Zuozhuan and Early Chinese Historiography

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CHAPTER 5

Poetry Quotation, Commentary, and the Ritual Order: Staging the "Noble Man" in *Zuozhuan*

Martin Kern

1 Introduction

Zuozhuan 左傳 is by far the largest and most important text of pre-imperial Chinese historiography, and for many particular events for the 255 years from 722 through 468 BCE our only source. It follows—and in the end somewhat exceeds—the structure of the *Chunqiu* 春秋 in the chronology of twelve successive rulers of the state of Lu. Unlike the terse and often enigmatic entries in the *Chunqiu*, it brims with stories and historical detail. And yet, its way of narrating the past is strikingly unique across the ancient world: neither the author nor the scope or content of the text are identified; the text does not speak in a single voice but appears compiled from multiple, diverse sources; it does not have a specific focus or topic; parts of it are a commentary on the *Chunqiu*, while other parts are a commentary on *Zuozhuan* itself, marked by the voices of the "noble man" (*junzi* 君子) or "Confucius" (as either Kongzi 孔子 or Zhongni 仲尼);[1] in chronological scope, its only rationale is the timeline taken from the *Chunqiu*; it is built around the speeches of historical actors from all geographical quarters, times, and walks of life that are, furthermore, connected to a vast number of anecdotes likewise from different times and places; much of it, but not all of it, appears overtly didactic; it mentions a very large number of historical actors, but more than a few names appear only once, without any further explanation as to the person's identity or historical significance; it contains any number of historical details whose significance is entirely obscure to us;[2]

I thank Yuri Pines and Paul R. Goldin for their numerous comments and corrections, and in particular for some key insights in questions central to my argument (see below); the present essay has gained very substantially from our long and intensive discussions. Other conference participants as well, especially Wai-yee Li and Xu Jianwei, have been greatly helpful with important references.

1 When referencing these Kongzi or Zhongni comments, I place "Confucius" in quotation marks because I assume that his name is invoked as a rhetorical function, and not that the historical Confucius (551–479 BCE) ever made these comments.

2 See Wai-yee Li and Stephen Durrant's contributions to the present volume.

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it invokes a certain number of earlier texts in the narrative voice, the voices of the historical actors, and also in those of the "noble man" and "Confucius"; on occasion it may reflect on the conditions of historical information in the *Chunqiu*, and in the voices of the "noble man" and "Confucius" also on the conditions of its own narrative, though neither reflection on the practice of historiography is performed consistently or systematically. In other words, the text resists being called a single, coherent work structured by the intent and firm hand of a single author, and it demands very significant hermeneutic effort—and the reader's ability to track multiple events and names across extended yet scattered passages of historical time and narrative text—in order to be understood. While each of these points is well-known, it is their sum total that shows how extraordinary a text *Zuozhuan* really is.

The present essay focuses on the relation between two of these aspects: the presence of the "noble man" comments and the use of explicit references to the *Poetry* (*Shi* 詩), both of them distributed unevenly through the entire text.

Across the 255 years of *Zuozhuan* there are about ninety comments by the "noble man," the majority of which appear in the earlier reigns and in the thirty-one years of the reign of Lord Xiang 襄 (572–542).[3] The anonymous "noble man" is not a historical figure but a textual function; in this form it appears not only in *Zuozhuan* but also across a range of pre-imperial historiographic as well as philosophical writings.[4] It is not even clear how the phrase *junzi yue* 君子曰 should be taken: "the noble man says"? Or rather "said"? And not "the noble man" but "a noble man"? Or perhaps the phrase speaks in the conditional mode, that is, "a noble man would say" or "a noble main would have said"? All of these are distinctly possible; they only represent different shades of impersonal speech. Earlier scholarship sees the "noble man" as a rhetorical function into which some authoritative if anonymous voice of wisdom is lodged in order to comment on *Zuozhuan* (and to a much lesser extent also on the *Chunqiu*), pass judgment on events or historical characters,

3 Here and throughout, all dates for the ruling lords of Lu 魯 are given without the obvious "BCE" notation. The count of ninety instances is that of the table in Henry 1999; for complete tables (with some minor differences or omissions) of the Chinese passages, see Li Kai 2012: 67–73; Lan Hui 2016a; and Lu Xinmao 2010: 93–97. Other scholars give a slightly different total count of "noble man" passages, which may be due to the fact that for a number of years, there are several "noble man" statements in rapid succession, and there are also "noble man" statements nestled within larger such statements; for the many different counts, see Wu Zhixiong 2004: 387–89n2. Kamada (1963: 68–75) lists the "noble man" comments not chronologically but by their different types.

4 See Schaberg 2005; Fu Daobin 2018; Pu Weizhong 1995: 71–77; Yang Mingzhao 1937. For comparisons between the "noble man" comments in *Zuozhuan* and *Guoyu* 國語, see Wu Shushi and Qian Lüjin 2010; Chen Yonglin 2016.

or issue predictions.[5] While this seems self-evident, in the present essay I argue for yet another dimension of the "noble man" and his engagement with inherited texts: he is the exemplary reader of the historical and textual past and hence not merely a rhetorical function but also a didactic one, that is, one aiming for instruction. This didactic function contributes to the principal goals of *Zuozhuan*, a text that speaks to the aspirations of the Warring States (453–221 BCE) cultural and political elite that defined itself through ethical and intellectual excellence: its collective mastery of historical accounts, its textual learning, its ritual practices, its moral insight and self-cultivation, and, most centrally, its ability to "understand" (*zhi* 知) and perceptively judge specific historical events through either praise or condemnation.[6]

To this end, *Zuozhuan* stages the "noble man" not as a distant ideal of authority, but as a model for the reader to emulate mimetically. Just as historical events and inherited texts are not self-evident but require perspicacious interpretation in the voice of the "noble man," so do the comments of the "noble man" themselves. Together, the text and its commentary demand, engage, guide, and ultimate create the ideal reader. *Zuozhuan* teaches the historical and textual past as a legible system of signs,[7] yet for this past to become intelligible, it depends on perceptive acts of interpretation. Such acts are continuously performed by the historical actors in their countless speeches, and they are further personified in the anonymous yet exemplary voice of the "noble man," a voice of cultivated learning and morality. Furthermore, I see elements in this voice by which the *Zuozhuan* compilers reinterpret Springs and Autumns period actions and events according to their own Warring States ideals, complete with the reconfiguration of the "noble man" figure itself from a Springs and Autumns social (i.e., aristocratic) ideal into a Warring States

5 Sinological scholarship on the function of the "noble man" in *Zuozhuan* and its relation to the composition of the latter includes Henry 1999, Van Auken 2016b and 2016a: 121–46, and Schaberg 2001: 178–82. In addition, Schaberg (2005) contextualizes the "noble man" comments in *Zuozhuan* within the appearance of similar expressions in a broader range of early Chinese texts. For a discussion of the appearance of "Kongzi/Zhongni" in *Zuozhuan* and a comparison with the "Confucius" of the *Analects*, see Cook 2015.

6 Henry (1999: 136–37) states that, unlike the "Confucius" commentarial voice, the "noble man's" evaluations are entirely focused on specific, narrowly defined actions—"one action at a time"—and never on the general character traits of the historical actors or some larger contexts. As shown below, I consider this statement somewhat misleading. Meanwhile, Xu Jianwei has reminded me (personal communication) that the "Confucius" comments appear overwhelmingly on events in the period of the historical Confucius's lifetime, in addition to a smaller number of Confucius's appearances as a historical figure in the text; see "Appendix 1" in Henry 1999: 149–52.

7 See Schaberg 2001 and Li 2007.

moral (i.e., Confucian) one;[8] yet we must also take into account how some of these ideals are already expressed in a large number of passages within the *Zuozhuan* narrative itself.

2 The Curriculum of the "Noble Man" and the Primacy of the *Poetry*

As the ideals of learning are contained in the hallowed texts from the past, the inherited texts that are most prominently invoked in the *Zuozhuan* narrative and by its historical actors, but then especially also by the "noble man," are those of the Warring States curriculum of the "six arts" (*liu yi* 六藝) that subsequently, at the early imperial Qin and Han courts, became defined as the textual canon of the Five Classics. These were the *Chunqiu* together with the *Poetry*, the *Documents* (*Shu* 書), the *Changes* (*Yi* 易), the *Rituals* (*Li* 禮), and the *Music* (*Yue* 樂), though at least prior to the empire it may be better to understand all these not narrowly as canonical texts but as broader discourses, including their practices of performance and commentary.[9] With the *Chunqiu* as the primary point of reference in *Zuozhuan*, the textual presence of the *Poetry*, the *Documents*, and the *Changes* likewise runs throughout *Zuozhuan*—albeit in very uneven patterns—from the reign of Lord Yin 隱 (722–712) to that of Lord Ai 哀 (494–468), that is, from beginning to end. By far, the text referenced the most is the *Poetry* and for this reason is one of the focal points of the present analysis.[10]

8 For this reconfiguration, see also Zhang Yi 2016: 108–12.

9 The Guodian *Yucong* 語叢 (Thicket of Sayings) 1 manuscript lists all six; see Jingmen shi bowuguan 1998: 194–95; Cook 2012: 836; as does the Guodian *Liu de* 六德 (Six Virtues) manuscript, see Jingmen shi bowuguan 1998: 188; Cook 2012: 785. The Guodian manuscript *Xing zi ming chu* 性自命出 (Human Disposition Derives From Allotted Fate) lists the *Poetry*, *Documents*, *Ritual*, and *Music*; see Jingmen shi bowuguan 1998: 179; Cook 2012: 711. The *Xunzi* 荀子 in its first chapter "Quan xue" 勸學 (Exhortation to Learning) leaves out the *Changes* but mentions the other five; see Wang Tianhai 2005: 23; Hutton 2014: 5.

10 Western scholarship on the invocation of the *Poetry* (or the use of inherited texts more generally) in *Zuozhuan* is limited (and appears limited to English-language works); see, e.g., Van Zoeren 1991: 17–114; Lewis 1999: 147–93; Li 2014; Schaberg 2001: 86–95, 222–55; Kern 2018. Major Chinese studies include Zeng Qinliang 1993; Zhang Suqing 1991; and Mao Zhenhua 2011. In Japanese, Okamura Shigeru (2002: 15–32) has compiled a useful list of all *Poetry* quotations in *Zuozhuan* with reference to the regional origin of the respective speakers. Several recent MA theses offer convenient surveys of both the original material and the history of its study, including Li Qingqing 2018 and Yang Wenke 2018. Chen Sheng 2017 provides extensive tables arranging the *Poetry* quotations by period, region, and *Mao Shi* 毛詩 section. For further context, see Liu Lizhi 2001; Ma Yinqin 2006; Zheng Bin 2017; Zheng Jingxuan 2004; Zeng Xiaomeng 2008.

The *Poetry* appears in two modes in *Zuozhuan*: the theatrical and the commentarial. The theatrical mode appears with historical actors who in performances on diplomatic and other occasions would "recite" (*fu* 賦) a particular poem, or a stanza of a poem, typically from the "Airs of the States" (*guofeng* 國風); the narrative in most cases merely mentions such performances and provides the titles of the poems performed, yet without citing any verses.[11] As the "Airs" are fundamentally open to a wide range of interpretation, their exchange in diplomatic intercourse served as coded communication. Consider the following passage dated to the year 526 BCE:

> 夏四月，鄭六卿餞宣子於郊。宣子曰:二三君子請皆賦，起亦以知鄭志。子蟜賦《野有蔓草》。宣子曰:孺子善哉！吾有望矣。子產賦鄭之《羔裘》。宣子曰:起不堪也。子大叔賦《褰裳》。宣子曰:起在此，敢勤子至於他人乎？子大叔拜。宣子曰:善哉，子之言是！不有是事，其能終乎？子游賦《風雨》。子旗賦《有女同車》。子柳賦《蘀兮》。
>
> 宣子喜，曰:鄭其庶乎！二三君子以君命貺起，賦不出鄭志，皆昵燕好也。二三君子，數世之主也，可以無懼矣。
>
> In summer, in the fourth month, the six ministers of Zheng saw Han Qi off in the outskirts of the city. Han Qi said, "I request that you several noble men recite in turn, so that I may understand Zheng's ambitions." Zichuo recited "In the Wilds There Are Creepers." Han Qi said, "How excellent this young man is! There are hopes for us." Zichan recited the Zheng "Lambskin Cloak." Han Qi said, "I am not worthy." You Ji recited "Hiking Up His Skirts." Han Qi said, "While I am here, would I dare trouble you to go to others?" You Ji bowed. Han Qi said, "How excellent that you should speak of this! If not for this incident, would we have been able to reach a good end?" Si Yan recited "Wind and Rain." Feng Shi recited "There Is a Woman Sharing the Carriage." Yin Gui recited "Bark."
>
> Delighted, Han Qi said, "Zheng comes close to perfection! You several noble men have entertained me at the command of your ruler. In not departing from the expressed intent of Zheng in your recitations, all of you showed intimacy and good cheer. You several noble men are masters for several generations to come. You would be justified in having no fears."
>
> ZHAO 16.3[12]

11 See the survey in Zeng Qinliang 1993: 13–31. Fragments of altogether twenty-eight different "Airs" across *Zuozhuan* are mentioned as being recited in this way.

12 Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016: 1536–39, q.v. for detailed notes. Here and throughout, all translations are taken from this work, on occasion quietly with minor changes. I adopt the

Or consider this passage from year 13 of Lord Wen (614 BCE):

> 鄭伯與公宴于棐。子家賦《鴻鴈》。季文子曰:寡君未免於此。文子賦《四月》。子家賦《載馳》之四章。文子賦《采薇》之四章。鄭伯拜,公荅拜。
>
> The Liege of Zheng and our lord held a banquet at Fei. Gongzi Guisheng recited "The Wild Goose." Ji Wenzi said, "Our unworthy ruler has himself not escaped this." Wenzi recited "The Fourth Month." Gongzi Guisheng recited the fourth stanza of "Gallop." Wenzi recited the fourth stanza of "Plucking Bracken." The Liege of Zheng bowed, and our lord, in response, bowed.
>
> WEN 13.5

No reader without intimate knowledge of the poems and their interpretations recited would have any idea of what these passages are supposed to signify, or why a certain poem or stanza was presented on the occasion; the names of the poems involved do not provide any historical information, and their performance stands in an underdetermined relationship with the narrative of events. Readers have always assumed the identity of the poems mentioned in *Zuozhuan* with the received text of *Mao Shi* 毛詩, and for many instances, they may be right. For example, *Zuozhuan* contains eighteen passages where one or more particular "stanzas" from the *Poetry* are mentioned, as it is in the two cases here for year 13 of Lord Wen 文 (626–609).[13] For some of these, one might find the respective stanza in *Mao Shi* perfectly suitable to the situation in *Zuozhuan*, where it is invoked to convey a particular meaning, delivered with the authority of canonical archaic verse. In other cases—including the mention of the fourth stanza of "Gallop"[14] in the account of Lord Wen—there has been discussion on whether or not the stanza arrangement known to the *Zuozhuan* compilers was actually the same as that of *Mao Shi*.[15] And indeed, from the evidence we now have from several newly discovered, mutually unrelated manuscripts dating from Warring States and Western Han (202 BCE–9 CE)

translators' usage of a single name for each protagonist (who in practice may be referred to by a variety of names).

13 These passages, some of which contain more than one such mention, are in Xi 24.2, Wen 7.4, Wen 13.5, Xuan 12.2, Cheng 9.5, Xiang 4.3, Xiang 14.4, Xiang 16.5, Xiang 19.12, Xiang 20.6, Xiang 27.5, Zhao 1.1, Zhao 1.3, Zhao 1.4, Zhao 2.1, Zhao 4.2, Ding 9.2, Ding 10.5.

14 *Mao Shi* 54, "Zai chi" 載馳.

15 For a discussion of the sequence of stanzas in "Zai chi," see Yang Bojun 1992: 599; Zeng Qinliang 1993: 60–61; and Yuan Xingpei, Xu Jianwei, and Cheng Sudong 2018: 191–95.

times, we know that there were significant differences in the early versions of the *Poetry*, including in their sequence of stanzas.[16] Even within *Zuozhuan* one finds instances where poems and stanzas clearly do not fit their appearance in *Mao Shi*. Perhaps the most famous example is that of "Wu" 武 ("Martiality")[17] where *Zuozhuan* refers to this single title and then several of its stanzas, but where the actual quotations all belong to different poems in *Mao Shi*.[18] Or take the case of a visit by Shusun Bao 叔孫豹 (d. 538 BCE) to the state of Jin 晉:

> 晉侯享之。金奏肆夏之三，不拜。工歌文王之三，又不拜。歌鹿鳴之三，三拜。韓獻子使行人子員問之曰……三夏，天子所以享元侯也，使臣弗敢與聞。文王，兩君相見之樂也，臣不敢及。鹿鳴，君所以嘉寡君也，敢不拜嘉。四牡，君所以勞使臣也，敢不重拜。皇皇者華，君教使臣曰:必諮於周…… 敢不重拜。
>
> The Lord of Jin feasted him. When [the musicians playing] bells presented three [pieces] of "Grand Xia," [Shusun Bao] did not bow. When the musicians sang three [pieces] of "King Wen," he again did not bow. [But] when they sang three [pieces] of "Deer Cry," he bowed thrice. Han Xianzi sent the envoy Ziyun to ask him about this … [Shusun] responded: "The 'Three Xia' are those with which the Son of Heaven feasts the leaders of the lords; as a subject dispatched here, I do not dare to hear of it. 'King Wen' is the music played when two lords meet each other; as a subject, I do not dare to reach up to that. 'Deer Cry' is that by which your lord praises my unworthy lord—how would I dare not to bow to such praise! 'Four Stallions' is that by which your lord recognizes the dispatched subject's (i.e., my) exertion—how would I dare not to bow again! 'Resplendent, Resplendent the Flowers' is how your lord instructs the dispatched subject, saying 'You must seek counsel from all!' … how would I dare not to bow repeatedly!"
>
> XIANG 4.3

Here, "Si Xia" 肆夏 ("Grand Xia") is mentioned as having three parts, while in the parallel passage narrating the same event in *Guoyu* 國語, it is one of the three parts of the ancient "Xia" 夏 suite of dance and music.[19] The *Guoyu*

16 See Hu Pingsheng and Han Ziqiang 1988: 31–35; Anhui daxue 2019; Zhu Fenghan 2020; Li Hui 2021.

17 *Mao Shi* 285; *Zuozhuan*, Xuan 12.2.

18 For further discussion of this issue, see Kern 2019: 64–65.

19 *Guoyu* 5.1 ("Luyu, xia" 魯語下); see Xu Yuangao 2002: 178–80.

passage further makes it clear that "three [pieces] of 'King Wen'" 文王之三 refers to the song "King Wen" (*Mao Shi* 235) plus the two songs that follow it in *Mao Shi*, "Great Brightness" (Da ming 大明, *Mao Shi* 236) and "Continuing" (Mian 綿, *Mao Shi* 237); and finally, both *Guoyu* and the *Zuozhuan* passage here show that "Deer Cry" (*Mao Shi* 161) is also not simply one song but the first in a series, which then also includes "Four Stallions" (Si mu 四牧, *Mao Shi* 162) and "Resplendent, Resplendent the Flowers" (Huanghuang zhe hua 皇皇者華, *Mao Shi* 163). For both "Wen wang" and "Lu ming," the mention of "three" (*san* 三) refers not to stanzas of the received poem but to a series of poems that were otherwise also known under their own titles. And yet, the connections between the songs may not always be clear: both "Si mu" and "Huanghuang zhe hua" describe the horses as they gallop forward, whereas this seems unrelated to "Lu ming"; and while both "Wen wang" and "Da ming" focus on the Zhou King Wen, "Mian" is mainly about the time that leads up to his reign. Nevertheless, these groups of poems were considered as sets that could be collected and mentioned under a single title and were presumably performed as suites.

There is also another element of ambiguity in the *Zuozhuan* accounts of theatrical performances of particular poems: not only were these poems in themselves not stable, but, as is well documented in both the received literature and in newly discovered manuscripts, there is abundant evidence for multiple different understandings of their basic meaning. We do not know, for example, why these particular poems mentioned above were recited in the reign of Lord Wen. Instead, we are challenged, like every reader before us, to interpret them according to how they might fit the situation—and scholars invariably start from the *Mao Shi* prefaces and commentary as their guide to explain how the meaning of a given poem matches why and how it was recited under the specific circumstances of a given *Zuozhuan* anecdote.[20]

In many cases, the *Mao Shi* interpretation appears to fit the circumstances of a particular anecdote in *Zuozhuan* quite well. This may be the result of the same retrospective normalization that appears to have assimilated the *Poetry* quotations in *Zuozhuan*, as noted above, to their corresponding lines in *Mao*

20 For a brilliant example of what perceptive interpretation can achieve in such an instance, see Schaberg 2001: 234–43; but even Schaberg notes that some of his interpretative choices are tenuous, and he can only, of course, operate from *Mao Shi*, which may be misleading. For example, at one point (p. 239) he comments that a certain poem was "a suitable choice" in the sequence of recitation because "in our version of the *Shi*, it comes directly after 'Magpie's Nest' [a recitation of which precedes the poem in question in the *Zuozhuan* anecdote], and there is reason to believe that the sequence of the poems has been stable since before the composition of the *Zuozhuan*." Such stability, as noted above, can no longer be taken for granted.

Shi. It is also possible that this concurrence between *Mao Shi* and *Zuozhuan* goes back to early Western Han times when Liu De 劉德, King Xian of Hejian 河間獻王 (r. 155–129 BCE), whose library was said to have rivalled that of the emperor, "was fond of learning and restored ancient [books and customs]" 好學修古 / "restored learning and was fond of antiquity" 修學好古, and who presented both old books and performances of ritual dance and music to Emperor Wu 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE). King Xian was also fond of "the learning of Lord Mao" 毛公之學, and he officially established academicians (*boshi* 博士) for both *Zuozhuan* and *Mao Shi* at his court, namely Lord Mao for the *Poetry* (i.e., *Mao Shi*) and Lord Guan 貫公 for *Zuozhuan*.[21] Toward the end of the Western Han, under the nominal reign of the infant Emperor Ping (r. 1 BCE–6 CE), both texts—following their promotion by the imperial court scholar and bibliographer Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE–23 CE)—were then concomitantly accorded the status of official learning (*guanxue* 官學) and provided with their own academicians at the Han imperial court.[22] In short, the close connection between *Zuozhuan* and *Mao Shi* is well established throughout Western Han times—yet nevertheless, we find the prominent differences noted above, and in various instances throughout *Zuozhuan*, all commentators have been left to their own devices for guessing why a poem was theatrically performed on a particular occasion.

We must also assume that despite the relative concurrence between the two exegetical traditions—*Mao Shi* for the *Poetry* and *Zuozhuan* for the *Chunqiu*—their relationship with each other was not exclusive. The officially appointed Han academicians who on various occasions engaged in formal court debates on the advantages of their competing textual traditions would have been familiar with more than one reading of each the *Chunqiu* and the *Poetry*. To know either text—and to engage in debate about it—would have meant, at least to some extent, being aware of its different interpretations. Take, for example, the distinct readings of "Xi shuai" 蟋蟀 (*Mao Shi* 114), which according to its preface in *Mao Shi* "criticizes Lord Xi of Jin" 刺晉僖公也 in the late ninth century BCE, in *Zuozhuan* is praised as the expression of "a head who guards his family" 保家之主也,[23] in the Qinghua University manuscript *Qiye* 耆夜 is said to have been performed (or even composed?) at a banquet by the Duke of Zhou 周公 (d. ca. 1035 BCE), and in the Shanghai Museum manuscript *Kongzi shilun* 孔子詩論 is noted to be about "understanding difficulty"

21 *Hanshu* 22: 1035, 1070, 1072, 30: 1708, 1712, 53: 2410–11, 88: 3614, 3620.

22 *Hanshu* 36: 1967, 88: 3621.

23 Xiang 27.5.

知難.[24] When reading a reference in *Zuozhuan* to a mere title of a poem—in particular a title of a hermeneutically wide-open "Airs" poem—and then trying to divine which of its verses may have carried what meaning in a particular historical anecdote easily leads the reader into circular reasoning that attempts to assimilate *Zuozhuan* and *Mao Shi* to each other. Often this works, or can be forced to work; but also often enough, such a reading is not only at odds with the manuscript evidence but fails even on its own account when the desired concurrence remains elusive at best.[25]

The deliberate ambiguity of accounts of recitation in *Zuozhuan* even extends to the very word for "recitation," *fu* 賦. In the overwhelming number of instances, the word refers to the performance of inherited verses from the *Poetry* but on rare occasions it also seems to mark the composition of a new poem.[26] Did the *Zuozhuan* compilers not grasp the difference between performance and composition, which to modern readers seems so blindingly obvious? If they had wanted to make that distinction in the way we understand it today, they certainly had the vocabulary for it—in three cases, someone is indeed said to have "made" (*zuo* 作) a poem.[27]

Occupied with modern ideas about authorship and the importance of textual origin and original composition, perhaps we insist on distinctions that may not have concerned the *Zuozhuan* compilers. Whether in recitation or in

24 For further discussion, see Kern 2019.

25 Secondarily, this has now also led to a small industry of books and articles in Chinese that attempt to force the manuscript evidence into the *Mao Shi* framework. Prominent, and particularly thorough, examples of such interpretation are Huang Huaixin 2004 and, already noted above, Ma Yinqin 2006; but even these authors are sometimes forced to concede that the evidence goes in different directions.

26 There are possibly four cases in which the word *fu* 賦 might refer to the composition of a poem, all of them concerning "Airs of the States." These are *Mao Shi* poems 57, "Shuo ren" 碩人 (Yin 3.7), 54, "Zai chi" (Min 2.5), 79, Qing ren" 清人 (Min 2.6), and 131, "Huangniao" 黃鳥 (Wen 6.3). All other cases in *Zuozhuan* refer to anonymous, presumably prexisting poetry.

27 In Xi 24.2, Mu, the Lord of Shao 召穆公, "makes a poem" (作詩) that is then quoted; it corresponds in part to *Mao Shi* poem 164, "Chang di" 常棣. In Xuan 12.2, King Wu 武 "makes a eulogy" (*zuo song* 作頌) and then "again makes [the eulogy] 'Wu'" 武; the various quoted lines are found in the *Mao Shi* poems 273 ("Shi mai" 時邁), 285 ("Wu"), 295 ("Lai" 賚), and 294 ("Huan" 桓). In Zhao 12.11, Moufu, the Lord of Zhai 祭公謀父, "makes the poem 'Qi zhao'" (*zuo* "Qi zhao" *zhi shi* 作祈招之詩), an otherwise unknown poem that may have been some kind of religious invocation. Given that *Zuozhuan* does include these three cases might suggest that in none of the numerous instances where someone "recites" (*fu*) a poem, *fu* should be taken as "to make" or "to compose." That however would impose a standard of coherence on *Zuozhan* that might be misplaced, nor is it certain that *zuo* in every instance denotes the original act of poetic composition, given that the term also means "to rise" or "to give rise to."

composition, the kind of poetry that we find in all these passages was always both traditional and new: traditional in the sense that it was never completely fabricated, and in fact mostly inherited, and new in the sense that its activation, interpretation, and uses were always flexible and involved an intellectual agility that in the minds of the ancients must have been close to "composition." What mattered was "to express one's intent by way of poetry" 詩以言志[28] through the recitation of verse either inherited or newly arranged.[29]

Most important, the engagement with poetry was always performative and intellectually engaging. In the historical anecdotes of *Zuozhuan*, the meaning especially of the "Airs" depended not on their original moment and purpose of composition—which are virtually never referenced—but on their understanding by a perceptive and perhaps even imaginative interpreter, that is, on the intellectual and moral capacities of both the historical *actors in the text* and the *readers of the text*.

Zuozhuan itself informs us that even a historical actor could fail in this task and as a result would incur disastrous consequences, as would happen to the immoral and ill-fated usurper of power in Qi 齊, Qing Feng 慶封, as well as to the hapless Hua Ding 華定 from Song 宋.[30] Yet if failure is staged in such spectacular manner, so is success. Those who understand the subtleties of encoded poetic communication are models of morality, perspicuity, and historical learning, and no one more so than the "noble man" who knows not only how to comment on such passages but also how to invoke the *Poetry*—and with it the hermeneutic challenges involved—in his own voice. Part of the very essence of the "noble man," *Zuozhuan* teaches us, is embodied in his ability to make the performances of the *Poetry* and other inherited texts a productive element in the moral interpretation of history—but his efforts will go nowhere without a perceptive audience of readers.

Whether within the narrative or in the "noble man's" comments, all such references to the *Poetry* place considerable demands on the reader to generate a historical understanding that both deepens and exceeds the narration of events. This—the understanding of the correct application and interpretation

28 See Xiang 27.5.

29 The *zhi* 志 ("intent") in question is always that of the reciter, not of the poem's original (anonymous) author; in the few cases where a poem may have been newly composed, not inherited, the roles of composer and reciter fall into one. See, e.g., Liu Lizhi 2001: 40–41.

30 Qing Feng repeatedly fails to understand the import of the poetry recited to him (see Xiang 27.2 and 28.8), including—in a marvelous self-referential loop of the *Zuozhuan* narrative—poetry that itself is understood to criticize ignorance of ritual propriety. In the end Qing Feng "was captured and his entire house exterminated" (Zhao 4.4). Similarly, when Hua Ding fails to understand a recitation, his future exile is predicted immediately (Zhao 12.3), a fate that he and his followers then face exactly ten years later (Zhao 22.2).

of the poems in diplomatic and other polite exchange—I take as one of the didactic purposes of *Zuozhuan*. Such understanding is not provided by the narrative itself but depends on the instruction *in* the text and *through* the text, in an interlocking hermeneutics between both *Zuozhuan* and the *Poetry*. Such didactic purpose is in line with various passages in the *Analects* where Confucius is quoted as stating that "those who do not study the *Poetry* have nothing by which to express themselves" 不學詩，無以言 (16.13) and are like a man who "stands with his face straight to the wall" 其猶正牆面而立也與 (17.10); and—especially pertinent to *Zuozhuan*—that if one can recite the poems but "when sent abroad is unable to apply them, then despite their being many, what use is there for them?" 使於四方，不能專對。雖多，亦奚以為 (13.5). Very similarly, the pedagogical program of how to apply the *Poetry* is further enacted in the *Kongzi shilun* where individual poems are characterized by terse phrases that seem to suggest merely the semantic core of their applicability, in what appears to be a didactic manual for how and in which contexts to deploy them.[31]

In addition to the theatrical mode of invoking the *Poetry*, there is the commentarial one. This mode is lodged in the figure of either a historical actor or an external observer who invokes the *Poetry*, most importantly in the comments of the "noble man."[32] Such quotations typically comprise just a couplet or two, and they are mostly derived from the "Court Hymns" (*ya* 雅) section of the *Poetry*. Unlike the semantically polyvalent "Airs," the "Court Hymns," especially the "Major Court Hymns" (*daya* 大雅), were semantically unambiguous and could be used either as expressions of judgment or as proof texts in support of an argument,[33] a function of the *Poetry* also known from a broad range of early philosophical texts. No poem could be reconstructed in its entirety from such quotations in *Zuozhuan*; instead, it appears that the *Zuozhuan* compilers were mostly interested in what may be called the

31 Ma Chengyuan 2001: 13–41, 121–68. For an interpretation of the *Kongzi shilun* as a pedagogical device, see Kern 2015. For the principal Chinese studies of the *Kongzi shilun*, see Huang Huaixin 2004; Liu Xinfang 2002; Chen Tongsheng 2004; and Chao Fulin 2013. For a reconstruction and translation in English, see Staack 2010.

32 About half of all "noble man" comments contain quotations of inherited texts, in most cases from the *Poetry*; no other part of *Zuozhuan* shows even remotely such density of quotation. For this particular aspect of the comments, see Ge Zhiyi 2010; Wu Shushi and Qian Lüjin 2010; Fu Daobin 2018; Wang Xiaomin 2015; Henry 1999: 132; Wan Ping 1990; Wan Ping 2000; Yu Xingda 1998; Lu Xinmao 2010: 77–85. In addition, several MA and Ph.D. thesis have been wholly or partially devoted to the "noble man's" quotation of the *Poetry*. These theses provide useful lists of the relevant passages; see Duan Pingping 2014: 28–40; Zhu Wenyu 2009; Chen Sheng 2017: 57–72; Zheng Bin 2017: 187–205.

33 See Goldin 2005: 25–35.

"signature lines" of individual poems that also appear quoted elsewhere and seem to have attained quasi-proverbial status.[34] Altogether, the commentarial "noble man" invokes the *Poetry* in some forty separate entries, drawing on some fifty different poems. Thus, the "noble man" quotes the *Poetry* far more intensely than does the *Zuozhuan* narrative itself;[35] even the "noble man's" own mode of speaking occasionally may appear, at least to some extent, modeled on the language from the *Poetry*.[36] The quotations themselves are invariably brief excerpts from longer poems, and in most cases laconically presented without further explanation. These quotations do not provide additional historical information or explanation. Between the "noble man's" quotation of a poetic couplet and the historical anecdote to which his comment is attached, there exists a significant cognitive gap that must be closed by a double act of interpretation: interpretation of the anecdote and interpretation of the quoted poetic lines. Instead of explaining a situation, the "noble man's" comments do something very different: they *perform and externalize* the act of interpretation in a demonstrative and didactic fashion, prompting the reader to connect history, historiography, historical evaluation, and poetry. By capturing the meaning of a historical anecdote in a succinct poetic quotation or otherwise terse statement, the "noble man's" comment transforms a unique historical action or event into an exemplary one and subsumes it under a normative paradigm from the overall repertoire of the human condition. It is not that the poem is affixed to the situation; instead, the situation is fixed by and within the parameters of the poem—parameters that, however, first need to be decoded. This is one of the principal didactic messages the "noble man" consistently drives home: to understand history, one must first master the semiotic system of the *Poetry* in all its flexible applicability and the moral paradigms of good social order expressed in it. Ultimately, in performing the art of reading history through the art of reading the *Poetry* and of contemplating the principles of social order, the "noble man" is presented as the model to emulate.

34 See Kern 2018. For a concordance of *Poetry* quotations in early Chinese texts, including in *Zuozhuan*, see Ho Che Wah and Chan Hung Kan 2004.

35 See Wan Ping 1990 and 2000.

36 See Zhu Wenyu 2009: 3–6. It should be noted, however, that even though the "noble man" repeatedly speaks in tetrasyllabic meter and other rhythmic cadences, none of his utterances shows substantial rhyming, nor does one find binomes (reduplicative, alliterative, rhyming) or the syntactic pattern "particle-verb1-particle-verb2" that are typical especially of the ritual "Court Hymns." For these features, see Kern 2000: 106–9.

3 Who Is the "Noble Man"?

If the "noble man" commentary thus to some extent represents the language and usage of the *Poetry*, the *Poetry* also mirrors the figure of the "noble man." There are 183 instances of the phrase "noble man" in sixty-two of the 305 poems of the *Poetry*. In a small number of instances—with one possible exception all of them in the "Airs"—it may be understood as "you, my lord," where a woman addresses her husband or lover. On the other hand, there is an overwhelming number of instances—especially in the "Court Hymns" both "Minor" (*xiaoya* 小雅) and "Major," where *junzi* refers to rulers, officers, and other leaders whose exalted social position is beyond doubt. In frequently used lines such as "Now that I/we have seen my/our noble man/men/husband" 既見君子[37] or "I/we have not yet seen my/our noble man/men/husband" 未見君子[38]—the language of love is interchangeable with that in praise of one or more princely men. Moreover, where *junzi* refers to a husband, he is typically cast not as an ordinary person but as an official, or otherwise a man with the trappings of high distinction; and when a couplet is quoted in isolation from the rest of such a poem, the meaning "husband" for *junzi* is rendered all but invisible. Most importantly, there is no poem in the *Mao Shi* where *junzi* refers—in the later Confucian sense—to a person of particular morality or self-cultivation; *junzi* in the *Mao Shi* denotes fundamentally nobility of status. The same is true, unambiguously, for all eight chapters in the *Documents* where the term appears.[39]

Within the some ninety comments of the "noble man" in *Zuozhuan*, there are six that contain *Poetry* quotations in which the comportment of the "noble

37 For possible instances of this line meaning "Now that I have seen my husband," see *Mao Shi* poems 10 ("Ru fen" 汝墳), 90 ("Feng yu" 風雨), and *possibly* also 116 ("Yang zhi shui" 揚之水), 126 ("Ju lin" 車鄰), and 168 ("Chu ju" 出車), with the last one being the only case outside the "Airs," though there is no agreement on the meaning of *junzi* among classical commentators here. On the other hand, in *Mao Shi* poems 173 ("Lu xiao" 蓼蕭), 176 ("Jingjing zhe wo" 菁菁者我), 216 ("Yuan yang" 鴛鴦), and 228 ("Xi sang" 隰桑), where the line appears repeatedly in each poem, *junzi* seems to refer to men of nobility.

38 For the meaning of "husband" in this line, see again *Mao Shi* poem 10 ("Ru fen" 汝墳), 14 ("Cao chong" 草蟲), and 132 ("Zhen feng" 晨風), and *possibly* also 126 ("Ju lin" 車鄰) and 168 ("Chu ju" 出車), while in poem 217 ("Kui bian" 頍弁), *junzi* seems to refer to the king/ruler. Note that in poems 14, 132, 168, and 217, this line is then followed by "my/our troubled heart/s is/are xx," with "xx" typically (with exceptions) being a reduplicative binome emphasizing emotional distress.

39 Chapters "Da Yu mo" 大禹謨, "Taishi, xia" 泰誓下, "Lü ao" 旅獒, "Jiu gao" 酒誥, "Shao gao" 召誥, "Wu yi" 無逸, "Zhou guan" 周官, and "Qin shi" 秦誓. Note that this understanding of *junzi* runs uniformly across the "ancient script" (*guwen* 古文) / "modern script" (*jinwen* 今文) chapters divide.

man" is praised;[40] in addition, the "noble man" appears in six more *Poetry* quotations by other speakers.[41] In this context, two passages with evaluations by "Zhongni" ("Confucius") are particularly illustrative:

> 仲尼曰:能補惑者，君子也。《詩》曰:君子是則是效。
>
> Zhongni said, "One who can make good his errors is a noble man. As it says in the *Poetry*, 'The noble man: him you take as a model, him you emulate.'"
>
> ZHAO 7.12, quoting *Mao Shi* 161, "Lu ming" 鹿鳴

> 仲尼謂子產:於是行也，足以為國基矣。《詩》曰:樂只君子，邦家之基。子產，君子之求樂者。
>
> Zhongni said of Zichan, "In this expedition, he acted in such a way as to serve as a foundation for his domain. As it says in the *Poetry*, 'Happy this noble man, Foundation of his domain and his house.' Zichan was the kind of noble man who sought happiness."
>
> ZHAO 13.3, quoting *Mao Shi* 172, "Nanshan you tai" 南山有臺

On dozens of occasions the "noble man" invokes passages from the *Poetry* that in turn mention the "noble man" altogether twelve times. The two "Zhongni" comments explicitly call up the *Poetry* to speak of the "noble man" as the model to emulate and to identify the famed and eloquent Zheng 鄭 minister Zichan 子產 (d. 522)[42] as an exemplary "noble man."

One witnesses in this a remarkable rhetorical transition. The "noble man" of the *Poetry* is, in general, the man of aristocratic birth and status, a pre-Confucian "prince" or "son of a lord" whose correct comportment is that of the ruling elite—and so are the "noble men" within the historical accounts of *Zuozhuan*. This does not mean that these "noble men" in the *Poetry* and *Zuozhuan* are not *also* possessed of moral excellence;[43] but such excellence does not define them in their social status, and no member of the lower-ranked

40 Huan 12.2, Xi 12.4, Wen 2.1, Cheng 8.2, Cheng 9.10, Zhao 3.3.

41 Huan 17.2, Xiang 11.5, Xiang 24.2, Xiang 29.17, Zhao 7.12, Zhao 13.3.

42 See, e.g., Schaberg 2001: 82–83.

43 See Zhang Yi (2016: 115–16) who argues that especially in the later years of *Zuozhuan*, this moral dimension appears in addition to the aristocratic one. Zhang considers this as evidence for a gradual historical trend that only culminated in the shift from the aristocratic to the moral ideal in the *Lunyu* but did not start with Confucius.

shi 士 class is ever referred to as "a noble man" in *Zuozhuan* (while, for example, *all* of the *junzi* in the *Lunyu* 論語 are *shi*).[44] The external commentarial voice of the "noble man," by contrast, consistently appears as the post-Confucian man not of exalted pedigree—nothing suggests his social status—but solely of moral excellence according to Warring States ideals.[45] This distinction and reconfiguration of the very idea of the "noble man" would not have escaped the *Zuozhuan* compilers and hence must reflect their conscious manipulation of the older meaning of the term for their own purposes. In other words, the appropriation of the "noble man" represents the transformation of an earlier social ideal into a new moral one.[46]

Beginning at least with Kong Yingda's 孔穎達 (574–648) *Wujing zhengyi* 五經正義 (Corrected Meanings of the Five Classics), Chinese scholars have commented upon and argued about the identity of the "noble man" and the source of his comments. Today, most scholars take the majority of these comments to be part of *Zuozhuan* proper, and not a later addition; and a number of scholars—perhaps still a minority—have argued that they do not represent a single historical voice but a composite text of various origins, including the *Zuozhuan* compilers but also various earlier sources.[47] Whatever these earlier sources may have been, they were integrated with both the historical narrative and one another by the *Zuozhuan* compilers who would have aimed—though not always succeeded—at creating some degree of coherence for the persona

44 I thank Yuri Pines for this important observation.

45 See, e.g., Liu Lizhi 2001: 39.

46 For these distinctions, see Pines 2017; Gassmann 2007; Zhang Yi 2016.

47 A number of premodern and modern scholars such as Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), Lin Li 林栗 (*jinshi* 1142), Liu Fenglu 劉逢祿 (1776–1829), Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞 (1850–1908), Hu Nianyi 胡念貽 (1924–1982), Zhao Guangxian 趙光賢 (1910–2003), or Wang He 王和 have adamantly argued that the "noble man" comments are later additions to *Zuozhuan*—some claiming by Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE–23 CE). Others such as Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990), Liu Shipei 劉師培 (1884–1919), Zheng Liangshu 鄭良樹 (1940–2016), Yang Xiangkui 楊向奎 (1910–2000), Yang Mingzhao 楊明照 (1909–2003), or Kamada Tadashi have shown in detail that a number of the "noble man" comments were already known to Warring States and Western Han authors and that, furthermore, the "noble man" is a rhetorical figure also known from other Warring States texts. Newell Ann Van Auken in addition argues that the comments were part of the original historical anecdotes before these were compiled into *Zuozhuan*. See Van Auken 2016b: 278–81; Yang Mingzhao 1937; Zheng Liangshu 1982: 341–63; Yang Xiangkui 1936; Hu Nianyi 1981; Wang He 2003 and 2011; Zhao Guangxian 1987: 136–87. For useful surveys of the history of the different positions, see Lan Hui 2016a: 6–13 and Lu Xinmao 2010: 63–75. An important recent contribution that transcends the earlier debates toward a more sophisticated analysis of the various ways in which the "noble man" appears in *Zuozhuan* is Zhang Yi 2016.

of the "noble man" as the personified representation of contemporaneous moral, political, and cultural discourse.[48]

This conclusion echoes Kong Yingda's comment: "Where [*Zuo*]*zhuan* has evaluations, it lodges them all in [the persona of] the noble man" 傳有評論，皆托之君子.[49] Likewise, Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721) in his *Shitong* 史通 (Penetrating History)—the fountainhead of Chinese historiographic criticism altogether—notes that whenever an evaluation is pronounced in *Zuozhuan*, the text "borrows the noble man to advance it" 假君子以稱之.[50]

This is not to suggest that *all* "noble man" comments are fully integrated in this vision. Yet while some scholars have observed that at least in certain cases, the "noble man" comments seem inconsistent with the narrative itself and thus cannot belong to it, this does not make *all* comments later additions.[51] Given the vicissitudes of early Chinese textual composition, fluidity, and accumulation, such demand for textual coherence would be too rigid for any early Chinese text. Moreover, one might easily assume that some "noble man" comments were part of certain sources before these were compiled into *Zuozhuan*, some were introduced by the *Zuozhuan* compilers themselves, and yet some others postdated the initial compilation, or even its later stages.

Before claiming a clear-cut distinction between the commentarial "noble man" and the one in the *Zuozhuan* narrative, one must take note how often actors within that narrative ruminate on the moral excellence of a *true* "noble man"—that is, someone distinguished in his exemplary behavior. Unlike previous scholarship[52] that has treated the commentarial "noble man" in isolation, I wish to emphasize here how the moral authority of this rhetorical figure is directly prefigured in how historical actors within *Zuozhuan* speak of the virtues of a "noble man": he "does not mistreat the young and humble" 不虐幼賤 (Wen 15.11), "considers what lies far ahead" 有遠慮 (Xiang 28.12), "understands what is important and far-reaching" 知大者遠者 (Xiang 31.12), "calms his heart" 平其心 (Zhao 20.8) when enjoying pleasures, "considers the beginning, middle, and end" 始衷終皆舉之 (Ai 27.3) in laying a plan, and so on. When in the position of a ruler, "his steps forward and back can serve as a standard, his

48 Schaberg (2005: 15) speaks of the "noble men" in various early texts as "personifications of rhetorical function." Fu Daobin 2018 describes the commentary of the "noble man" as an "intellectual discourse" (*sixiang huayu* 思想話語) that represents the Eastern Zhou ideals and core of literary learning. Wu Zhixiong (2004: 380) considers the "noble man" comments a "system of thought" (*sixiang tixi* 思想體系).

49 See his gloss in *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi* 18: 1839a.

50 Pu Qilong 1993: 4.81 ("Lun zan" 論贊).

51 *Pace* Wang He 2003 and 2011; Zhao Guangxian 1987: 136–87.

52 With the remarkable exception of Zhang Yi 2016.

every turn can be imitated as an example, his demeanor is well worth observing, his conduct of affairs can be set up as rules, his virtues and actions can be realized as a a model, his voice and aura can bring joy, his gestures have refinement, and his speeches are elegant" 進退可度，周旋可則，容止可觀，作事可法，德行可象，聲氣可樂；動作有文，言語有章 (Xiang 31.13). Such appraisals—in addition to various other speeches within *Zuozhuan* that laud the "noble man's" conduct[53]—do not refer to a mere aristocratic code of conduct or the rules of social hierarchy; instead, they point to the moral qualities of a "noble man" and even on occasion to his acts of self-cultivation.[54]

In turn, "the rhetoric of virtue and good order" that one finds expressed in speeches of statesmen, scribes, and diviners[55] is even more heavily deployed in the comments of the "noble man" when passing judgment on historical events: we read of "filiality" (孝), "trustworthiness" or "good faith" (*xin* 信), "loyalty" (*zhong* 忠), "goodness" (*shan* 善), "humaneness" (*ren* 仁), "rightness" (*yi* 義), "yielding" (*rang* 讓), and above all attention to "ritual" (*li* 禮, including its absence, *wu li* 無禮, or negation, *fei li* 非禮)—all of which as notions the "noble man" finds appropriate to attribute to historical actors and events.[56]

What is more, there are some curious feedback loops between the commentarial "noble man," "Confucius," and some historical actors. Narrative comments are being made on the "noble man's" comments,[57] and speakers quote a "noble man" in their statements.[58] Or take the example of Zichan in the years of Lord Zhao 昭 (541–510): first, Zichan talks about the qualities of a "noble man" only to be called, in return, a "noble man" by the Prince of Jin 晉;[59] eleven years later, the commentarial "noble man" praises Zichan as being a "noble man" who "understands ritual" (*zhi li* 知禮).[60] The following year, "Confucius" praises Zichan by quoting the above-cited couplet from *Mao Shi* that sings of the happy "noble man" who is the foundation of his domain[61] and then concludes, "Zichan was the kind of noble man who sought happiness" (子產君子之求樂

53 Xiang 14.2, Xiang 25.15, Xiang 29.13; Zhao 1.12, Zhao 2.1, Zhao 3.3, Zhao 4.6, Zhao 8.1, Zhao 16.3, Zhao 25.1.

54 For a remarkable "noble man's" speech that expounds on both aristocratic status and self-cultivation, see Xiang 13.3. I thank Yuri Pines for alerting me to this passage.

55 Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016: lxiv.

56 See Yin 1.4, Yin 3.3, Yin 3.6, Yin 4.5, Yin 6.4, Yin 11.3, Yin 11.5; Huan 19.1; Zhuang 22.1; Xi 12.4, 22.9; Wen 2.1, Wen 2.5, 3.4; Xuan 2.1, 4.2; Cheng 8.2, 10.5; Xiang 2.3, Xiang 3.4, Xiang 4.4, Xiang 5.10, Xiang 8.8, Xiang 13.3, Xiang 14.11, Xiang 23.2, Xiang 24.2, Xiang 30.12; Zhao 3.4, Zhao 5.3, Zhao 31.5; Ding 9.2, Ding 10.4; Ai 8.2.

57 Wen 1.5, Wen 2.5 (twice).

58 Xi 15.8, Xiang 14.2, Zhao 3.4.

59 Zhao 1.12.

60 Zhao 12.2.

61 *Mao Shi* 172, "Nanshan you tai" 南山有臺.

者也); and "Confucius" does not fail to bring up "ritual" (*li*) for good measure.[62] Another three years later, Zichan himself talks again about the "noble man" and his commitment to "ritual."[63] Four years after that, "Confucius" makes another appearance to comment on a separate event but then continues with a general statement about the virtuous "noble man" who does not commit "deeds that are not in accord with ritual propriety" (不犯非禮);[64] and a few months later, "Confucius" offers a comment on yet a different event—a comment which the commentarial "noble man" considers true.[65] The question here is not how to unravel the dazzling interplay of statements involving the "noble man" both as a commentarial voice and as an ideal celebrated in the *Zuozhuan* speeches (with "Confucius" repeatedly in the mix) but to appreciate the sheer rhetorical density and coherence of all these voices centered on the figure of the "noble man" both within and outside of the narrative.

As an integral part of *Zuozhuan*, the commentarial "noble man" stands partly outside the historical narrative but is partly also woven into it, dissolving the boundary between "text" and "commentary." As noted by Van Auken—who persuasively argues that at least some of the "noble man" comments were already part of the *Zuozhuan* source materials—"the narrative account and concluding Gentleman comment function together as a self-contained unit, with each part agreeing with, supporting, and elaborating upon the other."[66] From this perspective, as well as from the densely deployed quotations from the *Poetry*, it is clear that the textual function of the "noble man" comments in *Zuozhuan* exceeds that of a fully external, quasi-paratextual historical commentary or explanation. The comments themselves are part of the history being told, part of the reflection on that history, part of historiographic rhetoric, and part of the reflection on that rhetoric. Most importantly, and paradoxically, they infuse the text with both proof and ambiguity, challenging and engaging the reader in the process of making sense of both history and its historiographic account.

The ninety comments attributed to the "noble man" take four different forms. The most common of these, accounting for more than half of all instances, is the basic "the noble man said" (*junzi yue* 君子曰), followed by a statement; next are twenty-two instances, functionally identical, of "the noble man stated/referred to [the episode as]" (*junzi wei* 君子謂); third are eleven

62 Zhao 13.3. The notion of *le* 樂 ("happiness," "joy," "delight") here appears to relate to the Confucian idea of *le* as the result of a moral and praiseworthy life (see Shun 2017); note that Zichan here is said to "seek" (*qiu* 求) this happiness.

63 Zhao 16.3. Zichan also expounds on the "noble man" in earlier passages; see Xiang 24.2.

64 Zhao 20.4. A third instance of "Confucius" praising the "noble man" is Ai 11.7.

65 Zhao 20.7.

66 Van Auken 2016b: 280.

instances of "because of this, the noble man understood" (*junzi shiyi zhi* 君子是以知),[67] which in most cases signal a prediction of a future consequence; and fourth are eight instances of "the noble man considered" (*junzi yi* 君子以) something to be something.[68] In terms of content, the "noble man" commentary performs a range of functions: it evaluates specific historical situations, adds clarification and additional information to the narrative, dispenses praise and blame, offers interpretations, draws analogies, makes predictions, and, in rare cases, provides commentary not on *Zuozhuan* but on the related passage in the *Chunqiu*.[69]

As noted above, the "noble man's" utterances are closely linked to, and in part defined by, their practice of invoking the *Poetry*. This practice also relates the "noble man" directly to the numerous historical actors within *Zuozhuan* who likewise invoke specific lines from the *Poetry* in the commentarial mode. But there is something else that rhetorically integrates the "noble man" with the historical actors within *Zuozhuan*. I already noted the twelve instances where speakers in *Zuozhuan* quote poetic lines that mention a "noble man," and there are more references to particular poetic titles whose texts—not quoted directly—dwell on the positive characteristics of the "noble man."[70] Six of the twelve instances where the "noble man" appears within a *Poetry* quotation are in statements by the commentarial "noble man" himself; the other six appear in poetic lines quoted by other speakers in *Zuozhuan*. In addition to these quotations, however, the "noble man" as an abstract ideal is invoked by speakers throughout *Zuozhuan*: in the speeches of historical actors—e.g. Zichan's speeches discussed above—I have counted altogether fifty-six mentions of the generic "noble man."[71] In short, just as the commentarial "noble man" appraises historical situations and the comportment or deeds of their actors, the actors in turn continue to expound on the ideal of the "noble man."

67 Plus one case (Zhuang 8.2) of the same structure but with *shan* 善 ("to consider excellent," "to praise") instead of *zhi* 知 ("to understand").

68 Again, some scholars count slightly differently; for the four types, see Kamada 1963: 67–84; Lu Xinmao 2010: 11–14. Zhang Hongliang (2014: 21) provides a convenient table.

69 For the latter, see Huan 2.1, Xuan 4.2, Cheng 14.4, Xiang 30.12, Zhao 31.5. For the full range of commentarial functions of the "noble man" comments, see Huang Cuifen 1996: 98–101.

70 Xiang 27.5, Zhao 17.1.

71 Huan 5.3, Xi 15.8 (three times), Xi 22.8, Xi 26.3, Wen 7.3, Wen 12.5, Xuan 17.2, Cheng 2.3 (twice), Cheng 3.10, Cheng 9.9, Cheng 13.2, Cheng 16.5, Xiang 9.5, Xiang 13.3 (three times), Xiang 14.2, Xiang 24.2, Xiang 25.15, Xiang 28.12, Xiang 29.13 (twice), Xiang 30.3, Xiang 31.12, Xiang 31.13, Zhao 1.8, Zhao 1.12 (five times), Zhao 2.1, Zhao 3.1, Zhao 3.4, Zhao 4.6, Zhao 5.1 (in a quotation from the *Changes*), Zhao 7.12, Zhao 8.1, Zhao 13.3, Zhao 16.3, Zhao 20.4, Zhao 20.8 (twice), Zhao 25.1, Zhao 26.4, Zhao 28.4, Zhao 31.5, Ai 8.2, Ai 11.1, Ai 11.7, Ai 14.3, Ai 15.5, Ai 20.3, Ai 27.3.

The ideal, generic commentator who seemingly stands outside the text of *Zuozhuan* is frequently invoked and defined within *Zuozhuan* itself, as well as in the commentator's own statements, thus continuously blurring the boundaries between what appears to be the older, pre-Confucian aristocratic ideal of the "noble man" found in texts such as the *Poetry* and the *Documents* and the Warring States moral ideal of the "noble man" as a member of the *shi* class.

What many of these references to the "noble man" share is an intense emphasis on "ritual propriety" (*li* 禮). The "noble man's" comments themselves refer to *li* on twenty occasions,[72] as do two narrative comments on the "noble man's" words.[73] Speeches that laud the qualities of a "noble man" repeatedly reference *li* as the principal social standard.[74] Toward the end of *Zuozhuan*, "Confucius" states that "The conduct of the noble man takes its measure from ritual propriety" 君子之行也度於禮,[75] while the "noble man," when speaking of *li* and praising the *Chunqiu* for its ability to encourage the good and instill fear in the licentious, concludes that "this is why the noble man prizes this text" 是以君子貴之.[76] *Zuozhuan*'s overall emphasis on *li* has often been noted,[77] and it is particularly pronounced in the comments of the "noble man."[78] In sum, this emphasis on ritual propriety further integrates the "noble man" with other textual layers of *Zuozhuan*. And yet, just as the different ideals—very likely one earlier, one later[79]—of the "noble man" are consistently conflated, so are the profoundly different meanings of *li* 禮, possibly again one earlier, one later. For both pairs of terms, the direction from earlier to later is highly suggestive in the same way, that is, from pre-Confucian to Confucian where

72 Yin 11.3, Yin 11.5, Zhuang 22.1, Xi 22.9, Wen 2.5, Wen 6.3, Wen 15.11, Xuan 2.1, Cheng 18.6, Xiang 2.3, Xiang 4.4, Xiang 8.8, Xiang 13.3 (twice), Zhao 3.3, Zhao 3.4, Zhao 5.3, Zhao 12.2, Zhao 31.5, Ding 10.4.

73 Both in Wen 2.5.

74 Cheng 2.3, Xiang 13.3, Zhao 16.3, Zhao 20.4, Zhao 25.1, Zhao 31.5, Ai 8.2, Ai 11.7.

75 Ai 11.7.

76 Zhao 31.5.

77 See, e.g., Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016: xxvii, xxx; Lewis 1999: 132–35.

78 See Duan Pingping 2014: 17–20; Lan Hui 2016b; Fu Daobin 2018; Henry 1999: 133–37; Lan Hui 2016a: 19–22, 40–49; Pu Weizhong 1995: 80–87; Wu Zhixiong 2005.

79 I do think that even though it is impossible to put firm dates on any pre-Qin text, the aristocratic "noble man" within *Zuozhuan* reflects an earlier ideal that is well aligned with the "noble man" in the *Poetry*, and that the same is true for the notion of "ritual" (*li* 禮) which is clearly an Eastern Zhou term but impossible to date. Here again, it is not enough to compare *Zuozhuan* with the commentarial "noble man," given that both are undatable. What supports this relative chronology, however, is the appearance of both the "noble man" and "ritual" in the *Poetry*, most of whose individual poems in some form predate the Warring States philosophical masters who quote them as sources of inherited authority.

"ritual" is inseparable from notions of moral self-cultivation,[80] a connection that seems generally absent in the *Zuozhuan* narrative itself.

4 The Distribution of References to the *Poetry*

The figure of the "noble man" and the references to the *Poetry* are essential features woven into the textual composition of *Zuozhuan*. What can these references tell us about the *Zuozhuan* compilers' knowledge of the *Poetry*? And what might this knowledge tell us in turn about the *Poetry* in mid-Warring States times, presumably the time when *Zuozhuan* was compiled from various sources? Consider, for example, the case of the *Documents* quotations in *Zuozhuan*: in their large majority, these quotations correspond to fragments from otherwise lost texts—texts that only by the fourth century CE were then partly reconstructed, partly newly invented, for the composition of the so-called "ancient-script" (*guwen* 古文) version of the *Documents*. Likewise, recent finds of bamboo manuscripts from around the fourth and third centuries BCE have confirmed the existence of a much broader range of *Documents*-type texts that circulated independently among the learned elite but never entered the Qin and Han imperial version of the *Documents* as a canonical anthology. On the other hand, of the twelve chapters of the Western Han "modern-script" (*jinwen* 今文) version that are generally seen as the historical core of the *Documents*—royal speeches attributed to early Western Zhou (1046–771 BCE) rulers—only "Kang gao" 康誥 is quoted in *Zuozhuan*.[81] This suggests that these speeches were not available or of little interest to either the source materials of *Zuozhuan* or the fourth-century (?) BCE compilers of the text (as well as later

80 I thank Paul R. Goldin for the crucial observation that *li* in *Zuozhuan* is almost oppositional to *li* in the *Analects* and also *Mencius* precisely by lacking the emphasis on self-cultivation, and that it is as well different from *Xunzi* where *li* is related not only to social and moral order but also to the psychological and emotional development of its practitioner. (For *li* in the *Analects*, see Goldin 2020: 42–45.) Zhang Guye 1995 claims that *li* in *Zuozhuan* is distant from *Lunyu* and *Mencius*, but close to *Xunzi*; one can easily agree with the former part of this statement while questioning the latter part. For a broader discussion of the evolution of the concept of *li* in early China, see Pines 2000. As Pines notes (p. 28), "The major innovation of Mencius with regard to *li* was an attempt to turn it into internal virtue, part of the innate good nature of human beings."

81 Xi 23.4 (quoted as *Zhou Documents* [*Zhou shu* 周書]), 33.6 ("Kang gao"), Xuan 6.3 (*Zhou Documents*), 15.6 (*Zhou Documents*), 8.6 (*Zhou Documents*), Xiang 23.2 (*Documents*), Zhao 8.5 (*Zhou Documents*), Zhao 20.4 ("Kang gao"). Paradoxically, *only* the two passages quoted explicitly as "Kang gao" are *not* found in the received version of the "Kang gao" chapter. For a convenient survey of the *Documents* quoted in *Zuozhuan*, see Wang Lehui 2016.

editors like Liu Xin), at least through the Western Han. They also were by and large unknown or irrelevant to the "noble man" authors.

The situation of the *Poetry* is different, as most of its quotations match the received anthology. While much of Chinese scholarship continues to accept the *Poetry* references in *Zuozhuan* as evidence for the *Shi* anthology's formation and fixation as a text by around 600 BCE at the latest, the following analysis suggests that these references largely correspond to the ideological and didactic purposes of the compilation of *Zuozhuan* and its construction of the persona of the "noble man." Whatever position one takes on the issue, the references to the *Poetry* in *Zuozhuan* were evidently far more tightly controlled than references to the *Documents*. If there existed a larger body of *Documents*-style texts beyond the received anthology that circulated in the Warring States period—as is suggested by both the *Zuozhuan* quotation patterns and the evidence from newly discovered manuscripts—we cannot observe anything like this for the *Poetry*.

According to traditional accounts—first among them the "Hereditary House of Kongzi" 孔子世家 in Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–85 BCE) *Shiji* 史記—Confucius reduced an inherited body of three thousand poems to one of just three hundred, which was known during the Western Han and is represented in the received *Mao Shi*.[82] If the story of Confucius's compilation of the three hundred poems in the *Poetry* is historically factual, why is it then that references to the *Poetry* are particularly frequent in the reigns of Lords Xiang and Zhao (541–510) and also relatively frequent in those of Lords Xi 僖 (659–627), Wen, Xuan 宣 (608–591), and Cheng 成 (590–573)—that is, mostly the years *before* Confucius' purported late-in-life compilation of the anthology—while being altogether very rare in the reigns of Lords Ding 定 (509–495) and especially Ai (494–468), when Confucius was supposedly most closely engaged

82 I have explored the complicated relationship of *Poetry* fragments in Warring States and early Han manuscripts with texts in the received tradition in a series of studies, including Kern 2002, 2003, 2005, 2010, and 2019. More recent manuscripts finds—especially the looted Anhui University partial anthology of the *Poetry* and another (yet unpublished) partial anthology excavated in 2021 from Wangjiazui 王家嘴 tomb 798 in Jingzhou 荊州 (Hubei province)—will certainly generate further insights, though the haste in which some scholars have already declared the Anhui University text to be an early version of the received *Mao Shi* is based on a host of misconceptions and grossly misplaced. Interestingly, both the Anhui University manuscript and the one excavated at Jingzhou only contain "Airs of the States"; in addition, the much smaller find of *Shijing* poems from Xiajiatai 夏家臺 tomb 106 (excavated in 2014 also in Jingzhou, and also not yet published) is limited to fourteen poems from the "Airs of Bei" (Bei feng 邶風) section of the "Airs of the States."

with the *Poetry*?[83] How is it possible that, in their overwhelming majority,[84] these early references match up with the received *Mao Shi* when supposedly there was a far larger number of inherited poems in circulation? How—in light of the considerable graphic variants and other differences between the appearance of poems in newly discovered manuscripts and their counterparts in *Mao Shi*—is it furthermore possible that the actual quotations of poems match in nearly all cases verbatim how these passages appear in *Mao Shi*? And why, most strikingly, is there so little poetry outside of what we know from *Mao Shi* visible across pre-Qin sources altogether if poetry mattered so much?[85]

To begin with, if the poems as we now see them in *Zuozhuan* were part of the underlying historical sources, then one would expect a far wider range beyond those in *Mao Shi*, and, furthermore, one would expect even the poems we know from *Mao Shi* to appear with a range of textual differences similar to what we find it recently discovered manuscripts that date from the fourth through the second centuries BCE. Thus, the overwhelmingly unified form in which these poetic fragments appear quoted in the different layers of *Zuozhuan* (*and also* in various other pre-imperial texts) must be the result of post-Han editing and normalization on the basis of *Mao Shi*.[86] But second, and more important,

83 This engagement is documented not only in the received *Analects* but now also in the *Kongzi shilun*; see the relevant references in note 31 above. One might suggest that the narrative for the years of Lords Ding and Ai is altogether much terser than that of Lords Xiang and Zhao, but it is still more extensive (measured in graphs per year) than that of all earlier lords with the exception of Lord Min 閔 (661–660). In the reigns of Lords Ding and Ai one also notes fewer speeches and the virtual disappearance of the "noble man" (see appendices to Durrant's chapter, this volume). Why does *Zuozhuan* fall largely silent on *Poetry* performances at the time when Confucianism was incipient?

84 Ten out of altogether only fourteen so-called "lost odes" make an appearance in Xiang 5.7, Xiang 8.7, Xiang 21.5, Xiang 26.7, Xiang 28.9, Xiang 30.12, Zhao 4.6, Zhao 12.11, Zhao 25.1, and Zhao 26.10; the other four are in Zhuang 22.1, Xi 23.6, Xuan 2.3, and Cheng 9.10.

85 Leaving aside the anthology of the *Lyrics from Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭), of which no more than a few sections—and quite possibly nothing—predates the Western Han, and excluding further works that survive only in later sources, my most generous count, following Lu Qinli 1983, includes about one hundred and seventy poems or poetic fragments in purportedly pre-Qin sources. This includes texts found in sources such as *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 and *Liji* 禮記 that in their received form are Han compilations; it also includes even the shortest of verse fragments (a line of four graphs) as well as "sayings" or "proverbs." In addition, Lu Qinli lists about one hundred purportedly pre-Qin poetic texts and fragments (again in this inclusive sense) that appear in Han and later sources. This count accords roughly with Schaberg 1999. For all of *Zuozhuan*, Lu Qinli lists about fifty-five titles of poetic fragments of all kinds (once again including proverbs, ditties, sayings) that cannot be matched to the canonical *Poetry*.

86 See the analysis in Kern 2005. One could of course also consider that it is the *Mao Shi* text that was normalized according to *Zuozhuan*, but this would not explain the overall coherence—with a very small number of remaining variants that are traditionally

references to the *Poetry* across the 255 years covered in *Zuozhuan*, beginning in the very first year of Lord Yin in 722 BCE, overwhelmingly reflect the range of *Mao Shi*—but obviously, there was no such thing as *Mao Shi* during these early centuries. Thus, they appear to represent the work of the *Zuozhuan* compilers (or, at the latest, of Han editors like Liu Xin). They cannot have been part of historical records dating centuries earlier—records possibly contemporaneous with the events they describe—that the later compilers and editors to some unknown extent may have been able to draw upon, or otherwise we would expect a broader range of poetry beyond what we have in the received *Mao Shi* anthology. This is not to say that the poems themselves cannot be older, some of them perhaps even much older; but it is to emphasize that their particular selection and distribution in *Zuozhuan* should not be sought in pre-*Zuozhuan* historical records going back as far as the eighth century BCE.

Whether it is due to the fourth-century(?) BCE compilers of *Zuozhuan* or their more recent sources such as collections of historical anecdotes, the inclusion of the poems in *Zuozhuan* is probably best understood as reflecting the ideological and rhetorical interests of Warring States thinkers—that is, interests that reflect the gradual canonization of the *Poetry* and will likewise have informed the words of the "noble man." The only possible place where to look for *Mao Shi* traces during the Springs and Autumns period would be the rhymed Eastern Zhou bronze inscriptions. Yet there are no such traces. Perhaps the *Zuozhuan* (and *Guoyu*) compilers had some knowledge of earlier practices of poetry recitation on diplomatic occasions, but this does not explain the text's close coherence with *Mao Shi*. Note also that while the Eastern Zhou "Qin stone drums" (*Qin shigu* 秦石鼓)[87] show some affinity to the style of the "Airs of the States," they are clearly separate from the latter—which only suggests the early existence of developed poetry outside of the parameters observed in *Mao Shi*. Finally, there are various occasions where the *Mao Shi* prefaces or commentary refer to particular historical figures known from *Zuozhuan* in more detail than provided in *Zuozhuan* itself and sometimes even connect additional poems to these figures.[88] Had this information been known to

attributed to the *Poetry* versions of the Western Han "three schools" (*san jia* 三家)—of all the other *Poetry* quotations across various early texts. As Yuri Pines reminds me, another clear piece of evidence of the Han editing of *Zuozhuan* is the near-universal substitution of *bang* 邦 (domain) with *guo* 國 (state) to observe the taboo of using the Han founding emperor's Liu Bang 劉邦 (d. 195 BCE) given name.

87 Mattos 1988; for a summary account of Eastern Zhou bronze inscriptions, see Mattos 1997. Mattos tentatively dates the "stone drums" to the fifth century BCE, though many other dates—both earlier and later—have been proposed, none of them conclusively.

88 Compare the additional information given in *Mao Shi* to the poems invoked in Yin 1.4, Huan 6.4, Min 2.5, Wen 6.3, and Xuan 9.6.

the *Zuozhuan* compilers, one might perhaps expect some of these additional *Poetry* references also there.

When performed in the theatrical mode, the *Poetry* recitations within *Zuozhuan* appear to be directed at the historical actors themselves who either understand the recitation and respond in kind, or fail—and fail with terrible, correctly predicted consequences. But let us pause for a moment. It cannot have been the mere failure to make sense of a single poetry recitation that doomed people like Qing Feng or Hua Ding, destroying them together with their families. Instead, these records of poetic performance and communicative failure are *symbolic markers* of the person in question, that is, a person whose fate is sealed by far more serious misdeeds. Such anecdotes—especially in predictions that nearly always come true—are therefore elements of historiographic rhetoric and lore.[89] The audience of their poetic performances is not the cast of historical actors within the anecdote. It is the cultivated reader of *Zuozhuan*, the kind of person who is modeled and staged as the exemplary "noble man" of moral excellence and traditional learning who knows how to read the signs,[90] and whose "understanding" (*zhi* 知) can be emulated in sympathetic and mimetic acts of perception. The interpretative challenges posed by semantically underdetermined poetic performances in *Zuozhuan* are there for a purpose: to challenge and guide the reader to the true understanding of ritual propriety. It is perhaps from this perspective that the uneven distribution of the "noble man" comments as well as of the *Poetry* references may be explained: both are relatively dense in the earlier parts of *Zuozhuan*, peak in the middle reigns of lords of Lu, and then drop precipitously—and mimetically—in the final reigns of political decay, those of Lords Ding and Ai. As Lu falls into decline, so does *Poetry* recitation and the presence of the "noble man."

Yet assigning the records of theatrical poetry performances not to the stratum of the *Zuozhuan* source materials but to the subsequent fourth-century(?) BCE compilation of these materials raises another conundrum: if these records of historical actors reciting (*fu* 賦) inherited poetry emerged with the historiographic rhetoric of the *Zuozhuan* compilers, why is this rhetoric absent in virtually all other contemporaneous Warring States texts?[91] Why would the *Zuozhuan* compilers invent a format otherwise unknown—and then limit it

89 As discussed by both Schaberg 2001 and Li 2007. In a remarkable further continuation, poetic performances in Han historiography are likewise rhetorical elements used for political predictions as well as to mark moments of imminent personal disaster; see Kern 2004.

90 Li 2007.

91 The single exception is *Guoyu*, where we find altogether three anecdotes with such performances; see *Guoyu* 5.3 ("Luyu, xia" 魯語下; Xu Yuangao 2002: 182), *Guoyu* 5.15 ("Luyu, xia"; Xu Yuangao 2002: 200), and *Guoyu* 10.1 ("Jinyu, si" 晉語四; Xu Yuangao 2002: 339). For a

to an overall rather small number of years of the reigns mostly of Lords Wen, Xiang, and Zhao (see Table 5.3 below)? Or would this suggest that the records of theatrical performances are even later interpolations, postdating the commentarial practice of quoting selected lines from the *Poetry* that is common also to Warring States philosophical writings? We do not have the evidence to answer this question one way or the other.

There are various ways in which the reigns of the twelve lords of Lu can be divided into groups. One would be by the amount of detail provided for each of them. The first four reigns in the text, those of Lords Yin (722–712), Huan 桓 (711–694), Zhuang 莊 (693–662), and Min (661–660), together cover a period of sixty-three years. The next four reigns, those of Lords Xi (659–627), Wen (626–609), Xuan (608–591), and Cheng (590–573), cover eighty-eight years. Next, the two reigns of Lords Xiang (572–542) and Zhao (541–510) cover sixty-three years. And finally, the reigns of Lords Ding (509–495) and Ai (494–468) cover forty-two years. To evaluate the overall presence of references to both *Poetry* performances and "noble man" comments during these reigns, it is first necessary to understand the amount of text that *Zuozhuan* devotes to each rule. This can be tabulated as follows (Table 5.1).

TABLE 5.1 Quantitative coverage of the twelve lords of Lu in *Zuozhuan*

Reign	Dates BCE	Years	Graphs	Graphs per year
Yin	722–712	11	4,883	444
Huan	711–694	18	4,542	252
Zhuang	693–662	32	5,317	166
Min	661–660	2	1,713	857
Xi	659–627	33	17,115	519
Wen	626–609	18	10,009	556
Xuan	608–591	18	9,568	532
Cheng	590–573	18	15,645	869
Xiang	572–542	31	37,944	1,224
Zhao	541–510	32	46,431	1,451
Ding	509–495	15	9,682	645
Ai	494–468	27	16,293	603
Total	722–468	255	179,142	703

new study—published after the present essay was sent into print—on the appearance of poetry in *Guoyu*, see Waring 2023.

Three observations are immediately obvious: the number of years per lord range from two to thirty-three; the number of graphs dedicated to each lord ranges from 1,713 to 46,431; and the number of graphs dedicated to each lord per year ranges from 166 to 1,451 (the latter figures are rounded). Thus, by far the most detailed and extensive narratives per year are found, in this order, for Lords Zhao and Xiang; next are Lords Xi and Cheng; and then come Lords Wen, Ding, and Xuan. The latter three not only share roughly the same number of years but also roughly comparable numbers of graphs per year. The longest reigns are those of Lords Xi (thirty-three years), Zhuang (thirty-two), Zhao (thirty-two), and Xiang (thirty-one); but while the average annual coverage of Lord Zhuang amounts to only 166 graphs, and that of Lord Xi to 519, Lord Xiang receives on average 1,224 graphs per year, and Lord Zhao 1,451.[92] In light of these numbers, it is meaningful to tabulate the appearance of both the "noble man" and of *Poetry* references (in both the theatrical and the commentarial mode) as well (Table 5.2).

TABLE 5.2 Quantitative coverage of the "noble man" appearances and *Poetry* references[a]

Reign	Years	*Poetry* references in *Zuozhuan* narrative	*Poetry* references in "noble man" comments	*Poetry* references per year	"Noble man" appearances (as commentator)	"Noble man" appearances per year
Yin	11	1	6	0.64	11	1
Huan	18	1	1	0.11	5	0.28
Zhuang	32	1	1	0.06	6	0.19

a Both in the narrative and in the "noble man" comments, references to individual poems are often clustered. On each occasion, I count each poem by itself. "Lost odes," i.e., poems not found in *Mao Shi* (or where the match seems too tentative), are counted only when they are explicitly introduced with (a) the quotation formula "in the *Poetry* it is said" (*shi*/*yue yun* 詩曰/云, or a variation thereof) or (b) the phrase "recited xy" (*fu* 賦 xy) where "xy" appears to be the title of a particular poem. In the case of the "noble man," there are a few strings of utterances, each one introduced by "the noble man said" (or by some of the other formulae used to introduce his pronouncements). I count each instance preceded by such an introduction as a separate statement.

92 The calculation of the number of graphs is based on the *Chunqiu jingzhuan jijie* 春秋經傳集解 text in the CHANT database developed and maintained at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The online tool used for counting the graphs can be found here: https://www.chineseconverter.com/en/convert/chinese-character-count. My statistics include only the text of *Zuozhuan* proper, that is, without the text of the *Chunqiu*. For far more detailed tables on the various elements of *Zuozhuan* see the appendices in Stephen Durrant's contribution to the present volume.

TABLE 5.2 Quantitative coverage of the "noble man" appearances and *Poetry* references (*cont.*)

Reign	Years	*Poetry* references in *Zuozhuan* narrative	*Poetry* references in "noble man" comments	*Poetry* references per year	"Noble man" appearances (as commentator)	"Noble man" appearances per year
Min	2	3	0	0.67	0	0
Xi	33	13	6	0.58	8	0.24
Wen	18	16	10	1.44	11	0.61
Xuan	18	14	2 (+1 by "Confucius")	0.88(0.94)	6	0.33
Cheng	18	14	3	0.94	9	0.5
Xiang	31	63	14	2.41	21	0.68
Zhao	32	63	3 (+6 by "Confucius")	2.06 (2.25)	11	0.35
Ding	15	3	4	0.47	2	0.13
Ai	27	4	0	0.15	1	0.04

These statistics help putting the presence of references to the *Poetry* (and also to the *Documents*)[93] for each reign into perspective. By far the most such references are clustered in the sixty-three years of Lords Xiang and Zhao. By comparison, very few references appear (a) in the reigns of the first four lords (Yin, Huan, Zhang, and Min) but also (b) in those of the final two (Ding and Ai). The middle ground is covered by Lords Xi, Wen, Xuan, and Cheng, although here, too, one notes important differences relative to the number of years: the number of references to the *Poetry* for the reign of Lord Xi is similar to that of Lords Xuan and Cheng, even though Lord Xi's reign lasted thirty-three years versus eighteen years each for both Lords Xuan and Cheng.

Meanwhile, the total number of references to the *Poetry* during the reign of Lord Wen (also eighteen years) significantly exceeds that for the reigns of both Lords Xuan and Cheng and is, if averaged for the number of years, not far below that for the reigns of both Lords Xiang and Zhao. However, if we further consider that Lords Xiang (1,224 graphs per year) and Zhao (1,451) average far more extensive narratives per year than Lord Wen (556), a new picture emerges: relative to the overall length of text, the coverage of Lord Wen's reign

93 While of course not matching each other exactly, the numbers of references to both the *Poetry* and the *Documents* follow the same trajectory throughout *Zuozhuan*. While here I focus on the *Poetry*, similar observations for the *Documents* are implied.

contains the highest density of references to the *Poetry* and the *Documents* in all of *Zuozhuan*.[94] Consider here not only the total number of references to the *Poetry* in both the commentarial and theatrical mode, but furthermore just the distribution of the latter (Table 5.3):

TABLE 5.3 Theatrical *fu shi* 賦詩 performances in individual sections across *Zuozhuan*[a]

Reign	Years	Number of poems in *fu shi* 賦詩 performances by reigns and years (BCE)			
Yin	11				
Huan	18				
Zhuang	32				
Min	2				
Xi	33	Xi 23.6 (637): 2			
Wen	18	Wen 3.7 (624): 2	Wen 4.7 (623): 2	Wen 7.4 (620): 1	Wen 13.5 (614): 4
Xuan	18				
Cheng	18	Cheng 9.5 (582): 2			
Xiang	31	Xiang 4.3 (569): 3 sets	Xiang 16.1 (557): 1	Xiang 20.6 (553): 3	Xiang 27.8 (546): 1
		Xiang 8.8 (565): 3	Xiang 16.5 (557): 2	Xiang 26.7 (547): 3	Xiang 27.5 (546): 7
		Xiang 14.1 (559): 1	Xiang 19.3 (554): 2	Xiang 26.7 (547): 2	Xiang 28.9 (545): 1
		Xiang 14.3 (559): 1	Xiang 19.12 (554): 1	Xiang 27.2 (546): 1	Xiang 29.4 (544): 1
		Xiang 14.4 (559): 1			
Zhao	32	Zhao 1.3 (539): 2	Zhao 2.1 (538): 2	Zhao 12.3 (530): 1	Zhao 17.1 (525): 2
		Zhao 1.4 (539): 5	Zhao 3.12 (537): 1	Zhao 16.3 (526): 7	Zhao 25.1 (517): 2
		Zhao 2.1 (538): 4			
Ding	15	Ding 4.3 (506): 1			
Ai	27				

a The table includes all instances where a historical actor recites (*fu* 賦) a poem in front of someone else. For a small number of additional anecdotes in which the making or performing of a poem is mentioned, but not in the theatrical way toward an audience, see notes 26 and 27 above. These instances are left out of Table 5.3. In addition, I do not include here the grand concert of dance, music, and poetry for Prince Jizha 季扎 in Xiang 29.13 (544) at the court of Lu. For an account of this unique spectacle, see Schaberg 2001: 86–95. It may not be accidental that this concert is recorded in the reign of Lord Xiang, which in *Zuozhuan* represents the heyday of poetry recitation. The date of composition of this concert episode remains contested; the story is possibly a later interpolation.

94 For references to the *Documents* or texts that by their title appear to be similar to them, see Wen 2.1 ("Records of Zhou" [*Zhou zhi* 周志]), Wen 5.5 (*Shang Documents* [*Shang shu* 商書]), Wen 6.8 ("former records" [*qian zhi* 前志]), Wen 7.8 (*Xia Documents* [*Xia shu* 夏書]), Wen 18.7 ("Zhou rituals" [*Zhou li* 周禮], "Command by oath" [*Shi ming* 誓命], and *Yu Documents* [*Yu shu* 虞書]).

Theatrical *fu shi* 賦詩 performances, where one historical actor recites a poem in front of one or more others—which often leads to a recitation in response or, in some cases, an entire string of individual recitations by different actors—appear in only twenty-five out of the 255 years of *Zuozhuan*: in one year of Lord Xi, in one of Lord Cheng, in one of Lord Ding, but in four years of Lord Wen, in nine of Lord Xiang, and in seven of Lord Zhao. Moreover, in the reigns of Lords Xiang and Zhao, we often find multiple anecdotes with such performances (three in Xiang 14, two in Xiang 16, two in Xiang 19, two in Xiang 26, three in Xiang 27, two in Zhao 1, and two in Zhao 2). In other words, such theatrical performances are highly concentrated in the reigns of Lords Wen, Xiang, and Zhao—and almost absent everywhere else. In this context, note in particular the density of poetry recitations in the reign of Lord Wen, considering how much shorter that reign is in terms of years, and how much shorter its account is in terms of graphs (eighteen years, 10,009 graphs), compared to the reigns of Lord Xiang (thirty-one years; 37,944 graphs) and Lord Zhao (thirty-two years; 46,431 graphs). The same picture emerges for the appearances of the "noble man": of the ninety comments, twenty-one are in the reign of Lord Xiang, eleven in the reign of Lord Zhao, but eleven also in the reign of Lord Wen. In other words, there is one "noble man" comment for 1,807 words for Lord Xiang, one for 4,221 words for Lord Zhao, but one for 910 words for Lord Wen. For Lord Ding the number is one for 4,841 words, and for Lord Ai, one for 16,293 words. This correlation is perhaps not entirely surprising, given that about half of all "noble man" comments also contain references to the *Poetry*. However, the eleven "noble man" statements in the reign of Lord Wen invoke no fewer than ten different poems out of the fifty poems in all "noble man" comments altogether.

The exceptional density of both "noble man" comments and *Poetry* quotations and recitations—and *Documents*-style quotations as well—for the reign of Lord Wen is easily overlooked because it is drowned out by the overwhelming size of the accounts of Lords Xiang and Zhao, and the absolute number of references to inherited texts therein. Moreover, as noted above, especially in the reign of Lord Xiang one finds entire clusters of references to the *Poetry*, such as in the account of the presentation of multiple poems for Zhao Wu 趙武 of Jin 晉 in 546 BCE,[95] let alone the concert of dance, music, and poetry for Prince Jizha 季札 of Wu 吳 in 544 BCE.[96] However, within its more limited size, the account of Lord Wen's reign includes (a) the quotation of four poems by historical actors, (b) the mention of the recitation of nine poems by historical

95 Xiang 27.5.
96 Xiang 29.13.

actors, and (c) quotations of ten poems in the comments by the "noble man," with two poems each being quoted twice. Only one poem appears in two of these three categories: "Zheng min" 烝民 (*Mao Shi* 260) is quoted by both the "noble man" and a historical actor. Altogether, there are twenty-three different poems either quoted or named during the years of Lord Wen, all of which have counterparts in the received version of *Mao Shi*.

5 Correlations with Other Meta-Layers in the Account of Lord Wen

If, as I have suggested so far, both the "noble man" comments and the *Poetry* recitations and quotations are textual functions that operate not at the primary layer of the historical record but at the metatextual layer of historiographic rhetoric, it is useful to consider their possible correlations with other such layers of *Zuozhuan*.

The first correlation was already noted, namely that between the *Poetry* and the "noble man" comments. In the account of Lord Wen, the "noble man" appears in eight of eighteen years. Each of these years also contains references to the *Poetry*—or put the other way around, of the ten years that include such references, eight also include comments by the "noble man." In short, there is a very notable correlation between the appearance of the "noble man" and the invocation of the *Poetry*, and not only because of the fact that the "noble man" himself tends to quote lines from the *Poetry*. In my analysis of specific passages below, I will go so far as to suggest that in at least some moments of the narrative, it is the "noble man's" voice that drives the *Zuozhuan* narrative, and not the other way around.

The second correlation is with the discourse on "ritual propriety" (*li* 禮) in *Zuozhuan*, a discourse encompassing the interrelated questions of a person's appropriate comportment, the correct performance of sacrifices and other highly formalized activities (i.e., "rituals"), and the maintenance of social hierarchy and order. In the lexicon of early China, the term *li* is a latecomer: in the *Poetry*, it appears only ten times in altogether eight poems; in the *Documents*, likewise only eleven times in the "modern-script" chapters.[97] Yet in *Zuozhuan* and its commentarial layers, *li* is ubiquitous. In the "noble man" comments

97 Among these, *li* appears only in three of the chapters that are considered to belong to the early core of the *Documents*: "Jinteng" 金縢 (once), "Luo gao" 洛誥 (three times), and "Jun shi" 君奭 (once); the other six instances are in "Yao dian" 堯典 (four times) and "Gao Yao mo" 皋陶謨 (twice), both likely of a Warring States date. In addition, the term appears seven times in the "ancient-script" chapters. See also Pines 2000.

alone, it appears eighty-three times in altogether seventeen passages, including in two where the same lines from the *Poetry* are quoted:

> 人而無禮， 胡不遄死。
>
> A man who lacks ritual propriety: why should he not die before his time?
> ZHAO 3.4 and DING 10.4, quoting *Mao Shi* 52, "Xiang shu" 相鼠

One formalized way in which *li* is referenced is found with apodictic statements to the effect that something "is in accordance with ritual propriety" (*li ye* 禮也) or "is not in accordance with ritual propriety" (*fei li ye* 非禮也). As noted by Mark Edward Lewis,

> The anonymous third-person narrator refers to particular actions being "ritual" sixty-seven times, and he describes them as "violations of ritual" (*fei li* 非禮) thirty-two times. Figures in the narrative refer to actions as "ritual" six times, and "violations" sixteen times. The "gentleman" refers to "ritual" or "violations" six times. In addition Confucius twice discusses actions in terms of *li*. Therefore one hundred and twenty-nine actions in the *Zuo zhuan* are assessed in terms of ritual. In addition, the concept is implicit in many passages that do not employ the character *li* 禮.[98]

However, simple counts of the occurrences of the graph *li* are insufficient to grasp how deeply the notion of ritual propriety pervades all of *Zuozhuan*. There is some debate over whether the *li ye*/*fei li ye* statements constitute a separate layer of meta-commentary on the *Zuozhuan* narrative.[99] In my view, the fact that such statements also pervade the speeches of historical actors as well as the "noble man" comments does not invalidate taking them as a separate layer because, as already shown with the very persona of the "noble man," the different layers of meta-commentary can be tightly interwoven with the historical narrative proper. Without a question, the *li ye*/*fei li ye* statements constitute an

98 Lewis 1999: 133; see also 132–39.

99 Van Auken (2016a: 35) notes that because the phrases *li ye* 禮也 and *fei li ye* 非禮也 pervade the entire text on all its levels, "these passages do not constitute a homogeneous group of commentarial remarks that share a common provenance, and it is not appropriate to treat them as a single category of commentarial passage in the *Zuǒ Tradition*." On the other hand, Chinese scholars such as Wang He 2011 or Zhao Guangxian 1987 treat the *li ye* / *fei li ye* comments as an external commentarial level of *Zuozhuan* directed at the *Chunqiu*, and hence—as they do with the "noble man" comments—as a later addition to the historical narrative.

identifiable formulaic (i.e., itself ritualized) discourse in its own right. Whether or not in some cases, this metatextual layer was already part of the source materials prior to their compilation into *Zuozhuan* seems difficult to ascertain.

In the account of the reign of Lord Wen, there are no fewer than fourteen instances of *li ye/fei li ye* and no fewer than thirty more mentions of *li*,[100] including another case of *wu li* 無禮 ("without ritual propriety"),[101] a remark on "the beginning of *li*" (*li zhi shi* 禮之始),[102] three instances where the "noble man" comments on *li*,[103] a lengthy discourse on *li*,[104] and, finally, a grand remonstration on *li*.[105] In addition, there are nine years in which the *Poetry* is invoked in either the narrative or by the "noble man";[106] and in eight years one finds the "noble man" either as a commentarial voice or characterized in the narrative.[107] There are three years with *li ye/fei li ye* statements that do not include references to the *Poetry*,[108] but altogether six years are completely without references to either the "noble man," *Poetry*, or metatextual *li ye/fei li ye* statements.[109] On the other hand, there are seven years that include all three elements.[110] In sum, within specific years of Lord Wen, there is a clear correlation between judgments on ritual propriety, references to the *Poetry*, and the "noble man." Wherever one of these three elements appears, the other two are likely to be there as well; and in six years, all three are absent all at the same time.

Finally, there is yet another metatextual layer that appears in dozens of entries across *Zuozhuan*, with considerable frequency in particular in the earlier reigns, namely, comments on why something was or was not recorded (*shu* 書 / *bu shu* 不書) in the *Chunqiu*, or why something was recorded in some

100 Wen 1.2, Wen 1.8, Wen 2.5, Wen 2.7, Wen 3.3, Wen 4.4, Wen 5.1, Wen 6.9, Wen 7.2, Wen 9.2, Wen 9.10, Wen 12.1, Wen 15.3, Wen 15.5. In addition, other pronouncements on *li* are Wen 6.3, Wen 6.4, Wen 6.8, Wen 7.8, Wen 8.6, Wen 15.4, Wen 15.11, Wen 18.7.

101 Wen 3.7.

102 Wen 2.7.

103 All in Wen 2.5.

104 Wen 15.11.

105 Wen 18.7.

106 Wen 1.9, Wen 2.1 (three poems), Wen 2.5 (two poems), Wen 3.4 (three poems), Wen 3.7 (two poems), Wen 4.4, Wen 4.6, Wen 4.7 (two poems) Wen 6.3 (two poems), Wen 7.4, Wen 10.5 (two poems), Wen 13.5 (four poems), Wen 15.11 (two poems).

107 Wen 1.5, Wen 2.1, Wen 2.5 (three times), Wen 3.4, Wen 4.4, Wen 4.6, Wen 6.3 (twice), Wen 7.3, Wen 13.3, Wen 15.11.

108 Wen 5, Wen 7, Wen 9, Wen 12; not counting the other passages expounding on *li* listed as such in Table 5.4.

109 Wen 8, Wen 11, Wen 14, Wen 16, Wen 17, Wen 18; not counting the other passages expounding on *li* listed as such in Table 5.4.

110 Wen 1, Wen 2, Wen 3, Wen 4, Wen 6, Wen 7, and Wen 15.

unusual way.[111] Statements in the *shu*/*bu shu* format are extremely frequent throughout the reign of Lord Wen, occurring in all but five years, and often multiple times within a given year.[112] These passages are the ones that create the closest relationship between *Zuozhuan* and the *Chunqiu*, as they are directly concerned with the textuality of the latter. This, too, is an expression of the ritual order: according to *Zuozhuan*—and even more explicitly *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳 and *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳—something is written (*shu* 書) or not written (*bu shu* 不書) in the *Chunqiu* according to the rules of ritual propriety, which rigorously govern the writing of history.[113] Overall, the extreme density of *shu*/*bu shu* statements in the account of Lord Wen correlates with the other metatextual layers already noted for Lord Wen's reign as a whole, though for individual years not nearly as clearly as the correspondences between the "noble man," the *Poetry*, and *li*. Table 5.4 displays the appearance of these various elements across the years of Lord Wen.

All these various elements operate on the self-referential meta-level of *Zuozhuan*: they invoke inherited texts; they introduce an explicit commentarial voice; they refer to the textuality of the *Chunqiu* based on formal norms regarding what is to be recorded and how; they comment on actions that are or are not "in accordance with ritual propriety." In most cases, a passage that includes one of these elements also includes one or more of the others. References to inherited texts, especially the *Poetry*, are therefore aligned with one or more of the commentarial functions with which *Zuozhuan* overlays the historical narrative proper. They belong primarily, in other words, to a rhetorical stratum of utterances that refer back to the textuality of *Zuozhuan* itself, that is, to the *narration of history* rather than to *narrated history*. This is not to exclude the possibility that in some cases, the *Zuozhuan* source materials already included poetic references, and the same is true for the other metatextual layers. However, the closely interlocking patterns of such references in the received text—or at a minimum in the reign of Lord Wen—suggests an active design by the *Zuozhuan* compilers.

111 This commentarial layer is discussed extensively in van Auken 2016a; for a tabular survey of all such passages see idem, 215–49.

112 Wen 2.2, Wen 2.3, Wen 2.4, Wen 2.6, Wen 6.6, Wen 7.3, Wen 7.5, Wen 8.4, Wen 8.6, Wen 9.2, Wen 9.6, Wen 9.10, Wen 12.1, Wen 12.2, Wen 12.7, Wen 13.4, Wen 14.1, Wen 14.12, Wen 14.13, Wen 15.2, Wen 15.4, Wen 15.6, Wen 15.9, Wen 16.5, Wen 17.1, Wen 17.4, Wen 18.5. A number of these passages contain more than one *shu* 書/*bu shu* statement.

113 See Gentz 2001 and 2005; Van Auken 2016a and 2023.

TABLE 5.4 Correlations between appearances of the "noble man," invocations of *Poetry*, references to "ritual" (*li*), and *shu/bu shu* comments in the account of Lord Wen

Years	"Noble man"	*Poetry*	"Ritual" (*li ye*/*fei li ye*)	*shu*/*bu shu*
1	1	1	2	
2	4	5	2 (+6 other pronouncements on *li*)	4
3	1	5	1 (+2 other pronouncements on *li*)	
4	2	4	1 (+1 other pronouncement on *li*)	
5			1	
6	2	2	1 (+4 other pronouncements on *li*)	1
7	1	1	1 (+2 other pronouncements on *li*)	2
8			(1 other pronouncement on *li*)	2
9			2 (+1 other pronouncement on *li*)	3
10		2		
11				
12			1	3
13	1	4		1
14				3
15	1	2	2 (+8 other pronouncements on *li*)	4
16			(1 other pronouncement on *li*)	1
17				2
18			(4 other pronouncements on *li*)	1

6 Three Case Studies from the Account of Lord Wen

In the following, I focus on a small selection of passages to illustrate the role of the "noble man" in relation to the use of the *Poetry* in the account of Lord Wen.

6.1 *Wen 1 (626 BCE): A Historical Actor Invokes the* Poetry

In the first year of Lord Wen, Lord Mu of Qin 秦穆公 (r. 659–621 BCE) quotes six lines from the "Major Court Hymn" "Sang rou" 桑柔 (*Mao Shi* 257), a poem also invoked twice elsewhere in *Zuozhuan* (Xiang 31.10, Zhao 24.9) as well as in *Guoyu* 國語 ("Zhouyu" 周語) and several times in other pre-imperial texts, though never with these lines.[114] Lord Mu of Qin quotes the six lines to

114 See Ho Che Wah and Chan Hung Kan 2004: 252–55. Two quotations from the poem appear in the same anecdote in *Guoyu* 3.3 ("Zhouyu, xia 周語下"); see Xu Yuangao 2002: 99.

exonerate his military commander, who had been defeated in battle, and to accuse himself instead:

> 大風有隧，貪人敗類。 聽言則對，誦言如醉。匪用其良，覆俾我悖。
>
> A great wind blows brisk,
> A greedy man thwarts the skilled.
> To words of hearsay he responds,
> But to recited words he is like a drunkard.
> He does not employ the good,
> But on the contrary causes us to go astray.
>
> WEN 1.9

This quotation, followed by Lord Mu's identification of himself as the "greedy" (*tan* 貪) one, is more than a ruler's self-incrimination over a military defeat. It expresses a core rhetorical principle of the *Zuozhuan* narrative that every perceptive reader of the text learns quickly: those in power who heed their capable advisors will succeed, while those who do not are bound to face disaster. "Recited words" (*song yan* 誦言) of inherited texts are what advisors and ministers use when remonstrating; when here, Lord Mu—now using "recited words" from the *Poetry* himself!—laments his failure to heed "recited words," he realizes the logic of history in which *Zuozhuan* readers are being trained all along.[115] And there is more: in David Schaberg's observation, "If, as the evidence indicates, the *Zuozhuan* originated in a ministerial class, such representations of ministerial wisdom would serve clear interests," and "the historiographers … could not have failed to recognize what they had in common with the men whose deeds they were commemorating."[116] Lord Mu of Qin, in other words, is shown as being aware of what awaits someone who acts to recited words like he is drunk—and preempts his fate by *reciting* his failure to listen to recitation, that is, the expression of inherited wisdom. Such an anecdote does not need

115 Michael Hunter (personal communication) offers another reading of the line *song yan ru zui* 誦言如醉: "from words of eulogy he is like drunk," meaning, Lord Mu delights in being flattered. This reading, which is possible but not imperative, would lack the reference to remonstrance through recitation that I see in Lord Mu's words. *Song* 誦 (to recite, recitation) can be read as the homophonous *song* 頌 (to eulogize, eulogy) but does not need to be that way; the early commentary by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) understands *song yan* as the words recited from the *Poetry* and the *Documents*; see Wang Xianqian 1987: 950–51.

116 Schaberg 2001: 194, 257.

the "noble man's" comment; it provides its own auto-commentary on ritual propriety, the failure to heed good advice from the ministerial "noble men," and the use of the *Poetry*.[117]

6.2 *Wen 4 (623 BCE): Ritual,* Poetry *and the "Noble Man"*

In the account of the fourth year of Lord Wen,[118] much of the narrative is driven by the "noble man's" comment. The entries 4.2–4.4 of the *Chunqiu* note:

> 4.2: 夏，逆婦姜于齊。
>
> In summer, someone went to meet and escort home our lord's wife, Jiang, from Qi.
>
> 4.3: 狄侵齊。
>
> The Di invaded Qi.
>
> 4.4: 秋，楚人滅江。
>
> In autumn, a Chu leader extinguished Jiang.

On the first of these lines, *Zuozhuan* elaborates:

> "逆婦姜于齊"，卿不行，非禮也。君子是以知出姜之不允於魯也，曰:貴聘而賤逆之，君而卑之，立而廢之，棄信而壞其主。在國必亂，在家必亡，不允宜哉。詩曰:
>
> 畏天之威，于時保之。敬主之謂也。

"Someone went to meet and escort home our lord's wife, Jiang, from Qi," but the ministers did not go: this was not in accordance with ritual

117 What perhaps made Lord Mu of Qin an exemplary figure for such self-criticism is the great complexity with which he appears in early sources: he is the only Qin ruler who is given some agency in *Zuozhuan*, which otherwise largely ignores Qin affairs; he is both praised and criticized in the "noble man" comments; he is the only pre-Warring States Qin ruler also well-known from the broader corpus of early texts; and the poem "Huang niao" 黃鳥 (*Mao Shi* 131) is famously said to have been composed to deplore the fact that three nobles of Qin followed him into his grave (Wen 6.3). Interestingly, even if unrelated to *Zuozhuan*, since Han times Lord Mu is also identified as the author of "Qin's Harangue" ("Qin shi" 秦誓), the only Qin-related canonical *Document*, although only certain fragments of the much shorter version in *Shiji* 5: 194 match the *Documents* text.

118 Sections Wen 4.1–6.

> propriety. The noble man thus understood that Chu Jiang ("Departing Jiang") would not end well in Lu.[119] He said: "To formalize an engagement with a woman by means of elevated ceremony but to welcome her in a demeaning fashion is to recognize her as our lord's wife and then humiliate her; it is to establish her and then reject her; it is to cast aside good faith and ruin its basis. In a domain this must bring about rebellion; in a family this must bring about destruction. For her not to end well would be fitting. As it says in the *Poetry*,
>
> Fear the majesty of Heaven
> And thereby preserve Heaven's blessings.
> It is speaking of respecting the basis of trust."
>
> WEN 4.4, quoting *Mao Shi* 272, "Wo jiang" 我將

Altogether, the entire entry preceding the introduction of the "noble man" consists of nothing more than a statement on the lack of ritual propriety, which is not part of the historical narrative but a comment on that narrative; and it is this comment that then triggers the "noble man's" further elaboration, quotation of the *Poetry*, and ambiguous conclusion.

After a brief interlude on an unrelated matter (prompted by another line in the *Chunqiu*), the text turns to a topic from the previous year, now showing how Lord Mu of Qin had "exceeded [ritual] regulations" (*guo shu* 過數) in his mourning. This passage is once again capped by a "noble man" comment, which now consists of nothing but a *Poetry* quotation followed by a laconic affirmation to acknowledge Lord Mu's observation of his kinship ties:

> 惟彼二國，其政不獲。惟此四國，爰究爰度。其秦穆之謂矣。
>
> It was those two domains
> Whose government did not succeed.
> It was the domains on all four sides
> Which then took stock, which then took measure.
> Surely this is speaking of Lord Mu of Qin.
>
> WEN 4.6, quoting *Mao Shi* 241, "Huang yi" 皇矣

119 In 609 BCE, following Lord Wen's death, his uncle, Gongzi Sui 公子遂 (aka Dongmen Xiangzhong 東門襄仲), killed two of Lady Jiang's sons, establishing in their place his protégé, the future Lord Xuan of Lu. Thereafter, Lady Jiang mournfully departed from Lu (she is called in *Zuozhuan* "Mourning Jiang" 哀姜 [Wen 18.6]). Perhaps the "noble man's" ambiguity is related to the odd prediction that somehow implies Lady Jiang's fault ("For her not to end well would be fitting") when in fact she was the victim of a murderous plot in which two of her sons were killed.

One might well ask: what does all this mean? What is the "noble man" doing here? When encountering *Poetry* quotations or the laconic mention of particular *Poetry* titles that were recited on some occasion, we generally proceed from the assumption that the respective poem or stanza in some way explains or confirms the narrative anecdote in which it occurs or to which it is attached. Sometimes we do seem to understand the connection; sometimes we guess; sometimes we have no idea. Creative interpreters have excelled at making entirely obscure references or quotations say *what they should be saying* under the circumstances—but did they really say that?[120]

In the *Mao Shi* reading, "Huang yi" praises the Zhou dynasty and its success—in particular the virtue of the founding Zhou King Wen 文—after the previous two dynasties of Xia 夏 and Shang 商 had each failed. Yet commentators have provided two quite different readings of the couplet regarding "the domains on all four sides": in one—on which the above translation is based—it is these domains or states that, in response to the earlier failures of Xia and Shang, now critically examine their own political measures in order to win the hearts of the people.[121] But this is not the common reading in the *Mao Shi* tradition. Here, it is Lord-on-High (*shangdi* 上帝)—the unambiguous subject of the entire stanza—who examines and measures the various states in search for a new polity that may bring peace to the people, and who then settles on the virtuous Western state of Zhou and its King Wen 文.[122] In other words, the claim that the "noble man," in quoting these four lines, compares the critical self-examination of Lord Mu of Qin to that of the rulers of the earlier "four domains" is entirely based on the early *Zuozhuan* interpretation which, however, not only departs from the even earlier interpretation of the poem by Mao 毛 and Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) but does so by decontextualizing these four lines from their place in the stanza, where Lord-on-High acts as the single agent. As a result, the translation above with "It was the domains on all four sides / Which then took stock, which then took measure" translates the *Zuozhuan* commentary, not the *Mao Shi* poem (and not even the *Mao Shi* commentary).

This practice is, in fact, rooted in *Zuozhuan* itself, enshrined in the famous statement of one otherwise obscure Lupu Gui 盧蒲癸 who declared "Just as one breaks off stanzas when reciting the *Poetry* 賦詩斷章, I take what I seek,"[123]

120 Others have raised this problem before; see Liu Lizhi 2001: 40.

121 This is the reading beginning with the early canonical *Zuozhuan* commentaries by Du Yu 杜預 (222–284) and Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648); see *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi* 1840c (18: 20a in the 1815 traditional woodblock print edition), Yang Bojun 1992: 534–35.

122 See the *Mao Shi* commentary in Wang Xianqian 1987: 852–53.

123 Xiang 28.9. Lupu Gui also makes brief (and utterly nondescript) appearances in Xiang 23.4 and 25.2.

suggesting that it was standard practice to decontextualize *Poetry* quotations to make them fit the occasion. Cleverly leaving out the initial two couplets that precede the four lines in "Huang yi," the "noble man" got rid of the agency of "Lord-on-High"—or at least, this is what the early *Zuozhuan* commentators thought.

But what would happen if we reversed our approach, leaving behind Han and later commentaries while treating the seemingly easy-to-understand cases as accidental and the non-transparent ones as the norm? In the passage under discussion, we are left wondering whether the first quotation from the *Poetry* expresses respect "for the ruler" or "for the basis of trust," and why. Then the "noble man" reappears, quotes another poem and presents his laconic commentary on that quotation: "Surely this is speaking of Lord Mu of Qin." But why would a quotation from one of the most-cited "Major Court Hymns,"[124] dedicated to the praise of the early Zhou kings of the eleventh century BCE who had received the approval of Lord-on-high, be acceptable as speaking about Lord Mu of Qin? Why would the "noble man" create a puzzle in quoting the poem in one breath—apparently by "breaking off" part of a stanza to generate an entirely new meaning—and then commenting on this very quotation in the next?

There is a distinct possibility that we are asking the wrong questions. The cascading ambiguities in this brief section of *Zuozhuan* are not a textual deficiency. Had the ancient compilers wished to provide a clear, easy-to-understand account, they could have easily done so. But they didn't, which suggests a different set of questions: under what conditions did this text make sense, how, and to whom? And if its purpose was evidently not to provide a simple, clear account of history, what was it instead?

Our interpretative failures are not merely due to our own distance from the ancient text; Chinese scholars since the Han found it necessary to write commentaries on *Zuozhuan*. But what if the text was never meant to function in an environment of individual silent readers who could make sense of it just by resorting to their own devices of perception and interpretation? What if its enigmas were meant to be cherished and explored in didactic contexts where teachers asked their students to explore the very practice of trying to make sense of the text, and thus to mimetically trace and emulate the "noble man's" textual learning and cultivation? What if the text was not merely an object of study but the very means by which an interpretative community agreed on *how* to make sense of the cultural patterns of history? If we assume that the passages

124 See Ho Che Wah and Chan Hung Kan 2004: 214–17. While the poem is otherwise widely quoted, the particular four lines from the first stanza of "Huang yi" cited here appear in no other pre-Qin text.

in Wen 4 did not just stand by themselves, and hence were not directed at some anonymous reader removed in space and time, but were fully functional within an intellectual community, what were they about back then? The facts of history cannot have been the principal target; these would have been supplied more easily, unambiguously, and comprehensively in a different fashion. Instead, passages such as this one from Lord Wen's reign shift the emphasis to something quite different: how to invoke the ancient *Poetry* for the reading of history, how to submit the interpretation of history to the moral and cultural paradigms captured in the poetry of the past, and how to become a "noble man" as a master of textual learning and ritual practice, that is, culture. Twice in this passage, the "noble man" quotes the *Poetry* in some obscure way only to make it more obscure with his concluding comment. Here, it is not the text that narrates or explains history. It is history, presented in ways that cannot succeed without further instruction, that serves as a means to hone the practices of learning, and for which the "noble man" is presented as an authority for how to think and how to talk about history through the encoded idiom of poetry, the idiom of ritual propriety. Like the Confucius in the *Kongzi shilun* manuscript text, the "noble man's" interest in inherited poems lies not in their historical origin (anachronistic or not) but in demonstrating, in a quasi-dramatic actualization of specific poetic lines, the *Poetry*'s hermeneutic potential toward the moral evaluation of history. The "noble man's" auto-commentary on his own poetic quotation—a gesture repeated in several other passages for the years of Lord Wen—stages the poem together with its interpreter.

6.3 *Wen 2 (625 BCE): Inherited Texts Invoked by Historical Actors and the "Noble Man"*

The appeal to be like a "noble man" is itself expressed in another lengthy passage across almost the entire series of entries for the second year of Lord Wen that involves repeated quotations of passages from the *Poetry*. The passage begins with an analeptic account, including a series of speeches, of a battle at Yao 殽 that the Qin army had lost earlier, where a certain Lang Shen 狼瞫 of Jin—who appears nowhere else in *Zuozhuan* and thus remains entirely unknown to the reader—proved both courageous in battle and loyal to his ruler even when he got "angry" (*nu* 怒) over an unjust demotion. When encouraged to rebel, the obscure and yet learned Lang Shen immediately recites a passage from "the Records of Zhou" ("Zhou zhi" 周志), a *Documents*-style inherited text unknown to the later tradition: "A man of courage who harms his superior will not ascend to the Hall of Brightness" 勇則害上，不登於明堂.[125] After Lang Shen had finally perished in battle, the "noble man" begins to comment:

125 Wen 2.1a.

君子謂狼瞫於是乎君子。詩曰:
君子如怒，亂庶遄沮。
又曰:
王赫斯怒，爰整其旅。
怒不作亂而以從師可謂君子矣。

The noble man said: "In his action Lang Shen behaved as a noble man. As it says in the *Poetry*:
'If the noble man shows anger,
rebellion surely will quickly be quelled.'
Again it says:
'The king blazed up in anger
and then put his troops in order.'
He whose anger does not foment rebellion but is used to serve the troops can indeed be called a noble man."

WEN 2.1b, quoting *Mao Shi* 198, "Qiao yan" 巧言, and *Mao Shi* 241, "Huang yi" 皇矣

This brief passage revolves around two key terms: first, the word "anger" (*nu* 怒). The term first appears in the description of Lang Shen after he had been demoted, and it then triggers the "noble man's" choice of *Poetry* quotations, which echo precisely what was already said in the prose account preceding them. They do not contribute anything to the "noble man's" analysis but simply rephrase Lang Shen's action in the words from the *Poetry*. Unlike in Wen 4, these quotations do not introduce an element of ambiguity but merely restate the obvious by invoking the "noble man's" command of tradition.

Second, and more important, is the designation of the "noble man" itself. This designation appears on three levels: first, it is the "noble man" who comments on the historical event in *Zuozhuan*; second, within this comment, Lang Shen is twice lauded for being a "noble man" himself, a characterization strongly enhanced by his mastery of the inherited past and ability to quote its hallowed texts (in this case, the "Records of Zhou"); and third, the "noble man" appears in the first of the *Poetry* quotations within the "noble man's" comment. This staging of what defines the "noble man," now embedded into the "noble man's" own comment, is thus entirely self-referential: the "noble man" who delivers his comment shares his identity with both Lang Shen and the "noble man" in the *Poetry*.

The anecdote looks back to an account of the military confrontation between Qin and Jin two years earlier,[126] and now elaborates on another battle between them that is mentioned in the *Chunqiu* entry for Lord Wen ("In the second

126 Xi 33.3.

year, in spring, in the royal second month, on the *jiazi* day, the Prince of Jin did battle with the Qin army at Pengya. The Qin troops were completely defeated" 二年春王二月甲子，晉侯及秦師戰于彭衙，秦師敗績).[127] While mentioning again some of the historical actors who had appeared in the earlier narrative, the anecdote in the second year of Lord Wen is focused entirely on Lang Shen who is not mentioned in the *Chunqiu*, whose actual role for the overall success of Jin's victory remains unclear, and who died in the battle at Pengya. Lang Shen is one of those figures who briefly appear only once in *Zuozhuan* but are otherwise entirely unknown. But why does Lang Shen appear just here, and just once, in the first place?

On closer examination it appears that the details of this anecdote in the second year of Lord Wen are entirely dispensable but for a single purpose: they provide the "noble man" with the occasion to expound on virtue and loyalty even in a moment of injustice and anger. In other words, I read this anecdote as one where the relation between text and commentary is reversed: it is not the case that a pre-existing text would require the "noble man's" commentary (which adds nothing in terms of clarification); instead, for the "noble man" to be staged in his particular function, including his command of tradition, he is furnished with a matching anecdote to expound upon, complete with the protagonist's own quotation of an inherited text. In short, it is the "commentary" that is the "primary text."

The account of the second year of Lord Wen then continues along the same lines. First, another historical actor quotes yet another couplet from the *Poetry* to cap an argument about virtue;[128] next, over the following sequence of brief anecdotes, a series of metatextual comments are made on the *Chunqiu*;[129] and third, an extensive discussion about ritual propriety ensues from an entry in the *Chunqiu*:

> 八月丁卯，大事于大廟，躋僖公。
>
> In the eight month, on the *dingmao* day, a great affair was undertaken in the Grand Ancestral Temple. We elevated the tablet of Lord Xi above that of Lord Min.
>
> *Chunqiu*, WEN 2.6

To this, *Zuozhuan* offers the following elaboration:

127 Wen 2.1.
128 Wen 2.1; *Mao Shi* 235, "Wen wang" 文王.
129 Wen 2.2–2.4.

秋，八月丁卯，大事於太廟，躋僖公，逆祀也。於是夏父弗忌為宗伯，尊僖公，且明見曰:吾見新鬼大，故鬼小。先大後小，順也。躋聖賢，明也。明、順，禮也。

In autumn, in the eighth month, on the *dingmao* day, a great affair was undertaken in the Grand Ancestral Temple. We elevated the tablet of Lord Xi above that of Lord Min: this violated the order of sacrifices. At this time Xiafu Fuji was the master of ritual. He did reverence to Lord Xi, and then he declared what he had seen: "I saw that the new ghost is larger and the old ghost is smaller. To put the larger first and the smaller last is to follow the right order. To elevate sages and worthies is wise. To be wise and follow the right order is in accordance with ritual propriety."

WEN 2.5

This is the first and only time Xiafu Fuji makes an appearance in *Zuozhuan*; just like Lang Sheng before, beyond this single event, he does not appear to have been a figure of any historical consequence. His proposal to elevate Lord Xi (father of Lord Wen) over the previous Lord Min (uncle of Lord Wen), however, does not meet the "noble man's" approval, giving rise to a statement that not only refutes Xiafu Fuji but does so with far grander rhetoric—and thus, by the logic of *Zuozhuan* where the virtuous tend to be the superior speakers, holds the superior claim to being right:

君子以為失禮:禮無不順。祀，國之大事也，而逆之，可謂禮乎？子雖齊聖，不先父食久矣。故禹不先鯀，湯不先契，文、武不先不窋。宋祖帝乙，鄭祖厲王，猶上祖也。是以《魯頌》曰:

春秋匪解，
享祀不忒，
皇皇后帝，
皇祖后稷。

君子曰禮，謂其后稷親而先帝也。《詩》曰:

問我諸姑，
遂及伯姊。

君子曰禮，謂其姊親而先姑也。

The noble man considered this a deviation from ritual propriety: "In the performance of ritual there is nothing that does not follow the right order. Sacrifices are among the great affairs of a domain. Can it be called ritual propriety to violate the right sacrificial order? Even when a son is perceptive and sagacious, it is longstanding tradition that he does not

> precede his father in imbibing sacrifices. That is why Yu was not placed before Gun, Tang was not placed before Xie, and Kings Wen and Wu were not placed before Buku. Song traces its ancestry to Emperor Yi and Zheng traces its ancestry to King Li, and they still esteem their first ancestor. That is the reason it says in a Lu hymn,
>
> Not taking our ease in spring and autumn,
> We offer sacrifices without error.
> To the greatly august sovereign god on high,
> To the august ancestor Lord Millet.
>
> When the noble man calls this 'proper ritual,' he is saying that Lord Millet may be closer kin, but the god on high is placed before him. As it says in the *Poetry*,
>
> I will make inquiries of my paternal aunts
> And then I will come to my elder sisters."
>
> When the noble man calls this 'proper ritual,' he is saying that older sisters may be closer kin, but paternal aunts are placed before them.
>
> WEN 2.5, quoting *Mao Shi* 300, "Bi gong" 閟宮, and *Mao Shi* 39, "Quan shui" 泉水

Let us try to unpack this. The misplaced tablets in the ancestral temple were a matter serious enough to be mentioned in the *Chunqiu* and to be further explained in *Zuozhuan*, where the Lu master of ritual—apparently a man of fleeting significance—is even granted his own speech and claim to ritual propriety. Yet this *Zuozhuan* passage is but a fraction of what follows in the deliberation of the "noble man"—so much so that one may wonder if Xiafu Fuji would have ever made it into the text were it not for preparing the stage for the "noble man." Just as in some cases, the two layers of historical narrative and metatextual comment are interwoven with one another—suggesting that they cannot be chronologically stratified—here it appears that the "noble man's" commentary is of principal importance, with Xiafu Fuji's brief speech merely serving as a prompt or a pretext:

First, the "noble man" sets the record straight on the principles of ritual propriety and the inviolability of the correct sacrificial order. Next, to support his case, he delivers a grand tutorial on historical precedents beginning in remote antiquity that would have been part of any "noble man's" ideal education. Then he appropriately cites an ancestral hymn from the state of Lu; then he offers a brief comment on what it means when the "noble man" speaks of ritual, followed by another *Poetry* quotation; and finally, he caps his speech by yet another explanation on what it means when the "noble man" speaks of ritual. In other words, the "noble man" performs an auto-commentary on his own speech not once but twice, each time after quoting from the *Poetry*.

A master of both historical precedent and the poetic tradition, he commands the stage where he declares with authority what is and isn't the way of ritual propriety.[130] In this, the "noble man" never utters a first-person pronoun, let alone an expression of individual emotion—to the extent that it is impossible to decide with confidence on where to put quotation marks around his speech. His authority does not rest in his personality or voice; it is an exemplary authority that cannot be questioned.[131]

7 Concluding Remarks

Within all of *Zuozhuan*, the account of Lord Wen appears exceptional in its intensity of metatextual devices relative to its narrative substance. Perhaps it is simply an example of a particular cluster of such devices, similar to the clusters of commentarial passages found elsewhere in the text.[132] Perhaps some of these devices were adopted first by the writers or compilers of the Lu or Jin anecdotal histories (which provide the bulk of materials for Lord Wen's years) and then expanded by the *Zuozhuan* compilers. Perhaps the latter saw it fit to insert more metatextual passages into a section that, unlike the previous one on Lord Xi or the subsequent ones on Lords Xuan, Cheng, Xiang, and Zhao, is relatively devoid of major narratives of battles and coups. Perhaps the rule of Lord Wen, "the cultured one" (*wen* 文), was felt by the compilers to be the ideal place to stage the "noble man" in all his dimensions (poetry, commentary, command of ritual, moral rectitude). Perhaps there is a bit of all of these explanations, some of them, or none of them.[133] Whatever the answer, the account of Lord Wen throws into sharp relief the idea of the "noble man" and the potential to take him as a model—an ideal that surely radiated across the

130 In a somewhat bizarre move, the "noble man" comment is immediately followed by a lengthy "Confucius" ("Zhongni") comment of no relationship at all with either the anecdote or the words of the "noble man." Hermeneutic acrobatics by various commentators aside, perhaps someone, at some point, had this comment of thirty-eight graphs lying around somewhere in his mess of bamboo slips and fixed it to the Wen 2.5 passage simply to add further weight to the "noble man" comment. Whatever the case, the "Zhongni" words are utterly dysfunctional here.

131 In being entirely impersonal, the "noble man" thus differs fundamentally from Sima Qian, who is represented in the highly emotional—if also largely formulaic—*taishi gong yue* 太史公曰 ("the grand lord archivist said") comments in the *Shiji* that are often seen in the continuity of the earlier *junzi yue* statements in *Zuozhuan*. For the *taishi gong yue* comments, see Kern: forthcoming.

132 For the latter clusters, see Van Auken 2016a.

133 I thank Yuri Pines for helping me to think through the various possible explanations.

entire *Zuozhuan*. In this sense we might consider the Lord Wen section not as representative but as exemplary.

Be that as it may, *Zuozhuan* is well recognized as a highly complex text full of ruptures, discontinuities, and internal contradictions that defies any singular approach to define its purpose and meaning. The present essay is not intended to propose a harmonizing or unifying way of reading that makes all of *Zuozhuan* fall neatly into place. As noted by Blakeley, "every segment, even utterance, in the text must be judged independently."[134] Yet while there exists no credible path toward success in doing so, the time of grand statements about *Zuozhuan* as a whole, in all its elements and dimensions, is long over. Thus, I do not have to offer a new grand theory on reading *Zuozhuan*. In fact, even the ninety comments by the "noble man," spread out over 255 years, are marginal to the text on the whole. What I do wish to suggest, however, is the following: too often, modern readings of *Zuozhuan* are guided by assumptions and expectations about how the text is supposed to "make sense" as a reliable historical source, and how to overcome the hermeneutical conundrums it presents in the process. As an alternative, I suggest that a more productive reading is one that pays the closest possible attention to the rhetoric of historiography, and that takes passages that resist immediate understanding not as problems but as opportunities. If a particular passage—or an entire layer of *Zuozhuan*—just does not "make sense" to us, we may simply be asking the wrong questions. I suspect that the ancients knew full well—far better than we do today—that the different layers of text and commentary sometimes flow into one another, that the use of the *Poetry* and other inherited texts could be activated for widely different purposes and in profoundly different ways, and that the figure of the "noble man" was a textual function often more confounding than explanatory. They knew all this precisely because these features called upon practices of textual engagement—both communal and didactic—that are no longer ours. When we read that someone recited a particular poem, I do not think that the ancients necessarily knew, or claimed to know, what exactly was recited; but they certainly understood what kind of education, in the sense of humanistic *Bildung*, was asked of them in order to explore the hermeneutic possibilities that such recitation created. With this, I posit that in preimperial times *Zuozhuan* was at least as much a pedagogical tool to hone one's skills in moral conduct, *Poetry* learning, oratory, and reading the signs of human behavior as it was a source of historical knowledge. A *Zuozhuan* taken in strict isolation far too often fails to explain itself; it cannot have been conceived as intrinsically coherent or self-evident. Instead, it may have grown in the form we have it through multiple different forms of textual compilation,

134 Blakeley 2004: 264, quoted in Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016: xxxi.

performance, and usage in didactic contexts where its hermeneutic challenges were the very challenges and means by which one learned, instructed by one's elders and guided by one's peers, how to become a "noble man."

In this reading, *Zuozhuan* is ultimately a theatrical text, a spectacle that in its various metatextual layers stages the acts of interpretation that it demands of its audience. Its meaning does not rest self-sufficiently in itself, nor is the text—at least not as a whole—designed to offer a transparent, positivistic account of history. Instead, from the very beginning its semiotic system appears to have been distributed between and across its different textual layers, including those that are obviously metatextual and self-referential, but also between the text and its audience. Before the empire, in circumstances unknown to us, the text must have belonged, and was composed, activated, and curated, in a particular intellectual community that also had access to a wider range of other inherited texts.[135] This *Zuozhuan* was part of a discourse and of a repertoire of diverse materials and textual practices, some of which are still reflected in the textual function of the "noble man" and the different ways in which the *Poetry* is being activated for the generation of moral and cultural meaning out of historical narratives. With the early empire, when *Zuozhuan* left its place of origin and became reified as an object of bookish textual study at the imperial court, it required new forms and sets of explanations. Not despite, but precisely because of, its hermeneutic demands and lingering uncertainties, it finally became its own classic to which further commentaries, and then subcommentaries, were affixed.

The preimperial *Zuozhuan* could not have existed outside the contextualizing discursive practices of the communities that curated it as a shared mirror of both history and moral aspirations. For example, what would have been the point of putting up references to people and situations that nobody would be able to recognize from the text itself? What would a figure like the above-mentioned Lang Shen mean? Such an example suggests that the text was organized in ways that reveal its gaps and ambiguities as challenges to be met with commensurate procedures of exploration and discovery. Meaning was not erased but visibly shrouded, to be unveiled through the sublime understanding (*zhi* 知) of a "noble man" outside the text who, in mimetic and sympathetic acts of reading, could meet, appropriate, impersonate, and transform the "noble man" within the text. It is precisely the discontinuous narrative structure—and the profoundly polyvocal nature and structure of the "noble man" persona—that brings this dialectic of conspicuous concealment and always incomplete revelation into view. What makes *Zuozhuan* so interesting and indeed inexhaustible is how this dialectic is already inscribed into

135 See the contribution by David Schaberg to the present volume.

its different textual layers: the abundance of references to inherited texts; the discourse on ritual propriety not only of human action but also, in the *shu*/*bu shu* comments, of textual composition; and a "noble man" who appears not merely as an external commentator but also as someone who is lauded by both the historical actors and "Confucius" and theatrically configured as *Zuozhuan*'s cultured, perceptive, and moral reader of history as a system of signs. Unlike the historical actors in *Zuozhuan* whose actions unfold under specific historic circumstances, the "noble man" stands outside of time entirely, ready to be emulated by every aspiring future reader.

Let me conclude with the epilog of the *Gongyang zhuan*:

> 君子曷為為《春秋》？撥亂世，反諸正，莫近諸《春秋》，則未知其為是與？其諸君子樂道堯舜之道與？末不亦樂乎堯舜之知君子也？制《春秋》之義，以俟後聖，以君子之為亦有樂乎此也。
>
> Why did the noble man make the *Springs and Autumns*? Given that, in order to bring order to an age of chaos and to return it to correctness, nothing comes even close to the *Springs and Autumns*, would it be that he made it for this reason? Or was it because, as a noble man, he delighted in speaking of the Way of Yao and Shun? Or, finally, was it not because he was delighted that [future sages like] Yao and Shun would recognize the noble man?[136] When establishing the right principle of the *Springs and Autumns* in order to await [his recognition by] later sages, this surely is what a noble man would delight in.[137]

As I have discussed on another occasion, it would be tempting but perhaps too hasty to identify the "noble man" here with the historical Confucius.[138] What is not in question, however, is how the "noble man" is presented here: as the one who awaits posterity to be recognized and echoed in his perspicacious delight in antiquity, in learning, and in the reading of history past and present.

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136 In reading this difficult sentence, I follow Malmqvist (1971: 218–19), Gentz (2001: 90), and Li (2007: 412) who take the sentence to express the hope that future sages in the mold of Yao and Shun will recognize the author of the *Springs and Autumns*. Pines suggests a different translation, namely, that it was "to recognize the noble man as Yao recognized Shun," i.e., that a virtuous ruler will recognize "Confucius" or another "noble man" to be deserving the throne. For Pines's view of Yao's selection and elevation of Shun see Pines 2005: 273.

137 *Gongyang zhuan*, Ai 14.1 (Liu Shangci 2011: 650). On the "noble man's" delight, see note 62 above; Shun 2017.

138 Kern 2018a: 278–80.

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