of the difficulty of distinguishing them from official poets and because of their tendency to publish in small circles. Of Maghiel van Crevel's list of avant-garde poets who have written prose poems, however, two wrote their prose works in the 1980s and called them "long poems" (Yang Lian and Ouyang Jianghe), one was exiled after 1989 (Xue Di 雪迪), and one imprisoned and silenced (Liao Yiwu 廖亦武) during the 1990s. This leaves Xi Chuan and Chen Dongdong 陈东东: Chen goes slightly farther in describing his own work as prose poetry than Xi Chuan does, calling it such on his blog, but he also does not publish in official prose poetry magazines, and does not appear in anthologies like Wang. See van Crevel, Maghiel. *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 230, and Chen Dongdong's blog post titled "prose poems": http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_60bb50ff0100ju4d.html. It's important to point out that this is a very short list of prose poems from a very large group of people making poetry: the vast majority of contemporary avant-garde poets, including Zhai Yongming 翟永明, Sun Wenbo 孙文波, Han Dong 韩东 and a host of others, have never written poems without line breaks — the surest way to disassociate one's self with the prose poetic tradition.
- 426 For single-author collections, there is Shang Qin 尚琴, tr. Steve Bradbury. *Feelings Above Sea Level*. Brookline: Zephyr Press, 2006. Anthologies including Taiwanese prose poetry include Yeh, Michelle, and Malmqvist, N. G. D., ed. *Frontier Taiwan*. New York: Columbia UP, 2001, and Yeh and Malmqvist, ed., *Sailing to Formosa*. Seattle: U of Washington P, 2006. The best critical introduction to Taiwanese prose poetry in English is also by Michelle Yeh: "From Surrealism to Nature Poetics: A Study of Prose Poetry from Taiwan." *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese*, January 2000, p. 119-153.

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