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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exposing the Authorial Intent? Self-Commentaries in Xie Lingyun's *Shanju Fu*

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One remarkable feature of the early-fifth-century autobiographical poem *Shanju fu* 山居賦 (*Fu* on dwelling in the mountains) by Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433) is that the poet provided his verse with regular annotation in what he called "self-commentaries" (*zizhu* 自註). The *Shanju fu*, composed in the grand *fu* genre, was written after the poet, following his abrupt decision, not sanctioned by the court, to retire from office, settled on his ancestral estate in Shining in Guiji prefecture on the eastern periphery of Song state. The poem provides extensive descriptions of the environment through the eyes of the poet personally observing, discovering, inspecting, managing, and enjoying his estate. These descriptions are framed with brief meditations on the general topic of living in reclusion, the lives of the poet and his ancestors, and his own pursuit of Daoist longevity and Buddhist enlightenment. Unlike previous scholarship about the *Shanju fu*, I discuss the poem from the perspective of its self-commentaries and argue that they are an important structural device enabling the author to mitigate the potentially dangerous rhetoric of political independence and sovereignty subtly expressed in the poem.

新劉宋朝局勢剛剛穩定不久，謝靈運（385－433 年）辭官歸隱，回到祖居始寧別墅，創作了著名的自傳體辭賦《山居賦》，展現了作為莊園主的獨立性和高雅風致。在這篇宏大的賦作中，詩人不僅繼承了漢大賦恢弘的結構和磅礴的氣勢，還大膽地融入了創新元素。不同於傳統賦體的誇張與華麗，他以第一人稱生動地描繪家族莊園的細節和自己的山居生活，記錄了個人的親身經歷與細膩觀察。此外，作者在行文中添加了豐富的自註，使《山居賦》在賦史上獨樹一幟。與以往關於《山居賦》的研究不同，本文從自註的角度切入，將其視為一種重要的結構設計。通過對內容的精心註釋，謝靈運巧妙地引導讀者按照他設定的路徑理解作品，避免因誤讀而引發潛在的顛覆性解讀，進而消解關於他"背叛朝廷"或"稱雄鄉裡"的猜測和議論。

Keywords: Xie Lingyun, *Shanju fu*, self-commentary

關鍵詞： 謝靈運，《山居賦》，自註

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Introduction[1]

In the autumn of the first year of the short-lived Jingping 景平 era (423), Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433), disappointed by the failure of his political ambitions during the Jin–Song transition and humiliated by his demotion, decided to leave the official service of the recently enthroned incompetent teenage emperor Shaodi 少帝 (r. 423–424) and "forever" retire to his family estate in Shining 始寧, Guiji 會稽 prefecture, on the south-eastern periphery of Song state.[2] After relocating to his ancestral home, Xie Lingyun composed the *Shanju fu* 山居賦 (*Fu* on dwelling in the mountains), an extensive autobiographical poem of some 9,000 characters in the grand *fu* (*da fu* 大賦) genre.[3] This long composition consists of a short preface (*xu* 序) followed by the *fu* proper in forty-seven thematically distinct stanzas (*zhang* 章)[4] of unequal length that are rhymed and use an elaborate metre.[5] Most of the *fu* is dedicated to a fairly detailed description of the environment, both natural and man-made, around Shining, presenting itself as a factual record based on the poet's personal observations as he roams around the landscape, discovers its beauties, and manages and develops his estate. Here he also practises religious activities, searches for longevity drugs, and above all, as he repeatedly remarks, enjoys himself. Eight stanzas – four in the beginning and four in the conclusion – frame the mostly factual descriptions with more general argumentation and personal statements of values and aspirations. These touch upon the ideas of hermit life (stanzas 1, 2), the wisdom of Buddhist teachings (stanza 43), the Daoist view of the uselessness of book knowledge (stanza 44), and the search for longevity (stanza 46). Part of the framing, also, are stanzas with biographical information: one introducing Xie Lingyun's grandfather, Xie Xuan 謝玄 (343–388; stanza 4), in whose footsteps the poet has decided to retire to Shining (stanza 5), and one about the poet himself and his love for literature and literary talent (stanza 45). In the last stanza, the personal and philosophical merges in a short proclamation of Buddhist enlightenment as the ultimate goal of the poet's reclusive life.

Shen Yue in his biography of Xie Lingyun, before he inserts the full text of the *Shanju fu*, writes: "Each time a poem of his arrived in the city, everybody hastened to copy it, and in a moment it was all around, among nobility and commoners alike. From near and far, all adored it, and his fame resounded throughout the capital" (每有一詩至都邑，貴賤莫不競寫，宿昔之間，士庶皆徧，遠近欽慕，

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[1] I want to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions and comments. I also thank Marie Bizais-Lillig for initiating our discussion about commentaries in early and medieval Chinese literature and for her insights and comments. My thanks also to Alison Hardie for polishing some of my translations.

[2] After two and a half years, he eventually returned to the capital to resume office. In 428 he would retire again for another short period but was forced by circumstances to return to office again in 431, never to go back to his home estate. For a detailed biography see Frodsham 1967.

[3] The text is mostly complete, with several lacunae and one full stanza missing. In this article I used the *Song shu* 宋書 edition (Shen Yue 1974: 1753–1772), occasionally consulting Gu 2004 and Li 1999. I also consulted translations by Westbrook 1973 and Elvin 2008. For translation I use Westbrook as much as possible; if not marked as such, a translation is my own. I have unified transcription, punctuation, and capitalisation in verse in all translations.

[4] For the sake of simple identification, I number the stanzas, as Westbrook 1973 does as well, though he calls them "sections".

[5] For details about the elaborate metre, see the commentaries on the translation in Westbrook 1973.

名動京師; *Song shu* 67.1754). Thus, we can assume that when Xie Lingyun composed the *Shanju fu* he could also expect it would be read, admired, and discussed in the capital like his lyrical poetry. Compared to other poetry of the period, including Xie Lingyun's own *Zhuan zheng fu* 撰征賦 (Record of the Punitive Expedition), composed a few years earlier to celebrate general Liu Yu's 劉裕 (363–422; future emperor Wudi 武帝 of the Song) military campaign to the north, the language of the *Shanju fu* is relatively simple. Though the verse is mostly transparent, particularly in the descriptive stanzas, the poet annotated each stanza with a self-commentary (*zizhu* 自註) in plain prose. Like the stanzas, the commentaries are also of unequal length but put together they occupy more than half of the whole composition. Their considerable bulk and regular occurrence suggest that the poet used the commentaries as a structural device contributing to the overall meaning of the composition. Given the role of commentary in classical texts (Makeham 2003, Cheng 2017), we may assume that the unprecedented literary device of annotating his own verse was motivated by the poet's wish to guide the readers to the "proper" understanding of his poem and reveal his authorial intent. The central question of this article is how these self-commentaries are employed and what they convey. I will argue that Xie Lingyun complemented his verse with commentaries mainly to counterbalance the potentially dangerous implications of the themes of power and independence encoded in his choice of genre and permeating his proud depiction of his life on the family estate. The danger was not negligible given Xie Lingyun's personal record in the power struggles during the recent years of dynastic change.

The Rhetoric of Power

Thus far, scholars have not considered issues of power as central to the *Shanju fu.* The poem is mostly read as a eulogy of Xie Lingyun's Shining estate and as an innovation in the art of landscape literature (Knechtges 2012) or as an expression of a particular way of eremitism (Swartz 2010, 2018). Due to its comprehensive descriptions of both the natural landscape and economic activities on the land, Mark Elvin introduced it to English readers as "the first coherent conception of an environment" in China (Elvin 2008). Cheng Yu-yu 鄭毓瑜 does elaborate the issue of imperial rhetoric present in the poem, as she points out the presence of the genre conventions of the ancient grand *fu*; however, central to her reading is Xie Lingyun's new method of knowledge production through bodily experience recorded in the poem which "heralds a new kind of geographical discourse" (Cheng 2007: 204).

However, we also encounter in Xie Lingyun's comprehensive description of his mountain abode a distinct thread of meaning that is undoubtedly related to power and politics. This connection is signalled by the choice of genre and some of the vocabulary used, as the poet inscribes his family estate and his own person on to the template of Han-dynasty monumental descriptions of "all under heaven" with the omnipotent ruler at its centre.[6] Like the rulers in the grand *fu* of the Han, who travel around

[6] Knechtges also mentions that Xie Lingyun "is surveying his realm in the manner of an ancient sovereign" (2012: 30) and other scholars briefly comment on the grand *fu* template as well, but they do not regard the choice of genre and its conventions as essential for the

the imaginary world they rule over, Xie Lingyun also surveys his ancestral lands in the direction of the four cardinal points of the compass, switches between views of mountains rising upward and waters flowing below, and changes perspective from broad vistas to the "ten thousand things" presented through catalogues of plants and animals. In doing so, he introduces the environment as a self-sustained complete universe with himself in possession of and with full control over his "domain" (*fengyu* 封域; stanza 16).

Xie Lingyun frames the description of his estate with the legacy of his grandfather Xie Xuan, once the most powerful man in the Jin dynasty, whose former house and grave are located there. The poet also encodes power and authority in the key vocabulary of "landscape" (*shanchuan* 山川, mountains and streams, instead of *shanshui* 山水 typically used in recluse poetry), a topos used throughout the poem and originally related to regional administration and government control (Cheng 2008). Unlike in earlier recluse literature, the mountain abode Xie Lingyun depicts is not just a place to hide away from the mundane world. He writes that he also "administers it" (commentaries to stanzas 4, 5, and 29), using the vocabulary known from ancient texts as referring to the power of the ruler determining the borders of his lands (*jing* 經, or *jinglüe* 經略).[7] It is a place "opened by development" (*kaichuang* 開創; commentary to stanza 34), in which all sorts of production are occurring. Thus, the poet can claim economic self-sufficiency and has therefore "established himself" (*li* 立) on his fields (stanza 17), hence has become independent of the power centre at the court, "watering vegetables to provide for myself, not awaiting outside help" (灌蔬自供，不待外求者也; commentary to stanza 40).[8]

Imperial grandeur lingers behind the comparisons of his lands with the famous parks of the ancient feudal lords and rich aristocrats through references to Mei Sheng 枚乘 (d. 140 BCE), Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179–117 BCE), Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139 CE), Zuo Si 左思 (250–305), and other famous grand *fu* authors. Xie Lingyun claims that his Shining estate is superior to the famous parks of ancient rulers because of its completeness, which in turn is the core quality of the cosmic visions of the grand *fu*. In the preface he assures readers that the estate he is going to describe in his poem is unlike the imperial visions offered by the famous authors of the grand *fu*: "What I sing of on the present occasion is not the splendid appearance and sounds of the palaces or hunting expeditions in capital cities ..." (今所賦既非京都宮觀、遊獵聲色之盛...). Wendy Swartz understands this and a few other similar statements in the poem rejecting the grand *fu* tradition to mean that the *Shanju fu* is "deliberately situated outside the received corpus of *fu*" (2010: 383). However, by explicitly mentioning the themes and authors of the paradigmatic grand *fu*, Xie Lingyun still brings an awareness of the imperial imagination into the discourse. The poet, in a certain way, even compares himself to the

meaning of the poem.

[7] See the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, Lord Zhao 7: "The Son of Heaven determines the borders and the princes rectify the frontiers" (天子經略，諸侯正封。) (*Zuo Tradition* 2016: 1413).

[8] "Watering vegetables" is a variant of a widely used allusion to self-sufficiency in hermit life. It originated in the story of Chen Zhongzi 陳仲子 of the Waring States period, who withdraw from office to "water his garden" (灌园). Xie Lingyun might echo here the usage of this allusion in Pan Yue's 潘岳 (247–300) *Xianju fu* 闲居赋 (*Fu* on Living in Idleness): "I water my garden, sell vegetables in order to supply food for my morning and evening meals" (灌園粥蔬，以供朝夕之膳) (trans. Knechtges 1996: 147).

exemplary rulers of antiquity, the Yellow Emperor 黃帝 and Yao 堯, when alluding to Zhuangzi 莊子 (ca. 4th century BCE), who claims that the ancient sages eventually left the palace to enjoy themselves in the wilderness (see preface and stanza 1, which are from a structural perspective the crucial places setting up the poem's main themes).

The poet, however, counterbalances the rhetoric of power and sovereignty that might potentially be interpreted as subversive of the absolute power of the Song ruler. Unlike the expansive imaginary space typical of the grand *fu* embracing "all under heaven", Xie Lingyun places himself at the centre of a distinct space located on the periphery of the Song state with clearly delineated borders. Beginning with a general view of his "mountain abode" surrounded by waters and mountain ranges (stanza 6), he makes clear that his estate is blocked off from the rest of the country by difficult terrain. When he circles his domain for the second time (stanzas 11–14), he reconfirms the seclusion of his estate, and hence its distance from the centre of power in the capital, by naming mountains and rivers in the distance enclosing Shining on all sides, some inhabited by legendary recluses and immortals who also abandoned official service. Xie Lingyun further reiterates the limits of his domain by describing its concrete and local-specific features, turning the hyperbolic, imaginary visions of the expansive realm of all-under-heaven of the grand *fu* mould into a truthful record of a unique locality personally experienced and transformed by the poet.

Power and politics are present in yet another aspect of the *Shanju fu*, in the topos of a timely retirement from the highest courtly positions. Xie Lingyun first alludes to this in the theme-setting stanza 1 through stories of famous officials of the past, who after accomplishing remarkable deeds in the service of their rulers either withdrew from politics and thus preserved their life (Zhang Liang 張良 and Fan Li 範蠡), or remained in service and were eventually executed (Li Si 李斯 and Lu Ji 陸機).[9] He uses the same topos when writing about his grandfather Xie Xuan, recounting how Xuan, together with his uncle Xie An 謝安 (320–385), distinguished himself in securing the survival of the Jin dynasty and held the highest state positions, but eventually "asked to be released from office in order to avoid the troubles at the court" (於是便求解駕東歸，以避君側之亂; commentary to stanza 4).

The Commentaries

Writing extensive commentaries on one's own poem was an unprecedented literary device. According to Qing scholar Wang Qisun 王芑孫 (1755–1817), Xie Lingyun was the first author to annotate his

[9] Zhang Liang (250–189 BCE) helped to establish the Han dynasty, and Fan Li (536–448 BCE) helped king Goujian 勾践 of Yue 越 defeat Wu 吳. Both distanced themselves from the court of their rulers to practise the art of longevity, and thus avoided later turmoil. On the contrary, Li Si (280–208 BCE), who was instrumental in setting up the power of Qin Shihuangdi 秦始皇帝, and Lu Ji (261–303 CE), who achieved considerable success for his lord in the wars known as the Rebellion of Eight Princes, did not withdraw and eventually misfortune befell them. Both are known for regretting their decisions before being executed. Reference to the negative example of Pan Yue and Lu Ji in a way echoes discussion between Xie Lingyun's cousins Zhan 瞻 and Hui 晦 discussed by Cynthia Chennault (1999, 277–278).

own poem. The next to do so, only one and a half centuries later, was another Six Dynasties author, Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–591). In Wang Qisun's opinion, Xie Lingyun thus established a new genre of self-commentary in Chinese literature. [10]

For his experiment, Xie Lingyun chose the *zhu* 註 type commentary widespread during the early medieval period and typically used outside the established orthodox commentarial traditions (Makeham, 373–375). The *zhu* (which Makeham translates as "annotation") combines the practice of the *xungu* 訓詁 philological glosses typical of Eastern Han *gu wen* 古文 scholars with the *zhangju* 章句 type of exegesis explaining the overall meaning of each "section and sentence", first employed by Wang Yi 王逸 (fl. 130–140) in the *Chuci* 楚辭 poetic anthology (Schimmelpfennig 2004). Although Xie Lingyun sometimes glosses pronunciations and identifies the sources of intertextual references, he predominantly comments on his verses using a simple narrative, summarising their contents or elaborating upon a select meaning. Thus, the poet does to his own verse what Liu Xie 劉勰 would define in the *Wen xin diao long* 文心雕龍 as the purpose of the commentaries attached to the classics: "To elaborate and praise the meaning expressed by the sages; there is nothing as good as commenting on the classics" (*fu zan shen zhi, mo ruo zhu jing* 敷讚聖旨, 莫若註經; Zhou 1986, 445).

Disambiguation and Judgement

Xie Lingyun's self-commentaries typically remove potential ambiguities contained in his verse. The shortest ones briefly summarise the preceding stanza, restating in a factual way what was expressed in verse, even though the verse may not be difficult to understand. Such redundancy by the fact of repetition also highlights the main point of the prior verse.[11] For example, in stanza 33 about his two mountain residences the poet seeks to emphasise in this way their difficulty of access:

若迺南北兩居，　　Now there are two dwellings, south and north,
水通陸阻。　　connected by water, blocked by land.
觀風瞻雲，　　I observe the wind, look up to the clouds –
方知厥所。　　and only then know where they are.

兩居謂南北兩處，各有居止。峯崿阻絕，水道通耳。觀風瞻雲，然後方知其處所。

[10] Quoted from Hu 2013, 43. On the early evolution of "auto-commentary" in Chinese poetry, including in the *fu* genre, see Tian Xiaofei in this volume.

[11] The repetitiveness inspired Zhao Hongxiang (2016) to offer a hypothesis tracing the origins of the format of Xie Lingyun's self-commentary to the *Fojing heben zizhu* 佛經合本子註, i.e., editions of Buddhist sutras in which several different versions of the same text are collected together.

> "Two dwellings" means that the southern and northern sites each has a lodging. The peaks and cliffs block them completely, they are connected just by a water route. Only after I observe the wind and look up to the clouds, do I know where these places are (stanza 33).

Searching for one's way and getting lost in the mountains are reminiscent of a literary motif Xie Lingyun uses in his *shi* 詩 "landscape poetry", which is open to savouring potential meanings "beyond the words". His self-commentary limits the meaning to the factual statement that the places described are remote and difficult to access, and thus precludes a potential figurative reading. The same motif of difficult access and seeking the way by looking to the sky is again elaborated in a longer stanza about the environment of the northern residence. There, in twenty-four verses, the poet records his hikes in the mountains followed by a cross-water journey during which he becomes disoriented in thick bushes and in the end finds his way only by observing the stars (stanza 36). The imaginative verse of this stanza is open to the symbolism of seeking the way, but in the commentary the poet bluntly summarises his experience in one sentence before adding his personal judgement about the landscape:

> 往反經過，自非巖澗，便是水逕，洲島相對，皆有趣也。
>
> My route there and back, if it is not through ravines, proceeds by water; the islets face each other and it is all fascinating (stanza 36).

Laudatory remarks about the scenery like the one concluding the self-commentary to the just quoted stanza is one of the recurring features. Short explicit appraisals of course pale in the face of the vivid verse depictions and thus seem redundant. However, like the repetitive summaries, they function as indicators of what the poet wants to draw his readers' attention to. Through frequent assessments of his estate as fascinating (有趣), beautiful (*mei* 美), marvellous (*qi* 奇), pleasant (*le* 樂), or enjoyable (*wan* 玩), he echoes his initial statement from the preface that he "ventures to indulge his pleasure" (*gan shuai suo le* 敢率所樂), a remark guiding the reader away from the rhetoric of power to the socially sanctioned idea of living a reclusive life in accord with one's "inborn nature and disposition" (*xing qing* 性情).

Authenticity and Realism

The most visible effect of the self-commentaries in the *Shanju fu* is to underscore the authenticity and realism of the poem as a truthful record of the poet's life in his mountain abode. In some cases, the self-commentaries specify what was mentioned in the verse in general terms, whereas in others, they elaborate on the details of what the verse has already mentioned. With the help of the self-commentaries, the poet adds further local specific details and highlights his estate as a place unique in its

physical reality. Xie Lingyun adds or explains local toponyms, precise locations, distances and measurements, and records other factual aspects of the environment. As a result, as scholars have already noted, the commentaries virtually map out the space in which the poet is physically present.[12] Thus, the commentary in these stanzas guides the reader to focus on the factual, limiting metaphorical readings and potential meanings with dangerous implications of personal ambition.

We encounter a recurring pattern here: the poet first captures a beautiful dynamic landscape in verse which could stand on its own as an accomplished piece of poetry, while in the following commentary, he translates his poetic scenery into the factual language of the geographer and naturalist. The longest commentary of this type is attached to stanza 34, dealing with the house the poet had built at South Mountain; it is written as a full essay of more than 400 characters in length.[13]

Shanju fu contains several shorter examples of the same commentarial strategy. In the *fu* proper, in stanza 8 dedicated to the "near south" of the estate, the poet first charts one of his dramatic landscapes of rivers, cliffs, woods, water, and sand, all elements interconnected and interacting in constant motion. In his commentary, he specifies concrete details at the expense of the original dynamic whole. The verse and prose put together give the reader the impression that the poet is initially carried away by experiencing the beauty and dynamism of the landscape, which has unleashed his poetic art. But then he steps back to assure his readers that his verses mean nothing more than a factual recording of the physical reality of his mountain abode in Shining. Remarks about the terrifying wilderness and the remnants of the former administrative seat, now abandoned and overtaken by the forces of nature, highlight this place's isolation from the centre of civilisation and power in the capital:[14]

近南	Near to the south
則會以雙流，	is a confluence of two streams,
縈以三洲。	which coil around three islands.
表裏回游，	Outward and inward they turn and roam,
離合山川。	parting and joining the mountains and rivers.
崿崩飛於東峭，	Crags topple and fly from the eastern cliffs,
槃傍薄於西阡。	immense boulders extend to the western trail.
拂青林而激波，	The dark woods brush [water] and raise waves;
揮白沙而生漣。	The white sands scatter and form ripples.

雙流，謂剡江及小江，此二水同會於山南，便合流註下。三洲在二水之口，排沙積岸，成此洲漲。表裏離合，是其貌狀也。崿者謂回江岑，在其山居之南界，有石跳出，將

[12] Jin & Jin 2009 use the evidence of the *Shanju fu* to identify the original location of the estate on the current map of Shining and surrounding counties in Zhejiang province.

[13] For a translation of the commentary, see Swartz 2015: 23–25.

[14] For a different reading of this stanza, see Knechtges 2012: 24–25.

> 崩江中，行者莫不駭慄。槃者是縣故治之所，在江之西岸，用槃石竟渚，並帶青林而連白沙也。
>
> The two streams are the Shan River and the Little River, these two rivers conjoin south of the mountain, and then flow down together. The three islets are located at the mouth of the two rivers, which push sand and accumulate it into banks to form these sediment isles. "Outward and inward" and "parting and joining" describe their appearance. As for the crags, this is Huijiangcen ("The peak where the river turns") on the southern bounds of my mountain residence, rocks leap out as if about to collapse into the river, no one walking around here would remain unterrified. The "Great Boulder" in olden times was the seat of government for this district, it is at the river's ... [lacuna]...boulders were used to enclose a holm; it is girdled with dark forests and linked to white sands. (Westbrook 1973, 223–224, adapted)

The following stanza about the western side ("nearby west") of the estate is perhaps the most striking example of turning the reader's attention away from the poetic, and hence the ambivalent, to the concrete and straightforward. The concluding two couplets of the *fu* proper stand out for their imagery and poetic language. Through carefully balanced parallelism, the poet brings together colours, light, and sound, and the landscape, seemingly in motion, is merged into one dynamic picture transformed in time through cause and effect explicitly expressed in the syntactic construction with *yi* 以 and *er* 而 repeated in the last couplet.

近西則	In the near west
楊、賓接峯，	Yang and Bin connect peaks,
唐皇連縱。	Tang and Huang join freely.
室、壁帶谿，	The House and the Wall girdle the gorge,
曾、孤臨江。	Zeng and Gu overlook the river.
竹緣浦以被綠，	Bamboo hems the shores, cloaking them in green,
石照澗而映紅。	rocks shine into the torrent, reflecting red.
月隱山而成陰，	The moon hides in the hills, and it turns dark,
木鳴柯以起風。	the trees sound their branches, and the breeze rises (stanza 9).

The last two couplets are difficult to translate due to the ambivalence of the original enabled by Chinese grammar's flexibility and the multidirectionality of the verbs *zhao* 照 and *ying* 映, both of which have the double meaning of "to shine on" and "to reflect." The third couplet does not simply provide evidence of the colours and light of the landscape; it lets the colours and light appear and spread, reflecting off one another; the scenery is in motion, turning green and red. In the following couplet, the landscape's animation becomes even more complex, as the confusing cause-and-effect relationship

suggested by the grammar obliterates what is reality and what is false appearance. Has it become dark because the moon moved behind the hills, which would imply passing time, or is it the hills that hide the moon's rising above the confined space of a narrow valley? And what is the relationship between the "singing" of the trees and the rising wind? Could it be that with the rising wind (again a temporal element), birds — not mentioned in the verse but present in the self-commentary — hid on the tree branches, singing there? This uncertainty and disorientation draw the reader into the landscape, opening the scenery up to his own imagination and potential figurative reading. In the commentary, however, the poet switches to a dry geographical account, providing place names and other factual data, including references to local lore about immortals, implying again the meaning of seclusion and distance from the capital. The poetic image of the concluding couplet is eventually explained away with a rational argument:[15]

> 楊中、元賓，並小江之近處，與山相接也。唐皇便從北出。室，石室，在小江口南岸。壁，小江北岸。並在楊中之下。壁高四十丈，色赤，故曰照澗而映紅。曾山之西，孤山之南，王子所經始，並臨江，皆被以綠竹。山高月隱，便謂為陰；鳥集柯鳴，便謂為風也。
>
> Yangzhong and Yuanbin are both close to the Little River and are linked to the mountain. Tang and Huang then come out from the north. The House is the Stone House, it is on the south bank of the Little River estuary. The Wall is the north bank of the Little River. Both [mountains] are below Yangzhong. The Wall is forty *zhang* high, tinted red; thus I say "shines in the torrent" and "reflecting red." West of Mount Zeng, south of Mount Gu, is where Master Wang started his activities. Both [mountains] overlook a river, which is cloaked in green bamboo. The mountains are high, and the moon hidden, so I say, "it turns dark"; birds come to roost and branches rustle; thus I say "it causes wind" (stanza 9).[16]

Sometimes the poet's commentaries turn into a naturalist's cataloguing and classifying, with a touch of pedantic over-explanation, such as in stanza 23, which is about the abundance of animals flourishing around the mountains and streams in accord with their nature. In the overall arrangement of the poem, this stanza serves as a general introduction to stanzas focusing on fish, birds, and mountain animals, following descriptions of the vegetation. As in the short summarising commentaries quoted above, the main point here is to highlight one idea from the stanza, in this case, the natural order of things expressed through observing the animals behaving "according to what is proper for them". This notion meshes with the Daoist discourse of naturalness raised in other parts of the poem as well and is in accord with the recluse theme:

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[15] One of the reviewers suggested a more positive assessment of the commentary, pointing out how the commentary acts as an intertext for the poem, letting the reader juxtapose the poetic ambiguities with the factual scene as a value of its own. This is a valuable point; however, from the perspective of literary aesthetics, I still perceive the commentary as destructive to the immediacy of the verse.

[16] My interpretation is one of many possible (see, e.g., Knechtges 2012: 25–26); it was also disputed by Tian Xiaofei during the workshop held in Strasbourg in December 2022. The disagreement conforms to the poetic ambiguity of Xie Lingyun's verse, which is eventually narrowed down by the commentary.

植物既載， Once the vegetation was planted,

動類亦繁。 animals also became abundant.

飛泳騁透， Flying and swimming, galloping and bounding,

胡可根源。 how could one identify them?

觀貌相音， Observing their appearance and listening to their sounds –

備列山川。 they are arrayed through the mountains and streams.

寒燠順節， According with the season, cold and hot,

隨宜匪敦。 they follow what is proper for them, not to be compelled.

草、木、竹，植物。魚、鳥、獸，動物。獸有數種，有騰者，有走者。走者騁，騰者透。謂種類既繁，不可根源，但觀其貌狀，相其音聲，則知山川之好。興節隨宜，自然之數，非可敦戒也。

Grasses, trees, and bamboo are vegetation. Fish, birds, and beasts are animals. Among the beasts there are several kinds: those that leap, and those that run. Those that run, gallop, those that soar up, bound. This means the varieties are so numerous one cannot sort them out. Just by watching appearances and listening to their sounds, I can know how perfect the mountains and streams are. Prospering according to seasons is a matter of what is proper to each of them and it cannot be urged or warned off (stanza 23).

The above-quoted examples illustrate how Xie Lingyun adapts the grand *fu*'s cosmic imagination into naturalistic depictions of the unique secluded space of his estate. The self-commentaries further enhance the factuality of the depictions based on personal observations and involvement with the landscape. In some of his commentaries, particularly in stanza 29, the poet is explicit about the empirical basis of his knowledge about the environment, even rejecting reliance on divination (and hence text dependency): "I say that when I started to manage and plan the place, I personally walked around and endured all possible hardships. I completely removed all its imperfections without using yarrow stalks and tortoise shells" (雲初經略，躬自履行，備諸苦辛也。罄其淺短，無假於龜筮。).

Intertextuality

In Xie Lingyun's time, intertextuality was at the core of the poetic style both in *shi* lyrical poetry and *fu* rhapsodies. Allusions and borrowed vocabulary were used both to embellish the verse and to mediate complex ideas by engaging in dialogue with ancient texts. Notwithstanding the prominent factuality of the *Shanju fu*'s descriptions, confirmed and further developed in the self-commentaries,

some stanzas are rich in intertextual references, and the author devotes considerable space in his self-commentaries to identifying their source texts.

In his close reading of Xie Lingyun's landscape *shi* poetry, Stephen Owen points out that his seemingly direct observations of natural beauty are in fact shaped by literary sources and composed in response to them (Owen 2004).[17] Likewise, Wendy Swartz explores how Xie Lingyun's depictions of the landscape in his *shi* poetry were informed by quotations from the *Yijing* 易經 and more generally *Yijing* hermeneutics (Swartz 2010). In her research on the *Shanju fu*, she finds the same primacy of the *Yijing* text behind the themes of building, ornamentation, and representation, elaborated in the preface and stanza 2 with general ruminations about different types of reclusive life. She explores how the poet used this classic to structure his argument about his own concept of life as a recluse throughout the *fu*.

Besides the *Yijing*, in the *Shanju fu* Xie Lingyun refers to a broad variety of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist texts, as well as poetry (primarily *fu*), yet he mostly does so in a less complex manner than suggested by his use of the *Yijing*. Particularly in the descriptive stanzas, the intertextual references which the poet annotates in his self-commentaries do not so much reveal a structural pattern behind the representation of the landscape as they *ex post facto* provide textual evidence in a particular way confirming the representation of empirically experienced reality. Turning around Stephen Owen's observation about Xie Lingyun's lyrical *shi* poetry, we can say that in the *Shanju fu* the poet does not read the physical world through texts but rather sometimes transplants textual knowledge into the real landscape primarily experienced through his senses.

In his descriptions of the Shining environment, the poet works with intertextual references selectively. There are stanzas without any intertextual references (or at least the poet does not point to them in his self-commentaries), while for example in commentaries to stanzas dedicated to plants and animals, the "ten thousand things" of the Chinese universe, the poet annotates many, but usually without bringing deeper meaning into the poem. Swartz explains similar cases, when references to early texts are mixed up with factual descriptions, from an epistemic perspective as the "reciprocal reinforcement" of book learning and empirical knowledge (Swartz, 2018: 256). However, the abrupt insertion of unmotivated references to the canon into otherwise ostentatiously factual descriptions also suggests playful encoding of the textual authority into the reality of the Shining environment. In this way, the poet suffuses his own land with the aura of the classics and places the Shining periphery at the centre of the orthodox tradition tied to political power since time immemorial. Such elevation of his estate corresponds with his erudition and literary accomplishment which he proudly presents when speaking about himself (see stanza 45).[18]

This strategy of mixing embodied experience and textual tradition is perhaps best exemplified by the commentary to the powerful description of the profusion of water around the South Mountain house. In the *fu* proper, the poet observes with a naturalist's eye how the first springs emerge from the slopes

[17] François Martin also pointed out the intertextuality of Xie Lingyun's *yuefu* poetry (Martin 2000).

[18] An analogy of the technique of elevating his estate by imprinting authoritative texts on reality can be seen in the replica gardens based on records about the life of Buddha which the poet has built to make present the Buddha land in Shining (stanza 28).

of the hills surrounding Taihu 太湖 lake, then gradually gather water and force, forming abundant brooks and rivulets winding into the distance to eventually return and flow into the lake (stanza 35).[19] In the self-commentary, he confirms the factuality of his description, but only after he identifies as of bookish origin four adjectives describing the changing character of the water oozing out from the ground and swelling into streams with abundant water winding around:

因以小湖， Dependent on small lakes,

鄰於其隈。 close to their coves,

眾流所湊， there the numerous streams flow

萬泉所回。 and ten thousand springs wind around.

汎濫異形， Oozing askew, then overflowing, each with a distinct shape,

首毖終肥。 first only dripping, in the end abundant.

別有山水， This is a unique landscape,

路邈緬歸。 their course is long, from afar they return.

汎濫、肥毖，皆是泉名，事見於詩。雲此萬泉所湊，各有形勢。

"Oozing askew and overflowing," "dripping and abundant" – these all name the springs, see the *Shijing*. I say that it is a place where myriad streams gather, each with a distinct shape (stanza 35).

A similar blending of reality with references to the classics with unclear connotations is prominent in the stanza devoted to fish. It consists first of a catalogue of sixteen species living in Shining's waters. This is followed by a vivid description based on personal observations of their shapes and colours, movements in different types of water environments, and their typical behaviour (with four other species added):

...

輯采雜色， Gathering and blending colours,

錦爛雲鮮。 embroidered and colourful, cloud-like fresh.

唼藻戲浪， Nibbling on rushes, frolicking through waves,

汎荇流淵。 drifting among reeds, streaming to the depths;

或皷鰓而湍躍， some beat their fins and leap in the rapids,

或掉尾而波旋。 others flick their tails and swirl in the billows.

[19] For reading the stanza as a depiction of factual morphology around Shining see also Jin & Jin 2009: 111, and *baihua* translations. Westbrook 1973: 299–300 reads differently.

鱸鱖乘時以入浦， Sea-perch and mullet according to season advance upon the shallows,

鰔鮂沿瀨以出泉。 roach and speed-fish following the torrent emerge from springs[20]

(stanza 24).

The self-commentary first glosses the pronunciations of fish names (omitted here), some of them apparently of local origin, despite the fact that the poet identifies them also from the ancient dictionaries, *Shuowen* 《說文》 and *Zilin* 《字林》. After the glosses the poet in his commentary repeats in prose a naturalist detail from the penultimate verse ("sea-perch and mullet are seasonal fish," 鱸鱖一時魚), and he concludes with judgement: "all come out on stones in the gorges and always provide amusement" (皆出谿中石上，恆以為翫。).

In between the pronunciation glosses and his concluding appreciation, the poet inserts a reference to the source of some of the vocabulary from his description of the colourful fish. "Embroidered and colourful", the poet says, comes from the *Shijing* verse "How colourful was the embroidered coverlet" (錦衾有爛). The verse comes from "Ge sheng 葛生", a Tang Airs poem mourning a deceased wife,[21] interpreted by Mao as a veiled criticism of the warmongering Duke Xian of Jin 晉獻公 who caused the death of many people (Legge 2000: 186; Prolegomena 57). There is no plausible deeper semantic relationship between the colourful fish swiftly moving in water observed and enjoyed by the poet, and the *Shijing* poem the poet identifies in the self-commentary. In the context of the *Shanju fu*, this type of intertextual reference highlighted in the self-commentaries hardly opens a meaningful dialogue with the source text, but it can infuse the otherwise patently local landscape with the authority of the canon. (A similar uplifting effect results from the pronunciation glosses of the vocabulary, which the poet explains with references to classical dictionaries.)

Animals and other "things" (*wu* 物) were popular *topoi* in early medieval poetry, endowed with conventional symbolic meanings rooted in the canon, mainly the *Shijing* and the *Chuci*. A distinct *yong wu* 詠物 genre developed around them, in which select "things" observed and admired in their materiality simultaneously represent values, characters, and human situations (Kirková & Lomová 2022). In the stanza about water plants (stanza 19), the poet first unobtrusively mixes plants without literary precedence with the *Shijing* and *yuefu* 樂府 vocabulary, while he enumerates all in a single catalogue as a comprehensive record of real vegetation.

水草則 Of water plants, there are

萍藻薀茭， duckweed, aquatic grass, mare's tail, and sedges,

雚蒲芹蓀， vine-bean, cat's tails, celery and iris;

蒹菰蘋蘩， reeds, wild-rice, ferns, and artemisia,

蕹荇菱蓮。 rushes, lilies, water-chestnuts, and lotus.

[20] The fish names, borrowed here from Elvin, are only approximate. See Elvin 2008: 356–358.

[21] In standard *Shijing* editions the verse is slightly different: *Jin qin lan xi* 錦衾爛兮 (Legge 2000: 186).

雖備物之偕美， Though all these are beautiful,
獨扶渠之華鮮。 the lotus is the most dazzling;
播綠葉之鬱茂， a profuse scattering of green leaves
含紅敷之繽翻。 midst a riot of budding red blossoms.
怨清香之難留， I grieve that the pure fragrance cannot remain,
矜盛容之易闌。 and pity the full bloom, that will rapidly die.
必充給而後搴， One should carefully tend, and then pluck,
豈蕙草之空殘。 it cannot perish in vain like melilotus.
卷敏弦之逸曲， I love the easy strains of "rapping and bulwarks",
感江南之哀歎。 am moved by the sad plaint of "South of the River".
秦箏倡而溯遊往， The strings of *qin* sang of "going downstream",
唐上奏而舊愛還。 there was a performance "by the pond" for a lover's return

(stanza 19, Westbrook 1973, 247–248, slightly adapted).

The last four verses refer to poetry with motifs of water plants, a fact the poet explains in the self-commentary. Among all the named or indirectly referred to water plants, lotus stands out as "the most dazzling", and unlike the others it is described in considerable and suggestive detail, such as the emotional response of the poet grieving over the decay of the "pure fragrance", or a suggestion how the plant should be tended before being plucked. The disproportionate attention paid to the lotus and the way it is elaborated raises the expectation of some deeper meaning. The plant, including the poet grieving over its blooming and decay, undoubtedly evokes the frustrated persona of Qu Yuan 屈原 (342–268 BCE) presenting himself in the *Lisao* 離騷 as lamenting his misfortune while decorating himself with fragrant lotus flowers and green leaves. Reference to Qu Yuan and the *Chuci* tradition seems to be implied already by Xie Lingyun's choice of a very unusual name *fuju* 扶渠 for the plant.[22] In the self-commentary, the author first partially fulfils the expectation, glossing the verb "pluck" as of *Lisao* origin, but then he keeps silent about the plant, and lotus is conspicuously missing among the plants for which the poet provides literary sources.

搴出離騷。敏弦是采菱歌。江南是相和曲，雲江南采蓮。秦箏倡蒹茄篇，唐上奏蒲生詩，皆感物致賦。魚藻蘋蘩荇亦有詩人之詠，不復具敘。

[22] *Fuju* 扶渠 is a non-standard way of writing 芙蕖, a rare name for lotus used in the 5th poem of the "Nine Regrets" (Jiu huai 九怀) cycle by Wang Bao 王褒 (1st century BCE) and included in the *Chuci* anthology. In the poem Wang Bao mourns "good men of old", among them Qu Yuan, who met with an evil end, and in the spirit of Qu Yuan he laments the troubles of his homeland and himself (for translation see Hawkes 1985: 273–274). In the *Lisao* Qu Yuan uses the more common names *furong* 芙蓉 and *he* 荷.

> "Pluck" comes from the Lisao. "Rapping and bulwarks" is from the "Picking the water-chestnuts" song. "South of the River" is a *xianghe* song; it says "South of the River picking lotus." The strings of *qin* accompanied the "Rush leaves" song. Performance "by the pond" refers to the poem about cat's tails growing. In each case when an object caused emotion it was put to poetry. The fish, grasses, ferns, artemisia, and lilies have also been sung by the authors of *Shijing*, but I won't talk more about them in detail (stanza 19, Westbrook 1973, 248, slightly adapted).

In the self-commentary the poet highlights the symbolic potential of plants as they are directly related to emotions expressed in poetry. Unfortunately the poet remains silent about the kind of emotions he has in mind, and a closer look at the variety of the sources he identifies suggests a mixed picture from which it is hard to construct any coherent meaning relevant within the context of the *Shanju fu*.

When reading this stanza and the attached self-commentary, both suggesting and hiding the meaning potentially mediated by intertextual references, one cannot help but suspect that the poet teases his readers by invoking the Qu Yuan lore only to eventually deny its message. As a result, while the verse opens a variety of associations through intertextual references, the self-commentary both glosses the intertextuality, yet at the same time erases those meanings, which might be regarded as resentful and hence rebellious and dangerous for the poet.

We encounter a similar strategy of both invoking and guiding symbolic meanings away from the Qu Yuan lore in the stanza on the orchards (stanza 39). As in the case of the water plants, the poet first records actual observations about "hundreds of trees standing in rank, some near, some far" (百果備列，乍近乍遠) and enumerates thirteen species growing there. In the self-commentary, he singles out three of them to identify their textual sources: the apricot, the mango, and the orange tree. The annotation of the "apricot platform" (杏壇) as a reference to a place where, according to the *Zhuangzi*, a fisherman met Confucius, and the "mango orchard" (椹園) as a reference to the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*[23] fulfils the educated reader's expectations when reading the living-in-retirement poem.

The reference to the literary origin of the "orange grove" (橘林), however, denies the most obvious expectation of the orange tree as an allusion to "The Ode to the Orange Tree" (*Ju song* 橘頌), another well known part of the Qu Yuan lore. Instead, the poet relates his orange trees to a marginal remark in Yang Xiong's 楊雄 (53 bce–18 ce) *Shudu fu* 蜀都賦 (*Fu* on the capital of Shu), a poem not regarded as a typical source text for the orange tree topos. In fact, the poet could have left the orange trees in his park without identifying any literary source for them, as he did with the majority of the other trees in the stanza. As a result, by his choice of an unusual intertextual reference free of distinct symbolism,

[23] The name refers to the garden of Āmrapālī 奈氏樹苑, a rich courtesan from the city of Vaiśālī, who offered her garden to Buddha to live there surrounded by his followers. Xie Lingyun mentions the garden again using a different transliteration (菴羅之芳園) in the "Buddhist theme park" stanza 28.

he explicitly negates unwelcome associations with the Qu Yuan story and hence implications of discontent and protest, which the court could interpret as an expression of rebellious thought.[24]

Conclusion

The commentaries punctuating the verse at regular intervals disrupt the immediate poetic effect of the *fu* proper and may seem redundant. Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 (1910–1998) famously criticised the arrangement of verse and prose in the *Shanju fu* as "repeating the same meaning in different forms, drawing legs on a snake" (同意而異體,畫蛇添足; 1999, Vol. 4, 1289). In Qian Zhongshu's eyes, literary aesthetics is a distinct form of cognition and verbal art based on direct expression, and from that perspective, commenting on one's own poem and explaining the meaning of the verse in prose is destructive to the poetry, which is by its very nature indeterminate and open to multiple individualised readings.

However, Xie Lingyun had objectives other than just creating pure art, as Qian Zhongshu would demand of him, and he had good reasons to restrict the potentially dangerous ambivalence of poetic language, particularly if he simultaneously wanted to send to the capital a self-confident message about his living an independent life in freedom and self-sufficiency on his own ancestral land. The *Shanju fu* is as much a literary accomplishment as it is "propaganda" for the poet's own self (Elvin 2008, 336), a personal statement of the noble Xie family celebrity recently enmeshed in the power struggles at court, which brought about the execution of his relatives and friends and his own banishment.

As the proud inheritor of the highest aristocratic title in the state from the once most illustrious man in the empire, Xie Lingyun, even after leaving office, would not renounce his family heritage of power and authority to disappear as a recluse into oblivion, as his twenty-year-older contemporary Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–427) decided to do. Instead, he turned his failure in his official career into an advantage and in the *Shanju fu* presents himself as the sovereign of his land, distinctly cut off the rest of the state and not dependent on the court in any way, who has all material resources at his disposal and who claims for himself the orthodox culture traditionally attributed to the court as well as superiority in Buddhist spirituality. In other words, in his celebration of Shining as his home, the poet does not simply enjoy his private sphere (Swartz 2015) but carves out for himself an independent domain where he establishes himself (*li* 立) as a supreme ruler over his lands.[25]

Positioning himself in this way legitimated by the extraordinary merit of his ancestors was a dangerous gesture, a potential statement of disloyalty and rebellion punishable by death. To avoid suspicion, the

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[24] Xie Lingyun mentions the story of Qu Yuan as an example not to be followed when he says with approval in stanza 4 that his grandfather "[t]hought it slight of San Lü (i.e. Qu Yuan) to throw himself into the water" (狹三閭之喪江).

[25] Unfortunately, the only stanza missing in the *Shanju fu* is about the "far west," i.e., a place in the direction of the capital. It would be interesting to see if the poet referred in any way to the distant capital.

poet takes great care to provide interpretations of his celebration of independence and cultural superiority as not intended to threaten the power centre in the capital. For this purpose, a new literary technique, self-commentary, invented to disambiguate the verse in an authoritative voice and to explain away any potential subversive meaning was a perfect tool to assure the court that his ambitions did not reach beyond the borders of his family estate on the periphery of the Chinese state. Later in his life, suspicion about his ambitions eventually did prevail, and the poet met a premature death at an execution ground far away from his Shining home.

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