

Poems on Poetry

Literary Criticism
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(1190–1257)

Revised Edition

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QUIRIN PRESS

Melbourne & Basel

2019

Appendix C

Two Series of Poems on Poetry: Du Fu and Dai Fugu

Du Fu : "Playfully Written: Six Quatrains"¹

Poem One

<p>Yu Xin wrote more masterly as he aged— A mighty pen moving among the clouds in unexpected ways. Versifiers today fault his poetic expositions passed down, Not realizing former masters had healthy regard for their juniors.²</p>	<p>庾信文章老更成 凌雲健筆意縱橫 今人嗤點流傳賦 不覺前賢畏後生</p>
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Poem Two

<p>Yang, Wang, Lu, and Luo wrote in the style of their time;³ Now the flighty-minded won't stop sneering at them. Your person, your fame, dead and forgotten— Irrepressible, the Great Rivers flow on forever.</p>	<p>楊王盧駱當時體 輕薄爲文哂未休 爾曹身與名俱滅 不廢江河萬古流</p>
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Poem Three

<p>Even if Lu and Wang in their writing Fall short of Han and Wei in closeness to the <i>Odes</i> and <i>Lisao</i>, Riding thoroughbreds, dragon-striped and tiger-spined, They pass you by like minor impediments on the capital road.</p>	<p>縱使盧王操翰墨 劣於漢魏近風騷 龍文虎脊皆君馭 歷塊過都見爾曹</p>
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Poem Four

<p>In poetic genius it is hard to surpass those men;⁴ Of poets today, who stands out from the crowd? Some look like kingfishers atop an orchid; Have they the strength to grasp a whale in the blue sea?</p>	<p>才力應難誇數公 凡今誰是出羣雄 或看翡翠蘭苕上 未掣鯨魚碧海中</p>
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Poem Five

<p>I do not disapprove of contemporaries out of love for the ancients; Those of pure diction and beautiful lines are sure to be friends. I aspire to reach Qu Yuan and Song Yu and ride beside them, Lest I become the dust behind Qi and Liang poets.</p>	<p>不薄今人愛古人 清詞麗句必爲隣 竊攀屈宋宜方駕 恐與齊梁作後塵</p>
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Poem Six

<p>Don't be struck to find yourselves inferior to earlier worthies; In the poetic tradition transmitted us, who is one to emulate? Cut yourselves free from false style! Come close to the <i>Odes</i>! Then will the many masters be your guide.</p>	<p>未及前賢更勿疑 遞相祖述復先誰 別裁偽體親風雅 轉益多師是汝師</p>
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Dai Fugu: A Series of Poems on Poetry

Introduction⁵

Dai Fugu 戴復古 (Shiping 石屏, b. 1167), like many of the writers anthologized in the *Rivers and Lakes Poetry Collection* (Jianghu shiji 江湖詩集), lived on the patronage of wealthy officials during the Southern Song dynasty and did not study for the civil service examinations. Selected poems from his corpus are found in standard Song poetry anthologies. Although many Song poets wrote individual poems about poetry or poems including lines referring to poetry, the series of ten poems on poetry by Dai Fugu is unique for the period.

Du Fu had set the precedent of writing series of poems on poetry, with a series of six. And Dai Fugu's junior contemporary, Yuan Haowen, wrote the first extensive series, a group of thirty. Whereas the two series by Du Fu and Yuan Haowen were comprised mostly of critiques of specific poets or schools of poetry, Dai Fugu's series, for the most part, treats poetry in the abstract. The Du Fu and Yuan Haowen poems became the model for later poetry series of applied poetic criticism, Dai Fugu's for series on poetic theory.⁶

Dai Fugu does refer to individual poets in his series. But with the possible exception of Poem Two, generally taken to be about Su Shi, references made to specific poets are invariably done so as to make more general theoretical points. According to Dai Fugu, poetry should be a serious undertaking, its aim 'to mold personal nature and emotions' (#5). Poetic themes should be serious, best exemplified by poems of the Early and High Tang on affairs of the empire (#6), not the frivolous banter (#2), commonplace droning (#6), or literary display done as an end in itself (#5) much in evidence in late-Tang and Song poetry.

In this series of poems, the creative impulse is said to be prompted by the external world, by heaven and earth, and takes shape in chthonian depths (#8). The creative process itself is a manifestation of supernatural change in the universe (#4). Poetry that is the expression of true

individually gained knowledge or feeling (#7), and not the empty repetition of the words and thoughts of others (#4), should as a matter of course be outstanding. At the same time, poetry must be carefully revised and edited (#10), special attention being paid to rhyme (#9), like jade that must be chiseled and carved to become a vessel (#10) so as to be of use as well as beauty (#5). In other words, the poet must strike a balance between direct expression of thought and feeling, and carefully applied craft; too much of the former leads to crudeness, too much of the latter to harmful skill (#3). Exhaustive effort at fabricating lines—the sort of effort practiced by Dai Fugu's contemporary Jiangxi school writers, who are often criticized in the series (#1, #4, #6)—cannot guarantee good poetry; nor can following the rules of such a school (#7). Poetic taste varies from age to age (#1). But the overarching consideration that the poet must keep in mind is that true poetic communication, like true understanding in Chan (Zen) Buddhism, is beyond words (#7). The 'personal nature and emotions' (*xingqing* 性情, #5) that the poet aims to mold is none other than a morally educated response to experience.⁷ The 'true stamp' (*qixiang* 氣象, #3) of the poet is his 'aura,' the outward signs of his *qi* 氣 ('life-spirit').⁸ Earlier Song poets had warned against dogging others' footsteps, i.e. following the outward form of earlier poets.⁹ And by Dai Fugu's time, it had become commonplace to compare verse-writing with 'communion with Chan' (*canchan* 參禪, #7).¹⁰

Ten Poems on Poetry¹¹

Poem One

Literary work is valued or disvalued

in accord with the times—

Completely changed by the late Tang,

the spirit of the *Odes* and *Sao*.

Everyone recites poems by Li Bai and Du Fu;

No one of the age recognizes Chen Shidao

or Huang Tingjian.

文章隨世作低昂

變盡風騷到晚唐

舉世吟哦推李杜

時人不識有陳黃

Poem Two (about Su Shi)

Past and present within his breast,
 expansive as the Great Rivers,
 His genius excelled others' ten-fold.
 Occasionally he imparted banter to his writing,
 Not knowing the style would so lead others astray.

古今胸次浩江河
 才比諸公十倍過
 時把文章供戲謔
 不知此體誤人多

Poem Three

When reciting verse, I consulted the ancients—
 What is esteemed as the poet's true stamp
 is heroic verve.
 Too much embellishment results from harmful skill;
 In simplicity one need only shun crudeness.

曾向吟邊問古人
 詩家氣象貴雄渾
 雕鏤太過傷於巧
 朴拙惟宜怕近村

Poem Four

Creative endeavor takes shape supernaturally;
 If the tip of your pen has power, let it range freely.
 One should bring forth what is in one's heart;
 By all means avoid dogging others' footsteps.

意匠如神變化生
 筆端有力任縱橫
 須教自我胸中出
 切忌隨人腳後行

Poem Five

My aim, to mold personal nature
 and emotions (*xingqing*);
 Drawn out scenes are but child's play.
 A brocade bag of words, though they be rarities,
 Do not make for poetry of use among men.

陶寫性情爲我事
 留連光景等兒嬉
 錦囊言語雖奇絕
 不是人間有用詩

Poem Six

Du Fu, adrift, lamented the empire;
 Chen Zi'ang, moved, expressed pain at the times.
 As of late, instead of cries of autumn cranes,
 In confusion, countless cicadas
 drone in the evening sun.

飄零憂國杜陵老
 感寓傷時陳子昂
 近日不聞秋鶴唳
 亂蟬無數噪斜陽

Poem Seven

To commune with the rules of verse
 is like communing with Chan:
 The ineffable is not transmitted by words.
 Enlightenment born of the individual heart
 And expressed in words, is of itself surpassing.

欲參詩律似參禪
 妙趣不由文字傳
 箇裏稍關心有悟
 發爲言句自超然

Poem Eight

Poetry begins, formless in the deep void;
 All-compassing heaven and earth
 prompt feelings of song.
 Occasionally, a startling line may come to mind
 That no exhaustive mental effort can fabricate.

詩本無形在窈冥
 網羅天地運吟情
 有時忽得驚人句
 費盡心機做不成

Poem Nine

Writing poetry is not to be compared
 with writing prose;
 Since stanzas depend on rhymes,
 one must guard against empty ones.
 A rhyme found that is like a pillar, strong
 And immovable, is proof of real skill.

作詩不與作文比
 以韻成章怕韻虛
 押得韻來如砥柱
 動移不得見工夫

Poem Ten

Hurriedly to piece together stanzas is nothing;
 Making verse is easy—revising it hard.
 Jade becomes a vessel
 only after being chiseled and carved;
 Poetic couplets must be full and rich,
 each word fitting.

草就篇章只等閑
 作詩容易改詩難
 玉經雕琢方成器
 句要豐腴字要安

Appendix C: Two Series of Poems on Poetry: Du Fu and Dai Fugu

- 1 Du Fu, ch. 22, 360–61/19A–F: 戲爲六絕; translation by Wixted 1980, modified; cf. Zach 7.79–84 (1:259–61), S. Wong 1970–71: 151–55. Note studies of the series by Ma Maoyuan 1962, Xu Fuguan 1966, He Sanben 1973, Guo Shaoyu 1978, Zhou Zhenfu 1980.
- 2 The allusion is to *Lunyu*, 9/22; cf. Legge 1:223, Waley 143, D.C. Lau 99.
- 3 Namely, Yang Jiong, Wang Bo, Lu Zhaolin, and Luo Binwang; two are referred to in the next poem.
- 4 Yu Xin and the four named in the preceding note; they are also referred to in Poem Six.
- 5 Wixted 1986: 73–75, modified.
- 6 See the concluding paragraphs of “Later Evaluation and Influence of Yuan Haowen.”
- 7 For *xingqing*, see Poem 21 n. 7.
- 8 For *qixiang*, see Poem 13 n. 18.
- 9 Compare Poem 21.
- 10 For translation of a poem by Wu Ke 吳可 (fl. 1109) that uses the expression, from a series that likens the study of poetry to the practice of Chan Buddhism, see Wixted 1984: 356–57. For Chan as metaphor, see Addl. Crit., Section 4, including n. 40.

- 11 Dai Fugu, *Shiping shiji*, 7.20a–21a: 昭武太守王子文日與李賈、嚴羽共觀前輩一兩家詩及晚唐詩，因有論詩十絕。子文見之，謂無甚高論，亦可作詩家小學須知; translation by Wixted 1986:77–78, modified. The title also serves as a preface. It states that the series was prompted by the author's having read some late-Tang poetry, as well as verses by the previous generation, together with Yan Yu and others. Note the study by He Sanben 1972a.