

## ALLUSION IN T'AO YÜAN-MING

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This article is, with some slight alterations, a paper delivered to the 23rd Congress of Orientalists at Cambridge; it is intended to give general expression to the principles which I have followed in a new translation with commentary of T'ao Yüan-ming's works.

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The impression given by some recent translations of T'ao Yüan-ming is of a comparatively simple unallusive poet. Indeed it has been explicitly stated that T'ao "is exceptionally easy to translate because he is very sparing in his allusions, and those he does employ can all be detected and explained without difficulty".<sup>1</sup> This opinion is readily understandable. For T'ao possesses an apparent universality of expression which makes it possible to translate many of his poems intelligibly and attractively without any great knowledge of his contemporary situation or the sources upon which he drew. However, anyone who has studied the copious commentary and disputation which Chinese scholars have contributed on the life and works of this poet, must dissent from the opinion quoted above. In this short article I shall try to illustrate the thesis that T'ao is an intellectual poet, to some degree even a "bookish" poet, and that his verse is intimately involved with the philosophical and social questions of his day.

If such a view is a true one, we may be led to presume that his poems were usually addressed to a small circle of intimates who knew his mind or, as he himself says, "approved his tastes".<sup>2</sup> For the type of allusion which I shall discuss, seems to be used very personally or in association with personal symbols. The "substitute" type of allusion<sup>3</sup> which is part of the general coinage of Chinese poetry of most periods need not concern us here.

I have said that T'ao is something of a "bookish" poet. It is possible to

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<sup>1</sup> William Acker, *T'ao the Hermit* (1952), p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> v. *Drinking Wine* XIV.

<sup>3</sup> e.g., 不惑 from *Lun-yü* 2.4. to express "forty years old".

determine from his works a number of the titles in his library, and sometimes the exact edition. For example, the series of poems *On Reading the Shan-hai-ching* must have been written with Kuo P'u's text<sup>1</sup> at his elbow, since he draws not only upon the *Shan-hai-ching* but also on Kuo's commentary. Poem VIII indeed arises more from the commentary than the work itself. This case is simple, others are much less so. Where T'ao's allusions to canonical and other books are vital parts of his text, it is obviously important to determine which interpretation of the original work he was following. It is clearly futile to adopt Legge's or Karlgren's translation of lines from the *Songs* when T'ao can be shown to follow the Mao interpretation (as might be expected). Of course in some cases it is no longer possible to achieve any certainty in this matter because of the complete disappearance of books current in his day or their survival in a fragmentary state only.

Before coming to my illustrations, I should like to raise one more general point. From external appearance alone, it is not always possible to decide whether a line or a poem is allusive or not, and this is particularly the case with the many supposed political allusions or allusions to historical events. To cite an example—the first of the four-word poems, T'ing-yün 停雲 which T'ao says in his preface is "thought of a dear friend", contains the lines:

The trees of the eastern garden  
Their branches now blossom;<sup>2</sup>  
They vie with fresh delight  
To call forth my feelings.

These lines, the Sung commentator T'ang Han 湯漢 takes to refer to being called to serve the new dynasty, and thus the poem would have to date from 420 or later. Scores of such *ad hoc* judgments by critics of earlier and modern times might be quoted. This method of assuming an allusion and on that basis dating the poem seems to me fundamentally unsound, though to proceed in the opposite direction from the establishment of a date to the recognition of an allusion is far more reasonable. I should not, however, wish to suggest that we should reject such judgments out of hand. Clearly we ought to examine each against whatever evidence we can secure by other means. But in general I consider that the dating of T'ao's undated poems has often been done rather uncritically and that in some cases we shall have to be content with more cautious and less definite conclusions.

My purpose here, however, is not to consider specific problems but to show a fundamental characteristic of T'ao's writing, which, when realized,

<sup>1</sup> With its original illustrations, now lost, as is clear from Poem I.

<sup>2</sup> Or, following another reading, blossom again.

will aid in the solution of those problems. Where T'ao makes use of earlier writings, he often does not make a purely verbal borrowing but carries over the sentiment and atmosphere of the original, according to his own understanding of them. In those of his works in which this characteristic is manifested, two levels of meaning result. Besides the superficial meaning which is always completely effected, there is an inner meaning which is suggested through oblique allusion and is only to be perceived when the allusions are realized.

I come now to my illustrations which I have chosen with a linking theme, that of wine. Wine is a most important symbol in T'ao's works. Not that I wish to suggest that every time the word wine occurs it has some subtle significance. In the great majority of the occurrences it has its literal meaning.<sup>1</sup> But in a minority it carries deeper undertones.

Poem IX of the series *Drinking Wine* provides a good illustration of a superficially straightforward poem:

In the clear dawn I heard a knocking at the door.  
Tumbling into my clothes, I went myself to open.  
I asked: Sir, who are you?  
It was a peasant with kindly feeling.  
With jar of wine he had come far to visit me,  
Wondering if I was at odds with the times.  
"In tatters beneath thatched eaves  
Cannot be reckoned an exalted perch.  
The whole generation, everyone, approves the same things;  
I wish that *you* would drift in its mud."  
"I am deeply grateful for your words, old man,  
But my innate spirit is little in sympathy with them.  
To bend one's course certainly can be learned.  
Yet being false to oneself, how should one not go astray?  
So let's share the pleasure of this drinking.  
My chariot cannot be turned back."

At first sight we have a kindly and wordly wise peasant offering advice and having it spurned. But the first two lines derive from *Song* 100, "the east is not yet bright, he tumbles into his clothes", and the *Song* continues "he tumbles into them; from the court he is summoned". Going on, we find that the peasant surprisingly is a student of the *Ch'u-tz'ü*. Line 9 is taken from the *Li-sao*<sup>2</sup> and line 10, the most important clue, from the *Yü-fu* (*The Fisherman*). In the *Yü-fu* we have, I believe, the source and inspiration of

<sup>1</sup> Though I agree with J. R. Hightower, "The *Fu* of T'ao Ch'ien", *HJAS* 17 (1954), p. 224, that wine generally signifies "release".

<sup>2</sup> v. st. 78.

T'ao's poem, and I think he intended it to be recognized that his "t'ien-fu" is the "yü-fu" in another but similar occupation. It will be remembered how the fisherman advised Ch'ü Yüan: "the saint is not bound by material things and is able to yield to and change with his generation. If the men of your generation are filthy, why do you not wallow in their mud and raise their waves?" The multitude are all drunk, why do you not eat their dregs and drink their lees?" Further, it is important to note that the 2nd century commentator Wang I glosses the phrase "drink their lees" with the words "support yourself with their salary". Once these various allusions have been grasped, the poem seems to me to come into sharper definition. It is, I think, really an apologia for not bending to the age and refusing to accept office.<sup>2</sup> The peasant is contrived as a tempter and the wine he offers (on the inner level of meaning) is the murky wine of the world and it is not this wine that T'ao proposes to drink in the penultimate line of the poem.

"Wine" has, I believe, the same symbolic value in the poem entitled *Stopping Wine* which is a remarkable linguistic if not literary *tour de force*.

In dwelling I stopped near to the city,  
 In wandering I stopped to give myself rest.  
 In sitting I stopped beneath a lofty shade,  
 In walking I stopped within the wicker gate.  
 The tastes I enjoyed stopped at the garden mallows,  
 My great joy stopped at my young children.  
 My every day I did not stop wine;  
 If I did stop wine, my feelings had no pleasure.  
 If I stopped in the evening, I did not sleep easy,  
 If I stopped in the morning, I could not rise.  
 Day after day I wished to stop it,  
 But my care for my health stopped and was neglected.  
 I only knew that stopping was not pleasant,  
 I did not know that stopping was beneficial.  
 Now I have realized that stopping is good,  
 This very morning I have indeed truly stopped.  
 From this one stopping I shall go on  
 To stop upon the shores of Fu-sang.  
 A clear countenance will stop my former features.  
 May it stop for a thousand myriad years!

If I am not mistaken this poem is really intended to express T'ao's final

<sup>1</sup> i.e., follow their course.

<sup>2</sup> Whether it can be related to a definite offer of appointment, as Ku Chih 古直, *T'ao Ching-chieh shih chien* 陶靖節詩集 c.3, thinks, depends on the dating of the poem and cannot be discussed here.

renunciation of public life and not, as has been suggested,<sup>1</sup> his successful rehabilitation from the evils of alcoholism. There is no hint elsewhere that he made any attempt to free himself of the love of wine.

Just as wine itself is murky or clear, so too as a symbol wine has for T'ao its light as well as its dark aspect. The third of the series *Drinking Wine* reads:

The Way has been lost for nearly a thousand years;  
 All men are careful of their feelings.  
 Though they have wine, they cannot drink it,  
 But regard only their name in their generation.  
 What makes us value our person  
 Surely does not lie outside our single life?  
 A single life—how much can it amount to?  
 Swift as the flashing lightning's alarm,  
 Its greatness is contained within a hundred years;  
 Depending on this, what should one wish to achieve?

This poem is undoubtedly an attack on the Confucianism of his own day. The Way which has been lost is that of Confucius, as is clear from another poem where the identical line occurs.<sup>2</sup> The attack which the poet makes here is the same that he makes in the long *Hsing-ying-shên* poem, namely, that these men seek immortality in fame, *ming* 名, which too is mortal like the body. But what of wine here? It must be the clear wine of existence which is to be drunk to the full. When we appreciate this usage, we can give a deeper and richer meaning to those words in his autobiographic *Gentleman of the Five Willows*.

By nature he is fond of wine, but his family is poor and he cannot usually get it. His relatives and friends know that this is so, and sometimes set out wine and invite him. Whenever wine is given him, he will finish it off. His limit is when he is drunk. When he is drunk, then he retires. But he never regrets that he must go.

This must surely be intended to convey, as well as the surface meaning, his personal philosophy of Acceptance, with wine and drunkenness used as symbols for life and death.

In conclusion, poem XVIII, in which the two aspects of the symbol almost merge, may be quoted. Although using the name of Yang Hsiung and indeed in its opening lines based very closely on the "eulogy" at the end of Yang's biography in the *Han-shu*, it is probably autobiographic in intention.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Acker, *loc. cit.*, pp. 34-6.

<sup>2</sup> v. *Exhortation to Chou, Tsu and Hsieh*.

<sup>3</sup> Ku Chih, *loc. cit.*, however, considers the poem an exhortation to Yen Yen-chih 顏延之 not to take office.

*Tzū-yün* by nature had a taste for wine,  
But his family was poor, and he had no means of getting it.  
At the time he depended on a man interested in affairs,  
Who provided wine and took away his troubles.  
As, when the cup was brought, he always drained it,  
So, whatever this man asked, he never left unanswered.  
Yet there were times when he was unwilling to speak;  
Surely when it was a question of attacking other states?<sup>1</sup>  
The good man makes use of his own heart.  
How should he ever err in revealing himself or keeping silent?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A reference to *Han-shu* 56 (Biography of Tung Chung-shu), "I have heard that the ruler of Lu once asked Liu-hsia Hui about attacking Ch'i. Liu-hsia Hui said: "One does not ask the good man about attacking states".

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.*, in taking office or going into retirement.