

Town of the Dragon Vein (matt)

Recalling Carson's references to Chinese culture and literature in "The Anthropology of Water" as well as her citation of the Tao Te Ching in the introduction to "The Life of Towns," I quickly realized that the phrase "Dragon Vein" was probably a Chinese term and subsequently punched the two words into Google. According to "Feng-Shui Fundamentals," the energy that flows over mountains is called a "mountain dragon" and the pathway through which it flows is known as a "dragon vein." There are certain geological features that must be present in a mountain chain before it can be considered a "dragon vein," which essentially boils down to whether the mountains look like a dragon or not. "Dragon veins" are said to embody yang ("expansive," "initiating") energy. So, this is what Carson is most likely referencing (with that mention of "mountains" there can be little doubt). She draws a parallel between a dragon vein at night and a person's dreams. Carson seems to be describing a flow of energy, first between the mountains and some other entity (perhaps the dragons themselves?) and then involves the reader's dream experience. However, her unconventional punctuation has left some things unclear to me: the noise of the energy flow appears to be "withdrawn" early in the morning, yet later it has to be given back at night—I can't sort out the timeline and this confuses me. There is energy flowing, but when, and to who? I want to draw connections between the dragon vein and dreaming, I feel impelled to believe that the dream energy and the dragon vein are part of the same energy flow. However, since "Your nightly dreams. Are taps open reversely," that doesn't seem likely. From my understanding, a reverse tap doesn't produce liquid so sucks it up. This would fit with the energy likewise being "withdrawn" from the mountains, except for the fact that the energy is given back at night, when most people are sleeping. Carson seems to be toying with the Feng-Shui imagery, hinting with it but never being entirely coherent. This could be an example of the old Taoist saying "The Way that can be taught is not the Way." However, I can't help but think back to another quotation, from Angel:

WESLEY: "Feng shui."

GUNN: "Right. What's that mean again?"

WESLEY: "That people will believe anything."

Carson uses the imagery of Feng-Shui, but everything has a hint of the fantastic to it that, combined with what appears to be a deliberate lack of coherence, suggests that she is not taking everything about the "dragon vein" seriously. She uses this image of traditional Chinese mysticism to suggest powerful ideas about our connection with the world, about the nature of dreams, but it doesn't appear that she actually believes. Which I believe helps this poem maintain the surreality that is invoked in the first line: "If you wake up too early listen for it." Nothing seems quite real early in the morning and the poem uses its reference to dragon veins to capture that same quality.

Amendments

Town of the Dragon Vein (craig)

I must agree that the first line of the poem, as it speaks about listening when you wake up too early, references its own ambiguity in that nothing is entirely clear to a person when it

is “too early”. The “inverted whistling sound” seems to be caused by the energy of a person’s dream rushing off into the mountains from whence it came. Dreams being “taps open reversely” does not necessarily have to mean the literal act of “sucking up liquid” as you suggested, but rather absorbing the energy of the mountain. This sounds a lot like meditation, as it is essentially considered to be the act of absorbing and appreciating the world’s energy, which would parallel her Taoist pilgrimage in “Anthropology”. As the poem does not specify any specific type of audience, it leaves this act of meditating open to all in that they can do it in sleep as they dream.

Town of Dragon Vein (mike)

The explanation of Dragon Vein in Matt’s analysis helped a lot. I think that hissing noise might be due to the atmospheric transference forced at mountain ranges. During the day, extreme weather not preventing, the wind moves a different direction, up or down the mountain I can’t remember, than at night. This could be part of the play on time that the poem references.

Town of the Dragon Vein (marina)

Matt obviously had a lot to say about this poem, especially its relation to the Chinese culture, so I doubt I will have anything to add to all of that, even though I did go back and look up the dragon as a symbol of weather, water, the ying and the yang and all that jazz. So I thought that I’d mention a certain contrast between inside and outside in the poem that I noticed going on, as in the “inverted whistling” and “open reversely”. The ending I thought was really dramatic, or maybe the narrator was just trying to sound Chinese.

Town of the Dragon Vein (martin)

I agree that it would be very Carson to reference Chinese culture like Feng Shui. The commentary on this aspect of the poem is exhausted so that I don’t get much from the actual style and language of Carson concerning this poem. One line that shouldn’t be ignored is “At night just as.” After reading the preceding line, “They have to give it back,” the reader almost has to read the line as “As night just has.” This is a good example of Carson playing with her reader’s mind. It also strengthens the notion of having to give back this vague “energy” at night. Also, the breaking up of lines is very deliberate in this poem. The beginning has long lines, while the end has tacky one-word lines. “A sort of inverted whistling the sound of sound” seems like a line Carson would love to break up if she was keeping to her style, perhaps into “A sort of inverted whistling./ The sound of sound.” Why didn’t she do this? The structure and mood of the poem must have been interrupted significantly from her intention from this possible alteration. I see some hints of nature giving and taking away, allowing Carson to refute the common opinion of nature as motherly and nursing. It can also be withdrawing and render a person helpless. This goes along with her common underlying theme of loss and sadness.

Town of Dragon Vein (casey)

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might be due to the atmospheric transference forced at mountain ranges. During the day, extreme weather not preventing, the wind moves a different direction, up or down the mountain I can't remember, than at night. This could be part of the play on time that the poem references.

Town of the Dragon Vein (Allison)

Wow, this is a really strong, interesting analysis of this poem. I have no idea where I would have gone with "Dragon Vein" and had I not read the analysis, I probably would still be lost. I definitely like the idea of dragon veins being energy in the mountains, and when people are asleep, energy is given back to them. Time seems to be a key in this poem, like there isn't enough time to dream or something like that. I like the taps reversed as sucking up energy from the mountains, like there is a continuous circle of energy. The mountains suck it up from you all day (which is why you get tired) and while you are dreaming, the mountains give it all back. I would like to see "Time" dealt with a little more since it ends the poem on such a mysterious note, but I have no idea what Carson could be toying with.

Town of the Dragon Vein: (courtney)

Great work finding all of the info on Feng Shui and the meaning of dragon veins therein. The concept of energy needs to be expanded upon to get the full meaning of the poem—there is definitely a meaning within Dragon Vein mountains and energy. The energy that is “out” at nighttime is thought to be bad energy. If you are up before the sun, there is going to be bad energy around. According to Feng Shui, if you are in-tune with your surroundings, you can feel bad Feng Shui. Perhaps that is what is meant in the first few lines of the poem. The energy comes from the Dragon Veins—it is channeled from them and goes through Energy Regulators, which are another kind of mountainous formation, often found in the vicinity of Dragon Veins. Good energy is renewed during the night while a person sleeps, so that may be the meaning of the fifth line onward.

Town of the Dragon Vein (tom)

Okay I can see the Feng-Shui imagery working here and I can see the Dragon Vein being geologic phenomena with Carson's reference to mountains in line four. I do get a sense of the mystical coming from this poem though I think the Chinese reference is not that which to hang the poem upon. Instead I think it much simpler and that Carson is dealing with dreams and the spiritual/mystical side of life to which dreams are connected. Many peoples have believed that in and through their dreams they connected with the spiritual realm and even received messages, direction and strength. This is what could be meant by “taps open reversely”. That instead of being poured out we, in our dreams, are being poured into and that in our dreams time really doesn't seem to exist. I also see this mystical dream state to be connected with the “sound of sound” which can be heard when one wakes up to early, like before the dream or the receiving is finished. There also seems to be a business to life even in dreams and that time when your awake but just barley seems to be one of those few times of absolute calm, and thus one is able to hear the “sound of sound”.

Town of the Dragon Vein (tiffany)

Wow, there's a lot going on in this poem. I was truly enlightened when I read Matt's

analysis because I never would have connected it to Feng-Shui. Due to the somewhat Zen-like themes that have been discovered in Carson's work, I feel that his suppositions definitely fit the bill here. So, a dragon vein is the pathway of the energy that flows over mountains. The whistling sounds suggest that something is flowing (I figured wind at first). The yin-yang parallel between dragon veins and a person's dreams seems logical as well, but, I too, am dumbfounded by the timeline of this exchange/occurrence. My personal assumption is that the dragon vein and dreaming form a circular energy exchange. The energy stays with us while we dream at night and then is sucked away come the morning. This would clarify the "sort of inverted whistling" as the suction of energy from dreaming peoples into the mountains. It would also clarify the statement that "They have to give it back. / At night". "Taps open reversely" seems to allude to the corresponding suction of energy into the dream-state of nighttime.

Town of the Dragon Vein (monte)

Good analysis, man. Interestingly, I didn't read 'taps' the same way you did, which made sense because a reverse tap would be sucking out the energy, as opposed to a regular tap letting energy flow. I suppose that being prefaced with waking up early and listening, I read tap as the sound. However, I have no idea what a reverse tap would sound like – other than a regular tap. I don't know if that double meaning has any significance.

Town of the Dragon Vein (abby)

Just for Matt's confusion—the dream “taps” are “open reversely” INTO TIME, meaning rather than time flowing forward like in real life, YOU flow backward into your memories which are in the PAST. Cool. I think Matt did a really good job with the references in this poem.