The Sense of Not Ending:
Narrative Theory in Du Fu's Poetry of Exile

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[English draft of "Meiyou jiewei de yiyi: Du Fu liuwang shi de xushi lilun" 沒有結尾的意義：杜甫流亡詩的敘事理論, in *Chunhua qiushi, qianxue yongnian: Sun Kang-i jiaoshou lizan* 春華秋實，潛學永年：孫康宜教授禮讚, edited by Lawrence Yim 嚴志雄 and Hu Siao-chen 胡曉真, 1:218–61 (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua, 2024).]

Abstract: In the wake of the cataclysmic Rebellion of the Ans and Shis, Du Fu (712–770) wrote several extended series that trace narratives of a complexity unprecedented in the generally non-narrative art of Chinese *shi* 詩 poetry. Although they have never been discussed as such by narrative theorists, these series and the thought about narrative they contain display striking parallels to important currents within twentieth- and twenty-first century narrative theory in the West. This essay builds upon a previous introduction to and translation of these series, considering what we should make of these parallels.

Du Fu's Narrative Experiments

Generally considered the greatest poet in the Chinese tradition, Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) was also one of the most experimental, responding to the cataclysmic events of his lifetime by questioning the conventional forms through which his culture made sense of the world.[1] One of the previously little explored dimensions of poetry that Du Fu began to exploit in the aftermath of the great Rebellion of the Ans and Shis (755–763) was narrative. Often discussed in Western scholarship as "lyric," Chinese *shi* 詩 poetry through the eighth century had only a limited narrative impetus. Poems were generally short; were often written during, describing, and responding

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1. For a discussion of Du Fu's development as a poet, see my *Du Fu Transforms: Tradition and Ethics amid Societal Collapse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2021). Much of this introductory discussion draws on points developed more substantially there.

to present social occasions; and, at the furthest extreme of their narrative extent, tracked either a first-person process of perception and feeling or, in some subgenres, a more-or-less stereotyped vignette. Up to Du Fu's time, moreover, there was rarely any narrative between poems, as poets' collected works had in general not yet come to circulate in the chronological order of their composition.[2] Instead, seventh- and eighth-century poetry was, for the most part, episodic and susceptible to being read independent of precise knowledge about poets' biographies, making its meaning by playing with conventions of form, topos, and occasion and by reference to an extensive tropology drawn from literary, philosophical, and historical tradition.[3] According to much contemporary thought, the Tang had inherited this tradition, ultimately, from the great civilizing sages (*shengren* 聖人) of the distant past, and it had been developed over the centuries by people of talent and moral probity ("worthies," *xianzhe* 賢者) who had been shaped by the culture thus passed down; the tradition thus provided moral, political, and aesthetic touchstones for understanding life in the present day.[4] This pervasive tropology partly vitiated the interest of narrative as a mode of literary sense-making, as by its means, poetry could connect scenes present or imagined to a vast, meaning-providing repertoire of precedents without requiring information about their particular temporal contexts.[5]

2. This point will be discussed in the penultimate section of the present essay. For a quick introduction to what is known about the organization of literary collections in the Tang, see Xiang Hongqiang 項鴻強, "Tangren shiti bianci guan yu zibian wenji zhi guanxi" 唐人詩體編次觀與自編文集之關繫 [Tang People's Visions of how Poetry should be Arranged and its Connection to their Self-Editing their Collections], *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺産, 3 (2020): 75–85.

3. For late-medieval "tropology"—the practice of illuminating the moral and aesthetic significance of situations and people by drawing analogies to the repeating scenarios and exemplary figures of the precedent tradition—see my *Du Fu Transforms*, especially 45–46. For an earlier discussion of these techniques, and a useful debunking of the idea that medieval Chinese poetry before Du Fu is "autobiographical" in anything but the most limited ways, see Kawai Kôzô 川合康三, *Chûgoku no jiden bungaku* 中国の自伝文学 [Autobiographical Literature of China] (Tokyo: Sôbunsha, 1996), 208.

4. For an English-language discussion of these assumptions, see Peter K. Bol, *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1992), 76–107.

5. There were, of course, narrative genres in medieval China as well as a minor tradition of narrative *shi*-poems. Yet extended narrative genres do not seem to have played the central role in elite literary production before the ninth century that they would subsequently come to play in later Chinese history with the rise of longer *chuanqi* 傳奇, drama, and novels. For English-language scholarship on medieval Chinese narrative *shi*-poetry, see Joseph R. Allen, "Early Chinese Narrative Poetry:

Before the rebellion, Du Fu mostly wrote poetry along these lines, and partly for this reason, poems in his early collection—resembling in this respect the vast majority of his contemporaries and predecessors—are relatively difficult to date and to put into chronological order.[6] In the early days of the war, however, his work begins to change. He starts to notice the ways his experience runs against the tropologies of the precedent tradition, as if what had collapsed to the rebel onslaught was not merely the government of the Tang but also his belief in the characteristic faiths and self-justifications of its literate elite.[7] And as Du Fu's poetry from this period begins to focus on the difficulties of interpreting present personal, political, and military situations, its attention to detail renders it increasingly easy to contextualize and order chronologically, thus lending itself to a form of narrativization. In the verse that can be dated to around this same period, moreover, we can observe Du Fu beginning to think about narrative in long poetic series that string together in temporal sequence what would previously have been fragmented "lyrics" without a sense of relative time. These series represent a striking formal innovation within a tradition where intentionally composed sets were uncommon and narrative sets were vanishingly rare.[8]

The Definition of a Tradition" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1982); Dore Jesse Levy, *Chinese Narrative Poetry: The Late Han through T'ang Dynasties* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988); and Tsung-Cheng Lin, "Time and Narration: A Study of Sequential Structure in Chinese Narrative Verse" (PhD diss., The University of British Columbia, 2006). Scholarship in Chinese is too robust to list here.

6. Heroic efforts to reconstruct the chronology of Du Fu's verse over almost a thousand years of scholarship have resulted in at least a reasonably solid picture of his early life. The standard critical biography of Du Fu is Chen Yixin 陳貽焮, *Du Fu pingzhuan* 杜甫評傳 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2003); in English, see William Hung, *Tu Fu: China's Greatest Poet* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952). Yet the dating of even some of the most famous of Du Fu's early verse is less certain than is sometimes thought. See, for instance, my discussion in *Du Fu Transforms*, 45–51.

7. Other poets did not suffer the same crisis of faith that Du Fu did at this time. See Lucas Rambo Bender, "Other Poetry on the An Lushan Rebellion: Notes on Time and Transcendence in Tang Verse," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 79.1–2 (2019): 1–48.

8. See Joseph R. Allen, "Macropoetic Structures: The Chinese Solution," *Comparative Literature* 45.4 (1993): 305–29, 319; for an extended discussion of the forms of poetic sequence in China up to Du Fu's time, see idem, *The Chinese Lyric Sequence: Poems, Painting, Anthologies* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2020). For another remarkably innovative narrative series Du Fu wrote seemingly around this same time, see Stephen Owen, "A Poetic Narrative of Change: Du Fu's Poetic Sequence 'Going Out the Passes: First Series,'" in *Text, Performance, and Gender in Chinese Literature and Music: Essays in*

This essay considers three of these novel series that are particularly complex, in that Du Fu strings them together into an even larger narrative, creating a narrative sequence of narrative sequences, whose major theme, appropriately, is the question of how narrative works and what we can expect from it. I have published a philological introduction to and an annotated translation of these three sequences elsewhere.[9] Building on this previous work, my goal in this essay is to broaden our appreciation of these series' significance by considering them in a comparative narratological context. In particular, I will elucidate and explore the implications of a surprising set of correspondences between these series' theoretical reflections on narrative and the theoretical reflections of a set of influential Western narrative theorists over the past century.

This topic is perhaps an imperfect one for a tribute to Professor Sun, my mentor at Yale and one of the great luminaries of our field. Among the many remarkable characteristics of Professor Sun's remarkable oeuvre, perhaps the most basic is its incredible range, whereas I am here revisiting previous work. Yet my aim here is to attempt at least a pale imitation of her successful bridging of scholarly and cultural worlds.

Parallel Narrative Theories and the Narrative Secularization Thesis

The congruities between Du Fu's thought and that of the Western theorists to be introduced below are surprising, and not merely insofar as these theorists do not discuss Chinese poetry, but rather focus on more-prototypically narrative genres such as the novel and confine their source materials to the West, particularly the modern and contemporary West. What makes these congruities surprising, instead, is that these theorists confine their materials in this way partly on the basis of a claim that their own narrative theorization epitomizes a defining feature of the modern West that differentiates it from premodern and non-Western cultures like Du Fu's. These theorists, that is, are largely at one—despite their otherwise divergent methodological and political orientations and the decades that separate them —in binding their narrative theorizing to a particular account of narrative's history,

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Honor of Wilt Idema, ed. Maghiel van Crevel, Tian Yuan Tan, and Michel Hockx, 7–22 (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

9. Lucas Rambo Bender, "Three Narrative Sequences from Du Fu's Exile on the Western Frontiers," *Journal of Oriental Studies* 51.1 (2021): 1–68.

by which all premodern cultures were blind to something the modern West has come to understand: the innate human need for narrative and the dangers of misunderstanding that need. Their narrative theories, in other words, each belong to the pervasive genre of modern, Western thought Jane Bennett has dubbed "disenchantment tales": grand historical narratives that argue, across a number of related domains, that the modern West has achieved "a truer and more sophisticated relation to the world" in comparison to the premodern and non-Western cultures that are conscripted into "the part of modernity's credulous foil."[10]

The argument I will advance here, that Du Fu offers a surprisingly similar account of narrative to that proposed by these theorists, thus simultaneously validates these theorists' insights and threatens some of the historical underpinnings of their work. It also threatens some of the content of their theories, in particular the emphasis most of these thinkers place on the meaning-giving character of endings. This emphasis is not unrelated to the nature of "disenchantment tales" in general, since in these tales, it is precisely the ending (frequently the "death") of premodern and non-Western narrative cultures that has, supposedly, allowed the modern West to attain its unprecedented clarity about the world. If, however, premodern Chinese culture writ large contained attitudes towards narrative that are closely related to these theorists' own understanding—if, that is, Du Fu's thought in these series might have influenced other premodern Chinese thinkers and writers, who themselves went on to produce their own equally sophisticated narrative products and theories—then no such definitive ending of premodern cultures can be said to have occurred, and the meanings that these theorists have derived from this purported ending must be open to doubt. It is, moreover, precisely on the question of endings that I will argue Du Fu ultimately diverges from these theorists, and it is on the question of endings that the Chinese literary form he most decisively influenced, the poetry collection, diverges most dramatically from their primary cynosure, the novel.

The connection between a narrative of the ending of past narrative cultures and a vision of narrative endings as particularly important seems to have been first and most influentially drawn by Walter Benjamin in his 1936 essay, "The Storyteller"

10. Julie Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 50.2 (2019): 145–70, 150, 151. For the phenomenon of "disenchantment tales," see Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 56–57.

(*Der Erzähler*). Here, Benjamin argues that the passing of premodern forms of industry and the cataclysm of the First World War had occasioned the "dying out" (*ausstirbt*) of the premodern narrative form he calls "storytelling."[11] Storytelling's ending is, for Benjamin, an undeniable loss, robbing us of the storyteller's "wisdom" and "counsel."[12] Yet Benjamin also suggests that we have gained, in recompense, a more direct understanding of what it was we were always looking for in narrative, for "what draws the reader to the novel," the (modern) narrative form that has replaced the (premodern) story, "is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about"—"if need be [the protagonist's] figurative death—the end of the novel—but preferably their actual one."[13] This sort of ending is "more proper to [the novel] than to any story," since the subject matter of the story is "communal experience to which even the deepest shock of every individual experience, death, constitutes no impediment or barrier."[14] Yet even if premodern stories did not end at deaths, literal or figurative, death appeared in them "with the same regularity as the Reaper does in the processions that pass around the cathedral clock at noon," and death's authority is, moreover, "the very source of the story."[15] The storyteller's too, therefore, was a "gentle flame" (*sanften Flamme*) warming shivering lives, and as this oxymoron suggests, storytelling no less than the novel sought for intimacy with an event we can never experience.[16] It just did so in a way that dissembled death's awful unknowability and our "transcendental homelessness."[17] Now that storytelling itself has "died," we have lost the comfort offered by the storyteller, but we recognize our true situation that much more clearly.

Other narrative theorists following in Benjamin's wake have been less conflicted about the demise of premodern modes of narrative. In his 1967 *The Sense of an Ending*, for example, Frank Kermode offers one of narrative theory's clearest evocations

11. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt, 83–110 (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 87.

12. Ibid., 87 and 86.

13. Ibid., 101.

14. Ibid., 102.

15. Ibid., 95 and 94.

16. Ibid., 109.

17. Ibid., 99, borrowed from Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1974), 40 *et passim*.

of the secularization thesis, arguing that the transition to modernity has heralded a general release from premodernity's benighted subjection to narrative (what he calls "myth") to an enlightened understanding of it ("literary" fiction). Like Benjamin, Kermode suggests that we need narrative—be it millenarian or literary—in order to understand what we can never experience: death. "Men, like poets, rush 'into the middest,' *in medias res*, when they are born; they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends."[18] Both "myth" and "literary fiction" offer these concords. But whereas myths conceal their fictionality, literary fictions provide us what we need—an experience of time subjected to "a common organization," "charged with past and future," *chronos* become *kairos*—without tempting us to "rearrange the world to suit them."[19] In this sense, the death of myth reveals what myth was all along, a mystified and misused form of the novel that, according to Kermode, led to horrors like the last great burst of myth, the Holocaust.[20]

Much the same combination of the secularization narrative and an emphasis on narrative endings is also repeated in Peter Brooks' 1992 collection, *Reading for the Plot*.[21] Like Benjamin and Kermode, Brooks argues that narrative's interest derives from its promise of an ending we can never experience in life. "Anticipation of retrospection," therefore, is "the master trope of [narrative's] strange logic," ensuring that the "death instinct"—the urge to reach a meaningful end—drives us through a story "in a spirit of confidence, and also a state of dependence, that what remains to be read will restructure the provisional meanings of the already read." Developing further Kermode's notion of "concords with origins and ends," Brooks therefore observes that the narrative death instinct demands the formal "bundling" or "binding" of moments in the middle of a narrative into a "system of repetitions" that serves to "formalize the system of textual energies," ensuring that as the story moves forward towards the end, the significance to be revealed by that ending propagates backwards towards its beginning.[22] Ultimately, this structure guarantees that every-

18. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

19. Ibid., 46 and 42.

20. Ibid., 38.

21. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 23.

22. Ibid., 108.

thing within the narrative becomes organized by the end, which is thus revealed as timeless and foreordained, existing "before the beginning."[23] In this way, narrative offers the reader "the pleasurable possibility (or illusion) of 'meaning' wrested from 'life.'"[24]

The supersession in this last sentence of "possibility" by "illusion" subtly imports the sequence of the secularization narrative that underwrites Brooks' analyses. As Brooks tells it, plot's "emergence... as a dominant mode of ordering and explanation..., dating from the Renaissance and gathering force during the Enlightenment," began from "a falling-away from those revealed plots—the Chosen People, Redemption, the Second Coming—that appeared to subsume transitory human time to the timeless."[25] This seems, on its face, a strange claim: either premodern "revealed plots" were not plots, or plot was an important mode of ordering and explanation long before the Renaissance. Yet the point here is again that modern plots understand themselves as plots in a way premodern plots did not—and we, in our postmodern moment, understand plot even better, as offering only illusory consummations. As was the case in Benjamin's gentle and less-gentle "flames" and Kermode's use of "fiction" to denote both myth and literary narrative, Brooks repetition of the word "plot" in two different senses thus implicitly places its modern, Western readers at a moment of retrospection, where they finally recognize that plot is not out there in the world, but rather "the product of our refusal to allow temporality to be meaningless, our stubborn insistence on making meaning in the world and in our lives."[26]

This triumphalist vision of the history of Western narrative and narratology continues to be characteristic of Western narrative theory in the twenty-first century as well, with important scholars arguing that recent decades have witnessed the articulation of an even deeper understanding of narrative's nature than that represented by Benjamin, Kermode, or Brooks. Theorizing the twenty-first century "narrative turn in fiction and theory" in her eponymous 2014 book, for instance, Hanna Meretoja offers a narrative history of the progressively deepening understanding of narrative that has characterized the West since the advent of "modernization and seculariza-

23. Ibid., 103.
24. Ibid., 108.
25. Ibid., 6.
26. Ibid., 323.

tion, [when] the subject was transformed from someone inhabiting a prescribed place in an inherently meaningful cosmic order into an individual facing the task of having to construct, by him- or herself, meaningful order in the world."[27] According to Meretoja, "modernist" thinkers characteristically responded to this general modern predicament by "[stressing] the capacity of the subject to construct an objective representation of the world, and [conceiving] of the narrative order of the novel as a reflection of the natural order found in reality, disclosing its 'hidden sense.'"[28] "Postmodernism," subsequently, was a reaction against this "Balzacian" vision of narrative: as seen above in Kermode and Brooks, postmodernist thinkers became skeptical that narrative was really out there in the world, claiming that it was instead a (false, illusory) human imposition on it. More recently, however, proponents of the "narrative turn" have recognized that postmodernism's distrust of narrative projections itself reposed upon a problematic "myth of the given": the idea that the real can be understood as "'raw,' disconnected units of experience… independent of human meaning-giving processes."[29] Defending this new orientation, Meretoja argues that there is no such non-narrative "real," since narrative imaginaries "shape not only our beliefs and values, but social reality in general,"[30] guaranteeing that we are "entangled in webs of narratives from the day we are born, constantly reinterpreting our experiences through them in such a way that a process of narrative reinterpretation is constitutive of who we are."[31] We can thus neither maintain the modernist faith in narrative nor the postmodern stance of thoroughgoing skepticism towards it, but need to embrace what Meretoja calls a "metamodernist" celebration of "the mythopoetic power of literature": its capacity not to reveal or obscure reality, but rather to create and shape it.[32]

Compared to Benjamin, Kermode, and Brooks, Meretoja de-emphasizes the importance of narrative endings; for ethical storytelling, she writes, "more important

27. Hanna Meretoja, *The Narrative Turn in Fiction and Theory: The Crisis and Return of Storytelling from Robbe-Grillet to Tournier* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 10.

28. Ibid., 12.

29. Ibid., 224 and 85.

30. Hanna Meretoja, *The Ethics of Storytelling: Narrative Hermeneutics, History, and the Possible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 21.

31. Meretoja, *The Narrative Turn*, 146.

32. Ibid., 230. The term "metamodernity" is drawn from Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van der Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism," *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 2 (2010): 1–14.

than a sense of an ending (Kermode 1967) is *a sense of a beginning*... [since] integral to the human condition is the ability to initiate something new and unpredictable in the world."[33] Yet the meaning-giving power of endings is still implicit in her narrative of narrative, which continues to repose upon the secularization thesis. The "ability to initiate something new" is important, for Meretoja, partly because premodern narratives were oppressive in their inability to recognize their own fictionality. She suggests, therefore, that our reembrace of narrative must also embrace "the late modern world in which mythical narratives have lost their absolute, sacred status" and thus be "aware of their own relativity and cultural constructedness."[34] Even if metamodernism supersedes modernism and postmodernism, therefore, it nonetheless agrees with both that the modern West represents a dramatic and triumphant break from premodern and non-Western narrative cultures, which have, or should have, come to an "end."

Put simply, my goal in this essay is to suggest that each of these theorists is wrong to identify the "end" of the premodern world and the "beginning" of the modern as a radical break in narrative thought. Instead, I will show that we can find remarkably close prefigurings of their theoretical contributions—and thus of their consciousness of narrative's nature and functions—in the three poetic series to be considered here, series that I will suggest may have played a role in shaping the narrative template that would become characteristic of the Chinese poetic collection in the millennium following Du Fu's experiments. Paradoxically, then, the very wrongness of these four theorists' narratives of narrative points to some fundamental rightness in their narrative theories, since they so accurately diagnose the motivations of artworks they do not study from a historical world they do not consider. This rightness may even suggest that we should see the disenchantment tales in which their work is rooted as themselves expressive of something transtemporal and transcultural, and thus as the continuation of a story of narrative understanding that has neither a clear beginning nor a predictable end.

33. Hanna Meretoja, "From Appropriation to Dialogic Exploration: A Non-subsumptive Model of Storytelling," in *Storytelling and Ethics: Literature, Visual Arts and the Power of Narrative*, eds. Hanna Meretoja and Colin Davis, 101–22 (New York: Routledge, 2018), 114–15.

34. Meretoja, *The Narrative Turn*, 230.

Narrative as the Re-Discovery of Order

One possible way of accounting for the parallels between Du Fu's thought about narrative and that of these modern theorists has been offered by Susan Stanford Friedman in her 2015 book, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time*. Here, Friedman suggests that Du Fu wrote in response to a cataclysmic historical dislocation, the Rebellion of the Ans and Shis, that mirrors the upheavals to which Benjamin, Kermode, Brooks, and Meretoja trace the Modern West's skepticism of narrative.[35] It is possible, that is, that narrative was for Du Fu a way to think through a loss of order in his world, much as Brooks and Meretoja suggest it was with the rise of secularism and Benjamin and Kermode suggest it was in the wake of the World Wars.

The three poetic series to be considered here were written, specifically, in the latter half of 759, after a major reversal in the course of the ongoing war prompted Du Fu to abandon his government post in the heartland to flee with his family to the far western frontier of the empire. Though I will not repeat here the more detailed historical contextualization I offered in my previously published work on these series—nor will I repeat here their translation, except to discuss a small selection of the poems (a different selection from that discussed in my other publications on these poems)[36]—it may be useful to note just how tenuous Du Fu's existence was at this moment. On his arrival to Qinzhou, Du Fu was homeless both transcendentally and quite literally, needing equally to figure out a way to survive in the unfamiliar borderland to which he had fled and to find a new way to think about his life, which had, according to the available precedents of his culture, gone awry. The first narrative series that Du Fu wrote upon arriving in Qinzhou, therefore, concerns just these questions: whether and how he can make a physical and spiritual home for himself here.

It is not hard to see how this dilemma might have invited a narrative resolution. Before the rebellion, Du Fu had primarily written poetry that, as was the general practice in his age, related the realia of the moment to the significance-giving resources of the cultural tradition, often designated in his time by the shorthand, "This

35. Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 191–98.

36. For my previous discussions of these series, see "Three Narrative Series," and *Du Fu Transforms*, 141–69.

Culture" (*siwen* 斯文).[37] This poetry might be said to fit into what Meretoja identifies as the basic "premodern" vision of narrative, by which "things and deeds acquire reality, identity and meaning [largely] to the extent that they repeat[, vary, or build upon] an example provided by mythical [here read instead: "traditional"] predecessors."[38] When, however, the rebellion's violence called into question what Brooks might call the tradition's "revealed plots" and forced Du Fu into situations for which he could find no satisfying traditional precedent, this sort of backwards-looking sense-making became impossible, and he therefore began to turn his gaze from the past to the future, in hopes that his current bewilderment might lead, ultimately, to a resolution he could not yet see. In the first narrative series of these three, Du Fu thus begins to string his poems together in a chronological sequence so as to chart the direction their development might point. In this sense, this sequence is a sort of "Balzacian" or "modernist" (in Meretoja's terms) examination of reality, aimed at "disclosing its 'hidden sense.'"[39] It thus represents an "advance" in narrative thinking roughly analogous to that Meretoja ascribes to early Western modernity over the premodern world.

In order to transform the heretofore non-narrative form of the Chinese *shi*-poem into a narrative genre that could discern reality's "hidden sense," Du Fu employs a striking formal innovation. Although this first series is entitled "Twenty Miscellaneous Poems of Qinzhou" 秦州雜詩二十首—a title that apparently disclaims his intention to plot its constituent poems into a significant order—it turns out on inspection to be structured by systematic repetitions across its two halves.[40] The first poem, that is, is thematically, imagistically, and linguistically parallel to the eleventh,

37. This phrase derives from the *Lunyu* 論語 (9/5); see *Lunyu jishi* 論語集釋 [The Analects of Confucius, with Collected Explanations], comp. Chen Shude 程樹德, ed. Chen Junying 程俊英 and Jiang Jianyuan 蔣見元 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 17.579.

38. Meretoja, *The Narrative Turn*, 157.

39. Meretoja, *The Narrative Turn*, 12.

40. For a more thorough discussion and demonstration of these systematic repetitions, see Bender, "Three Narrative Series," 5–9. For the series itself, see Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu* 杜甫全集校注 [Complete Collection of Du Fu's Works, Collated and Annotated], 12 vols., ed. Xiao Difei 蕭滌非 et al. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2014), vol. 3, 6.1405–71. For the texts of all poems reproduced below, I follow the editions published in the so-called *Songben Du Gongbu ji* 宋本杜工部集 [Song Edition of the Collection of Du of the Ministry of Works], comp. Wang Zhu 王洙 (997–1057), Xu Guyi congshu facsimile edition (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 1957). This series is found at *Songben*, 10.15b–18a.

the second to the twelfth, and so on. Since intra-series parallels of this sort were apparently unprecedented in the tradition of Chinese poetry up to Du Fu's time, readers would not have expected them—and indeed, it seems that no critic since the eleventh century has ever remarked on them before. But even ignored or sensed only subliminally, these parallels shape the "miscellaneous" poems into a narrative, ensuring that the set will not spin off in too many directions and offering Du Fu's readers—and Du Fu himself—the chance to observe how his thinking has changed over time.

Consider, as an example, the fourth and the fourteenth poems of the series.[41]

IV.

	鼓角緣邊郡	Drums and horns surround this frontier region
	川原欲夜時	as night falls on its river-plains.
	秋聽殷地發	Heard in autumn, they come, shaking the earth;
4	風散入雲悲	then scattered on the winds, sad, they enter the clouds.
	抱葉寒蟬靜	Cold cicadas still, clasping their leaves;
	歸山獨鳥遲	a lone bird is late returning to the hills.
	萬方聲一槩	Everywhere the sounds are all the same:
8	吾道竟何之	where, in the end, can my way take me?

XIV.

	萬古仇池穴	Since ancient times the Mate-Pool cave
	潛通小有天	has secretly linked to Little-Presence Heaven.[42]
	神魚人不見	Though no man sees its sacred fish,
4	福地語真傳	true word is passed that it's a holy place.
	近接西南境	Close upon Qinzhou's southwest border,
	長懷十九泉	I've long yearned for its nineteen springs.
	何時一茅屋	So when will I in a lone, thatched hut
8	送老白雲邊	send off my old age at the edge of white clouds?[43]

41. The following poems can be found at *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu*, vol. 3, 6.1417–19 and 6.1148–51.

42. Mate-Pool Mountain was approximately 150 km south-southwest of Qinzhou. "Little-Presence Heaven" was a Daoist grotto-heaven on Mt. Wangwu 王屋山 in Henan, not far from Du Fu's hometown outside Luoyang.

43. This line recalls a poem by the Daoist master Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536): "You ask me what there is in the mountains? / Upon the peaks, many white clouds. / One can with them make

These poems share subtle linguistic and thematic connections that suggest progress has occurred from the first half of the series to the second. In the fourth poem, Du Fu is regretting having come to Qinzhou. Though he fled here to escape the war in the heartland, the region is far from untouched by military activity, as the drums and bugles of the nearby fort attest. He is worried, moreover, that he has arrived too late in the year and too late in his life to set up a feasible hermitage: the cicadas are already starting to quiet as autumn ends, and although the lone bird of line 6 is late returning to its perch in the mountains at dusk, it still has a head start on him. If this poem ends in uncertainty, however, by poem XIV, he has decided that he can, in fact, make a home here in Qinzhou, and decided which of its mountains will be his perch in his twilight years. He has heard—as he heard the drums and bugles in poem IV—that Mate-Pool Mountain is a place he can practice the Way (*dao* 道), rendering it a suitable place for his "way" (also *dao*) to take him. And by this point, even Qinzhou's connection to the heartland has been revalued. Whereas in poem IV, the military sounds audible both in the capital corridor and here in Qinzhou made him wonder if he made the wrong choice in fleeing to this border region, now the grotto-wormhole that legendarily links Mate-Pool Cave with his hometown assuages his fear of living out the remainder of his days on the margins of the Chinese world.

Both poems, finally, evince an interest in the question of endings, an interest that integrates them into the larger narrative of the series as a whole. In the last line of poem IV, Du Fu wonders where his way will take him "in the end," a perplexity poem XIV then recalls in similarly ending with a question, now no longer "where" but rather "when."[44] This latter question will ultimately be answered in the final poem of the series, wherein Du Fu resolves on a solution to the problems he has mulled throughout its course. He will, he proclaims, never to return to the heartland, setting up instead a hermitage here in Qinzhou where he can spend his time seeking out the Daoist texts legendarily hidden in Mate-Pool's caves. Just as poem

oneself happy, / but they cannot be captured and sent in to the ruler" 山中何所有，嶺上多白雲。只可自怡悅，不堪持寄君; see Lu Qinli 逯欽立, ed., *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nan Beichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983], "Liang shi," 15.1814.

44. The issue of what "the end" means is also transformed here by the equivocal phrase "send off my old age" 送老, which indicates either that Du Fu will happily pass on Mate-Pool the short time that remains to him or that he will dispense with the normal consequences of old age by practicing the Daoist arts of immortality.

XIV had offered Mate-Pool in answer to poem IV's question of "where in the end...?," poem XX thus answers poem XIV's "when" with "now." The progressive recall and answering of these questions thus integrates these poems into a teleological narrative of gradually discovered purpose.

The overall arc of the series, therefore, is of Du Fu discovering that his life story did all along have a "plot" in Peter Brooks' sense: a preordained ending that makes sense of the apparently senseless exile that preceded it.[45] Indeed, given that the meaning-revealing ending of the series is offered as the "end" of Du Fu's previously-uncertain "way," the sequence demonstrates remarkably clearly points made particularly by Kermode and Brooks in their accounts of narrative's nature. In its architectural echoes across its two halves, for instance, this poetic series instantiates even more dramatically than do Brooks' own chosen novels his vision of narrative as a "system of repetitions" "binding" the apparently miscellaneous details of a life or story so as to present them, finally, as *not* miscellaneous but preordained, thus "discharging" their energies in the resolution of the end.[46] Equally clear is the series' illustration of Kermode's claim that narrative aims to subject time to a "common organization" through the establishment of "concords" between our experience "in the middest" and our destined end. Du Fu's goal in this series is precisely what Kermode suggests: to transform the meaningless time of his exile, *chronos*, into *kairos*, the crisis moment of his life-story that will ultimately reveal its significance.[47] And in order to do that, all the "miscellaneous" poems in the series have to be revealed, as they eventually are, as pointing ineluctably towards its end.

Narrative as False Comfort

There is also another respect in which Du Fu's procedures in this series echo a point made by Kermode, one that is, however, more threatening to the resolution the poet hoped they would provide him. For Kermode, as we saw, we "in the middest" seek concords with ends because we can never experience those ends themselves; as a

45. Although medieval Daoism did not emphasize the sorts of "revealed Plots" Kermode and Brooks emphasize in Judeo-Christian religion, it was often held that individuals could have a "destiny" (*ming* 命) to become immortal (*xian* 仙 or *zhen* 真).

46. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 108.

47. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 46.

result, all such concords are inevitably "fictive."[48] Though Du Fu had discerned, he thought, the trend of his narrative, its end remained an extrapolation: as he wrote the final lines of "Twenty Miscellaneous Poems," he could not know whether he would, in fact, be able to fulfill his resolve to set up a hermitage in Qinzhou. The "bindings" he had so carefully built into this art, in other words, could not bind up all the loose ends of his life itself. And as it happened, he would within a few weeks' time be forced by hunger to leave the region and its fictive consummations behind.

This experience proved the spur to another significant development in Du Fu's narrative thinking. After the failure of his quasi-"modern," "Balzacian" project in "Twenty Miscellaneous Poems," Du Fu's decision to leave Qinzhou for what he thought might be a more propitious hermitage site in Tonggu occasioned his leaving behind the hopes he had initially placed in narrative. Over the course of this journey, Du Fu wrote a second series whose structure pointedly revises the failed narrative theory of "Twenty Miscellaneous Poems," evincing this time not a discovered narrative but rather a narrative of discovering that narrative answers merely to our needs and is thus inherently untrustworthy. In this second series—which, for reasons of space, I will only discuss here in general terms without repeating the translation of the poems from my previous article—Du Fu thus attains to something like the consciousness of fiction-making's falseness that Meretoja identifies as characteristic of the "postmodern" generations that included Kermode and Brooks.

Du Fu's swift progress from something resembling the "modern" to something like the "postmodern" view of narrative might have been enabled by the fact that, within the intellectual culture of his age, such skepticism of human fiction-making would have been far from unprecedented. A central strand of Chinese Buddhist thought, for instance, focused precisely on our tendency to project our own "constructions" (*saṃskṛta*, *wei* 為) onto the "unconstructed" (*asaṃskṛta*, *wuwei* 無為). To be sure, Buddhism had its soteriological narrative as well, but many Chinese Buddhist thinkers emphasized its only-provisional usefulness. Because both "delusion" (*vikalpa*, *wangxiang* 妄想) and "truth" (*tathā, zhenru* 真如) are concepts used by beings trapped within delusion, neither can escape suspicion of being themselves delusory. Upon reaching liberation (*nirvāṇa*, *niepan* 涅槃), we are apt to realize that no being has been freed, no narrative accomplished.[49]

48. Ibid., 7.

49. For reflections on the problematic question of fictionality in the literature of Du Fu's age, see

Du Fu may not have had these Buddhist ideas in mind when he set out, in the first poem of the series of twelve he would write chronicling his journey from Qinzhou to Tonggu, to project a new plot and a new ending for his life.[50] In the first poem of this new series, the only possible reference to Buddhism is a term—"happy land" (*letu* 樂土)—that has equal resonance in the Confucian Classics, and that may not, therefore, have initially seemed to him to be harboring a Buddhist meaning. In the Confucian *Classic of Poetry* (*Shi jing* 詩經), a "happy land" is a kingdom free from predatory misgovernment and therefore from want,[51] and it is this resonance Du Fu recalls, writing that he is seeking a "happy land" because he has "no food" 無食問樂土. Tonggu, this first poem of the new series projects, will be such a "happy land," and reaching it will thus "bring to a successful conclusion his lifetime's wandering" 庶遂平生遊.[52] As he travels towards Tonggu over the ensuing eleven poems, however, the Buddhist resonances of the term *letu*—which can also denote "pure lands" (*buddhakṣetra*), mythical paradises sustained by the powers of buddhas—come to the fore. And as they do, so too does the Buddhist skepticism of fictional projections, including Du Fu's own projection that Tonggu will represent a satisfactory end to the wandering story of his life.

The transformation of the Confucian "happy land" into a Buddhist "pure land" is effected, once again, by Brooksian "bindings" that "revers[e] meaning within forward-moving time."[53] Like "Twenty Miscellaneous Poems," this twelve-poem series is structured by parallels that obtain between the first half and the second—though in this set, they are even more complex, with each poem bound to both its parallel and its chiastic opposite across the midline of the series.[54] Once again, these bindings provide a "common organization" to the time of the series, guaranteeing that early poems look to their fulfillment later in the sequence and that later poems progres-

Sarah M. Allen, *Shifting Stories: History, Gossip, and Lore in Narratives from Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014), particularly 1–25, as well as Sarah M. Allen and Jack W. Chen, "Fictionality in Early and Medieval China," *New Literary History* 51.1 (2020): 231–34.

50. This series is found at *Songben*, 3.12b–15b and *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu*, vol. 4, 7.1699–770.

51. *Maoshi zhushu* 毛詩注疏 [Commentary and Subcommentary on Mao's Odes], annot. Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) et al., in *Chongkan Songben Shisanjing zhushu fu jiaokan ji* 重刊宋本十三經注疏附校勘記, ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) (Taibei: Yiwen yinshu guan, 1981), 5.211a.

52. *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu*, vol. 4, 7.1699.

53. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 108.

54. For a discussion and demonstration of this architecture, see Bender, "Three Narrative Series," 9–16.

sively integrate earlier poems into a program of significance that funnels towards the end. In this process, the ideals that motivated Du Fu at the series' outset—in particular, the ideal of finding a hermitage that could provide him food and warmth—are revealed as unsatisfyingly selfish. He cannot be happy, he comes to recognize, in a paradise that is only for him. What he really wants is less a "happy land" than a "pure land" that realizes a more general salvation.

Besides their retrospective discovery in the first poem of the set, Buddhist themes are particularly evident in poems six, seven, and twelve, each of which subtly reenact scenes from Buddhist scriptures. In the sixth poem, for instance, Du Fu comes upon a Buddhist monastery in the mountains, and thinks briefly about abandoning his family to stay there as a monk. As Xiaofei Tian has observed, this poem recalls the "illusory city" (*huacheng* 化城) of the *Lotus Sutra* (*Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*, *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經), a mirage in the desert that presents travelers a false goal but that is useful in sustaining them for a portion of their journey.[55] In the *Lotus*, this "illusory city" serves as a parable for the individual salvation that the Buddha initially offered his disciples to tempt them onto a path that ultimately will lead to greater things.[56] The monastery halfway between Qinzhou and Tonggu likewise represents a false goal: a possible salvation for Du Fu, were he to renounce his family and become a monk there, but not for the family he would be renouncing. His rejection of this possibility thus represents a significant step along the spiritual journey described by the series.

Given its Buddhist themes and the appealing progress it describes from selfishness to universal compassion, it is tempting to read this sequence, as Tian does, as presenting a narrative of Mahâyâna 大乘 enlightenment. And surely it does: the final poem of the series—in which Du Fu, after arriving in Tonggu, imagines sacrificing himself to feed a phoenix whose appearance could portend peace for the empire, imitating the Buddha's own self-sacrifice to hungry animals in many past lives—represents a thoroughgoing conversion, a rebuke of the self-centered, eremitic (and thus potentially Hînayâna 小乘) plot that he set for his journey at its outset. At the

55. Xiaofei Tian, "Feeding the Phoenix: Du Fu's Qinzhou-Tonggu Series," in *Reading Du Fu: Nine Views*, ed. Xiaofei Tian, 93–108 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2020), 100.

56. *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 [*The Lotus Sutra*], trans. Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344–413), T262 in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次朗 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, vol. 9, 1a1–62c14 (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1932), 3.22a18–27b8.

same time, however, and in good Buddhist fashion, this enlightenment undercuts the teleological narrative it establishes. The phoenix that Du Fu imagines finding past the Tonggu county seat to the southeast on Phoenix Terrace Mountain is, of course, no less fictional than was his initial fantasy of a personal "happy land." And whereas he had hoped in the first poem of the series that this journey to Tonggu would finally "bring to a successful completion his lifetime's wandering," not only would getting to Phoenix Terrace require another journey, but he admits in an authorial note attached to the title that the mountain is so steep as to be unscalable. He ends the series, therefore, lamenting that what he has learned over its course can have no real-world effect: that no matter how vivid his newfound compassion can make a fantasy of self-sacrifice, that fictional ending of his life does no one any good. The arc of the narrative, therefore, has taken him from one unrealistic fantasy to another, and in this respect, no distance has been traversed.

Whereas in "Twenty Miscellaneous Poems of Qinzhou," Du Fu tried rather straightforwardly to reveal the plot guiding his life, this series thus undermines the narrative it projects. In this sense, its dynamics are very close to the complex interplay of "inhuman reality" and "human justice" Kermode sees as characteristic of appropriately self-conscious literary fictions in the modern and postmodern West.[57] "The humanizing of the world's contingency," Kermode writes, "cannot be achieved without a representation of that contingency. This representation must be such that it induces the proper sense of horror at the utter difference, the utter shapelessness, and the utter inhumanity of what must be humanized. And it has to occur simultaneously with the *as if*, the act of form, of humanization, which assuages the horror."[58] In this case, Du Fu realizes that not only is there no paradise waiting at the end of his journey, but that even the supposed spiritual progress he makes over its course will not render his failed life a success. He has learned that reality is recalcitrant to his needs and desires. And yet, that learning is itself a narrative with its own bleak satisfactions—as the disenchantment tales that underwrite the postmodern skepticism of Kermode and Brooks attest.

57. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 64.
58. Ibid., 145.

Narrative as Continuous Reinterpretation

The postmodern-like skepticism of narrative at which he arrived in Tonggu did not represent the end of Du Fu's narrative of learning about narrative. Following a brief period of near-starvation there, his family decamped once again, this time for an arduous trek through the mountains to the southern metropolis of Chengdu. Though the road from Tonggu to Chengdu was more than four times as long as that from Qinzhou to Tonggu, Du Fu nonetheless decided to chronicle the journey in a series of twelve poems, matching the twelve of the previous set and thus offering himself a formal means for rethinking how the narrative of that previous series had gone so awry.[59] Not only, therefore, does this second twelve-poem set structurally mirror the previous, including all of the internal parallels between halves that "formalize[d] the system of textual energies" in that series, but each poem of the Tonggu-to-Chengdu sequence also pointedly echoes its counterpart in the Qinzhou-to-Tonggu sequence, with the first poem in the later sequence containing linguistic, thematic, and imagistic parallels to the first poem in the previous series, the second to the second, and so on.[60] In this way, as Du Fu progressed towards Chengdu, he formally subsumed his previous journey to Tonggu within a larger narrative and, by changing the "bindings" of the earlier series' textual energies, unlocked meanings within it that had not been visible inside its own horizons.

In and of itself, this formal procedure represents a significant divergence of Du Fu's narrative thought from that of Brooks and Kermode, whose theories have to this point shone such surprising light on his procedures. By re-binding the poems of the previous series, these new poems transform what was once its ending into just one more instance of "the middest," thereby suggesting that this third set too—or any artificially bounded narrative, for that matter—could be incorporated into an indefinitely expanding process of rethinking and reinterpretation. Du Fu thus not only gives over at this point the interest in finding "an end to his lifetime's wandering" that had structured "Twenty Miscellaneous Poems of Qinzhou" and launched his Qinzhou-to-Tonggu series. Having recognized that no such ending could offer him a final, definitive retrospection on the meaning of his life, he also moves over the course of this series beyond the conclusion he reached at Phoenix Terrace, that his

59. This series can be found at *Songben*, 3.17a–20b, and *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu*, vol. 4, 7.1821–903.

60. This latter dynamic was discovered by Xiaofei Tian, though she does not discuss it at length; see her "Feeding the Phoenix," 108. For a discussion, see Bender, "Three Narrative Series," 16–20.

narrative constructions were not grounded in the unconstructed real. He comes, instead, to see them—in Meretoja's words, describing the position characteristic of the "narrative turn"—as "constantly reinterpreting our experiences … in such a way that a process of narrative reinterpretation is constitutive of who we are."[61] In this respect, this Tonggu-to-Chengdu series represents another advance in narrative thinking, one that resembles Meretoja's "metamodern" position in its supersession of the more skeptical "postmodern" accounts offered by (for instance) Brooks and Kermode.

Du Fu's new formal procedure in this third series, and some of the shifts that accompany it on the thematic level, are well emblematized in the second poem of sequence.[62]

木皮嶺 **Treebark Ridge** (#2)

	首路栗亭西	As we took to the road west of Chestnut Pavilion,
	尚想鳳皇村	I was still imagining Phoenix Village.[63]
	季冬携童稚	At winter's end, holding my children by the hand,
4	辛苦赴蜀門	wretchedly we head towards Shu's Gate.[64]
	南登木皮嶺	To the south we mount Treebark Ridge,
	艱險不易論	its ardors and perils not easy to tell.
	汗流被我體	Sweat flows, covering my body;
8	祁寒為之暄	the vast cold becomes, on its account, warm.
	遠岫爭輔佐	The distant peaks vie to buttress and support it;
	千巖自崩奔	a thousand cliffs crumble and flee from it.
	始知五岳外	Only now do I know, beyond the Five Marchmounts,
12	別有他山尊	there are other mountains to hold in awe.[65]
	仰干塞大明	It encroaches above to block out the Great Lights,
	俯入裂厚坤	and enters below, splitting the Thick Earth.
	再聞虎豹鬬	Again I hear tigers and leopards battling,
16	屢蹋風水昏	and repeatedly tread through winds and waters dark.

61. Meretoja, *The Narrative Turn*, 146.
62. This poem is found at *Songben*, 3.17a–b, and *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu*, vol. 4, 7.1828–29.
63. Where Du Fu stayed in Tonggu.
64. That is, towards Chengdu.
65. The Five Marchmounts are the great mountains of China proper, one in each of the five directions as defined by the Central Plain.

	高有廢閣道	High up is an abandoned plankway,
	摧折如短轅	broken off to the width of a short-shafted cart.
	下有冬青林	Below it are groves of wintergreen holly,
20	石上走長根	with long roots running over the rocks.
	西崖特秀發	West Cliff is especially outstanding,
	煥若靈芝繁	glowing as if with numinous mushrooms.[66]
	潤聚金碧氣	Moistened by cumulate auras of gold and sapphire,
24	清無沙土痕	it is pure, without a trace of dirt.
	憶觀崑崙圖	I recall seeing a diagram of Mount Kunlun:
	目擊玄圃存	what my eyes strike here holds Mysterious Gardens.[67]
	對此欲何適	Facing this place, where am I going?—
28	默傷垂老魂	in silence it wounds my soul, drooping with age.

Here, Du Fu is rethinking the second poem of the Qinzhou-to-Tonggu series, a description of a particularly arduous section of that journey Du Fu concludes by worrying that he will "die by the roadside / and forever be laughed at by worthy men" 常恐死道路，永為高人嗤.[68] It is perhaps indicative of Du Fu's end-oriented thought in that earlier series that the image of death arises so early in its course, for as Brooks argues, although "the narrative must tend toward its end, seek illumination in its own death... this must be the right death, the correct end," and for this reason, "the improper end... lurks throughout narrative... [illustrating] the danger of short-circuit."[69] By this point, by contrast, Du Fu no longer expects the end of his journey to bestow meaning on his life. Although he spent the first poem of the series and the first lines of this second poem regretting having to leave Phoenix Village, which he depicted there as a "transcendent realm" 絕境,[70] he spends the majority of this poem imaginatively reinterpreting this initially horrifying mountain pass into a haunt of Daoist immortals, one of their legendary gardens growing the numinous mushrooms that confer endless life. The destined end of Du Fu's journey in

66. West Cliff is the peak of another mountain in the same range. "Numinous mushrooms" are the food of the immortals, and confer immortality on those that find them.

67. The Kunlun Mountains are the Himalayas, legendarily the dwellings of the immortals and the site of the Mysterious Gardens.

68. See *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu*, vol. 4, 7.1708.

69. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 103–4.

70. *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu*, vol. 4, 1821.

Chengdu, by contrast, will just be a mundane, human space where he will grow old and ultimately die, thus robbing him of the meaning he finds in the short-circuit of the here-and-now.

If this second poem thus illustrates how Du Fu had by this point moved beyond his previous preoccupation with endings, its chiastic opposite in the series, poem #11, exemplifies the narrative implications of this progress: namely, that interpretations are never final. In the following poem, the Chengdu plain is, indeed, a mundane human space where he can expect to age and ultimately die. Yet death may not represent the loss of meaning he previously feared.[71]

鹿頭山 **Deerhead Mountain** (#11)

	鹿頭何亭亭	Deerhead, rising straight up!
	是日慰飢渴	on this day it comforts my hunger and thirst.
	連山西南斷	Linked mountains had cut off the southwest;
4	俯見千里豁	but gazing down here, a thousand leagues open out.
	遊子出京華	The wanderer who came from the capital,
	劔門不可越	all the way to Swordgate, the uncrossable,
	及兹阻險盡	Finds that, reaching this point, the perils end,
8	始喜原野闊	and delights now at the wild plains' breadth.
	殊方昔三分	A different land, once one of three divisions,
	霸氣曾閒發	where overlords' auras have sometimes shone forth.
	天下今一家	These days, though, all the world's one family,
12	雲端失雙闕	if at clouds' edge I've lost the paired towers.[72]
	悠然想楊馬	Faded in the distance I envision Yang and Ma,
	繼起名硉兀	appearing in succession, their fame towering up.[73]
	有文令人傷	Writings they had, they make me grieve:
16	何處埋爾骨	for where now have they buried your bones?
	紆餘脂膏地	Winding abundantly, a rich and fertile land;
	慘澹豪俠窟	gloomy and dark, a lair for haughty bandits.
	杖鉞非老臣	Were not the axe-holder an old servant of the throne,

71. The following poem is found at *Songben*, 3.19b–20a, and *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu*, vol. 4, 7.1828–29.

72. The "paired towers" are the guard-towers of the imperial palace, back in Chang'an.

73. "Yang and Ma" refers to Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179–117 BCE) and Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE), two famous Han-dynasty writers from the Shu region.

20	宣風豈専達	how could he take charge of spreading its influence?[74]
	冀公柱石姿	This Duke of Ji, he could be a pillar of state;
	論道邦國活	with him planning the way, the kingdom will survive.[75]
	斯人亦何幸	What great fortune it is for this people—
24	公鎮踰歲月	may his pacifying influence last years.

As expected based on its chiastic binding with "Treebark Ridge (#2)," this poem likewise takes up topics of death and immortality, albeit transferred now from a Daoist register to a cultural one. If in the earlier poem, Du Fu's awe of Treebark Ridge drew his interest "*beyond* the Five Marchmounts" 五岳外 (line 11) that symbolized the geographic extent of the Chinese world, his focus now returns to the Chinese cultural community, "This People" (*siren* 斯人, line 23), and Sichuan's continued inherence in it despite its tendency to periodic disconnection from the Central Plain. For Du Fu, the region remains defined by the *wen* 文 (writings, culture) of the great Sichuanese writers Sima Xiangru and Yang Xiong—to the point, indeed, where he describes its very landscape as "winding abundantly" (*xu yu* 紆餘), a term that sometimes designated a rich literary style like theirs and whose *locus classicus* is a piece by Sima Xiangru himself.[76] Though these writers have been dead over seven-hundred years, their cultural influence survives (prefiguring the "survival," *huo* 活, of the polity in line 22), contributing to the transdynastically empire-integrating politico-ethico-aesthetic culture that Pei Mian, the Duke of Ji, was at that moment seeking to uphold.

In this poem, Du Fu is thus mulling a topic that would recur throughout the remainder of his literary life: the capacity of cultural communities to afford writers like himself posthumous continuity. In later work, he would come to recognize that such cultural communities inevitably transform over time, in the process transforming as well the individuals they remember. That idea is only nascent in this poem, which on the contrary expresses hope that the Tang dynasty specifically will survive its present precarity. Yet the logic of this third series already hints in the more complex direction of his future work. By continually reinterpreting and re-emplotting ex-

74. The axe-holder is the regional commander, an axe having been given in antiquity as a sign of martial authority.

75. Original note: "Vice Director Pei Mian, the Duke of Ji" 僕射裴冀公冕.

76. See his "Shanglin fu" 上林賦, *Wen xuan* 文選 [Selections of Refined Literature], comp. 蕭統 (501–531), annot. Li Shan 李善 (630–689) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996), 8.362.

perience within indefinitely expansible narratives, Du Fu here suggests an openness to the possibility that each of his provisional formulations of significance may be altered by future experience. Not only, that is, has this final series already moved from the presentism of "Treebark Ridge (#2)" to the open-ended futurity of "Deerhead Mountain (#11)," but the logic of the series suggests the possibility of continued development past its "end."

The Future of Chinese Lyric Narrative

After these three long narrative series, Du Fu largely abandoned the form.[77] Yet the story narrated by these series does not end here. I have suggested elsewhere that these narrative works laid the foundation for the themes and thought of much of Du Fu's later work, which often, like "Deerhead Mountain," hung its potential significance on a future beyond even the "end" of the poet's life.[78] In this section, I want to take up a slightly different issue: the question of how these series might have influenced the *form* of Du Fu's subsequent poetry, and how this form might have influenced the forms in which later poets wrote as well. My discussion of this question will involve some speculation beyond what can be decisively proved. Yet there exist some tantalizing clues suggesting not only that these narrative series represented a watershed moment in Du Fu's poetic career, but also that they may have played a role in catalyzing a significant change in the forms of Chinese poetry writ large.

The first clues are actually found in the Qinzhou-to-Tonggu and Tonggu-to-Chengdu series themselves. The first poems of these series are each furnished with a note in the earliest surviving editions of Du Fu's collection. On "Leaving Qinzhou" 發秦州, the note reads "Twelve poems recording my journey in the second year of the Qianyuan Reign, going from Qin Prefecture to Tonggu County" 乾元二年自秦州赴同谷縣紀行十二首; on "Leaving Tonggu County" 發同谷縣, it reads, "Recording my journey on the first day of the twelfth month of the second year of the Qianyuan Reign from Longyou to Jiannan" 乾元二年十二月一日自隴右赴劍南紀行.[79] As Chen Shangjun 陳尚君 has argued, "notes that so precisely tell the

77. Du Fu would not write another until the final year of his life, ten years later. I discuss this later series in Bender, *Du Fu Transforms*, 289–305.

78. See ibid., particularly 220–316.

79. *Songben*, 3.12b and 3.17a.

moment [of the poems' composition] down to the month and the day cannot have been added inferentially by [the early editors of Du Fu's collection] Wang Zhu (997–1057) and [his son] Wang Qi; obviously they come from Du Fu's own hand" 諸注敍時間準确到月日，王洙、王琪是不可能臆加的，顯然出於杜甫之手. Chen hypothesizes from these notes, among other pieces of evidence, that Du Fu must at some point have "self-edited his collection" 自編詩集, and given "the extreme importance Du Fu [obviously thus] placed on the date of his poetry's composition" 杜甫對詩篇寫作年代極其重視, Chen suggests that the collection Du Fu edited "might have been organized chronologically by year" 是可能按年次編排的.[80]

Since we do not have an autograph copy (or even a record of an autograph copy) of Du Fu's works, Chen admits that his hypothesis cannot be proved to a certainty. But a good deal of circumstantial evidence supports it. It is well known that Du Fu's was the first poetry collection to be edited into chronological order by literary editors, and it was the first collection to be provided a chronological year-chart (*nianpu* 年譜).[81] Yet Chen notes that these extensive scholarly projects postdate Wang Zhu and Wang Qi's edition of Du Fu's poetry, which, though it is not strictly chronological but rather divides the poetry into "old-style" and "recent-style" verse, is nonetheless largely chronological within each section. The Wangs' edition, moreover, contains strong indications that this ordering derives from some previous, more-chronological edition that they (or their source texts) in fact broke up, ren-

80. Chen Shangjun 陳尚君, "Du shi zaoqi liuchuan kao" [An Examination of the Early Circulation of Du Fu's Poetry] 杜詩早期流傳考, in *Tangdai wenxue congkao* 唐代文學叢考 [Collected Examinations of Tang Literature], 306–337 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1997), 329.

81. For the early history of the *nianpu* genre, see Wu Hongze 吳洪澤, "Songdai nianpu kaolun" 宋代年譜考論 [Examination of Song-dynasty Year-Charts] (PhD diss., Sichuan daxue, 2006). For Lü Dafang's 呂大防 (1027–1097) pioneering *nianpu* for Du Fu, see ibid., *passim* and particularly 45; see also Zhang Zhonggang 張忠綱 et al., eds., *Du ji xulu* 杜集敍錄 [Bibliographical Records of Du Fu's Collection] (Jinan: Qi-Lu shushe, 2008), 19–20. For the changes in critical practice relating to the issue of chronology that clustered around Du Fu's collection in this period, see Liu Mingjin 劉明今, *Zhongguo gudai wenxue lilun tixi: Fangfa lun* 中國古代文學理論體系：方法論 [The Theoretical System of Chinese Classical Literature: A Discussion of Methods] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2000), 390–414; Asami Yōji 浅見洋二, *Chūgoku no shigaku ninshiki: Chūsei kara kinsei e no tenkan* 中国の詩学認識: 中世から近世への転換 [The Understanding of Chinese Poetry: The Transition from the Middle Ages to the Modern Period] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 2008), 385–459; Ji Hao, *The Reception of Du Fu (712–770) and His Poetry in Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 53–93; and Jue Chen, *Du Fu: The Song Making of China's Greatest Poet* (Leiden: Brill, 2023).

dering certain textual notes—of the form, "From here on are poems I wrote after escaping from the rebels and returning to Fengxiang" 此以下自賊中竄歸鳳翔作—nonsensical in their edition.[82] In an unpublished paper that likewise argues Du Fu's autograph collection was probably ordered chronologically, Stephen Owen notes that Su Shunqin's 蘇舜欽 (1008–1048) and Wang Zhu's comments on the disorganized nature of the Du Fu manuscripts they were working with themselves suggest that these manuscripts were not *totally* lacking in chronological order, but rather displayed noticeably imperfect ordering—that is, in Su's case, "their befores and afters were not in order" 前後不倫, and in Wang's, "what old texts survive in the imperial library, along with what private individuals have and call either complete or partial collections, are all just what remains after loss, and what others have gathered on their own does not match the ordering from back then" 今秘府舊藏，通人家所有稱大小集者，皆亡逸之餘，人自編摭，非當時第敘矣.[83] Taken together, these hints render plausible Chen's identification of the "Shu edition" 蜀本 that Wang Zhu used as a source—probably deriving from the Five Dynasties state of Latter Shu 後蜀 (934–965)—as that "old Shu edition" 舊蜀本 Yan Yu 嚴羽 (d. ca. 1241?) describes as being "organized chronologically and not divided into old- and recent-style poetry" 編年而不分古近二體.[84] And since there are no records before the eleventh century of (what would have to have been massively involved and remarkably successful) scholarly projects to discern the chronological order of Du Fu's works, the existence of a chronological collection in the tenth century would suggest strongly that this was the original form of Du Fu's work.

Further support for the case argued by Chen and Owen can also be adduced from my observation of the internal parallels that structure the Qinzhou-to-Tonggu and Tonggu-to-Chengdu sequences. Scholars attempting to reconstruct the route of Du

82. *Songben* 2.3a. See Chen Shangjun, "Du shi zaoqi liuchuan kao," 329. Chen also shows that notes of this sort clearly echo the notes that structure other surviving chronological collections from the Tang; see ibid., 329–30.

83. See *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu*, vol. 12, "Fu lu er," 6587, and *Songben*, "Du gongbu ji ji" 杜工部集記, 2a. For Stephen Owen's essay, see "The Poet in the Scroll: Du Fu's Collected Poems in Manuscript," accessed April 18, 2023, *https://scholar.harvard.edu/sowen/publications/poet-scroll-du-fus-collected-poems-manuscript*.

84. Yan Yu 嚴羽 (d. ca. 1241?), *Canglang shihua jiaoshi* 滄浪詩話校釋 [Canglang's Poetry Chats Collated and Explained], ed. Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞, second ed. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1983), "Kaozheng," 231. For Chen Shangjun's discussion, see "Du shi zaoqi liuchuan kao," 307; see also Zhang Zhonggang et al, eds, *Du ji xulu*, 4–5.

Fu's journeys have, following the best available sources for historical geography, generally done so in a way that requires rearranging in places the series' sequence.[85] Yet these internal structures guarantee that the poems (which are not numbered in the original) are in fact in the correct order in Wang's edition. This edition must, therefore, preserve an ordering that cannot have been a scholarly reconstruction but can only derive from the autograph manuscript. Although this observation does not prove that the entire collection was chronologically ordered, it does prove that parts of it certainly were, and that Wang Zhu's edition at least sometimes preserves the sequence of his sources.

This point matters, ultimately, because chronological organization of any sort was not the norm in Du Fu's time.[86] Indeed, there are few surviving precedents for such a practice, and these suggest only a very rough chronological organization, along the lines of Jiang Yan's 江淹 (444–505) "early... and late collections" " 前集... 後集 and Wang Yun's 王筠 (481–549) "one collection for each office [over the course of his career]" 一官一集.[87] Three collections that show more detailed chronological ordering survive from the Tang, but suggestively, each of these writers—Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), Wei Zhuang 韋莊 (836?–910), and Han Wo 韓偓

85. See, for instance, Li Jizu 李濟阻 et al., annot., *Du Fu Longyou shi zhuxi* 杜甫隴右詩注析 [Du Fu's Poetry in Longyou, Annotated and Analyzed] (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1985), 268. The identification of Longmen garrison by Li et al. is also followed by many other scholars, including, for instance, Song Kaiyu 宋開玉, *Du shi shi di* 杜詩釋地 [Explanations of Placenames in Du Fu's Poetry] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004), 197–98. Note that the more-recent rebuttal of this identification in Zhang Xiren 張希仁, "Du Fu Longyou jixing shi 'Longmen zhen' kao" 杜甫隴右紀行詩《龍門鎮》考 [An Examination of Du Fu's "Longmen Fort" from his Travels in Longyou], *Shehui zongheng* 社科縱横 25.8 (2010): 94–97, relies upon the ordering of the *Songben* for its argument and thus assumes the point I am making here. I have discussed the numerous works annotating these series and providing geographical locations in "Three Narrative Series," 24, but for a few I did not mention, see also Liu Ning and Jue Chen, "Du Fu Studies, 2000–2019,' *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 7.2 (2020): 411–69, 421–22.

86. See Liu Yujun 劉玉珺, *Siku Tangren wenji yanjiu* 四庫唐人文集研究 [Research into the Literary Collections of Tang Writers in the Four Categories] (Chengdu: Ba-Shu shushe, 2010), particularly 21–30 and 42–52. See also Owen, "The Poet in the Scroll."

87. See Yong Rong 永瑢 (1744–1790) et al., eds, *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要 [Annotated Catalogue of the Complete Works of the Four Treasuries] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1933), 148.3101. The fact that Xie Lingyun's travel poems are organized in *Wen xuan* in what appears to be the chronological sequence of their composition may also suggest that his collection, while it survived, circulated in at-least-partly chronological order; see *Wen xuan*, 22.1036–48.

(842?–923?)—were early and exceptional devotees of Du Fu's, as was Wang Yucheng 王禹偁 (954–1001), one of the earliest Song poets to compile his own work into chronological sub-collections (themselves mostly organized chronologically).[88] It is thus possible (as Owen suggests) that these poets were influenced by Du Fu's example, especially since Bai Juyi's collection only begins to be ordered chronologically in around 815, the same year that he discusses Du Fu as a literary model in a letter to Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831) and mentions reading Du Fu's "poetry collection" 詩集 (perhaps not coincidentally, on his own way into exile in the south).[89] Bai Juyi's poetry was immensely popular from the ninth century through the early eleventh, and if, as many other scholars have noted, chronology became cemented in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as an important mode of both organizing and understanding the poetry of an individual writer, his collection is likely to have been at least as important in this process as was Du Fu's.[90] Yet it might have been Du Fu's collection that first sparked the trend, ultimately culminating in writers like Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1283) compiling their own *nianpu*; in Fang Gonggan 方拱乾 (1596–1666) proclaiming that "poetry must always be arranged in chronological order" 詩必編年; and in chronologically arranged collections becoming the preferred modern format for premodern poetry collections, even for poets who were previously appreciated quite adequately without the benefit of chronology.[91]

In his unpublished essay, Owen suggests that the relatively problematic chronol-

88. For Wang Yucheng's collection, see Gong Bendong 鞏本棟, *Song ji chuanbo kaolun* 宋集傳播考論 [Examination and Discussion of the Circulation of Song-dynasty Literary Collections] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 10; see 9–12 for the increasing prevalence of chronological collections over the course of the Song.

89. The collection in question is *Baishi Changqing ji* 白氏長慶集, of which a partial Song period manuscript survived in Japan apparently preserving the original ordering; see *Bai Juyi ji jianjiao* 白居易集箋校 [Bai Juyi's Collection, Annotated and Collated], ed. Zhu Jincheng 朱金城, 6 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1988), "qian yan," 13. For Bai's 815 mentions of Du Fu, see 15.956–7 and 45.2791. Owen, "The Poet in the Scroll," 10, suggests Bai may have been influenced by reading Du Fu's collection around this time but does not mention the timing of these works.

90. Bai Juyi is the only other poet, to my knowledge, whose collection was edited by another into a more complete chronological order (by Yang Chongxun 楊崇勳 [976–1045]) before 1050. For a discussion of this work, see Wu Hongze, "Songdai nianpu kaolun," 55.

91. See ibid., 93–94, and Zhou Qiaomu 周喬木, "Fang Gonggan 'shi bi biannian' shuo de tichu, shijian ji shixue yiyi" 方拱乾"詩必編年"說的提出、實踐及詩學意義 [Fang Gonggan's Proposal that "Poetry Must Be Chronological," Along with His Practice and Its Implications for the Study of Poetry], *Xueshu jiaoliu* 学术交流 286.1 (2018): 150–58.

ogy of Du Fu's works before his exile in the west and south hints that it was precisely on the journeys described in these narrative series that he began to preserve his collection in chronological order by writing on scrolls, which would have been easier to transport than the sheets of paper (*jian* 箋) that seem to have been poetry's most common medium of composition in the Tang.[92] Though this hypothesis is even more speculative than the others introduced in this section, our discussion here of these series' narrative thought adds a certain plausibility to the idea that they might have been involved in whatever decisions Du Fu made, at whatever point in his life, to preserve his collection in a way that has made reconstructing its chronology possible. It is, of course, conceivable that he began experimenting with long narrative series in this period partly because of a change in his material situation subsequent to his flight from the heartland to Qinzhou. More persuasive to my mind, however, is the observation that Du Fu's thought in these series leaves off at a place where the narrative form of the chronological collection would have represented a reasonable result to the chain of narratological developments they describe. By the end of these narratives, Du Fu has given up on the idea that his story was going to lead him to a meaning-giving ending, and as a result, he seems to have ceased programming in "bindings" through the use of fixed architectures or predetermined numerical series. He had not, however, given up on the idea of narrative or the idea of "binding" significance, provided that progressive "rebinding" remained always an option. As a result, it would make sense for him to begin thinking of his poetry as a vast, unbounded narrative series wherein there are no beginnings or ends but only middles, and where systematic repetitions give way to the more spontaneous returns that characterize a life in time, with its investments, its obsessions, and its meandering paths of change. It would make sense, in other words, for him to think of his poetry along the lines of a chronological collection, the form that would, centuries later, become the default format for classical Chinese poetry writ large.

It is impossible to prove to a certainty the chronological format of Du Fu's collection, his rationale for organizing his work this way, or the influence such a decision might have had on later writers. If any of the speculations outlined in this section is incorrect, then the remarkable parallels we have observed between the developments in narrative thinking characteristic of Western modernity, postmodernity, and metamodernity and those in these three narrative series may simply end there.

92. Owen, "The Poet in the Scroll," 3 and 8.

If, however, these speculations are correct, then it might be possible to say that classical Chinese poetry, as understood from the Song to the present, bears an inheritance from a process of narrative thinking fundamentally similar to that which has characterized the West over the past hundred years. It might, of course, be true that vanishingly few later readers recognized the narrative of narrative thinking in these series specifically. Yet their result, the chronologically organized collection, would nonetheless be imbued with—and its longstanding appeal might be partly explained by—a highly sophisticated approach to narrative's pitfalls and potentials.

Parallel Progress Without Teleology

Whether or not the narratological thought of these series eventuated in the chronologically organized poetry collection, it is worth observing that the parallel progress of narratological thought in the modern West has not made this form, or indeed any form particularly similar to it, dominant in Western literary or media cultures. This is not surprising, given the different heritages and media environments of late-imperial China and Western modernity. But the apparently divergent results of these remarkably parallel narratives of narrative thought do raise questions about how we should think about such parallels across space and time.

Similar questions have recently arisen elsewhere in literary study, particularly those domains wherein disenchantment tales structure thought about the differences between premodern cultures and the modern West. In a recent article on the question of "Who Has Fiction?," for instance, Julie Orlemanski has offered a typology of possible ways of understanding the relationship between premodern and modern thought concerning what is now commonly discussed as "fiction." On what she calls a "modernist" model, fiction proper is a feature only of the modern West, since premodern cultures still lived in an enchanted world that forecloses the "willing suspension of disbelief" that is necessary for true fiction and that only became a real possibility with the rise of secular disenchantment. On what she calls a "universalist" model, by contrast, fiction is in fact found pervasively throughout human culture, simply something that people everywhere have engaged in—though the modern West has been more sophisticated in this universal human activity than have others elsewhere.[93] Criticizing both of these options as either explicitly or implicitly

93. Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction?," 146–55.

informed by what she characterizes as the now-debunked secularization thesis, Orlemanski herself proposes a third possibility: a "comparative poetics" of fiction "that is attuned to relation across variation and that declines to make *comparanda* stand in relations of succession or teleological development."[94] On this model, part of what is interesting about such parallel phenomena across distances of time and space is simply the differences between them, which sketch a broader possibility space than we might recognize by taking modern, Western examples as either their only or their most sophisticated realization.

Though Orlemanski's typology provides a useful starting place for considering the parallels between Du Fu's narrative series and the progress of narratology in the modern West, none of the options she sketches is ideal. A universalist account, for instance, would have little to say about the basically non-narrative poetry that was characteristic of Du Fu's age, and a teleological ("modernist") paradigm might have trouble reconciling the apparently quite "modern" aspects of the series considered here with the fact that neither Du Fu's later collection nor the chronological format characteristic of much poetry throughout the later Chinese poetic tradition winds up much resembling the literary genres of the modern West. And though a "comparative poetics" would at least make space for medieval Chinese thinkers and poets to present interesting contrasts to the modern West, it might not do justice to Du Fu in particular, whose reflections do seem to me to highlight the importance of "relations of succession." Over the series we have considered, that is, he has become convinced that conceptual and literary progress is possible: that we can learn both about the nature of narrative and about the world in which it functions. And given that he learns many of the same things in much the same order as has the modern West—at least according to Hanna Meretoja's history—we too might not want to sacrifice entirely the vision of progress characteristic of the "modernist" account for a purely horizontal comparative matrix.

The challenge here is to preserve the possibility of progress within comparison without, however, relying upon teleology. And it is at this point, I propose, that Du Fu's narrative thought in these sequences may itself become theoretically useful, despite the unfamiliar, apparently non-theoretical form in which it is carried out. Especially in the third sequence, with its constant structural return to the second, Du Fu is searching for a means by which the comparison of two parts of a narrative

94. Ibid., 164.

of progress might progress the narrative. Having learned through these experiments that the endings he had posited neither provided irrefragable meanings nor were, ultimately, even endings, he thus begins to treat repetitions no longer as the working of a narrative "death instinct," "binding" significance towards its full discharge at the end, but rather, we might say, as a narrative instinct towards continuance and change, *unbinding* and *rebinding* it. Recognizing, in other words, that continuance necessarily resystematizes any finite system, he comes in his final journey to treat each successive echo of the previous both as fixing new meanings and unfixing old ones, revealing previous fixities as fictions and unlocking novel perspectives on his past.

If, following this model, we were to treat the echoes between Du Fu's series and the thought of Benjamin, Kermode, Brooks, and Meretoja as repetitions within a yet-unended narrative, we might be able to unbind these modern theorists' genuine insights from the particulars of their disenchantment tales. And equally important, we might be able to learn from Du Fu's poems more than he himself could at his time. In particular, by rebinding his narrative reflections with the modern theory considered here, we can begin to speak to an issue in which he was deeply interested but which his place in history rendered opaque to him: the degree to which cultures could truly "end," their concepts and concerns proved to be mere ephemera. As we noted above, Du Fu was, like Benjamin and Kermode, driven to his narrative reflections by the outbreak of a horrific violence that threatened to invalidate the supposedly great culture he had inherited and that seemed to be so flourishing before the war. But the histories he knew offered no clear parallels for his situation. He thus had no way to tell whether it was true, as postmodern proponents of the secularization narrative might be read as suggesting, that traditions are potentially mortal because they are unmoored from any grounding in transcultural reality: that "what can be thought must certainly be a fiction"[95] and that we thus merely "construct meaningful order, irrespective of whether or not our constructions correspond to the way the world is 'in itself.'"[96]

Even were it true, however, that the modern West has attained to a "truer and more sophisticated relation to the world" by recognizing cultures as such tissues of fiction, that point would itself tend to suggest the existence of at least *some* transcul-

95. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 34, quoting Nietzsche.

96. Meretoja, *The Narrative Turn*, 222–23.

tural realities to which cultures could conform. And if such realities exist, then it might be possible for us to learn about them from parallels like those we have observed between Du Fu and these modern theorists, as well as, potentially, from the divergent direction in which Chinese poetry developed, relative to modern Western narrative genres, after Du Fu's confrontation with the untrustworthiness of narrative endings. Such parallels and divergences might, in other words, offer us access once again to the sort of "collective wisdom" Benjamin mourned with the supposed passing of premodern storytelling and the ascent of the modern novel. If, indeed, we were to think of these convergences and divergences on something like the narrative model at which Du Fu's poetry arrives in the three series discussed here—as parallel progresses within a story that has not ended and whose meaning is not yet settled—then they might offer counsel from a broader human *Kollektiverfahrung* to which "even the deepest shock" to any cultural community, the passing and replacement of its conceptual world, "might constitute no impediment or barrier."[97]

97. Recalling Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 102.