

Ways of Looking at the Moon Palace

The moon, endlessly fascinating, has been the subject of much study by sinologists, myself among them. The following paragraph is an epitome of lunar imagery prevalent in T'ang literature.¹

The moon is a visual token of the Grand Yin (*t'ai yin* 太陰), a cosmic store of latent energy, apprehended as a cold, white, phosphorescent body, seemingly akin to snow, ice, water, white silk, silver, white jade, rock crystal, pearls, and the like. These materials are concentrated in such lunar creatures as the uncanny toad and his antithesis, the irresponsible moon hare, as well as in moon people. The most popular of these are immaculate nymphs, clones of Ch'ang-o 嫦娥 (or Heng-o 姮娥), the great lunar deity. She is also called "Moon Fairy" (Yüeh-o 月娥), as are her nymphs; they all resemble snowflakes, or the petals of white flowers. This delightful troupe entertains its mistress and her guests with clear, high-pitched music, as if their zithers were crystalline and their voices like the tinkling of icicles.² But some poets represent Ch'ang-o as an unhappy creature, the celestial counterpart of a beautiful but lonely widow or cold-hearted courtesan, desolate despite her dazzling perfection. She needs a husband, or a fur coat, or a beaker of brandy.

But little attention has been paid to the moon palace as the lady's domicile, salon, and asylum. My present purpose is to reveal a little of these aspects of that shining house.

The moon palace had, of course, been a precinct of dreams and the goal of dream travel long before the T'ang period. In Six Dynasties romance, the Han miracle man Tung-fang Shuo 東方朔 is reported to have visited it during his extraordinary excursions. The story of his elevated pilgrimage was duly incorporated into the Taoist canon along with the other adventures of the ancient hero.³

¹ Edward H. Schafer, *Pacing the Void: Tang Approaches to the Stars* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1977), pp. 171-210, is the chief source for the following synopsis of medieval Chinese moon lore. The reader is also referred to Michel Soymie, "La lune dans les religions chinoises," *La lune: mythes et rites*, Sources Orientales 5 (Paris: Edns. du Seuil, 1962), pp. 291-321.

² Moon tunes also existed in the sublunar world; see, for instance, Ku K'uang 顧況, "Wang shih Kuang-ling san chi" 王氏廣陵散記 (*Ch'uan T'ang wen* 全唐文 529, p. 9b).

³ *Hai nei shih chou chi* 海內十洲記, in *Yün chi ch'i ch'ien* 雲笈七籤 (HY 1026) 26, p. 1b. Here and subsequently, HY refers to Weng Tu-chien, ed., *Combined Indices to the Authors and Titles of Books in Two Collections of Taoist Literature*, Harvard-Yenching Sinological Index Series 25 (Peking:

But this bare report was soon overshadowed and outshone by the mutations of the palace itself in the astral theology of the Highest Clarity (*Shang ch'ing* 上清) sect of Taoism. As that denomination began its transformation of the magi and wizards of ancient mythology into a spirit population better suited to its gossamer star palaces and their somatic counterparts (the chambers of spun gold and transparent gems in the bodies of advanced adepts), so the sublimity of the moon palace was enhanced by the acquisition of a specific title. In the *Inner Scripture of the Yellow Court*, a basic text current in the earliest years of the sect, it is called "Palace of Widespread Cold" (*Kuang han kung* 廣寒宮), figured as the destination of an adept's liberated spirit. Here it is actualized as a divine palace, not in the moon itself but in the north of our world, where the moon's vitality is periodically renewed.⁴ The name also occurs in a song of the same era, sung by a Jade Woman to the medium Yang Hsi 楊羲. The lady reveals the great ice palace as the dazzling goal of the adept's soul as it plunges through space.⁵ Although the moon is not specifically mentioned in this song, it is clearly represented as a mystical home beyond the sky. Yet another old scripture tells of a great Tao lord for whom the "Moon Basilica of Widespread Cold" (*Kuang han yüeh tien* 廣寒月殿) is a vestry where he assumes a costume of feathers before accepting a holy text from the supreme lord of the universe.⁶ All of these esoteric emanations of the moon, detached in time and space from the white disk we see from our low perspective, are the residences of great deities to whose high courts all terrestrial adepts, prepared by long devotion to spiritual disciplines, aspire. One such divinity is the Thearch of the "White-soul" (*p'o* 魄) of the moon;⁷ he resides in the celestial city Lin-lang 琳瑯, named for an unearthly selenite.⁸ These stark icons persisted through the fifth and sixth centuries to form part of the Taoist cabala of T'ang.

In the imaginative literature of T'ang, however, such arcane hiero-

Ha-fu Yen-ching hsüeh-she, 1935). In the notes all works from the *Tao tsang* 道藏 are given their *HY* index number (see *HY*, pp. 1-37). Any modern pagination refers to the facsimile reprint of the Cheng-t'ung 正統 era edition of the *Tao tsang* published by the I-wen yin-shu-kuan 藝文印書館, Taipei, 1976.

⁴ *Huang t'ing nei ching yü ching* 黃庭內景玉經, collected in *Hsiu chen shih shu* 修真十書; see *HY* 263 (ch. 55, p. 8b, stanza 3, verse 5, p. 5770). The *Huang t'ing nei ching* appears to have been composed late in the 4th century.

⁵ *Chen kao* 真誥 (*HY* 1010) 4, p. 5a (5th century A.D.).

⁶ *Tung chen ching* 洞真經, quoted in *Wu shang pi yao* 无上秘要 (*HY* 1130) 22, pp. 17b-18a.

⁷ For "White-soul" or "protopsyche" as the waxing moon, see Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, pp. 177-81.

⁸ *Yün chi ch'i ch'ien* 41, p. 20b. Here I use "selenite" to mean an unidentifiable moon gem, not, as in terrestrial mineralogy, crystalline gypsum.

graphy is rare. Instead the moon palace remains the pearly hideaway of Ch'ang-o. It is a frozen eyrie, an idealized alpine chalet lit by faint, cool lamps. But its privacy does not necessarily exclude occasional intimacy, as when the moon nymph is entertaining one of her cousins — the goddess of the moonlit Ho on earth (see below), or the divine woman of the Sky River, or some other sylph with snowy skin.⁹

As for the old mythological occupants — the nervous hare, the placid toad, and the cinnamon (or osmanthus) tree (*kuei* 桂) — the bards allow us an occasional unflattering glimpse. The prominence of the divine tree in lunar lore gave an alternative name both to the moon palace, which became the great Cinnamon Palace (*kuei kung* 桂宮), a comfortable version of the Palace of Widespread Cold, and to its chief building, the Cinnamon Basilica (*kuei tien* 桂殿).¹⁰ Comparable housing was sometimes deemed suitable for fair-skinned beauties in the world below. Tradition tells that Ch'en Shu-pao 陳叔寶, last ruler of the state of Ch'en, built a moon palace for his beautiful consort Chang Li-hua 張麗華. Its vital nucleus was a white-powdered courtyard in which stood a single cinnamon, visible through a round pane of rock crystal. There the lady, clad in the purest white, diverted herself with an albino hare.¹¹

Journeys to the moon palace were not uncommon in T'ang times. A number of reports of such adventures survive in straightforward prose. Unhappily, most do not give vivid accounts of the architecture and ornamentation of the glittering *enceinte*, although it seems to have been imagined very much like a typical walled city of the Middle Kingdom. One such conventional description can be found in the story of the journey of T'ang minister-to-be Lu Ch'i 盧杞, who flew to the moon in a calabash. He was obliged to dress in oilskins for protection against cold rain and sleet. On arrival he found the high-platformed buildings and watchtowers of a grand palace, all fashioned of "water crystal," that is to say, of transparent quartz, regarded in those times as a form of petrified ice. Here he met the Lady of Grand Yin, an exalted version of the moon goddess, in her crystal hall. But he demonstrated the shallowness of his taste by refusing her hand, offered in marriage, in favor of the boon of political advancement on earth. I have told the whole tale elsewhere.¹²

⁹ Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, p. 195.

¹⁰ See, for further information, Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, pp. 185-86, 195.

¹¹ Feng Chih 馮贇 (fl. 904), *Nan pu yen hua chi* 南部烟花記, T'ang-tai ts'ung-shu (rpt. of 1806 edn. Taipei: Hsin-hsing shu-chü, 1968, p. 352), p. 1a.

¹² Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, pp. 197-98, trans. from *Ishih* 逸史, in Li Fang 李昉 (925-996) et al., comps., *T'ai ping kuang chi* 太平廣記 (1846 woodblock edn.; hereafter cited as *TPKC*) 64, pp. 4a-5a.

But this ambitious pilgrimage was trivial in comparison with the regal ascent of the great Taoist monarch Li Lung-chi 李隆基 (T'ang Hsüan Tsung 唐玄宗).

The various tales of Li Lung-chi's visit to the moon palace, under the guidance of one or another Taoist adept, are hardly less prosaic than the chronicle of Lu Ch'i. They are told in plain language and express a plain meaning — the ready accessibility of a celestial palace, familiar to everyone, to the Taoist monarch who, more than any other, embodied the grace and power that had blessed the dynasty from its outset. This special grace is symbolized by the sovereign's transferral of a lunar song and dance routine to his palace in Ch'ang-an. Moreover, this fairyland's inhabitants are often very ordinary creatures and its fittings commonplace contraptions. These features make the visit a believable enterprise, the participants of which, even the wonder-working priest, are quite everyday people. Even the wonderful transport is mere embellishment to the real tenor of a rather matter-of-fact narration. In more than one version of the story, the mode of travel is not mentioned. In one no levitation is required: the transit is made by way of a great bridge, flung by magic, like Bifrost, the bridge to Valhalla, over the abyss of the sky.

However, some versions of the royal airlift, although based on the same event, give us more than a perfunctory view of the inhabitants of the great ice palace: for instance, the tale in which Heavenly Master Shen Yüan-chih 申元之 is the monastic guide presents a pageant of white dancing girls, white birds, perfumed mist, fading blue light, and sweet celestial music.¹³ Another narration, similar to this in some respects, places great emphasis on the transmission and transcription of the music to fit terrestrial modes and instrumentation.¹⁴ Even more richly decorated is the story of Li Lung-chi's moon journey with the Taoist Yeh Ching-neng 葉淨能. (It should be observed that the cosmic guide in each extant version of the myth is a different adept.) This version provides much information on the building stones of the palace and its furnishings — rock crystal, "beryl," and carnelian.¹⁵

¹³ In *Lung ch'eng lu* 龍城錄 as printed in *Shuo k'u* 說庫, Wang Wen-ju, comp. (rpt. Taipei: Hsin-hsing, 1963), p. 3b. A synopsis of this story may be found in Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, p. 200. For the problem of dating this narration, see Hans Frankel, "The Date and Authorship of the Lung-ch'eng-lu," *Silver Jubilee Volume of the Zinbun-Kagaku-Kenkyusyo, Kyoto University* (Kyoto: Kyoto U., 1954), p. 149.

¹⁴ Cheng Ch'i 鄭榮 (f. T'ang), *K'ai P'ien ch'uan hsün chi* 開天傳信記, in *TPKC* 204, pp. 7b–8a; trans. in Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, pp. 199–200.

¹⁵ For a translation and full explication of this version, which survives in a Tun-huang ms. in the British Museum, see Alfredo Cadonna, "Astronauti' taoisti da Ch'angan alla luna: Note sul

The most eminent of the escorts said to have shown the way to the moon to Li Lung-chi was the "Celestial Master" (*t'ien shih* 天師) Yeh Fa-shan 葉法善, a Taoist priest and practitioner of supernatural arts, noted both for his worldly success and for his longevity. He was said to have been born in the Sui period, and died full of honors during the long reign of Hsüan Tsung. Several generations of his male ancestors had also been Taoist priests. He himself was a specialist in *yin-yang* theory and the arts of divination. He proved himself useful to the T'ang court when Li Chih 李治 (Kao Tsung) employed him to test the claims of gold-making alchemists, whose folly and deceit he straightway exposed. He also enjoyed a reputation for unmasking illusionists who claimed power over spirits.¹⁶

The story of his lunar excursion survives in several closely related texts.¹⁷ In the translation that follows I adhere to the version of *Tai p'ing kuang chi*. Where I deviate from it I note the source of the alteration:

On the full moon of the eighth month,¹⁸ the Master went on an excursion to the moon palace with the Mystic Ancestor.¹⁹ Listening attentively, they could hear heavenly music within the moon. They asked for the name of the tune, and were told, "The Purple Cloud Tune." The Mystic Ancestor had long been enlightened in instrumentation and music theory. Wordless, he memorized the sounds, and when they returned he passed on the notes, [which were then set down in the Archive of Music. He changed]²⁰ its name to "Rainbow Petticoat and

manoscritto di Dunhuang S 6836 alla luce de alcuni lavori de Edward H. Schafer," *Orientalia Venetiana* 1, *Volume in onore di Lionello Lanciotti* (Firenze: Olschki, 1984), pp. 69–132. I owe a great deal to Mr. Cadonna's researches into the bibliography of the variant texts dealing with Hsüan Tsung's famous journey, especially those in the Taoist canon. A useful summary of his findings may also be found in his book *Il Taoista di sua Maestà; Dodici episodi da un manoscritto cinese di Dunhuang* (Venezia, 1984), pp. 22–25, 30. This valuable book is otherwise devoted to translations of the other stories in S 6836.

¹⁶ *Hsin Tang shu* 204, pp. 4b–5a; *Chiu Tang shu* 191, pp. 11b–12a (both in SPPY edn.).

¹⁷ That in *TPKC* 26, p. 3b (based on Hsüeh Yung-jo [fl. 820], *Chi chi* 集異記 and Tu Kuang-ling 杜光庭, *Hsien chuan shih i* 仙傳拾遺) and in *Tang Yeh Chen-jen chuan* 唐葉真人傳 (*HY* 778) agree very closely. That in *Li shih chen hsien t'i tao t'ung chien* 歷史真仙體道通鑑 (*HY* 296) — evidently a compilation of the 14th century — is an abbreviated version, which shows some minor differences.

¹⁸ *HY* 296 has "mid-autumn," but the terms are synonymous. The Mid-Autumn Festival was a time for all sorts of celebrations and mysteries connected with the spirits of the moon, and liaison with the moon palace.

¹⁹ That is, Yeh Fa-shan, the Celestial Master, went with Li Lung-chi.

²⁰ The words in brackets are lacking in *TPKC* but occur in *HY* 296 and *HY* 778. The altered name of the song, with its Taoist overtones of intimacy with a (female) rainbow spirit and the flight of birds, was, according to tradition, first presented at court by the Lady Yang, Noble Consort, as a representation of the dance of an alluring moon spirit. For the probable origin of the tune in Serindia, and its reflexes in the Japanese *Nô Hagoromo* (羽衣), see Edward H.

Dress of Plumagery." As they were returning from the moon palace, they passed above the walled city of Lu 潞 County.²¹ Raising their heads they looked upward at the forbidding aspect²² of the wall and fortifications, where the light of the moon was like daylight. Thereat the Master asked the Mystic Ancestor to perform the tune on his jade flute. The jade flute was in the Basilica of Repose,²³ so the Master commanded a person to fetch it. He returned shortly, and [the monarch] performed the tune, after which he tossed gold coins inside the city wall. This done they returned. After a decad of days, Lu County reported that on the night of the full moon of the eighth month there was celestial music, which approached the city wall from above, and that simultaneously [the residents] were gifted with gold coins. These they submitted [to the court].

In the story just translated, the ascent to the moon seems to have been instantaneous, like John Carter's transference to Mars in Edgar Rice Burrough's novel *The Princess of Mars*.

In another tale the journey is made by a bridge of moonbeams. (Why else a silver bridge?) The cosmonaut who shows the way to Li Lung-chi is Lo Kung-yüan 羅公遠, who, unlike Master Yeh, is not known to official history. Still, I find no reason to doubt that he was in fact one of the many practitioners of Taoist arts associated with the court of the magical monarch. Three versions of his adventure are extant.²⁴ I translate the *T'ai p'ing kuang chi* version, noting where I have altered it in favor of one of the other two:

It was the night of the full moon of mid-autumn, during Opened Prime (K'ai-yüan),²⁵ when the Mystic Ancestor was within the palace cele-

brating. Kung-yüan made a submission in these words: "Unapproachable Throne! Would you not care to go into the palace of the moon and look around?"²⁶ And he took up his support staff and hurled it out into space, where it was transformed into a great bridge, whose aspect was like silver. He asked the Mystic Ancestor to climb with him, and they proceeded about several tens of *li*. The elemental light snatched away their vision, and the frigid air²⁷ drove through them. Eventually they reached the pylons and watchtower of an *enceinte*, and Kung-yüan said, "This is the palace of the moon!" They saw several hundred transcendent women, all in loose garments of shimmering white stuff, dancing in a broad courtyard. The Mystic Ancestor asked, "What tune is that?" and [Kung-yüan] said, "It is 'Rainbow Petticoat and Dress of Plumagery.'" The Mystic Ancestor secretly memorized the sounds with their melody. [Then they were oppressed by cold air]²⁸ and so turned back, observing that the bridge dissolved behind their footsteps. Presently he summoned the Officer of Musicians and composed, conformably to those sounds and their melody, the tune of "Rainbow Petticoat and Dress of Plumagery." [Subsequently it became current in the world.] [Moreover, in the fourth year of Heavenly Treasure (A.D. 745), on the day when the Realized One of the Yang clan, from the Palace of Grand Realization, was made Noble Consort, and was presented for viewing costumed as an Heirgiver,²⁹ she performed to the tune of "Rainbow Petticoat and Dress of Plumagery."]³⁰

These little prose tales narrate an incident more or less bare of ornament or stylistic sophistication. They seem naive when compared with poetic treatments of the moon palace. At the other end of the gamut of style, where mystery takes precedence over plain fact, free of such coarse and hasty identifications as "the moon palace!" are the quatrains in the mode "Saunters in Sylphdom" (*yu hsien* 遊仙), composed by the hesitant apostate Ts'ao T'ang 曹唐. They provide enigmatic vignettes of a world of appearances, projections of an almost unguessable reality.

I have discussed and translated many of Ts'ao T'ang's poems elsewhere, and indeed some familiarity with the aura of illusion and confused

Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of Tang Exotics* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1963), pp. 114-15.

²¹ Otherwise Shang-tang 上黨, it was in what is now southeastern Shansi, north of Lo-yang. This return from the north suggests that the trip to the frigid moon was by way of the frozen north of the earth. This apparent detour accords with the *Yellow Court* scripture, which places a duplicate moon palace in the polar region.

²² Using the 峭 of *HY* 778 rather than the 峭 of *TPKC* and *HY* 296.

²³ *Ch'in tien* 寢殿, the royal bedchamber.

²⁴ One in *TPKC* 22, pp. 1b-2a, based on Tu Kuang-t'ing, *Shen hsien kan yü chuan* 神仙感遇傳, Tu Kuang-t'ing, *Hsien chuan shih i* 仙傳拾遺, and *I shih* 逸史 (mid-9th century); one in *Yün chi ch'i ch'ien* (*HY* 1026) 113a, pp. 2b-3a; one in *San tung ch'ün hsien lu* 三洞羣仙錄 (*HY* 1238) 14, pp. 13b-14a. The last named purports to cite *I shih*. It is much the shortest of these three versions, but unlike the others, concludes with a passage about Lady Yang's performance of the lunar dance.

²⁵ 713-741 A.D. *I shih* (in *HY* 1238) begins "Early in Heavenly Treasure," putting the event some years later.

²⁶ Adding "palace" from *HY* 1026.

²⁷ Taking the 氣 from *HY* 1026, instead of the 色 in *TPKC*.

²⁸ This clause occurs only in *HY* 1026.

²⁹ *Hou* 后, i.e., the mother of the heir, a title to which Lady Yang could make no claim and which she never bore.

³⁰ The sentence "Subsequently . . . world" is from *HY* 1026; the remainder of the paragraph is interpolated from *HY* 1238.

identities which invest these stylish stanzas, populated by shy and elusive beings, is essential for understanding the wavering aspect of any particular one of them.³¹

In the quatrain that follows, Ts'ao T'ang exhibits the ambiguity characteristic of his "Saunters." It is difficult to be sure of the location of the elfin scene, somewhat reminiscent of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Is it a terrestrial palace, lit by a misted moon? Is it a replica of our world within a magic calabash — or deep within a grotto? Or is it on the snowy moon itself, whose terraces and lofts are illuminated by the welling up of its own cold inner fire? We need not make definite exclusions; all of these possibilities may coexist. Ts'ao T'ang's ninety-nine "Little Saunters in Sylphdom" are all invested with supernatural atmospheres, and this one seems to reveal a fairy mansion on earth magically transformed into the lunar palace itself:

The moon's phantom dims in the distance — autumn trees light up;³²
 Dew blows on rhinoceros — an elephantine couch becomes buoyant.³³
 Ladies-in-Waiting and Consorts stand long outside the curtained
 gateway;³⁴
 Muffling their laughter at the sound of their Lady offering wine.³⁵

This poem may be paraphrased as follows, without dismissing other concurrent levels of meaning: lunar whiteness illumines the already pallid trees, reflecting or parodying the lunar landscape itself. Lunar spray drifts down upon a white couch, which seems to float aloft. High-born ladies lurk outside the chamber stifling their giggles as the goddess Ch'ang-o, or her avatar, extends a beaker of wine to a divine visitor.

But even this dreamlike scene is anchored to worldly attachments and glandular preoccupations. A poet otherwise could cut his verses free from

³¹ Translated poems by Ts'ao T'ang appear in the following of my publications: "The Other Peach Blossom Font," *Schafer Sinological Papers* (hereafter *SSP*) 11 (Berkeley, May 22, 1984); "Ts'ao T'ang and the Tropics," *SSP* 15 (Berkeley, September 22, 1984); "The World between Ts'ao T'ang's Grotto Poems," *SSP* 32 (Berkeley, October 15, 1985); *Pacing the Void; Mirages on the Sea of Time* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1985).

³² "Phantom" represents a word (*ying* 影) that is also translatable as "apparition, image, shadow, reflection," etc., that is, a light-created replica. "Autumn" is symbolically white: the trees are whitened by moonlight. The moon is all water and snow, the source of the dewdrops that fall on our world.

³³ "Rhinoceros" and "elephantine" are synecdoches for rhinoceros horn and elephant tusk — ivories used to enrich costly furnishings. (Cf. Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* I, 135–36: "The Tortoise here and Elephant unite, / Transformed to Combs, the speckled and the white.") They also enhance the whiteness of the lunar setting.

³⁴ For "Consorts" (*fei* 妃) in this context, see Schafer, *Mirages on the Sea of Time*, p. 70.

³⁵ No. 21 of Ts'ao T'ang's 99 "Little Saunters," *Ch'uan Tang shih* 全唐詩, Ts'ao Yin 曹寅 (1658–1712), comp. (orig. woodblock edn., 1707; hereafter *CTS*), *han* 10, *ts'e* 2, *ch.* 2, pp. 2b–3a.

such frivolities, and transport his imagined protagonist into a place quite detached from the colors and concerns of the sublunary world.

An example is the subtle and delicate double "canto" (*tz'u* 詞) in which the tenth-century writer Sun Kuang-hsien 孫光憲³⁶ has realized a blurred vision of an elusive two-natured goddess — a kind of Sabrina-Selene — not as a capricious performer in a masquerade in the manner of Ts'ao T'ang, but as a tinted phantom. The poem is set to the tune of "The Spirit of Ho Conduit" (*Ho tu shen* 河賚神).³⁷ The opening scene is set in a shrine on the Fen (汾) River, an important tributary of the Ho 河. The scenario of the first canto is the transformation of the fane into a celestial palace.

The mysterious protagonist is manifest first as "Mercurial Maid" (or "Shimmering Woman" or "Volatile Girl"), *ch'a nü* 姮女, a personification of the silvery moonglade on the Ho and Fen rivers — a kind of fleeting, hallucinatory mirror image of the moon goddess who inhabits a cold, wet, shining world like hers. She is the high lady's twin sister and other-identity,³⁸ and in the first stanza of Sun Kuang-hsien's canto, she flies up to don her other mask.³⁹ But neither nymph is named in the poem.

This scenario is not a rarity in medieval poetry. The reader is invited to compare the *tz'u* of Mao Wen-hsi 毛文錫, to the tune of "A Single Wisp of Cloud at Shamanka Mountain" (*Wu shan i tuan yün* 巫山一段雲), in which the Ho goddess assumes the alias of the Kiang goddess who presides over the

³⁶ Died 968. He is well known as the author of *Pei meng so yen* 北夢瑣言, a compendium of anecdotes about the region of Ching-nan 荆南 (Nan-p'ing 南平), a T'ang successor state in the central Yangtze region (hence *Pei meng* 北夢) in which he held important offices. For more, see Herbert Franke, ed., *Sung Biographies*, Münchener Ostasiatische Studien 16 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1976), pp. 976–77.

³⁷ *CTS*, *han* 12, *ts'e* 10, *ch.* 9, pp. 6b–7a. In the ancient mythical geography of China, the land was divided by the hero Yü 禹 into nine habitable regions (*chou* 州), separated by Four Conduits to make a magic square. These were the Ho 河, the Chiang 江, the Huai 淮, and the Chi 濟, of which the latter two have long since disintegrated into a net of interlocking waterways. In antiquity, possibly since Shang times, official sacrifices were made to the spirit of the Ho and the Fen at Lin-chin 臨晉, near the conjunction of the Fen 汾 River with the Ho. In Ch'in and Han times the rites were conducted by a female shaman. See Edward H. Schafer, "Two Taoist Bagatelles: 2. The Mutations of Mercurial Maid," *Society for the Study of Chinese Religions Bulletin* 9 (Fall 1981), p. 11. Li Lung-chi restored the temple at Fen-yin 汾陰 (the name is significant) in 722, officially dedicating it to Hou T'u 后土, and in 723 ordered worship services there: "prior to this . . . there was once the clay image of a woman at the old shrine." See *Chiu Tang shu* 24, pp. 11b–12a.

³⁸ There is also reason to suspect an affinity with our Milky Way (i.e., 天河, 雲河, 銀河, 星河), the celestial counterpart of the earthly Ho and its spirit, the Star Fairy (Hsing O 星娥).

³⁹ In the jargon of alchemists her name represented "quicksilver," as in our alchemical tradition "Hermes" (i.e., Mercury) represented the same element. Schafer, "Two Taoist Bagatelles, 2. The Mutations of Mercurial Maid," p. 10. The lunar epithet *ch'a yüeh* 姮月, found in a 9th-century poem, combines the two images. *Ibid.*, p. 13. Compare also the canto "Spring in the Moon Palace" (*T'ieh kung ch'ün* 月宮春) of Mao Wen-hsi 毛文錫, in which "Heng-o and Volatile Girl playfully hug one another" (*CTS*, *han* 12, *ts'e* 9, *ch.* 5, p. 4b).

gorges of the Yangtze and slips up the milky Sky River to don the costume and makeup of the moon goddess in her snowy palace.⁴⁰

The underlying plot of Sun's intricate poem is this: a poet-pilgrim — both thaumaturge and devotee — counterpart of a shaman-demigod at the shrine of the Divine Woman of Wu Shan 巫山, approaches the goddess's deserted shrine on the Fen. He finds it dilapidated and overgrown, but in his ecstasy he transforms the scene into a vision of the departure of the nymph for her higher abode in the moon. My translation of each verse needs an interpretive comment:

Fen Water is cyan, steadily gently flowing.

[This is the nymph's natural habitat, and her shrine is close by.

There are overtones of sky blue, referring to her other home, and of serene, unhurried change.]

Yellow clouds of falling leaves begin to fly.

[The season is autumn; the *yang* force in nature is failing, yielding to the increase of *yin*, which is represented by the forward-pressing dark blue water. Decay and separation are in the air, but the wind which blows the yellow leaves is a spiritus; in poetry it often indicates the transit of a supernatural being.]

Once halcyon-moth has gone, let no one speak of return.

[When the divine beauty with eyebrows like the feathery antennae of moths traced in blue (蛾 also suggests 娥, an epithet of the moon goddess, as in 素娥) departs from the lower world, it is hopeless to expect her early return. Her enraptured suitor will get no grace from her — only a fleeting sign of her upward flight. Here the kingfisher blue, the mark of the divine woman, reflects the darker blue of the first verse which symbolizes the watery element, present both in her earthly haunt and in the frozen moon to which she returns.]

The fane's gate is shut, on vacancy, against the down-slanting flash.

[Simply: The gate to the now vacant shrine is shut against the rays of the setting sun. But "vacant" may also imply "in vain."

As the sun nears the horizon the beams of receding *yang*

penetrate directly into the front door of the temple of the *yin*-spirit; hence the outer gate resists the penetration in vain. But the striving, fertilizing male element makes its assault against an empty house. The goddess has departed.]

The four walls, umbrage shaded, display rows of ancient pictures.⁴¹

[Dimly visible murals, presumably of the goddess and her entourage, are the only traces that remain of a procession that is now ascending the stratosphere — destination Moon. A figment, a shadow, a phantom is all that remains of her once numinous presence.]

As before, the snow-gemmed wheel, her plumed equipage,⁴²

[Now, as before, her shining crystalline disk — a flying carriage — is visible above. Here begins the transition from the actual world to the world of fantasy: the faded, shadowy mural paintings take on their ancient freshness and brightness. As the full moon rises, exactly opposite to the setting sun, the shrine is briefly alight, and the poet-magician projects the image of the goddess in her sky-faring chariot onto the face of the moon.]

[And] her small basilica, beyond reach in the clear night.

[Now the deserted shrine, receding rapidly beyond his reach and touch, is transformed into her private residence — an ice palace in the moon.]

From the silver lamp — tossed down in free fall — its aromatic drippings.

[Midnight approaches. The old temple is no longer visible. It has been replaced by its splendid alter-ego, the silvery sky palace, now at the zenith. In it, the goddess lights a candle. From it drops of scented wax fall to earth — tokens of divine favor, and perhaps a promise of a more successful assignation. To the votary they appear as sparkling moonshine on the river, or as dewdrops, which are the same thing. Dewdrops figure as miniature moons both in Chinese mythology and in poetry. He is anointed by grace from on high.]

⁴⁰ Edward H. Schafer, "A Trip to the Moon," *Parabola* 8.4 (Fall 1983), pp. 80-81. This translation corrects a basic error in my version of the same poem that appeared in *JASOS* 96 (1976), pp. 27-37. (The account in *Parabola* itself needs correction. Change p. 80, col. 2, last paragraph, after "cloud image" to read: "This turns out in the end to be a divine being, serving a far greater entity than herself. As the perpetually employed agent of the 'Primal Harmony,' the great balancing and harmonizing power in nature, it is her responsibility to restore her face monthly.")

⁴¹ "Umbrage shaded" (*yin sen* 陰森): "umbrage" is the shade of foliage. For the phrase, compare "Umbrage shaded spirit fane" (*yin sen kwei miao* 陰森鬼廟) in Li Shen 李紳, "Kuo Ching men" 過荆門 (*CTS, han 8, ts'e 1, ch. 1, p. 4b*). "Pictured walls, umbrage shaded" (*hua pi yin sen* 畫壁陰森) in Wen T'ing-yün 溫庭筠, "Sheng mei p'ing feng ko" 生樛屏風歌 (*CTS, han 9, ts'e 5, ch. 1, p. 3b*).

⁴² "Equipage" is *chia* 駕, following a standard dictionary definition: "a carriage of state or of pleasure, with all that accompanies it, as horses, liveried servants, etc."

The second part of the canto, embodying the same structure as the first, moves the scene to the Kiang River, probably near Tung-t'ing Lake 洞庭湖, but possibly west of there at Shamanka Mountain (Wu Shan 巫山) in the gorges — one haunt of the Divine Woman, whom poets have identified with the Consort of the Hsiang (Hsiang Fei 湘妃), as Venus has been identified with Aphrodite.⁴³ The Kiang-Hsiang goddess, a presence only faintly visible here, is the counterpart of the Ho-Fen goddess of the first stanza. Here the poet as lover, or king, or shaman, dreams of a divine liaison:

Above the Kiang the herbs are lushly verdant;

[A green slope over the great river shows the fertility of nature, appropriate to the appearance of a fertility spirit in the next verse. The setting is antithetic to that at the beginning of the preceding stanza, which was set in dying autumn.]

It is the evening of spring, before the Consort's fane.

[It is not merely "a spring evening" but spring's evening — the late spring. In the Chinese calendar, early spring yields sparse apricot blossoms to match the remnants of winter snow — not the lush vegetation supplied here. We learn below that this is the morning after a night of divine visions.]

A whole quarter of egg-color: the sky south of Ch'u!

[An egg-tinted sky — that is, the color of ivory — is an image of a humid or rainy atmosphere. The protagonist, presenting himself at the temple during the spring season of ritual mating sees the early tokens of the approaching summer monsoon in the southern sky. He interprets the vision as a sign of the presence of the divine woman of Sung Yü's 宋玉 rhapsodies:⁴⁴ she is always present in the fertilizing rain.]

Several columns of wild geese aslant: uninterrupted flight.

[Strings of wild geese, headed northward to their mating grounds in Siberia, pass endlessly across the sky in chevron array; this is yet another sexual allusion. It appears to stimulate the pilgrim to reminiscence, as follows.]

Alone, I lean on the vermilion railing — feelings limitless.

[From a balcony, the visitor contemplates the northward progress of yang, as the yin of winter fades. Apparently he has stayed overnight at the temple, as the custom was, hoping for

some kind of ecstatic union, if only in a dream. But his hope fades too.]

Our cloud-souls⁴⁵ parted, I keep that other in mind all through the dawn.

[After waking from his dream or trance, in which he experienced some sort of union with the naiad, the narrator passes the early morning hours brooding about her fleeting, inconstant image.]

A pair of oars — unaware of surge or ebb;

[The protagonist is leaving the riverside temple by boat. He plies his oars, indifferent alike to the movements of the water and to the affairs of the busy world. The rhythmic oscillations of the oars mark the regular passage of time, the ups and downs of everyday life, the swings of fashion, and the like. He has had a glimpse of eternity, and, obsessed with his midnight experience, is still indifferent to the world of transience.]

At times they rouse falcated teal⁴⁶ from a far sandflat.

[Occasionally the splash of the oars sends up pairs of drowsy teal from distant sandbars. The pretty creatures represent the real world of movement, form, and color. Our hero passes gradually out of his private world of dreams and illusions.]⁴⁷

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CTS *Ch'üan T'ang shih* 全唐詩

HY *Combined Indices to the Authors and Titles of Books in Two Collections of Taoist Literature*

TPKC *T'ai p'ing kuang chi* 太平廣記

⁴³ For "cloud-soul" (*hun* 魂) see Edward H. Schafer, "The Capeline Cantos," *Asiatische Studien* 32 (1978), p. 40, citing a poem by Wei Chuang 韋莊 that describes a dream liaison between a Taoist priestess and her divine lover. In dreams this tenuous entity is separated from the body to travel and encounter other souls, spirits, and even wakeful persons.

⁴⁴ A colorful teal with sickle-shaped tertiaries; the name apparently included both *Anas falcata* and the Baikal Teal (*Anas formosa*). The little ducks frequent inland fresh waters.

⁴⁷ There is an inaccurate translation of these stanzas in Lois Fusek, *Among the Flowers: The Hua-chien chi* (New York: Columbia U. P., 1982), pp. 148-49.

⁴³ See Edward H. Schafer, *The Divine Woman* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1980), p. 122.

⁴⁴ *Kao T'ang fu* 高唐賦 and *Shen nü fu* 神女賦.