

Pseudo-Hermit Exposes Pseudo-Hermit



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I have but little left of life now; I approach nearer and nearer to the peak of death, as the moon slides down the sky toward the mountain top. Just as I am about to start for the dark land of death, how should I trouble myself with earthly cares? The teaching of Buddha is to love no earthly things. It would be a sin even to love this mossy cottage; it might also be an obstruction in the way of salvation, should I repose on the lap of tranquillity. Woe to them who waste their time wallowing in pleasures of no value!

One still morning when I was sunk in meditation over this, I asked myself: “To escape from the world and live among woods and hills is only to set one’s mind at ease and practice one’s principles. And yet you, although you look like a sage, have an impure mind. Your conduct is even inferior to that of Shuribandoku, though your hut resembles that of Jyomyokoji. Is it the effect of poverty that troubles you? Or is it the influence of impurity that makes you mad?”

I could answer nothing to the question, but said prayers twice or thrice for mere form’s sake.

—Kamo no Chōmei, *Hōjōki*, final passage, Translation T. Kusajima

After graduating from university, the lockdowns continue. I idled away a year by the riverside near the mountains in Hangzhou. Then, come summer, I returned home. In July, after being with us for a decade, Xiaomei died. By early autumn in September, urged by family, I went to study in Belgium. There was hardly any particular reason for the choice, when asked, I’d say it was because of “randomness” or my old admiration for the Flemish primitives. Over the past two-plus years, I’ve learned almost nothing, nor done anything noteworthy. The only anecdote fit for joking among half-acquaintances is perhaps that I slept in a tent in the living room for two years.

Regret, once such thing is spoken aloud, it becomes dull. It shifts from a simple, comical action to a kind of gimmick—done just to be talked about. Indeed in the end, it largely self-verified just as such. Yet initially the reason was simple: the apartment I finally rented was terribly rundown, covered in grime, walls moldy, floors rotten, filth accumulated in the gaps, and miniature stalactite-like formations hanging from the ceiling—such that the place felt more like a street corner or raw nature, devoid of privacy or security. Additionally, buying a bed was expensive and cumbersome, and there were constant mosquitoes, thus I settled on the cheapest tent I could find to move in.

During that time, I frequently pondered the idea of hermits. Sleeping in a small tent, in a spacious old room in a foreign country, sensing all those vague or concrete layers of distance and thickness, reminded me of numerous details about hermit legends. Personal experiences, and observation of the absurdities and tragedies of the time, fueled my recent interest in Buddhism and nature. Sometimes, I even imagine myself as the most ludicrous kind of hermit. My recent creations all loosely relate to these themes: the randomness of fate and the abruptness of death, interpretation of causality and emotion, relations and conflicts between subject and object, visible and the hidden. They revolve around this simple question: Who is a hermit? What motives, what environment, what conditions?

A hermit stands on the edge of general productive society, lifted from the vexations of wealth and fame, using keen, innovative wisdom, simple comedic actions, and powerful silence to resist the mechanical operations of the mundane and heartless. Sometimes assuming other names, they engage in such movements: countering systems through randomness, fighting efficiency through invalidity.

The beauty of a hermit's spirit is that of detaching, clarity, and purity. It has been ceaselessly observed, imagined, and praised. There have always been those who become hermits, and there have always been those finding them:

In China, the motif of Zhaoyin (Seeking Hermits) was established two thousand years ago and thrives ever since, it depicts the process of venturing into the mountains to find a hermit:

杖策招隐士，荒涂横古今。
Holding a staff seeking hermit,
the desolate path spans ancient to present.
岩穴无结构，丘中有鸣琴。
Cave dwellings devoid of structure,
within the hills, a zither sounds.
白云停阴冈，丹葩曜阳林。
White clouds rest on shady ridges,
crimson blossoms shine in sunny woods.
石泉漱琼瑶，纤鳞或浮沉。
Stone springs rinse jade and jewels,
slender fish float or dive.
非必丝与竹，山水有清音。
No need for strings or flutes,
mountains and rivers have clean sounds.
何事待啸歌，灌木自悲吟。
Why wait for whistling or singing?
Shrubs themselves mournfully hum.
秋菊兼糗粮，幽兰间重襟。
Autumn chrysanthemums serve as rations,
hidden orchids adorn layered robes.

踟躇足力烦，聊欲投吾簪。
Hesitating, the weary legs grow restless;
there's inclination to cast away hairpin.

—Zuo Si, *Zhaoyin*, 3rd century, Western Jin Dynasty

郊原雨初霁，春物有馀妍。
In the countryside, rain has just cleared;
spring's things retain their lingering beauty.
古寺满修竹，深林闻杜鹃。
The ancient temple is filled with lean bamboo;
in the deep forest, cuckoos are heard.
睡馀柳花堕，目眩山樱然。
After a nap, willow blossoms fall;
gazing upon them, mountain cherries dazzling the eyes.
西窗有病客，危坐看香烟。
By the west window sits a sick guest,
straight-backed, watching incense smoke.
行歌白云岭，坐咏修竹林。
Walking and singing on the white-cloud ridge;
sitting and chanting amidst the tall bamboo grove.
风轻花自落，日薄山半阴。
The wind is gentle, flowers fall naturally;
the sun wanes, leaving the mountain half in shadow.
涧草谁复识，闻香杳难寻。
Who now recognizes the grass by the stream?
The fragrance is faint, hard to trace.
时见城市人，幽居惜未深。
At times, the city men are seen;
a pity, the secluded retreat is yet not deep.

—Su Shi, *Two Poems on Roaming Crane Forest Zhaoyin*,
11th century, Song Dynasty

These poems omit the subject, yet the omitted narrator is conspicuously revealed. This poet praising the hermit's life is not the hermit himself, but a visitor. His behavior is perplexing: was he invited, or did he arrive unbidden? Would this private-living hermit welcome the dwelling being shown to us in this manner? In the final line of the second poem, this “city man” intruding on the mountain's stillness faintly mentioned such contradictions. Just as the ending of Taohuayuan Ji (Record of the Peach Blossom Spring) suggests, outside observation negates one's seclusion. Similarly:

Han Kang, styled Boxiu, from Baling in Jingzhao. Often roamed famous mountains, gathering medicinal herbs to sell in Chang'an's marketplace. For more than thirty years, he never bargained over his price. One time, a woman buying herbs from him grew angry at his fixed price and said: “Are you Han Boxiu, insisting on no haggling?” Han sighed: “I wished to hide name, but now even a housewife knows me. What's the point of selling herbs here?” He then withdrew into the Baling mountains.

—Hangfu Mi, *Gao Shi Zhuan*

The invasion of visitors upon the hermit's territory never stopped. Today, it at times appears in more absurd forms. Four hours' drive from Beijing, 阿那亚 Aranya was transformed from a failed real estate project, spreading over 3,300 acres of coastline are uniquely crafted buildings, concert halls, auditoriums, art galleries, and meditation centers, conceived with an architectural language of austere simplicity. Among them is the Seashore Library standing on the empty beach, now greatly renowned under the title “The Loneliest Library.” Aranya's operation model perfectly solves the problem of the visiting by too many tourists destroying its “lonely” beauty. Surrounding these core buildings are high-end apartments, villas, and premium hotels, with the entire compound closed to non-residents. 阿那亚 (A Na Ya), appearing as 阿兰若 (A Lan Ruo) in the Diamond Sutra, also seen in the term *Aranyaka* (The Forest Books), literally means wilderness or jungle, originally refers to

the place the Hindu practitioner following the *Four Āśramas* (stage) system lives in during the forest-dwelling stage—vast primeval forests across hot and humid regions of India. There, Aranyaka practitioners abandon all attachments of the householder stage, family, wealth, power, and social relationships, devoting themselves fully to ascetic practice and contemplation.

Compared to the courage and determination required for lying in a forest, Aranya Resort defends its solitude with a paywall, it transparently goes against the essence of hermitage. The dignified name “Aranya” is therefore thoroughly corrupted. In Zuo Si's *Zhaoyin*, the seeds of such outcome were already sown: the hermit spirit—a movement of passive resistance—dissolves in aestheticization.

The tendency accelerates through every copy sold of *In Praise of Shadows* and *The Book of Tea*. Okakura Kakuzō shamelessly pronounced, in English to a western audience—the death of the Chinese art of tea

To the latter-day Chinese tea is a delicious beverage, but not an ideal. The long woes of his country have robbed him of the zest for the meaning of life. He has become modern, that is to say, old and disenchanting. He has lost that sublime faith in illusions which constitutes the eternal youth and vigour of the poets and ancients. He is an eclectic and politely accepts the traditions of the universe. He toys with Nature, but does not condescend to conquer or worship her. His Leaf-tea is often wonderful with its flower-like aroma, but the romance of the Tang and Sung ceremonies are not to be found in his cup.

—Okakura Kakuzō, *The Book of Tea*

The tea ceremony that he propagates, which he claims lost by China in its continuous warfare—the romance of tea, with its simplified and codified formality from the Southern Song Dynasty: a meticulously sculpted beauty of poverty, comically and sorrow-

fully misses the true nature of tea—a beverage of tea leaves' flavor. The symbolism of tea is fundamentally mistaken. Simply, between tea and porridge lies no difference:

Chan Master Zhaozhou Congshen (Joshu) once asked a newly arrived monk, "Have you been here before?"

Replied, "I have."

Master said, "Go have tea."

Again asked another new monk, monk replied, "I have not."

Master said, "Go have tea."

—*Wu Deng Hui Yuan* (The Source of the Five Lamps)

Chan Master Zhaozhou Congshen, when a monk asked: "I've just arrived the forest (monastery), seek master's guidance."

Zhou said, "Had your porridge yet?"

The monk said, "I had."

Zhou said, "Go wash your bowl."

—*Wu Men Guan* (The Gateless Barrier)

Through aestheticization, hermitage is transformed into a product, sized and measured, sold in batches, or with stages built, reserved for viewing. In this business, both buyers and sellers are actively involved. In Qing dynasty, The artist collective "The Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou" styled themselves as mountain recluse "weirdos", Indulged in tea and wine, unyielding and rebellious. Yet all their activities were intertwined exclusively with the wealthy salt merchants in the commercial powerhouse of Yangzhou; bamboo and orchids—symbols of gentlemanly integrity—were sold at steep prices for household decoration, and the artists themselves often served as assistants in the wealthy patrons' pursuit of pretentious refinement:

Jin Nong lived as a guest in Yangzhou, salt merchants admiring his fame, vied to invite him. One day at a banquet in Pingshan

Hall, Jin took the first seat. During the banquet, ancient poetic lines featuring "flying red" were used as the theme for drinking game. When the turn shifted to a particular merchant, he struggled with no avail, the guests were about to impose a penalty. The merchant said, "I have it! 'Willow catkins drift by, piece by piece speckled with red.'" The room erupted in laughter, ridiculing him for making up the line. But Jin said: 'That's from a Yuan poem praising Pingshan Hall—most fitting indeed.' They requested the complete poem, Jin recited, "By the Twenty-Four Bridges blow twenty-four winds; leaning on the railing recalls old Jiangdong. The setting sun reflects on the Peach Blossom Ferry; Willow catkins drift by, piece by piece speckled with red." The crowd applauded his vast knowledge, though in truth, the poem was Jin's impromptu creation to rescue the merchant. Overjoyed, the merchant gifted him a thousand taels of silver the next day.

—Niu Yingzhi, *Yuchuang Xiaoxi Lu* (Rain-Window Idle Notes)

We shouldn't be too harsh in the judgement, the flattery and self promotion were merely acts of survival. Most of them lived and died in persistent poverty. In the inscription verse on Zheng Banqiao's painting of orchids, Jin Nong self mocked such humiliation:

Bitterly coaxed out by the spring wind,
Alongside onions and garlic, selling on the street.

By the mid-Qianlong era (18th century), at the twilight of the prosperous age, signs of decay had begun to emerge. The wealthy reveled in extravagance, while famine had driven some to the horrors of cannibalism. The Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou stood in between, cautiously cultivating an image of lofty seclusion. Their painting deviated from convention yet remained tentative; their poetry poised to speak yet held back.

Around the same time, European aristocratic estates employed

garden hermits, fully dispensed the hermit's inner struggle and voluntary intention. As if using bamboo whisk beating a fizzy tablet in the tea bowl—the real protagonist had already vanished, and seclusion was wholly externalized, becoming a performance that pleases the audiences.

In such performances, visiting mountains or visiting marketplaces is effectively the same. In the Qing dynasty, the imperial palace sometimes included artificially constructed “market streets” for emperors to experience commoner life:

East of Fuhai in Yuanming Yuan (Garden) stood Tongle Yuan (Garden of Shared Joy), where each year the emperor granted ministers the privilege of watching theatrical performances. In the High Temple times, every new year a marketplace was set up in the garden, containing antiques, second-hand clothing, teahouses, eateries—everything existing outside was replicated inside, down to hawkers carrying small baskets of melon seeds.

...

Whenever the carriage passed by the shop's entrance, the hall staff would call for tea, the shop assistant would report the accounts, and the shopkeeper would verify the calculations. A cacophony of voices arose all at once, adding to the joy of New Year outings.

—Yao Yunzhi, *Zhuyeting Zaji* (Bamboo-Leaf Pavilion Miscellany)

In this immersive theater, the performers do not pretend to be mysterious hermits; they play common folks from a bustling market. By contrast, those who painstakingly sought to replicate everyday life—the emperor and nobles—present themselves as the most secretive, purest hermits. This purity does not lie in their intentions, but in a life completely hidden, impossibly distant and irrelevant from the common society. 天子 Tian Zi—The Son of Heaven, emperor that is below only Heaven itself, happens to be the highest of 高士 Gao Shi (the high man: lofty recluses, hermits).

He can also be compared to another materialization of the lofty recluse: The stylites of ascetic Christianity, who lived year-round atop a pillar. They saturated the paradox of revelation and concealments in the hermit concept. Determined to cast aside the secular world, they did not hide themselves; on the contrary, they placed themselves at the center of the public eyesight, turning seclusion into an open proclamation, lecturing loudly to the non-reclusive. Simeon of Syria subsisted on food delivered up to him, conversed with pilgrims, and wielded formidable political influence—“persuading the Roman emperor to defeat the insolence of the Jews”.

The highest Gao Shi of Qi Dynasty, Tao Hongjing, secluded in the Mao mountain, when requested by the emperor to describe the scene there, he answered:

What are there in the mountain?
On its ridges, many white clouds.

Unlike hermits who seeks “nothing” from the height, who remain silent out of a sense of nothing to say to the world, the stylite's withdrawal seems to be always a means, making the tension between revelation and concealment no longer bothersome.

To approach the sky, a mountain must surpass the stone pillar in height, thereby naturally dispelling the clamor of city streets and marketplaces. But when the intention shifted from the nothingness of the elevation, then mountains became just a stage for the hermitage performances. Tang emperors esteemed reclusive “high scholars”, many who failed in the imperial examinations thus simply moved into Mount Zhongnan—famed for its Daoist hermit tradition near Chang'an—waiting for the court to call upon the sage in the mountain. Among them was Lü Cangyong, who famously shuttled between Mountain Zhongnan and Shaoshi near the two imperial capitals (Chang'an and Luoyang) whenever the emperor alternated between these seats of power:

Lü Cangyong initially hid on Mount Zhongnan. Then under Emperor Zhongzong, he held important offices. Daoist Sima Chengzhen was summoned by Emperor Ruizong to the capital. While departing, Lü pointed at Mount Zhongnan and said: “There’re abundance of fine spots here, why insist on the distance?” Sima responded slowly: “From my view, that is a shortcut to officialdom.”

—Liu Su, *Datang Xinyu* (New Anecdotes of the Great Tang)

Without such clear objectives, judging a hermit becomes more delicate. As Han Kang’s example suggests, a hermit (as in 隱士 Yin Shi: hidden man) is one who hides, yet once he leaves his name to be known by us, from being a hermit to being recognized as one, his concealment is then proven a failure. By such ultimate definition, every hermit we know of has taken part in perpetuating the deception. Apart from extremes of stylites or the ones of Zhongnan shortcut, other hermits were lapse through carelessness: the mediators who witness and retell the hermit legends, they are always keenly searching for materials, then forging it into precarious lore of the noble hermit.

Counterfeit Hermits

Huangfu Mi, author of *Gao Shi Zhuan* (Biographies of Lofty Scholars), exemplifies as such.

Then fate played its trick, employed this art of fabricating hermits even more bluntly onto his descendant—a hermit who enacted a fixed script:

Xuan lamented that all dynasties had recluses, but his era alone had none. Thus summoning Huangfu Xi, the sixth-generation grandson of Huangfu Mi, to be the compiler, providing him with resources, but ordering him to decline them all—giving him the

title of Gaoshi. People at the time called him Chongyin (placeholder / counterfeit hermit).

—*Book of Jin*

Zhongnan hermits were likewise merely products of the system’s incentives, retreating so the monarch might demonstrate refined taste and merit-based governance through the gestural procedure of inviting hermits. Lü Cangyong was undeniably a talent, yet without donning this cloak woven from the mountain weeds, he would likely fade into obscurity within the narrow and crowded paths of officialdom. The fundamental flaw of the counterfeit hermit lies in the inversion of cause and effect in their motives.

Hermits on the Road

From the vermilion gate, wine and meat stinks;
on the road lie the bones of the frozen dead.

The timeless verse by Du Fu remains poignantly descriptive even today. Taken alone from the context and examined as how it is in a common quotation, it presents a complexity beyond the literal. As usual, it omits the subject, blurs the state of the narrator, and maintains the tone of a bystander, highlighting the stark contradiction. Yet the verse describes only two scenes: the banquet inside the vermilion gate and the devastation on the road. As the poet belongs to neither, then where can we find him? Du Fu softly expressed his stance: the banquet lies beyond his sight, known only by the smell wafting through the gate, while the frozen corpses are directly witnessed by himself. But where did this earnest witness come from, where is he going? Situated between the two, the poet is trapped in an insidious challenge of positioning. who is his envisioned audience? Is he speaking on behalf of the miserable, writing for their genuine suffering? Is he speaking to Tian Zi, the highest under heaven, persuading him to use his omnipotent

power, to bring salvation? Or does he convey the plight of the frozen dead to the nobles behind the red gates, serving as an agent of their conscience, producing guilt for them to absolve—or pity as a commodity for them to consume? As the fact that we are reading this verse implies, Du Fu has already left that section of road near the vermilion gate, headed elsewhere.

The Hermit above Hermits

Contempt for counterfeit hermits and the weariness of the hermit on the road also stimulate the pursuit of an even purer, higher form of seclusion:

Xu You, styled Wuzhong, Yao wished to cede the empire to him, so he fled and hid by the southern slopes of Zhongyue by the Ying River, secluded beneath Ji Mountain. Yao summoned him again to serve as Governor of the Nine Provinces, Xu You did not wish to hear of it, washed his ears along the Ying River. At that time, a man named Chao Fu (Nest-Dweller) led his ox to drink. Seeing him washing ears, asked the reason. Answered, “Yao wants to appoint me as governor of the Nine Provinces, I loathe hearing such things, thus washing my ears.” Chao Fu replied, “If you had resided upon high cliffs and deep valleys, impassable to man, who could have found you? Yet you roamed about, seeking reputation, sullyng my ox’s mouth!” He then led his ox further upstream to drink.

—Hangfu Mi, Gao Shi Zhuan

Chao Fu is clearly a Hermit above Hermits like Xu You—He so thoroughly renounced politics and fame, nestled in the tree, herded cows for a living, almost more like an oddly tempered peasant. But among the wilderness teems with countless peasants like Chao Fu, are they all thereby the purest hermits? If so, then wouldn’t the ox—effortlessly remaining its silence and indifference as its

owner rails against Xu You—be an animal hermit that is even purer, greater than Chao Fu?

The notion of a pure hermit is disintegrating into nonsense. Why aren’t animals and peasants considered hermits? The animal in the nature - autonomously exists, irrelevant to the phantom of withdrawal or involvement, it neither reveals nor conceals, purely exists without any narrator, holding a true solitude. Whereas the hermit never escapes the gaze of society, his retreat is perpetually absorbed into spectacle, unable to arrive at such natural solitude. In this contrast, the hermit no longer symbolizes solitude, rather, constant exposure, his efforts to flee society instead making him reliant on its reflections, exhausted by the ever-contradictory imperative of self-justification.

Such irony was already mentioned in the early days of the *Zhaoyin* motif’s emergence:

Minor hermits hide in Ling Sou (hills and marshes),
great hermits hide in Chao Shi (courts and marketplaces).

...

Congealing frost withers rosy cheeks;
cold springs wound one’s jade-like feet.
Holistic talent pursuits the masses,
skewed wisdom traps in self indulgence.
Embracing the role, one attains natural harmony;
abusing the nature, one loses essential truth.

...

—Wang Kangju, *Fan Zhaoyin* (Countering Zhaoyin)

The Hermit above Hermits /
The Hermit Who Breaks Silent—Du Fu

The hermit’s purity is eventually verified by Du Fu’s death, in

history, he is revered as the Poet Saint, a title that coincidentally aligns with the Catholic Church's criteria for sainthood: a virtuous life, a miracle, and martyrdom, legend holds that in his final years, Du Fu drifted along the Yangtze, trapped by floodwaters for days without food, when receiving beef and wine from the Magistrate of Leiyang County, he ate all over a night, then died of abdominal distension. Through the ultimate action - a sudden death, he at last proves to be not a compromiser, becomes the absolutely pure, unassailable hermit.

He is therefore worthy of the rank Hermit above Hermits, and yet differs from most hermits' passive stance, he faithfully records and describes the atrocities of the world, while articulating an utterly altruistic vision, attempting to impact reality by his own effort. Du Fu seems to have found a reconciliation of the lament and expression. One might say he is a Hermit Outside the Hermit, breaking the silent. But as he died, without "constructing the thousands of spacious mansions hosting the poor", his verses continue to be endlessly referenced, outside and inside the Vermilion Gate, are not these efforts proven to be utterly futile?

The appalling juxtaposition of the vermilion gates and the roads recurs constantly in reality: on the road lies an abundance of suffering and death without reason, the deaths of civilians killed in warfare, of Slavic / Burmese / Buryat youth of poor families conscripted to the army, deaths of residents in suddenly collapsed buildings, deaths of natural disasters, deaths of complication of infectious diseases...

On the other end, the stench of wine and meat continues to waft from the vermilion gate: gorgonzola, kombucha, oud incense; films and music on loop; and the all but impotent, insipid activities in the arts space—an infinite prolongation of the banquet, with plate after plate of elaborate and tiring additions.

After the realization of the Four Noble Truths and the Three

Seals of Dharma, do hiding and silence remain necessary? Do revealing and expressing still hold meaning? Within Buddhism, debates of negativism and positivism evolve into the opposition of "lesser" (Pratyekabuddha, Śrāvaka) versus "great" (Bodhisattva) vehicles. Theravāda Buddhism advocates a tacit understanding of the Buddha's original teachings until liberation, while Mahāyāna Buddhism proclaims a possibility of proceeding to the salvation of others without entering Nirvana after the accomplishment of the practice. Born likely out of a rejection of mechanical dogma and asceticism, it provided an excuse for those recluses who hedge and evade, trapped in the labyrinth of pointless actions.

Clinging to the hut, the pillar, the mountain wilderness, or the marketplace, they reveal the hermit's plight: a pitiful hypocrite. With too much to think and too little to wager, he can never become an animal, nor a ruler. The addictive obsession on the hermit's spirit leads to only one path: the weaving of hermit stories—an imagination of a truthful, pure, and self-evident art. In there, rather than hiding one's body and words, the creators of such plain yet solemn art hide their motives, logic, and emotions. They take disguise as vloggers, smuggled immigrants living in the foreign countries, bad mayors, great dictators and home dogs, entirely focused on the acts of repetition, survival, comedy, abstraction and love. They exclusively experience the real misery of a true hermit:

loneliness, boredom, danger, the persistent vacancy of meaning;
being objectified, materialized;
being romanticized, used as a template,
prompting new waves of pathetic imitation;
the loneliness of losing language and body.

Compared, the stupidity of the fake hermit is obvious:

the ineffectiveness of countering systems through randomness,
the invalidity of fighting efficiency through invalidity.

Here exists the deceiving nature of contemporary art: claiming invalidity, meaninglessness, pointlessness, and while already invalid, working for invalidity. Using superficial terms to claim superficiality. But invalidity is a secret quality, it cannot be claimed by anyone. Meaningless, truly meaningless, the challenge against the triumph of meaning, the detachment of feeling, the art of meaning disappearing—is a rare quality of some of the few exceptional works that have never claimed to fight for it.

—Someone in 1990s

The founding piece of the *Zhaoyin* motif—*Zhaoyin* by Huainan Xiaoshan—preserved a depiction of the initial hermit scenery, before the finalization of the hermit theme: a terrifying, primeval, unromantic, and unbearable realm. It stands at opposite poles of the hermit world from the circumstances I inhabit: a tent in a warm apartment in a winter's night. The mere association of the idea of a hermit in such a context feels more laughable than the act itself. To that I have to impose an excuse, insisting this purely formalistic hermitage in fact stems from self-mockery and a few utilitarian intents, beside that, perhaps a hesitant half-way hermit / a self-deceived pseudo-hermit may have a somewhat more empathetic intermediary value to this complex topic.

For all of this, I feel grateful that outside my tent (for the time being) there stands a warm apartment.

桂树丛生兮山之幽，偃蹇连蜷兮枝相缭。
Osmanthus trees cluster in the mountain's depths,
bending and curling, their branches intertwining.
山气嶙峋兮石嵯峨，溪谷崭岩兮水曾波。
Mountain air billows; rugged rocks rise steep,
in deep ravines the water churns with waves.
猿狖群啸兮虎豹嗥，攀援桂枝兮聊淹留。
Troops of monkeys howl, tigers and leopards roar;

climbing and clutching to the osmanthus branch, lingering.
王孙游兮不归，春草生兮萋萋。
The young noble wanders and does not return;
spring grass grows thick and lush.
岁暮兮不自聊，蟋蟀鸣兮啾啾。
At year's end, there is no ease;
the cicadas chirp plaintively.
块兮轧，山曲茀，心淹留兮恫慌忽。
All is vast and grinding, the mountain bends and twists;
the heart lingers in anxious dread.
罔兮沕，憐兮栗，虎豹穴。
Dark and murky, chill and shudder, tigers and leopards gallops.
丛薄深林兮，人上栗。
In thin brush and deep woods, men recoil in fear.
嵒岑碚礧兮，碨礧磊砢；
Sheer cliffs and jutted crags, rock upon rock in jagged heaps;
树轮相纠兮，林木葭馥。
Tree rings coil into one another, dense woods gnarl and twist.
青莎杂树兮，蘋草霍靡；
Green sedge mixes with all sorts of trees, reeds sway and bend;
白鹿麕麇兮，或腾或倚。
White deer and roebuck, leap or recline.
状貌峩峩兮峨峨，凄凄兮漉漉。
Their shapes stand tall, towering and stark, bleak upon bleak.
獼猴兮熊羆，慕类兮以悲；
Baboons and bears grieve for their own kind;
攀援桂枝兮聊淹留。
climbing and clutching to the osmanthus branch, lingering.
虎豹斗兮熊羆咆，禽兽骇兮亡其曹。
Tigers and leopards clash, bears roar;
startled beasts scatter, fleeing their flock.
王孙兮归来，山中兮不可以久留。
Young noble, return;
One cannot stay long in the mountains.

—Huainan Xiaoshan, *Zhaoyin*, 2nd century BC, Western Han Dynasty

