Remembrances

The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature

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For Rustem and Leigh

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Introduction: The Lure and Its Origins

Classical Chinese literature made a promise, early in its history, that it would be a means to perpetuate the self of the good writer. Such promises of literary immortality are, of course, not unfamiliar in the Western tradition; but through its long history the Chinese tradition increasingly stressed a grand and quixotic qualification of that promise: it would transmit not simply the name but the very "content" of the self, so that the later-born might truly know the person by reading the work. It was a promise fraught with anxieties and difficulties in proportion to the powerful hopes it raised.

One consequence of this potent lure was that classical Chinese literature internalized its hopes, made them one of its central topics, and everywhere concerned itself with intense experience of the past. The fundamental rule was the reaffirmation of a contract made with past and future: "As I remember, so may I hope to be remembered." In this way classical literature constantly doubled back on itself, inscribing the form of its hopes in its own internal actions and seeking in the past the repetition of those doublings in the actions and writings of predecessors. Yet every strong hope is mated to a corresponding fear. Thus the fear of loss and of some illegible fading away was always present to darken the hope of some permanent "writing the self."

In the tradition of Western discourse on literature there continually recurs, as the emblem of literature, the figure of Truth wearing a veil. The text is a vestment, opaque or transparent, outlining for the imagination, yet at the same time concealing, the sweet body within. There is always a gap, a space between the text and its meaning, between surface appearance and truth. The master figure for this

mode of knowing is metaphor, the word that conceals and reveals, the word that tells truth and tells lies.

This mode of knowing does occur commonly in Chinese classical literature, but it is secondary to another mode of knowing. Here also we find a gap, but of a different sort, a gap of time, effacement, and memory. The master figure here is synecdoche, the part that leads to the whole, some enduring fragment from which we try to reconstruct the lost totality. It has a ritual counterpart in the necessity of having some article of clothing of the dead person when performing the ceremony of summoning the soul. In this tradition the experience of the past roughly corresponds to and carries the same force as the attention to meaning or truth in the Western tradition.

The two traditions share a fascination with a gap or barrier. In the Western concept of *mimesis,* "imitation"/"representation," what imitates must always be secondary and posterior to what is imitated. The imitation is perpetually imperfect and unfulfilled; if it achieved perfection, it would no longer be itself, becoming instead the thing imitated. A similar gap occurs between remembering and what is remembered: memory always moves *toward* what is remembered, but a gap of time, loss, and incompleteness intervenes. Memory too is always secondary, posterior. The force of literature lives in that gap, that veiling, which simultaneously promises and denies access.

The gap between a representation and what is represented divides two distinct levels of truth. A painting of an apple may have a material reality, but as representation it exists on a different order of being from a real apple; if the two occur together, as they sometimes do in a kitchen or in another painting, the juxtaposition recalls the difference between art and the empirical world. The artwork is framed, closed to the world around it: it may replace the real world, but it does not merge with it. For the Greeks the *Iliad* was the heroic past, complete and vividly present, like the shield of Achilles, a circular artifact that represented, and in representing replaced, the lost heroic age. It was precisely this closure, this inner subsistence of a work of art that separated it from the matter of history.

The gap of memory is different: the scenes and object of memory direct our attention to a lost fullness on the same level. A memento, such as a lock of hair, does not stand for the past; it links present to past and leads us toward a lost fullness. The particulars of memory are perpetually incomplete in themselves; they seek fulfillment in some totality. A literature of memory engages a sustained retrospective gaze

that struggles to extend itself and encompass those absences surrounding what survives. Classical Chinese poetry remained open to that larger world of the past: the poem was sustained by that world and in recompense returned a specter of the absent past into the present as art.

Consider the following simple poem, one of the most famous in the Chinese language, and reflect upon the conditions of its greatness. It is a poem about remembering in which the silences of memory return to haunt the present and color the way it is known. And it is a poem by which its author is remembered, by which we in the present have a partial clue to the fullness of "who he was." To accomplish that task of remembrance, to bring the poet's past into our present, the poem opens into the historical world around it, calling upon its readers to look from the brief text to the fullness of its circumstance. Both the scenes of memory within the poem and the poem as a memento of the person and the age are incomplete. Yet here incompletion carries the force of art, as the lineage of mimesis carries the force of art in another tradition.

In the lodges of the Prince of Ch'i
  I saw you commonly,
And heard you so many times
  in front of Ts'ui Ti's halls.
Right now, in the finest scenery
  of all the Southland,
And in the season of falling flowers,
  I meet you once again.

Where is the poetry here? We find nothing remarkable in the words, nothing striking in the images, no new and rare way of making unfamiliar the all too familiar world. Suppose I were to offer a paraphrase translation: "I used to see you and hear you often at the Prince of Ch'i's and Ts'ui Ti's; now I meet you again in late spring in the Southland." Is this even poetry, much less major poetry? But perhaps it is the question that is wanting rather than the poem. Perhaps the question should be: under what conditions can we discover the poetry that we know lies in this poem?

The poem is about encounter and remembrance of a time long past, a time which to be remembered, needs only be named in a general way. This naming is a mark of intimacy as, when I speak to an old friend, I need only say, "Remember that summer . . . ," and

details fill our memories, perhaps in different ways for each of us, but each certain in the silence of his thoughts that this is how it really was. So for the poet here to simply mention "the lodges of the Prince of Ch'i" is enough. And we, the readers standing outside the pair and in a later time, are drawn into this intimate address and repeat the event enacted within the text: we encounter their encounter and are referred by it to the silences of *our* memories—to our readings and our formed imaginings of what it was like then.

Without those readings and formed imaginings there can be no poem: we are excluded, bypassers who know neither the speaker nor the person addressed. But if we know this poem is Tu Fu's "Meeting Li Kuei-nien in the Southland" of 770, that knowledge points us to the changes and motions of Tu Fu's life, to the great rebellion of An Lu-shan, the devastation of central China, and to the loss of pleasure, splendor, and security that seemed to exist in the past, in the K'ai-yüan and early T'ien-pao Reigns of the Emperor Hsüan-tsung. We remember that this is one of Tu Fu's last poems, written in old age when the wanderer has finally realized he will never again return north to his home in the capital. And we remember our image of Li Kuei-nien, the most famous singer in the capital before the days of the rebellion, one of Hsüan-tsung's favorites in the Imperial Music Academy. After the dispersal of the academy musicians during the rebellion, Li Kuei-nien lost his popularity and privileged position; now in his old age he wanders through the Southland, surviving by selling his aging talents at parties. The *Records of Ming-huang* tell us, "He had once received special favor from His Majesty, but afterward became a wanderer in the Southland, who would always sing a few stanzas whenever he came upon some special occasion or fine scene. And when the guests at a party heard him, there was not one but would put down his winecup and wipe away tears." For the banqueters of the Southland, Li Kuei-nien is what Tu Fu called *yü-wu,* a "remainder," something left over"—not simply the singer who stands before them, but a reminder of what he once was and of the changes that have occurred in the world and in the singer's circumstances. He stands before us and sings, framed by the ghosts of the K'ai-yüan era, a world of luxury and pleasure that was blind to the destruction coming upon it.

Where is the poetry in these four lines? It is not simply in the melancholy evocation of past splendor lost but in the space between what is said and what the two men are thinking and feeling. Let me

be precise about this: the poetry is not in the scenes remembered or in the fact that they are remembered or even in the contrast between then and now. The poetry lies in the way in which the words guide the motions of memory and at the same time in the way the words *hang back* from the completion of those motions. These particular words give their own shape to the pain of loss, yet they pretend to cover it over. The words are a gossamer veil, the mere form of a concealment that intensifies the allure of what lies beneath.

Tu Fu remembers the salon of Li Fan, the Prince of Ch'i and the great patron of music and poetry in the early K'ai-yüan. If we have read enough poems and anecdotes of the K'ai-yüan, we can remember those gatherings too. But Tu Fu says, "I saw you then commonly," *hsün-ch'ang,* and "heard you sing so many times," *chi-tu.* Unlike so many memories, this is not the memory of a moment, but of a span of time when encounters with Li Kuei-nien were "common" *(hsün-ch'ang).* It may be that even in those days Tu Fu valued such encounters, but nothing "common" is ever valued enough. Now, having lost that easy access, the very commonness of such encounters is itself to be valued, and the ordinary *(hsün-ch'ang)* becomes extraordinary. In this moment memory recognizes loss, and the loss confers value on what was then taken for granted.

Li Kuei-nien, seeing Tu Fu as he appears now, might never guess that such a person was once a frequent guest at those splendid aristocratic gatherings—but then who would guess that of Li Kuei-nien? Tu Fu "recognizes" who Li Kuei-nien was, and seeing himself in his present state through Li Kuei-nien's eyes, asks for similar recognition, that *he* was that sort of person once too. Now listen to the poem again and hear his desire to be acknowledged: "I saw you ever so often then."

Against the "commonly" and "so many times" of long ago, we have a present "once again," *yu:* this time a solitary encounter, given value by the loss of past encounters, insufficiently valued, a solitary encounter framed by long separation, both in the past and anticipated in the future. The readers of this poetry were acutely aware of what was not said, and here Tu Fu withholds the most common sentiment expressed in poems on meeting someone: "When will we meet again?" The present meeting will probably be their last; they both know it; they are old men. Tu Fu does not speak of it: instead he speaks only of the moment, "right now," *cheng-shih,* and the beauty of the scenery.

In gesturing to the beauty of the scene before us, he would direct

our attention away from remembrance of times past and the probable future. But the gesture is a veil so transparent that it makes us feel our losses all the more intensely. It is one of those painful moments when we say, "Let's not talk about that," and try to change the subject. And there is a forced enthusiasm about the new subject, marking the truth that our thoughts are still trapped, and trapped even more than before, in what we have agreed to forget.

But let's put that darker truth aside and simply notice the lovely scenery, *hao feng-ching*. Then we notice the more particular season of that scenery, "the season of falling flowers." And for all its distracting charm, this scenery will not permit a person to forget; it gives back an image of "last moments," of falling and fading, to echo their own.

A memory of human edifices and society, of princely lodges and aristocratic parties, is conjured up in a couplet and vanishes. As the chimeras of memory vanish from our eyes, a compensatory beauty of the present natural landscape appears in their place. But this compensation darkens into a mere reminder of the loss, with falling flowers that recall again the conclusiona of seasons of splendor.

The final words are the beginning of the present occasion: "I meet you once again," *yu feng chün,* another statement haunted by silences. The poem seems to say, "I met you many times before, and now I meet you again," as if to add simply one more to the sum of their encounters. The statement is true, but of course, this meeting is no mere "meeting you again" as in those "common" encounters in the K'ai-yüan: this is a very special "meeting you again," like no other. It is not at all the simple repetition it claims to be. By phrasing it as common repetition—"I meet you once again"—he half pretends to conceal all the weight of this meeting, the peculiar happiness and pain that lie precisely in its not being like all the others. Again the gesture is transparent: by not saying it, he shouts what he does not say.

Four lines of memory, loss, and absence: the loss of a past, absolute loss anticipated in the future. Yet nowhere does the poem say a word about loss. It speaks only of meetings:

> In the lodges of the Prince of Ch'i
> I saw you commonly,
> And heard you so many times
> in front of Ts'ui Ti's halls.
> Right now, in the finest scenery
> of all the Southland,
> And in the season of falling flowers,
> I meet you once again.

The poetry is found in the ghosts summoned up by the words and in the way those words try to pretend the ghosts are not present; the strength of the ghosts depends upon the intensity of that pretense. It is the same for us. We read this simple poem, or find an encrusted arrowhead on an ancient battlefield, or visit some scene of our private past: the poem or object or scene in our eyes has a mocking doubleness: it is both its minimal self and at the same time a site, a locus for something else. Such poems and objects and scenes are circumscribed spaces through which the past makes its way back to us.

The eight chapters in this book tell a story about such sites and what they do to the human beings who happen upon them. The chapters are not systematic or chronological; they are not meant as bricks for the sturdy base or for the airy pinnacle of the edifice of Chinese literary studies. Nor are they intended as a balanced introduction for the nonspecialist. They aspire only to give pleasure in reflection on some memorable texts, as we make our way through the encounter with the past, which can never be comprehended by any single route.

To write an orderly history of the experience of the past in the Chinese literary tradition would be to construct an illusion: not only would such a history be untrue in the way that all histories are untrue, it would also offer singular violence to this particular concern. Writing about the past may have its "roots and branchings" *(pen-mo),* but "history" is something we do to the collective memories of the civilization, just as memoirs and autobiography are something we do to our own memories. The historian processes the past and attempts to definitively master its dangerous forces. Such acts of making memory into history are interesting in themselves, but we should not necessarily try to process our own reflections into the illusion of a history. The past shows its true dominion when it breaks into the present, at precisely those moments before we can control it with the fixed ceremonies that constitute a "history."

Still we may consider "roots and branchings," some phases of an order in time: how the fascination with the past first came into being, some of the forms it later took, and some of the ceremonies of response the encounter engaged. This loose web of generalities and

common texts can form the background for the individual works of particular allure taken up in the following chapters.

A backward gaze can be found in the earliest works of Chinese literature, in the *Shu ching,* the *Book of Documents,* and in the *Shih ching,* the *Book of Songs* (but not in the early strata of the *Yi ching,* the *Book of Changes,* which concerns itself with the eternally recurrent). In the authentic portions of the *Book of Documents* a watchful eye is always kept on the ancestors and their strictures, as well as on the minatory example of failed predecessors. In the same way the "Great Odes" *(Ta-ya)* and "Hymns" *(Sung)* of the *Book of Songs* praise the ancestors and celebrate ancient victories. Everywhere attention is given to precedents and received custom, to what the Greeks called *nomos,* "law" in the sense of traditional usage. As in virtually all early societies, each significant act was to be carried out with careful regard to the proprieties of ancient custom.

This steady backward gaze was not, however, true reflection on the past. In the "Temple Hymns of Chou" *(Chou sung)* from early in the first millennium B.C., the deified ancestors are all around us; the universal regard for precedent and received custom is not a consideration of the past in its pastness, in its absence, but rather a compelling presence. In early societies the past is never far from the present; parents, the deified ancestors, hover close by. One speaks cautiously, knowing they are listening. In the great harvest festival ode *Sheng-min,* "Giving Birth to the People," the singers first recount the legend of Hou Chi, the gift of grain, and the foundation of the House of Chou; they conclude with what would now be considered a performative utterance, making something true by declaring it so:

> So the fragrance begins to rise,
> and the god is content to consume it.
> How sweet it is, how truly timely,
> for Hou Chi founded the rite
> and the folk have no fault or flaw in the doing
> from then on until now.

Ancient strictures and ritual usages are not handed down without anxiety. Always there is the threat of some "fault or flaw" in the transmission, which will make the ancestors displeased and cause them to withdraw their blessings. Against this anxiety the singers declare the rite to be perfect. Yet behind both the celebration and the anxiety lies the certainty that the past is not separate but, rather, attends closely upon our actions.

At some early stage of their development, civilizations with written records tend to encounter a challenge to *nomos,* received custom and rite. In response to that challenge the *nomos* is either overthrown or secured on new and firmer grounds. For the Greeks the challenge came from a philosophical tradition with its new physics and cosmology, culminating in Socrates, who claimed the right to question all custom to see if it could withstand the test of rational inquiry. The citizens of Athens may have put Socrates to death, but they were themselves the great enemies of *nomos.* In Thucydides' history the Spartans saw themselves as the guardians of *nomos,* while the Athenians prided themselves and were hated by others for their defiance of custom. In the Jewish biblical tradition the crisis of *nomos* survives in tales of popular apostasies and the allure of foreign cults; here old custom emerges victorious by making a claim to transcendent rather than to merely traditional authority, giving birth to a new and absolute version of the Law.

In the intellectual ferment that accompanied the dissolution of the Eastern Chou monarchy (from the seventh century B.C., down to the Ch'in reunification of China in the third century B.C.) *nomos* was put to a severe test. New value systems, advocating behavior based on some version of expediency, were raised by philosophers and social thinkers from Mo-tzu to Han-fei-tzu. Unlike Greece, China produced no compelling vision of morality apart from *nomos* (although Greece never produced a compelling amoral vision as the Taoists did). The apologists of expediency could build an intellectual structure on the world as it then was in order to make government more successful, but they could not *justify* the world as it was.

We cannot know how far the reverence for the Chou *nomos* ever really extended outside the world of the early Chou court; however, we do know that those who did revere the Chou *nomos* believed that it should be permanently and universally true. Unlike the law of the people of Israel or the *nomos* of the Greeks, the customs of Chou were considered valid for all human beings. And that vision of the validity of the Chou *nomos* survived heroically in a world where its implementation was all but hopeless. Some of the finest moments of ancient Chinese literature occur precisely when a traditionalist encounters the living world of expediency.

Witness the following speech given in the *Tso ch an,* an early history which became one of the Confucian classics. Whether the speech is based on an original document or is an artistic recreation is uncertain, but it breathes an archaic sense of custom and the rule of precedent. Prince Chao, the eldest son of King Ching of the Chou, has been forced to flee the central court to the southern state of Ch'u because the feudal lord of Tsin has set up a rival claimant for the throne. Prince Chao sends the following appeal to the other feudal lords, requesting their aid in establishing him rather than his brother on the throne. The date is 515 B.C.

Prince Chao begins by tracing the origins of the Chou feudal system, the grants of territory to the full brothers of the royal house of Chou, and the reciprocal obligations demanded by those lords to protect the Chou throne. This is followed by a long series of examples of how the "brothers" fulfilled their duties. Yet the personal appeal to kin, invoking archaic consanguinity, is willfully blind to five centuries of independent evolution of the ducal houses. The story he tells, using the language of ritual obligation, of how the brothers "did their utmost for the royal house," is only the thinnest veil over the violent history of the Chou throne.

Long ago King Wu conquered Yin,
King Ch'eng made all in the four directions tranquil,
And King K'ang gave our people ease:
These all set their full brothers in fiefs
To be a hedge and screen for Chou.
This too they said: "We will not keep only for ourselves
the achievements of Kings Wen and Wu,
And if our descendants should go astray, face ruin, be
overwhelmed,
Then the feudal lords will save them."
. . . . . .
Then it came to King Li,
And that king's heart was stubborn and tyrannical,
So that the myriads of our people could not bear it;
Then the feudal lords established the king in Che,
And gave up their own places
To attend to the royal government.
. . . . . .
When it came to King Yu,
Heaven had no pity on Chou:
The king was blind and unseemly,

And through transgression lost his position.
King Hui usurped Heaven's decree of rule,
But the feudal lords replaced him
And established the king's rightful successor,
Thereby transferring the seat to Chia-ju.
These have been examples of how our brothers have
been able to do their utmost for the royal house.

Beneath the story of righteous action is another story—of rebellion, ursurpation, and powerful dukes deposing and enthroning puppet kings at will. Prince Chao continues by telling of a prophecy, given "in the sixth year of King Ting," that after three generations there would be a disruption in the royal line; he tells of how Kings Ling and Ching completed their reign, but how he, in fulfillment of the prophecy, has been deprived of his rightful place on the throne.

Now chaos has fallen on the royal house:
Ch'i of Shen and T'i of Liu
Have brought terror and destruction to all the world.
Their tyrannous actions are unseemly,
And when they speak of our former kings, they say:
"What is there of permanent authority?—
I shall do as my own mind decrees."
Who has the courage to call them off,
As they lead their hordes of merciless men
To bring destruction on our royal house?
. . . . . .
Insolent they are in behavior
And have falsified the commands of the former kings.
Tsin has acted unrighteously,
Supported them, assisted them,
Intending to let them carry out unbounded desires.

Here is one, unfortunate,
Terror-stricken, driven afar,
Hiding away in Ching-man
With nowhere to go.
But if my several brothers and relatives
Will follow the laws of Heaven
And give no aid to those crafty evildoers,
So that they thereby obey the decree of the former kings
And avert calling punishment upon them from Heaven,
Thus protecting and providing for me in my misfortune,
Then I will have my wish.

The unseemly perpetrators of present misfortune are evil precisely in their disdain for the Chou *nomos:* they reject the permanent authority of the former kings, and instead of "Heaven's decree," they proclaim a new and lawless world in which "I shall do as my own mind decrees." Such mad self-authorization is contrasted with archaic obligation, as if the mere juxtaposition would shock the feudal lords into supporting the prince's cause. The prince continues his speech by citing what seems to be the ancient law of succession, and, applying the law to Tsin's claimant to the throne, he shows that claim to be illegitimate. He concludes regally: "May you, my brothers elder and younger, take action upon it."

The entire speech, in sentiment, diction, and form, is rich in an archaic dignity that had no place in the political world of the late sixth century B.C. It may be a later recreation, but if it is a genuine document, its blind faith in the authority of the Chou *nomos* would be appropriate for someone raised in the ritualism of the late Chou court. This writer obviously had great feeling for history, ritual, and custom. If the writer really was Prince Chao or someone of his entourage, then he was remarkably naive to hope that such an appeal to precedent, custom, and moral law would be effective. No rewards are promised, no advantages pointed out, no threats made, no clever analogies drawn: the persuasive force of the speech rests entirely on faith in the power of the Chou *nomos* to command allegiance.

What gives this speech much of its appeal is the comment appended to it in the *Tso chuan:* "Min Ma-fu heard Master Chao's words and said, 'There is ceremony in the circulation of these words. But Master Chao has violated the decree of King Ching; moreover, he has taken himelf far from the might of Tsin—this is want of ceremony in the extreme. Anyway, what good will his words do?' " Without debating the rights and wrongs of Prince Chao's position, we have here a true collision between the old world and the new world of the late sixth century B.C. The old world, as presented in the speech itself, is not that of the Chou at the height of its power, but a Chou of memory, an elegaic Chou—the feudal state as family, with faith in the force of custom, a world in which ceremony and moral choices shape the actions of rulers. Min Ma-fu belongs to the new world: he answers Chao's appeal with ethical countercharges but supports them with the true consideration of the age, not without a certain cynicism—Prince Chao has *yüan Tsin chih ta,* "taken himself far from the might of Tsin." "Anyway, what good will his words do?"

This text speaks for the late Chou court with a blind assurance or blind hope, appealing to a moral order that no longer exists. Such a claim to authority as is made here for the Chou *nomos* must either succumb to the argument of expediency or be given a new foundation. We find that new foundation in the *Lun-yü,* the *Analects* of Confucius. Setting aside the often discussed transformations of traditional ethical concepts in the *Analects,* let us consider instead the most subtle, and perhaps the most important, way in which Confucius set the old Chou *nomos* on a firmer foundation: it is Confucius who begins to present the Chou moral order not as a fact but as a possibility, not as something one can assume but as something to be desired.

Many passages in the *Analects* attest to this new relation to the Chou past. Let us consider one of the most famous: "He said, 'I am not someone who was born knowing it; I love the past and am someone who seeks for it earnestly' " (VII.19). We may wonder if the "it" he seeks is the same "it" he does not know innately, yet if we are acquainted with Confucius, we recognize that the two must be in some way inseparable. Innate knowledge is not necessarily of the past or of the present; it is simply the condition of the sage. But if one happens to be born without that innate knowledge, one must seek it from those who possess it—the ancient sages. Thus the seeking becomes a seeking in and of the past. For Confucius this knowledge is not to be had effortlessly; embodied in the Chou *nomos,* the sages' knowledge must be sought both by self-examination and by study. Contrast this with the declaration of the perfect presence of the tradition in *Sheng-min,* "Giving Birth to the People," or with the desperate assertion of the Chou *nomos* in Prince Chao's missive to the feudal lords. In the *Analects* that tradition must be loved and sought; it must be recovered, internalized, and transmitted. The great lords of Tsin laugh at those who assume, like Prince Chao, that the Chou *nomos* still is a force, but to say that it *should be* a force and may sometime be realized again is a far stronger claim and one not so easily mocked.

The transformation of the Chou *nomos* from present possession to distant object of desire also acknowledges that the tradition can be broken and lost; again the *Analects* refer to the two archaic dynasties preceding the Chou—the Hsia and the Shang (or Shang-Yin): "He said, 'I might speak of the ceremonies of Hsia, but Ch'i [the state charged with the maintenance of Hsia rites] cannot attest to what they were. I might speak of the ceremonies of Yin, but Sung [the

state charged with the maintenance of Shang-Yin rites] cannot attest to what they were. This is because the records are inadequate. If the records were adequate, I might attest to these things' " (III.9).

The appearance in the *Analects* of this vision of the past was a major event in the history of the civilization, and this event is the proper beginning of my topic of inquiry. The past became an absence and an object of desire that had to be earnestly sought, its remains recovered, its losses lamented. In China the ancient tribal *nomos* of the Chou was not supplanted by philosophical inquiry or considerations of expediency, nor was it transformed by transcendent authority into the law; rather it survived as a historical possibility, the fragments of its "records" conserved and studied, in the hope of restoring it. But the perfection of restoration always eludes us. The deified ancestors have been watching over our shoulders as we perform the harvest rites and sing the perfection of the rites in the performance. We turn our heads, and the ancestors are gone; we are no longer certain how to proceed. All that remains is the imperfect memory of how the rites were done perfectly before; all we have is a few old texts. On one side is the laughter of Chuang-tzu's wheelwright P'ien, telling us that our texts are merely the dregs of the sages' wisdom, telling us that what was truly important could not be handed down. On the other side is the First Emperor of Ch'in, ordering our books to be burned and our scholars to be executed in the last desperate act of a long utilitarian tradition. The utilitarian tradition recognized clearly that its true enemy was our affection for the past; unable to defeat that affection by argument, at last it was driven to violence. It failed.

When we speak of the experience of the past, we should take care to distinguish other concerns that merely use the past as a disguise. Perhaps the most common and least interesting is the use of the past as a "mirror" for the present. Ssu-ma Ch'ien, the Grand Historian of the Han, presents this starkly: "We reside in the world of the present but set our minds on the ancient Way, that it might be a mirror for us . . . Observe how honor and fame were attained, how dismissal and disgrace were incurred, and you will have a compendium of success and failure in your own age" (*Shih chi* 18, p. 878). If this passage is indeed by Ssu-ma Ch'ien, it is not the same Ssu-ma Ch'ien who is so deeply moved by the fates of those whose stories he tells. This passage is simply the utilitarian argument in historical garb: the past is no more than a collection of examples, giving the reader

insight into the most advantageous way to proceed in the present. Nothing could be more different from the Confucian imperative to restore the Chou *nomos*. The *Shih chi* passage suggests that we make free use of historical examples to accomplish tactical goals for personal advantage; the Confucian imperative insists that in encountering the ancients, we ourselves must be changed—we discover in the ancients not mere means but the embodiment of values.

A second common misuse of the past, allied to the preceding one and no more interesting, is as a comparison or contrast to the present. A poem on T'ang social abuse using a Han setting or an account of a T'ang campaign in Central Asia in the shape of a Han campaign has nothing really to do with the past. Reference to the present may be found in all writing about the past if the reader looks for it, but this truth admits complex gradations, finally reaching a point where the past has no subsistence in its own right, where it is nothing more than a gossamer disguise for the present.

When I speak of the past here, I am speaking of it as "being past," some fullness that is over and gone, something that survives only metonymically—in texts, shards, and memories. Even the most vivid recreation of an ancient scene in historical song has an elegaic distance, something that eludes us despite the evidence of our senses, as when Helen stands before Faust. A powerful historical exemplar is not simply a case to be studied and used for present benefit; he makes a claim on us to acknowledge his historical being, and when we grant that, his absolute separation from us becomes significant. For T'ang poets, T'ao Ch'ien is not simply a neutral model of attitude and behavior; the fact that he was a living person is significant beyond the authority it confers on the model, and poets often express regret that they were not alive in T'ao's age to have known him. There is some subsistence and wholeness in the past that eludes mere application to the present, just as the past always eludes perfect knowledge of it.

This true sense of the past engages reflection on the continuity of the civilization, on what can and cannot be transmitted and on what can be known in transmission. Only the secular tradition grants any promise of permanent value and significance to human acts (perpetuating a "self" whose illusory nature is exposed by Taoism and, later, by Buddhism); in this context the problem of transmission is a question of some moment. Whenever someone confronts that question, it is an ominous and unsettling experience.

• • • I • • •

Lush Millet and a Stele: The Rememberer Remembered

There is a category of active relations in which imperfection is the necessary condition for the continued existence of the relation. In its theoretical perfection an "imitation" ceases to exist as itself and becomes the thing imitated. In the same way a perfect erasure disappears along with what is erased. For an erasure to be present for us, we must know that something *was* there; we must see the traces of the erasure: blottings, blurrings, indentations on the page or in the landscape. Erasure is the forceful writing of loss, absence, and rejection. Because we crave to "be"—in body, in works, in writing—we can never view such erasures dispassionately, as mere blank space.

Nature erases us. A time comes when human beings and their works sink to the earth and are covered over. The contrast between the permanent renewal of nature and the extinction of the individual is a cliché, a worn theme linked to a commonplace sentiment. But buried beneath every cliché is some shared human concern; we give such responses the contemptuous name "clichés" because we resent the extinction of the individual response in the common sentiment. This too is an erasure, and we react against it with a contempt born of fear, a fear that is a foretaste of that other extinction of human identity.

Clichés ask to be excavated, and especially this cliché, which is concerned with the loss of what is individual in the past, what has been covered over by anonymous nature. It is not just a cliché itself, it is the emblem of all clichés—the individual wearing away, disappearing into anonymity and collective repetition.

Hills may still outline the terraces of fallen palaces, and worn stones may be steles whose inscriptions are just barely legible. Time covers things over, effaces detail, blurs form. "What was" becomes invisible except to those who know how to look for it. It is that disposition to look on the world in a certain way which bears the full weight of our relation to the past.

There is a photograph by Herbert W. Gleason (1855–1937) with the title "Mayflowers, Plymouth, 1903"—a photograph of flowers blooming among the rocks. Those mayflowers, which preceded and now survive the name of the ship *Mayflower,* touch on our cliché of the disappearance of individual human works into nature's unchanging continuity. But what is truly startling about the photograph is the date. The mayflowers of today differ not at all from the mayflowers of 1903, and if I could find that spot in Plymouth, at the right moment of the year and the right time of day, I could take a photograph which, if not identical, would be hard to distinguish from Gleason's. If the photograph had been entitled simply "Mayflowers," or if it had been part of an old botanical text, I would see the photograph differently. But with the subscription "1903," the photograph gathers a particular beauty and value into itself; and I seem to discover in it the unique tints and elegaic grace old photographs so often possess. But this picture, in its timeless anonymity, mocks my affection for it and reminds me to what degree remembrance lies in the rememberer.

It is a commonplace of cultural history that each age ascribes its own concerns to ages past, even though that later age aspires to impartial interpretation and just remembrance. And if that later age is itself concerned precisely with the remembrance of earlier ages—looking to "things that survive," *yi-wu,* and "traces of what was," *ku-chi*—then strange doublings may occur. Researchers of that later age, reflecting on texts and artifacts from the past, may discover there the mirror of their own interests, someone in the past reflecting on a still more distant past. There are chains of remembrance, linking one past to pasts still more remote, and sometimes also reaching into a speculative future that will remember our remembering. And as we discover and commemorate the rememberers of the past, it is easy to conclude that in remembering we ourselves will be remembered and will be worthy of memory.

Such contracts of remembrance bind a civilization through time. Confucius tells us *shu erh pu tso,* "I transmit; I do not make" (*Analects*

VII.1). "Making" belonged to those sage-kings of the remote past who initiated the civilization. "Transmission" is the task of the best of the later-born, of *hsien,* "those with virtue." In proclaiming that he only transmits, Confucius silently instructs us to follow his example, and in that instruction is embedded another truth: were the Master only to "make," later ages might follow *that* example, each "making" but failing to remember and transmit what has been made before (and pretending not to remember the powerful example of making they would be remembering and following). By setting in oppositon the terms "transmission" and "making," Confucius reminds us of the fragility of what is made, how it is subject to erasure unless tended with constant care. Only through the promise of transmission can human action hope to survive beyond a circumscribed present.

Transmission is no mere duty, reluctantly performed: it is a central piece of the machinery of civilization, whose imperfect functioning is watched with anxiety and passion. In the fourteenth poem of his "Autum Meditations," Meng Chiao (751–814) speaks of that anxiety with a fierce intensity:

> The Yellow River rises back up to heaven,
> And for all streams there is a coming back;
> But the human mind cannot equal these streams—
> It goes straight off and never turns round;
> It goes straight off, and though some are clever,
> They never reach the Blessed Isles.
> It goes straight off, it never tires,
> Reaches no farther than some public post.
> Hold with the past, don't lose the past:
> If you lose the past, your will easily breaks;
> If you lose the past, even the sword snaps;
> If you lose the past, the zither too laments.
> And the Master's tears for the loss of the past
> In those days fell streaming in torrents.
> This old poet's mind cares for the loss of the past,
> By now a chill and sparkling white.
> Bones of the past have no corrupting flesh,
> Robes of the past are like the moss.
> I urge you, strive to hold with the past:
> Hold with the past and all foulness melts away.

This is a bizarre, frenzied, almost incoherent vision of human mortality: the circularity of nature's cycles is set in opposition to linear humanity, which "goes straight off"; in that straightness is combined both the moral and the mortal aspects of human nature. Yet hidden in the poem are secret human continuities, the human circularities of repetition. Meng Chiao repeats the Master, Confucius, in rejecting a search for immortality on the "Blessed Isles" and finding no ultimate value in public position, but instead clinging to and transmitting an antiquity that constantly threatens to slip away. The frantic voice of the poem acknowledges the seriousness of the threat: without the promise of transmission, the "will" (*chih,* "goals," "that upon which one is intent") to achieve anything in the civilization would be broken, and nothing would matter beyond the pleasure of the moment.

Yet when we look at the only specific moment in the past that Meng Chiao remembers, we find Confucius there, shedding tears for the loss of the past. The rememberer is remembered, his act of remembrance more vivid than the object of his memory. Likewise we read that the Master "transmits; he does not make": it is this passage in the *Analects* on remembrance that *we* remember and make famous. Here is a reflexive irony, that what is transmitted is transmission itself; the form of survival becomes the content of what survives. And in this we may discover a hidden truth about the nature of historical civilization, that above all it is the structure of its own perpetuation.

A broad and general concern for the preservation of ancient values can be found throughout the early texts of Chinese civilization. Classics such as the *Book of Songs (Shih ching)* were interpreted as the embodiments of ethical values transmitted from a greater antiquity. Those songs that did not refer specifically to historical situations were usually taken as having general ethical referents: for example, fine jade corresponding to good character. However, during the Western Han these more general ethical interpretations were increasingly bound to specific historical examples. Consonant with the historical interests of the age, the Mao interpretations of the *Songs* located virtually all of the individual poems at particular moments in the moral history of the ancient Chou Dynasty.

Having survived the general loss of ancient texts and the book burning of the Ch'in, the *Songs* were truly *yi-wu,* "things which had survived." When properly read, they seemed to offer their Han exegetes compelling glimpses of the lost world of the Chou. The *Songs* constituted a special kind of moral history, which differed from the third-person narrative of the *Shih chi,* the *Historical Records.* The *Songs*

were taken to be the direct responses of ages long past, preserving the inner lives of the ancients just as a bronze vessel or chronicler's entry might tell of their outer lives. Reading the *Songs* with their Mao interpretations was itself an encounter with "traces of the past."

Each age looks into the past and discovers itself there. As the Han exegetes searched for historical occasions in poems that yielded such occasions only unwillingly, it is not surprising that they discovered at least one song that seemed to repeat their own interests. They thought they heard the voice of someone being stirred by "traces of the past" and were themselves particularly stirred by that poet's being stirred. Although they did not name it as such, the Mao commentators of the *Songs* created through their interpretation the first *huai-ku,* a "meditation on the past" occasioned by the encounter with some ancient site (the honor should properly be shared with the song and story of the Shang prince Chi-tzu passing the ruins of the Shang capital, as recounted in the *Shih chi*). The *huai-ku* that they created by interpretation contains many elements of the genre as it was practiced in later poetry: an ancient site encountered, the poet stirred by human loss in contrast to nature's cyclical continuity, and the outlines of absent shapes that hold the poet's attention and keep him from leaving. The Mao preface explains:

> "There the millet is lush" is a lament for the Chou ancestral capital. A great officer of Chou was passing the former ancestral temples and palace buildings, which were entirely covered by millet. He lamented the collapse of the Chou royal house and lingered there, unable to bring himself to leave. He then wrote this poem:
>
> There the millet is lush,
> There the grain is sprouting.
> I walk here with slow, slow steps,
> My heart shaken within me.
> Those who know me
> Would say my heart is grieved;
> Those who know me not
> Would ask what I seek here.
> Gray and everlasting Heaven—
> What man did this?
>
> There the millet is lush,
> There the grain comes to ear.
> I walk here with slow, slow steps,
> My heart as if drunk within me.
> Those who know me
> Would say my heart is grieved;
> Those who know me not
> Would ask what I seek here.
> Gray and everlasting Heaven—
> What man did this?
>
> There the millet is lush,
> There the grain forms its seed.
> I walk here with slow, slow steps,
> My heart as if choked within.
> Those who know me
> Would say my heart is grieved;
> Those who know me not
> Would ask what I seek here.
> Gray and everlasting Heaven—
> What man did this?

There are several reasons why the Mao commentators discovered a *huai-ku* in this poem, which gives so little internal indication of its frame of reference. One reason may be the very similar song attributed to the Shang prince Chi-tzu, supposedly written when passing the ruins of the Shang capital. Another reason lies in lines that have no parallel in Chi-tzu's song: "Those who know me," challenging the reader with the old Confucian imperative *chih-jen,* "to know people." The poem draws a distinction between the discerning viewer/reader and the ignorant viewer/reader, who cannot understand why the traveler lingers there. The traveler sees not merely a field of millet, but rather the buried ruins of the old Chou capital and the history of its fall; in the same way we, the later readers of the poem, are asked from within the poem to see not the mere surfaces but what lies beneath—not the outer surface of a man pacing through fields of millet but rather a "heart within," *chung-hsin,* brooding on traces of the past that are likewise buried beneath the deceptive surface of millet. Such a capacity to read through illusory surfaces to a complexity buried beneath belong not just to *huai-ku* but to the reading of all old poetry.

In this repeated contrast between knowing and not knowing, distinguishing those who "know people" from those who do not, we cannot help but notice the last line of each stanza: *tz'u ho jen tsai,* literally "Who was this?" The Mao exegete and his exegete Cheng

Hsüan take this to refer to the one who was responsible for the ruin of the capital. Our speaker, who asks that *he* be understood, confesses that he does not know who, or what kind of person, could have brought this to pass, or more properly, what could have been in the person's heart *(chung-hsin)*. The chain of knowing ends in a question, in ignorance and a desire to know the final moral and historical truth behind these grain-covered surfaces. What is remembered in our reading of this poem is itself an act of remembering, which ultimately meets an uncertainty, a blank space, an origin or "root" *(pen)* that has been erased.

The grain keeps changing in its cycle, from sprout to ear to seed; the man lingers, his state of mind varying in nearly synonymous categories of distress—shaken, drunk, choked. The three stages of growing grain and three states of mind are the only changes that occur in the three stanzas: one follows a natural progression; the other goes nowhere. He is trapped in repetition, barely noticing the changing surface, looking instead to the unchanging "origin" *(pen)* of the present scene, the "root" *(pen)* hidden beneath the surface of the grain.

The chain of memory ends in uncertainty, anonymity, some blank space. We ask "What person did this?" Confucius, the great rememberer, is more vivid to us than the ancient sages *he* remembers: after telling us "I transmit; I do not make," he continues, "I trust in and love antiquity, and secretly compare myself to old P'eng." We scarcely know who "old P'eng" is, and we scarcely care; for us, the rememberer is greater than the one remembered.

Remembrance concerns names, circumstance, detail, site. We prefer not to stand too close to the hazy and uncertain end of the chain of memory. It is less moving to remember the anonymous dead than to remember a particular person who was himself moved by remembering the anonymous dead. Better still if we know exactly where to stand.

There were sites for acts of remembrance and for commemorating acts of remembrance for future generations. Perhaps the most remarkable of these was the "stele for shedding tears," *to-lei-pei,* on Mount Hsien, erected for Yang Hu, the governor of the region in the mid-third century. The *Tsin History* tells:

> Yang Hu delighted in the mountains and rivers. Whenever the atmosphere was particularly fine, he would always go off to Mount Hsien, and there he would drink and recite poetry, never tiring the whole day through. But once, overcome with emotion and sighing, he said to Tsou Chan and others, "As long as the universe has been, so long has this mountain been. Many have been the worthy and great men who, just as you and I now, have climbed here to gaze afar. They have all perished and are heard of no more—this is what gives me sorrow. If after my lifetime I still have any consciousness, then surely my soul will climb to this spot." And Tsou Chan said, "Your virtue crowns the whole world; your way continues that of wise men of the past. Such noble reputation and admiration will surely continue on with this mountain. But for people like myself, it will be just as you have said." . . . [After Yang Hu's death] the people of Hsiang-yang erected a stele and built a temple on the spot where Yang Hu used to take his ease on Mount Hsien, and every year they would make sacrifices to him. And not a single person who looked on the stele could help shedding tears, so that Tu Yü gave it the name "stele for shedding tears."

This site is not simply a locus for remembrance; it becomes so out of Yang Hu's own act of remembrance in the middle of the third century. Ostensibly Yang Hu's virtue as governor ensures that he will be remembered, but the commemorative stele is linked by its site and by its popular name, the "stele for shedding tears," to the occasion of the anecdote above. Yang Hu sighs for the anonymous dead; the later-born weep for a name, Yang Hu, and in that name, for the memory of his virtue and his famous act of remembrance. To weep for a particular man rather than for the anonymous dead, there must be a stele with writing, a mediating fragment that marks the name and a special spot on the mountain.

It was not something Yang Hu did simply for the sake of remembrance that ensured his being remembered; undying fame was freely given to him by others. He was remembered initially by the people of Hsiang-yang because of his kindness as governor, but eventually visitors from all over China came to weep at his stele, remembering his remembrance of the anonymous dead. He became the very embodiment of the contract that the rememberer will be remembered, which served the hopes of the later-born even as it served Yang Hu. Outside of that contract one must join the anonymous dead, name lost, perfect erasure.

Of the "three ways to immortality" *(san pu hsiu),* Yang Hu ostensibly achieved remembrance by an "accomplishment of virtue"

(li-te); the writing on the stele was given by others. Remembering Yang Hu, the later-born could inscribe their names in the chain of memory only by an "accomplishment of words" *(li-yen).* In this way Meng Hao-jan became one of the great rememberers of Yang Hu in "Climbing Mount Hsien with Others":

> In human affairs there is succession and loss;
> Men come and go, forming present and past.
> Rivers and hills keep traces of their glory,
> And our generation too climbs here for the view.
> The waters sink, run shallow through Fishweir;
> When the sky is cold, you see deep into Yün-meng Marsh.
> Yang Hu's stele is still here:
> Done reading, tears soak our robes.

Tai-hsieh, "succession and loss": one thing "takes the place of" *(tai)* some other thing, which at that moment "departs" *(hsieh).* This is the cyclical process of the grain, of the seasons, of that anonymous humanity for which Yang Hu sighed, and even of the dynasties whose capitals disappear, their place taken *(tai)* by lush fields of millet. Of human affairs only "names"/"reputations," *ming,* and perhaps "inscriptions," *ming,* survive—or at least "*still* survive," *shang-tsai.*

Meng Hao-jan's poem closes with something like a ritual of remembrance: as all who have read the "stele for shedding tears" before us have wept, we too read and weep in our turn. A rite is an established form of action, which, as the *Book of Rites (Li chi)* tells us, appears as a natural norm from the communality of human feeling *(ch'ing).* A rite is always bound to some occasion—a wedding, a funeral, a coming of age—and in carrying out the rite, the person is less an individual than a role, a function in the relations of the occasion. In the performance of a rite, everything that is individual is submerged in the normative and collective human response proper to the occasion. The submergence of the individual is what permits repetition, and the possibility of repetition is the very soul of ritual.

Meng Hao-jan "climbs Mount Hsien with others," and his voice here is a truly collective voice, "we." Yet this poem is very much concerned with names, with what is individual, whether surviving or lost. The name Yang Hu is a focal point in the chain of the rite: as Yang Hu climbed to this spot with companions and sighed for the forgotten dead, so we companions, like all other visitors to this spot since Yang Hu's death, come here and weep for him. "In human affairs there is succession and loss"; in our rite of remembrance we are led by a name, *ming,* in an inscription, *ming,* which is not forgotten. That name is a nexus between the anonymous past and an anonymous future: we remember the rememberer.

The whole landscape on and around the mountain is marked by names and particular memories: Fishweir recalls the ancient recluse P'ang Te Kung, and Yün-meng Marsh makes us think of the poet Ch'ü Yüan—everywhere are *sheng-chi,* "traces of their glory" or "traces on the glorious landscape." Claims upon our memory have been staked everywhere in the scene; when we survey the landscape around Mount Hsien, we can no longer see only innocent nature, uncontaminated by history. In the human *lai-wang,* "coming and going," some have managed to attach something of themselves to nature's permanence, some "trace," *chi,* that is "retained," *liu.*

The eye passes over Fishweir and Yün-meng, stirring flickers of memory, but only when the eye turns back from its outward gazing, inward to the stele, do we encounter the only human name in the poem, Yang Hu. Yang Hu also gazed outward as we did, saw Fishweir and Yün-meng; we repeat him and the emotions he felt in the first six lines. The difference between then and now is in the stele, the name inscribed on it, and the anecdote from the *Tsin History* that lies behind it. There is a difference: Yang Hu climbed, gazed, and wept; we read, climb, gaze, read, and weep. There is a name, *ming,* and an inscription, *ming,* which mediates our experience. And our tears do not come until "the reading is done," *tu-pa.* We stand there and read out loud the same words about Yang Hu that have been read by so many before us, who stood where we now stand. It is precisely in this act of reading that the word, with the individual name and identity embedded in it, comes together with the repeatable, collective, and spontaneous act of ritual.

The rememberer is himself remembered through reading a text. Meng Hao-jan tells us how he, in his turn, remembers the rememberer and Meng inscribes his own act of remembering in a text for *us* to read in our turn. And this text is one of Meng Hao-jan's most famous poems, one for which he is remembered. Later, when T'ang poets visited Mount Hsien, they would not only remember Yang Hu, they would often also allude to, echo, or write in the style of Meng Hao-jan.

Meng Hao-jan managed to stake his own claim on part of that

landscape, overlapping Yang Hu's own. But for the later-born the landscape became crowded with names; there had been too many doings and undoings, too many visits, noble acts, and sentiments. There was no place left for the later-born to write their own names. Nature had become a patchwork of "sites."

To the first great rememberers it was given to inscribe their names, both literally, upon steles and monuments, and figuratively, upon the natural landscape. Sites, like texts, are essential for remembrance: they permit rereading, revisiting, and repetition as times do not. Sites and texts are *loci* of remembrance, bounded spaces in which a plenitude of human history, the complexity of human nature, and human experience are concentrated. They are the visible surfaces, the lush fields of millet, beneath which we look to the dense intricacy of the root. But they also occupy the ground, crowding out the weaker, later growths that try to take hold there.

With this in mind we revisit Mount Hsien and Yang Hu's site in the eleventh century, in the gentle and thoughtful prose of Ou-yang Hsiu's "A Record of the Pavilion on Mount Hsien":

> Mount Hsien looks down on the River Han; when I gaze at it, I can barely make it out. It is surely the smallest of the major mountains, yet its name is particularly well known in Ching-chou. Of course, this is because of the persons associated with it. And who are those persons?—none other than Yang Hu and Tu Yü.

Characteristically, the Sung writer takes what had previously been an implicit truth and raises it to the level of an explicit question, calling for reflection and investigation. Ou-yang Hsiu does not speak of Mount Hsien simply as a famous mountain, nor does he keep a tactful silence about a fact that must have startled many visitors—"So that's the famous Mount Hsien—that little mountain!" He notes at once the disparity between its fame and its size, the intrinsic endowments that might make a mountain noteworthy. This mountain is more than a pile of rock and earth "because of its people," *yi ch'i jen*. The use of the possessive pronoun, *ch'i,* is perfect here: in a certain way those famous people belong to the mountain, just as the mountain depends upon their *ming,* "name" and "reputation," for its own identity, its *ming*. The people and the mountain can no longer be separated: the mountain has become a "site," itself a figurative stele on which

the names of Yang Hu and Tu Yü are permanently inscribed. And what is the "root" of this; how did it come to happen?

> The Tsin was engaged in a military struggle with the state of Wu, and it was considered of great importance to hold Ching-chou. These two men, Yang Hu and Tu Yü, were governors here in succession; and thus in the conquest of Wu and in the completion of the Tsin heritage, their glorious deeds crowned that age. There is still some lingering resonance of their heroic and dashing manner which swells lushly over the whole region here, where the Yangtse meets the River Han; and people today still think on them. But it is on Yang Hu that they think most deeply.

The Sung essayist looks to the root and reflects on the history that is concentrated in the site; it is not enough here simply to shed tears in remembrance of Yang Hu; the Sung writer must ask how and why they came to be remembered. The deeds of both men were significant in the Tsin unification of China, yet almost at once Ou-yang Hsiu realizes that this answer is inadequate. Many eminent officials served the royal house of Tsin, and of Mount Hsien's two famous men, Tu Yü's deeds were the greater, yet it is Yang Hu who has the greater claim on our remembrance. And what lingers most directly in memory is not their deeds but something concerning their *feng-liu,* their "heroic and dashing manner." This calls for the skills of a historical biographer like the ancient Ssu-ma Ch'ien, someone who can compare the relative merits, the similarities and dissimilarities, of the two men. It is of interest, in this late and crowded world of the Sung, how that achievement, "undying fame," occurs.

> Tu Yü is, perhaps, the more famous for his deeds, while Yang Hu is famous for his kindness [*jen*]. Although these two men differed in their actions, in both cases what they did was enough to bring them immortality. But I do wonder why it was that they were both so anxious about their fame in later ages. The story goes that Yang Hu once climbed this mountain and in depression said to his entourage that the mountain would be here forever, while men of ages past had perished utterly and no more was heard of them. Then he considered his own case and fell into deep sorrow. Little did he realize that the mountain would become famous because of him. Tu Yü, on the other hand, had his achievements inscribed on two

> stones; one of these he set up on the mountain, and the other he threw into the deepest part of the river. He understood quite well that valleys and hills would someday change places (so that the inscription in the river would eventually be on a hilltop). What he did not understand was that the stone would someday wear away. Was it that they both went too far in their concern for immortality out of delight in the extent of their fame [*ming,* "name"]? or did they long for such remote goals because they paid themselves too much honor?

An interest in *ming,* "name" and "reputation," haunts the entire Record—the fame of a mountain and of persons, how fame is achieved, whose fame is greater, and now, having acknowledged that they have achieved undying fame, a polite scorn for their too great concern for fame. Yet it is exactly in these two anecdotes, which Ou-yang Hsiu raises up for scorn, that the two men's names are linked forever with Mount Hsien.

There is in this passage all the subtle plainness for which Ou-yang Hsiu is famous. Having acknowledged that Yang Hu is the more deeply remembered of the two men, Ou-yang Hsiu distinguishes the qualities for which they are remembered; he does not need to state the conclusion that Yang Hu's *jen,* his "kindness" or "fellow-feeling," lends greater strength to our fellow-feeling in remembering him. He turns gently away from comparison to note that both men are indeed remembered, as if the attainment of permanent remembrance alone were more significant than the degree or quality of the remembrance. And here he begins his criticism of the concern for everlasting "fame."

Tu Yü comes in for the stronger criticism, because he cast a duplicate stele into the depths of the river so that when the river valleys, after eons, became the hills, his stele would still be there on the mountaintop. In referring to those steles and in comparing the two men, there is the unspoken presence of that more famous "stele for shedding tears," set up not by Yang Hu but by others in memory of his kindness.

One cannot help feeling that Ou-yang Hsiu has misread the anecdote about Yang Hu and has been unfair in his criticism. Yang Hu sighed for the forgotten dead and for the fact that he and his friends would also be forgotten; his was a general lament for the human condition and oblivion, not a striving for the immortality of his own name. In his "kindness" Yang Hu remembered others, and

for that kindness he was remembered. The anecdote about Tu Yü is the counterexample: he is remembered not for his great deeds but for the extravagance of his desire to be remembered forever: ironically he is remembered for the folly of wanting to be remembered.

Why then does Ou-yang Hsiu set the two men together for joint scorn? Perhaps he suddenly realizes that both of the anecdotes enshrining the memory of the two men concern the *question* of being remembered. Yang Hu's kindness and Tu Yü's deeds are only incidental to that central question. And there seems some injustice, some secret vanity in the fact that because of these two anecdotes their two names should stake such a large claim on the name of this mountain. The concern for immortal fame both lures Ou-yang Hsiu and repels him; moreover, his function, in writing this Record, is to squeeze their magnitude a little smaller and to make a space in which one of the later-born, his friend Shih Chung-hui, may inscribe *his* name on the mountain.

> The mountain has had a pavilion from early times. Tradition has it that this is the place Yang Hu used to visit. Often it has fallen into ruin and just as often has been rebuilt; the reason for this is that there have been so many in later ages who admired Yang Hu's name and thought about the kind of person he was. In 1068, the first year of the Hsi-ning Reign, my friend Shih Chung-hui left his post as ceremonial director and came here to Hsiang-yang as governor. Because the pavilion was getting old, the following year he enlarged it and renovated it, surrounding it with a magnificent balcony and extending its rear porch, making these as popular as the pavilion itself.
>
> Shih Chung-hui's name is well known in our times, and his excellent reputation follows him wherever he goes. Hsiang-yang's people are at rest under his governance, and they delight in going with him on excursions. Thus it was that they came to give his former office title to the name of the new porch—"The Porch of the Ceremonial Director." Moreover, they wanted to record the occasion on stone so that it would be transmitted into the far future along with the names of Yang Hu and Tu Yü. Shih Chung-hui was unable to prevent them in either matter, so he came to me to write the Record.

Here is memory, renewal, and repetition—Yang Hu (and Tu Yü) always remembered; the pavilion at the site of Yang Hu's visits always

renewed; the repetition of Yang Hu in Shih Chung-hui's good government and excursions, accompanied by the fond, anonymous citizenry. We have here almost an exegetical illustration of the principle articulated in the *Analects* (II.11), *wen-ku erh chih-hsin,* "to cherish and stay familiar with what is old while understanding the new." The form of prose records *(chi)* like this often corresponds to the two clauses of the *Analects* passage: *wen-ku,* reviewing the past of the site, and *chih-hsin,* observing the present circumstances in its relation to the past. There is often a richness and subtlety in the relation between the two parts, past and present; nowhere is that more true than here, in the hands of the master, Ou-yang Hsiu.

Yang Hu, says Ou-yang Hsiu, was too greatly concerned with his *ming,* his "name." But the glory of his *ming,* then and now, came ultimately from his kindness, his care for others, and thus from how others thought of him. An outward gaze lies at the heart of this remembrance: he looked outward from this site and thought of others who had gazed outward from this site before him; so we too, when we stand here and gaze outward, repeat his actions and feelings and remember him as one of us. Tu Yü, on the other hand, took charge of his own inscription; when he thought of others climbing Mount Hsien in future days, he thought of them looking inward toward the mountain, reading his name on the inscription. He is remembered in an anecdote of extravagant folly; he failed to understand the true form of memory in repetition and constant renewal. His "name" too survives, but without the strong affection that visitors feel for Yang Hu. And Ou-yang Hsiu, the writer of written commemorations, often writes his doubts about the permanence of written commemoration.

In restoring Yang Hu's pavilion, what does Shih Chung-hui add to it? A balcony and a porch, where he and his friends can stand and look outward, where others after him can stand where he stood. His "name" is great in his time; others want to "name" the new porch after him and carve his "name" upon an inscription so that it will become immortal, along with the names of Yang Hu and Tu Yü. Ou-yang Hsiu has softly warned him against too great a concern for immortal "name"; but he gives Shih hope for such fame in Shih Chung-hui's exact repetition of the circumstances of Yang Hu—climbing to this spot with others, gazing outward into the landscape, concerning himself with others who may stand or who might have stood here, a kindness that leaves to others the erection of a commemorative stele and the inscription of his "name." This is the silent praise for Shih Chung-hui in Ou-yang Hsiu's conclusion:

> It is my opinion that since Shih Chung-hui understands so well the proper admiration for Yang Hu's manner and how to follow in his traces, we can know the kind of person he is and his aspirations. Because the people of Hsiang-yang love him and are contented with him, we can know the way he has governed Hsiang-yang. This is written because of the desires of the people of Hsiang-yang.

Tu Yü's name has dropped away; his case was only a minatory example, warning Shih Chung-hui and us against too great a concern for undying *ming.* Whatever failings Yang Hu may have had in this regard, Shih Chung-hui repeats the best aspect of Yang Hu: Shih's inscription—and perhaps, eventually, undying *ming*—comes from the love of others: "This is written because of the desire of the people of Hsiang-yang."

There follows a strange and beautiful coda in which Ou-yang Hsiu excuses himself from the usual responsibilities of a writer of "prose records" *(chi)* and in doing so, follows his own lesson: he leaves some freshness and freedom to the future. He withholds something of the power of the written word to stand between the well-read viewer and the landscape. He would spare his future readers an excess of history; he offers them a porch rather than a stele:

> When it comes to the splendid forms of the mountains and rivers around the pavilion, the blurring haze of plants, trees, clouds, and mist coming into view and disappearing in the broad and empty expanse, hanging between presence and absence, which can fully satisfy the poet's gaze as he climbs these heights and writes his own "Encountering Sorrow"—it is best that each viewer find these for himself. As for the frequent ruin and repair of the pavilion, either records already exist or the details do not merit close examination. I will say nothing more on this. 1070, the third year of the Hsi-ning reign, the twenty-second day of the tenth month: a Record by Ou-yang Hsiu.

I look out on the landscape, its appearance in constant change; it is the same landscape you will see when you climb here. I could tell you all about it, but I won't. When you climb here, you can write

your own *Li Sao,* "Encountering Sorrow," another version of countless other versions of an old poem. I'm not going to tell you that what you see and what you feel is nothing new. Thousands have climbed here, looked out on the scene, written poems, lamented the ruin of the pavilion or celebrated its restoration—I'm not going to tell you the names, dates, and occasions: too much of the past robs the future. Only a few can be remembered.

> Yang Hu delighted in the mountains and rivers. Whenever the atmosphere was particularly fine, he would always go off to Mount Hsien, and there would drink and recite poetry, never tiring the whole day through. But once, overcome with emotion and sighing, he said to Tsou Chan and others, "As long as the universe has been, so long has this mountain been. Many have been the worthies and great men who, just like you and I now, have climbed here to gaze afar. They have all perished and are heard of no more—this is what gives me sorrow."

• • • 2 • • •

Bones

On his way to Ch'u, Chuang-tzu saw a hollow skull, its form all bleached. He rapped on it with his horsewhip and asked, "You there, sir, did you come to this out of a lust for living and a failure to regard the due order of things? Or did you come to this in the destruction of your homeland, condemned to the headsman's axe? Did you come to this through some evil act, your shame leaving behind a taint on your father and mother, on your wife and children? Did you come to this in misery, in freezing and starvation? Or did you perhaps come to this in the fullness of your seasons?" When he finished his speech, he took the skull and lay down with his head pillowed upon it. In the middle of the night, the skull appeared to him in a dream and said, "You bandied words with me like a professional orator. And in everything you said I could see the ties that entangle the living. When you're dead, there's none of that. Would you like me to tell you about death?"

And Chuang-tzu said, "Of course."

Then the skull said, "When you're dead, there's no prince at the top of things or subjects below. And there are none of the things that have to be done in each of the four seasons. You go as you please; the span of Heaven and Earth is your own. It is a happiness unsurpassed even by a king on his throne."

But Chuang-tzu was unconvinced: "Wouldn't you like it if I got the Master of Fate to bring your body back to life, to give flesh and skin to your bones, and send you back to your father and mother, to your wife and children, to your native village and those you know?"

The skull frowned deeply, knitting its brows: "Why do you think I would give up all the happiness of a king on his throne to return to the troubles of the human world?"

• • •

The skull that frowns and knits the brows it does not have, to express a repugnance it cannot feel is one of those touches of Chuang-tzu's humor (or the humor of his spiritual progeny) that reminds us of the distance between the world of parable and the truth that eludes direct words. "The happiness of a king on his throne" is a happiness Chuang-tzu knows well to be no happiness, yet the metaphor is given to persuade us and an unenlightened Chuang-tzu of death's absolute liberty. At the moment when we doubt the metaphor and the expressive mobility of the rigid bone, we realize that in death there is no will to delight in the exercise of such liberty nor any inclination to disabuse those of us who might misunderstand death. The parable, and even the motive for offering it to us, dissolve in understanding its message.

We want to keep the dead, to devise some means by which they can speak to us even if, as here, it is only to tell us that they are beyond us, that they have nothing to say to our kind. A civilization of steles, tomb inscriptions, and a funerary culture feeds and reveres the dead, seeking to keep them with us, to maintain contact. In such a civilization the truth of Chuang-tzu's parable—not the speaking skull, but the truth emerging from the self-destruction of the parable—represents a threat to be overcome.

Human bones are very much at the core of that threat, something surviving from the past that both is and is not the former person. Bones without a commemorative marker represent a loss of identity, of one's place in time, and of the family whose purpose was to preserve the memory. Bones are timeless, anonymous, and without kin. Speaking to the skull, Chuang-tzu tries to entangle it with terms of kinship and ties to others. He wonders to the bones whether death brought shame on kin, and as the ultimate lure he holds out for the bones a promise of return to kin and home. The skull responds that to return to life would be to give up the position of a king on his throne. However illusory that royal liberty might prove to be, the king is always *kua-jen,* "the orphan," a position achieved by the death of a parent, but beyond that, a position from which one always speaks the rhetoric of solitude.

The dead escape from us: we knock at the door of the skull, and they do not answer, even to tell us to leave them alone. To conquer the truth embedded in Chuang-tzu's parable, kinship must be reestablished with the bones; we must make the anonymous dead "our own dead," whether they want it or not. We can see this impulse

clearly in a small group of later texts that rewrite Chuang-tzu's parable. The most famous of these is the *Tu-lou fu,* attributed to Chang Heng (78–139 A.D.) and translated here by Arthur Waley as "The Bones of Chuang Tzu."

I, Chang P'ing-tzu, have traversed the Nine Wilds and
seen their wonders,
In the eight continents beheld the ways of Man,
The Sun's procession, the orbit of the Stars,
The surging of the dragon, the soaring of the phoenix in
his flight.
In the red desert to the south I sweltered,
And northward waded through the wintry burghs of
Yu.
Through the Valley of Darkness to the west I
wandered,
And eastward traveled to the Sun's abode,
The stooping Mulberry Tree.

So the seasons sped; weak autumn languished,
A small wind woke the cold.
And now with rearing of rein-horse,
Plunging of the tracer, round I fetched
My high-roofed chariot to westward.
Along the dykes we loitered, past many meadows,
And far away among the dunes and hills.
Suddenly I looked and by the roadside
I saw a man's bones lying in the squelchy earth,
Black rime-frost over him; and I in sorrow spoke
And asked him, saying "Dead man, how was it?
Fled you with your friend from famine and for the last
grains
Gambled and lost? Was this earth your tomb,
Or did floods carry you from afar? Were you mighty,
were you wise,
Were you foolish and poor? A warrior or a girl?"
Then a wonder came; for out of the silence a voice—
Thin echo only, in no substance was the Spirit seen—
Mysteriously answered, saying, "I was a man of Sung,
Of the clan Chuang; Chou was my name.
Beyond the climes of common thought
My reason soared, yet could I not save myself;
For at the last, when the long charter of my years was
told,

I, too, for all my magic, by Age was brought
To the Black Hill of Death.
Wherefore, O Master, do you question me?"
Then I answered:
Let me pray for you to the Gods of Heaven and the
Gods of Earth,
That your white bones may arise,
And your limbs be joined anew.
The God of the North shall give me back your ears;
I will scour the Southland for your eyes.
From the sunrise I will wrest your feet;
The West shall yield your heart.
I will set each several organ in its throne;
Each subtle sense will I restore.
Would you not have it so?"
The dead man answered me:
"O Friend, how strange and unacceptable your words!
In death I rest and am at peace; in life, I toiled and
strove.
Is the hardness of the winter stream
Better than the melting of spring?
All pride that the body knew
Was it not lighter than dust?
What Ch'ao and Hsü despised,
What Po-ch'eng fled,
Shall I desire, whom death
Already has hidden in the Eternal Way—
Where Li Chu cannot see me,
Nor Tzu Yeh hear me,
Where neither Yao nor Shun can reward me,
Nor the tyrants Chieh and Hsin condemn me,
Leopard nor tiger harm me,
Lance prick me nor sword wound me?
Of the Primal Spirit is my substance; I am a wave
In the river of Darkness and Light.
The Maker of All Things is my Father and Mother,
Heaven is my bed and earth my cushion,
The thunder and lightning are my drum and fan,
The sun and moon my candle and torch,
The Milky Way my moat, the stars my jewels.
With Nature my substance is joined;
I have no passion, no desire.
Wash me and I shall be no whiter,

Foul me and I shall yet be clean.
I come not, yet am here;
Hasten not, yet am swift."
The voice stopped, there was silence.
A ghostly light
Faded and expired.
I gazed upon the dead, stared in sorrow and
compassion.
Then I called upon my servant that was with me
To tie his silken scarf about those bones
And wrap them in a cloak of sombre dust;
While I, as offering to the soul of this dead man,
Poured my hot tears upon the margin of the road.

The rewriting of an old story is an act worthy of our attention. It occurs when something in the earlier version both attracts and disturbs the reader; by additions, deletions, and alterations, the later writer redirects the story and emends the sources of his anxiety. Chang Heng's amplification of Chuang-tzu's parable is in many ways a significant revision of his great predecessors. Two of these changes merit our reflection. First, Chang Heng (Chang P'ing-tzu) asks the question left loudly unasked in Chuang-tzu's parable and receives a reply. From Chuang-tzu's "How did you come to this?" Chang Heng shifts to "Who were you?" and is answered "Chuang-tzu" (Chuang Chou). Now the original questioner himself is questioned, as if to say "How do you feel now that *you* are in the position of the skull?" The change arises from our collective human distrust of the values embodied in Chuang-tzu's parable—the joy of death, the lack of sorrow. The message requires reaffirmation from someone who doubted before.

Chuang-tzu's bones say what they must and speak of the toil of life, the release of death. But in the rewriting Chang Heng makes a second change to heal the thorn-wound of our distrust. We are struck by the ending with its ritual overtones—graveclothes, burial, a libation poured in tears of lament for the dead. Chang Heng's response is in direct conflict with the "message" delivered by the bones; although the response fails to understand one truth, it satisfies another truth quite well. Chuang-tzu may be happy to be free of human kin, but Chang Heng gives him back a family in the claim that "creation" is his father and mother. Then Chang Heng takes upon himself the role of filial descendant, attending to the burial and offering tears in that perfection of rites where spontaneous sentiment and customary

ceremony coincide perfectly. Chang Heng frames Chuang-tzu's truth and undoes it; these bones have a name, a relation to the living, and ties of kinship.

Encountering the bones of the nameless dead, we make a ceremonial interrogation and a burial. They no longer speak back to us, telling us how little they care for our world and the obsequies we pay them. Now when their spirits appear, it is usually to confirm our sense of the importance of maintaining a close ceremonial relation between the two worlds. In numerous anecdotes spirits appear and request reburial of their exposed bones, or ghostly disturbances convince some wise magistrate that a tomb has been opened and its contents exposed. When war or natural disaster leaves a multitude of unburied corpses, government edicts place the state in the role of family to attend to a proper interment. Skulls may discourse on the absolute liberty of the dead, but the responsible society of the living laments that the dead have no one to "rely on" *(yi)*, imposing on the dead the language of dependence and kinship. When the small family fails to care for its own, the greater family of society steps in to keep the anonymous dead bound in a proper relation to the living.

In the year 430 workmen on the fortifications on the outskirts of the capital Chin-ling accidentally opened an ancient tomb.

Hsieh Hui-lien, *An Ancient Tomb: Ceremonial Address to the Dead*

While excavating a moat north of the wall of the Eastern Precinct, we had gone down to a depth of several yards when we found an ancient tomb. There had been no marker of a burial ground above, and for the sarcophagus no tiles had been used, only wood. In the sarcophagus were two coffins, exactly square, with no headpieces. As for spirit vessels, we found twenty or so different kinds, of ceramic, bronze, and lacquer; most of these were of unusual form, and we were not able to identify them all. There were also more than twenty human figures made of wood, each of them three feet long. When the grave was first opened, we could see that these were all human figures, but when we tapped them or poked them with something, they disintegrated into dust under our hands. On top of the coffin were more than a hundred "five-penny-weight" Han coins. In the water were joints of sugarcane, along with some plum pits and melon seeds, all of which floated up, none of them very rotten.

The grave inscription had not survived, so we were unable to ascertain the date or age of the tomb. My Lord commanded that those working on the wall rebury them on the eastern hill. And there, with pork and wine, we conducted a ceremony for the dead. Not knowing their names, whether they were near to us or far, we gave them the provisional title "The Obscure Master and Mistress."

In the seventh year of the Yung-chia Reign (430) on the fourteenth day of the ninth month, Baron Chu Lin, Instructional Director and Clerk of the Censorate, charged as General Administrator of the Arsenal, General Registrar, Magistrate of Lin-chang, prepared ceremonial pork and wine and respectfully presented them to the spirits of the Obscure Master and Mistress:

I gathered this laboring multitude,
To build earthen ramparts was my charge,
I went to the depths of springs to make the moat,
Massed soil for the wall's base.
This single sarcophagus was opened,
Two coffins lay therein.
Hods were set aside in sorrow,
Spades cast down with streaming tears.
Straw spirit-figures were decayed,
The carts of clay were broken,
The banquet table had rotted,
Its vessels for service fallen in.
On the platter were still some plums,
In the crocks were still some pickles,
And of sugarcane, some joints were left,
Of melons there remained some rind.
Thinking back on you, good people,
What was the age in which you lived?
How long were you in the resplendent body?
At what date did the soul sink away?
Was it ripe old age or early death?
Were you eminent or obscure?
The tomb inscription has perished,
No part of your names comes down to us.
Who now are your descendants?
And who were your forebears long ago?
Were your name and deeds foul or fair?
How is it they have been utterly lost?

"A hundred-league wall made all at once,"
Ten cubits high, even all around:
We could not turn the wallworks away,
We could not bend the moat around.
The cypress-core bindings had been destroyed,
The chambers of your tomb had fallen.
Touching coffin-heads stirred brooding,
Handling tomb figures strengthened lament.
As Ts'ao Pa once extended his kindness downward,
As generosity once flowed from Ch'en Ch'ung,
So we reverence these bones by the precinct folds,
And cover the skeletons by the wall's bend.
In emulation of ancient custom
Site another grave on your behalf.
Wheels move you from the northern fosse
To the "long night" at the foot of eastern hills.
Joint burials are not of high antiquity,
But have continued since the Duke of Chou's day,
And respecting that past principle,
Again we inter your paired souls.
Of wine there are two jugs,
Of sacrificial beasts, the chosen pig.
Your spirits appear in a blur,
Tasting the bullock-shaped goblet.

In contrast to the informal colloquies of Chuang-tzu and Chang Heng, the "ceremonial address to the dead" *(chi-wen)* was a very formal means of communication with the spirits. But rites and literary genres may encounter critical situations in which their very definition becomes problematic. As in any human discourse, it is essential here to know whom we are speaking to. The "ceremonial address to the dead" was always directed to someone in particular, engaging a personal or social relation between the speaker and the dead. These paired remains belonged to particular persons, and the grave goods surrounding the pair suggested that they were persons of importance, worthy of consideration and commemoration. The genre through which Hsieh Hui-lien was speaking had a very definite program in what should be said to the dead. Hsieh Hui-lien, knowing nothing of the pair, has no way to fulfill the required program; instead, like Chuang-tzu and Chang Heng, he replaced all the essential categories of biographical knowledge with questions, the language of ignorance translated into the dialogic mode.

Most remarkable, however, is the movement between the preface and the ceremonial address proper; that movement is a formal embodiment of the skeletons' doubleness: both persons and mere "things." In the preface Hsieh Hui-lien is the amateur archeologist, the curious observer who narrates the opening of the tomb and gives an inventory of the grave goods. Here the dead are mere things, items in the ensemble of the tomb. He is the essayist, noting by juxtaposition that the fruit pits and sugarcane are more durable than human name and the memory of human acts. He speaks freely here, knowing the dead are not listening. But in the ceremonial address proper, Hsieh's voice changes: now the dead *are* listening. They undergo a metamorphosis from things into persons. Where before the curious workmen had poked the rotten figurines and watched them disintegrate, now they set down their tools in respectful grief. The story he told in the preface is retold in a ritual and religious context, requiring a respectful apology for disturbing the tomb and an account of the amends being made.

Somehow the juxtaposition of the two versions undermines the authority of the rite: we see a subordinate official carrying out an assigned task, speaking in a hollow form of ritual address. The society of the living may insist that its formal relation to the dead be maintained, but here, even more strongly than in Chuang-tzu and Chang Heng, we recognize the true indifference of the dead and their absence from the world of the living. We only pretend to speak to them.

As in Chang Heng's rhapsody *(fu),* the anonymous dead must have a name so that we can address them, even in a hollow rite. But these bones will not speak to us: they are nothing more than the questions we pose. Thus we can only name them poetically for our ignorance: "The Obscure Master and Mistress," Mr. and Mrs. Unknown. The very names by which we can address them are names of their absence from us.

We believe what Chuang-tzu tells us: the dead no longer have any interest in the living; they care nothing for us or for the rites and obsequies we offer them. Yet even as we reaffirm that truth, we feel compelled to persist in the performance of those rites. Most of us believe firmly that a corpse or a skeleton is a mere "thing," but who among us can stand close to such a "thing" and think it nothing more than one thing among others? Our discomfort in the presence of the dead is a *memento mori,* a reminder of our own mortality, but it is also much more. At such moments we live all the doubleness of Chang Heng facing the bones of Chuang-tzu: the dead are utterly beyond

us, but we treat them as if they might still be with us. They are both thing and human, one powerful metamorphosis of memory's form, an absent humanity inscribed in a presence. And the presence of their humanity, even withdrawn from us, demands of us a relation to them.

A relation between human beings is constituted of particulars. When we encounter the anonymous dead, we may discover that we don't know enough about them to know what that relation should be. A true human being must have identity and a "place" in our world. As the features melt away in the flesh, as the tombstone inscription weathers, as memories grow dim, we find it ever more difficult to respond adequately to the undiminishing demand that we acknowledge the absent humanity of the bones. So we interrogate them. Were you good or evil?—so that we may know whether to admire you or scorn you. Were you young or old?—so that we may know whether to pity or reverence you. Were you male or female, Chinese or barbarian? Perhaps you were of our town, perhaps even our distant kin? Such questions seek the categories that make relations between humans possible. The dead are silent. But still the impulse remains to talk to them, to catch them back up in a web of human relations.

Early in the sixteenth century a minor post-station attendant in the mountainous wilds of Kuei-chou buried some travelers who had died on the road. The attendant's name was Wang Shou-jen (Wang Yang-ming, 1472–1528, later known as the greatest Neo-Confucian thinker since the twelfth century). The work he wrote for the occasion was *Yi-lü wen,* "Burial on the Road."

> The fourth year of the Cheng-te Reign (1509), the third day of autumn's first month. There was a bureau clerk, said to have come from the capital—I didn't know his name—accompanied by his son and a servant, going on his way to take up a post. Passing by Lung-ch'ang, he put up for the night in the home of one of the local Miao tribesmen. I saw him from a distance across a bamboo hedge. It was dark and stormy at the time, and even though I had thought to ask him about news from the north, in the end I did not. I sent someone to inquire after him early the next morning, but he had already set off.
>
> Toward noon that day someone came from Centipede Slope with word that an old man had died at the foot of the slope and that two other men remained weeping by his side. "How sad," I said, "it must be the bureau clerk that has died." Toward evening another man came with word that there were now two dead men beneath the slope, and beside them one man sat weeping. When I inquired further into the situation, I found that the son had died as well. And then the next day another man came with word that there were now three corpses at the foot of the slope. I realized that the servant had also died. What a sad occurrence!

Like Hsieh Hui-lien's ceremonial address to the dead, "Burial on the Road" has a double audience. Later in the work Wang Shou-jen speaks to the dead man directly, but here he reaches out to include us, his later-born readers. He needs to have us overhear him speaking to the dead, so that our relation to him will be fuller than the blankness between him and the bureau clerk. It is important to him that we know the circumstances, that the event had nothing to do with him—"I didn't even know his name." For our sakes he is precise about the full extent of his relation to the deceased: he saw him across a hedge.

Yet we hear some uneasiness, something almost confessional in the circumstantial detail as he gives it to us. He didn't even know the man's name. He might have come to know it, might have established a closer relation to the traveler, but the weather was bad that night—it was inconvenient. And the next morning, when he sent a messenger, the man was already gone. There is no relation, no obligation to attend to this man, but we know that he knows a relation might have been established—how could he have known what would happen? And whether a clerk on his way to a post was or was not entitled to use the government post station, in this case a traveler from the north was compelled to spend the last night of his life lodging with non-Chinese natives, within easy distance from the government way station, whose attendant was Wang Shou-jen, charged with the care of travelers.

He tells us that he intended to meet the man; it was inconvenient; no relation was established. And the failure is Wang Shou-jen's. He wants to absolve himself. He tells us he sent a messenger early the next morning, but it was too late; the man had already gone. Beneath this plain narrative are complex, inarticulate movements of human feeling, emerging in the text not as statements of feeling but as a need to mention certain details.

Then follows the bizarre sequence of deaths. The news, brought

to Wang Shou-jen each time, denies him the freedom from caring, the guiltless indifference that ignorance of the deaths would have allowed him. Each surviving member of the party would have been responsible for the dead; but now all are dead, and the closest "next of kin" is the one who cares most, the closest northerner, the person who might have established a relation to the dead, but for the inconvenience.

> Thinking intently on their bodies lying exposed, with no one to take charge of them, I took my two servants with hods and shovels to go bury them. When the two servants showed reluctance, I said to them, "You and I are just as they." Then they felt pity, tears streamed down, and they begged to go. By the foot of the mountain we dug three graves and buried them.

The human drama that sustains this work is concentrated in the first clause of this passage, the point where "I ought to" wars with "I don't want to," "no relation to *me,*" "how inconvenient." In the outer man we see only the resolution to take moral action, but he confesses to us the *nien,* "thinking intently." That *nien* is the space of conflict between moral action proposed and performed. That space, leading to decision, lets us know that Wang Shou-jen is a "good man," *hsien,* but not a "sage," *sheng.* The sage performs the good act without the need for reflection; Wang Shou-jen's goodness is of a kind that is still within our common human grasp.

He takes the moral decision, answering the innate impulse to recognize and perform the good act; he behaves "naturally," as the "natural" is defined in Mencian Confucianism. The two servants, balking at the prospect, serve as foils for his resolution. When Wang Shou-jen states the principle to them, their attitudes are morally transformed, *chiao-hua;* now they go about their task eagerly and willingly. There is no doubt that here we are being offered a compact Confucian homily of moral action. But not only is the piece as a whole more complicated than an easy Confucian principle, even this homiletic moment in the work is sustained and overwhelmed by the intricacies of human feeling.

The Ch'ing critic Lin Yün-ming recognized this clearly. "To bury the dead is basically an act of anyone who has fellow-feeling (*jen-jen*). The sentiments need not be so sorrowful as this. We find them here because in his mind there arises a sympathy from anticipation of suffering the same. He doesn't know whether he will return to the heartland or not. His heart is pained by the scene he encounters. Even though he grieves for the bureau clerk, it is actually himself he is grieving for." Wang Shou-jen does not address his servants with a naked moral imperative: "It is our duty to bury those who have no one to attend to their funerals." He does not offer an argument of advantage: "If we don't bury them, they will become angry ghosts in the neighborhood." Rather he says, "You and I are just as they"—alone in the wilderness of the frontier region, with no kin, apt to fall by the side of the road and be forgotten. But note that it is not, "We must care for them so that we, in our turn, may hope to be cared for." In the heartland he might have made such an argument, but here in Kuei-chou, no such anticipation is possible. If we fall by the side of the road in Kuei-chou, it is unlikely that anyone will attend to us. No pragmatic hope is offered. We act only out of feeling, and our feeling for them is, at root, a feeling for ourselves.

There is an honesty here: the need to establish a relation to the dead is essentially selfish, selfish as a sentiment (though not selfish in the sense of an act that helps us or a pragmatic hope). It is the anticipatory desire of the living for relation to the world when all relations are severed. It is precisely such clinging to life's ties that the skull in Chuang-tzu's dream scorns. The affirmation of life, of family, and of community is the simple ground of common human feeling that impels our relation to the dead. Dying is a betrayal of those values, and our sense of having been betrayed complicates the simple clinging that is the basis of our relation to the dead.

> Then I, with a chicken and three bowls of rice, sighing and in tears, spoke to him: "Alas, who were you? who were you? I am the attendant of the Lung-ch'ang post station, Wang Shou-jen of Yü-yao. You and I alike were raised in the heartland. I do not know your district or your city. Why is it that you have come to be a ghost in these mountains?
>
> "In olden days people considered leaving their homes to be a serious matter, and officials did not serve more than a thousand leagues away from home. *I* came here because I was banished, and that was fitting. What was your crime? I have heard that your office was no more than that of a bureau clerk; your salary could hardly have been five pecks of rice—you could have gotten that much working a plow and giving orders to your wife and children. Why did you trade your life

for those five pecks of rice? Or maybe it was not enough and you wanted more for your son and servant. This is so sad.

"If it is true that you came here with your heart set on those five pecks of rice, I am sure you first set out on the road cheerfully. But when I saw you the other day, why was your face so furrowed, as if with some unbearable sorrow? Braving frost and snow, struggling up slopes and over cliffs, walking across the peaks of ten thousand mountains, suffering hunger and thirst, strength of bone and sinew wearing down, miasmal vapors attacking you from outside, and a swelling striking you from within, is it any wonder you died? I knew for a certainty you would die, but I had no idea it would come so swiftly as this or that your son and servant would also perish so suddenly. And you must admit that you brought it all on yourself.

"I have come here to bury you, thinking on how your three corpses had no one else to whom to turn. But this has caused me boundless grief. So sad! Even if I had not had you buried, the foxes of these dark slopes would have come in their packs, and the serpents of these shadowy valleys, serpents as big as cartwheels—these surely would have buried you in their bellies: they would not have left your bones in the open for long. Since you no longer have any consciousness, why is it that I find this so hard to bear?

"It has been three years now since I left father, mother, and homeland to come here. I was able to endure the poisonous vapors and keep myself in one piece because I never let myself become depressed, even for a single day. The present pain I feel for you is such that it shows my seriousness on your behalf and a light incaution in acting for my own good. It is not right that I grieve for you any longer."

"Since you no longer have any consciousness . . .": Wang Shou-jen recognizes that this relation to the dead is his own fiction, yet it is an intense, necessary fiction that takes on its own peculiar reality. As Lin Yün-ming observed, on one level Wang Shou-jen is writing primarily about himself; the fate of the clerk, which prefigures his own possible fate, brings out all his repressed anxieties and the misery of his exile. Yet he is able to discover himself only through this relation, through "acting on behalf of" the dead clerk, through weighing the similarities and differences of their circumstances.

The ultimate self-centeredness of Wang Shou-jen's relation to the dead may be transparent, but the act itself and the relation established become opaque, criss-crossed by contrary emotions and impulses. His account begins as it might have begun a few days earlier if Wang had braved the inconvenience of bad weather and gone to the home of the Miao to meet the clerk: "Who are you? I am the Attendant of Lung-ch'ang post station, Wang Shou-jen of Yü-yao." Relations depend upon identities—names of persons, places, positions. Receiving no response from the dead man, Wang proceeds to give the clerk an identity—not a name, as Hsieh Hui-lien gave his dead, but an inferred history. He knows the man's rank, and since that rank is inferior to even his own, Wang Shou-jen feels justified in being blunt and admonitory. Furthermore, he assumes that the clerk is from somewhere in the Chinese heartland, which establishes a tenuous ground of kinship between them. One must stand virtually outside China, in Kuei-chou, to recognize the civilized heartland as a common home. Had they been just one province closer to the center, this clerk from an unknown district would have been far more a stranger. On a different planet he might take even a Miao tribesman as a fellow countryman. Wherever we are, we divide the world between stranger and kin; let this man then be kin.

Once the preliminaries have been established, the tone changes abruptly: "Why is it you have come to be a ghost in these mountains?" The Chinese text is very specific—"why?" not "how?" Dying is treated as if it were the dead man's choice, his responsibility. Wang Shou-jen meant to ask a different question—"How did this happen?"—but the softer interrogative is shifted by the force of his feeling, by his irritation at being forced to take responsibility for these dead, to make them his own and pay them from his reservoir of pain. The tone of blame intensifies: "I came here because I had no choice; you must have come here for personal gain, brought yourself to destruction, and forced me to care for you." He is filling out a relation to the dead man, giving him a history, criticizing his decisions. Wang Shou-jen tells his servants that their care for the dead is care for themselves; later he scolds the dead clerk for stirring in him a grief that puts his own life in danger; here he blames the clerk for not being careful enough, for lacking foresight of the dangers. Death makes us cling to life all the more fiercely, and it angers us toward those who betray it: we call their spirits back and scold them.

In his mind's eye he sees the clerk setting out in greedy anticipation of gain. But by the time Wang sees him in Lung-ch'ang, he is changed: a look of doom hangs about him. Wang hadn't mentioned

this when he described for us the particulars of the encounter that did not occur; we overhear it now as he speaks to the dead. The hints of guilt become clearer now. It was not simply the inconvenience of the stormy night that held Wang back; it was also an aura of ill fortune, a look of doom that hung about the man. Let him go away and die somewhere else; let me not have to know about it. But he died so close by; all of them died. And I, the only other northerner in the area, was the one they told. Wang speaks to the dead to clear himself of the charge that he silently raises against himself: "I had no idea it would come so swiftly as this or that your son and servant would also perish so suddenly." Speaking to the dead releases his anger, yet it also atones for his guilt. He clears himself of responsibility: "You must admit that you brought it all on yourself."

Not content with this, Wang Shou-jen initiates a countersuit in this complex economy of debts and balances in human relations. He offers an account of the debt the dead owe to the living. "I have buried you, and it has caused me great inconvenience and misery: my gift of grief endangers my own life, which I have protected these past three years by grieving for nothing." But the dark conceit by which he tries to wring gratitude from the dead—an ironic alternative "burial" in the bellies of foxes and serpents—undermines the force of his suit. Wang Shou-jen intended to demonstrate to the dead man the advantages he had received from Wang, the terrible fate he had avoided. But even as Wang demonstrates this, he realizes the truth of Chuang-tzu's parable, that the dead do not care—do not care how or where or even if they are buried. At that same moment Wang Shou-jen realizes a second truth that was not part of Chuang-tzu's parable—that *he* does care. His whole complex argument has been generated out of his feelings *on behalf of* this silent Other, feelings he ascribes to the dead man, but which the dead man cannot feel. And the emotions surrounding this intricate self-generated relation work against that very affection for life that produced the relation in the first place. Enough then. "It is not right that I grieve for you any longer."

We see the great Confucian philosopher Wang Shou-jen standing before three hastily dug graves in the wild mountains, with the ancient sacrificial offerings, carrying on an intense, one-sided dialogue with the dead—excusing himself for not having taken the trouble to meet the clerk before, blaming the clerk for his rashness, demanding from the dead man recognition for his services and sympathy for his exertions. He does not let the dead go. He drags them back into relation to the living; he makes them his own.

I'll make a song for you; you listen:
"Ranged peaks edge the skies,
birds in flight can't pass;
The wayfarer thinks of his home,
be it east or west, he cannot tell.
Be it east or west, he cannot tell,
only the skies are the same:
A strange region this, a different place,
in the midst of circling seas,
Yet the perfected point of view acquiesces in whatever it meets—
it need not be our physical home.
O soul,
be not miserable."

A strange consolation, this one—more suited to calm the living than the dead. If follows perfectly from Wang's own resolution to grieve no more but offers little more consolation to the soul of the dead clerk than an exhortation to acquiescence. Credible self-exhortation may become odious if directed to another. But out of this complete process—introduction, apology, blaming, and now struggling back to equanimity—Wang Shou-jen attains a new level of uncomplicated familiarity with the dead man, enabling him to write one more song. This final song is the fruit of his intense "dialogue" with the dead, a true consolation with all the ease of a friendly relation with a living person.

Then I sang yet another song to console him:
"You and I both have been separated from our homeland,
Ignorant of these aboriginal tongues;
Our fates here could not be foreseen.
If I should die in this land,
Bring your servant and son and come along with me:
We'll roam together and have our joys,
Drive purple tigers, mount striped dragons,
Climb high places, gaze toward home and sob.
If I should chance to go home alive,
Your son and servant go with you still—
No cause for sorrow at being companionless.
Tomb markers are piled all along the roads:

Many from the heartland have been lost here.
Join with them, hooting and whistling, and tarry
To dine on the winds, drink dew, and never starve.
At dawn be the friend of deer; in evening roost with
wild gibbons:
Be at peace, be at rest,
And be no cruel wraith in these wastelands."

The whole song is a promise of companionship, a restitution of all the living relations that death has severed. Wang Shou-jen began by introducing himself to the dead clerk, compensating for his guilty failure a few days earlier, a failure to concern himself with a fellow northerner wandering in the southern wilderness. By this last song the introduction has become the beginning of a friendship, to be fulfilled on Wang's own death. The wilderness is filled with the happy society of the northern dead—eating, drinking, rejoicing and weeping, an alternative to the grim solitude of the living. Wang Shou-jen's vision of death is as lyrical as that of Chuang-tzu or Chang Heng, but different—gone is death's greatest terror, its solitude and the breach made in human relations. Instead we have a crowd of gibbering spirits who roam the mountains, friends of the deer, bedfellows of the wild gibbons.

Chuang-tzu's frowning skull speaks to the living of solitary joys incomprehensible to the living. Wang Shou-jen is the living man speaking to the dead to satisfy the needs of the living, to protect them from the pain of loss, which draws them closer to the dead. Earlier he had admitted the harder truth, that the dead have no consciousness and do not care. He passed that truth by as dangerous: to accept only that truth about the dead is inimical to life.

Wang Shou-jen opposes the destructive pain and fear not simply by speaking to the dead and by singing to them but by *writing* of speaking and singing to the dead. Out of solitude he writes a relation to the dead man and composes a happy society of the dead. He may have actually spoken to the dead clerk, but he *writes* for us, reaching out from the solitude of Kuei-chou and of his own eventual death to draw *us* into a relation to him. Chuang-tzu's parable of the skull destroys itself: its words, images, analogies. But here the written text is precisely the fierce clinging to life and to the very relation to others that the skull mocks.

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A Splendor and a Fading: The Mechanism of Necessity

In the thirteenth year of the Chien-an Reign (208 A.D.), Lord Ts'ao Ts'ao, warlord of North China and self-styled "guardian" of the last, puppet emperor of the Han, led a great army south to the banks of the Yangtse. On the river Ts'ao Ts'ao had prepared a flotilla for the invasion of the southern Kingdom of Wu, which had declared itself independent of the Han and Ts'ao Ts'ao's authority. The admiral of Wu's river fleet and brother-in-law of the king, Chou Yü, led a daring attack on Ts'ao Ts'ao's ships as they were moored by Red Cliff. Driven by a long-awaited east wind, Wu's fireships were released against Ts'ao Ts'ao's galleys; the northern fleet, which had been chained together for protection, was completely destroyed.

The battle ended Ts'ao Ts'ao's hopes for conquering the South and reunifying China. But if he had been able to conquer Wu, he surely would have taken as his booty the two Ch'iao sisters, the most beautiful women of the age—one the wife of the king, the other the wife of Chou Yü. And if the fleet had not been destroyed, and if the two Ch'iao sisters had been taken north, then after Ts'ao Ts'ao's death, the sisters would have ended their days in the same way Ts'ao Ts'ao's other wives and concubines ended theirs, confined in the great tower on Copperbird Terrace to honor their dead lord.

More than six hundred years after that battle, the poet Tu Mu (803–853) discovered just that chain of unfulfilled consequences in a rusting halberd blade found at "Red Cliff":

Broken halberd, sunk in the sand,
iron not rusted away;
I take it, clean and polish it,

recognize a former dynasty.
Had the east wind not worked
for Chou Yü that day,
Springtimes thick around Copperbird Terrace
would have locked in the Ch'iao sisters.

As in many poems about finding ancient objects, there is much uncovering here, much scraping away of encrustations, much investigative restoration of the missing pieces. The purpose driving this process is *jen,* "recognition" of what the thing really *is*. The object here first appears as only a partial mystery, not entirely "sunk in the sand" but barely protruding, enough to invite the poet to draw it out of its concealment. And enough remains of the thing to name its category—"halberd"—but that name is not enough to know what the thing *is.* When at last he peels the thing to the core of its pastness, he discovers not what was but what never was. There is something whimsical, speculative, unserious here.

In the first two lines of the quatrain, we are caught in an abbreviated version of the common compulsion to unclothe the object and know it. Together with Tu Mu we "recognize a former dynasty," *jen ch'ien ch'ao.* We recognize the halberd as being old, the work of some former dynasty, then we recognize in it a particular dynasty, and finally, the true goal, to recognize that dynasty and its fate in the halberd. The veiled object itself diminishes into insignificance once we "know" it and restore all the missing pieces of the past around it.

But just before the final moment of fulfilled recognition, our trajectory, like Ts'ao Ts'ao's campaign, is blocked and falls short. We do not cross the barrier and possess the mysterious beauty; our thrust to knowledge is deflected in idle dreamings of what might have been. The halberd's advance is warded off; it falls to the sand, hiding for centuries, surrounding itself in rust, dreaming of how an otherwise green spring might have surrounded and hidden the two Ch'iao sisters. If only spring's east wind had waited for *our* advantage, blowing a concealing denseness into the foliage around Copperbird Terrace, instead of blowing then, for the advantage of Chou Yü. Deflected from its goal, the object embodies an unfulfilled possibility: it "recalls" what might have been, and finding it, we too dream its dreams.

The beauty of this poem lies in the obliquity of the mind's motions as they cross into the second couplet. Synechdoche is the common figure of old things, the part that leads to recognition and

knowledge of the lost whole. But here the halberd thrust, deflected, deflects us along with it into a metalepsis, where cause and effect are remote, separated by layers upon layers of conditions. *If* spring's east wind had not served Chou Yü that day by blowing the fireships in among Ts'ao Ts'ao's fleet, then Ts'ao Ts'ao would have taken Wu and would have taken the Ch'iao sisters back to his harem. Then, on Ts'ao Ts'ao's death the same east wind of spring would have blown a lushness into the vegetation around Copperbird Terrace, where the two Ch'iao sisters would have been imprisoned, filled with the sexual desires that come with spring, desires that would remain unfulfilled without Ts'ao Ts'ao. This closing image of frustrated sexual desire (sustained by a long tradition of "Copperbird Terrace" poems) is the dreamer's revenge for Ts'ao Ts'ao's unfulfilled desires, in which the halberd seems to share. Unclothing this object, we discover much about desire and the deflection of desire into never-fulfilled possibility.

Tu Mu's poem lives in these speculative "might-have-beens," which have little place in classical Chinese literature. They can appear only through some moment of crisis, a moment of chance and of bold attempt or "trial," when events might have gone one way or another. Tu Mu's poem seems to tell us that history might have been "deflected" onto a different course were it not for the accident of the east wind that day.

Accidents and the conjunctions of raw chance have always posed a particular problem for the historical temper, both in China and in the West. Histories concerned with the particulars of events must acknowledge such moments, but historians prefer to bury them in processes that have knowable causes and consequences. "History," properly speaking—as opposed to the way the world truly works—is a mechanism driven by Necessity, the ancient goddess Ananke, which has many divine aspects and avatars: Empirical Necessity, Moral Necessity, Economic Necessity, Divine Necessity. It does not truly matter how we qualify it, as long as some face of necessity is recovered out of the jumble of the living world. But Tu Mu here has deflected the thrust of historical necessity's plot, just as the east wind foiled Ts'ao Ts'ao's merely mortal plots for the conquest of Wu.

The deflection of necessity in the history of dynasties is heresy; tradition punishes heresy by exegesis. Thus we find a tradition of interpretation begun in the Sung by Hsü Yen-chou, that Tu Mu's poem is a "veiled" criticism of Ts'ao Ts'ao; he peels away the veiling surface of the text and reveals Tu Mu's true intention, to expose Ts'ao

Ts'ao's greater interest in taking the two Ch'iao sisters than in his more serious duty of reunifying China. Later critics bared the moral lesson even more nakedly, adding that Ts'ao Ts'ao's military failure was the inevitable consequence of his impure motives.

Let us ignore the question of the validity of such an interpretation; validation in this sense could be found only in Tu Mu's true intentions, which must remain forever veiled, an ancient beauty we shall never possess. But we can play the historian of causes and consider why such an interpretation arises and why it persists. We might say simply that this interpretation lends moral seriousness to the poem by placing it in the context of moral history; such an interpretation may be true, but it tells us nothing of why *this* interpretation is made. Another explanation, equally justified in the text, might be that the poem is in fact a veiled criticism of Chou Yü, more concerned with keeping possession of the younger Ch'iao sister than with defending his nation. This second, hypothetical explanation would have no interpretive force because it would not tell us *why* Ts'ao Ts'ao was defeated: the east wind would be aiding someone whose motives were impure. The exegetical conquest of Tu Mu's poem, where chance and free possibility seem to reign, is not simply moral interpretation; it is an attempt to marry moral necessity and historical fact, to show necessity's dominion over events.

When the events of the past are governed by the mechanisms of moral necessity, freedom is taken out of the natural world (where it would be manifest as accident) and given an exclusive, but problematic, home in the human world. The presumption is that if Ts'ao Ts'ao had possessed the motives of a true founding emperor, he would not have had his mind on the two Ch'iao sisters and would have been victorious at Red Cliff. This immediately begs the question whether Ts'ao Ts'ao's motives were within the scope of his own moral freedom or part of some larger plot of historical necessity. Here is the true veiled mystery, before which poet, exegete, and historian all stand. Before we consider that scene, let us allow ourselves to be deflected for a while into reflection on the concept of tragedy.

There have been many attempts to define tragedy as it occurs in the Western tradition. Most such definitions speak of some experience of absolute human limitation, in which the protagonist discovers that he or she is the mere object of some greater will and is involuntarily driven by destructive necessity. Some semblance of free will contends with necessity and is defeated or discovers that it is, in some way, unfree, that its actions have been unwittingly directed by necessity. Not every work that goes by the name of tragedy fits this description perfectly, but it remains a center around which countless variations spin.

A concept of retributive justice, some comprehensible moral mechanism in which human beings are given a degree of free choice, is essential to tragedy and may play two seemingly incommensurate roles in the encounter with necessity. On the first level retributive justice may be used in an attempt to domesticate necessity, to transform the incomprehensible goddess into her most comfortable avatar, "Moral Necessity." It is assumed that the protagonist has committed some transgression (*hamartia,* the "flaw," "missing the mark," "deflection") or has inherited it from his ancestors. This interpretive act restores a measure of intelligibility and control over necessity's actions, even though the moment of human free will, when events might have gone one way or another, is displaced into the irrevocable past. But in true tragedy this pre-text of transgression and retributive justice is overwhelmed by the magnitude and mystery of necessity; a simple drama of retribution, of crime and punishment, cannot be tragedy.

On a second and more basic level, the impotence of retributive justice may be revealed in its inability to deflect the unintelligible, even amoral force of necessity. The protagonist does the "right thing" and is destroyed. The human moral order is set in doomed conflict with necessity hypostatized as an incomprehensible will, now named "divine justice."

In Western stories and histories, tragedy occurs through the agency of a will that transcends the human characters, a will that determines what must be according to its own rules, a will that is the author of the plot. No human court would convict Oedipus of a crime done in ignorance and directed by forces beyond his control; it is the god who organizes both the crime and the punishment. In the *Bacchae* Pentheus upholds *nomos,* the human justice of the community; by doing so he sins against Dionysus and must be torn to pieces by the Bacchantes: god the hunter tracks him down.

We need not expect to find tragedy in the Western sense in the Chinese tradition; it may be a merely local structure. If we want it badly enough, we can find moments of it: the *Shih-chi* story of Hsiang Yü, the failed contender for the Ch'in throne, is an often-cited example: he was a hero, brave and virtuous, worthy to be the founder of a new dynasty, yet "Heaven destroyed him," made him its special

and individual victim. But such cases of tragic circumstance have nothing like the same paradigmatic force in Chinese civilization that they claim in European civilization. However, we might expect to find a similar paradigmatic force in some other structure of the conflict between the human moral order and amoral necessity.

In the Chinese tradition amoral necessity does not often appear as an arbitrary and incomprehensible will whose freedom vanquishes some merely human freedom. The absence of that capricious, absolute will is matched by a diminished role for the maker of literary fictions, whose control over the written plot parallels the operation of transcendent will within the plot: the value in the Western tradition of conscious fictionality and the centrality of true tragedy seem to be mutually dependent.

In the Chinese tradition the role of amoral necessity is usually given to the impersonal forces of cyclical nature, or nature as mechanism. In later ages the more subtle operations of that mechanism are named *ming,* "what is ordained," "fate" as the most refined physics rather than as some arbitrary predestination. The most striking contrast to tragic necessity is the perfect intelligibility of this version of necessity; nature's mechanisms are known to all, and *ming* usually reveals itself in many small omens and evidences of the inevitable. A movement from ignorance to knowledge is the norm for the tragic hero; the Chinese counterpart of the tragic hero often recognizes the unhappy and foregone conclusion long before it is fulfilled. There is no struggle of free wills here, but instead a free conquest of despair, nobly playing out a doomed position. There is an aspect of Confucius behind this role—the Master in his complexity being the source of many distinct roles in the tradition; it is Confucius who "knows it is impossible but acts for it anyway" (*Analects* XVI.41).

At other times the protagonists are unaware or only half aware of a doom whose inevitability the reader recognizes. Powerful impulses translated the real events of the life of Li Yü, the last ruler of the Southern T'ang, into a "counterpart" of the tragic hero: a blind indulgence in pleasure, heedless of certain doom, consummated in the fall of the Southern T'ang and Li Yü's legendary execution by the Sung founder. There is a peculiar pleasure for the reader in following the course of doomed pleasure (in which reading and writing often played a central part—in Li Yü's case, writing sensual songs). There is an allure in the innocent blindness of many of the central figures in the eighteenth-century novel *Story of the Stone (Hung-lou-meng,*

Dream of the Red Chamber); that allure exists only because every reader knows the inevitable downfall of the Chias, knows that every splendor must be followed by a fading.

Whether the protagonist is aware of personal doom or not, this is not tragedy; but in the Chinese tradition the situation has the frequency and the emotional and intellectual weight of tragedy in the West. It is the human trapped in the determined mechanism of nature's cycles, *sheng-shuai,* a splendor and a fading. And it happens that this process is most commonly observed in retrospect: its mode is elegy, a temporal distance corresponding to the fictional distance that mediates the "pity and fear" of the audience of tragedy.

If nature as mechanism assumes the role of amoral necessity, the problematic role of retributive human justice is taken by nature as moral order, on which all common human justice is founded. In the Western tradition the agency of divinity may allow a radical distinction between capricious divine will and human justice (the book of Job closes with an awkward attempt at reconciliation). However, in the Chinese tradition the amoral, mechanistic necessity of cyclical nature and the moral order are united in Heaven *(T'ien).* And the attempt to reconcile the two irreconcilable forces is the never-ending task of those storytellers known as historians.

If we were seeking the most perfect counterpart of tragedy, we would look to those moments when the great project of moral history cracks: this always occurs on an individual level, when some good person "does not meet his time," *pu yü shih;* virtue is defeated and the good person is usually destroyed. Here we find Ch'ü Yüan, Chuko Liang, Yüeh Fei, and even Confucius. The stories of such men constituted a clear but problematic moral drama, in which the mechanisms of historical necessity (history as a process of nature) were victorious over virtue, intelligence, and good policy.

It was, however, more common in the Chinese tradition to stand back from the veil of true origins and causes, to leave unresolved the conflict between the moral order and amoral necessity, nature as mechanism. Western scholastic theology struggled to reconcile a concept of absolute free will in the divinity with a determinate human morality; the divine will that must obey moral laws is a mere executor and no longer free. In the same way nature as mechanism continually comes into conflict with nature as moral order. For what sins do the flowers fall? Why does every splendor *deserve* the fading that follows? The rhythms of natural change are indifferent to justice, and if we

seek to rewrite moral history to make it conform to the rhythms of mechanistic nature—for example, to say, first, that dynasties fall because their rulers err, and second, that rulers late in a dynastic cycle inevitably err—then moral history will be consumed by that more potent narrative of natural necessity. In such a case moral history, which should lie within the scope of human freedom, becomes only a flimsy garment for Ananke, the strong and ruthless goddess at the heart of things. Moral historians attempt that dangerous reconciliation: they tell us that Ch'en Shu-pao, Sui Yang-ti and Li Yü were exemplary "bad last emperors," paradigms of the ill consequences of self-indulgence. Yet assimilated to the amoral necessity of the epicycles of dynasties, they become the flower about to fall, and their pleasures seem the compensation for, rather than the cause of, their imminent ruin. Their stories become cautionary tales gone wrong; and in later poetry, drama, and fiction they exercise an allure for readers in which moral judgment is only the flimsy garment.

Suppose we look on the site of a ruined city, as Pao Chao looked on the ruins of Kuang-ling in the middle of the fifth century. Two models compete to shape our understanding; it may be that the ruin is the result of some transgression on the part of its inhabitants (nature as moral order), or it may be that the city's fall is part of a cyclical process of inevitable decline (nature as amoral mechanism). If these two truths are set in irreconcilable opposition (with a city of the virtuous destroyed because its time has come in the cycles of history), we have the counterpart of tragedy. If the two truths are forced to run together, we have moral history. But if the two truths are left uneasily side by side—not deflecting the passionate drive to recognize true causes, but stopping before we remove the veil—then we have a special mode of Chinese elegy.

In the year 459, Tan, Prince of Ching-ling, declared a revolt against the Liu-Sung emperor and seized control of the prosperous city of Kuang-ling. In the autumn of that year the rebellion was suppressed by an imperial army under Shen Ch'ing-chih, culminating in the sack of Kuang-ling and the massacre of over three thousand of its inhabitants. Soon thereafter Pao Chao visited the ruins and composed his most famous poetic exposition, "The Weed-Covered City."

An old note identifies the "weed-covered city" with Kuang-ling, but nothing in the text confirms this beyond question. The generality of the work is remarkable: there is no preface, no specific reference,

nothing to identify these ruins as last year's ruins rather than the ruins of centuries. Poetic expositions *(fu)* on cities and places tended to be quite specific, rich in detail and local lore. Perhaps to protect himself from coming under suspicion for criticizing government policy, Pao Chao leaves the city nameless and unattached to history. By allowing the specific case to disappear into the general case, he must treat the topic in a way that makes the workings of the natural order most visible.

We read of the splendor and fall of the city, and we observe clearly the operations of natural necessity in the process, but at the same time we discover that we cannot determine precisely how the natural order functions. As we read, we follow one version in which the poetic exposition is a straightforward lament: nature is an amoral mechanism in which each splendor must be followed by a fading. At the same time we read another version, a warning against arrogance and rebellion, appealing to nature as a moral order that punishes transgression with destruction.

Such uncertainty about the moral frame of reference was an important force in the Chinese hermeneutic tradition: exegetes debated hotly whether Tu Fu's "Autumn Meditations" were "criticism" *(feng)* or "lament" *(ai)*. Likewise it was debated whether the great poetic expositions of the Western Han on parks and hunts "criticized" *(feng)* ostentatious display or "encouraged" *(ch'üan)* it. Morally ambivalent texts exercised a fascination, and there was a tendency to read moral ambivalence into texts that leaned too far to one side or the other: in every alluring splendor and in every sensuous delight was an undercurrent of sin and danger, punishment and doom.

> The level plain rolls on,
> running south to Ts'ang-wu and the tropic seas,
> speeding north to Purple Pass and Wild Goose Gate,
> towed by watercourses and canals,
> with the K'un hills as its axles.
> Hidden away behind river upon river and layers of
> barrier passes,
> it is a concourse of highways.

Pao Chao begins with a plain that seems to stand at the center of vast spaces stretching to the far south and the remote north. It is the "hub" of axle-mountains. This is not a real China, especially not the China of the Southern Dynasties, but a mythic political and commercial

topography. The old note identifies this place as Kuang-ling, but it is described as if it were a "center," *chung-kuo,* a "central state" or "capital." Pao Chao may be standing before Kuang-ling, but the description, in parts, might just as easily be the Han capitals of Ch'ang-an and Lo-yang or the Liu-Sung capital of Chin-ling.

This language of centering suggests dominance and rule. Its topography is stamped with canal and axle: it is a concourse to which goods and produce flow from the surrounding space. He looks at it one way and it is open, a center that draws wealth; a moment later he looks again, and it is a protected fastness, walled against the danger that attends being the splendid center.

Long ago when it was in full flower,
carriages caught hub on hub,
people bumped shoulders,
its wards and gates covered the land,
songs and piping boiled into the skies.
They fostered their goods by salt fields,
mined gain from mountains of bronze.
The force of their genius was rich and bold,
their warhorses were the finest, the most lovely.

Hsi, "long ago," casts us back into an indeterminate past. Although Kuang-ling had been a relatively prosperous city before the sack of 459, we are given the illusion of a span in which the city's life cycle has unfolded. The T'ang commentator Chang Hsien located this "long ago" in the time of another rebel, Lui P'i, the Han Prince of Wu. But in fact this "long ago" in the context of the whole exposition takes us from true history into timeless cycles. When the T'ang prose writer Li Hua viewed an ancient battlefield, he asked: "Was it Ch'in? or Han? or of some more recent age?" The disappearance of historical detail, the particular case dissolving into the general case, was an oblivion that made the sacrifice of lives meaningless. In the same way, Kuang-ling has lost all identity, has become the mere type of a ruined city, so that in the following lines Pao Chao anachronistically speculates whether it "transgressed the ordinances of Chou."

There is a centered space, a protected concourse; all at once it is filled to overflowing with people and carriages, music bubbling into the sky, a concentration of wealth and power. Pao Chao does not tell us how this fullness has occurred; no one does or causes anything. Two

stages are given, an emptiness and a fullness; the reader bridges this ellipsis with the most "natural" model of relation—organic growth.

Thus they could overstep the laws of Ch'in,
transgress the ordinances of Chou,
marking off lofty redoubts,
hacking out profound moats,
and planning thereby to have the mandate abide with them for long generations.
For this purpose was the grandeur of their earthworks and crenellations,
the labor of wall-tower and beacon-keep,
whose summits rose higher than the Five Peaks,
whose length and breadth equaled the three river banks,
as precipitous as sheer cliffs,
as level as long banks of clouds.
There they set lodestones to withstand attack
and painted walls with flying patterns of reddish soil.
Then they looked upon its fastness of foundations and barrings
and intended a single overlordship for ten thousand years.
Through three dynasties,
somewhat more than five hundred years,
it was, at last, split like a melon, hulled like a bean.

We are able to pinpoint Kuang-ling's splendor in the age of Liu P'i by making a literal interpretation of "somewhat more than five hundred years" and by interpreting the "three dynasties" as the Han, Wei, and Tsin. But half a millennium may be emblematic time rather than exact historical time, and the mention of Chou and Ch'in (not to mention the common usage of "three dynasties" to designate the ancient Hsia, Shang, and Chou) tends to put the time of this city in the indefinite past.

An empty space fills with abundance; it builds a hard, protective rind around itself; at last it is "split like a melon." This is a story of nature's mechanisms, of full flowering, fruit, and rotting. The vegetative cycle implicit in the description functions quite independently of human action and will. But there is another story here, of nature as a moral order, a story of acquisitiveness, arrogance, and transgression, of walls built for eternal protection and of just retribution. The

two stories are incommensurate: one tells that the fall was inevitable; the other tells that it could have been avoided. One version laments; the other admonishes. Any attempt at reconciliation that makes arrogance and transgression *necessary* stages in the cyclical processes of history undermines the weaker narrative of moral history and destroys any purpose in the admonition.

As a literary genre, the poetic exposition *(fu)* aspired to embody the innate structure of its chosen topic: the divisions of the literary work were to correspond to the components of the natural entity. Since nature's form is symmetrical, the poetic exposition presents a matching symmetry. A splendor must be matched by a fading or a desolation; a past must be matched by a present. The amoral mechanism of cyclical nature and the moral order share this economy of balance (since both are located in the operations of Heaven, "Nature" with a capital N). Thus the symmetrical structure of the poetic exposition encodes ambivalence; it is both the counterbalance of retribution and the counterbalance of nature's mechanisms.

In the time of splendor, the two stories of vegetative flourishing and of transgression can be perfectly intertwined. However, in the balancing countermovement a more determinate interpretation struggles to emerge: the two stories begin to separate, juxtaposed but not placed in explicit opposition. First, a landscape dominated by blasted transgression:

Wetland mallows lie over the wells,
  wild creepers enmesh the roads.
In the central halls vipers and lizards form their ranks,
  on the stairs musk-deer and squirrels do battle.
Hamadryads and mountain demons,
  wild rats and city foxes,
  hoot in the wind, whistle in the rain,
  appearing at dusk and hurrying off at daybreak.
Starveling falcons sharpen their beaks,
  winter owls screech at their brood;
  crouching snow panthers and hiding tigers
  nurse on blood, dine on flesh.
Fallen groves block the roads,
  deepset are the ancient avenues.
The white willows fall early here,
  grasses on the barriers wither before their time.
A sharp chill is in the frosty air,
  the force of the wind comes howling,

  as a solitary tumbleweed shakes into motion,
  and sands leap upward in flight.
A tangle of weeds as far as the eye can see, unbounded,
  and dense growth stretching continuously.
Its moats have been filled into level land,
  and the lofty corner-towers have collapsed.
I can look straight for more than a thousand leagues
  and see only the brown dust rising.
I concentrate my thoughts, listen in this stillness,
  my heart already overwhelmed with pain.

Out of the level plain a city grew, and to a level plain the city returns. Earth fills the moats, the towers and groves fall, and once again the eye can see far into the distance. If a vegetative cycle of growth and dissolution sustains part of this passage, it is still not to innocent nature that the city returns. Everywhere the violence, the arrogance, and the crowding of humankind recur demonically in the ruin and in its creatures. Nature has become infected, as if human transgression echoes in the ruins even in the absence of inhabitants. This second openness is not the inviting openness of the beginning; now we have a wasteland, the roads tangled with growth, barren stretches of sand and dust all around. The moral judgement passed on the city is written everywhere.

At this point the two opposing principles are on the verge of coming into true opposition. Amoral necessity, embodied in nature's cyclical mechanisms, is a structure of repetition and recurrence. Earth displaced into moats and walls is again leveled. Human beings may act upon nature, may displace the earth, but their actions are subject to exactly the same laws of cyclical recurrence: what they do will be undone and done again. But if nature is a moral order, then free human actions can affect nature's cycles—can even cause things to "wither before their time." This moral effect must break nature's cycles of change and recurrence; it must be a *permanent* inscription. Permanence is central to the moral order, both in the transgression of "intending a single overlordship for ten thousand years" and in the disfigurement that follows retribution. In this passage human actions reach out and write their transgressions in the cycles of the plant and animal world, producing grotesque forms in which the poet can read an indictment of the former inhabitants.

Yet at this moment, when the poet should read a moral lesson in the scene, he "concentrates his thoughts, listens in this stillness."

He looks into the past and has a vision of splendor lost; there is a pang of desire for those all too alluring transgressions of opulence and pleasure. *Feng,* "criticism," undergoes a metamorphosis into *ai,* "lament."

Well-wrought door-bars, curtains embroidered in black
and white,
the bases of halls for song and towers for the dance,
the agate pools and emerald trees,
lodges for bow hunting in forests and fishing on isles,
the singing voices of Wu, Ts'ai, Ch'i, and Ch'in,
amusements of fish and dragons, birds and horses—
from all these the sweetness is gone, the fires
consumed,
the light is darkened, the echoes are ended.
Gentle damsels of the eastern capital,
beauties from the southland,
hearts full of grace, flesh white as gauze,
faces of alabaster, vermilion lips—
not a one but whose soul lies buried in these hidden
stones,
not a one but whose white bones are cast down into
barren dust,
nor can they now recall the joys of riding with their
prince,
or the sorrows of the palaces of lost favor.

The dead cannot remember either past pleasures or past sorrows, and such easy oblivion should indicate the vanity of those feelings. But in noting what they cannot remember, the poet remembers all too well and gives us an inventory of absences and losses. The great poetic expositions *(fu)* of the Han, especially those on the imperial capitals, were filled with opulent inventories of presences and possessions; that poetry echoes here in the later-born poet Pao Chao, in a catalogue of wonders now missing—or if surviving, surviving only in writing. The images of a consort riding with her prince and of palaces of lost favor belong to the Han imperial capital; the provincial metropolis of Kuang-ling disappears into Han Ch'ang-an or Lo-yang, just as a poetic exposition written in an age of decline and fading remembers the grandeur of Han poetic expositions on the capitals. He ends in frustration, posing the unresolved question of understanding—"How does Heaven's way work?"—then falling into silence.

How does Heaven's way work?
many must swallow their resentment.
Then I bring out my zither and make a song of the
Weed-Covered City:
North wind keen, a chill upon the walls,
Wells and paths dissolve, burial mounds remain.
A thousand years, ten thousand years—
Everything is gone—what more is there to say?

Pao Chao feels that he belongs to an age of decline, fading, and loss; such a person looks back on past splendor with a special intensity. Past splendor becomes the object of jealous anger and the object of desire—anger that they enjoyed pleasures he cannot share, desire to have such pleasure for himself. The anger is translated into a story of transgression and punishment, which recoils upon the later-born interpreter, who stands among the ruins and pays the price of his ancestor's sins. Desire is translated into a story of mechanical cycles of recurrence, in which pleasure is natural and promises to return; here no permanent infection is written in the landscape and in the fate of the later-born. But however the later-born read the past, with righteous anger tinged by desire or with desire tinged by righteous anger, they can never cross the barrier to reach it. Like Tu Mu's halberd, they can only rest before that impassable barrier and dream, with suppressed violence and desire, of how it might have been. Unable to conquer and/or seize the past, they would interpret it, but they find there the same barrier and veil that holds them away. Yet in their interpretations they tell a story—of walls and moats and the concentration of opulent pleasures within, then of the breaking and penetration of those barriers, "split like a melon."

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Fragments

In the encounter with the past there is usually some fragment that mediates between past and present, a cracked lens that both reveals and conceals. These fragments appear in many forms: fragments of discourse, fragments of memory, fragments of some artifact surviving in the world. And since the fragment always stands between us and the past, it is worth reflecting on what kind of category it is and how it "means."

A fragment is a part of something, but not simply a component or organ of the whole. If we put the components of something together, we have the thing itself; if we assemble a complete set of fragments, we have at best a "reconstruction" of the thing. The fragment points backward; it is a part that survives the dissolution of some whole: we read in it a breaking apart, and it draws our attention to the empty spaces around its jagged periphery. It is a "shard": its relation to the whole is asymmetrical. If the epitome of a literary work survives, or a list of contents, or a long sequence of chapters, we do not say that it "survives in fragments": fragmentation means loss of continuity. A fragment may be beautiful, but only in the special way of a fragment. Its significance, its allure, its value are not self-contained: the fragment compels us only as a "pointing," an index of absence.

Contemplation of a skull is a *memento mori* and more: its anonymity is painful to us. The individual disappears into the category; we try to reach in and draw out the individual, but the relation between category and particular remains an insoluble problem. By contrast the memento of a lock of hair is a true fragment, recalling for the possessor the individual to whom it belonged. As a *memento mori* the skull is metonymy (one member of a class of things that represents the class or concept). The lock of hair, the true fragment, is synecdoche, Time's favorite figure. The rite of summoning the soul required some article of possession of the dead person; the possession functioned as a fragment of the world that was and formed a bond of attachment between past and present.

To some degree any work of literature is a composed whole, a unity in itself; to some degree no work of literature is truly complete in itself, but rather is embedded in a living and inherited world that extends beyond the text. Civilizations may differ in the truths they desire to recognize and those they seek to be blind to. The Western literary tradition has tended to make the boundaries of the text absolute, like the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad,* a world unto itself. The Chinese literary tradition has tended to stress the continuity between the text and the lived world. But unless we were there, present in the mind as it wrote, the lived world in which the text is embedded is present to the later-born reader as an absence. Language that claims to have once been part of a continuous and living world is language as fragment.

The archetypal book of the Western tradition is the Bible (which simply means "the Book"), and it has served as both the explicit and implicit model of writing in the tradition of Western literary thought. It is the bounded and portable Logos, corresponding to the Logos that is the living world in the mind of God. The Bible is the unified structure of time, beginning "In the beginning . . ." and ending with the Apocalypse of time's end. Nothing of true significance is overlooked: it is the internally complete word.

The Bible's complete word merged with the Aristotelian emphasis on internal unity and necessity to shape the dominant values of Western literature and literary thought. The interpretation of internal unity and completeness changes, but the values remain. Thus when Dryden, in "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy," set out to defend earlier English drama against Neoclassical attacks, he did not reject the value of perfect unity; rather he developed a more complex version of unity:

> Our plays, besides the main design, have under-plots or by-concernments, of less considerable persons and intrigues, which are carried on with the motion of the main plot: as they say the orb of the fixed stars, and those of the planets, though they have motions of their own, are whirled about by the motion of the *primum mobile,* in which they are contained. That similitude expresses much of the English stage; for if contrary motions may be found in nature to agree; if a planet

> can go east and west at the same time;—one way by virtue of his own motion, the other by the force of the First Mover;—it will not be difficult to imagine how the under-plot, which is only different, not contrary to the great design, may naturally be conducted along with it.

The model on which a poet conducts his "great design" could hardly be more explicit.

It may be objected that "high" literature since the Romantic era seems to have shifted toward values of incompletion and asymmetry. But the origins of this shift are in a Romantic theory of the fragment, which turns out not to be a true fragment but a new metamorphosis of older theories of unity and completion. The German Romantic Novalis wrote of this pseudofragment in "Blütenstaub" ("Pollen") in the *Athenaeum:*

> The art of writing books is yet to be discovered, but it *is* on the point of being discovered. Fragments of this sort are literary sowings. There may well be many a barren seed among them—but if only a few of them sprout!

What is true here of the theoretical fragment also applies to the new lyric taking shape in the Romantic era; the modern privilege accorded to the lyric (which in popular usage has become synonymous with poetry) is the legacy of this Romantic theory of the fragment. Yet what we see here is not a genuine fragment but a seed, containing the whole as a future possibility. It is the divine Logos in embryo, looking to some future fulfillment when sown in the reader's mind.

The Confucian classics offered a diverse set of model texts to serve as counterparts of "the Book." None of these models involve making in quite the same way in which God made the world and the Bible or in which poets make a poem. The closest analogue is the *Book of Changes,* a systematic record of the observed order of the physical world. However, the authority of a classic was most often seen to rest not in systematic exposition but in an act of judicious editorial selection: such was Confucius' choice of the significant event and the perfect phrasing in the *Spring and Autumn Annals,* or his choice of paradigmatic texts from a larger corpus when editing the *Book of Songs* (and, in some accounts, when editing the *Book of Documents*). But the work that most perfectly embodied human words and a human personality was the *Analects,* the sayings of Confucius.

The *Analects* is, above all, a repository of fragments, the words of the Master that happen to have been heard, remembered, and preserved. The disciples, in their turn, transmitted the words of one who "transmitted but did not make." When we read the *Analects,* we assume that the Master said many other valuable things in his lifetime, that other fragments of his wisdom now are lost. Even more important, we assume that the Master *could* have said much more, that the words are merely the circumstantial articulations of a wisdom transcending the particular utterance. The cryptic terseness of their style is a sign of this more profound incompleteness. The very fragmentariness of these words directs our attention to a living world that is now lost. The labor of the traditional exegete was to build frames for those words—to explain in the common sense of exegesis, but also to offer biographical and historical contexts, speculative occasions to tell us why the Master said this, to whom the Master was speaking and how that shaped what he said, what circumstances might have elicited such a response.

Like the Bible, the *Analects* was a significant form, teaching millennia of readers how to understand another person's words. A premium was placed upon "reserve," *han-hsü,* a depth of feeling or wisdom withheld from the surface of the text, but just barely visible to the practiced eye. The text is incomplete in itself: it becomes full only when we look to those lost external relations—to the person, the circumstance, the age.

Chinese classical poetry was descended from the poems of the *Book of Songs;* its filiation to the fragmentary dicta of the *Analects* is less often acknowledged. If the Western poet secretly hoped to be like the One who carries on an intricate grand design or seeds the world, the Chinese poet secretly hoped to be the Sage. The poet's words, like those of the Master, were to be indices of some depth held in reserve; they were only the surviving fragments of a lost richness, the living person in his own world. Although the classical poem had a unity of form, it announced itself as being part of a larger world of living circumstance. In doing so, the poem asserted internal ellipses and, at its boundaries, ruptures of continuity; these reminded the reader of gaps waiting to be filled.

Some poets, seeing the discrepancy between the words and the fullness of circumstance and sentiment from which they survived, accepted that truth grandly and boldly; they would cast their readers into the poem abruptly and then tear them out, wondering and still unsatisfied.

To see clearly how such poets survive for us, we seek the moments where they reveal how others survived for them. We seek doublings and repetitions, chains of fragmentary contact. We search for a poetic fragment of experience that itself concerns receiving a fragment from a still more ancient past. Thus Li Ho (791–817) wrote "Song of an Arrowhead from the Battlefield of Ch'ang-p'ing":

Char of lacquer, powder of bone,
pebble of cinnabar:
In the chill gloom ancient blood
blooms flowers in the bronze.
The white feathers and gilt shaft
have gone in the rains,
And all that remains is this
three-spined, broken wolf's fang.

I went searching over that level plain,
driving my two-horse team,
Through the stony fields east of the station
by the foot of a weed-grown slope;
Daylight shortened, the wind was steady,
stars hung in its moaning,
Black banners of cloud were draped soaking
in the empty night sky.
To my right and left their phantoms
cried out, starving, lean:
I poured a jug of cream in libation,
took a lamb to roast.
Insects settled, the geese flew sick,
the sprouts of reeds turned red,
And spiraling gusts sent the traveler on his way,
blowing their shadowy fires.

Seeker of the past, tears streaming,
I reaped this snapped barb,
Whose broken point and red-brown cracks
once cut through flesh.
On a southern lane in the capital's eastern ward
a boy on horseback
Tried to get me to trade the metal
for an offering basket.

He throws us at once into a confrontation with the thing and what it "is." "Char of lacquer, powder of bone, pebble of cinnabar":

he names it with misnamings, each one canceling the others' claim to be the "thing" and none of them truly the right name for the thing. These misnamings site us in Li Ho's own wondering about the nature of the thing: he holds an encrusted lump that clearly *was* something but that now has no form, category, or definition—this sooty black, "char of lacquer" (used in armor); the specks of white, perhaps tiny chips of bone; "pebble of cinnabar" for the rust-red color of dried blood. Whoever has taken a piece of old metal out of the earth will understand the uncertainty that here translates into metaphors, the guessings that try to peel away the encrustations. Metaphor always raises the problem of what the thing truly "is." Yet these misnamings are significant in the process of knowing; they are "namings toward" what the thing is: char or ash, something that remains after burning; powder of bone, relics of death and dissolution; cinnabar, the lode mineral of mercury which, swallowed as a pill, promises immortality to the physical creature. These are misnamings of the arrowhead but correct indices of the fragment, the physical survivor that recalls a shattering and a dissolution.

We see it first with many names, a mere lump whose misleading encrustations are gradually uncovered to disclose the true thing. "In the chill gloom ancient blood blooms flowers in the bronze." This *chi-chi* is not simply a weak "chill gloom" but the mood that surrounds the thing, a somberness in the chill of the ancient metal his fingers touch, a shudder that runs from the touching fingers through the one who touches, and the loneliness of the thing and the scene. Removing the encrustations, we come to metal, not golden bronze but green bronze that forms patterns around points of corrosion, points where blood touched the metal and "flowered." Here is a point of contact between death and new life, life new but infected, its colors inverted: green flowers of corrosion growing out of red blood, the beginning of the lump that conceals the thing, just as the growing grain covered the ruins of the Chou capital. These are blossoms from a precise moment in history, when the great army of the ancient state of Chao was slaughtered by the troops of Ch'in on the battlefield of Ch'ang-p'ing. These blossoms cover over and preserve that moment, and they never fade.

Scraping away the encrustations to find what is there, he also finds what is missing, "the white feathers and gilt shaft have gone in the rains, and all that remains is this three-spined, broken wolf's fang." Blood brings blossoms, but the rains cause decay. The mind

reconstructs what has rotted away; the shafted arrow, once loosed from the fierce army of Ch'in, which was, as they called it then, "the land of jackals and wolves." And this is a fragment of that great body, the wolf's fang.

The thing uncovered is no longer a whole thing, an object fully present for us, a lump. It is an index of absences, a concrete point from which we follow a series of attachments: an arrowhead attached to a shaft to which feathers were attached from which we follow its line of flight back to an archer in an army of wolves, Ch'in's wolves, of which this is the remnant fang. But when one faces the thing and scrapes away its encrustations to discover its missing attachments to a past, there is another history, that of the arrowhead's discovery. This story he can tell from the beginning. After uncovering the object in the first four lines, he leaps to the story of its discovery, and the leap is a significant discontinuity that teaches us the motions of the mind in facing fragments. We are cast backward, trying to locate the fragment in some completeness of origins and circumstance. The thing "is" the history of both its deposit and its recovery.

The story he tells is of an encounter with ghosts in a landscape infected by ancient suffering. The ghosts are hungry, unfed; no one honors them, cares for them, takes them as his personal responsibility. But Li Ho dismounts and feeds them—lamb's flesh for the victims of the wolf's fang. It is only after this act of ceremony and remembrance that he finds the arrowhead.

Rhythms of reciprocity give shape to most Chinese narratives, even to a fragment of poetic narrative like this one: an act performed is answered by some other act of corresponding quality. We cannot help recognizing in the discovery of the arrowhead some problematic repayment for the kindness he has shown to the hungry dead. "Seeker of the past, tears streaming, I reaped this snapped barb, whose broken point and red-brown cracks once cut through flesh."

We see the object again, not as an array of metaphors as we first saw it but as a nexus of relations—as a token in the relation between the hungry ghosts and the poet, as an occasion for tears, as a death in an ancient battle. It is scarcely an artifact any more, its sharpness broken and its body covered with fissures that seem still to retain some trace of ancient blood, as if the object mirrored the wounds it once made. The disclosure of the "thing" reveals not its thingness and its aloofness from the human world but rather its complex bonds to people.

At this peak of intensity, the sudden realization that this "thing," this encrusted lump of broken metal "once cut through flesh," he tears us away from the ancient battlefield. Suddenly we are in the capital with a young man on horseback and a barter proposed. The drastic shift in setting and tone has given rise to numerous interpretations and suggested emendations. Here we should be less concerned with which interpretation might be correct than with the centuries of readers' discomfort, making commentators search desperately for some way to buffer the shock of the last couplet. Whether Li Ho has, in fact, been encouraged to purchase a bamboo shaft to make the arrow whole again or is offered a votive basket with which to make offerings to the dead, in each exegetical ingenuity we catch a whiff of awkward rationalization.

The shift in locale signals a shift in mood, and we notice everywhere ironic parallels: an encounter with hungry ghosts, ancient youths slain, set against a well-to-do young man of the capital; a spontaneous ceremony of remembrance for the dead, from which the arrowhead appears as a token of requital, set against a proposed barter. But the strongest contrast lies in the metamorphosis of the arrowhead itself. It was a mysterious object in which he gradually uncovered a weight of history; it was a token of his complex relation to the ancient dead, a fragment of the human past; to the stranger it becomes commodity or at best a souvenir. Previously the thing had many names and misnamings; here in the capital its name is "commodity."

He leaves us wondering and uncertain. The poem is done, but like the arrowhead, it discloses itself to us as a token of a relation in which we ourselves have been caught up. Here Li Ho does not cry out to his readers as he so often does elsewhere; instead, he himself listens to the cries of others, of the ghosts. And at the end he obliquely warns us of the ugliness in failing to hear those cries and failing to see the fragment for what it truly is. In the young man we see the blindness of looking at the fragment and seeing only thing, only commodity.

One of the most forceful characteristics of the fragment is the concentration of value. Because the fragment implicates something more than itself, it often seems to possess qualities of repleteness and intensity. Torn strips of papyrus have left us many bits and pieces of Greek poetry, strange sequences of beginnings, middles, and endings of lines. Scholars have reconstructed these poems to provide us with something similar to what the experience of reading complete Greek

lyrics might have been, but no reconstruction has quite the magic of Ezra Pound's famous rendering of a torn bit of Sappho:

Spring . . .
Too long . . .
Gongula . . .

Such ellipsis has become an all too easy trick of modern poetry, yet in this case, the absences invest the surviving fragment with a particular intensity, an intensity that does not exist in the words alone and that would be wanting if the entire poem had survived.

There develops an aesthetics of silence, of words said and lost or of words repressed. Yet the aesthetics of silence can be presented in poetry only through words. In its most basic form the aesthetics of silence is not essentially related to fragment. It requires a figure who does not speak or who stops speaking too soon as well as a narrator to take note of the fact. Perhaps the most famous such silence in the Western tradition is that of Ajax before Odysseus in *Odyssey* XI; he was a warrior who never spoke well, who was driven to his death by his lack of words, yet finally found eloquence in not speaking. In the Chinese tradition Po Chü-yi discovered a similar power of silence in "The Song of the P'i-p'a"; after a performance on the lute *(p'i-p'a),* the woman player stops:

Then another hidden grief, an invisible bitterness
appeared,
And at this moment her silence was more powerful than
sound.

Po Chü-yi's qualification "at this moment" tells the essential truth; it is not the silence itself but the circumstance that carries the force.

The poet who would make such eloquent silences his own has no recourse but to stop writing where he might continue. Within the text this appears as discontinuity, gaps and ellipses in discourse. A sudden shift in tone, topic, setting, or motion may mark a silence, and the reader's attention is drawn unerringly to what is withheld. But the most common silence in a poem occurs at the end, abandoning words before they fall into the easy formulas of poetic closure. Such silences give the poet a formal means to enact the more profound fragmentariness of the poem as a piece broken out of a living world.

The promise that the written poem is only a fragment of a full and living world appears most strongly in occasional poems. There the closing silence may itself be a message, a promise of continuity

of feeling beyond the time of the poem, as in Po Chü-yi's "When I Read Yüan Chen's Poems in a Boat":

I took a scroll of your poems,
read them by lamplight;
The poems were done, the lamplight
lingered on,
the sky was not yet bright.
My eyes were sore; I put out the light,
but kept on sitting there in the darkness,
In the sound of adverse winds blowing waves
that beat against the boat.

Above all we must recognize that this little poem is truly *for* Yüan Chen; if Po shows it to us, his later-born readers, it seems to be only as an afterthought and not for the sake of the poem as an art-thing, but so that, in overhearing him speak to Yüan Chen, we can understand his relation to his closest friend. Po Chü-yi speaks to Yüan Chen not of a moment in the true sense but rather of a fragment of lived time. The poem has narrative elements, but it does *not* have the internal unity of a narrative: it is open on both ends—attached to biographical circumstance, to an earlier relation between the two friends, to Po's receipt of Yüan's poems, and to Yüan's anticipated receipt of this poem from him. It is nothing more than a fragment of a larger continuity; any other claim would send Yüan Chen the wrong message. By giving the poem forth as only a fragment, Po Chü-yi can tell Yüan that his thoughts continue on after both the reading and the writing.

The mode of the fragment is one of the most distinctive traits of Chinese literary art: the text is permeable, joined with lived time before and after the poem. In the same way the poem enters the lived time of its readers, Yüan Chen and the later-born, who recite out loud this poem of Po Chü-yi, written on reading out loud Yüan Chen's poems, which Yüan had earlier recited out loud as he composed them. And we feel the mood of the poem continuing on, a mood growing from awareness of how the mood of Yüan Chen's poems continued on. Perhaps the most mysterious aspect of such continuance appears in the moment when Po's recitation ceases and he hears, in the new silence, the sound of the waves beating against the boat; at that very moment our own recitation ceases, and we hear the sounds of our own new silence. This particular poem tells us how we should read

it and all poems, pointing beyond the time of the poem to the surrounding lived world and the interior world of feeling beneath it. We are not told what Yüan Chen's poems say, we are not told what Po Chü-yi feels on reading them; we see only a fragment of the surface, but that fragment is sufficient to let us continue on toward the whole.

He unrolls a scroll, reciting out loud, moving from one poem to the next in the lamplight, until finally the scroll is done and the lamplight *ts'an,* both "lingering" and "attenuating." "My eyes were sore," *yen t'ung;* the force of the poem may lie here as much as in the last line. Something ties us to the physical world, where we always encounter endings and limits: the scroll is completed, the lamplight almost exhausted, the strength of his eyes almost used up. But each limit and each ending is passed with a continuation. He puts out the light, but the light is on the point of returning in the faint brightening of the predawn sky. He puts out the light to rest but does not rest: he sits on in the darkness. The sound of his recitation ceases, but sound continues on in the dashing of the waves.

The last line is in "the language of scene," *ching-yü,* rather than in the "language of feelings," *ch'ing-yü.* If Po had qualified the last line with a phrase such as "sadly I listen to . . ." we would not have here a famous quatrain, but simply one among hundreds of merely sentimental quatrains of the period. In its present form the last line has an incompleteness. It omits and, in omitting, seeks someone who in a particular state of mind listens. It casts our attention beyond itself to the feeling of the moment. It is only a "fragment," nothing more than a shard of a complete circumstance; the last line is a formal embodiment of continuation, just as the steady pounding of the waves is an image of continuation and as Po's sitting on in the darkness is an act that gives evidence of his continuing thoughts about his friend. Po Chü-yi can never tell Yüan Chen the fullness of how it was at that time, either the fullness of physical detail or the fullness of his state of mind; thus he sends only a fragment, which discloses itself as fragment and leads the reader's thoughts out beyond itself.

Going Astray

The value of the whole is concentrated in the fragment: it is replete. But as with other repositories of value, the value may gradually come to seem a property of the token itself. And we in turn acquire value by possessing the token. If I have gold, I am "wealthy"; if I spend the gold on myself, I become poor. When it leaves the repository, value is dissipated, lost. Thus the fragment, which lends an aura of specialness to the person who knows how to understand it, can become an autonomous token of value; and only a miserliness of spirit forgets what the token is for.

This is a snare: a person may be caught in it easily, inadvertently, as perhaps Li Shang-yin (812–858) was, when he went astray at a party and ended up "Drunk Beneath the Flowers":

> We went looking for blossoms, and I, unawares,
> got drunk on drifting-cloud wine;
> I went soundly to sleep, propped on a tree,
> while the sun was already setting.
> I woke up sober; the party had scattered;
> it was then deep in the night;
> But I went on to take a red candle in hand
> to enjoy the last of the flowers.

Ts'an, translated weakly as "the last of" in "the last of the flowers," is the word that secretly unifies these fragmentary meditations on fragments. *Ts'an* joins the sense of "destruction" and "dissolution" to the sense of "what survives": thus in the last line we cannot be certain whether *ts'an-hua* are the "ruined flowers" strewing the ground or "the last of the flowers" remaining on the branches. Yet whichever of these "fragments" he looks at, he sees it not as itself but as a relation to an earlier time when the trees were filled with flowers.

He had come with others to see the trees in blossom; it was to be a shared experience of a transitory moment. But he drank the "drifting-cloud wine" of immortals and took no note of time's passage. A person drinks for oblivion, to be "unaware," *pu-chüeh,* of certain things; even though we may hesitate to infer that he willfully chose to miss the moment, we do detect a certain pride and pleasure in the way things turned out. Hidden behind Li Shang-yin's poem, we recognize the solitary drinker in Li Po's (701–762) "Expressing My Feelings":

> Facing my wine, unaware of darkness coming,
> Falling flowers covered my robes,
> And I rose drunk, walked through the moon in the
> creek—
> The birds were turning back, men too growing fewer.

It is a chosen role: to be the only one who remains, who lingers on after the others have scattered, who lingers to view the last of the flowers after the other blossoms have fallen and scattered. Like the person who paces alone over the vanished site of the Chou capital in "There the Millet is Ripe," this is someone who stands out from the others because of his special fondness for remainders, whether of dynasties or spring flowers. Such a person both fears and takes pride in the possibility of being misunderstood. The poem is a means to make his specialness known and admired.

In both Li Po's quatrain and in Li Shang-yin's we read *pu-chüeh,* "unaware," pretending that all was an accident. But their need to inform us of this makes us doubt, especially as we read their self-proclaimed delight at finding themselves alone in the darkness amid the fallen flowers.

Gradually we recognize that Li Shang-yin prefers the fragment to the whole. There is nothing inherently more beautiful about the "last of the flowers": their value is only in being the last, a relation to another time. Yet this fragmentary scene of the grove, with small sections of tattered flowers illumined by a candle in the dark of night, is more alluring than the sight of the full grove with all its flowers in broad daylight. Solitude is essential to this peculiar beauty; the rest of the party has gone home. But no less essential is the need to inform others, by means of a poem, that such beauty was his alone.

The aesthetics of the fragment is bound up with the notion of a unique sensibility, an elite and private capacity that is laid bare to the public in a poem. In such poems the poet cultivates an image of himself as he wants others to see him. We recall Po Chü-yi sitting alone in the darkness, listening to the waves dash against his boat; we recall Li Ho, who, unlike the young man of the capital, understands the true value of the arrowhead. In the *Analects* Yu receives the Master's praise because he could "resolve disputes" on hearing only a "fragment," *p'ien-yen,* of the circumstance. A noble singularity is linked to the capacity to understand fragments and incomplete things.

There is a clear danger here, a snare: the ability to appreciate and understand the fragment may become nothing more than a touchstone of sensibility, an oblique exercise in self-praise. One may cease to care about the lost whole, which leads us to what is Other, and instead prefer the fragment in its own right, as it reflects back on the understanding self. This is not yet true in Li Ho's song or Po Chü-yi's quatrain, but in Li Shang-yin's poem we may have passed over into a true decadence, in which everything turns back upon itself, and sensibility is a decoration of the self rather than a means to know. At this point the fragment becomes nothing more than a prop with which the writer's sensibility can occupy center stage, claiming with feigned surprise that he was "unaware" he would find himself there all alone.

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The Snares of Memory

Through remembrance we repay our debt to the dead, a payment of present time offered to time past, and in that act of remembrance may secretly lodge our own hopes to be remembered. But remembrance can also become a trap for the living. Too many memories may crowd the present. This occurs in interior and involuntary remembrance, when a magnitude of things past rise up before us wherever we turn. That same danger may also be found in a strange, exterior formalization of remembrance; this is the antiquarian passion, in which the value of the past is embodied in the value of some ancient thing and in whch acts of conservation are imperceptibly transformed into acts of acquisition.

Suppose these snares of memory, both the interior and the exterior, came together in the history of a collection, laboriously gathered and painfully lost, bit by bit. Suppose further that the historian of the collection is not the primary collector but the collector's wife and companion, herself a connoisseur who shares in the collecting but who has enough distance to recognize the human cost. Then place such a complex act of remembrance in a present that refuses to be crowded out, the dissolution of a dynasty, framing and contributing to the dissolution of the collection. This is the situation in which we find Li Ch'ing-chao, writing in 1132 an afterword to the remaining portions of her dead husband's monumental study of epigraphy, *Chin-shih lu, Records on Metal and Stone.*

Writings on metal and stone are inscriptions on stone monuments, bronze ceremonial vessels, and the like; the phrase was also a commonplace for permanence in commemorative inscriptions. Li Ch'ing-chao's husband, Chao Te-fu, made copies of such permanent inscriptions on mere paper and wrote colophons for them, in recognition of the fact that records on metal and stone do indeed wear away; a laborious and learned effort of conservation was demanded before the inscriptions disappeared altogether. But the ceremonial vessels and the man who recorded their inscriptions were lost as the Northern Sung disintegrated in the invasion of the Chin Tartars. All this Li Ch'ing-chao records in her afterword, itself a devotional act of commemoration that inscribes its doubts about the value and permanence of such acts, a testament of love mixed with great bitterness.

> What are the preceding chapters of *Records on Metal and Stone*?—the work of the governor, Chao Te-fu. In it he took inscriptions on bells, tripods, steamers, kettles, washbasins, ladles, goblets, and bowls from the Three Dynasties of high antiquity all the way down to the Five Dynasties (immediately preceding our Sung); here also he took the surviving traces of acts by eminent men and obscure scholars inscribed on large steles and stone disks. In all there were two thousand sections of what appeared on metal and stone. Through all these inscriptions, one might be able to correct historical errors, make historical judgements, and mete out praise and blame. It contains things which, on the highest level, correspond to the Way of the Sages, and on a lower level, supplement the omissions of historians. It is a great amount indeed. Yet catastrophe fell on Wang Ya and Yüan Tsai alike: what did it matter that the one hoarded books and paintings while the other merely hoarded pepper? Ch'ang-yu and Yüan-k'ai both had a disease—it made no difference that the disease of one was a passion for money, and of the other, a passion for transmission of knowledge and commentary. Although their reputations differed, they were the same in being deluded.

It begins less like a preface or an afterword than like the colophon to a book, a colophon written on a collection of colophons. It begins with the question "What is this book?" The reader, who has probably glanced at the book before coming to the afterword, has formed some notion of what he was looking over. The afterword surprises him, follows the expected words of praise for erudition with an admonition against the ugly folly of passionate erudition. Then, as he reads on in the afterword, the reader discovers that these entries are not simply themselves but a complex history of gathering, preservation, and loss. He discovers that these "surviving traces of acts by eminent men and obscure scholars" are also the surviving traces of acts by another eminent man, Chao Te-fu, and another obscure scholar, Li Ch'ing-chao.

Judgements on the histories of dynasties are embedded not only in the records themselves but also in the story of their composition and their tenuous survival. Blame and praise are meted out, not only in the inscriptions but also in the narrative of their recording. All this noble, laborious effort is folly and waste: these writings are mere things like other things; the passionate concern for them is no more enlightened than any other passion. She recognizes this truth and tells us that she recognizes it, but she still clings passionately to what survives, and publishes it, with an afterword, for posterity.

> In 1101, in the first year of the Chien-chung Reign, I came as a bride to the Chao household. At that time my father was a division head in the Ministry of Rites, and my father-in-law, later Grand Councilor, was an executive in the Ministry of Personnel. My husband was then twenty-one and a student in the Imperial Academy. In those days both families, the Chaos and the Lis, were not well-to-do and were always frugal. On the first and fifteenth day of every month, my husband would get a short vacation from the Academy: he would "pawn some clothes" for five hundred cash and go to the market at Hsiang-kuo Temple, where he would buy fruit and rubbings of inscriptions. When he brought these home, we would sit facing one another, rolling them out before us, examining and munching. And we thought ourselves persons of the age of Ko-t'ien.

The first part of her story is pure idyll—her marriage, Chao Te-fu's student days, the simple pleasures shared by the young bride and her husband. The language of frugality figures prominently throughout her story, from the conventional "pawning clothes" (an allowance) to purchase rubbings, to her remarks about lacking the accustomed luxuries of official households, to her apparently straitened circumstances after Chao Te-fu's death. Yet many details she mentions—the extent of their collection, ownership of at least two households, fine bindings for books, a high reward offered to redeem works stolen from her—all these indicate substantial wealth, if not common luxury.

This recurrent theme of frugality grows from a fear of fortune's cycles, that wealth portends loss, that accumulation anticipates scattering. She draws over herself and her husband a thin disguise of the poor scholar, a vain defense against the impoverishment that inevitably follows riches. Instead of fine food, fine clothes, and fine ornaments for the body, the couple gathers fine books, fine paintings, and antiques. But when the time of scattering comes, she discovers that the books, paintings, and antiques are lost just as easily and as painfully as the more common trappings of wealth. She repeats the old disguise of poverty here, but she has already told us that she knows better, knows that this passion is "no different from a passion for money."

Yet Li Ch'ing-chao remembers those books, paintings, and antique vessels less as objects in themselves than as the center of an experience she shared with Chao Te-fu. That is the significance of the fruit. We are struck less by the fact that Chao Te-fu brought home rubbings from the Hsiang-kuo Temple than by the recollection that he brought home rubbings *and* fruit. Reading this tells us less about Chao Te-fu—after all, it is hardly surprising that he brought home fruit—than about how Li Ch'ing-chao remembers. Possession of the rubbings was less significant in her memory than the shared pleasure of going over them with Chao Te-fu, an event in which "munching" on the fruit played an essential part.

This word "munching," *chü-chüeh,* means not only literally chewing fruit, but also figuratively "chewing," "mulling over" passages in writing. It is a word in which the slow savoring of sweet fruit and the slow savoring of the significance of an inscription can become one and the same. Collecting, eating, learning—all are pleasures of slow absorption and acquisition, joined in the word *chü-chüeh.* Later in the afterword, the pleasure of "chewing over" books becomes a substitute for eating too well, and perhaps also a defense against the dangers that eating too well may bring upon them; yet this substitution provides no real defense against the end of pleasure. "And we thought ourselves persons of the age of Ko-t'ien." "We thought ourselves," *tzu-wei,* marks their illusion, youth's innocent blindness now recognized for what it was.

I would like to "chew over," *chü-chüeh,* this final passage. To speak of "persons of the age of Ko-t'ien" unmistakably recalls the end of T'ao Ch'ien's famous "Biography of Master Five Willows." The memory of this text carries more force for Li Ch'ing-chao than a mere evocation of a primordial and mythic past, the age of Ko-t'ien, when everyone lived in simplicity and contentment. Like this section of the afterword where she recalls it, the "Biography of Master Five Willows" speaks of the pleasures of reading, of the difference between grim study and innocent delight in a text. We read here also how the joy of reading may take the place of eating; it has something to say

about contentment with simple things, and it contains a wife's admonition to her husband. Coming to Li Ch'ing-chao's mind as she describes her early married life with Chao Te-fu, the "Biography of Master Five Willows" is the subtext of her history, her silent admonition to her dead husband, a compendium of values he once shared with her but lost.

T'ao Ch'ien, *Biography of Master Five Willows*

We don't know what age the master lived in, and we aren't certain about his real name. Beside his cottage were five willow trees, so he took his name from them. He lived in perfect peace, a man of few words, with no desire for glory or gain. He liked to read but didn't try too hard to understand. Yet whenever there was something that caught his fancy, he would be so happy he would forget to eat. He had a wine-loving nature, but his household was so poor he couldn't always obtain wine. His friends, knowing how he was, would invite him to drink. And whenever he drank, he finished what he had right away, hoping to get very drunk. When drunk, he would withdraw, not really caring whether he went or stayed. His dwelling was a shambles, providing no protection against wind and sun. His coarse clothes were full of holes and patches; his plate and pitcher always empty; he was at peace. He forgot all about gain and loss and in this way lived out his life.

Ch'ien-lou's wife once said, "Feel no anxiety about loss or low station; don't be too eager for wealth and honor." When we reflect on her words, we suspect that Five Willows may have been such a man—swigging wine and writing poems to satisfy his inclinations. Was he a person of the age of Lord No-Cares? Was he a person of the age of Ko-t'ien?

The "Biography of Master Five Willows" is a secret foil for each stage of her life with Chao Te-fu. Here is the simple contentment that increasingly eludes husband and wife. In the early days of their marriage their joys seemed simple; but as they chew over the old writings, Chao Te-fu takes them too seriously, loses his former ease in the passion for collecting, and gets caught up in the quest for glory and gain, in which he loses his life and almost loses his good name. Each in their own way, husband and wife both become victims of memory.

When, two years later, he went to take up a post, we lived on rice and vegetables, dressed in common cloth; but he would search out the most remote spots and out-of-the-way places

to fulfill his interest in the world's most ancient writings and unusual characters. When his father, the Grand Councilor, was in office, various friends and relations held positions in the Imperial Libraries; there one might find many ancient poems omitted from the *Book of Songs,* unofficial histories, and writings never before seen, works hidden in walls and recovered from tombs. He would work hard at copying such things, drawing ever more pleasure from the activity, until he was unable to stop himself. Later, if he happened to see a work of painting or calligraphy by some person of ancient or modern times, or unusual vessels of the Three Dynasties of high antiquity, he would still pawn our clothes to buy them. I recall that in the Ch'ung-ning Reign a man came with a painting of peonies by Hsü Hsi and asked twenty thousand cash for it. In those days twenty thousand cash was a hard sum to raise, even for children of the nobility. We kept it with us a few days, and having thought of no plan by which we could purchase it, we returned it. For several days afterward husband and wife faced one another in deep depression.

Later we lived privately at home for ten years, gathering what we could here and there to have enough for food and clothing. Afterward, my husband governed two commanderies in succession, and he used up all his salary on "lead and wooden tablets" [for scholarly work]. Whenever he got a book, we would collate it with other editions and make corrections together, repair it, and label it with the correct title. When he got hold of a piece of calligraphy, a painting, a goblet, or a tripod, we would go over it at our leisure, pointing out faults and flaws, setting for our nightly limit the time it took one candle to burn down. Thus our collection came to surpass all others in fineness of paper and the perfection of the characters.

I happen to have an excellent memory, and every evening after we finished eating, we would sit in the hall called "Return Home" and make tea. Pointing to the heaps of books and histories, we would guess on which line of which page in which chapter of which book a certain passage could be found. Success in guessing determined who got to drink his or her tea first. Whenever I got it right, I would raise the teacup, laughing so hard that the tea would spill in my lap, and I would get up, not having been able to drink anything at all. I would have been glad to grow old in such a world. Thus, even though we were living in anxiety, hardship, and poverty, our wills were not broken.

The recurring refrain of "anxiety, hardship, and poverty," punctuating an anecdote of perfect contentment, is a vain defense to ward off the coming storm: we see through the disguise of rags to a comfortable life of plenty and shared joys. It was a period of gathering, but the afterword recalls the joys and economies of gathering itself rather than of what was gathered. Strangely, the only particular item remembered is the Hsü Hsi painting they could *not* acquire. Had they been able to raise the money to purchase it, it would have been lost with the rest of the collection and would have passed unrecorded here. It survives in memory as the acquisition missed, while a thousand successful acquisitions pass unmentioned. Its value in the afterword is not as a work of art but as an occasion that reveals their shared passion for books, art, and antiquities, how it escaped their grasp and left "husband and wife facing one another in deep depression." What was acquired was lost, and lost to memory as well; what was lost is now preserved as memory. Such is the nature of memory, everywhere and here in the afterword, concerned with what is lost and out of reach.

Husband and wife were scholars together and connoisseurs, constantly attentive to what was flawed, fraudulent, or incorrect. They carried out repairs and made collations to preserve the past perfectly. But we note a doubleness in this activity, a union of seriousness and amusement that remains within the scope of idyllic reading described in the "Biography of Master Five Willows." Transmission is not drudgery but an occasion for delight. Strength of memory is not what saves the schoolchild from humiliation; it is a game. The competition between husband and wife was an occasion for sharing between equals, an occasion for merriment. The books and the tea were mere props for joy in the present. Here in this hall named "Return Home," after T'ao Ch'ien's famous rhapsody—in which T'ao chooses freedom and simplicity over the bondage of society—the hierarchy between husband and wife disappears, and the surrounding records of the past find a comfortable home in the present.

> When the book collection was complete, we set up a library in "Return Home" hall, with huge bookcases where the books were catalogued in sequence. There we put the books. Whenever I wanted to read, I would ask for the key, make a note in the ledger, then take out the books. If one of them was a bit damaged or soiled, it would be our responsibility to repair the spot and copy it out in a neat hand. There was no longer the same ease and casualness as before. This was an attempt to gain convenience which led instead to nervousness and anxiety. I couldn't bear it. And I began to plan how to do away with more than one meat in our meals, how to do away with all finery in my dress; for my hair there were no ornaments of bright pearls or kingfisher feathers; the household had no implements for gilding or embroidery. Whenever we would come upon a history or the work of a major writer, if there was nothing wrong with the printing and no errors in the edition, we would buy it on the spot to have as a second copy. His family had always specialized in *The Book of Changes* and the *Tso chuan,* so the collection of works in those two traditions was most perfect and complete. Books lay ranged on tables and desks, scattered on top of one another on pillows and bedding. This was what took our fancy and what occupied our minds, what drew our eyes and what our spirits inclined to; and our joy was greater than the pleasure others had in dancing girls, dogs, and horses.

Classical Chinese requires a personal pronoun only when the distinction of person will not be clear from the context. Except at the moment when Li Ch'ing-chao comments on her powers of memory, her description of their early life together consistently omits personal pronouns. Yet there are many occasions of "facing"—"chewing over" fruit and rubbings, the depression at their failure to acquire the Hsü Hsi painting, or playing memory games and drinking tea. From these anecdotes we know that antiquarian learning was their joint passion. In that period of their life, the third-person singular of "he sought," "he purchased," "his collection" cannot be distinguished from the first-person plural of "*we* sought," "*we* purchased," "*our* collection."

However, with the building of the bookcases the problem of pronouns becomes acute, and their omission is the means to disguise as well as to record a domestic trouble. When "*we* set up a library," the choice of the first-person plural is still comfortable and automatic. But it becomes increasingly clear that the new rules of library use are her husband's and not her own. In the context of the ease of their earlier life together, we would like to understand *ch'ing-yao* as "we would get the key," but the proper force of *ch'ing* and the apparent nature of the situation makes us suspect that *ch'ing-yao* means "I would ask him for the key." We would like to believe that if either husband or wife found a damaged section in a book, they would both feel that it should be repaired. We realize that the sense of "respon-

sibility" to repair the book is felt differently by husband and wife; she recognizes it as a loss of ease. The writer's memories have secret pairings that define change: before, fruit juices dribbled all over rubbings, and tea could be spilled everywhere in laughter and shared pleasure; now the discovery of a soiled book is a constant source of anxiety, "no longer the same ease and casualness as before." Now she articulates the first person pronoun clearly, to separate her own feelings from those of her husband: *yü pu nai,* "*I* could not bear it."

The idyll is over. The collection had previously been a site where the hierarchical distinction between husband and wife dissolved, where the remains of the past found a comfortable home in the living present; though the books are the same, a difference has arisen between "his collection" and "her collection." And we lose our confidence in how to read the text. When she speaks of the purchase of second copies, the unstated distinction between "he" and "I" suddenly becomes crucial and leads to two different stories: although she makes the passage sound as if purchasing books was a joint enterprise, that can no longer be taken for granted. It may be that, as a result of the new library rules, *she* has been purchasing second copies and that the household economies are undertaken so that she can have books of her own to use as she pleases (in this case change all the "we's" in the second half of the passage to "I"). Or it may be that, even though the collection is complete, *he* keeps on purchasing second copies for collation and comparison, in which case the statement of household economies, previously noted with pride, takes out an air of complaint (change the "we's" to "he"). By not clearly indicating the subject, she pretends to conceal the division in the rhetoric of joint enterprise, but once the first-person plural becomes "he" and "I," the damage cannot be mended. The two versions are not the same; they have different meanings and different values. The description of utter absorption in books at the end of the passage may be the "good" pleasure she has in her own collection, or it may be her husband's increasingly excessive passion, which she can no longer entirely share. On the surface she still wants the act of purchasing books to appear as a shared interest, yet we strongly suspect she is speaking of the man, whose "joy was greater than the pleasure others had in dancing girls, dogs, and horses." This seems to be the voice of someone who would convince us that she prefers her husband to be a passionate book collector rather than one who engages in more dubious amusements. We, who would like to believe her, at the same time recall what she said earlier, that no passion is better than any other passion.

Li Ch'ing-chao has not lost her love of books, but that love has changed, has become mixed with wariness. Before, the books had been nothing more than a prop in the small dramas of affection staged with her husband. Now the pleasure she finds in books differs from that of her husband, the collector; it seems to be directed to what can be read in the books. Thinking back to T'ao Ch'ien's "Biography of Master Five Willows," she claims that hers is the authentic appreciation of books. In the same way her love for Chao Te-fu has become complicated and changed; there appears a faint undercurrent of resentment and disapproval, still mixed with genuine pride and affection, a sense of discomfort intensified and held in check by the memory of happier times together. She seems to have withdrawn somewhat from "the Collection," and wisely so, now that the storm is coming that will scatter what has been so laboriously gathered. In her subsequent role as the unsuccessful conservator of the collection, her care for the collection is inextricable from its link to her husband and to their earlier life together.

> In 1126, the first year of the Ching-k'ang Reign, my husband was governing Tse-ch'uan when we heard that the Chin Tartars were moving against the capital. He was in a daze, realizing that all those full trunks and overflowing chests, which he regarded so lovingly and mournfully, would surely soon be his possessions no longer. In the third month of spring in 1127, the first year of the Chien-yen Reign, we hurried south for the funeral of his mother. Since we could not take the overabundance of our possessions with us, we first gave up the bulky printed volumes, the albums of paintings, and the most cumbersome of the vessels. Thus we reduced the size of the collection several times, and still we had fifteen cartloads of books. When we reached Tung-hai, it took a string of boats to ferry them all across the Huai, and again across the Yangtse to Chien-k'ang. In our old mansion in Ch'ing-chou we still had more than ten rooms of books and various items locked away, and we planned to have them all brought by boat the next year. But in the twelfth month Chin forces sacked Ch'ing-chou, and those ten or so rooms I spoke of were all reduced to ashes.
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> The next autumn, the ninth month of 1128, my husband

took charge of Chien-k'ang Prefecture but relinquished the position in the spring of the following year. Again we put everything in boats and went up to Wu-hu and Ku-shu, intending to take up lodging on the River Kan. That summer in the fifth month we had reached Ch'ih-yang. At that point an imperial decree arrived, ordering my husband to take charge of Hu-chou, and before he assumed that office, to proceed to an audience with the Emperor. Therefore he had the household stop at Ch'ih-yang from which he would go off alone to answer the summons. On the thirteenth day of the sixth month he set off to carry out his duty. He had the boats pulled up onto the shore, and he sat there on the bank, in summer clothes with his headband set high on his forehead, his spirit like a tiger's, his eyes gleaming as though they would shoot into a person, while he gazed toward the boats and took his leave. I was in a terrible state of mind. I shouted to him, "If I hear the city is in danger, what should I do?" He answered from afar, his hands on his hips: "Follow the crowd. If you can't do otherwise, abandon the household goods first, then the clothes, then the books and scrolls, then the old bronzes—but carry the sacrificial vessels for the ancestral temple yourself; live or die with them; don't give *them* up." With this he galloped off on his horse."

The northern half of the Sung Empire is crumbling before the invasions of the Chin Tartars. Another passionate collector, the Emperor Hui-tsung, has been carried off into captivity. Now everything that has been amassed, lovingly corrected, set in perfect order, repaired, protected in locked bookcases with rules for use—now all this must meet its time for scattering and destruction. Realizing this, Chao Te-fu looks about desperately, hoping to save as much as he can, ranking the items of the collection in a hierarchy of value. At some point between the time they sat discussing the flaws and merits of each new acquisition and this present ranking of their collection, a subtle transformation has taken place. From a connoisseurship of knowledge and appreciation, we have moved to an almost mercantile connoisseurship of possession, in which every object is a commodity with a relative value. This new world is altogether different from that of Master Five Willows, who read at random and found delight in whatever struck his fancy; this world also differs from one in which a husband and wife play games of guessing the location of a particular passage, indifferent to whether the passage is in a printed Academy edition

or in a rare manuscript. The difference seems to center in a distinction between the work as object and "what is *in* the work. The transformation of books and art into objects is part of a system of possession, which in controlling, organizing, ranking, regulating, and locking things away, corrupts a genuine relation to the past just as it corrupts the relations between human beings in the present. Li Ch'ing-chao learns that she too has a value and a relative position in his collection.

Fifteen carts carry the collection southward, leaving the bottom of the hierarchy of value to burn in the sack of Ch'ing-chou. The collection shows its ugly face, not as knowledge and pleasure but as a mass of objects that enslave their owners: every move means packing up the collection and seeing to its transportation. Then at Ch'ih-yang a decree comes, separating Chao Te-fu from "his" collection and leaving the full weight of its charge to Li Ch'ing-chao. This parting is a memorable scene, as Li Ch'ing-chao describes her husband's heroic appearance with love, admiration, and a glitter of womanly desire. But suddenly everything changes: the collection infects the scene. Again using the first-person pronoun, she says *yü yi shen o,* translated above as "I was in a terrible state of mind." This is a problematic phrase, which decorum might make us take simply as an expression of her apprehension ("I anticipated the worst"); but its history of usage hints at a tension between them: "I was in a bad mood." Realizing that she is being left a prisoner of the collection, she "shouts" her question at Chao Te-fu's departing form. Chao Te-fu answers as one who can instantly appraise the value of commodities, cataloguing the order in which she should abandon the household goods and the collection. She too has her place in the catalogue—along with the sacrificial vessels, the last to go.

How are we to weigh this speech? Much depends on how we understand *tsung-ch'i,* the sacrificial vessels for the ancestral temple. These may be either the sacrificial vessels of the Chao clan or the finest bronzes in the collection. On the one hand, there is no doubt that her recording of the speech here is intended to redound to Chao Te-fu's credit, either as the passionate antiquarian or as the person charged with the preservation of the ritual vessels of family sacrifices. In either case, he prizes the vessels as much as life itself. Although he must hurry off in response to imperial command, we would like to believe that *he* would be willing to die with the sacrificial vessels as readily as he expects Li Ch'ing-chao to sacrifice herself. But it is one thing to choose such a death for oneself and quite another to

order someone else to die for a few pieces of bronze, especially when that someone is one's wife and partner, the person left to write the record. If these are the sacrificial vessels of the family, we have an *exemplum* of Confucian duty. But if these are merely part of the collection, the passionate antiquarian has paid a terrible price for his passion, forgetting what pleasure is due, putting his books under lock and key, making them masters of the living. She does tell this incident with pride, but as in many tales told with apparent pride about the strength of character of loved ones, a bitterness haunts the subsurface.

"But carry the sacrificial vessels yourself—live or die with them." We may remember here an ancient story, told in the *Chuang-tzu:*

> The priest of the Ancestral Sacrifice dressed in his black robes once looked down into the pigpen and delivered an oration to a pig as follows: "Why should you hate death? For three months I will fatten you, for ten days practice abstentions, then for three days fast. Next I will strew white rushes, then on the carved sacrificial platter lay your shoulder and rump. Under those circumstances you wouldn't mind, would you? I suppose that if I were thinking as a mere pig, I would probably say that I would much rather eat chaff and stay in the pigpen. But thinking on my own case, I would certainly do it, as long as I could enjoy the honor of caps and carriages while living, and when dead, get to ride in a decorated hearse with a fine coffin. If I were thinking as a mere pig, I'd turn all that down; thinking for myself, I'd welcome it. And what then is the difference between my desires and those of the pig . . . ?"

Like the passionate antiquarian, the passionate ceremonialist somehow loses sight of certain basic values. But Chuang-tzu presents this distortion of values in an outrageous parody of ancient oratory. Chao Te-fu has forgotten how it sounds to encourage another creature to a noble death that he himself would choose. But *we* may remind Li Ch'ing-chao that buried in that domineering mass of exquisite editions is a wise voice that mocks her husband's command to die gloriously and willingly with her arms full of bronzes.

> As he was hurrying on his journey, he suffered sunstroke from the intense heat, and by the time he reached imperial headquarters, he had contracted a malarial fever. At the end of the seventh month I received a letter that he was lying sick. I was much alarmed, considering my husband's excitable nature and how nothing had been able to prevent the illness deteriorating into fever; his temperature might rise even higher, and in that case he would have to take chilled medicines; then the sickness would really be something to be worried about. Thereupon I set out by boat and in one day and night traveled three hundred leagues. At the point when I arrived he was taking large doses of *ch'ai-hu* and yellow *ch'in;* he had a recurring fever with dysentery, and the illness appeared terminal. I was weeping, and in such a desperate situation I could not bring myself to ask him what was to be done after his death. On the eighteenth day of the eighth month he could no longer get up; he took his brush and wrote a poem; when he finished, he passed away, with no thought at all for the future provision of his family.

He who made such careful provision for his collection during his life made no provision for his household after his death. Here again a failure of humanity has a corrupting effect, forcing Li Ch'ing-chao to worry for herself in worrying about his illness, forcing her to conclude the narrative of his death with an indictment. Her conservation of *Records on Metal and Stone,* with her afterword, is a work of love, honoring Chao Te-fu's memory, yet the afterword does not always do honor to him. Up to this point Li Ch'ing-chao's criticism of her husband has been muted, the faintest undercurrent of resentment, sometimes rising to the surface, but always mixed with love and respect. Here, as Chao Te-fu leaves the world and the narrative, criticism surfaces clearly. Li Ch'ing-chao has been left alone, with no guidance or provision, in a dissolving society in which, even at its most stable, it was almost impossible for a woman to function independently. Complicating that anxiety, she has been left with her husband's charge to preserve an immense bulk of rare books, paintings, and antiquities, the sole fruit of her husband's lifelong labors and the focus of her memory of their lives together.

> When the funeral was over I had nowhere to go. His Majesty had already sent the palace ladies elsewhere, and I heard that crossings of the Yangtse were to be prohibited. At the time I still had twenty thousand *chüan* of books, two thousand copies of inscriptions on metal and stone with colophons, table service and mats enough to entertain a hundred guests, along with other possessions equaling those already mentioned. I also grew very sick, to the point that my only vital sign was a

rasping breath. The situation was getting more serious every day. I thought of my husband's brother-in-law, an executive in the Ministry of War on garrison duty in Hung-chou, and I dispatched two former employees of my husband to go ahead to my brother-in-law, taking the baggage. That winter in the twelfth month Chin invaders sacked Hung-chou and all was lost. Those books which, as I said, took a string of boats to ferry across the Yangtse were scattered into clouds of smoke. What remained were a few light scrolls and calligraphy pieces; manuscript copies of the collections of Li Po, Tu Fu, Han Yü, and Liu Tsung-yüan; a copy of *A New Account of Tales of the World (Shih-shuo hsin-yü);* a copy of *Discourses on Salt and Iron (Yen-t'ieh lun);* a few dozen rubbings of stone inscriptions from the Han and T'ang; ten or so ancient tripods and cauldrons; a few boxes of Southern T'ang manuscript editions—all of which I happened to have had removed to my chambers to pass the time during my illness—now a solitary pile of leftovers.

Since I could no longer go upriver, and since the movements of the invaders were unfathomable, I went to stay with my younger brother Li Hang, a reviser of edicts. By the time I reached T'ai-chou, the governor of the place had already fled. Proceeding on to Shan through Mu-chou, we left the clothing and linen behind. Hurrying to Yellow Cliff, we hired a boat to take us toward the sea, following the fleeing court. The court halted a while in Chang-an, then we followed the imperial barge on the sea route to Wen-chou and Yüeh-chou. In the twelfth month of the fourth year of the Chien-yen Reign, early in 1131, all the officials of the government were released from their posts. We went to Ch'ü-chou, and then in the third month of spring, now the first year of the Shao-hsing Reign (1131), we returned to Yüeh-chou, and in 1132, back again to Hang-chou.

When my husband had been gravely ill, a certain academician, Chang Fei-ch'ing, had visited him with a jade pot—actually it wasn't really jade but *min,* a stone like jade. I have no idea who started the story, but there was a false rumor that they had been discussing presenting it to the Chin as a tribute gift. I also learned that someone had made formal charges in the matter. I was terrified and dared say nothing, but I took all the bronze vessels and such things in the household and was about to turn them over to the imperial court. But by the time I reached Yüeh-chou, the court had already gone on to Ssu-ming. I didn't dare keep these things in the household any longer, so I sent them along with the manuscript books to Shan. Later, when the imperial army was rounding up defeated enemy troops, I heard that these had all been taken into the household of General Li. That "solitary pile of leftovers" of which I spoke had now been reduced by about fifty or sixty percent. All that remained were six or so baskets of books, painting, ink, and inkstones that I hadn't been able to part with. I always kept these under my bed and opened them only with my own hands.

At K'uai-chi I chose lodging in a cottage belonging to a local named Chung. Suddenly one night someone made off with five of the baskets through a hole in the wall. I was terribly upset and offered a substantial reward to get them back. Two days later Chung Fu-hao next door produced eighteen of the scrolls and asked for a reward. By that I knew the thief was not far away. I tried every means I could, but I still couldn't get hold of the rest. I have now found out that they were all purchased at a low price by the Circuit Fiscal Supervisor, Wu Yüeh. Now seventy or eighty percent of that "solitary pile of leftovers" is gone. I still have a few volumes from three or so sets, none complete, and some very ordinary pieces of calligraphy, but I still treasure them as if I were protecting my own head—how foolish I am!

She had been charged by her husband to watch over the collection, and now she must watch that bulky charge dissolve before her eyes—burned in Hung-chou, plundered in Shan, stolen in K'uai-chi, until all that remains are a few odd volume of broken sets. There are rich ironies here: what survived the fires of Hung-chou survived precisely because she did not keep the collection together; they survived because she kept some books with her out of affection, rather than acting from the collector's sense of value and order. Had her husband's system of locked bookcases still been in force, she probably could not have kept so many with her at one time. The priceless treasures that burn in Hung-chou are as nameless as the treasures that burned in Ch'ing-chou; here in the "solitary pile of leftovers," preserved by her personal interest, names of books appear for the first time.

The elaborate itinerary of her movements chronicles her circumstances in an immediate way, a scattering of household goods and the collection in constant flight, amid the flight seaward and the imminent

dissolution of the Sung government. The Yangtse line is held against the Chin, and the frightened court cautiously returns to make its new capital in Hang-chou. It was a time of fear, suspicion, and dishonorable actions. Not only is Chao Te-fu dead, his good name is put in jeopardy. And that very connoisseurship on which his reputation (*ming,* "name," "good name") has been founded now threatens to destroy his reputation. To save his good name, Li Ch'ing-chao wants to take the surviving bronze vessels and present them to the court. And here again we have the connoisseur's fine judgement of value: we know that these vessels are worth a life ("But carry the sacrificial vessels yourself—live or die with them"); yet in the eyes of their new appraiser, Li Ch'ing-chao, they are worth something less than a reputation; she would gladly barter them for that.

The household shrinks, and the collection shrinks to a few baskets under her bed in a rented cottage; the wall is breached, most of the baskets are stolen, and the theft is flaunted in her face. But she treasures what remains—a few volumes of broken sets—and pretends to laugh at herself for valuing what has no value, at least according to the criteria of the collection as it used to be. Works were chosen for their perfection—no broken sets then. She claims that these too are worth a life ("as if I were protecting my own head"), just as the sacrificial vessels were worth a life to Chao Te-fu; but we recognize how different these two kinds of value are, both of which are so lightly set against the value of human life.

In this afterword Li Ch'ing-chao has written for us a secret treatise and history of valuing: first, when her husband was a student, valuing old texts only as part of a complete experience shared with her husband; then in maturity, his valuing the books as "things," commodities in a connoisseur's market; and in her growing isolation from him, her learning to value the books for what is in them, for the solitary pleasures they offer; now finally valuing what survives as a link to her past, as "old friends" who, when encountered, give occasion for remembrance.

> Nowadays, when I chance to look over these books, it's like meeting old friends. And I recall when my husband was in the hall called "Calm Governance" in Lai-chou: he had first finished binding the volumes, making title slips of rue leaves to keep out insects and tie-ribbons of pale blue silk, binding ten *chüan* into one volume. Every day in the evening when the office clerks would go home, he would do editorial collations on two *chüan* and write a colophon for one inscription.

> Of those two thousand items, colophons were written on five hundred and two. It is so sad—today the ink of his writing seems still fresh, yet the trees by his grave have grown to an armspan in girth.

Looking at these tattered remains, she remembers—with a fondness mixed with irony—the care Chao Te-fu lavished on the conservation and perfection of the collection. Even though that care was part of the metamorphosis of the collection into an oppressive "thing," she remembers it not as a contributing cause but as a living scene of his scholarship: as when the young couple sat chewing fruit and examining rubbings, it is the event and not the object that she recalls. His handwriting, which seems so fresh, embodies all the complex ratios of continuity and loss. The man is dead, the collection is gone, but here in the colophons something of the man and the collection lives on. Now Li Ch'ing-chao, in her turn, preserves what he once worked to preserve. She is no less ensnared by the past than her husband was, but her past is a living past of experience, one that has not disappeared entirely into its thingly traces, that weight of objects that become masters of their human masters.

> Long ago when the city of Chiang-ling fell, Hsiao Yi, Emperor Yüan of the Liang, did not regret the fall of his kingdom, yet destroyed his books and printings [unwilling to see them fall into the hands of his conquerors]. When his capital Chiang-tu was sacked, Yang Kuang, Emperor Yang of the Sui, wasn't concerned with his own death, only with recovering his books [his spirit overturning the boat in which they were being transported so that he could have his library in the land of the dead]. It must be that the passions of human nature cannot be forgotten, even standing between life and death. Or maybe it is Heaven's will that beings as insignificant as ourselves are not fit to enjoy these superb things. Or it might be that the dead too have consciousness, and they still treasure such things, give them their devoted attention, unwilling to leave them in the world of the living. How hard they are to obtain and how easy to lose!
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> From the time I was eighteen [two years younger than Lu Chi when he wrote the "Poetic Exposition on Literature"] until now at the age of fifty-two [two years after the age at which Ch'u Po-yu realized the error of his earlier life]—a span of thirty years—how much calamity, how much gain and loss I have witnessed! When there is possession, there must be lack of possession; when there is a gathering together,

there must be a dissolution—that is the constant principle of things. Someone loses a bow; someone else happens to find a bow—what's worth noticing in that? The reason why I have so minutely recorded this story from beginning to end is to serve as a warning for scholars and collectors in later generations.

Written this second year of the Shao-hsing Reign (1132), the eighth month, first day.

Li Ch'ing-chao

Strange—this work, which claimed to be an afterword and turned into a long narrative, now is called an admonition against precisely the kind of passion that produced the work to which it is appended. Resentment flows just beneath the surface: she implicitly compares her husband's passion for collection to the bibliomania of Emperor Yüan of the Liang and Emperor Yang of the Sui, both exemplars of bad government and its dire consequences, both representatives of destructive distortions of value (and there is another, unstated example in the last Northern Sung emperor, Hui-tsung, the imperial aesthete and collector whose preoccupations would bear the blame for the Sung loss of North China). The family is the microcosm of the state; how different then is valuing books above a kingdom from valuing one's collection above one's kin? It is a passion no better than other passions, dehumanizing in its disarrangement of all other values. She calls the books and the objects in the collection "superb things," *yu-wu,* a phrase heavy with associations of dangerous beauty in a woman, objects of addictive attraction, things that might indeed give more pleasure than "dancing girls, dogs, and horses." Such things are too dangerous for mortals; Heaven should take them back. Or perhaps the dead carry their passions with them into the grave, then reach out to draw the objects of those passions in after them.

Li Ch'ing-chao has been close to the fires of such passions, and she rejects them with commonplaces on the danger of attachments, the Chinese "consolation of philosophy" in the principle of alternating gain and loss. But do we believe for a moment her stated motive in writing as she has, to give warning to future scholars and collectors? Granted, this afterword, a mirror and a warning, will make them uneasy in their passion, but the force of warning in this text will come from recognizing here the scar of her own attachment and the common compulsion of all those with fierce attachments to display what they are bound to. She too is caught in the snares of memory, tangled in recollected pleasures and wounds she cannot forget.

...6...

Repetition: Of Small Pleasures in Idleness

Everywhere in the workings of memory we discover a secret compulsion to repetition. And when we turn to consider repetition itself, we discover that only through memory is repetition possible. The beast, driven by instinct to repeat the motions of its ancestors, lacks the capacity to say to itself wearily, "Yet again." But for us memory utterly overwhelms instinct in all but our most mechanical repetitions. Within us these two events, memory and repetition, are two faces of a single demon.

Our repetitions are the scars of some incompletion, of imperfection: something in our lives stutters. Something is not content simply to be and to have been, but must try to be again and again, and never successfully and finally. The event remembered may always be unique and unrepeatable—at least we say it is, even while we repeat it—but not all of the unique and unrepeatable past is the material of memory. We truly forget only what is "perfect," finished. This proposition may violate all we would like to believe about memory, but let us suppose that every memory that survives more than a brief while is sustained by some painful imperfection. There is some maimed story that should have gone on in one direction, should have turned and ended differently, or simply ended. The sharper this thorn of imperfection, the more memory opens itself to variation. Memory becomes a hollow form, a rite of error in which new actors continually appear to play the familiar roles, in which bits and pieces of the familiar story are continually rearranged, in which new settings and circumstances are tried. But there is some core in this rite of error

that remains unchanged, unresolved, and that thereby perpetuates the rite.

Writers repeat themselves. They make the same motions of mind and tell the same stories again and again. The very ingenuity they invest in concealing and varying their repetitions tells us how fiercely they desire to escape repetition, to find some way to at last complete the story and get on to something new. But when we discover the old stories coming back just beneath the surface of new stories, we recognize something they cannot let go of, a problem they can neither resolve nor forget. And we conclude that one measure of a writer's greatness may be the degree of opposed force between that struggle to escape, to get on to something new, and the tenacious compulsion to repeat.

In their personal repetitions writers often repeat the old stories of the civilization; something unresolved in their own past finds an echoing chorus in the more distant past. We, in our turn, may find ourselves drawn into the trance of their repetitions, discovering that for us as well these stories have not ended so finally that we can set them aside as childish things and have done with them. A compulsion to repetition is the engine at the core of human civilizations: faces, details, circumstances are changed to drive new creatures through archaic plots. Civilizations would pretend otherwise, and writers, more than all others, would disclaim that truth. Yet all the Western myths of the poet's near-divine freedom, and all the corresponding myths in China of perfect detachment or impulsive abandon—all these professional masks of the poet are not only compulsive repetitions in themselves, they are also desperate concealments of a darker truth. Behind all great poets and behind every reader who was ever touched by great poetry stands the god of the "Ion," making us twitch, weep, and dance to his archaic music.

What is there for us in this, that we listen to the same old stories and tell the same old stories again and again? Drawn into repetitions, we find that we cannot leave what is past in blankness and silence. Beginning each sad old story anew, we are taken yet one more time by the lure that we can have back something that must remain perpetually lost, that we can outwit the inevitable sequence, that we can master some demon we should know will prove invincible.

> While I was off in the hills performing the rites of sweeping the family tombs, I searched around and found some fine-looking stones with ridge patterns in them. On returning home, I talked over with Yün what should be done with them: "If it were Hsüan-chou stones we were mounting with our putty in a white basin, we would get an even color; but if we use our putty with these stones, we're going to have a color contrast between the yellow and the white, and the traces of the artifice will be obvious—this despite all their rough and plain charm. What can we do?" And Yün said, "Why don't we try taking one of the more ordinary of these stones, grind it into a powder, and mix it into the cracks where the putty shows while the putty is still wet. When it dries, the color may be uniform." It worked just as she said it would.
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> Then we took a long rectangular plate of Yün-hsing ware and built up a mountain peak on it, sloping upward to the left with some smaller rises on the right. On the back we worked a pattern of right angles on the model of a Ni Ts'an painting. It was steep and craggy, with depressions and rises, looking like some rocky promontory hanging over the Yangtse. Then we emptied one corner and filled it with river mud, and there we planted the white duckweed with a thousand petals; on the stone itself we next planted the dodder that is popularly called "cloudy pine." We worked on it several days before it was completed. By late autumn the dodder had spread over the whole mountain, like wisteria vines hanging from stone cliffs, and its flowers blossomed a bright red, while the white duckweed came out through the water grandly. A person's spirit might wander there freely through the red and white, as if going off to the immortal isles.
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> We set it out under the eaves, where Yün and I appraised its various points: here we should have our little tower by the water, here we should put up a thatched pavilion; here we should carve the words "Between falling blossoms and flowing water." Here we should make our dwelling, here fish, here gaze. It was a landscape of hills and valleys of the mind, and it was as if we were going to make our home there.
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> One night two cats were fighting over some food. They fell from the eaves, and both the plate and its stand were shattered to pieces in an instant. I said with a sigh, "Even this little labor of ours must have offended Creation somehow." Neither Yün nor I could hold back our tears.

This is one of the memories of Shen Fu (1763–?), told in the second chapter of his memoirs, *A Drifting Life (Fu-sheng liu-chi),* a

chapter entitled "Of Small Delights in Idleness" *(Hsien-ch'ing chi-ch'ü)*. This chapter lies between the two most important chapters of *A Drifting Life,* the first on his marriage to Yün and the third on their later hardships, culminating in Yün's death. Like the putty mixed with chips and fragments that seamlessly joins the stones of the miniature mountain, "Of Small Delights in Idleness" interrupts the inexorable movement of the narrative with reminiscences of Shen Fu's childhood, advice on gardening and flower arranging, and a few anecdotes like this one, from the time of his marriage to Yün.

Although a story may be told from a memory, a memory is not a story; a memory may be the occasion for much brooding and reflection, but a memory is not thought in the ordinary sense. They say a memory is something like a visual image in the mind, but if it is, it is not the same as an image in our eyes. An image in our eyes has a background of detail and continuity with the living world; in our memory this background blurs, and certain forms rise up, forms in which are concentrated story and significance and unique problems of value. A memory is a broken shard out of the past; it intrudes into the ongoing present and commands our attention: we "dwell on it." Shen Fu needs only to call to mind the "mountain in the tray," and all the richness of surrounding circumstance and private significance is right there for him: all can be concentrated in an image, a name, and a moment. But what we read here is not memory but "memoir." For the sake of writing memoir he must unpack the concentrated focus of memory: he must "write" it as narration, description, reflective interpretation. And strange forces are at work in this process of unpacking memory, forces that we, in our turn, may want to unpack.

What is he doing, making stories out of memories, taking broken stones out of his past and shaping them into a miniature mountain where lovers may dwell forever, or may once have dwelled, but where they do not dwell now? In the first chapter of *A Drifting Life,* he takes his memories of his marriage to Yün, writes an idyll, and tells us implicitly, "That is how it really was." Later in the book we read of the pains, the frictions and troubles with the family that were occurring in the same period; in the first chapter Shen Fu studies selective forgetting in order to shape memory's fragments into the way it *should* have been, but telling us "that is how it *was.*" In the same way, when Yün was alive, the two lovers were always writing idylls into their lives, organizing small spaces for themselves, building

illusions and miniature mountains—at least those are the stories he writes for us out of his memories.

Yet in every idyll and in every illusion there is the danger that the artifice will reveal itself, that the joints will show. And every idyll is brief and vulnerable; there are dangerous, destructive beasts outside the miniature world. Always the idyll is smashed into shards; always he gathers up the broken stones and puts them together again.

Shen Fu tells the story of his and Yün's life as it should have been, but he tells it as if that were how their life really was. It is memoir, a work of art that tries to hide its traces as a work of art. Yet everywhere are joints and fissures filled with putty: gaps of omission and invisible integuments shaped by desire. He and Yün stand back, view their handiwork, and say, "Look, you can't see the puttied joint right there, and there, and there." The little mountain is made for their pleasure and not to astonish others. But every time *they* look, they know the exact location of every puttied joint and delight at each site of invisibility. If *we* look at the mountain or read the memoir, we may be deceived, but neither the mountain nor the memoir is truly for us: they are acts of desire and of eternally unsuccessful self-deception.

Hunch down close, block out the periphery: you see from the back a Ni Ts'an landscape painting transformed into a mountain overhanging the Yangtse. At this moment we are at a seam, a visibly invisible joint between art and a living world. Thus he makes little landscapes and little stories, driven by the hope to be deceived, but never deceived and knowing the attempt will be shattered along its seams and will have to be painstakingly rebuilt. Not only is every artifice of illusion a foredoomed attempt at self-deception, every illusion is a repetition, a rebuilding of some earlier illusion.

All his life Shen Fu tries to wriggle out of this world into some idyllic tiny space. He takes stone from the mountains around the family tombs. He desires to build of them another mountain, one where he and Yün can live in imagination. The act is somehow caught up in questions of family, diminishing generation, a child marriage, a passion to reproduce in miniature. But his world is always a toy, a toy that gets broken. His little mountain, his marriage to Yün, his memoirs—all are idyllic imitations of something real; they are only cherished artifices, toys.

In their marriage Shen Fu and Yün were endlessly inventive in writing idylls into their lives—designing rooms, building tiny moun-

tains, going on excursions. Occasionally, in the joints, we discern the cramping pressures of the extended family all around them. Then from outside of the miniature idyll the beast comes and breaks the illlusion. Shen Fu tries to rebuild it all in his memoirs; but in the form of the work as a whole and in the anecdotes themselves, he repeats the pattern again and again.

Shen Fu is always trying to escape permanently into the mountain, to write a story in life or in words that is finished once and for all. Narrative, the impulse to art in the memoirs, drives inexorably toward a period, toward unity, anticipated crises, and completion. Narrative aspires to put a term to repetition. This was the most fundamental insight of Freud's psychoanalytic task, to translate inner life into stories on paper and then to translate those stories back into the living world of the patient. We always hope that the perfected narrative will redeem us from repetition. Shen Fu's narratives always fail that completion; *fu,* the Chinese character meaning "repetition," is his given name.

In the repeating pattern of events, the world in miniature plays an essential role for Shen Fu. It is an archetype in the tradition, from the story of Fei Chang-feng and the "world in a jug" told in the *History of the Later Han,* to fables of worlds existing on different scales from our world, common in Taoist works like the *Chuang-tzu* and *Lieh-tzu*. There is the ant kingdom in the famous T'ang tale "The Governor of Southern Bough," and the theme of miniature worlds appears often in later drama and fiction. But in contrast to those earlier cases, which were chance encounters, in Shen Fu's memoirs the miniature world is an object of abiding desire. Since he does not happen upon such a world, Shen Fu sets out to discover one or construct one. His constructed miniatures are hedged about by a sense of constriction—cramped quarters, prying eyes, the ubiquitous rules, restraints, and conventions of the Shen family and others. To find space, his thoughts are driven inward to miniature landscapes, where he can pretend to enjoy the illusion of extension and freedom.

The fascinating small spaces become the sites for works of artifice, absorbing all of his and Yün's care in their layout and construction—a room, a flower arrangement, a mountain in a tray. Attention is drawn inward and downward to a diminished scale. These are sites for the self, loci of desire, other worlds into which their maker disappears figuratively, absorbed in the construction or contemplation, and into which he would like to disappear literally. They are the spaces of *shen-yu,* the "free wanderings of the spirit."

All too often Shen Fu insists that he is content in these miniature constructs, always "just like" the larger world. His willful assertion of contentment seeks a chorus of assent from Yün and his readers, who are to reassure him that these constructs are perfect and space enough. His assertions of contentment are mirror images of his anxiety that the seams of fabrication may reveal themselves. We always know that a toy is only a toy, but because what we seek is the larger, primary reality and not its diminutive substitute, any reminder of the toy's artifice or any mention that it might be inadequate is unbearable.

Shen Fu's miniature worlds are often some version of a garden, sustained by a rich tradition of gardens both real and literary. As it is everywhere, the garden is the site of idylls and of a movement from childhood to sexuality. The garden is nature organized and safe within defined boundaries. But outside Shen Fu's miniature gardens something bestial waits, something from a larger plane of being, ready to destroy the garden and devour the lovers or their sexual organs at the height of unsuspecting pleasure. The beast—whether a pair of cats, a toad, or a duck—is identified as an eater. In the anecdote of the miniature mountain we have an adult displacement of Shen Fu's primal myth. Sexual relations appear as two lovers inhabiting the miniature mountain in spirit; cats, fighting over something to eat, indirectly destroy the lovers' landscape in their fall. But this story has rawer versions: there is a strange worm in the real garden . . .

> I remember when I was very young I could look into the sun with my eyes wide open. I could make out even the tiniest specks quite clearly, and whenever I saw something minute, I would always examine its patterns closely. Thus I often found delights that were not of this world.
>
> In summer when the mosquitoes were buzzing, I would think of them as flocks of cranes doing their dances in the sky. And when my thoughts were inclined to that point of view, they really were cranes—by the hundreds and thousands. I would look up and stare at them until my neck was sore. I would also keep mosquitoes in a little tent of white silk; then I would blow a stream of smoke in on them and would have them fly singing through the soaring mists of smoke, a vision of white cranes in blue clouds; and it was indeed just as if

cranes were calling out from the edges of the clouds. Then I was utterly content in my joy.

Where there was a dip in an earthen wall or where small plants grew all mixed together in some raised flower bed, there I would often crouch, setting my eyes at the same level as the earth. Then I would concentrate and gaze at the details, thinking of the clumps of plants as a forest and the ants and other insects as wild beasts. Where there was a rise in the soil or the gravel, I took it as a hill, and where there was a depression, I took it as a valley. There my spirit wandered freely in complete contentment.

One day I saw two insects fighting in the grass. I was totally absorbed in observing them when all of a sudden a monstrous creature came on the scene, pulling up hills and knocking over trees—as it turned out, a warty old toad. With one gulp it swallowed both insects down whole. I was so young and my spirit was so much in the scene that, without knowing it, my mouth hung open in terror. When I calmed down, I grabbed the toad and hit it again and again, driving it out of the yard. When I think about this incident now that I'm older, I'm sure that this "fighting" of the insects was really a rape. There is a saying: "Fornication leads to death." Can this be true of insects too?

Once while indulging in self-gratification, my "egg" was stung [literally "breathed on"] by a worm (in Wu slang the male organs are called the egg), and it became so swollen I couldn't urinate. As a remedy they took a duck and forced its mouth open so that it would breathe on it. But the maid-servant accidentally released her grip, and the duck stretched out its neck as if to swallow it down. I was so scared I let out a loud cry. People thought it was a good story and used to tell it all the time. These all were the idle pleasures of my childhood.

Beneath the surface of new stories, we discover an old story being told again and again. Beneath the anecdote of the miniature mountain in a tray, we find the recurrence of this earlier story, of a speculative shift in the scale of the world and of seeing two mating insects devoured by the intruding beast. Then an abrupt, unmarked transition brings us to an even more primitive version of the same story, of being "stung by a worm" when masturbating in the garden and a second retribution for pleasure in having a duck try to swallow his "egg." These events were, he tells us, the origin and first occasion for telling stories about his life.

We cannot hope to reconstruct the full psychological dimensions of these anecdotes, but if we hope to understand the workings of Shen Fu's memory, we cannot ignore the force of his private myths, reenacted time and again through the course of his life. We recognize a story that Shen Fu repeats in dozens of versions in his memoirs and in his life, a story of secret and diminutive pleasure overtaken by pain, mutilation, and public humiliation. These, he tells us, were "the idle pleasures of my childhood." And with these two anecdotes Shen Fu begins his second chapter, "Of Small Delights in Idleness."

"I remember when I was very young I could look into the sun with my eyes wide open." He begins with a bold and magical claim, one of those lies that our childhood memories tell us. It is a claim that is strangely linked to his vision of the world's minutiae. Each of the first three chapters of *A Drifting Life* begins again from the beginning. The first chapter begins with biographical convention, his date of birth and an apology for the "blemished mirror" of his memoirs; the third chapter begins with a meditation on the undeserved misfortunes that have always been his fate. But this second chapter, "Of Small Delights in Idleness," begins in a blaze of light. The sun's brightness, *ming,* confronts his unique "clarity of vision," also *ming,* and he gains a special access to the tiny things of the world.

In the Chinese tradition perfection of understanding does not always lie in grasping some large, structuring principle of things; understanding also involves recognizing the *miao,* the "subtle workings," the details and fine points. It is Shen Fu's *ming,* his "clarity of vision," that gives him such an "intensive" access to the world. His intensive perfection of understanding admits another claim, that of transcendence, of being *wu-wai,* "beyond things," "not of this world." The fascination with minutiae is a desire to escape the world, to have infinite space and private space by being small.

Escape is, of course, self-deception: he never truly escapes, never succeeds in forgetting what he is. The illusion is always exposed, secretly recognized as illusion in his too insistent claim of its reality. The will to escape into the very small constantly calls for artifice to

conceal the joints of construction, to cover over each point that reminds him of the falsity of his vision. But that very artifice proclaims the untruth of the illusion all the more strongly. He tries to imagine the mosquitoes as cranes (transforming a tiny insect into the bird that is immortal and transcendent, *wu-wai,* "beyond things"). Yet this simple act of imagination is not enough: Shen Fu must also entrap the creatures in a silken cage and blow smoke over them to enact the scene of his desire. This scene of desire, "cranes in blue clouds," comes from a literary and artistic iconography that the child tries to repeat in his living world, just as later he seeks to imprint the pattern of Ni Ts'an's landscape paintings on his mountain in a tray.

Here, as elsewhere, he begins with a projective image of how things should be; he then organizes his miniature world into a semblance of that image; finally he declares to us, the adult readers of his adult memoirs, that he can believe in it or inhabit it. The terms he uses are words of artifice, instrumentality, a private will: even of the mosquitoes he tells us, literally, he "would have them" fly singing—*shih,* "to cause" or "to compel." But he never attains that impossible perfection of artifice that effaces itself in reality; he never attains the perfection of instrumentality in something that acts freely and autonomously, according to its own nature; he never attains the perfection of private will in something that has power over him, something with an allure and capacity to absorb him.

The episode of the mosquito-cranes is a miniature of Heaven, and he follows it with a symmetrical miniature of Earth: the child places his eyes at ground level to imagine a mountain forest, with "rises" *(t'u)* and "depressions" *(ao),* just like the miniature mountain in a tray. The terms of this anecdote are less displaced and closer to the primitive form of the story: the fighting cats are here fighting insects, which are in fact mating; there the beasts' desire to eat was only incidental in the destruction of the idyllic world, but in this earlier anecdote the toad breaks into the miniature world and eats the "lovers." It appears in the conventional guise of a monstrous beast, "pulling up hills and knocking over trees," figuratively destroying the miniature landscape just as the cats literally destroy the mountain in a tray.

The concluding moral, that fornication leads to destruction, is offered to us playfully, but there is a dark discomfort beneath the play: can this be true even of insects, even of creatures so small they might hope to escape the notice of the beast? He then turns with naive abruptness to an even more primitive version of the story, not even trying to conceal his private association of the two episodes beneath a public rhetoric of subordination or coordination.

Unless eighteenth-century Su-chou had some remarkably vicious earthworms or unless childhood's imperfect zoology misremembers the category of the creature, we may suspect that here again is one of those deceptions of childhood memory in which the way an event was supposed to have taken place, the way in which it was first narrated, takes the place of what actually happened. Pain follows pleasure; he mythologizes it, makes it into a story of being bitten by the beast. He carefully uses the colloquial term for his sexual organs, even realizing he must gloss it for us: it is the "egg," the being in miniature, the homunculus. Immediately the myth repeats itself: an adult lets loose another, larger beast that seems to try to bite his sexual organs again, this time to swallow them, to eat them.

He tells us of screaming out in terror, then of how "people thought it was a good story and used to tell it all the time. These all were the idle pleasures of my childhood." This is a remarkable sequence of statements. There is childhood terror—and no terror is so overwhelming as childhood terror—followed by the humiliation of being laughed at. In the adults' repetition of the story, his experience of terror and pain is repeated again and again. This becomes the paradigm of memoir writing, teaching Shen Fu how to treat terror and pain. Now from the distance of age, he joins in the laughter of those adults long ago as he tells the story again to us, for our amusement. But the laughter he demands of us is uncomfortable; there is an undissipated darkness around these "idle pleasures" of childhood, something that compels him to tell variations of this story in the events of his life and in his memoirs.

The largest variation of the myth is the main narrative thread of *A Drifting Life:* the story of his marriage to Yün, their idyllic and diminutive space within the extended family, his father's growing hostility to Yün, being driven out of the family and their hardships, culminating in Yün's death. This largest version of Shen Fu's private myth contains many smaller repetitions of the story, such as that of the miniature mountain in the tray. Eventually we wonder on what level these repetitions occur: are they merely in the telling of the stories, in the way he interprets his past as he writes his memoirs?

or has he somehow managed, by his personality and his half-conscious actions, to write the same story again and again into his life? What role did he unconsciously play in the disintegration of the relation between his father and Yün? Why did he place the miniature mountain in such a vulnerable place? Is it possible that only in the destruction of the site of pleasure he can make of his suffering a story to be repeated, gathering up the broken pieces and by careful artifice fitting them together again?

Let us set aside the gloomy possibility that he endlessly reenacts his private myth in his life. Let us pretend that repetition occurs only in the memoir writer, for whom memories surface selectively out of the chaotic immensity of his past. He unpacks those memories, trying again and again to bring the narrative to a different conclusion, but always finding the story broken, interrupted, forcing him to write it once again. Repetition may be the power that compels our lives, but it is easier to recognize it as the power that shapes writing. Out there in the world the stubborn independence of circumstance and other people may not want to perform their assigned roles in our private narratives. But the memoir writer will ensure that the pattern is enacted, even in the most unwilling facts.

Consider one more anecdote, this one from the fourth chapter of *A Drifting Life,* about Shen Fu's journey to Canton. In this episode he goes with his friend Hsiu-feng and others to visit the floating brothels. There he takes up with a young prostitute named Hsi-erh:

> We let the little boat drift in the current until late in the night, our hearts open, our drinking unrestrained. I was afraid I couldn't keep myself under control any longer and insisted on going back to our lodgings in the city. But the city gates had already been locked for a long time—I had not realized that the coastal cities locked their gates at sunset. When we had finished eating, some of the party lay back and smoked opium; others put their arms around the girls and began bantering with them. Servants brought a quilt and pillow for everyone and set about unrolling the bedclothes in a row, side by side. I whispered a question to Hsi-erh, "Could we go to bed on the main boat?" She answered, "There's a loft we might be able to stay in, but I don't know if there are any customers in it or not." A "loft" is the term for the room atop the main cabin of a junk. I said, "Why don't you go find out?" We summoned a skiff to carry us to the Shao junk, and all we could see was a mass of lanterns, face to face in rows like a long corridor. It happened that there was no customer in the loft.
>
> The madam met us with a smile. "I knew that we would have an important visitor today—I've reserved the loft just for you." I laughed, "Granny, you really are a fairy godmother." The servant brought a candle and led us by way of the stern up a little ladder to a chamber just like a closet. The chamber was fully furnished with a long bed to one side, a table, and armrests. Pulling back a curtain divider, we went on into another room, the main stern cabin. Here also was a bed at one side. In the middle was a square window of glass. The lamp was not yet lit, but light filled the whole room, no doubt lantern light from the opposite row of boats. The bedclothes, hangings, mirror, and vanity were quite elaborate.
>
> Then Hsi-erh said, "From the upper deck we can look at the moon." We opened the hatch through the ladder door and wriggled through it snakelike to the top of the stern. On three sides there was a railing, with the orb of the moon all over the breadth of the waters and the empty sky. Stretching this way and that, like random leaves drifting in the water, were the party boats. And what glimmered like the dense constellations arrayed in the sky—these were their lanterns. Also there were tiny skiffs shuttling back and forth; the sounds of singing voices, of the music of wind and string instruments mixed with the lapping of the continual surf so that I was completely carried away. "This must be why they say that a young person should never come to Canton. It's too bad my wife Yün couldn't have made this trip with me." I looked back at Hsi-erh, and in the moonlight she bore a faint resemblance to Yün. Then I led her back down from the deck, put out the candle, and we went to bed.

We hold our breath. Here are all the ingredients of one of Shen Fu's sexual idylls: withdrawing from the community into a small space with the beloved, a dreamlike scene that takes him out of his senses and out of this world. We wait for the destructive intrusion. But real events outside of Shen Fu's private myths do not cooperate, and the destructive intrusion survives only in a benign metamorphosis, the noisy apperance of his friends the next morning:

> As day was dawning, Hsiu-feng and the others arrived with a great commotion. I put on my clothes and went out to greet them, but they all scolded me for running way from them the

> night before. I said, "I was just afraid you would go around pulling back the curtains and quilts." Then we returned to our lodgings.

It seems as if Shen Fu has finally managed to conquer the broken narrative and write a happy conclusion. Notice that the elements that served to break off his earlier stories are still present, but transformed: the intrusion of the beast, its mouth open and ready to bite, has been transformed into the intrusion of his friends, teasing and scolding him. The humiliating exposure of the sexual act survives as an unrealized fear.

But the forces that drive the machinery of repetition are not so easily mastered by mere accident, by the way things happen to turn out in the world. The next section, "several days later," has Shen Fu and Hsiu-feng out sightseeing, then finding themselves again at the floating brothels. This time the loft is occupied, so Shen Fu suggests to Hsiu-feng that they take their girls back to their lodgings in the city—a daring impropriety. This is arranged, and they are about to begin a party when:

> No sooner had the wine moistened our lips when suddenly we heard a great commotion of voices on the first floor, as if trying to force their way upstairs.

It turned out that the landlord's nephew had brought a gang of bullies to break in and catch them with the girls. Shen Fu, Hsiu-feng, and the girls are discovered and have to fight their way through the mob to escape; Hsi-erh becomes lost in the confusion, then found; finally they bribe a watchman to let them escape through the city gate.

The conclusion is neither disastrous nor tragic, but it is satisfyingly humiliating. It shows the power of Shen Fu's story of interrupted pleasure to return and unfinish what had been left so happily concluded. When Shen Fu spent a blissful night in the loft with Hsi-erh, some force of disruption was left waiting and unsatisfied; Shen Fu had to give the beast another chance to act out its role. Perhaps it is nothing more than the way in which the memoir writer joins his stories, but we cannot help noticing that it was Shen Fu who suggested leaving the charmed space of the boats for a riskier party in the city. And when the gang is trying to force its way upstairs, Shen Fu, the memoir writer, is careful to record Hsiu-feng's complaint: "This is all because of Shen Fu's impulse of the moment—I never should have gone along with him." The writer will not forget to remind us of his role in setting this second scene, where the beast is given another chance to act.

Writers repeat themselves and seem to write their eternally unfinished plots back into the living world to provide material for the epicycles of their memoirs. If memoirs could be composed posthumously, we may suspect they would show that life ends without being able to bring such broken narratives to their final period.

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A Door Finely Wrought: Memory and Art

As we read the writings of memory, it is easy to forget that we do not read memory itself but its transformation through writing. Writing is one of the many modes of repetition that memory generates, but writing aspires to carry memory outside the self and beyond perpetual repetition. Writing is the translation of memory into art, a "figuring forth" of memory in determinate form. There is some pain in all memory, either because the remembered event was itself painful or because there is pain in the loss of something sweet. The translation into art tries to control that pain, to grasp what is in memory elusive and too densely packed; it gives memory distance, makes it beautiful.

Sometimes the form in which we write memory is stylized and heavy with the history of earlier writing—"artful" in the common sense. Circumstances we helplessly endured are told in language that bears the signature of artistic control; a private pre-text becomes a public text; the stubbornly occasional situations of memory are transformed into timeless typologies. The more artful the transformation of memory, the more the writer is compelled to reflect on the act of art: the stylized song is both the attempt to master memory and a meditation on the genesis of its artifice.

Let us begin in a villa on the outskirts of Hang-chou in late spring toward the middle of the thirteenth century. From the garden there is a clear view of West Lake, with the leaves of the willows just beginning to take on color, forming what seems to be a pale green mist. Through the garden strolls the flower of the artistic circles of the great city—poets and song writers, wealthy connoisseurs and dilettantes, with a few of Hang-chou's most famous courtesans.

Among the day's varied entertainments is a special treat, the

performance of a new song by Wu Wen-ying, the most famous song writer of the decade, acclaimed for his technical mastery of the craft, for the allusive density of his style, for the subtle motions of sentiment in his songs. The connoisseurs of song might dispute whether these qualities are good or bad in their influence on the song tradition, but they agree on the overall quality of the work. As Wu's younger contemporary Chang Yen put it, his work "dazzled a person's eyes." Today Wu Wen-ying is to play his most recent composition, new lyrics for the tune *Ying-t'i hsü,* the longest of the song melodies, in four stanzas. He begins:

> Just now the lingering chill takes unfair advantage of
> me, ill from too much wine,
> and I close the finely wrought door of aloeswood.
> Swallows come, flying late into the west of the city,
> as if to tell us spring's happenings are drawing to a
> close.
> Painted boats have borne the Clear and Bright Festival,
> past and away,
> and a clear-weather mist, so delicate, forms
> in Wu palace trees.
> But I brood on how a wayfarer's sentiments are swept
> with the winds, changing into light gossamer floss.

Those who know Wu Wen-ying's songs know that the turn of his sentiments at the end of the first stanza will lead him into remembrance. For Wu Wen-ying, the last of the great Sung song writers, is also a poet of memory. His is the voice of the age, the last decades of the Southern Sung, which cultivates and finds great pleasure in this tone of elegaic lateness. Memory and the past had long played a central role in literature, but never before had they been what they became in those years—a fashion, almost an aesthetic cult, as if intense absorption in art and retrospect could conceal the foreboding future. In only a few decades Mongol armies were to break through the frontiers from North China and crush the Southern Sung.

"Just now the lingering chill takes unfair advantage of me, ill from too much wine." In Chinese poetry the relation between inner and outer world, sentiment *(ch'ing)* and scene *(ching)* had always been a matter of interest. In most poetry and earlier song, the mood of the outer world either corresponded to or contrasted with the poet's mood. Before the Sung we rarely find the mode of relation between the self and the outer world that is so common in Western poetry, in which

nature is personalized with its own will and motives and thrown into an active human relation to the poet. But here in the first line of Wu Wen-ying's song, anticipation of a parallel relation between inner and outer world dissolves: the outer world becomes Other, hostile Other, treating him in a certain way as if for its own motives. He figures his discomfort and irritation in a human relation, unfair advantage taken. One aggressive act invites another; he closes the door.

The very beginning of the song throws us into an ongoing event: *cheng,* "just now," "at this moment." It is an abrupt, rude encounter, without the usual ceremonies of leisurely prelude, that aspect of the song writer's craft known as *p'o-t'i,* "broaching the topic." The thirteenth-century song was very much an art of fine modulations of sentiment, and the listeners pay close attention to such bold abruptness in the opening, quickly calming in the rest of the stanza into the more gentle images appropriate to the beginning of a song.

He is affronted, taken by surprise; he closes or places a screen to cover the chamber's opening to the outside (*hu* may be either the chamber door or the window). And this event is peculiar because the rest of the song involves "seeing out" or "going out" in various ways. This act of closure puzzles us here, so early in the song; it is a gesture that is common at the *end* of poems and songs, recoiling from outside experiences embodied in the course of the song. It is out of place here in the opening, a response to vulnerability and unfair advantage taken. Vulnerability to events and an anxiety about that vulnerability dominate the rest of the song, but from this point on his vulnerabilty is finely wrought, under control. Once he has closed the opening to the outside world, he will not again be caught so abruptly by an external force. A shift of mood occurs, and the connoisseurs of song savor controlled modulations of mood.

Then we consider this opening that has been shut in front of our eyes to keep out the cold: the covering is *hsiu,* a term of embroidery applied to what is "finely wrought" or "intricately carved," here a carved wooden screen or door. *Hsiu* belongs to a group of terms that were commonly applied to intricate craftsmanship, including "chiseled," *tiao,* and "filigree," *tsao,* which might properly be used in describing the style of this song. A level of intricate arabesque, a decorative lightness, covers the door's/screen's more solid function of fending off the chill. Moreover, *hsiu-hu,* the "finely wrought door (or window screen)," usually calls to mind a woman's chamber; in concert with the mood of helplessness, the sensitivity to the chill, and the later

stance of the abandoned lover, it strongly suggests a woman's voice. Yet Wu's song soon reveals that the speaker is a man, the lyricist's biographical "I." His pose too is a filigree of art.

Someone is uncomfortable from drinking too much; he feels a shiver of chill and responds by shutting it out with a finely wrought door or screen. Then we see "swallows come, flying late into the west of the city, as if to tell us spring's happenings are drawing to a close." It is late in the spring season, late for the arrival of the swallows, late for the early spring chill that is still in the air. The swallows come into the western part of the city and, just like the lingering chill, will fly into houses unless the openings are screened against them. The connoisseurs of song will note this balance of passage through *(t'ung)* potential barriers and blockage *(se),* intrusive swallows and an intrusive chill versus the intricate door that blocks the cold air and vision. As in countless earlier poems the swallows call to mind lovers together, just as the chill suggests isolation and absence of a lover. And as the chill behaves with human insolence, so the swallows are figured with the illusion of human motive: the information we deduce from their arrival—that spring is drawing to a close—becomes a message they deliver. But in this case the song writer exercises the poet's control over humanized nature: nature's human motions are *merely* figured in explicit simile—"*as if* telling"—like the figuring on an intricately carved door.

"Painted boats have borne the Clear and Bright Festival past and away, and a clear-weather mist, so delicate, forms in the Wu palace trees." There is much coming and going in this song, seen through (or on) the closed door: swallows coming as figurative message bearers, painted boats going, their departure figuratively carrying off the spring festival, a "mist" of fine, late-spring willow leaves appearing in the palace trees. This image, whether tendrils of mist or tendrils of new willow leaves, is associated with the "tendrils" of sentiment: they are "threads," *ssu,* which are also, in a homophonous character, "thoughts" or "longings." He builds a conceit out of this metaphor based on an old, familiar pun: the *ssu,* "love longings" stirred by the spring wind, whipped and shaken by it, are blown out and away into "threads," *ssu,* streaming out toward the beloved beyond the horizon and undergoing a metamorphosis into those "threads" or "tendrils" of fine willow floss blowing in that spring wind.

Behind this conceit stand thousands of other poems and songs about willows—willow leaves as markers of spring's end, willows by

the royal moat, willows as women, willows as markers of separation, in which *liu,* "willow," becomes another character, also *liu* "linger on." The willow leaves are mist, the willow leaves are gossamer threads of longing, blowing toward the person in one's heart.

This stanza is a "scene of sentiment," woven out of images with a long history of usage, each bearing its burden of associations and coloring of mood. The images in the stanza are hieroglyphs of sentiment, figures on a tapestry (for *hsiu,* "finely wrought," is literally "embroidered"), which have lost their place in the outer world of nature. Literary usage has accumulated a repertoire of such images: for "tortoise" read "longevity," not reptile; for "mandarin ducks" read "conjugal love," not birds; for "willow" here, read a matrix of mood and association more complicated than "tortoise" or "mandarin ducks" but still part of the inner world and not *this* willow tree. These are the images of nature from behind a closed door.

The connoisseurs of song know that this work by Wu Wen-ying is a composition of sentiments, not a scene of the outer world nor even the embodiment of an experience of the outer world. They recognize this all the more forcefully when someone covers over the opening to the outside and writes the next six lines about outside scenes; they recognize this when someone describes the slow movement of the early morning mist and in the next line writes of a strong breeze blowing.

Many traditional critics observed that in Wu Wen-ying's songs it was hard to find the *mo-lo,* the "veins and arteries" that animate and unite the living body of song. But this song is interior landscape; the door is closed; we are inside. And we are looking not at nature but at a finely wrought door, *hsiu-hu.* Beyond the door may lie insolent, even dangerous nature, which escapes our control, but on the carved door are arrayed images taken from nature, turned into complex signs of human states of mind. The song writer even admits this obliquely, noting a "metamorphosis," a "changing into" *(hua),* when the "threads" of longing become gossamer willow floss. He shows us how he takes control, closing the door against the outer world's insolent otherness, which shows such utter indifference to a person's condition.

Classical Chinese "poetry," *shih,* engages itself directly with the living outer world. But this is "song," *tz'u,* which is most at home in interiors, of rooms or of the human mind. And the writer of song feels particular comfort when his subject is memory, for memory gives

fragments of images and scenes torn from a living world, images inseparable from human sentiments and recomposed according to sentiment's inner laws.

Ten years of West Lake,
of tying my horse by the willows,
of enjoying its charming dust and supple haze.
And I followed pink blossoms upstream, just then
summoned into immortal vales,
sent clandestine notes by her servant "Brocade."
I leaned then on silver screens, the spring so loose, my
dreams so constrained,
and pink rouge, broken, soaked the singer's silken fan
and her robes with golden threads.
The darkening banks grew empty,
and too lightly we took the sun's last rays,
gave them all back to the egrets and gulls.

The connoisseurs of song nod their approval of a familiar movement in the rhythms of song. The first stanza gives the occasion of remembrance, and the second turns to the memory itself. His thoughts, transformed into the streaming willow floss near West Lake, have reached their object—the West Lake of long ago and the willows as they were then, when he tied his horse there. The "steadily moving" mist of the present scene reappears there too, a "charming dust" and "supple haze" in which the remembered scene and the remembered woman seem to merge.

In the opening stanza, on first closing the finely wrought door, the singer was a simple observer naming the figures in his mind's eye. Now, as his thoughts stream back into the past, he is absorbed in the scene and appears as a figure in his own memory: he ties his horse by the willows, enjoys the womanly suppleness of the haze, follows pink blossoms upstream into valleys of pleasure. The connoisseurs of song follow these movements with their own pleasure: from violent intrusion, to a figured door closed before us, then a fragmentary scene of sentiment in which the writer has no part, until the emotions, stirred, stream out into willow floss, which transforms into a willow of long ago, beside which the singer appears, now a figure in the scene. And this second stanza, carrying us from morning mist to the evening return of the pleasure seekers, frames those ten years as if they were the course of a single day and brings us back to

the twilight mood in which the song opened. The connoisseurs of song sigh in admiration at this display of mastery and controlled craft.

To remember "ten years of West Lake," and indeed for almost any song to remember a bygone time of love and pleasure, is to remember "Expressing What Is on My Mind" by Tu Mu (803–853):

> Down and out on the rivers and lakes
> I went carrying wine,
> The waists of Ch'u women, so slender
> and light in my palm;
> After ten years woke once and for all
> from my Yang-chou dream:
> All I won for myself was a reputation—
> as a faithless man in the blue mansions.

The T'ang poem is so familiar that the connoisseurs of song scarcely bother to take note; yet *we* might pause here to observe how the vivid and private memories of one's own past have become fused with vivid images from the poetic past, how the particular becomes a stylized type (just like those intricate figures on the intricately carved door). Throughout the song his own memories are pieced together out of snatches of older poems and stories, with only a few words changed here and there to mark the past scene as his own—West Lake here, not "rivers and lakes"; "ten years" as *shih-tsai* rather than *shih-nien;* Hang-chou here, not Yang-chou. But the song writer willingly pays the particular as the price for the rich associations of the general type: the moment he sings "ten years of West Lake," we hear "After ten years woke once and for all/from my Yang-chou dream." And in that echo we know at once that the following stanza will be a memory of pleasure, we know its mood, we know how it must end.

"And I followed pink blossoms upstream, just then summoned into immortal vales." This memory of pleasure is the final stage in the process of absorption, moving "upstream" in memory. Here again private experience comes to memory through old stories. His journey into pleasure and his journey back to remembered pleasure become that of the fisherman in T'ao Ch'ien's prose idyll, "Peach Blossom Spring": following peach blossoms upstream, that legendary fisherman discovered a timeless, "immortal" society free of the world's strife. Once he left Peach Blossom Spring, the fisherman was never able to find it again. This story fades into another story, which is the conventional emblem of sexual encounters in songs: how Liu Ch'en and Juan Chao were traveling in the mountains when their provisions ran out, how they then found some peach trees by a stream and there met two lusty goddesses who entertained them for half a year, "all the while the weather was like late spring." "And I followed pink blossoms upstream, for a brief while summoned into immortal vales"—he need say no more: as with the willows and the "ten years," here the connoisseurs of song immediately recognize the figure for experience of a certain type.

The "finely wrought door," *hsiu-hu,* is literally the "embroidered door"; the language of embroidery and weaving offers an important figurative vocabulary for work of such intricacy that the individual threads disappear into the texture of the whole, and the private is made public so involutely that it cannot be read and reverts again to the private. "Brocade," the conventional name for the beloved's maidservant, carries "clandestine notes," *yu-su,* literally "hidden white silk" of a letter, figured with secret messages. Behind the "embroidered door" no communication is open and successful: the tapestry of song is woven with the illusory messages of swallows, here with secret messages, "done stealthily," later with silences and letters that do not come. The song makes private memories public in figures of intricacy and secrecy, closings of "embroidered doors" and the concealing fabric of clothing: nakedness hides under a garment on which are woven the stylized figures of body and desire.

"I leaned then on silver screens, the spring so loose, my dreams so constrained." Some commentators tell us that this refers to long springs and short dreams, yet these words, "loose" and "constrained," are strange ones. We know that spring's "looseness," *k'uan,* is also ease and insouciance, a sense of license. The "constraint," *chai,* of his dreams may be the seeming brevity of his past pleasures, as in Tu Mu's "Yang-chou dream," or it may be the abbreviated sleep of nights spent other than in dreams. But *k'uan-chai,* "looseness and constraint," is the language of clothing and the way the body wears it, as in the line from Li Shang-yin's (813–858) *Yen-t'ai:*

> The sash of my robes lacks all feeling—
> it may be loose or tight.

We read in this the change from the tight sash of plump satisfaction to the looseness of robes worn by someone grown thin from love's

sorrow. We hear this only in the background, as an antithesis of joy and sorrow, but here, as throughout the song, the secret language of fabric and vestment is the ground on which memory is figured.

That concealing fabric of desire reappears in the next line, as the rouge-stained tears spatter the silken fan used to hide the woman's face and on her robes with threads of gold, the brocade metamorphosis of those silken threads of longing and willow. Earlier, when the listeners heard of "pink" flowing with the current, they saw peach blossoms; now in those flecks of color carried by tears they see rouge. To discover the beloved, Wu followed that trail of pink, the broken blossoms, upstream to pleasures outside of the mortal world; now on parting, it is "broken pink," *tuan-hung,* of rouge flecks, which we follow "downstream" in tear tracks along her cheeks, marking her fan and robes. And memory moves with the rhythms of meeting and parting, upstream and downstream, following the flecks of red borne on streams, both real and figurative. The connoisseurs of song sigh with admiration at this intricate figuring of memory; they await the coming transformations of woman as landscape—both are "supple" and "charming" in the haze of memory, both run with red-flecked streams, the colored traces of tears on fan and gown, the marks of memory in fabric.

At the stanza's end he must disperse this memory of pleasure he has conjured up and modulate the tone to his true concern—not the memory itself but the act of remembering, reserved for the third stanza. "The darkening banks grew empty, and too lightly we took the sun's last rays, gave them all back to the egrets and gulls." She weeps as she sings the parting song, the guests at the farewell banquet scatter and go their ways, West Lake empties. The end of the stanza brings us back to evening again, now a scene of absence, the empty shores of the lake abandoned to the birds. But the connoisseurs of song take special note of the word "lightly," *ch'ing,* a carelessness and lack of forethought in the surrender of those moments of pleasure. This word carries the motions of sentiment in the song reminding us where he stands now; it is a word that can be spoken only when he recognizes that the moment was "too lightly" surrendered. True value can be recognized only in remembering the experience, and such memory is thus far richer than the foolish, heedless experience itself.

Soon afterward the hidden orchid aged,
and then the sweet william grew again,

while I sojourned still in these river lands.
Since parting I've visited the Six Bridges, no letter came;
events have gone their way, the flowers cast aside,
their white jade interred, their sweet fragrance buried
how often in the wind and rain?
Long waves cast jealous glances,
and the brows of far hills seem shy;
as fishermen's lanterns, reflections separating,
stay out for the night on the spring river,
I recall how back then, with short oars,
my Peach Root crossed over.
The blue mansions are a blur in my eyes—
on their ruined walls, the poems written for imminent separation,
whose tear-filled ink is now dreary in dust and dirt.

Value and the force of sentiment lie not in the scene remembered but in the act and mood of remembering. The pain of retrospect is to be savored. The aging and rebirth of the flowers mark the passing years, each dying flower recalling the pain of loss, each blossoming flower mocking that pain. The flowers are the conventional figures of woman, and he watches their changes in order to remember. Again he appears as a figure within the scene: he remembers himself remembering, revisiting West Lake's Six Bridges each time spring ends, to view the ruin of the flowers. Such acts and the translation of those acts into song are late spring ceremonies of sorts, a reduction of the particular into recurrent pattern to mimic nature's recurrent patterns. The fallen flowers mean nothing in themselves; they are only figures of human loss.

Typologies, conventions, and recurrent patterns in song are, like those ceremonial late spring acts, figures of repetition. My experiences repeat Tu Mu's; to see my longing as threads in willow floss repeats the way in which thousands of others have understood their feelings. Just as the ancient rites, in their communality and repeatability, provided a form through which we could encounter loss in the death of those we loved, so poetic ceremonies, which reduce the particulars of the world to figures and recurrent patterns, are a means to encounter the sense of loss recognized in memory. This art closes the door on real and unwanted pain, then figures that pain on the door again and again and again.

In this ceremony of pain, figuration is the artistic metamorphosis

of ritual substitution: a ram for the first-born Isaac, a clay figurine in the king's grave for his retainers, fallen flowers for a lost love—the figures of desire on an embroidered gown that covers the body or on an embroidered song that covers the heart. One thing both recalls and takes the place of another, achieving by that substitution a protection, a "covering over." "The charming dust, the supple haze" is enjoyed and figures the enjoyment of that woman; the mythical stream flowing with pink blossoms becomes the figure of tear tracks bearing flecks of rouge; and "long waves cast jealous glances, and the brows of the hills seem shy." Knowing that a woman's alluring glances are conventionally figured as waves and that her brows seem like hills, the connoisseurs of song smile with approval here. The loss of the loved one, living or dead, is a dispersal; she is scattered in the lake, the hills, and fallen flowers. In some earlier poets the dispersal of the beloved into the landscape becomes a demonic haunting, but not here—these are safe, poetic exchanges and intricate ceremonies of loss.

The woman I loved becomes this or that part of the landscape; the woman I loved becomes the woman someone else loved, perhaps Peach Root, T'ao-ken, or her sister Peach Leaf, T'ao-yeh, who were beloved by the Tsin gallant Wang Hsien-chih:

> Peach Leaf, O the peach leaf
> Can cross the river without an oar.
> Just cross, don't worry about a thing—
> I'll be there to meet you.

Echoing the "oars" and the "crossing" of this short song, Wu Wen-ying should have called his beloved "Peach Leaf" rather than her sister "Peach Root"; but prosody constrains his choice, and one of the sisters can stand for the other, just as either can stand for his own beloved, and as Peach Leaf can be spoken of as a real peach leaf that "can cross the river without an oar."

Puns, plays on names, substitutions—the woman as leaf and root, found by following the pink peach blossoms upstream, blossoms that have been borne along to him "without an oar," blossoms becoming flecks of pink rouge in her tears at parting, blossoms buried in the wind and rain. As in the embroiderer's art these figures wind around one another, threads and motifs disappearing into the tapestry and reemerging, so that the traces of a particular thread and pattern disappear into the overall texture and pattern of the fabric. It is perhaps

what the T'ang critic Ssu-k'ung T'u (837–908) described as *Chen-mi,* "Dense and Closely Woven":

> In this there are true traces (of the crafting),
> But it is as though they cannot be known.
> The image of the thought is only on the point of
> emerging,
> And already the process of Creation is wonderful
> . . . . . .
> It is as spring is to the color green,
> Or bright moonlight when there is snow.

Ssu-k'ung T'u strives to describe an elusive quality in which, as in a green spring scene or a moonlit snow scene, individual forms are only barely visible in the intricate texture of the whole.

The sisters Peach Leaf and Peach Root recall for us the pink peach blossoms flowing in the stream, and those blossoms in turn lead us to think of pink rouge flecks in tears, marking fan and gown. Then we hear: "The blue mansions are a blur in my eyes—/on their ruined walls, the poems written for imminent separation,/whose tear-filled ink is now dreary in dust and dirt." The connoisseurs of song are overwhelmed—truly Wu Wen-ying is the master of intricate figures, the closely woven embroidery. They understand how the fishermen's lanterns, "reflections separating," led him to recall that previous moment of separation by the water, ironically echoing Wang Hsien-chih's song of meeting and welcoming. They hear of peach blossoms and leaves borne downstream, but now, back in time, upstream again to "separation imminent," where his tears fall in the ink as her tears carried blossom flecks of rouge. He is the daring craftsman who boldly repeats *fen,* "separation," in this stanza, as he repeated *hung,* "pink"/"red," in the previous stanza.

But the crowning intricacy is in the tears that stain, that mark, that write separation—blossoms borne in the water and buried, red flecks of rouge in tears on fan and robe, and now tears in ink, marking a wall and buried now in dust and dirt. Clandestine messages, poems written in tear-diluted ink all fade with the passage of time and are buried. And those poems, sinking under dirt on a crumbling wall, are there in Tu Mu's "blue mansions" of the pleasure quarters, now a "blur in my eyes," a double fading. That blurring and fading of figures into the planes of fabric, wall, and carved door is part of the intricacy and itself is a figuring of time's passage and memory.

From the steep pavilion I gaze as far as I can
to the color of plants on the horizon
and sigh that white thatch has half encroached
on my own locks.
Silently I reckon over the count
of separation's tear tracks,
of the times lips were moist with pleasure—
still dyeing my merman's gauze;
the phoenix, wings drooping, loses its way home;
the simurgh, broken, too lazy to dance.
I await some writing of her intense feeling,
of her long suffering in a letter;
but indigo clouds and the far seas swallow
the wild geese in passage;
and this wasted love-longing is plucked
into the grieving zither's frets.
They wound my heart, these thousand leagues of
the Southland,
as bitter melodies once again summon
a sundered soul, is she there or not?

The song is done; the guests in the garden close their eyes in delight. Each stanza, each panel of the intricate embroidery, is a distinct stage in the process of memory and longing. We are carried from the occasion that stirs memory, upstream to a time of past pleasure, then in the third stanza downstream again through recurrent remembrance, and finally in this stanza back to the present. Here he looks to the future in desperate hope and anticipation. The failure of those hopes turns the whole process back in upon itself, driving him to reenact the process in song—this song he has just sung.

The final stanza is framed by an echo of the final lines of the "Summons to the Soul," *Chao-hun,* attributed to Sung Yü in the third century B.C. and supposedly written to call back the soul of Ch'ü Yüan, who was wandering through the southern marshes in despair.

Rolling on the river's waters—above there are maples,
Eyes gaze a full thousand leagues—wounding a spring
heart,
O soul—come home, alas for the Southland.

It is an extremely well-known passage. There is no subtlety in its use, but subtlety is not called for—this is to be an outcry of sorrow. As in "their white jade interred, their fragrance buried," this echo carries

strong overtones of death. The message is clear: return and you live, remain away and you are dead. The language of breaking apart and division is strong throughout the song—broken flecks in the rouge, separating reflections, the simurgh "sundered" from its mate, and in the last line the ultimate breaking apart—the soul divided from the body and from Wu Wen-ying.

In this final stanza the particular relation and the private memories disappear almost entirely in allusion and figurative commonplace, the language of types and universals. Climbing to a high place and gazing off to the horizon is a stock gesture of poetry and song, the mark of a desire to return home or to have someone return to you. The gazer looks to the horizon and sees only green vegetation, marking the absence of the place or person he cannot see, stretching "on and on" like the gazer's thoughts. The vegetation, increasingly dense and green toward the end of spring, marks the season, leading to thoughts of time's passage and the whitening of the gazer's hair. Here Wu Wen-ying stamps convention with the signature of artifice, implicitly noting the color of youth's glossy hair in the "color of plants" and thinking of *chu,* "thatch" or "pale yellow grasses" creeping into his own hair. In this worn figure we close the design of woman as flower, as her lover too fades into the vegetative cycles of the seasons.

What puzzles us is that as the emotional intensity grows toward the close of the song, there is a corresponding growth in the signatures of artifice—the kinds of figuration that signal to the reader craft, cleverness, and an emotional distance from the situation. This is not exactly what is meant in the manual of song composition, "Errors in Song" *(Yüeh-fu chih-mi)*, where it says, "If you are speaking of the sentiments, you cannot be obvious"; however, the motive, a discomfort with direct statements of strong feeling, remains the same. It is not simply a matter of conveying the emotions more effectively by indirection, although that is how the impulse is justified; rather it is the assumption, beneath the imperative to indirection, that the writer must have distance to control the presentation of emotion. Such control is the very opposite of the ancient theory of poetry as an involuntary singing forth of inner life; this late and sophisticated art of song is the careful reweaving of emotions; the more intense the emotions, the more control is necessary to govern them.

Such signature of artifice is apparent in the bizarre conceit of the body's fluids "still dyeing my merman's gauze," echoing all the other stained fabrics of concealment. "Lips moist with delight" is a

decorous rendering of *huan-t'o,* "pleasure's spittle," perhaps suggesting other liquids in addition to drooling ecstasy. And here the song writer closes the design of pink blossoms in the stream, rouge flecks in tear tracks, pale poems written in tear-diluted ink: all this dispersed liquid, drawn together, soaks and dyes the fabric. In Chinese the coloring or influence of emotion is spoken of as a "dyeing" or a "staining." Yet this speculative measurement of the body's involuntary emissions in pleasure and pain is treated with a hyperbole that signals more wit than feeling.

One by one he concludes each set of figures in his tapestry: the design of vegetation and flowers is done; the design of flowing water is done. Now he closes the design of birds: after the mated swallows bearing news, after the egrets and gulls ruling West Lake, we turn here to the great solitary birds of myth, figures of the singer. There is an old song attributed to Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju, said to have been written for his beloved Cho Wen-chün:

> The phoenix, O the phoenix returns to his home,
> Rambling over the whole world, looking for his mate.

But this phoenix, Wu Wen-ying, does not find his mate; the great wings droop. The simurgh, *lüan,* was captured but would not sing its beautiful song without another simurgh; the legend says that to make it sing, a mirror was used to create the illusion of another simurgh.

One more group of birds is necessary to round out the design: the message-bearing wild geese that do not come, the inverse images of the message-bearing swallows of the first stanza which told him of time's passage. He waits for a letter whose words will be the mirror images of his own sorrow. He waits to hear of her "intense feeling," *yin-chin,* just as Wang Hsien-chih waited for Peach Leaf to come across the river without an oar. But like so many other messages sent in the song—the figurative news of the swallows, clandestine notes, fading poems on broken walls, which are "a blur in his eyes"—these messages do not reach the surface of the design: the wild geese, inscribing in their formations the words "one," "two," "the person," sink behind blue clouds.

The finely wrought door is closed; he remains passive now, waiting for the sound of corresponding grief, just as he was once summoned to pleasure. Finally, as she "summoned," *chao,* him to pleasure, now he summons her soul. The summons does not reach through the intricate, blocking surface. No response comes, then his desire and longing, *ssu,* circle back and enter the fabric of song, becoming its intricate figures, which emerge out of the zither strings, which are also *ssu,* strands of silk.

Perhaps no body of poems in the Chinese tradition is so insistently concerned with memory and acts of memory as the songs of Wu Wen-ying. A woman who left him and did not return provides the biographical circumstance by which many of the songs are understood. But Wu Wen-ying's disposition to remember might fasten on any topic; reading his complete songs, we realize that his fascination with memory shaped his response to being deserted, not vice versa.

Yet the quality of memory in these songs and in the songs of many of Wu's contemporaries differs from the role of memory in most earlier poetry and prose. Memory is savored, is more beautiful, less dangerous and problematic. Such cultivated pleasure in the elegaic mode is inseparable from the careful and self-conscious art of these songs. I use the term "art" here advisedly and with precision. In earlier poetry *(shih)* there was a constant interplay between the poet's shaping, interpretive power and the determinations of the world into which he was thrown; the constructing power of art is present, but in the best poetry it contends with lived experience, which does not always obey the rules of art. In contrast, in song *(tz'u)* the writer's power to construct is dominant: the flora, fauna, seasons, weather, and time of day are removed from the living world and recomposed, not according to empirical rules but according to the inner laws of the sentiments, *ch'ing.*

Because of memory's power to construct the past according to the private motives of the rememberer and its freedom from the intrusive claims of the empirical present, which we inhabit, memory is the supreme model of a poetic art that "makes" the world of the poem (dream is a second great model, most powerful in the narrative and dramatic traditions). And in this art built on the model of memory, a doubling occurs: memory is not only the model of the song, it is also a favorite topic within the song.

To make a world of art (rather than contending with the world we inhabit) is an assertion of absolute control that begs a motive. On the symbolic level it reveals a degree of threat in the living world, by forces so dangerous they require complete reconstruction. Such an art closes a door of figures against the insolent cold. The cult of aesthetic

memory in Wu Wen-ying not only absorbs attention from the ominous present, it also brings painful personal memories under control, it makes them beautiful, teaches pleasure in the hurt of loss, and gives a central place not to what is remembered but to the occasion and act of remembrance. The control achieved through art is illusory, sited in a compulsion to repeat. Wu Wen-ying writes this same song of loss and memory over and over again in a hundred different versions.

The finely wrought door against the cold is the "embroidered door," *hsiu-hu,* a magic fabric figured with the very images it protects him from, or alternatively, figured with the images of desire it clothes over. Through the course of the song this strange fabric is constructed—woven from the silken threads of longing and the silken threads of the zither's strings, dyed with the body's liquids mixed with ink and rouge, and embroidered with figures of birds, flowers, and landscapes, substitutions for the inner world of sentiments, which has no words.

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To Be Remembered

In the central chapters on "authenticity" *(ch'eng)* in the Confucian classic *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Chung-yung,* 26), a process of fostering authenticity is described whereby the human being may become the counterpart of Heaven and Earth. Then follows a remarkable passage (26.7):

> The Way of Heaven and Earth can be summed up in a single line: as an entity it is without doubleness and thus unfathomable in generating other entities.

In many ways this passage also "sums up" *The Doctrine of the Mean;* the perfection of the human being is to be nature, and the determinant condition of nature is its unity—no variance or distance between intent and act, between inside and outside. Nature's actions are unfathomable because, as the twelfth-century philosopher Chu Hsi says, no one can tell why it goes the way it goes; nature is the terminus in the chain of all causes and motives. "Why" is a question that can be posed only in a world of doubleness, of actions first proposed, then executed, with an infinite regression of motives and causes streaming back into the past.

> Someone asked him: "Does writing literature harm the Way?"
>
> He answered: "It does harm indeed! Whenever you write, unless you give your mind entirely to writing, it won't be very good. And if you give your mind entirely to something, your concerns will be limited by that thing. And then how can you share the immensity of Heaven and Earth?"

The suspicions with which some philosophers, such as Ch'eng Yi here, regarded literature were well founded: the passionate attention to writing grows out of a chain of other passionate concerns, each one

a focus that limits, separates, and distinguishes. Literature seems to embody all the internal divisions of the human creature, and thus to embody human difference from nature. Even the most resolute attempts to erase the self and its motives, as in the writings of the eighth-century poet Wang Wei, expose themselves precisely as *attempts* to erase the self, a motive that screams in its silence. In the canonical theory of poetry, the "Great Preface" to the *Book of Songs,* poetry is defined by the distinction beween what lies inside and what appears outside the human creature. Even the most perfect transparency keeps the clear glass in place, directing our attention inward to an act of fathoming the potentially fathomable. The Great Sage writes no poetry, and literature remains a painful evidence of our fallen state: as Han Yü says, "an outcry from some disequilibrium."

Remembrance is of the unique, the individual, not of what is constant. We do not remember the flowing of waters or the blossoming of flowers except by binding the recurrent event to a particular time, a particular place, a particular moment in our lives. *The Doctrine of the Mean* stresses the continuousness of the Sage and his wisdom, which continues like nature. The Sage and the condition of the Sage become available to reflection by becoming available to memory, by dying and being lost from us. Memory and the very possibility of memory are associated with violent discontinuity, interruption, something individual involuntarily cast up from the steadiness and thoughtlessness of nature. Ch'eng Yi was correct to link the passion for literature with limitation, in contrast to the Sage who is *with* all Heaven and Earth; he was right that literature, by its very nature, draws one away from the whole. Literature is the subversion of the condition of the Sage: literature needs to say "I am," "I was."

One notes in Chinese thought on art a remarkable absence of both the beautiful and the sublime. Both concepts are modes of alienation, confrontations between pure subject and pure object. The absence of true relation thus can pretend to be freedom. Contemplation of the painted nude is the emblem of such a notion of art and aesthetic experience, teaching a distance that transcends both desire and the denial of desire. In contrast, Chinese thought drives forcefully toward integration and reintegration. The fulfillment of this process is the model of the Sage, who is, in a profound way, *with* Heaven and Earth. In the context of the family, the Sage is the parent as seen through the eyes of the child, someone whose actions and motives are a perfect unity, whose "I am" does not distinguish him/her from the whole but rather represents the whole within which the child's "I am" distinguishes and separates itself.

But the child can never be the parent whom he or she sees; memory always makes us someone's child, and in that role we are like the ancient paragon of filial piety, Lao-lai-tzu, forever destined to caper in white hair before still more aged parents. One may yearn to share in the parent-sage's perceived unselfconscious unity of being, but the desire is itself a division of proposal and performance.

The writer and the poet represent an imperfect but attainable stage in that drive for integration. Here we find a degree of integration combined with the assertion of identity, the capacity to say "I am" and not be alone. It is an uneasy condition, a "disequilibrium," because the assertion of identity implicitly separates one from the whole and carries with it fears of solitude and loss. A dialectical movement between assertion of the self and reintegration into the great family of the world runs throughout Chinese classical literature. Here death's solitude is the supreme solitude, and the written hope of being remembered restores the relation to others. Thus the written "I am" of the literary text is both the assertion of identity and the hope of remembrance, of always being recognized. In literature one chooses the course that the Sage has transcended and forgotten: one devotes oneself singlemindedly (Ch'eng Yi's *chuan-yi*) to inscribing an eternal "I am." The strong fears and desires attending on such an act produce precisely the doubleness, the division between inner and outer person, that is alien to Heaven, Earth, and the Sage.

The power of these concerns can be verified by observing how often certain questions and situations tend to come together in Chinese classical literature; when they do, they often charge the discourse with a force it can hardly sustain—fill it with complications, contradictions, and often a strained playfulness or emotional stridency. The following occur together: the question of the motive for writing, the question of writing's permanence, and some form of loss, separation, or exclusion from the community. We are struck less by the motive given or by the claim of absence of motive than by the incessant concern for motive. The writer may tell us that his work will last forever or that he keeps it under his bed where no one will ever find it, but in both cases he shows a constant interest in whether he will be read and when. If such questions come to mind, we can be certain we are encountering a text in which the writer has invested a great reserve of care, to which later readers, in their turn, respond strongly.

After the fall of the Ming Dynasty, Chang Tai (circa 1597–after 1671) composed a book of his reminiscences of life in the south before the Ch'ing conquest: *T'ao-an's Dream Memories.* Chang Tai's own preface to this work is a remarkable piece of writing, in which all these concerns come together in confusion, contradiction, and passion.

> Chang Tai's state fell, his family was destroyed, and he had nowhere to go. So he let his hair hang wild and went off into the mountains to become a frightening man of the wilderness. When old acquaintances saw him, they were fearful and kept their distance, not daring to have contact with him, as if he were a poison or some wild beast. He wrote his own dirge and was always just on the verge of suicide; but because the books in his stone casket were not yet complete, he continued to look back and breathe in the world of the living. But his bin was often empty of grain; he had nothing for even lighting a cooking fire. It was then he understood about the two old men of Mount Shou-yang, Po Yi and Shu Ch'i; the story that they simply starved to death, unwilling to eat the rice of Chou, was just an embellishment of those who lived after them.
>
> While living in constant hunger, he liked to amuse himself with brush and ink. And thus he would think on bygone days, of growing up among the lordly Wangs and Hsiehs and there experiencing much luxury and splendor. For this he must now suffer the retribution. This hat of plaited rush is retribution for his pate; these straw sandals are retribution for his heels—both to compensate for the hatpins and fine slippers of those days. A patched robe is retribution for his furs; coarse linens retribution for good silk—compensation for light and warm clothing then. Green peas are retribution for his meat; coarse, gritty rice is retribution for the finest rice—compensation for delicacies then. This mat is retribution for his bed; this stone is retribution for his pillow—to compensate for softness and gentleness then. A rope latch is retribution for his locks and bolts; the mouth of a jug is retribution for his windows—compensation for brisk and spacious surroundings then. Mist is the retribution for his eyes; dung is the retribution for his nose—to compensate for voluptuousness and sweet fragrance in those days. The road is retribution for his feet; the sack is a retribution for his shoulders—compensation for sedan chairs and retainers in the past. I see all the various criminal charges brought against me in all these various forms of retribution.
>
> When the cock crows over my pillow, and the night air withdraws, I then see in my mind's eye all the splendor and frivolous beauty of my life, passing before my eyes and empty now, so that the past fifty years have become one long dream. The yellow millet is done; the coach returns from the anthill—how can I endure it? I think far back to events in the past, and as I remember, I write them down and bring them before the Buddha so that I can beg pardon for every one. They are not arranged by years and months and thus differ from a chronological autobiography. They are not divided up by categories and are thus unlike a collection of anecdotes. Just by accident I'll take hold of a certain item, and it's like visiting former scenes or seeing old friends. When I see the people of the city, unlike Ting Ling-wei *I* am delighted. Truly this is what they mean when they say you can't tell a dream to a fool (or he will take it seriously, as I have). Long ago there was a porter of Hsi-ling who was carrying wine for someone when he slipped and broke the jug. Considering that he had no way to pay for it, he sat a long time in dumbfounded speculation, then said, "It's all right if it was only a dream." And there was a poor scholar who had passed the local examination and was on his way to the celebration banquet. He was in a daze, still believing the whole thing wasn't true; he bit his arm, saying, "Isn't this a dream?" A dream and no more—the one only feared that it wasn't a dream, the other feared that it was a dream, but in being fools they were exactly the same.
>
> I will soon wake from the greatest dream of all, yet still I work at this "insect-carving" [writing]; this too is mumbling in a dream. Thus I sigh for the compassionate literary man who finds it so hard to change a heart concerned with name and reputation: just as the Han-tan dream is about to break off, as the waterclock is running out and the bell is ringing, suppose Mr. Lu is submitting his last memorial, proposing to make rubbings of the calligraphy of Wang Hsi-chih and Wang Hsien-chih to pass on to later generations. In that case the speck of attachment to name and reputation will be as hard and firm as the *śārī,* that jewel the Buddhists speak of found in the ashes of a Buddha, which the fiercest blaze of kalpa fires may burn without destroying.

His preface is too generous with reasons for writing this book; it offers too many explanations of what the book is and the circum-

stances of its composition. It is an amusement and a pleasure, the final pleasure remaining to him in deprivation and despair. It is a ledger of transgression, its composition an act of penance. It is mere mumbling in a dream; it is a vain hope of remembrance and immortality, a self-proclaimed folly. And like his attachment to name and reputation, it is the *śārī,* the eternal jewel that appears in the ashes of a Buddha, a jewel that even the earth-consuming fires of a kalpa's end cannot consume.

These clauses of self-explanation have a complex order of sequences and pairings. These writings are his sole pleasure and the center of his pain, his glory and his laughable folly, transient mumblings and the most permanent "thing" in the universe. And in the succession of explanations for his writing, he writes himself out of despair into a growing hope to be remembered. As amusement and pastime, the writing does not look to the future; as penance it inscribes a list of charges, anticipating some future judgment. Out of this the idea of immortality occurs, then is dismissed as a vain hope; but from the fires that will consume all the vain illusions of this world, there appears the *śārī,* the attachment to his memories and his hope to be remembered through them, embodied in his writing.

The preface begins with a dissolution of all ties and a separation from the community: the destruction of state and family, the loss of place, and transfiguration into a wild man, who frightens away his surviving friends. Chang Tai becomes the archetypal figure of loneliness and pain in the Chinese tradition, a new avatar of Ch'ü Yüan, for whom suicide is the next inevitable stage. As Ch'ü Yüan laments himself before throwing himself into the river, Chang Tai composes his own dirge. But one thing holds him back at the very brink of death: "Because the books in his stone casket were not yet complete, he continued to look back and breathe in the world of the living." These "books in the stone casket" were Chang Tai's drafts of Ming history; his tenuous ties to life were his memories of the past and the task of recording them. Such unofficial histories are called "wilderness histories" *(yeh-shih),* the fitting labor of a "man of the wilderness" *(yeh-jen).* Here we may recall someone else who was held back from suicide long ago, who was compelled to live on in degradation because he had to complete his historical work—Ssu-ma Ch'ien, the Grand Historian of the Han, who accepted the imperial punishment of castration rather than the implicit command to commit suicide. It was Ssu-ma Ch'ien who, in his famous "Letter to Jen-An," spoke of literary immortality to compensate for the loss, in his castration, of another kind of immortality. Such an example might come to the memory of one whose "family was destroyed" in the fall of the Ming.

Chang Tai not only remembers the past, he remembers also the past models of those who remembered: Ssu-ma Ch'ien and the two legendary loyalists of the Shang, Po Yi and Shu Ch'i, who, after the fall of their dynasty, went to live in the "wilderness" on Mount Shouyang and there starved to death, "unwilling to eat the rice of Chou." In a similar situation Chang Tai, loyal to the fallen Ming, discovers that he lives on and on, despite his hunger. The story remembered does not hold true in the present: it must be no more than a legend, an "embellished" tale, an ancient lie. And who told us that ancient lie?—Ssu-ma Ch'ien, the Grand Historian, who lived on, enduring *his* shame, to remember and write.

Chang Tai lives on to record the past, sustained by ancient examples, but those examples crack with doubt and mistrust. His writing staves off death as he tells stories of those who did not themselves write, but who died when honor and despair demanded that they die. Such stories shame the writer who lives on to tell them: exemplary history causes him pain, and thus it must lie. And he turns from the dubious transmission of historical writing to the more narrow, but more trustworthy, sense of memory, reminiscence.

Turning away from the serious labor of the manuscripts in the "stone casket," he comes to the present book of memoirs and the first inscription of the motives behind it: "the inclination to scribble amid starvation," to "amuse himself with brush and ink." In the tradition the question of eating or not eating is often bound to the question of writing or not writing, but still this is a most peculiar conjunction, and it reinforces the recurrent association of writing with survival and life. In his phrasing Chang Tai joins not only desperate hunger and writing, but also desperate hunger and pleasure, evoking other ancient values:

> He said, "Virtuous indeed is Yen Hui, eating from a single bamboo tray and drinking from a single gourd, living in a narrow lane. Others could not bear the sorrow of this, yet Hui's delight is unchanged. Virtuous indeed is Yen Hui."
> *Analects* VI.8

And such delight amid suffering, which generates these memoirs, is superior to the more dour imperative that sustains his history writing,

to be "steadfast in hardship" *(ku-ch'iung)*. (Analects XVI.1.)

He tells us he writes for pleasure, and although there is virtue in maintaining good cheer in hard circumstances, we quickly discover that the objects of his memory and the sources of his pleasure are not in themselves virtuous—a past life of "power and splendor." This is a most peculiar claim, to find amusement in recalling and writing down the pleasure of his past life amid the hardships of the present, hardships that are, item by item, retribution for past excess. We might anticipate an enumeration of contrasts between his past and present lives, but he calls that enumeration a list of criminal charges, the reading of an indictment. He translates his experience into that mercantile version of Buddhist *karma* in which one is presented with an itemized bill for past sins, a bill that must be paid. "And as I remember, I write them down and bring them before the Buddha so that I can beg pardon for every one." This explanation for his book is patently false, a mere "embellishment" by our private historian: in the preface and in the memoirs themselves we find only wistfulness, attachment, desire, and not the least shred of regret or contrition. But if we consider further, we discover in the symmetry of his penance a structure that will continue and extend his life; each lived pleasure must be counterbalanced now by a lived hardship. As the act of writing holds him back at the very edge of death, so it also discovers the reasons he must keep on living. It is a loving enumeration, seeking in memory more and more excesses whose account he must now pay.

Turning away from the simple mechanics of *karma,* Chang Tai tries another popular Buddhist explanation: the world is nothing more than an illusion, or in one of the most well-worn metaphors of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature, life is a dream. "When the cock crows over my pillow and the night air withdraws, I then see in my mind's eye all the splendor and frivolous beauty of my life, passing before my eyes and empty now, so that the past fifty years have become one long dream." Every morning he awakes from dreams of his past life, then in waking memory he redreams those dreams of the past, which was itself one long dream, no longer distinguishable from those of the past night. As these daydreams come, he writes them down. He boasts of the associative disorder of his writing as the disorder of dream. And in this we discover yet another explanation for writing this book: "Just by accident I'll take hold of a certain item, and it's like visiting former scenes or seeing old friends." Writing is a willful act of return, repetition, clinging—to memories come upon "by accident," just as he chanced upon the original places and events.

Chang Tai's disorderly enumerations of past pleasures and present retributions, the randomness of the entries in his memoirs, the accidentally encountered fragments of dream, and even the disorder and self-cancelings of his acts of self-interpretation in this preface—all this cherished disorder is significant form. The historian's work involves fixed cycles and sequences of events, linear processes that drive inexorably toward the destruction of dynasties, the ruin of families, and the death of writers. But the disorderly storehouse of memory and memoir disrupts that linearity; all life becomes equally accessible and, in a sense, repeatable. His very randomization of the past, the shattering of narrative models, is itself an affirmation of life.

As metaphor is the great substitution trope of western poetics, allusion and reference (*yung-shih,* allusion to a story or historical event) are perhaps the most powerful substitution tropes in the Chinese tradition. And it is significant that allusion and reference are similitudes of history, of memory, recalled and not invented. A great metaphor is one that seems apt and is essentially uncontrollable: a simple statement of intention behind the metaphor, even within the discourse itself, cannot control what the metaphor does. In the same way in allusion and reference, the writer may claim one simple ground of comparison, but the old text is very powerful and may do strange things to the situation in which it is applied.

The story of Ting Ling-wei is of a Taoist adept who studied the Way on Ling-hsü Mountain. Long spans of time passed unnoticed, until finally he transformed himself into a crane to fly back and revisit his home in Liao. Everyone he saw there was unfamiliar. As he perched on the city gate, he saw a young man lift a bow to shoot at him, then he flew up into the air singing:

> A bird there is, a bird there is, whose name is Ting Ling-wei:
> He left his home for a thousand years and just came back today.
> The city walls as they always were, the people no longer there;
> Better to study eternal life, for tombs lie everywhere.

Chang Tai revisits his old haunts in memory, and "seeing the people of the city . . . unlike Ting, I'm delighted." Why does *this* allusion come to mind? He tries to tell us that *he* is delighted in revisiting the places of his youth, while Ting Ling-wei was not. But Chang Tai's explanation is weak beside the perplexing weight of the reference—the one who revisits lives on and on, and, anticipating disappointment, unrecognition, and a threat of violence in the living world, seeks another immortality in memory and writing.

Ting Ling-wei recognizes that he has become alien to that past world; Chang Tai claims to be at home there and to find pleasure in it, at the same time mocking his pleasure and its illusoriness. Beneath his claim of contrition for his past life, we read a wallowing pleasure in his memories; beneath the claim of pleasure, we read the pain the memories bring, the danger, the self-mockery, and the anger that he cannot escape them. Fool, he calls himself: "You can't tell a dream to a fool" because he will take it seriously, as I do. But in telling us that, he also tells us that he doesn't take it seriously. In the text the boundary between memory and past reality dissolves. We no longer know which he is referring to. He tells us two anecdotes of fools, each directed against himself. One wanted to claim that what was real was, in fact, only a dream; the other *feared* that what was real was only a dream. Finally we have three cases of folly—one fool who believes a dream to be real and two fools who believe what is real to be only a dream, one hopefully and one fearfully. And these examples apply to too many incongruous possibilities in his own situation; they take the argument nowhere, turning on one another and canceling one another, leaving us with only one clear message in our disorientation: "Fool!"

"I will soon wake from the greatest dream of all, yet still I work at this 'insect-carving': this too is mumbling in a dream." He turns in anger on his writing, explaining it now as a compulsive, involuntary act, like remembering itself. He sees its pointlessness, but he cannot help himself. In both remembering and writing, he clings tenaciously to life, yet he scorns and despises himself for that involuntary hold. The next reference he throws at himself is devastating. Chang Tai sees himself as Mr. Lu living out his illusory dream life, as told in the "Record of the Pillow," *Chen-chung chi*. On the point of waking up, Lu realizes that all he has undergone was a meaningless illusion. But there is an addition to the story, that at the very moment before waking, he is submitting one last memorial, to have rubbings made

of the calligraphy of Wang Hsi-chih and Wang Hsien-chih so that their transmission to posterity will be ensured. This addition is not in the original "Record of the Pillow"; it is a later "embellishment," an emblem of wasted earnestness and the vanity of caring for the transmission of the past into the future. It is Chang Tai, laboring to record his memories, on the point of waking from life to discover that neither he nor his memories matter.

But out of this scornful piling of vanity upon vanity comes the remarkable conclusion, that the intensity of attachment to one's "name," *ming,* will make it the immortal *śārī* outlasting even the kalpa fires. It is a sudden and violent denial of the dream theme and all its Buddhist overtones: here is not the *śārī* born of perfect nonattachment, of buddhahood, but rather an anti-*śārī* of passion and attachment to one's identity, bound to a personal past and transmitted into the future.

The *śārī (she-li),* the immortal jewel discovered in the cremated ashes of a Buddha, is a sign for and remainder of the life that was. Chang Tai's *śārī* is not the book itself but the attachment that lives in the book. Chang Tai's *śārī* is not the *śārī* of a Buddha or the Sage. Attachment implies division: one who clings and what he clings to—be it a past life, present living, or the hope of having his name remembered. It is attachment that creates history, that concerns itself with the past and projects itself into the future. And attachment perpetually postpones death: there is always some manuscript in the stone casket waiting to be finished. Writing is the very enactment of attachment.

"The Way of Heaven and Earth can be summed up in a single line: as an entity it is without doubleness and thus unfathomable in generating other entities." When we reflect on this passage, we recognize its truth, that "Heaven and Earth" is indeed a unity of being, without doubleness. But in the writing of that truth changes occur that give us pause: written into the fallen world this unity is doubled—"Heaven *and* Earth"—one above, one below; one moving, the other stable; one bright, the other opaque and dark. In the world of writing, everything falls into relation, division, and the attachment of desire. Chang Tai belongs neither to the material unity of Heaven and Earth nor to the unitary void of Buddhism: for him everything is double and doubles its doubleness: inside is divided from outside, the life of the mind from the body; motive is divided from act and must be recovered in all its contradictory multiplicity; past is divided from present, painful reality from painful dream.

Sources of Quotations

Note: All translations are the author's except that on pp. 35–37.

Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an is abbreviated as *SPTK.*

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