

ENDLESS STREAMS AND MOUNTAINS

Ch'i Shan Wu Chin

Clearing the mind and sliding in
to that created space,
a web of waters streaming over rocks,
air misty but not raining,
seeing this land from a boat on a lake
or a broad slow river,
coasting by.

The path comes down along a lowland stream
slips behind boulders and leafy hardwoods,
reappears in a pine grove,

no farms around, just tidy cottages and shelters,
gateways, rest stops, roofed but unwallled work space,
— a warm damp climate;

a trail of climbing stairsteps forks upstream.
Big ranges lurk behind these rugged little outcrops —
these spits of low ground rocky uplifts
layered pinnacles aslant,
flurries of brushy cliffs receding,
far back and high above, vague peaks.
A man hunched over, sitting on a log
another stands above him, lifts a staff,
a third, with a roll of mats or a lute, looks on;
a bit offshore two people in a boat.

The trail goes far inland,
somewhere back around a bay,
lost in distant foothill slopes
& back again
at a village on the beach, and someone's fishing.

Rider and walker cross a bridge
above a frothy braided torrent
that descends from a flurry of roofs like flowers
temples tucked between cliffs,
a side trail goes there;

a jumble of cliffs above,
ridge tops edged with bushes,
valley fog below a hazy canyon.

A man with a shoulder load leans into the grade
the trail goes up along cascading streambed
no bridge in sight—
comes back through chinquapin or
liquidabars;
another horse and a hiker.
Trail's end at the edge of an inlet
below a heavy set of dark rock hills.
Two moored boats with basket roofing,
 a boatman in the bow
 looks lost in thought.

Hills beyond rivers, willows in a swamp,
a gentle valley reaching far inland.

The watching boat has floated off the page.

At the end of the painting the scroll continues on with seals and poems.
It tells a further tale:

"—Wang Wen-wei saw this at the mayor's house in Ho-tung town, year
1205. Wrote at the end of it,

 'The Fashioner of Things
 has no original intentions
Mountains and rivers
 are spirit, condensed.'
 '. . . Who has come up with
 these miraculous forests and springs?
Pale ink
 on fine white silk."

Later that month someone named Li Hui added,

 '. . . Most people can get along with the noise of dogs and chickens; Everybody cheerful
in these peaceful times. But I —why are my tastes so odd? I love the company of streams
and boulders.'

T'ien Hsieh of Wei-lo, no date, next wrote,

 '. . . The water holds up the mountains, The mountains go down in the water . . . '

In 1332 Chih-shun adds,

 '. . . This is truly a painting worth careful keeping. And it has poem-colophons from the
Sung and the Chin dynasties. That it survived dangers of fire and war makes it even
rarer.'

In the mid-seventeenth century one Wang To had a look at it:

‘My brother's relative by marriage, Wen-sun, is learned and has good taste. He writes good prose and poetry. My brother brought over this painting of his to show me . . .’

The great Ch'ing dynasty collector Liang Ch'ing-piao owned it, but didn't write on it or cover it with seals. From him it went into the Imperial collection down to the early twentieth century. Chang Ta-ch'ien sold it in 1949. Now it's at the Cleveland Art Museum, which sits on a rise that looks out toward the waters of Lake Erie.

Step back and gaze again at the land:
it rises and subsides —

ravines and cliffs like waves of blowing leaves —
stamp the foot, walk with it, clap! turn,
the creeks come in, ah!
strained through boulders,
mountains walking on the water,
water ripples every hill.

I walk out of the museum—low gray clouds over the lake—chill March breeze.

Old ghost ranges, sunken rivers, come again
stand by the wall and tell their tale,
walk the path, sit the rains,
grind the ink, wet the brush, unroll the
broad white space:

lead out and tip
the moist black line.

Walking on walking
under foot earth turns.

Streams and mountains never stay the same.

Note: A hand scroll by this name showed up in Shansi province, central China, in the thirteenth century. Even then the painter was unknown, ‘a person of the Sung Dynasty.’ Now it's on Turtle Island. Unroll the scroll to the left, a section at a time, as you let the right side roll back in. Place by place unfurls.