Front of Yeats's lapis lazuli stone

The Poem on the Mountain:
A Chinese Reading of Yeats's 'Lapis Lazuli'

'It may be well if we go to school in Asia.' [1]
W. B. Yeats

During my first stay in Beijing in 2001, one poem kept running through my head. It was W. B. Yeats's 'Lapis Lazuli'. Why this would be so puzzled me at first. I had come here teach a course in Western Civilization at a small, elite university; this year I was not even teaching literature, much less Irish literature.

It was not until I began expeditions into the city that I realized why Yeats's poem had taken on such new insistence. In the recent past, the Chinese authorities had begun to raze most of inner-city Beijing. Whole districts of *hutongs* – low-level courtyard dwellings, many of them centuries old – had defined this ancient place. Now these were being rapidly replaced, their former residents forcibly relocated. Everywhere I traveled around the old city, I could see was the shells of half-destroyed houses (hovels might be more appropriate, given their semi-derelict state) as the diggers tore into them. Sometimes all that would remain was a flattened, dusty acre or two bounded by plywood walls and busy streets.

Out of these sites, punctuated by colonies of towering cranes, shiny new steel and glass mountains arose – sometimes within months. Chinese workers are deployed on 24-hour shifts; the work continues night and day. So that, over the next few years, I saw a whole new city – and with it, it seemed, a whole new China – rising from the rubble of the old:

All things fall and are built again….

Not until 2006, however, did I see, for the first time, the actual carved stone which had inspired 'Lapis Lazuli': on loan from his family to the exhibit on William Butler Yeats at the National Library of Ireland in Dublin. After several years of accumulated experience in China, I realized that this stone was an aesthetic object with distinctive Chinese meanings. *What could this stone mean* – first to Yeats and now to us – within the wider perspective of Chinese views of the world? This question became a major preoccupation over the next few years.

Critical commentary on 'Lapis Lazuli'is in fact sparse. One invaluable essay from *Notes and Queries* in 1977 by David Parker gives a detailed account of its Chinese iconography. A

second, broader essay on 'The Art of Yeats's "Lapis Lazuli"' by William H. O'Donnell for the *Massachusetts Review* of 1982 helps place the poem within Yeats's own thinking, particularly within his own aesthetic system. Finally, there is Calvin Bedient's less helpful meditation on 'what seduced Yeats, and what Yeats seduced' within the context of the poem's 'sighted language'(but with no reference at all to its Chinese significance): an essay written for the *Yeats: an Annual of Critical and Textural Studies* in 1989.[2] Nothing substantial appears to have been published since, perhaps because the poem appears now diminished by two things. Most importantly, by a limited knowledge of its Chinese significance. Perhaps (more arguably) by its crucial reliance on one word – 'gay' – largely used today in a narrow sense as denoting a same-sex orientation.[3]

While the poem still needs to be rescued from this distracting evolution of 'gay', much more remains to be clarified about its Chinese origins. Of the three essays mentioned, David Parker's is perhaps the closest to recreating a helpful Chinese context. As Parker explains, Yeats's stone is one of a specific genre called in China, "jade islands" a designation that includes stones other than jade (or nephrite). Specifically, Yeats's stone may be taken to represent the Chinese Isle of the Blest or Eastern Paradise: in pinyin, *Peng-lai Shan*. The principal of five islands imaged as being somewhere in the Eastern – i.e. Yellow – Sea (the wooden base of the stone shows very clearly its carved waves), these islands were traditionally believed to be the home of the Eight Immortals.[4] Two are shown on Yeats's stone. These sages were not merely old; they were ancient, having achieved a longevity which merges indistinguishably into immortality. Thus, as a birthday gift for a famous but aging poet, this carved stone was singularly apt, designed to remind its observer of a state of blessedness associated with old age and its proximity to eternity.

Yet despite Parker's effort to locate Yeats's stone within its iconographic tradition, neither his nor the other essays make any attempt to explicate the cultural *assumptions* which actually shaped the stone's creation and use. Nor has there been a coherent explanation of how its Chinese significance has been incorporated into the poem by Yeats himself. While we may never know just how much Yeats himself learned about the Chinese nature of this stone, it is clear that he did somehow come to an understanding of what it signified within its own culture of origin. In doing so, Yeats also discovered how it could bring meaning to the close of his own life, both as man and as poet.

As is well known, Yeats received the lapis lazuli stone on his 70th birthday, 4 July 1935, as a gift from an admiring young poet, Harry Clifton. Carved in the shape of a small mountain (10.5 by 12 inches high), it is made, apparently, from a semi-precious blue stone, lapis lazuli.

Someone, possibly his friend Edmund Dulac (who was knowledgeable about such things), may have explained to Yeats what would have been generally known: that the carved stone dates from the reign of the Qianlong Emperor therefore somewhere between 1739-1795. Famous for his aesthetic pursuits, this Emperor routinely accepted such precious and semi-precious stones as tribute or booty. Later in his reign, following conquests of regions to the West, Qianlong brought back huge boulders of jade which he had carved and often inscribed with poems either by or attributed to himself.[5] And, indeed, as Yeats noted to Dulac two days after his birthday, his own lapis mountain also had an inscription in Chinese characters on the back – although Yeats apparently showed no immediate interest in having it translated.[6]

On the same day Yeats also wrote Dorothy Wellesley:

I notice that you have much lapis lazuli; someone has sent me a present of a great piece carved by some Chinese sculptor into the semblance of a mountain with temple, trees, paths and an ascetic and pupil about to climb the mountain. Ascetic, pupil, hard stone, eternal theme of the sensual east. The heroic cry in the midst of despair. But no, I am wrong, the east has its solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the east, that must raise the heroic cry.[7]

Unversed in Chinese art, Yeats initially did not read the stone's iconography correctly. What is surprising is that, by the time he came to finish 'Lapis Lazuli' almost exactly a year later,[8] his reading of the stone is not only correct, but, within a Chinese context, appropriate. For, while his initial remarks were off-centre in terms of detail, Yeats seemed immediately to grasp the stone's larger significance, as is clear from the turn of the last two sentences of this letter. 'But no,' he writes: 'I am wrong, the east has its solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, and not the east, that must raise the heroic cry.'

In what ways did Yeats discover he was *wrong*? And how does he, subsequently, come to interpret this exotic artifact? And, finally, how did he manage, from his own resources, to arrive at a reading so consonant with that of its original Chinese context?

First of all, it is clear that Yeats must have had a mentor (perhaps Dulac?) – someone to have helped him read the distinctively Chinese iconography of the carving. This is the tentative conclusion of David Parker, who points out how, in the final poem, Yeats corrects his initial catalogue of its images. Thus the mountain 'temple' becomes in the final poem a 'little half-way house'. The two Chinamen, originally 'an ascetic and pupil', are now understood as two equals: implicitly, scholars or artists/literati, members of a class with which Yeats, albeit in another world, would be ready to identify himself. The third carved figure, said to be

'doubtless a serving-man', is now correctly seen as carrying 'a musical instrument'. Yeats (concludes Parker) would not have 'learned to recognize the *ch'in* [*qin*] lute merely through chance reading'.[9] Finally, the 'long-legged bird' (ignored in Yeats's initial letter) is now acknowledged to be a crane, and, with its traditional Chinese association, as a symbol of longevity.[10]

There still remain one or two items whose Chinese significance Yeats did not exploit: the pine trees, for instance, another symbol of longevity through resilience but which – perhaps in reference to their stylized clumps of needles – he misread as blossoming plum or cherry trees.[11] Also, beside the path is a waterfall, which he mentions but does not integrate in any obvious way. Yet, as Yeats came to understand, these too are part of the larger symbolic system which plays into a Chinese reading of the stone, one to which the 'Lapis Lazuli' poem, at least implicitly, subscribes.

These oversights, however, are trivial compared to the astonishing insight that Yeats attained during this one year, 1935 – 36. For the meditations which culminate in this poem offer a far deeper comprehension of the issues involved in the creation of the stone mountain: issues that have to do with nothing less than ultimate significance of living – and dying – within this world. It is in clarifying these issues that reading the stone within a Chinese context is most useful. For, to any Chinese viewer, the lapis lazuli mountain speaks of the great themes of human existence: what it means to live – especially in full mindfulness of death, whether from old age or some more public catastrophe.

That Yeats grasped the spiritual potential of the stone, and that he specifically assigns it to 'the east', is explicit from his first response to the lapis mountain: 'The heroic cry in the midst of despair. But no, *I am wrong, the east has its solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy*' [italics added]. Of what tragedy does Yeats write? And how can 'the east' know 'nothing' of it?

As the opening stanza of 'Lapis Lazuli' makes clear, the 'tragic scene' of the last verse was dominated by those catastrophes taking place during the year of its composition. Between 1935 and 1936, Adolf Hitler, now elected Chancellor of the new German Democratic Socialist Republic, announced renewed national rearmament and universal (male) conscription. He also established the *Luftwaffe* (the German Air Force), which reawakened memories among Yeats's contemporaries of the bombing of London by Kaiser Wilhelm's Zeppelins during the Great War.[12] Then, as if to vindicate these fears, Hitler occupied the Rhineland in March of 1936; his first step towards his ambition of conquering all of Europe. As if in a dire parody, Benito Mussolini had by now reached the apex of his political power in Italy, while, in Russia, Joseph

Stalin's regime was tightening its grip. Newspapers also brought Yeats news of open bombing of Spanish cities, a frightening prelude to the civil war that was finally to erupt during the month 'Lapis Lazuli' was (apparently) completed. Not surprising that, as Yeats flatly states, 'everybody knows or else should know/That if nothing drastic is done/Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out …. Until the town lie beaten flat'.

In such a context, the poets 'that are always gay', along with their artist and musician friends, must certainly appear at best merely marginal; at worst, displaying a brazen indifference: a case of literally fiddling while Rome burns. What, under these circumstances, can be the status of art? In particular that art which, as tragedy, seeks to engage with such cataclysmic disruptions in human affairs?

To answer that question, Yeats turns in next stanza to the Western cultural articulation of what 'tragedy' means. Inevitably, perhaps, his model is Shakespeare; not the historical Shakespeare, but Shakespeare as replayed in everyday life: 'There struts Hamlet, there is Lear…'. Here, as Yeats notes, Hamlet suffers 'all men's fate'[13]; but Hamlet is also Yeats himself, who as a boy copied the pose of Henry Irving while playing this part.[14] Now rapidly aging, Yeats too must also face 'all man's fate,' that of death. Yet, as the poem observes, great actors, performing a tragic play, do not (unlike ordinary mortals) 'break up their lines to weep':

They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.

At stake here is not simply personal oblivion, but 'All [that] men have aimed at, found and lost'– the entire course of human endeavour ending in 'Black out'. That order to close off all sources of light in London during the bombing of the Great War becomes (in Yeats's own words) that 'perception of a change [from the sensual to the spiritual], like the sudden "blacking out" of the lights of the stage'.[15] Such a change occurs violently, as, at the climax of that 'tragic scene', terror and pity move into a brief, brilliant illumination: 'Heaven blazing into the head.'(The very enjambment of the clauses here makes the point.) Yet however often this 'tragic scene' is repeated, however coldly we observe its multiplication on the world-stage (as 'as all the drop-scenes drop at once'), tragedy as an artistic form remains unable to move beyond itself: 'It cannot grow by an inch or an once'. Nor can the blaze of tragic ecstasy move into any larger vision of man's fate beyond the performance of his inevitable end.

For Yeats, the key stanza is the next one, in which he envisions the barbarian hordes who always arrive to destroy civilizations. This vision of ever-returning destruction pushes Yeats

beyond what had become his great consolation: the eternity of artifice or (at the very least) the illusion of eternity granted by artifice. In 'Sailing to Byzantium' that consolation had already become qualified; the marvelous golden bird which sings of 'What is past, and passing, and to come' served only as a toy 'to keep a drowsy Emperor awake'. Now in 'Lapis Lazuli' Yeats foresees the more probable fate of his own work: as 'Old civilizations [are] put to the sword' then 'they and their wisdom went to rack'. Here, at the last, Yeats is prepared to acknowledge that even the greatest works of art do not guarantee immortality.

To make this point, Yeats chooses as exemplar the classical Greek designer and sculptor Callimachus. Reputed to be the inventor of the Corinthian column, Callimachus was also the alleged sculptor of parts of the Parthenon frieze. Within it, the great Temple of Athena was said to have had a remarkable lamp – also designed by Callimachus. But why Callimachus? As a sculptor, he was not of the first rank of his contemporaries in the Athens of the fifth century BC, Phidias or Polykleides. Nor has any of his work survived, except in Roman copies. Moreover, Callimachus was known more for his technical expertise than for his sculptures: he was able, as Yeats accurately notes, to handle 'marble as if it were bronze' and make 'draperies that seemed to rise/ When sea-wind swept the corner.'

As these details make clear, Callimachus is significant for Yeats because they respond to the poet's deepest preoccupations. No original works of Callimachus survive. (Would Yeats's own work endure?). Callimachus was able to handle marble in such a way as to bring movement into stone. (How can Yeats bring this inert Chinese stone to life?). Finally, Callimachus is used here as a bridge marking a transition from West to East. (How can 'the east' have 'its [own] solutions' to the 'heroic cry' of Western despair?)

Slightly more than ten years earlier, in *A Vision* (1925), Yeats had embraced 'half-Asiatic' Callimachus as an artist whose use of the running drill was to become common in later Hellenistic and then Byzantine art.[16] In that Byzantium Yeats also sought an imaginative world in which one could move beyond the antinomies of Western 'tragedy' into the unifying vision of 'the east', a world in which

All things fall and are built again,
And those that build them again are gay.

If the refrain at this point begins to sound almost blithe, it is because the poet is moving swiftly beyond the Western vision of 'Black out' as oblivion offset only by that 'blazing into

the head': from such violent antinomies into a steady, enlightened vision of how Western heroic defiance may be transformed into Eastern detachment.

That transition may be tracked through the changing resonances of the word 'gay'. What 'gay' comes to mean in this, and the following stanzas, will be achieved only through the poem's last word. As it moves towards that final syllable, in each preceding stanza 'gay' gathers weight even as it becomes less definable. In the process, each stanza jumps over vast abysses, binding its narrative through a focus on successive tragedies: that of the coming war; that of the performance of tragedy as great art; or, as in this stanza, that of the destruction of great art itself, and, with it, the civilization which gave it birth.

The greatest gap, however, is between these first three and the last two stanzas, as the poem shifts abruptly to the carved lapis stone. And as it does so, it also shifts from a predominantly past tense into the present – bringing the stone into the immediate presence of the poet. Yeats composed this poem after years of despair about his aging body and now failing health. All the props of medical intervention and a briefly renewed sexual energy now seemed to be failing him. For at least a decade now, he had been obsessed with his own physical decline.[17] In common with all artists, Yeats now wondered: Would his art survive him? If so, for how long?

In the lapis lazuli stone, Yeats found a response. He inscribes that understanding in the poem, but no critic to my knowledge has yet succeeded in making it explicit. That is, I believe, because few readers of Yeats grasped the cultural assumptions crystallized in the stone itself.

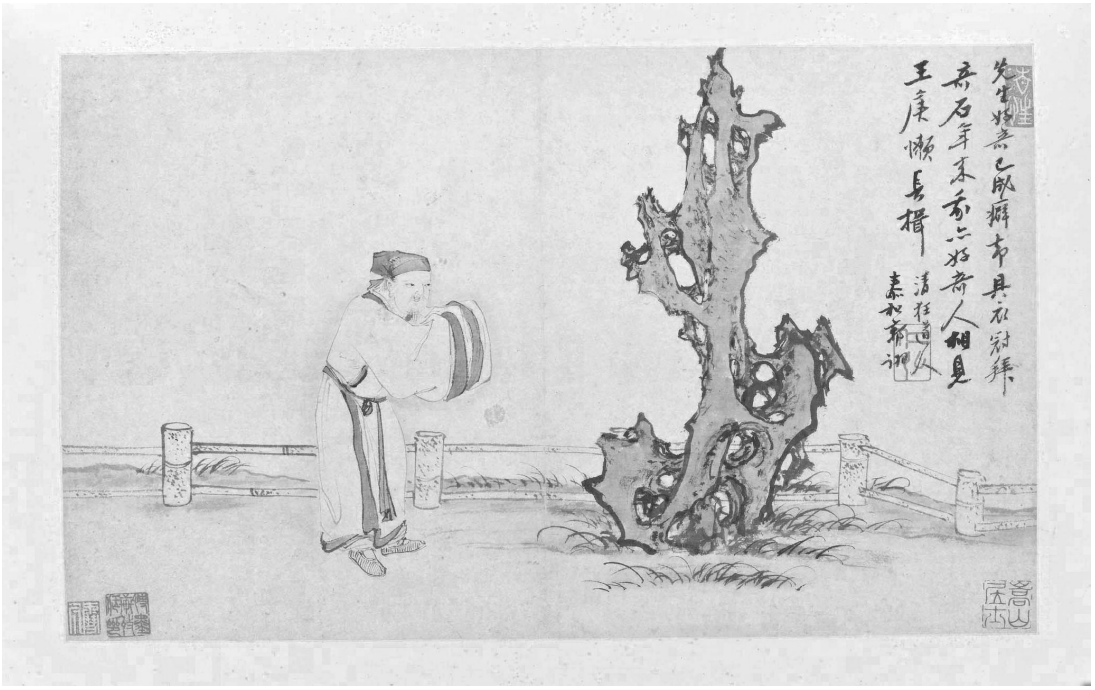
Yeats apparently stumbled upon some understanding of the significance of the stone on his own. It probably did not have to be explained to him, for instance, that stones such as his lapis mountain have no practical use. They are not paper-weights or even desk ornaments for the Chinese scholar-poet. What might have been explained to Yeats is that, in common with 'scholar-rocks', such carved stones have long been actively used as tools for contemplation. This is because, for the Chinese, rocks are not merely inert 'dead' matter. Within the Chinese world, rocks too are alive: they act, as does everything in the world, as manifestations of *qi*, the primary life-force which flows through the universe. Indeed, so great was the veneration for such rocks that Mi Fu, a famous painter and calligrapher of the Northern Song Dynasty (960 – 1127), that it is said he not only 'loved rocks' but also 'believed they had souls. This became something of an obsession, so that when he saw an interesting rock, he bowed before it in

worship.'[18]

Mi Fu Honouring a Rock

Although Mi Fu was known as an eccentric who carried Daoist principles to an extreme, his veneration for the life-force implicit in rocks represents a long-standing Chinese mind-set, which has persisted across many centuries. Even today, scholar-rocks are collected and prized. Those rocks most favoured for contemplation are those that manifest a lively *qi*; here evident in the subtle colouration of the lapis mountain as well as its complicated patterning of cracks and curves. By contemplating such an object, it is believed that one may also channel its particular *qi*, so that it enters the mind, and by doing so, enlivens and alters it, reorienting it so that one may enter into the still larger, impersonal energy system known as the *dao*.

Here, in these last two stanzas, Yeats' poem opens itself consciously to such energies. In other words, instead of writing *about* the rock, Yeats *allows the energy of the rock to write him*,



channeling the life-force that is *qi* :

Every discolouration of the stone,
Every accidental crack or dent,
Seems a water-course or an avalanche,
Or lofty slope where it still snows ….

Through these lines the stone's discolourations or cracks *become* the water-course or avalanche of Yeats's ensuing vision, allowing the rock's *qi* to become its very shaping force.

To put it another way, in these last two stanzas, Yeats' delight in 'seeing' becomes a way of entering into the energy of the stone. (He might even have quoted one of his favourite lines from William Blake: 'energy is eternal delight.' And Blake too, as Yeats knew, believed in the animate nature of inanimate things, sometimes depicting mountains, rivers clouds, trees and rocks in a humanized form.[19]) Yeats enters into this energy by allowing the stone to move away from what it merely represents. Caught up in its energies, Yeats now imagines that on the mountain it 'still snows' (pure invention!). The pines are transfigured into fragrant 'plum or cherry-branch'. Instead of still climbing up the mountain (towards the 'little half-way house'), the Chinamen are now 'seated there'. By thus entering the energies of the stone mountain, Yeats enables its static scene to move, extending and completing itself within his vision.

More significantly, by engaging such energies, Yeats himself moves away from the world of the West, where a 'thing' is a 'thing'. Specifically, he moves away from the art-world of Callimachus whose carved marble merely 'stands' or at least 'stood', its illusory motion itself finally swept away by those forces which determine that 'All things fall and are built again'. In this world, Callimachus's works are swept away because, as static or dead 'things', each 'stands' in opposition to the very forces which rule them. (The very contortions of this sentence, landing heavily on the postponed verb 'stands', stress the centrality of this concept in a Western view of art: art-objects, as putatively immortal, must 'stand' against what seeks to destroy them.) In the world of China, however, where 'things' are not 'things' and are part of the energy which shapes them, they cannot be swept away by 'other' forces, as they themselves are deemed part of these very energies, and thus change with them.

Yeats himself had arrived at much the same formulation when he discussed the difference between comedy and tragedy in a late essay published shortly after his death, in which he observed:

> Some Frenchman has said that farce is the struggle against a ridiculous object, comedy against a movable object, tragedy against an immovable; and because the will, or energy, is greatest in tragedy, tragedy is the more noble; but I add that 'will or energy is eternal delight', and when its limit is reached it may become a pure, aimless joy.[20]

And indeed, at the end of stanza three, that ultimate limit to Western resources has been reached ('It cannot grow by an inch or an ounce'). From the tragedy of a Hamlet or a Lear to the tragedy of the great artist himself, the poem confronts that 'immovable object' which will eventually destroy all but the vestiges of what he has, through will or energy, created. Yet as that limit (of tragic resistance to limits themselves) is reached, or as is about to happen, surpassed, the thwarted will or energy, in Yeats's words, becomes 'a pure, aimless joy' – whence the gaiety of those who have escaped that struggle as defined by Western heroic resistance.

Having reached the limit of this (Western) world, Yeats moves into another, Asian universe. From the moment the Chinamen enter, the lapis mountain changes from being a 'thing', an immobile carving, into an *event.* Carried on a succession of verbs in the present, the crane, a symbol of longevity, flies over the 'carved' scene, transforming the world below into an eternal moment of duration: one that lasts, like music, by moving through time out of time.[21]

In China, where that which endures is honoured, prolongation of actual life tends to be interpreted as a form of immortality and is hard to differentiate from it. Stone endures; here, with its cracks and discolourations, it corresponds to the 'wrinkles' of the two Chinamen – and even to the wrinkles of Yeats's own aging body, as, through the force of his vision, the poet engages with the energies of the stone. For the Chinese, such imperfections are traditionally deemed to be badges of honour, speaking as they do of the capacity to weather life's storms. Such too is the significance of the gnarled and twisted pine trees: icons on the lapis stone ignored by Yeats, perhaps willfully.[22] Weathered rock and twisted trees here operate not merely as decorative scenery, but as talisman for the invisible forces which have shaped them and within which they still endure.

In these final stanzas Yeats moves beyond the world represented by the stone's carvings to articulate these forces. Most apposite is the musical instrument carried by a servant. From its shape and size, one would deduce that this is a *qin*, an ancient Chinese form of the zither much prized by Daoists as producing the music nearest to natural sounds such as bird-song or rain, wind or water-course. Unlike the 'fiddle-bow' of the first stanza, which is strictly marginal, the music of the *qin* is deemed central to the Chinese world. In calling for 'mournful melodies' to be played, the two Chinese sages seek nothing less than to become one with the invisible forces which shape the larger universe. Through such 'accomplished' music, its hearers participate in that fleeting world within which 'All things fall and are built again. . . .'

Woman playing a gu-qin (Shanghai Museum)[23]

Such meditation moves vision inward, not outward: the Chinamen 'stare'. Far beneath their gaze, the 'tragic scene' is not simply seen but becomes a way of seeing: exemplifying that kind of meditative activity which brings, ultimately, wisdom. It is sought in particular by the Daoist sages, who understood that through the increasing detachment of old age, longevity and immortality may move into one continuum.

Those sages make another appearance on Yeats's lapis mountain – unnoticed until now. On the back of this stone a poem has been inscribed; it describes a meeting of two such souls. Such an inscription represents an ancient Chinese tradition of painting or carving words on mountain cliff-faces. Today many such inscriptions may be found, perhaps most famously, on Taishan in Shandong Province (a mountain long associated with Confucius), as well as on Huangshan, the sacred Yellow Mountains of Anhui Province.

Writing on a rock-face in Huangshan, Anhui Province

Why do the Chinese write on mountains? To the West, this seems a bizarre practice, akin to graffiti. Could one imagine, for instance, carving verses from 'Under Ben Bulben' actually *on* Ben Bulben? To us in the West, that would seem a form of vandalism, a desecration of the pure 'wildness' of the mountain itself.

Clearly not so in China, where writing on mountains is carried out, it seems, precisely as a way of making them Chinese. In fact (as one expert notes) the 'simple concept of fixing memories and ideas on the surface of the earth through the carving of texts has deep roots in Chinese culture. These centuries-old tradition of "polished-cliff carving" (*moya* 摩崖 or *moya shike* 摩崖石刻), are texts carved into granite boulders and cliffs that are part of the natural terrain. They began to appear in China during the first century C.E. Over the course of the two thousand years since then, they have been carved in all areas of the country, and have become one of the distinguishing features of Chinese civilization.'[24] As such, these inscriptions are not intended to make the mountain 'speak'; they are there to appropriate the *qi* of a mountain in such a way that it enters the human, that is, the civilized world. As it enters, it does so as an energy, one with the power to transform.

To a Chinese person, then, it would come as no surprise that Yeats's own carved lapis mountain had a poem inscribed on its back – as if in imitation of an actual sacred mountain.

What I found surprising was that, apparently, Yeats never sought to have the poem translated; nor has any public effort been made to translate it since his death.

To correct this oversight, I consulted experts able to read the old mandarin script (now simplified in today's China). Photographs of the poem on the back of the stone made by Sarah Shiels of the National Library of Ireland were first examined by Dr Shane McCausland, then Curator for the Chinese Collection of the Chester Beatty Library, also in Dublin. He confirmed that the poem was written 'by imperial decree': which means it was written either by the Qianlong Emperor himself or by an imperial court poet at his command. As such, the inscription follows the standard format for a court poem: that of four, seven-character lines. But further than that it was almost impossible to go, as the carved characters, once inlaid with gold, are now only barely legible in parts, the last line posing particular difficulty. Accordingly, only a most tentative translation could be reached.

However, there was now enough evidence to approach the Gugong (the Imperial Palace Museum) in Beijing. There, Dr. Alfreda Murck, a well-known scholar of Song dynasty art – and at the time the only Westerner curator there – showed the photographs of the inscription to her Chinese colleague, Mr. Zhang Xin. He was able to identify the poem as indeed attributed to the Qianlong Emperor from the *Collected Poems* (vol. 2, juan 13).[25] This identification clarified two things: first of all, it allows us to assign a secure date for the stone of 1749 (for it is to be assumed that the poem was actually composed to be inscribed on this particular rock). Secondly, identifying the poem allows the partially-effaced mandarin characters to be filled in at last, thus providing the basis for a literal translation, here accompanied by pinyin for the Chinese characters, which runs as follows:

Back side of Yeats's lapis lazuli stone, with poem circled

春　　山　　訪　　友

Chūn shān fǎng yǒu

Spring Mountain Visiting Friend

緑　　雲　　紅　　雨　　向　　清　　和

Lü yún hóng yü, xiàng Qīng Hé

Green clouds, red rain, nearing Qing He Festival

[8th day of 4th lunar month]

寂　寂　深　山　　幽　事　多

Jì jì shēn shān, yōu shì duō

Quiet, quiet, deep mountains, secret stories many

曲　徑　　苔　封　　人　跡　絶

Qū jìng tái fēng, rén jì jué

Winding path, sealed by moss, human footprints none

抱　　琴　　高士　　許　相過

Bào qín gāoshì xǔ xiāngguò

Holding, musical instrument [*qin*] hermit, promised to meet[26]

What the translation of this poem confirms is that Yeats's lapis lazuli mountain is firmly within the spirit of Daoist art: that is, it shows a meeting of two friends, one a hermit, who seek the 'quiet, deep mountains' to share 'secret stories'.[27] Meditating there to the music of the *qin*, they would seek to become one with the *dao*: the name given to the invisible forces which, always changing but always interconnected, shape the visible world.

As all of the instincts in these last two stanzas of 'Lapis Lazuli' are firmly in the spirit of this Chinese poem, it seems likely that Yeats must have had someone give him a rough (and presumably oral) translation of the poem. Moreover: Yeats must already have been attuned to the nature of Daoist beliefs, for, in the leap into the last two stanzas, Yeats too leaps into their

world. Daoists value spontaneity above more deliberate virtues: for they believe that to act spontaneously is, if one is in touch with the *dao*, to act with an intuitive rightness. It is that 'rightness' that rings most true about these final verses; certainly the manuscript evidence seems to confirm the impression that Yeats probably wrote these two final verses straight off,[28] in an intuitive rush, as that 'fulfillment of the soul in itself, some slow or sudden expansion of it like an overflowing well'.[29]

That hypothesis holds true in another way also: the poem reads more coherently if one reads it in a circle. Doing so allows one to see how Yeats may have worked backwards through the first three stanzas. As each stanza posits successive resettings of that 'tragic scene' on which the sages 'stare', each registers a shift in resonances for the word, 'gay'.

Clearly, in the first stanza, the 'tragic scene' for the West is that of contemporary history. Its scorn for the 'hysterical women' who anticipate (as it happens, accurately) a world cataclysm, is striking. The poet in fact returns their scorn with scorn; the tone being one of an almost false jocularity when it comes to Kaiser Wilheim who, like 'King Billy', will come out with 'Aeroplane and Zeppelin', pitching in bombs 'Until the town lie beaten flat.' Even the concatenation of the two, King and Kaiser, makes the point that this has all happened before. Yeats had long held to the notion that history repeats itself. In *A Vision* he worked it out as the system of gyres: of a historical time that works in vast interlocking cycles.

In the West, on the contrary, time tends to be seen as unilinear and its course irreversible, with a set beginning or origin and a defined end. These are exactly the conditions that Aristotle set out for tragedy: it must have a beginning, a middle and an ending. In Chinese time, however, there are no set beginnings or endings: no civilizational origin stories, for instance, comparable to *Genesis*; no apocalypse, as in *Revelations*. Chinese stories often lack defined beginnings or closure; so (some would complain) does traditional Chinese music. Whereas framed pictures are the major mode in the Western art world, the scroll (in which beginning and end are typically out of sight) is the major mode in traditional Chinese art and writing. In other words, Western aesthetics tends to like clear definition of origins and ends; in China, such boundaries often do not exist or are not clear – or are not readily disclosed, because in this world process is more important than a sense of a finished product.

Without such clear definition of beginning and end, however, there can be no concept of 'tragedy'. Although this would not be the only reason why Western tragedy does not translate into the Chinese world, Shakespeare's tragedies are usually not perceived in China as 'tragic' in the Western sense, as, in China, 'tragic' endings tend to be modulated into more hopeful finales.[30] This is accomplished, it seems, not by a change of text but by a change of emphasis.

After all, even *Hamlet* ends with the coming of Fortinbras. Whereas the Western production would emphasize the tragic demise of Hamlet, a Chinese production might emphasize the hopeful new cycle initiated by Fortinbras, who brings with him the promise of a new, perhaps less corrupt, regime. It is a question of where the stress lies; but there is a world of difference in the interpretation: while one is clearly tragic, the Chinese version presents the tragic as simply another phase in the revolutions of time.

What is of interest here is how closely Yeats's attitude to history (as articulated in the gyres) mimics that of the Chinese.[31] For most Chinese, time is cyclical. It has no beginning or end, but revolves in large cycles. Nothing then is irreversible. In essence that philosophy is contained in the lines: 'All things fall and are built again....

But whereas Yeats defines a civilization in terms of certain specified artefacts, the Chinese attitude is best exemplified in their capital cities, where, successively, 'All things fall and are built again….' As one expert in Chinese historiography observes, 'the successive dynastic changes [of emperor] provided for a built-in "return to square one," symbolized by the tearing down of the palaces built by the preceding dynasty and/or the construction of a new capital…'.[32] At the core of this practice 'lies the idea that every newly founded dynasty must manifest its seizure of the Heavenly Mandate in architecture because the layout and the construction of the new capital as the idealized centre of the universe was believed to decide upon the course that the new dynasty will hypothetically take.' Rebuilding is thus seen as a breakthrough into a new order of the universe, representing, symbolically, a new order of time.

As this analysis makes clear, it is this sense of history that mandates the tearing down of old Peking and its rebuilding as Beijing – as capital of yet another 'new China'. And it is in this spirit that the Chinese sages of 'Lapis Lazuli' greet destruction as a necessary part of that process in which 'All things fall and are built again….' In other words, one can read most fruitfully the first three stanzas of 'Lapis Lazuli' as different versions of Western historiography, each offering a different vision of an ending: whether in the coming war; in the dramatic reenactment of cataclysm through tragedy; or by means of the destruction of art-objects previously deemed 'immortal'. Each sets up a model of apocalypse implicitly rejected by the final two verses.

But as close reading will show, that Western version of history is already being subverted from verse one. For if, as Yeats believes, time is not linear, if historical events are only to be repeated as part of a vast cyclical revolution (such as that of the gyres), then even the apocalyptic vision of the coming world war are mere restagings of earlier events. Thus King Billy, who bombarded Derry in the 17th century, anticipates the ravages of Kaiser Wilhelm,

just as the 'hysterical women' who fear the future anticipate the Ophelia and Cordelia who weep over the past.

In the second stanza, the Western vision of this 'tragic scene' is similarly subverted. As Aristotle dictated, tragedy must be irreversible: having a beginning and middle and end. And yet its 'heroic cry' is repeated again and again, not only on the stage but, as Yeats envisions it, even today on the very streets around him. Thus, in this version, every play becomes a replay, offering no solutions except that of the most complete vision of man's destruction as 'All things fall….' Finally, considering the fate of Callimachus, Yeats implicitly acknowledges that this also may be the fate of his own art. No longer the 'unaging' monuments of 'Sailing to Byzantium', these works too will eventually be swept away with the fall of the civilization which nurtured them.

How then can such destruction be greeted as 'gay'? As the whole poem turns on this word, it is important to understand its evolving significance.

In the first stanza, poets 'are always gay' in the sense of its original (14th century) meaning that they are merry or light-hearted in the face of dire circumstance.[33] Because of their perceived lack of moral seriousness, 'gay' here might also be reverting to an early 17th century suggestion (OED 2a) of being 'addicted to social pleasures and dissipations' and even, euphemistically, as immoral. Yet, in the next stanza, Yeats implicitly sanctions such a response by placing it within the Western tradition of high art. Hamlet and Lear are 'gay' in the more modern usage of the word as defining a state in which one feels 'keenly alive'.[34] Here Yeats is already reframing the word within the implied oxymoron of tragic joy, 'transfiguring all that dread'. It is such a paradox that, as Yeats wrote, 'the heroes of Shakespeare convey... the sudden enlargement of their vision, their ecstasy at the approach of death…. I have heard Lady Gregory say… "Tragedy must be a joy to the man who dies"… '.[35]

That tragic joy, expounded by the first two pieces in *New Poems* (1939), gives way in the third stanza of 'Lapis Lazuli' to something even bigger and more fierce. Here, the poet proclaims, 'All things fall and are built again,/And those that build them again are gay.'

Such joy arises out of the hideous violence which Yeats foresees will destroy the poet's world (at a projected date of AD 2000), but which, according to *A Vision*, prophesizes a new civilization. In this refrain ('All things fall…') one hears echoes of the Yeats who imagined 'always at my left side just out of the range of sight, a brazen winged beast that I associated with laughing, ecstatic destruction'. [36] For Yeats, destruction may be exhilarating because destruction and creation are the two inseparable halves of one process – as he once wrote, 'every act of war is an act of creation'.[37] And although Yeats earlier used such phrases as

'God's laughter at the shattering of the world,'[38] within a Chinese context it could well describe the positive energies released by the razing of old Beijing – as the necessary and sufficient condition for rebuilding of that city and, with that reconstruction, the symbolic inauguration of a new world order.

Thus, with each of these uses, 'gay' widens in connotations as in its circumscribing energies: from unwarranted moral frivolity of the first verse to tragic catharsis in verse two and then into a cosmic laughter at the destruction of whole worlds. All of its resonances finally depend on the fierce oxymoron of 'tragic joy'. For the full effect of this rhetorical figure, Yeats depends on the intellectual habits of the Western reader. As Yeats had come to understand through his studies of Eastern philosophies, the West conceives of the world in terms of mutually exclusive and opposing energies: here, in terms of creation vs. destruction, of life vs. death, of the 'gay' vs. the tragic. Thus 'tragic joy' is a specifically Western phenomenon, one that can only occur in terms of violent opposition, as a heroic defiance against the destructive forces that rule the world: or, in the words of Wallace Stevens (in his famous definition of the imagination) as 'a violence from within that protects from a violence without'.[39] Thus to be 'gay' in a Western sense is creatively, and thus spiritually, to stand, heroically, against one's inevitable fate – of destruction, perhaps even oblivion.

But, in the end, this sense of 'gay' is also ultimately seen as inhuman: resounding in Yeats's ears as the brazen laughter of the gods. For, as Yeats also understands, to compensate for the inevitable destruction of the individual and all his works, the West tends to reach towards a world outside the human: towards a transcendent 'immortal' or 'eternal' realm, intuited by ecstasy and entered, presumably, through death.

In the final stanza, having explored the limits of his own world, Yeats leaps into the world of Asia. In doing so, he leaps into another vision of what it means to be human. To this Western vision of a world as one of opposing forces, Yeats now proposes another vision, that of 'the east', specifically of China. As he (correctly) intuits it, this is a world without transcendence, one in which the individual can become immortal as he enters, within his human life, the forces of nature through the ageless *dao*.[40] Here there is no violence, no standing against, in a contrarian gaiety that defies the mandate of heaven. Instead, the Chinese sages experience that sudden expansion of the soul which brings a 'pure, aimless joy' – one nearer to that state of mind in another late poem, 'Vacillation' in which, by going beyond the world's 'antinomies', Yeats found suddenly that he was 'blessed and could bless'.[41]

Thus, only in the final word of the final stanza, is the fierce oxymoron of 'tragic joy' abandoned for resonances that move beyond Western antinomies into a world of Eastern

correspondences. It is a world with which Yeats had become increasingly familiar, remarking in an essay of 1934 how 'I have a Chinese painting of three old sages, … one with a scroll open at the symbol of yen [sic] and yin, those two forms that whirl perpetually, creating and re-creating all things.'[42] Entering such a world, distinctions dissolve: between seer and scene, voice and vision, as the poet, through contemplation, becomes part of the complementary, eternally shifting energies which together constitute the *dao*.

Yeats had once, a few days after receiving the stone, imagined himself on this very mountainside. [43] Now having climbed his own mountain towards death – and abandoning Western hopes for immortality – the poet gazes through the eyes of these Chinese sages. Their eyes are 'ancient' (not simply 'old') because they have entered into the wisdom of the ages. Under their gaze, the perspective on the 'tragic scene' has changed drastically. No longer 'tragic', it is now seen as simply inevitable, part of the grand evolutions of cyclical time which brings destruction as the condition of future creation. The poet is thus able to greet it with 'joy [as] …with his eyes he enters upon a submissive, sorrowful contemplation of the great irremediable things'.[44] By means of such contemplation, the lapis mountain, no longer a static 'scene', becomes another way of 'seeing': provoking an ecstatic acceptance of the human condition which itself passes beyond the human. With eyes 'glittering', the sages view the world below with a gaze that is cold, detached, impersonal – and enduring. Beyond either joy or pain, they have attuned themselves to the deepest forces of existence.

All rests on the final word, 'gay'. In expanding this word into its least well-defined and most numinous sense, Yeats uses it in the Daoist manner. Just as the *dao* is that which cannot be named and, in naming it, will be missed,[45] so the word 'gay' here becomes ultimately indefinable; as, as such, opens a gateway to a suddenly enlarged vision through which the word echoes like a gong, sending its resonances to the very edge of sound and sense.

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[1] W.B. Yeats, 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan,' *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 225. Although I apply Yeats's use of 'Asia' and 'the east' in this essay exclusively to China, of course Yeats had in mind primarily Japan and India: civilizations cognate in many ways to each other as well as with that of China.

[2] David Parker, 'Yeats's Lapis Lazuli,' *Notes and Queries* (October 1977): 452 – 454;

William H. O'Donnell, 'The Art of Yeats's 'Lapis Lazuli',' *Massachusetts Review* 23:2 (Summer 1982): 353 – 367; Calvin Bedient , 'Yeats's 'Lapis Lazuli': Romancing the Stone,' *Yeats: an Annual of Critical and Textual Studies* 7 (1989): 17 – 41.

[3] At the time Yeats was writing 'Lapis Lazuli', the word 'gay' was beginning to undergo this transformation, from its usual meaning of being light-hearted, mirthful or brilliantly animated into one that played on older meanings of the word, as leading an immoral or dissipated life (from 1310 on). Its first use as denoting homosexual is quoted by the Oxford English Dictionary (3rd. edition, 1989, Vol. VI) as dating from 1935, citing N. Erskine, *Underworld and Prison Slang.*

[4] 'It is in fact a Chinese jade island – the term is generic and covers carving in stones other than nephrite. …Others with a similar subject matter are illustrated in *Chinese Jades in the Avery Brundage Collection* by Réne Yvon Lefebvre d'Argencé (Berkeley, 1972).' Footnote 2 from David Parker, 'Yeats's Lapis Lazuli,' *Notes and Queries* (October 1977): 452 – 454. It is worth noting that sometimes what may appear to be lapis lazuli may well be a similar stone which has been dyed blue. It is in fact difficult to tell whether Yeats's own stone was jade or lapis lazuli (the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, site of the Brundage Collection as mentioned above) displays two similar pieces it describes as 'jade colored to appear like lapis lazuli').

[5] An example of the Qianlong Emperor's aesthetic preoccupations can be found in the jade books held by the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, Ireland, which are also inscribed with poems attributed to the Emperor (but which often may have only been written at his command).

[6] Informed by Yeats of this fact, Dulac offered to have the poem translated if Yeats could send him a copy or a photograph; but there is no evidence that Yeats ever took him up on this offer. Unpublished letter, 6 July [1935], Humanities Research Center, University of Texas; quoted in O'Donnell, 'The Art of Yeats,' *Massachusetts Review*, p. 355.

[7] *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954; New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 837.

[8] 'Yeats wrote "Lapis Lazuli" in July 1936.' A. Norman Jeffares, 'The General and Particular Meanings of "Lapis Lazuli"' (1967) from *Yeats's Last Poems: A Casebook*, ed. Jon Stallworthy (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 160. Jeffares had this information from Mrs. W.B. Yeats. See also O'Donnell, p.357, n.9, citing a letter from Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley of 26 July 1936.

[9] Parker, *Notes and Queries*, p. 454.

[10] Parker, *Notes and Queries*, pp. 452 – 454, to whom this discussion of Yeats's understanding of the lapis mountain's symbolism is indebted.

[11] This misreading by Yeats is particularly odd in view of the set design for *At the Hawk's Well* which has a large - usually painted - pine as the centrepiece of its backdrop. It's Japanese but it's also 'Eastern', and its core symbolism borrowed from China.

[12] Edmund Dulac had written to Yeats at the time he was working on the poem that he [Dulac] was 'terrified of what was going to happen if London was bombed from the air.' Given originally in Frank O'Connor's *A Backward Look* (1967), p. 174, the letter is quoted in Jon Stallworthy, *Vision and Revision in Yeats's Last Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 44.

[13] *Essays and Introductions* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 255. Compare also Neville in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* – a novel Yeats knew: 'It is better…to read Shakespeare as I read him here in Shaftsbury Avenue. Here's the fool, here's the villain, here in a car comes Cleopatra.' (London: Hogarth Press, 1931), p. 312. I am indebted to Professor Daniel Albright of the English Department, Harvard University, for pointing out this parallel.

[14] *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 47.

[15] *Autobiographies*, p. 326.

[16] *A Vision: An Explanation of Life Founded upon the Writings of Giraldus and upon Certain Doctrines attributed to Kusta Ben Luka* (London: privately printed for subscribers only by T. Werner Laurie, Ltd., 1925), p. 270.

For a detailed and convincing argument situating Callimachus for Yeats as 'an artistic intermediary between East and West', see O'Donnell, pp. 359 – 363.

[17] *W.B. Yeats: A Life, II: The Arch*-Poet, by R.F. Foster (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Cf. index listings under Yeats, William Butler, 'Health' for pp. 496 - *passim*.

[18] Cf. catalogue #9, Guo Xu (1456 – c. 1529) 'Album of Various Subjects,' from *Telling Images of China: Narrative and Figure Paintings, 15th – 20th Century, from the Shanghai Museum*, ed. Shane McCausland and Ling Lizhong (London: Scala Publishers, 2010), p. 95, in detail at p. 96. Another illustration from this album (#4) shows the 'Immortal Qiu' kneeling to pay homage to the hollow stump of a very gnarled, ancient tree.

[19] As he illustrates from his early essays, in particular, 'William Blake and the Imagination' and 'William Blake and his Illustrations to 'The Divine Comedy''' from the collection *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1903), Yeats most certainly knew of the two illustrations which most graphically represent Blake's animism: the plate for Thomas Gray's 'The Bard' that opens 'Hark, how each giant-oak' in which the oaks, the rocks and the river all have human faces/bodies; and the plate called 'Sunshine Holiday', an illustration for John Milton's 'L'Allegro' for which Blake wrote the following note: 'Mountains, Clouds, Rivers, Trees appear Humanized….' I am grateful to Professor Daniel Albright for pointing out this parallel; although it is notable that Blake's energy system tends to be anthropomorphic, whereas the Daoist energy is strictly inhuman and thus impersonal.

[20] *Explorations*, selected by Mrs. W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1962; New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 449.

[21] While Calvin Bedient attempts to explain such a moment through Bergson's notion of 'duration', he is hampered by having recourse only to Western concepts --as opposed to a Chinese, and, more specifically, a Daoist vocabulary. In particular, Bedient's relentlessly Western analysis relies heavily on the opposition between subject and object, thus insisting on Yeats's actions upon (i.e.'seducing' or 'injecting' duration/time into) the stone – rather than

taking into account the responding effect of the stone's energy on him. In Chinese thinking, however, there exists no such opposition between subject and object: objects can thus enter into selves, just as subjects can act upon objects. The defects of Bedient's analysis are evident in the extent to which he must torture the English language to say what he wishes to say – and the consequent obscurity in what he does, in fact, assert.

[22] Yeats should have been already familiar with their iconography from a pair of Chinese hanging scrolls presented to him by Edmund Dulac in 1922 and still hanging in Yeats's study in the 'thirties. Cf. O'Donnell, p. 356.

[23] Detail from You Shao and Wang Gong (active 1796 – 1820), *The Female Disciples of Master Suiyuan* (dated 1796), Catalogue # 34 from *Telling Images of China*, pp. 144 – 147.

[24] This passage is from a review of *The Landscape of Words: Stone Inscriptions from Early and Medieval China* by Robert E. Harrist jr. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008) by Hui-Wen Lu, National Taiwan University, published in the *Harvard Journal of Asiastic Studies*, vol.70, no. 1 (June 2010), 232 – 246. Harrist's book is the first monograph to tackle this subject from a cultural perspective.

[25] 乾隆御制诗二集卷十三
古今体七十三首 己巳六（**1749** 年 乾隆十四年）
In translation: *Qianlong yuzhi shi, er ji* [Qianlong imperially composed poetry, compilation 2]; *juan* 13*: 'Gujin ti'* [73 poems, ancient and modern forms]; [the date:] *jisi* 6 [in 1749 / Qianlong 14th year].

[26] Translating poems from the Chinese is an art, particularly as the language not only allows but encourages multiple translations. For this reason, only a literal word-by-word rendition is given here.

[27] This would be an important modification for those who seek a purely Buddhist interpretation of this poem, such as Stephen Wolfe, 'The Half-way House: Some Eastern Thoughts in Yeats's Poetry,' at elib.doshisha.ac.jp. According to Wolfe, Yeats read a classic work of Daoism, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, which describes Daoist meditative practice. As Wolfe acknowledges, the form of Buddhism which interested Yeats was a synthesis with Daoism which (indirectly) became Zen Buddhism. Yet what is imagined as happening in 'Lapis Lazuli', as two friends climb a mountain together to seek enlightenment and do so to the music of the *qin*, is in direct opposition to Buddhist meditative practice, which emphasizes solitude and, often, silence, and is also often quite indifferent to the surroundings in which such practice takes place.

For an strong argument in favour of Yeats's Taoism [Daoism in the old Wade-Giles system of Romanization], see Aintzane Legarreta-Mentxaka, 'Yeats and Taoism: to Maria Motxobe Legarreta,' *Yeats Eliot Review*, Fall, 2005, on http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_6763/is_3_22/ai_n28320928/?tag=content;col1.

Here the author makes a cogent case for Yeats's exposure to the major Daoist texts, such as the *Dao de jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, remarking in relation to the latter, that the most most likely source for Yeats's knowledge of Daoism would have been Oscar Wilde, who reviewed the first complete translation of the writings ascribed to Zhaungzhi [Chuang Tzu in Wade-Giles] under the title of 'A Chinese Sage'. Yeats first met Wilde, as recorded in the *Autobiographies*,

p. , during a visit to Wilde's home for Christmas, 1889, at a time Wilde was working on this review (published in February, 1890). For further exploration of the Wilde/Zhangzi connection, see Jerusha McCormack, 'From Chinese Wisdom to Irish Wit: Zhuangzi and Oscar Wilde,' *Irish University Review,* vol. 37, no. 2 (autumn/winter 2007): 302-321.

[28] Noting the smooth and relatively unrevised nature of the last two verses (with only two minor corrections), together with its echoes of Yeats's initial response to the stone in his letter to Wellesley, at least two other scholars have concluded that these were probably composed first, perhaps even months before the initial three stanzas. Cf. O'Donnell, p. 357 and Bedient, p. 27.

[29] *Autobiographies,* p. 471.

[30] This analysis owes much to Professor Gu Zhengkun of the English Department of the University of Peking, one of China's leading Shakespeare experts. As he writes, Western tragedy 'finds no equivalent in Chinese. In short, both Western and Chinese people have the similar sense of what is tragic but Western tragedy as a dramatic form is indeed greatly different from Chinese "tragedy". Where Westerners emphasize fear and pity, Chinese would emphasize misery and pity. In other words, Chinese tend to soften the fearful aspect of the drama. There could be many disastrous events taking place in the process of the dramatic development; but the hero or heroine would always turn out to be victorious in one way or another, usually with the wrong corrected or justice done. The ending of the play usually gives the atmosphere of happiness so that the audience would not go home in grief.' Email to author (18 July 2010).

In an email two days later, Professor Gu is at pains to state that of course there are other cultural reasons for 'tragedy' having a different form in China: among them, the Confucian injunction towards moderation, which advises against indulging in the extremes of emotion, even within extremes of circumstance (such as mourning).

See also Xiao Yang Zhang, 'Tragedy and Comedy: The Culturally Produced Differences and Similarities,' in *Shakespeare in China: A Comparative Study of Two Traditions and Cultures* (Newark, N.J.: University of Delaware Press, 1996), pp. 21 -61. Although helpful in contrasting notions of "tragedy" in China and the West – in particular, the Chinese insistence that tragedies must have happy endings – this article does not discuss the production of Shakespearean plays in China, nor the particular interpretations that Chinese directors and actors might bring to bear on a Shakespearean text.

[31] Of course Yeats composed his version of history in the light of various philosophies of the East (as noted above, not exclusively Chinese, but also from India and Japan).

[32] Achim Mittag, 'Historical Consciousness in China: Some Notes on Six Theses on Chinese Historiography and Historical Thought,' *New Developments in Asian Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Paul van der Velde and Alex McKay (London: Kegan Paul, 1998), 60-61. Following quotation from this source.

[33] *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edition) Vol. VI (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) definition 1a. Following definition is taken from this source.

[34] *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. Interestingly enough, such a definition does not appear in the Oxford English Dictionary.

[35] *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 522 – 523.

[36] *Explorations*, p. 393. I am indebted to these references concerning 'tragic joy' in this and notes 34 and 35 to Professor Daniel Albright of the English Department, Harvard University.

[37] *A Critical Edition of Yeats's A Vision (1925)*, ed. by George Mills Harper and Walter Kelly Hood (London: Macmillan, 1978), "Notes," p. 66.

[38] 'The King's Threshold' 1904, l. 89, *Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats*, (London: Macmillan, 1952, p. 114.

[39] Wallace Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words,' *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1951), p.36. This famous formulation is echoed by Seamus Heaney in defining poetry as 'our imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality'.

[40] As Parker has noted, for the Daoists, longevity and immortality were not regarded as two distinct states of being; both were regarded as blessed and moving in a continuum, from one to another. 'Yeats's "Lapis Lazuli",' p. 453 and note 3.

[41] W.B. Yeats, 'Vacillation' (written/published 1933) – which, in its cry from the great lord of Chou [Zhou], 'Let all things pass away,' and its move beyond 'antinomies' in many ways anticipates the Chinese vision of 'Lapis Lazuli'.

In these terms, Parker in fact identifies the stone mountain as a representation of *P'eng-lai Shan*, the principal of the five Islands of the Blessed, where the Eight Immortals are said to dwell (*ibid*, pp. 452-53). But, in making this identification, there is a danger that the Western reader might think this is an otherworldly *location*, such as the Christians often imagine heaven to be, whereas in fact in Daoism it is clearly established as a state of being, that is, arrived at within life through spiritual practice; needing nothing more than this imaginative figuration of the Islands of the Blessed to invoke a sense of place.

[42] 'The Resurrection: An Introduction,' *Wheels and Butterflies* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1934), p. 109.

[43] Letter to Gwyneth Foden, 6 July [1935]: "Tell the Swami that last night came from a rich young Englishman a great piece of Lapis Lazali carved by some old Chinese artist into the semblance of a mountain with a little temple among trees half way up, & a path leading to it & on the path an ascetic with his pupil. The ascetic, pupil and little temple prophesying perhaps the Swami & myself at Mallorca." I am grateful to Professor Warwick Gould for calling to my attention this letter, published in the online edition of the *Collected Letters,* Intellex 6281.

[44] *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 254 – 55.

[45] Note the opening lines of the *Dao de Jing*:

The Dao that can be expressed in words
Is not the true and eternal Dao;
The name that can be uttered in words
Is not the true and eternal name.

(from *The Book of Tao and Teh*, translated by Gu Zhengkun)