

Poems from *Changing* by Richard Berengarten for Paul
Scott Derrick's essay *Looking Backward for Moving
Forward*

Roots, roofs, routes

Purpose
differentiates life
from non-life.

*In the depths of
the now, inexorably
we model futures.*

Organisation
characteristic of life
is end-developed.

*Wood has purpose
to grow through trees
root leaf seed.*

The central nervous
system – most evolved of
teleonomic structures.

*Whose purpose prompts
this? Is it we who pattern
language? Or does it us?¹*

a little higher

let us climb a little higher

¹For Yorick Wilks. Inspired by Roman Jakobson's discussion of the purposiveness inherent in biological and linguistic structures and processes. See his *Main Trends in the Science of Language*, 1973 (London: George Allen & Unwin): pp. 55-59. Embedded references to Jakobson's text quote, paraphrase or summarise statements by the following biologists: lines 1-3, N. A Bernšteyn; lines 7-9, M. L. Cetlin, Jonas Salk, C. S. Pittendrigh and J. Monod; and lines 13-15, J. Monod. The base-line quotes 'Mythestorema 23' by George Seferis, in his *Collected Poems 1924-1955*, trs. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (London: Jonathan Cape): p. 58.

Sometimes they answer

Sometimes they answer
even though I've asked
no question.

Sometimes they say
nothing, and appear to
smile and look away.

Or else they stare, like
the dead, through me
towards infallible sky

as quietly they pick
out question *behind*
question, before even

any thought lurking under
images and their nuances
or timbres has arisen

let alone right words
to articulate thought have
discovered me and opened.²

catching

fish

² Homage to John Blofeld (1913–1987). See his accounts of his first divinations in his book *I Ching: The Book of Change*, 1991 (New York: Penguin Arcana): esp. pp. 25-30.

Well, inexhaustible

Self-replenishing
and inexhaustible
well, generous

secret, open face
of Underworld, with
rounded mouth

and level gaze –
polished mirror and
porthole of night,

silvery cord
and vertical pipe
invisibly joining

heaven and earth's
skin and core,
beneath these eyes

in your reflection
on the sky's forehead –
a star.³

spring

inexhaustible

³ Homage to Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961). Following his first experiences of divining, Jung interpreted hexagram 50 (entitled 'The Cauldron' in the Wilhelm/Baynes version) as the voice of the *I Ching* itself. See his 'Foreword' to *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, trs. Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes, 1965 [1951], pp. xxvi-xxviii (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul). My own preferred imagem for the *I Ching* itself is this hexagram 48, whose Chinese name 井 (*jing*) means 'well'.

Mountain fir

*Your arrow-summit pierces
starkest light silhouetted as
if against blue flame-heart*

*and stilled so transparent
on hill-height as to appear a pool
unrippled by wind, unmargin'd*

*but by world-edge. Then, your
lower trunk so thick-wrapped
in haze as to be visible only*

*as ghost-pillar, as figment
of itself. Then, deeper than nether
crawlings of ants and spiders*

*or glide of sleek-headed adder
among mosses, deeper than shadows
within shadow, coil your roots*

*beside inky Lethe around
whirlpooling cauldron of black
light, everything's mainstay.⁴*

on the mountains, trees

slow they grow

⁴ For Nasos Vayenas. Based on a passage in the *Iliad*, Book 14:

ἐνθ' ὕπνος μὲν ἔμεινε πάρος Διὸς ὅσσε ιδέσθαι
εἰς ἐλάτην ἀναβάς περιμήκετον, ἧ τότε ἐν Ἰδῆ
μακροτάτη πεφυῖα δι' ἠέρος αἰθέρ' ἵκανε

Sleep then stopped, before Zeus' eyes could see him,
climbed a high pine tree, at that time the tallest one
growing on Ida. It stretched up through the lower air ('aer')
right into the sky ('aether').

(Tr. Ian Johnston,

<https://www.oneeyedman.net/schoolarchive/Classes/fulltext/www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/homer/iliad14.htm>. Reconsulted, July 27, 2016. The point of interest here is the distinction between 'air' and 'aether', and how these terms are to be understood today. See Charles H. Kahn, *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology*, 1994 (Indianapolis: Hackett): pp. 133–145, esp. p. 145

Wild geese

Slow the wild
geese in V formation
approach the shore

Slow the wild
geese land on the crag
settle high up

Slow the wild
geese wing ways
to highlands

Slow the wild
geese settle on
tree branches

Slow the wild
geese arrive among
blue-grey hills

Slow the wild
geese pace cloud-avenues
over mountains⁵

slow the wild geese

approach the shore

⁵ For Edward L. Shaughnessy. For his commentary on the imagem of geese in hexagram 53, see his *Before Confucius: Studies in the Creation of the Chinese Classics*, 1997 (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press): pp. 21-23. See also his *I Ching, the Classic of Change: the first English translation of the newly discovered second-century B. C. Mawangdui texts*, 1996 (New York, NY: Ballantine Books): pp. 11-12.

What Zhang Zai thought

Out walking alone as an autumn
sun was going down and a yellow ball
of a hunter's moon coming up,

Zhang Zai sat on a tree stump
and quietly forgot about time and
mortality and himself awhile

as he soaked himself into
and through things. Not much of
a life, he thought, if you can't

or don't get a chance to see
patterns and images of heaven
and earth as merely sediment

of marvellous transformations.
And not much of a view if you've
forgotten it. Better be poor and

remember this than have power
and wealth and forget heaven is
text and context for all wisdom.⁶

dragon

rising in the field

⁶ For Steve Spence. Zhang Zai (1020-1077 CE) was a philosopher and astronomer. For lines 10-13, see Ira E. Kasoff, *The Thought of Chang Tsai* 1984 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): p. 64.

What Zhang Zai said

Zhang Zai said, Earth is
a thing. Heaven is a marvel.
One look up at the stars

at night far from any city,
and what he meant is clear.
Yet since this world

floats on, in, across
and through heaven, doesn't
being in and on the world

mean being in and on heaven
too? And if so, don't seas, rocks,
soil, air contain as much

heaven as stars and
interstellar spaces up there?
Therefore, isn't heaven

as much in my fleshed
mortal hands and yours as
it might lurk in any god's?⁷

among

stars on the roof

⁷ For Catherine Ng. For lines 1-2, see Ira E. Kasoff, *The Thought of Chang Tsai*, 1984 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): p. 56.

What Zhang Zai knew

Heaven is more
than discernible sky.
You could never

see all of heaven
or even imagine it.
Zhang Zai knew

heaven is actually
where we are already –
fully empty and

emptily full,
unfathomable and
insubstantial, both

by substance and by
our irreducible material
sources and ends

in the way of ways.
Buoyed in void we
rise, fall, rise, fall.⁸

among stars

falling

⁸ See Ira E. Kasoff, *The Thought of Chang Tsai*, 1984 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): pp. 53-65.