
Li Bai and Modernity: Drinking with Tao Qian

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Abstract: In this essay I examine Li Bai's relationship with Tao Qian/Yuanming, his poetic ancestor, through their poems on drinking and on the Double Nine Festival. Li Bai's invitation to share wine with Tao takes the form of emulating his poetry. It also shows its impossibility, which is expressed in the form of unfulfilled longing. This awareness is what defines the modernity of Li Bai's poetry.

Keywords: Paula Varsano, Tao Yuanming / Tao, Li Bai, Double Nine Festival

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To write about Li Bai, wine-drinking would not only be an obvious topic to discuss but one might think there would not be much to say. However, Paula Varsano demonstrates otherwise in her important study of Li Bai,¹ *Tracking the Banished Immortal*:

One would think that enough has been written about Li Bo's relationship to wine to make it difficult to add anything new. . . . There would be little point in denying that the poet enjoyed drinking, but it would be equally misguided to attempt to gauge his dependence on wine by calculating occurrences of related words in his corpus. (252)

She describes wine-drinking as a practice and a poetic gesture that are related to "the values of immediacy and authentic expressions," a gesture which is well entrenched in Chinese poetic tradition. In Li Bai, the "stuff of the goblet" became the "stuff of his legend" (282). Varsano discusses Li Bai's wine-drinking with the Double Nine Festival which played a ritual role:

They are both stimulus and subject, context and content. As stimulus and context, wine surrounds the poet, modifying both his perceptual and his expressive faculties. *When the now tipsy poet turns to writing, wine plays the role of creative catalyst*, eroding the barrier between the internal faculties of memory or imagination and the outwardly directed act of perception. . . . In a contrastive (but not

contradictory) poetic gesture, the imbibing of wine as an intoxicant provokes—and evokes—if not forgetfulness itself, then the desire for it. *The actively forgetting poet expresses a desire for some respite from hard times. In the particular case of the latter-day poet aspiring to ancient authenticity, this desire is also one for freedom—however momentary—from the weight of poetic convention.* (282-283, emphasis mine)

Wine, for Varsano, is a catalyst for writing poetry, making it possible for the poet to abolish the boundaries of perception between himself and his predecessors, but also to forget the past. She does not refer to the cliché of “drinking to forget hard times” or when one is lonely. To the poet aspiring to authenticity, wine-drinking means forgetting the poets of the past, those who came before him, in the sense that Harold Bloom defined “the anxiety of influence.” The poet, by means of wine, gains freedom not only from the rigors of “poetic convention,” which are imposed upon him, but also from those who came before him and who limit and dampen his creativity. The only benefit missing from Varsano’s list is that in wine there is “truth,” “*in vino veritas*,” or, as they say in China, “*jiu hou tu zhen yan*,” after we drink wine we tell the truth.

Varsano’s comments on wine-drinking as a poetic stimulus are meant, first and foremost, for Li Bai, the legendary poet and drunk who wrote poems about drinking wine while drunk, and legend has it that he drowned because he tried to reach for the moon when he was drunk. This reputation as a wine-drinking poet has not always served Li Bai well. In the Introduction to Arthur Waley’s *The Poetry and Career of Li Po*, the General Editors wrote: “Li Po himself was not a man of high character; on the contrary (says Dr. Waley) ‘he appears in his works as boastful, callous, dissipated, irresponsible and untruthful, in particular, he was a drunkard’” (x).

For Varsano, Li Bai is the intoxicated poet who chooses to drink wine to actively forget the poets of the past and sought freedom from poetic conventions in wine. One wonders what Li Bai would have to fear from Tao Qian, who was also a “drunkard” who wrote about drinking wine and getting drunk, who is quoted often in Li Bai’s poetry and was a great influence on his poetry. One wonders why Li Bai who was an outsider would feel restricted by poetic conventions. In the West, poetic genius is defined, precisely, as the ability to break with conventions in order to express one’s genius freely—and wine has nothing to do with it. Li Bai was a genius who also liked wine, like Tao Yuanming / Qian.

In this essay I would like to address the issue of Li Bai’s poetry and wine-drinking within the context of his relationship to Tao Yuanming / Qian and the Double Nine Festival. Sometimes Li Bai quotes Tao by name, other times he alludes to him, but Tao is never too far away. A comparison of the two poets will provide us with the opportunity to test the degree of Li Bai’s “anxiety of influence,” and to what extent, tipsy or not, Li Bai was able to adhere to the poetic conventions of his day.

Perhaps the best place to start is the poem where Li Bai expressly mentions Tao Yuanming / Qian, “Ascending the Mountain on Double Nine.” Writing poetry on the occasion of the Festival of the 9th day of the 9th month is a tradition among poets from Tao Qian to Du Fu, and Li Bai follows tradition in writing a poem typical of “Double Nine.”²

Li Bo's Ascending the Mountain on Double Nine (Jiuri deng shan)*Yuanming, "Returning Home,"**Did not follow the ways of the world.*

Since he was lacking the stuff of the goblet,

He befriended a local magistrate

And having hailed the man in white,

With a smile they poured out some yellow chrysanthemum wine.

I, in coming here, did not fulfill my hopes,

In vain I passed the time this "Double Nine."

How exceptional, he for whom the carriage was designated!

So let us keep our engagement south of the city wall!

Massing earth into a rise that connects with Mount Xiang,

Looking down upon the banks of the Wan river.

Northland barbarians call upon jaded flutes,

Girls of Yue play their frosted strings.

To make of oneself the descendant of generals,

In pleasures which none can spy.

Crimson carp surge up under Qin Gao,

White tortoise leads forth Bing Yi.

*If the immortals are like them,**Pour a libation and they will know from afar.**All those who've "climbed high" since times of old,**How many are still there today?*

If on Cang Isle old promises break,

One can still await the days to come.

Chains of mountains look like startled waves,

Their folded layers emerge from a darkened sea.

I raise my sleeves and wave at those seated around,

In drunkenness what do they know?

Singing song of Qi, send goblets all around,

And all rise up in formless dance.

The guests depart with the scattering of leaves,

A hat flies off with the autumn wind.

After parting I climbed this tower,

Wanting to speak of "Longing for you."

(Varsano 273-279, emphasis

mine)

Li Bai addresses Tao Qian at the beginning of the poem by referring to his key poem "Returning Home" when he gave up work as a civil servant and returned home. What is important to Li Bai, in quoting the poem, is that Tao "did not follow the ways of the world," that he was an independent thinker who did not think with the crowd, in other words, *Tao was like him*. Li Bai refers to Tao

with his original name of Yuanming and to wine drinking. When he returned home, Yuanming had no wine, “the stuff of the goblet,” so he befriended a local magistrate and “with a smile” they drank together “some yellow chrysanthemum wine.”

The difference between Li Bai and Tao Yuanming is that the latter in returning home has fulfilled his hopes and desires, and he happily drinks chrysanthemum wine with the magistrate on “Double Nine.” Li Bai has no one to drink with and his hopes have not been fulfilled. His poem on Double Nine is an attempt to reach out to the immortals of old, such as Tao Yuanming, who have climbed the mountain on the Double Nine Festival. He asks how many of those immortal poets are still around; the question seems rhetorical since the answer is probably “none.” However, his question is not entirely rhetorical because he believes that he is also one of those immortals, so the answer to his question is: one, Li Bai. However, those around him are too drunk to realize that they are in the presence of an immortal and when he waves at them they don’t respond. The wine they drink makes them oblivious to an immortal, whereas the wine Li Bai drinks is to communicate with his poetic immortal ancestors. All one needs to do is pour a libation, fill a goblet with wine, and they will know: “Pour a libation and they will know from afar.”

Since Li Bai refers to Tao Yuanming at the beginning of the poem with “Returning home,” as an invitation to drink with him, he concludes the poem with one of his poems: “Longing for you.” There are two additional poems by Li Bai, translated by A. R. Davis, which express the feelings of “Longing for you”: “Endless Yearning I” and “Endless Yearning II.” “Endless Yearning I” is about the poet’s yearning for the city of Chang’an: “I am endlessly yearning to be in Chang’an.” The other poem, which is addressed to an individual far away, seems to be more appropriate as an answer to Tao Yuanming:³

Endless Yearning II

The sun has set, and a mist is in the flowers;
 And the moon grows very white and people sad and sleepless.
 A Zhao harp has just been laid mute on its phoenix holder,
 And a Shu lute begins to sound its mandarin-duck strings. . . .
 Since nobody can bear to you the burden of my song,
 Would that it might follow the spring wind to Yanran Mountain.
I think of you far away, beyond the blue sky,
And my eyes that once were sparkling
Are now a well of tears.
 . . . *Oh if ever you should doubt this aching of my heart,*
Here in my bright mirror come back and look at me! (n. p., emphasis mine)

The poem addresses a “you” who is far away and cannot be reached because no one can bear to carry the burden of sadness expressed by the song, so the song can only be carried to Yanran Mountain by the spring wind. The “you” who is not named lies “beyond the blue sky” and while, in former times, his or her presence made the speaker’s eyes sparkle, now it brings them to tears. The theme of “longing for someone,” as Owen points out, is one of the oldest of the *yuefu* tradition (155).

It was meant to address a loved one, but within the context of “Ascending the Mountain on Double Nine,” it can apply to Tao Yuanming since the poem cannot be delivered by anyone living but has to be carried by the spring wind where all the Immortals are, where Tao is.

The reference to “Longing for You” or “Endless Yearning II,” is meant to complete the conversation between the two poems, or poets, which began with Tao Yuanming’s “Returning Home.” The conversation concludes with an invitation expressed in “Endless Yearning II” that if ever Tao doubts his feelings for him, he should come to see for himself: “Oh, if ever you should doubt this aching of my heart, / Here in my bright mirror come back and look at me!” There are no signs of Bloom’s anxiety of influence; on the contrary, in thinking of Tao “beyond the blue sky,” Li Bai’s eyes swell up with tears. To confirm his genuine feelings for Tao, Li Bai invites him to come and see for himself: the “bright mirror” in which he is invited to look at Li Bai is not clear. On the other hand, the “bright mirror” is the poem, to be sure.

Arthur Cooper has a slightly different version of “Endless Yearning II” whose title is, simply, “Longing,” which sheds some light on the symbols of the poem, as well as on the identity of the “bright mirror.”

Longing

Sunlight begins to fade,
mist fills the flowers,
The moon as white as silk
weeps and cannot sleep,
Chao zither’s Phoenix frets
no more shall I touch,
Shu lute’s Mandarin Duck strings
I’ll sound instead:
*This song has a meaning
that no one can tell,
it follows the Spring wind
as far as Yen-jan.
To you far, far away
beyond the blue sky—
Whom once I gave
A sideways glance
With eyes that now
Are well of tears—
If you do not believe
that my heart breaks,
Come back and look with me
into this glass!*

(n. p.)

Although Cooper’s version is similar to A. R. Davis’s poem, there are substantial differences

that may help clarify their meaning. Where Davis translates “nobody can bear to you the burden of my song,” Cooper renders the line, “a song that has a meaning that no one can tell.” In this version, the poem, or the song, is the cryptic or enigmatic message of one poet to an older poet, of Li Bai to Tao Yuanming, which ordinary people cannot understand. The other major difference is Davis’s “my bright mirror” which Cooper renders as “this glass” giving it another meaning and importance. While Davis’s rendition of “bright mirror” is somewhat opaque, Cooper’s version makes it possible to see “this glass” as a “glass of wine” to reinforce the idea of Li Bai’s invitation to Tao to drink with him. Davis’s reading of “bright mirror” as a symbol of the poem is somewhat the same since, in both cases, it is a question of looking into a poem or a glass of wine. In either case, Tao can ascertain Li Bai’s feelings and need of companionship, because “my heart breaks.”

To get a better perspective of Li Bai’s invitation to Tao Yuanming, I have chosen two poems by Tao Qian on “Double Nine” festival. The first is on the occasion of the festival, when the poet is still a reluctant official and the other after his retirement from his office. The two versions are by James Robert Hightower, who is probably the best translator of Tao Yuanming / Qian.

The Ninth of the Ninth Month

Little by little autumn has come to an end
 Chill, chill the wind and dew combine.
 The creeping vines put out no blossoms now
 Already courtyard trees have lost their leaves.
 The crisp air scours summer’s dregs away,
 The distant boundary of heaven is high.
 The sad cicada’s cry is heard no more
 Geese fly honking through the empyrean.
 The myriad changes are all interconnected
Is Human life anything but hard?
From earliest time all have had to die—
The thought sets my heart inside afire.
How am I to do my feelings justice?
Unstrained wine will serve to cheer me up.
I do not know about a thousand years,
So I had better just prolong today. (Hightower n.p.)

This is typical of Tao’s poetry while serving as an official. The mood is very bleak and pessimistic: life is hard and we were born to die. He has difficulty expressing his feelings and the unstrained wine he drinks does not cheer him up. He is uncertain about the future and can only make the best of the day: “So I had better just prolong the day.”

The second poem on “Double Nine” written after his retirement is more cheerful and hopeful.

The Double Ninth, In Retirement

Living in retirement, *I rejoice in the name of the Double Ninth.*

This autumn the chrysanthemums fill the courtyard, but I have no way to come by wine.
*So I have to be content with drinking the blossoms of the Ninth and expressing my feelings
 in words.*

*Life is short but our desires are many;
 And all mankind finds joy in living long.
 When day and month reach this auspicious time
 Everyone rejoices in its name.
 The dew is chill, the summer wind has ceased,
 The air is clear and all the sky is bright.
 No trace remains of departed swallows,
 The honking still echoes from passing geese.
 Wine serves to exorcise all our concerns,
 Chrysanthemum keeps us from growing old.
 But what is the thatched-hut gentleman to do
 Who helpless views time's revolutions?
 The dusty cup shames the empty wine cask,
 The cold flower blooms uncelebrated.
 Drawing tight my robe, I sing to myself,
 In my reverie deepest feelings stir.
 There are many joys in living here,
 And just to see it through is something gained.*

The contrast between the two poems, before and after retirement, is startling. The first poem is sad and bleak. It begins with the end of autumn and the first chills of winter. The vines produce no more wine and leaves are falling from the trees in his courtyard. Everything is dying. In the retirement poem, everything has changed. Everyone, including Tao, rejoices at life in the name of Double Nine. He no longer drinks “unstrained wine,” but has chrysanthemum wine, which will keep him from growing old. If he didn’t know before how to express his feelings, he knows now how to express them in words. He knows that life is short but desires to live a long life.

Even the description of the approaching winter is positive. Although the swallows and geese have left, they are still present in their absence. The swallows have departed but no trace of them remains; the honking geese have left, but an echo remains. This time, the wine is not used to forget but only to chase his worries, “our concerns,” away. When Tao asks what his purpose is now that he has retired, the answer is not negative or pessimistic. He is living in poverty (“Drawing tight my robe”), he has no wine and no one to celebrate Double Nine with. He sings and expresses his deepest feelings in his reveries: “In my reverie deepest feelings stir.” For Tao, living is a joy, and every day brings something new: “There are many joys in living here, / And just to see it through is something gained.”

Tao is happy in retirement. Compared to his unhappy existence when he was working, he has found in retirement a new voice for his poetry, a new meaning in life, and can now rejoice in Double Nine. This latter aspect is what concerns us in our reading of Li Bai’s poem on Double Nine.

It would appear that when in the poem Li Bai refers to “Longing for you,” he has in mind the second version of Tao’s “Double Ninth.” Unlike other people who on this day are enjoying themselves and getting drunk, Li Bai has not fulfilled his hopes. His loneliness and lack of fulfillment generates a longing for the past, for his poetic ancestor, for a dialogue with Tao Yuanming: “After parting I climbed this tower, / Wanting to speak of ‘Longing for you.’” While Tao in retirement found new joy in his poetic reveries and enjoyed living in the present, Li Bai is dissatisfied with his future, and does not have any expectations. His only choice is to look back to the past, to Tao Yuanming with whom he shares the same attitude toward life and a love for wine. Li Bai turns to Tao, to the past, to find the fulfillment that he does not find in the present, or in the future. This fulfillment can only be found in poetry when it is shared with an older poet one reveres. Their only possible meeting place is in the lines of a poem where one can share a cup of wine. The poem affords the possibility of “returning home” to fulfill a “longing for you.” It, however, is also the place where this longing can never be fulfilled, because it is a longing which will always and forever be a “Longing for you.” It is the place where the impossibility of Tao’s return to take up Li Bai’s invitation to share a cup with him will always be renewed every Double Nine Festival.

Another example translated by Varsano of a poem by Li Bai on wine-drinking and the Double Nine Festival clearly reiterates the theme of sharing wine with Tao Yuanming:

On the Ninth

Today the sky is fine,

The water green and autumn’s mountains gleaming.

I take the gourd and pour some “Rose-cloud nectar,”

Pluck a chrysanthemum and float the cold petals on it.

The land extends far, pine and stone are ancient,

The wind carries aloft the clarity of string and reed.

A peek in the goblet reflects a joyful face,

Alone I smile and then drink myself.

A fallen hat, drunk beneath mountain moon,

In vain I sing of missing my friend.

(Varsano 279, emphasis mine)

Although Tao Yuanming is not mentioned by name, his presence is evident in the poem in the reference to the “plucking of chrysanthemums.” As Varsano points out, the lines, “A peek in the goblet reflects a joyful face, / Alone I smile and then drink myself” recall two lines from poem #7 of Tao’s “Drinking Wine”: “Although, with one goblet, one can but toast alone, / When the cup is finished, I myself pour from the gourd” (280). Hightower’s translation of this line is more specific: “I drink my solitary cup alone / And when it’s empty, pour myself another.” With this comparison, Varsano is only interested in showing that “even the solitary act of wine-drinking attains the status of shared convention” (279). She overlooks the fact that this shared convention is with Tao Yuanming and leaves out other lines from poem #7 of Tao’s “Drinking Wine” which establish a greater basis for comparison between the two poets.

“Drinking Wine,” Poem # 7

*The fall chrysanthemums have lovely colors.
I pluck the petals that are wet with dew
And float them in this Care Dispelling Thing
To strengthen my resolve to leave the world.
I drink my solitary cup alone
And when it’s empty, pour myself another.
The sun goes down, and all of nature rests
Homing birds fly chirping toward the grove.
I sit complacent on the east veranda
Having somehow found my life again.*

(Hightower 133-134, emphasis mine)

Li Bai repeats almost verbatim the lines from Tao on plucking the chrysanthemums and floating them in wine (the “Care Dispelling Thing”), in order to strengthen his resolve to leave the world. While Tao has no one to drink with and drinks his cup alone, Li Bai’s cup, or goblet, “reflects a joyful face,” Tao’s face. The reflection of Tao’s face in his goblet is Li Bai’s way of sharing a cup with Tao, which explains his “smile”: “Alone I smile and then drink myself.” The image of Tao in the cup recalls Li Bai’s invitation to Tao in “Longing for you” to drink with him: “Come back and look with me into this glass!” The poem “On the Ninth” concludes with a similar expression of unfulfilled desire: “In vain I sing of missing my friend.” Varsano is uncertain who this friend is (Varsano 281), but here, as elsewhere, there is no doubt as to the identity of this friend who can only be Tao Yuanming.

In the other two poems on drinking that I will discuss here, Li Bai makes it clear how wine, or poetry, are the means to get in touch with his poetic ancestor, with whom, as we have seen, he wants to share his wine rather than drink alone. The first poem is “Facing Wine,” which Varsano describes as a poem in which “the wine-drinking poet reveals the pathos of unfulfilled desire” (283).

Facing Wine

*I urge you not to refuse a cup,
For the spring wind has come to laugh at us.
Peach and plum trees are like old friends,
Tipping forth their blossoms to open toward me.
Swirling warblers call from emerald trees,
Bright moon peers into the golden wine cup.
The rose-cheeked lad of yesterday,
Today the white hairs grow apace.
Brambles grew beneath Shi Su Pavillion.
The dwellings of emperors since times of old,
Their walls and gates shut in yellow dust.
If you do not drink the wine,
Then where are the men of yesteryear?*

(283, emphasis mine)

In this poem we can recognize elements from previously cited examples by Li Bai. There is “the spring wind” that returns, but this time, not to carry the poet’s message but “to laugh at us.” There is the “bright moon” which “peers into the golden wine cup.” These clues can only be understood, if at all, by relating them to the last two lines in which the poet invites the reader to drink wine with him. However, when they refuse because they do not want his company, Li Bai turns to his poetic ancestor, Tao Yuanming, who alone knew the value of drinking wine and friendship. Drinking wine, however, is not something that should be taken literally as drinking for the sake of getting inebriated. Drinking wine, in these poems, is a metaphor for poetry, for sharing and communicating between poets. Li Bai’s invitation to Tao to drink is an invitation to celebrate poetry, his poetry, which is the only way a poet can reconnect with the poets of the past, “the men of yesteryear.” The poet’s first person supplication, “I urge you not to refuse a cup,” is an invitation to read this poem, as well as other poems and poets of the past; they are “like old friends,” similar to the “peach and plum trees.” The “bright moon” which peers in the poet’s “golden wine cup” reflects Li Bai’s face as a young man, “the rose-cheeked lad of yesterday,” who has now grown old and has “white hairs.” The moon, of course, is the symbol of Li Bai’s poetry, the poet’s only and constant companion. The poem “Facing Wine” invites readers to drink with the poet, but if they don’t accept his invitation, as those people in the first poem who deserted him, Li Bai will turn to his ancestor who alone can understand him. Of course, this poem, as the others we have discussed, puts into question this possibility: “where are the men of yesteryear?”

The other poem on wine-drinking listed by Varsano is “Drinking Alone” (285). In her view, wine “simultaneously increases the poet’s solitude in the context of the poem and enhances the subjectivity of his vision as its creator” (286).

Drinking Alone

The spring grasses seem to have an intention,
 Growing into a weave in the shade of the jade pavilion.
 The east wind blows sadness here,
 And so, white hairs encroach.
*I pour alone, but urge my lonely shadow to join me,
 And idly sing as I face the fragrant woods.*
 But, you, tall pines, what do you understand,
 For whom do you whistle and hum?
*My hand dances with the moon on the rock,
 Across my knees rests a zither among flowers.
 That which lies beyond this wine goblet,
 Placid and deep, is not my heart.*

(286, emphasis mine)

The poem reiterates many of the symbols of the previous poems. In this poem, the sadness is carried by the east wind which moves the tall pines. The poet, who is getting old, has no one to drink with but his shadow. The poet dances with the moon to a music improvised on a zither made of flower petals. He is completely unconcerned with the world, with anything which is not related to

his goblet, wine, or poetry.

Varsano's interpretation of the poem, which she finds strange, leads her to examine "the source of its strangeness," which she hopes to find in similar lines in one of the "Sirs of Zheng" in the *Shijing* (287-288). It does not occur to her that this poem is not any different from the other drinking poems where the absent interlocutor is Tao Yuanming. The theme of drinking alone is a favorite of Li Bai as well as Tao, whose presence may be felt in that "wine goblet" which is Li Bai's only concern. The model for this poem, once again, is Tao Yuanming, who "is always getting drunk alone," and when he has a guest, it is his other self who "stays sober all the year around" but whom the poet tries to persuade to drink ("Twenty Poems on Drinking" #13).

Li Bai's drinking poems can be said to be modeled on Tao Yuanming's "Twenty Poems On Drinking" not only as a source of inspiration but as a tribute to "another" immortal poet whose poetic influence, pace Bloom, is not one of "anxiety" but one of joy, as it is an occasion of consorting with the older poet and sharing a goblet of wine together.

At the level of poetic representation, the temporal difference that separates Li Bai from Tao Yuanming is an attempt to recapture the past and model himself after Tao, to long [desire? want?] to return to the source, and to experience the impossibility of doing so. Tao's very personal and individualistic poetics is the perfect model to imitate, especially in the context of the Double Nine Festival. The impossibility to reach beyond the heavens to a distant past stems from the ambivalence of a language which is both representational and nonrepresentational at the same time. As Paul de Man states in "Lyric and Modernity": "All representational poetry is always also allegorical, whether it be aware of it or not, and the allegorical power of the language undermines and obscures the specific literal meaning of a representation open to understanding" (185). This is a necessary condition of all allegorical poetry which contains a representational element that makes understanding possible, "only to discover that the understanding it reaches is necessarily in error" (185). De Man illustrates the point with the intra-poetic relationship between Stéphane Mallarmé and Charles Baudelaire, which can serve as the model for the poetic relationship between Li Bai and Tao Yuanming. This paradigm illustrates the impossibility of a representational and an allegorical poetics to engage in a mutually clarifying dialectic: "Both are necessarily closed to each other, blind to each other's wisdom" (185). Li Bai's "Ascending the mountain on Double Nine," and reaching "beyond the blue sky" to Tao Yuanming's poetic model is expressed in the form of a longing which remains forever unfulfilled. If Li Bai's eyes "were once sparkling," they are "now a well of tears" since the poet is aware that all he can do is repeat, blindly, Tao's poetic model without arriving at a final understanding: "Oh, if ever you should doubt this aching of my heart, / Here in my bright mirror come back and look at me!" The impossibility to emulate Tao Yuanming is, at the same time, a sign of Li Bai's modernity since they are both Immortal, at least in poetry's heaven.

Notes

1. According to scholars and transcriptions from the Chinese, Li Bai goes by many names: Li Po, Li Bo, and Li Bai. Varsano uses Li Bo while others such as Stephen Owen use Li Bai. I have used Li Bai throughout.
2. On the tradition of Double Nine, see A. R. Davis, "The Double Ninth Festival in Chinese Poetry," *Wen-lin. Studies in the Chinese Humanities*, edited by Chow Tse-tsung, U of Wisconsin P, 1968, pp. 45-64.
3. In other versions, the endless yearning is not for Chang'an but for someone who is not there, translated by David Hinton as "Thoughts of you unending." See *The Selected Poems of Li Po*. A New Directions Book, 1996. Stephen Owen translates the poem as "Yearning" but is noncommittal as to whom the poet yearns for: "Endless yearning / here in Chang'an" (154-155). It is hard to know which of the two versions is the one intended by Li Bai's "Longing for You." I have opted for A. R. Davis's "Endless Yearning II" which seems to be more appropriate to the occasion.

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