

STEPHEN OWEN

TRADITIONAL
CHINESE POETRY
AND POETICS
OMEN OF THE WORLD

TAIWAN EDITION

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TRADITIONAL CHINESE
POETRY AND POETICS
(全一冊)

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vii
Prologue	3
The Other Prologue	6
1 Omen of the World: Meaning in the Chinese Lyric	12
2 Transparencies: Reading the Chinese Lyric	54
3 An Uncreated Universe: Cosmogony, Concepts, and Couplets	78
4 Voice	108
Aside: Only a Poem	143
5 Learning Lessons	163
Aside: Of Laziness	187
6 Rebellions	191
7 A Special Form of Discourse	223
8 Alone	251
Epilogue	286
Notes	291
Index	301

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Unlike my earlier works on literary history, this book was not "written" in the sense of sitting down to do research on a pre-arranged topic. It took shape over a period of almost ten years, a literary historian's dissatisfactions with precisely those aspects of poetry which literary history cannot adequately treat. Though it may be necessary to create some frames of reference in reading, systematic exposition can betray the act, can lead us astray, can make us forget the full extent of our freedom as readers of poetry.

Works which take shape over many years owe many silent debts, not all of which can be acknowledged here. However, there still must be an unencumbered span of time in which the bits and pieces can be brought together; such a span was provided by the American Council of Learned Societies in the form of a grant in Chinese Civilization from January to August 1980, during the tenure of which I worked in Oxford. To Glen Dudbridge, my host at Oxford, this book owes a great deal, both for his practical help in making my Oxford stay a happy and profitable one and for his willingness to read and comment on the essays as they were taking shape.

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TRADITIONAL
CHINESE POETRY
AND POETICS

PROLOGUE

*. . . that which hath greatest force in the very things
we see is notwithstanding itself oftentimes not seen.*

—Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*

There are dimensions of the poetic art, often those of the "greatest force," which lie beyond the reach of our usual discourse on literature. When that "greatest force" is felt to move in poems, there is no reason to meddle with it or to seek to expose its workings. But when an art is displaced—by transfer to another civilization, by time's longer spans, or by the disruption of its continuity—then we must discover a way to give voice to those very dimensions of the poetic art which are usually left in tactful silence.

This book is an introduction to the art of Chinese poetry, the *shih*, drawing on texts from the fourth to the twelfth centuries. It is an introduction not to the easily named features of a poetry but to its intangibles. The procedures of the book have been shaped on behalf of those intangibles. The book promises no simple addition to a store of learning; it does not ride on the whitecaps of the latest critical wave—if you seek those things, look elsewhere. This introduction is a beginning, beginning over again; our matter is old and familiar, sometimes even obvious, but worth our renewed attention because it is important and true. To those who come back to this beginning from a longer acquaintance with Chinese poetry, the book is for you only if you are lured by it; and if you are lured by it, come willingly as someone lured and for the sake of the lure alone.

This book speaks not of what surely is and was but of what might be and might have been. The book is set in the conditional and borrows its mood from that side of any art which must

remain always in the conditional. Poetry lives not only by gloss and orthodox explanation, it lives also by tacit presumption, by implicit ways of knowing, by unstated anxieties. When by time, language, or civilization a poetry becomes displaced, the silent circumstances of the art may in turn become a vast edifice of irrecoverables. No documents recreate those circumstances: they were built around truths which poets and readers never thought to speak of, never needed to speak of. And beyond those circumstances were still other truths which were so much a part of the way one thought about poetry and through poetry that those truths themselves were inaccessible to reflection. If we desire to be true readers of such a poetry and not mere archeologists of the written word, we must not only recover or recreate those silent circumstances of the early poet and reader, we must also, in some peculiar way, inhabit them.

Worlds of the mind have been lost along with the civilizations that supported them. We can never recover and inhabit those worlds with certainty; we can never *be* Chinese readers of an earlier century. The barrier is an absolute one; to ignore it is a complacency in an individual or in a culture. For such poems as these our own poetic education is misshapen and in reading yields only a parody of a great art. Yet because the poems ask to become fully animate once again, we cannot with equal complacency accept their inaccessibility. Between the impassable barrier and the insistent imperative to cross it there is recourse only to play—an educated, speculative play, by inference and guess recreating those lost worlds.

There are no risks, reader. We are not playing with human lives or the fate of nations—these are only poems, and they will survive your misreadings and mine. They have lingered a millennium waiting to be read and misread; they are durable and will linger another millennium, utterly impervious to the wildest fancies which we might pose for their truths. As we build speculative frames for these poems, do not ask, "Is this true?"; instead ask, "When I read, what happens if I take this to be true?" Some of the frames may repel you; some may intrigue you; some may even seem to answer what the poems ask for in their waiting, making them unfold, sparkle, and shake off their long torpor.

We begin by wondering what a Chinese poem of the eighth or eleventh century asked of its readers, and then for a while we are to play such readers. In short, we are enjoined to read differently than we habitually do. A great art does not exist to confirm a world in which we feel at home and comfortable; instead, it asks that we give ourselves for a time to another world. I promise that you can live a while in that other world with no threat to yourself—accept this lure and bait. But if you emerge from that world and find that you are indeed a bit changed, then the poem and I will smile at our work well done.

This book is about poems, but it is neither criticism nor is it concerned with criticism. Good criticism treats the shared domain of literature: it asserts what every good reader *ought* to find in a text. Whatever tolerance it feigns, still it legislates. And because it concerns itself with what is shared, good criticism leaves out (should leave out) those complex choices of actual reading in which the reader must exercise his freedom to go this way or that.

This book concerns reading—as an aesthetic act. It first treats rules of reading—another shared realm distinct from criticism—but in addition it “reads” poems. As we read here, we exercise our reader’s freedom—to err, to ignore, to wander a bit, to choose where no choice needs to be made and thus to limit the text beyond the boundaries of good criticism. Only in this freedom can a text become fully animate. Our reading is not legislative—it does not secretly command you to go and do likewise—rather, it is exemplary.

We can be taught to consider a poem as a “thing,” a construct of words; we can speculate on the shared rules of reading; but when we consider reading itself, we reflect upon a process, an event in time. Reading is itself only when it is an act, and an anatomy of reading is a betrayal of the act. The only way to adequately represent an act is to enact, and the reading we do here is enactment—with uncertainties, with errors and corrections, with inner arguments, and with confusions left undisputed.

This book is in the conditional; reader, you have been warned. It permits me the freedom to turn arguments around upon themselves, to lead us down blind paths, to answer the

same question in a variety of ways, to provide a variety of questions for the same answer. Some of the propositions are probable, some menacing—believe them if you will.

All the imaginative contexts we summon are for the sake of the poems, which wait patiently. Do not think the waiting is easy for them simply because they are so sturdy. Poems that were unique, overpowering, poems which “made ghosts and gods weep” and carried the poet’s living voice have faded into sameness or bland distinctions—examples of a theme, a cult, an age, an idea. Once sated with an array of pleasant images, the reader of translations from the Chinese can find little of the satisfaction that attends great poetry. Voices still speak in those poems; we cannot expect them to speak to the concerns of this late world; it is we who must be changed to hear them.

THE OTHER PROLOGUE

to persuade you away from the concerns
of this late world

Poetry, unfortunately, is not an art of language: it occurs “in language,” but it is not “of language.” Language is necessary to poetry, but only as a necessary condition. More precisely (and more obviously), it is an art which *may* occur when we are reading or hearing language, reading and listening in a special way to language which we take to be of a special sort. This language aspires to transparency, to disappear as “merely words”; but it does not possess the easy, self-effacing transparency of everyday language: it can be balky, intractable, oracular, even playful. Nevertheless, we understand the arabesques of the word to be important for something beyond language. We may be in error:

it may be only language; but it does not expose itself as "only language" until we have stopped reading.

When we have left off reading, we may become aware of the internal mechanisms of language, how it shapes and governs discourse in its own arbitrary ways. To concern ourselves with these mechanics of the received word is an interesting, even perversely satisfying occupation; but it has nothing to do with poetry. Simply stated, poetry is an event, not an entity. Like foolish and jealous lovers, we may be led to believe that a mastery of the entity is the sure promise of the event. We will be disappointed. The event exists only in its own time, and then, only when the "entity" becomes another being, beyond mastery.

The flight of modern theorists into the mechanics of the received word grows from honest difficulties. They knocked at the door, and no one answered. And as they ran through an enchanting series of accoustical possibilities—raps and thwacks and taps and poundings—they found that answers came only rarely and unpredictably. In the ingenuity of experiment for the "right knock," they failed to make the one essential distinction—between the knock as a sign of presence and the knock as a command, compelling an answer. That distinction is no distinction in the accoustical realm; it is significant only if we recognize an independent, fickle, and essentially uncompellable will behind the door.

Let us leave the happy realm of parable and build the theoretical formulation which circumscribes its own failure. Reading is a process, an operation governed by shared rules. But those rules are manifest only in their enactment, within the process. Their existence in a pure form can only be inferred, hovering amid actual readings, which are always more determined and private than the open rules. Their openness is only hypothetical; to be realized they demand *some* determination.

The text is made to be read, and all its linguistic forms are given on the assumption that they will operate through certain rules of reading: they are contingent, and their contingency is born through the vague hope with which the poet issues a poem to the world. The poem does not demand the recovery of a spe-

cific intention, but rather hopes that a community of readers will know roughly "what to make of it." Like the linguistic forms of a poem, the rules of reading are historical. That historicity does not mean that the rules are valid only in their hypothetical configuration at the moment of composition: surprisingly, a poem can be read a hundred years later, two hundred years later, three hundred years later. But there are pragmatic limits: to "hear" the poem there must be some agreement or organic relation between the rules of reading for which the poem was written and the rules of reading which the reader brings to the poem. To ask this is to ask no more than that the reader know the language of the text.

Even if we could reconstruct the rules of reading that belonged to another age and another place, they cannot simply be set forth and "used." In actual reading the rules are internal. They are not an instruction manual: rather, they disappear into the process itself and become the secret forms of an *art* of reading. They must be the knock which is a sign of presence and not the objectified instrument to compel response. We have in poetry not a "hermeneutical task" but a problematic act of communication in which the process of understanding comes only when it comes on its own, impelled by something outside the reader.

It is the need to internalize the rules of reading which makes our historicity a problem. We belong to our own age and civilization and not to another, and there is an absolute barrier between ourselves and the rules of reading which belonged to another age and another civilization. Indeed, to call them "rules of reading" is too limited and literary: reading is no more than the most complicated form of the processes of understanding. We cannot live these other processes of reading and understanding as they must be lived. To the extent that we can recover them, we can recover them only as object.

There is the possibility that readers may refuse to recognize the historical barriers. Either from complacency or ignorance they may bring their own art of reading to a text that belongs to another time and another civilization. In doing so they may discover what they seek and confirm their established predilections; but as time passes, this kind of reading becomes increasingly an act of will on the part of the reader, not something

freely given by the text. What should be an internally impelled unfolding of the text's meaning becomes, in fact, a "task" of recovery.

The most interesting exception to the distance that grows between a reader and a text is the canonical work in a single tradition. A canonical text will remain animate for centuries precisely because it plays a considerable role in guiding and stabilizing the evolution of the reading process. It means nothing to predicate Shakespeare's genius on the fact that he has answered the interests of successive generations of English readers; rather, the canonical status of Shakespeare was a presence in the evolving sense of what literature was and how it was to be understood: his work is the root, and our poetic values are the branch.

But across the barriers between civilizations and across the greater spans of literary history, there are distances, losses, and fallings away. We may not wish to acknowledge this truth, but it is as real and irrevocable as the historicity of language. A student's first encounter with an obsolete usage in a seventeenth-century English poem may produce a meaning more interesting than the original warrants; blindness to the historical barrier results in a reader making meaning, to the detriment of the poet's ability to give meaning. As the language changes, so with the passage of time the basic contract between a poet and his reader may fail, nor is such a failure as easy to repair as restoring the lost usage of a word. Bridging this rift implicates the very being of the reader, how he understands anything.

Whether the barriers are recognized or not, what was once given freely and naturally in a poem gradually falls away, until the text becomes barren and there are only a few old notes and inner promptings to tell you, "This poem may be important; labor to discover how." The original voice of the text, at once accessible and Other, is lost.

If then we accept, as we must, the absolute historical and cultural barriers between us and such a text, we must consider how to reconstruct the conditions under which such texts might be read. Why should we do so?—because the poets were promised eternity and we honor old treaties, because they have something

to say that we will not hear elsewhere, because the historical barriers are an injustice we cannot tolerate.

To reconstruct the rules of reading merely as object is inadequate. As in learning language in its lower sense, paradigms, declensions, and vocabulary lists cannot teach you to speak or understand properly the fullness of the language. The true value of words, the significance of a turn of phrase, the subtle jolt of irony can only be known from repeated and living use. As language in this sense is perfectly assimilated only by examples, so reading, the most complex form of understanding language, must be learned by example. But the "native speakers," those who heard the old poetry in all its power, have become dust and have left behind only a few notes, thoughts, and records of their amazement. To share the possibility of discovering again such a poetry, we can only imaginatively recreate examples of reading, examples adequate to the historical contracts of the text. Yet the insurmountable barrier does not leave us, and all the possible contexts we can summon from beyond the barrier are speculative.

The speculative mode, our conditional, is essential: it is a mode of discourse which, like literary fictions themselves, invites you into another world under the promise that you can return again to your native element. We can accept the fictional world—we are truly *in* it—but conditionally. Thus we frame the old poem in a reading context which honestly admits that we are beyond the domain of sure assertion, but which, because it "nothing affirms," can invite you in to overhear the poem being read. This is our promise, but as in literary fictions, we may deceive you: you may hear a voice that does not belong to the speculative reader, and if you do, you may discover that you have slipped over the insurmountable barrier.

One act of faith is necessary here: that as you overhear me reading these old poems you distinguish my voice from the poem itself speaking. If there is no hope that the poem can be brought to speak with its own voice, if the poem is only the construction of its later readers, then there is no point in this or any other kind of literary study.

The danger that seems to hang about us is mere subjectivism—that the reading is all my creation. But this is not so great a danger as it might seem: the real danger is silence, not ventriloquism. I live in a darkened room with no windows. You listen from a hidden microphone. There is someone else in an adjoining room who speaks to me through a thin spot in the wall. I have no confirmation of his existence beyond that voice. I speak constantly to entice him to respond, but the voice comes only when it pleases and at unexpected intervals. I can conceive the possibility that what I hear might be only private fantasy, but when the voice comes, I recognize it as belonging to someone else, with his own identity and his own things to say. I know I am not saying those things. But as I said, I can conceive that I might be deceived. But you who overhear will not be deceived.

ONE

OMEN OF THE WORLD

MEANING IN THE CHINESE LYRIC

Poetry is the displaced prophetic vocation.
—Ernst Bloch

If so, then Chinese poetry is the displaced vocation of the diviner.

Prophecy arises from inner vision, private but ordained by its own laws to be shared; for sharing, the common words of the world are needed, though they are stubborn words that always threaten to fail the brightness of vision. But the inborn gift of divination depends upon the immanence of truth in this physical world: it is visible to all who look for it and who know how to look; this is outer vision and the words of the physical world will do. The diviner observes and reflects:

Slender grasses, breeze faint on the shore,
Here, the looming mast, the lone night boat.
Stars hang down on the breadth of the plain,
The moon gushes in the great river's current.
My name shall not be known from my writing;
Sick, growing old, I must yield up my post.
Wind-tossed, fluttering—what is my likeness?
In Heaven and Earth, a single gull of the sands.

Tu Fu 杜甫 (712-770) "Writes of what he feels, traveling by night" 旅夜書懷.¹ The title, given for the reader's sake, frames the poem with an occasion and tells what "kind" of statements are made in the poem: Tu Fu's lines are *huai* 懷,

"what he feels," or more precisely, what is on his mind with concern and strong feeling. The *huai* may be something perceived, something thought, something felt: the scene drawn in the first two couplets is no less *huai* than the reflections in the third couplet. The simile of the last couplet is also *huai*, something *he feels*; it is presented not as a device of poetry but as the act of a living mind—discovering an analogue for the self.

Tu Fu's words might be a special kind of diary entry, differing from common diary in their intensity and immediacy, in their presentation of an experience as occurring at that very moment. Like diary, the poem promises a record of historical experience: the exact time, the exact place, the exact conjunction of circumstances may be lost beyond recovery, but the reader trusts their historical reality and depends upon it. The greatness of the poem emerges not through poetic invention but through the happy chance of this poet meeting this moment and this scene.

Another poet stands on Westminster Bridge at dawn on September 3, 1802, and looks at London:

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
 Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
 A sight so touching in its majesty:
 This City now doth, like a garment wear
 The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
 Ships, towers, domes, theaters, and temples lie
 Open unto the fields and to the sky;
 All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
²

Wordsworth's title precisely locates the time and place. We could go back to old maps and engravings, we could guess which dome and which temple might have been seen then from Westminster Bridge, we might check old almanacs for dawn's hour and minute, exhume shipping records to estimate the number of ships lying at anchor that day and position their masts in the field of vision. But even the most passionate antiquarian will know that this interest in circumstance is not essential to the poem. It does not matter whether Wordsworth saw

the scene, vaguely remembered it, or constructed it from his imagination. The words of the poem are not directed to a historical London in its infinite particularity; the words lead you to something else, to some significance in which the number of vessels on the Thames is utterly irrelevant. That significance is elusive, its fullness eternally out of reach, as open as the city itself. We can try to lock up that elusive significance in a hundred ways: we can say it is "nature making all natural," or "the epiphany of solitary vision," or "a reactionary revulsion against the new industrial and urban society." The ways in which we name the poem's significance may be gross or fine, certainly true or hardly likely; the text points to a plenitude of potential significance, but it does not point to London, at dawn, September 3, 1802.

Texts lie open to the inclinations of their readers. Significance is granted in reading; and readers, unlike poets, are made, not born. Though the learned rules of reading differ from age to age, from school to school, certain fundamental assumptions unify all diversity and place boundaries on change and variation. Such unities define a literary tradition. The canons of Western literary education hammer home the first lesson again and again:

. . . the nature of literature emerges most clearly under the referential aspects. The center of the literary art is obviously found in the traditional genres of the lyric, the epic, the drama. In all of them the reference is to a world of fiction, of imagination. The statements in a novel, in a poem, or in a drama are not literally true; they are not logical propositions. . . . Even in the subjective lyric, the "I" of the poet is a fictional, dramatic "I."³

Which is another way of saying, with Sidney, "Now for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth."

It matters not at all whether Wordsworth ever actually stood on Westminster Bridge on September 3, 1802, and gazed at the city of London. It is only a fiction—this lyric "I" which pretends to report what it perceives. The reader assumes that the poet's historical "I" makes use of the lyric "I," and that his visions, real

or pretended, become poetry only for the sake of some other ends. The city "doth like a garment wear / The beauty of the morning": the comparison occurs on the level of the poetic art with its many mysterious motives; the comparison is not taken as an action in the mind of the historical poet, standing on the bridge. The reader is taught to ignore Wordsworth's precise instructions: dawn, September 3, 1802, Westminster Bridge.

We have two different ways of reading poetry. For the reader of Wordsworth, all is metaphor and fiction; the referential instructions to regard place and moment are an embarrassment, an unwanted intrusion. Literary language is supposed to be fundamentally different from the language of diary and empirical observation: its words mean Something Else, something hidden, richer, infinitely more satisfying.

In Tu Fu's poem, the assumptions through which significance grows are different, and potent consequences follow from those initial differences, which at first seem so slight. The differences shape two fiercely distinct concepts of the nature of literature and its place in the human and natural universe. For Tu Fu's reader the poem is not a fiction: it is a unique, factual account of an experience in historical time, a human consciousness encountering, interpreting, and responding to the world. And in his own turn the reader, at some later historical moment, encounters, interprets, and responds to the poem.

Consider two versions of metaphor: "The poet is a gull between Heaven and Earth"; "It seemed to me I was like a gull between Heaven and Earth." Between these two statements is the center of the difference between two traditions of poetry and reading. The first statement is not true: it is a metaphorical fiction and asks you to consider how the poet might be like a gull. The second statement may be literally true; it also asks you to consider the relation between poet and gull, but it asks for the sake of what the comparison reveals about *the state of mind of the poet*, the direction of his attention, his desire to know himself, to find one like himself, to share his condition with another.

The distinction extends beyond obvious metaphors. One poet perceives "ships, towers, domes, theaters, and temples"; the other poet, "slender grasses, breeze faint on the shore." We

assume that Wordsworth is not simply naming what he saw; the items of the scene are listed for some purpose; we look beyond the mediating scenes for ends and artistic motives which we must intuit or guess—perhaps to show how in the silence of the vista all works are joined in harmony, the sacred and secular, the mercantile, military, and artistic? perhaps to give concrete particularity to a panorama, not a bland “everything” but “this, this, and this”? perhaps to indicate the naturalization of human constructs when bare of the humans who made them and consider them only for their use? Though the precise purpose must remain forever uncertain, we accept with certainty that the fusion of significance and word-scene occurs on the level of art. But for the other poet, we presume instead that the “slender grasses, breeze faint on the shore” is indeed simply what he has seen, or more precisely, what has drawn his attention: the enumeration in the poem indicates some meaningful pattern which is both present in the world at that moment and of special interest to the poet’s mind. For Wordsworth’s reader, the poem (and sometimes even the world itself) is a created set of hermetic signs. For Tu Fu’s reader, meaning is subtly infused in the particular forms of the world perceived and uncertain, perhaps, even to the poet; the poem raises up portentous forms, and in doing so, it tells you about both the world and the inner concerns of the poet.

細	草	微	風	岸
fine/thin	grass/plants	faint	wind	shore
危	檣	獨	夜	舟
high/precarious	mast	alone/lone	night	boat

Slender grasses, breeze faint on the shore,
Here the looming mast, the lone night boat.

He travels on by boat that night; the moonlight outlines roughly the shapes of the scene, but the finer forms in the night landscape are hidden in darkness. How then, we wonder, can he make out those slender blades of grass and thin tendrils of plants, 細草,

swaying on the shore? And this faint breeze he may feel on the water—how can he know its effects on the bank? The two parts of the line need one another: they act upon each other according to the laws of the empirical universe, and in their interaction a relation is known—the hidden image of thin grasses bending in the breeze. The movement of the slender blades, of only the slender blades, shows a breeze and only the faintest breeze. Or the faint breeze on the shore will, he knows, move the grasses, but only the slender blades, unseen.

The mast looms, above him, *wei* 危, its shape “high” and “precarious,” threatening fall. There is an instability in it that conveys uneasiness, as it sways with the rocking movement of the boat. His eyes, moving from thing to thing, follow a mutation of forms: the tiny, bending blades of grass recur transformed in the mast that sways menacingly above him. And the watcher’s perspective defines his size—immense and secure as he looked out to guess about the tiniest shapes in the darkness, then suddenly small as the shape reappears, rocking above him.

In the recurrence of forms comes an intuitive sense of differences and oppositions: out there, the many; here, the one. There, the stable shore; here, the world of water and flux. There, the supple, the bending but firmly rooted; here, the rigid and precariously swaying. There, tininess and insignificance; here, true magnitude. The oppositions are portentous; they echo in correlative frames of reference: flux and endless movement, set against stability and rootedness; one who travels on alone, set against others living in security; endangered uprightness, great stature, and nobility, set against the pliant, the lesser, the common. No assertions are made; no contradictions are excluded; a pattern is rising up.

This is a moment’s work in the good reader’s mind. He grasps the fullness of the oppositions, senses their importance to Tu Fu, and sees their horizon of significance extend outward. In the pattern of this brief scene correlatives echo in the poet’s life, in the order of the universe, in the moral order, in the social order, in the order of literature where the “breeze,” *feng* 風, is “song,” *feng*, the moral power of one whose “influence,” *feng*, makes the “many” bow low to it.

The natural cosmos, of which the historical empire was the institutional reflection, was a system of processes, things, and relations. Between systems, correlations were made by a principle which might be called analogy, if analogy did not presume some fundamental difference. The most apposite term in Chinese is *lei* 類, "natural category": these correlations of pattern were not made by a willful act of analogy but rather occurred because their elements were, in essential ways, "of the same kind."⁴

The term which situates literature in this orderly cosmos is *wen* 文; in its most general sense, *wen* is "pattern," in which aesthetic value and significance are conjoined.⁵ *Wen* is "literature" and sometimes, "writing" itself; *wen* is to be "cultivated," to have the grace, restraint, and sensibility of education; *wen* is the civil aspect of society, as opposed to the military. The great king Wu of the Chou embodies the virtue, "mighty" (*wen*), not in his wrath or force of arms but in the civilizing force of culture.⁶ A person who aspires to be *wen* will unite the semantic meanderings of the word: becoming *accomplished* through education, he may serve the government in a *civil* post, his capacity for such a position having been examined by a public test of his *writing*; he finds himself naturally drawn to *literature* in which the "aesthetic pattern" (*wen*) of the universe becomes manifest. Liu Hsieh 劉勰 (465-522) writes of *wen*:

Great is the fulfilled power of aesthetic pattern, for it appeared along with the generation of Heaven and Earth. All color derives from a blending of the Dark of Heaven and Earth's Yellow; by the circularity of Heaven and Earth's squareness all shapes are differentiated. The successive disks of sun and moon are suspended configurations that make the heavens lovely, while the luminous intricacy of hills and streams unfold forms that order the earth. We might say that this is the aesthetic pattern of Natural Process [Tao]. Above we may contemplate radiant brilliance; below we examine the latent sectioning; and in these we find the fixed positions of high and low. Thus the two basic Principles appear.

Man, endowed with the spark of spiritual nature, is added to these to form the Great Triad. Man is the flower of the Elements and the mind of Heaven and Earth. With mind, language appears, and in language, aesthetic pattern becomes manifest. This is an inherent character of Natural Process.

Yet when we go on to consider all the multiple categories of things, we find that everything, animal and vegetable, possesses aesthetic patterning. Dragon and phoenix show auspicious events in the brilliance of their design; the tiger by his brightness, the leopard by the tended lushness of his spots ever indicate a magnificence of manner. In the plastic forms and colors of the clouds, there is something which goes beyond the greatest subtlety of the master painter; nothing in the flowered splendor of the vegetation need yield to the most wondrous craft of the embroiderer. In no way are these things adorned from without; they are the way they are by their very natures. And when the vents of the forests form their lingering echoes, they are as much in harmony as the music of pipes or strings; or when tones are stirred by the stones of a brook, they blend as perfectly as chimes and bells. With any form, there appears manifest sectioning [*chang* 章]; with sound emitted, there appears aesthetic pattern [*wen* 文; together, these terms constitute *wen-chang*, a "literary piece" or "literature"]. If such things, unaware, possess the radiance of many colors swelling within, how can this human vessel of mind lack its own aesthetic pattern?'

Wen, aesthetic pattern, is the outward manifestation of some latent order. From the primal configurations of Heaven and Earth down to the animals and plants, each class of phenomena manifests *wen* appropriate to its own kind. In the human, *wen's* outwardness does not appear on the physical body (which is, all in all, rather plain in comparison to nature's gaudier displays); *wen* is here manifest through the essential human characteristic, "mind" (*hsin* 心, "mind" as the seat of consciousness, thought, and emotion). The outward, manifest form of the activities of

"mind" is "writing," *wen*—or in its essential form, "literature," *wen*. (A distinction can be made between "writing" and "literature" by compounding *wen* with another character, but alone, *wen* comprehends both.) As "the mind of Heaven and Earth" 天地之心, the human is the only creature with reflective consciousness, but the phrase also suggests that man serves the function of "mind" in the cosmic "body." All phenomena have an inherent tendency to become manifest in *wen*, and their manifestation is for the sake of being known and felt; only the human mind is capable of itself knowing and feeling, and of that process, literature is the outward manifest form. Literature thus stands as the entelechy, the fully realized form, of a universal process of manifestation.

In the passage above from the opening chapter of Liu Hsieh's general survey of the literary art, literature is granted a special privilege over the visual arts.⁸ In failing to attain the degree of intricacy and complexity of visible nature, the visual arts are set in a mimetic relation to nature (whether the painter or embroiderer is in fact trying to imitate nature is less significant than the judgement of their work by the criterion of its approximation to nature's intricacy).⁹ Insofar as the visual arts merely imitate nature's *wen*, they are subject to the Platonic critique of art as a secondary (or tertiary) phenomenon. But in this formulation literature is not truly mimetic: rather it is the final stage in a process of manifestation; and the writer, instead of "re-presenting" the outer world, is in fact only the medium for this last phase of the world's coming-to-be.

Not only does a particular instance of literature emerge naturally from the conjunction of a particular aspect of the world and a particular human consciousness, the written language (*wen*), in which the conjunction becomes manifest, is itself natural. Directly after the passage quoted above, Liu Hsieh traces the origins of writing: its primary forms are the trigrams and hexagrams of the *Book of Changes*, the most basic schematizations of pattern. Writing is not constituted of arbitrary signs, created by historical evolution or divine authority; writing appears from observing the world.

Concepts of imitation, representation, or even expression can never entirely free literature from its status as a secondary phenomenon, later and less than some "original" (in the case of expression, the "original" is a state of mind). Western theories of literature are the children of the Platonic critique, and though they rebel and marry into less tainted lines, they cannot escape their ancestry. If the "originals" belong to this sensible world, the deficiencies and deviations of the imitation are all too apparent. To escape the foredoomed failure, a most ingenious revision was devised: the "original" was displaced out of this world and became a hidden Something Else to which the poem gives unique access. By this strange inversion, the "original" significance becomes epistemologically contingent on the secondary representation. The history of Western literary thought develops in a melancholy competition between determining representation and a determining but hidden "original" content. Each lineage takes its turn in partial dominance. And our art of reading is founded upon these shifting ratios in the power of word versus the "truth beyond language."

But if literature (*wen*) is the entelechy of a previously unrealized pattern, and if the written word (*wen*) is not a sign but a schematization, then there can be no competition for dominance. Each level of *wen*, that of the world and that of the poem, is valid only in its own correlative realm; and the poem, the final outward form, is a stage of fullness.

The process of manifestation must begin in the external world, which has priority without primacy. As latent pattern follows its innate disposition to become manifest, passing from world to mind to literature, a theory of sympathetic resonance is involved. Again Liu Hsieh:

Springs and autumns follow on in succession, with the brooding gloom of dark Yin and the easeful brightness of Yang. And as the bright countenances of physical things are impelled in their cycles, so the affective capability of mind [*hsin*] too is shaken. When the Yang force sprouts in the darkness of the twelfth month, the black ant scurries to its

hole; and when the Yin begins to coalesce, the mantis feasts. It touches the responses of even the tiniest insects: the four seasons impel things deeply. . . . All the bright countenances of things call to one another, and how amid all this may man find stillness?

When spring appears with the incoming year, feelings of delight and ease spread; in the billowing luxuriousness of early summer, the mind too swells with happiness. And when autumn's skies are high and the animating air takes on a chill clarity, our thoughts, sunken in the darkness of Yin, touch on far things; then frost and snow spread over limitless space, and brooding deepens, grim and stern. The year has its physical things, and these things have their countenances; by these things our emotions are shifted, and from emotions language comes. The fall of a solitary leaf finds its place in our understanding [and we know that autumn is coming]; in the voices of insects we find something capable of drawing forth the mind. And how much stronger than these merely partial evidences would be cool winds and a bright moon, together on the same night; or radiant sunlight and spring groves in the same morning? When poets are stirred by physical things, the categorical associations are endless. They forget themselves in their wanderings through the configurations of phenomena, even to their limit, and with deep seriousness they sing out the minutiae of what they see and hear. They sketch the animate spirit and delineate outward appearance, as they themselves are rolled round and round with the course of things; they apply the right palate of colors, match correlate sounds, and linger on about things with their minds.¹⁰

Though rational and conscious of the world, the human is also a part of the natural world, linked to it by those same patterns of resonance that impel all creatures in their cycles. Liu Hsieh here speaks primarily of the cyclical dimensions of resonance and the gross patterns of seasonal change, but the same resonance will emanate from the finer and more subtle aspects of the "bright countenances of physical things"—the interaction between a

blade of grass and the breeze, the opposition of the flux of the river and shore's stability. The mind of the poet is "rolled round and round with the course of things": he is both in the physical world and at the same time aware of being caught up in it. The poet is the passive scientist of the natural order through whom its empirical principles are made manifest.

Being of the world's stuff, we not only share in its fluctuations, we also know its sequences and replications. Liu Hsieh speaks also of the capacity for categorical association: each thing and event of the world is the fragment of a coherent whole, and knowledge of the whole unfolds out of the fragment. To see a single leaf fall is to know autumn; to know autumn is to know its correlatives in the cycle of human life, in the dynastic cycle, in all domains of reference. To see a single blade of grass bending is to know a faint breeze; to feel a faint breeze is to know that the thin blades of grass are bending. Association is endless: it spreads horizontally, filling in the relations between things in the scene at hand; it rises in vertical resonance through correlative frames of reference. This process lingers after the words of the text are over: "When the bright countenances of physical things are gone, the response still lingers on—this is perfect understanding."¹¹

Liu Hsieh's "lingering response" became an enduring theme of Chinese literary theory, richly varied and elaborated in later ages: at its best, poetry continues after the text. The text, the entelechy of one process, is only the beginning of another living process in the mind of the reader.

星	垂	平	野	闊
stars	hang	level	wilderness	broad
月	湧	大	江	流
moon	gush/bubble	great	river	flow

Stars hang down on the breadth of the plain,
The moon gushes in the great river's current.

Space grows, and with its increase, the viewer's dimensions shrink; the eye runs from the slender blades of grass, unseen, up

to the looming mast, then out and up further, to the full breadth and height of the night scene. There the eye meets repetition of the pattern observed on earth: grasses firmly rooted and stars securely hung, tending downward as the blades of grass are bent down. Many stars securely tied; one moon fallen, fallen as a reflection in the river where its light is cast about and shattered by the waves. The tiny entities rooted below and those strung above are set against one mast waving precariously over the water, then one moon fallen down, into the water. One great light is at the mercy of the fluid shapings of the river's surface, shattered; many lesser lights remain secure and whole.

The first line of the couplet is composed of two unsubordinated segments; set together, the segments act upon one another and intrude upon the poet's and reader's mind. The two lines of the first couplet form parallels and oppositions, generating ever more associations, increasingly complex relations. Then we have two couplets, matching one set of oppositions by a correlative set of oppositions, defining change and entering a wider frame of reference.

The oppositions becoming manifest in the world find resonance in the mind of the solitary poet, traveling by night on the river; they fix his attention and echo his insecurity, his constant movement, his sense of isolation, his pride in his uniqueness and superiority. But at the same time that he feels the resonance with the great, endangered "ones" of the riverscape, his own dimensions are shrinking in the widening scope of his vision, and he becomes a smaller and smaller point in the immensity of the night scene.

We begin with "things" set side by side to act upon one another; the repetition of certain patterns of opposition makes those patterns manifest, visible to both the poet and the reader. We may read this process as an omen which the outer world offers; we may understand it as the poet's compulsion to notice, the scar of his private pain. In either case,

伊茲文之爲用 固衆理之所因

The true function of literature/*wen* is to be the means by which all inherent order may come through.¹²

Literature is a gate for the latent and inarticulate to become manifest. The poem is not simply the manifest state of the world's inherent order; its movement is the process of that order *becoming* manifest.

The oppositions in the physical scene may set up resonances in the realm of the poet's life:

名	豈	文	章	著
name/fame	how	literary writings		manifest?
官	應	老	病	休
office	surely must	old	sick	quit

My name shall not be known from my writing,
Sick, growing old, I must yield up my post.

As before, one confronts many; here it seeks recognition; the separation cannot be overcome and a greater falling away threatens. The present does not know me; the future will not remember me; I must yield up even my minor post. There will be no place for me either in literature or in history, which together are the collective recognition and memory of our civilization. A precariously swaying mast, a fallen moon, a forgotten poet—all are things that rest upon the river and are subject to its flux.

But a poem is an act of making manifest what is overlooked, lost, hidden; and this poem, through which the poet becomes aware of his isolation and a falling away from others, makes that very truth manifest to others. The literary work

Passes thousands of miles, no impediment,

恢萬里而無闕

Spans a million years, a way across them;

通億載而為津

Hands down models to coming generations,

俯貽則於來葉

Gives us images to consider from men past.¹³

仰觀象乎古人

A poem is the manifest form of the mind's activities, and this manifestation is, in its turn, directed to other minds. Tu Fu's poem strikes out at the barrier between others and the self which is falling away from them: in its genesis the poem strives to overcome the very order of the world it perceives. The poem begins with the private and particular and moves to things manifest and shared.

飄	飄	何	所	似
fluttering	wind-tossed	what	be resembled to	
天	地	一	沙	鷗
Heaven	Earth	one	sand	gull

Wind-tossed and fluttering—what is my likeness?
In Heaven and Earth, a single gull of the sands.

After observing a series of *correlatives* for the self, the poet makes a true *analogy* in the simile of the gull. Metaphor (or simile) is not essential to a poetry that writes what the poet sees, thinks, and feels; the metaphor is no more than one action of the mind among others. But in this particular poem the formation of a simile is a resolution and escape from the oppressive repetition of the pattern noticed everywhere in the visible world—one separated from many. The very form of a simile admits the possibility of essential likeness in things which are different: there is something that may be shared across the barriers of identity. Simile makes kinship possible, and in the gull the poet finds true kin.

Here is the bird which both is and is not the man. As a human is the third term joined with Heaven and Earth in the Great Triad, so this creature is also the third, belonging neither to the heavens, where the stars hang securely, nor to the earth, where the grasses are firmly rooted; it is a creature of the river, a creature moving from element to element, forever in-between. Like the slender blades of grass, the bird is tossed by the winds; yet it does not bend; it soars with or against the wind, frail and unattached but somehow resilient. The immensity of the perspec-

tive—Heaven and Earth—diminishes the small creature to a tineness, but its solitary dominion over the vast emptiness (Heaven, Earth, and one bird) grants it a unique interest and importance. The poet has stopped his outward gaze into the world to read the omens of one separated from the many; the many have disappeared, and all that remains is the poet confronting his parallel identity.

Digression: Counterstatement Exposing the Motives of the Correlative Cosmos

The world has no inherent order of correlatives and transformations. The illusion of such order is no more than the projection of a human mind. And in the human mind no system of order is innate; systems of order are learned and taught; neither of those processes is disinterested. Behind every system of ordering the world lie the potent motivations of economic and social realities. Furthermore, when these true motivations are kept carefully concealed, we know that the powers which sponsor the system cannot bear the exposure of its motivations.

There is a complicity between Chinese classical literature and the imperial system. The complicity is obvious in the public face of that literature, speaking for the imperial system and supported by it. But the values of the unified empire are no less present in ostensibly private poetry and prose. Consider the T'ang Dynasty (618-907), the period which most later readers saw as the height of classical poetry: during the T'ang, poetry was composed and read only by a small segment of imperial society. Poetry did not even belong to an entire class—only to those propertied families that had some tie to the central government. And even in that small minority of a single class, poetry presents us with neither a full nor even an adequate picture of their lives and experiences: poetry portrays them in only one attitude, their faces turned toward the central government. It is a poetry that promises to make experience manifest, but in fact it speaks only for the approval of the ruling powers. The force of their ap-

proval shapes poetry into no more than an instrument of the central government in its eternal struggle with local interests.

There is no question that the great efflorescence of poetry in the eighth century was linked to its introduction into the *chin-shih* examination. Only afterwards did poetry spread to a truly broad range of social occasions and private situations. Poetry's dominant public modes were petition and apology—seeking office or explaining the motives and reasons for being out of office in terms acceptable to the central government. Poetry's dominant "private" mode was self-definition—obsessively trying to place the self in the orderly imperial cosmos.

Expose poetry even more harshly: a poem was a symbolic act of loyalty to the central government. For this reason and for this reason alone, the composition of poetry was used as a means to qualify prospective officials in the *chin-shih* examination. This is a most peculiar way to choose civil servants; qualification for public service should reasonably demand some test of administrative competence, intelligence, or experience. If skill in poetic composition to a set topic qualified a person to serve, then there must have been something in that ability which answered the government's needs more perfectly than competence, intelligence, or experience. If the poem in no way proved the candidate's capacity to serve the people, then perhaps it proved something in the other direction—concerning the candidate's adherence and loyalty to the central government.

Qualification by such an elaborate act of literary obeisance must imply a potent sense of threat and concern for the candidate's loyalty. Who is put to this peculiar test? For those whose family interests are already inextricably bound up with those of the ruling dynasty, service is open by hereditary privilege and other means of recommendation. The examination in poetry is used primarily to draw outsiders—sons of collateral branches of great families, sons of lower provincial officials, sons of independent propertied families—into the imperial system. For such candidates with independent family interests, some proof might be required to show that they possessed or could adopt the point of view of the central government and could conceive of the world in its authorized terms.

Within the highly circumscribed rhetorical moves of examination verse are found the formal embodiments of the imperial ideology—the politically legitimate sentiments, the attention to only the authorized aspects of the outer world, the parallelism and rules of rhetorical amplification which teach that all objects and events belong in a system of received relations. In other poetry the rigid rules of examination verse seem to be relaxed, but this liberation is only illusory: beneath the surface all the proprieties are either observed or denied in acceptable ways. Poetry becomes an extension of the Confucian doctrine of *cheng-ming* 正名, "calling things by their 'proper' names": it gives politically acceptable words by which to comprehend and express the darker motions of the human spirit.

A poem does not simply say "I am loyal"; such a statement too-openly acknowledges the dangerous alternative. Instead, the poem demonstrates a thorough assimilation of the correlative cosmology on which the government's authority, even its justification to exist, is founded. The imperial ideology appears in poetry in many guises. Most obvious are the inviolable taboos that surround the domain of poetic discourse. All such taboos involve interests which might conflict with those of the central government—ties of family and clan, sexual passion, personal hatreds, private economic interests. Such dangerous interests existed; rather, it is inconceivable that they did not exist, even though they appear only in fragmentary hints through the filter of T'ang writing. To neutralize the power of those interests, the government sponsored in poetry and prose a set of substitutions, of alterative intellectual terms in which to understand disruptive desires. One who could use these authorized terms, who could use them as if they inhered naturally in the world, proved himself capable of transcending dangerous private interests and was thus qualified to serve the state.

Begin with poetry expressing "private" values, where the need for a submissive acknowledgement of the government's authority is most acute. Why is there so much poetry of "reclusion" in the T'ang? Why did the government and its high officials look so fondly on "recluses"? Reclusion is a theme in poetry and prose, constituted of a set of terms, values, and images; these frame a

certain attitude and life situation which roughly corresponds to Western "reclusion." But is the concept of reclusion consonant with the historical realities to which the term is applied?

An official under the pressure of work or attacked by enemies may long for "reclusion." A "recluse" may present himself in the capital and form social connections in hopes of being recruited for service. Dismissed from office or failing to gain office, a poet may extol a life of "reclusion." In addition there *were* a handful of sincere misanthropes who wanted nothing to do with human society; a few of those even wrote some poetry: to such the term "reclusion" properly applies. But between contented service in public office and misanthropy lies a vast range of situations and attitudes. Poetry admits only an "either/or" (the desire to serve or the desire to avoid human society); it overlooks that vast intermediate range, and the oversight is a good indication of the kinds of social ties which the sponsoring powers did not want considered.

The language of reclusion was applied to any period in a person's life when that person was not directly involved in the central government. This included all forms of life as a private citizen—living off the income of family estates and property, travels to do business for the family, etc. To name such normal activities "reclusion" was to set them in a negative relation to state service; "reclusion" transformed all motives for not serving the state into a purely personal inclination, and it severed any significant connection with local economic and political interests. The authorized theme of "reclusion" effectively kept a person from affirming the priority of any social organization other than the central government. In the poetic ideology there were only two situations a person could conceivably desire—to serve the central government or to live as a "recluse," a private alternative to state service in which one found "peace of mind."

For other interests and passions, too, the poet must resort to silence or to trivializing substitutions. For sexual passion, substitute a bland sensuality, as in observing dancing girls at a party. If, as seems to be the case in the poetry of Li Shang-yin, the passion is overwhelming, cloak it so hermetically that it can be taken as political allegory. For the bitter hatred of private feuds,

substitute "slander," acknowledging the subordination of both enemies to a higher (though easily misled) authority. The language is Statethink, new words to emasculate all threats to the central order.

But these are only words; the state's complicity in the poetic cosmos goes still deeper. The intellectual system which gives meaning to the world is reinforced and supported by the central government. Private interests, family interests, and local interests always constituted the primary threat to the central government, the greatest potential source of conflicting loyalties. Such threats may be met more or less successfully, but they never disappear. To subordinate local and family loyalty to loyalty to the central government requires a faith in hierarchical correlatives, not as a mere poetic device but as an inherent structure of the universe: my loyalty to the emperor is the correlative of my loyalty to clan and father, but on a higher level. The legitimacy of this simple analogical operation rests on the universal and absolute validity of correlation as the structural principle of the cosmos. Correlative links cannot be seen to come simply from the state's needs: they must be *believed*. As a symbolic act of loyalty to the state, the poem affirms this principle of order and makes it manifest. The parallel couplet, the structured description of a landscape, the presumption of meaning incarnate in the world—all these formal patterns and conventions of figuration carry the secret message, "I believe in the universal and eternal validity of the cosmic-imperial system."

Someone asked me about this.

I said: This is nothing more than an unkind context, attempting to diminish poetry by "exposing" its "true" motives. Our affection for poetry is not so fragile that it can be turned to contempt by the sly rhetoric of exposure. But if we look behind the rhetorical posture, there are principles here with which we may agree: one function of poetry is indeed *hua* 化, "to transform and civilize," 變其視聽 "to change the way

people see and hear things."¹⁴ If we choose to look to the relation between a literature and its society, we can hardly be surprised to discover that they support each other. If we choose to construe that mutual support as literature reinforcing the values of a society, we will find that too. But to "expose" that relation creates the illusion that it is the sole determinate force in what is, in fact, an open and complex interaction between a literature and its society. The parts of a civilization are a living whole: even an art that promises autonomy and independence of social motives serves a social need for some realm of experience apparently free of social motive, and thus finds itself impelled by a negative social motive.

Someone asked: Is it true that Chinese poetry avoids all social and private interests that conflict with the interests of the central government?

I said: In general, yes. But the significance is more complex than the interlocutor of the Digression allows. Consider, for example, a poem thanking a semi-independent military satrap for his patronage: the warlord will be lauded as the staunchest upholder of the imperial throne. A poem in which the "recluse" returns to the georgic bliss of his farm probably conceals shrewd land transactions, the appointment of a third cousin as overseer, and a strict watch kept on lazy fieldhands. Poetry does indeed tend to reduce a wide range of circumstance to an "either/or" of reclusion or state service. However, the true question is whether the "either/or" served the interests of the state by silencing alternatives or whether all finer distinctions simply faded before the larger opposition that was of paramount concern to the civilization as a whole—social responsibility or freedom from it.

It is impossible to say whether the state justified itself by the correlative cosmology implicit in poetry or whether the state was itself shaped by the cosmological model, received from the past. The model was received, learned with the written language; and when someone wanted to speak of justifiable

social responsibility, the terms of the imperial state were the only terms available. Thus to praise one's military patron as the most loyal servitor of the imperial throne (rather than as "the toughest warrior east of Lo-yang") might be less an act of support for the central government than an appeal to the only values which could comprehend service to a warlord. To speak of serene reclusion in the canny management of the family estate may be no more than recovering from the experience what is comprehensible and valuable. Can we truly say that the state demands its servants to express their experiences in terms of those values? Can an institution, independent of the people who fill it, be said to possess such precise, Machiavellian instincts? We should not underestimate the productive power of an intellectual tradition to shape both institutions and individual values through the terms it provides.

Someone asked: By constantly linking individual, particular experience to larger patterns of order, doesn't poetry strip experience of its intensity? Even if this process does not come from the state's desire to erase dangerous private passions, isn't it still frighteningly Apollonian? Framed by the magnitude of the cosmic order, all joy, rage, and passion mellow into ephemeral manifestations of immutable pattern. Where are the flytings and harsh satires of Western poetry, the poems of passion, the devotional poems, the ecstatic drinking poems?

I said: I could answer you with a series of Li's—Li Po, Li Ho, and Li Shang-yin. I could quote you dozens and dozens of examples to show you that such poetry does indeed exist. But in general, you are correct: there is a pervasive moderation, and where there is no moderation, there is repression—some things must not be said. But consider—the peculiar intensities of experience will never leave the human species: they were known by the poets and will be known by the readers of the poets. More important, the readers know that the poets themselves knew those intensities. In the best poetry the readers do

not see mere mellowness but the winning of a mellowness out of frenzy; they see not only the surface of a repression but the power of the danger that called for such repression. Everywhere you are disturbed by the discontinuity between chaotic humanity and poetry's order and values. Your error is in seeing only the order and values, as if the poem were merely a textbook of ethics, government, or cosmic science. The poem is not mere order and value; it is a strenuous process of discovering and asserting order and value. The poem lies in the space between the chaotic and inarticulate realities of human experience and a hard-won ordering.

Back from the Digression: Propositions

1. In the Chinese literary tradition, a poem is usually presumed to be nonfictional: its statements are taken as strictly true. Meaning is not discovered by a metaphorical operation in which the words of the text point to Something Else. Instead, the empirical world signifies for the poet, and the poem makes that event manifest.
2. Significance can appear in the forms of the sensible world through the presumption of a correlative structure of the universe. This presumption does not belong to literature alone, but rather it is central to the entire intellectual tradition, including the state.
3. Significance and pattern are latent in the world. The poet's consciousness and the poem are means by which latent significance and pattern become manifest.
4. The crossing of analogical levels is based on the principle of sympathetic resonance and categorical association. These are conceived as a process, one which, at its best, outlasts the reading of the text.
5. Although the poet sometimes interprets the significance of a scene explicitly, more often he simply orders the patterns of his experience and responds to it, leaving to the reader the greater part of the process of association.

Tu Fu

Facing the Snow

對雪¹⁵

戰 battle	哭 weep	多 many	新 new	鬼 ghosts
愁 sad/ sorrow	吟 recite/ groan	獨 lone	老 old	翁 aged man
亂 disorderly/ rebel	雲 clouds	低 lower	薄 thin	暮 sundown
急 urgent/ swift	雪 snow	舞 dance	迴 return	風 whirlwind
瓢 ladle	棄 cast aside	尊 cup	無 is no	綠 dark green
爐 brazier	存 endure	火 fire	似 resemble	紅 red
數 several	州 prefectures	消 news	息 cut off	斷 cut
愁 sad	坐 sit	正 just now	書 write words	空 emptiness

Weeping of battle, many fresh ghosts,
 Sadly chanting a poem, a lone old man.
 Riotous clouds lower in sunset,
 Swift, urgent snow dances in whirlwinds.
 The dipper tossed aside, no rich color in the cup,
 The brazier lasts on, its fire seems a red.
 From several provinces news has been cut off—
 I sit in sorrow just now tracing words in the air.

The time was the winter of 756. The northeastern armies under the command of the Sogdian general An Lu-shan had revolted against imperial authority and marched on the capital.

The emperor Hsüan-tsung fled to the west, and Tu Fu was trapped in the fallen capital, unable to make his way through enemy lines to reach the T'ang forces. On November 17, the flower of the imperial army, under the inept command of the minister Fang Kuan, had tried to stop the advance of the rebel armies at Ch'en-t'ao, west of the capital, and had been disastrously defeated. The remnants of those forces rallied and joined with fresh imperial reserves to meet the rebels again a few days later at Ch'ing-fan, where the loyalists were again put to rout. In the winter of the year, with loyalist fortunes at low ebb, Tu Fu, still trapped in the capital, sat facing the snow.

"Weeping of battle, many fresh ghosts, / Sadly chanting a poem, a lone old man"—English forces us to make choices here, to limit and exclude some of the possibilities left open in the Chinese text: in the undefined relation between "weeping" and "battle," the perplexing "of" helps us defer comprehension. We do not know if this weeping is for all battles, or for the battles that have been fought this past year, or for this last, most recent battle. Nor do we know who is weeping—the ghosts, the poet, or people in general, weeping for recent ghosts. And the Chinese text generously admits possibilities which are lost in even the vaguest translation—a transitive weeping in which this battle brings the newly dead to tears, as sorrow drives the old man to compose. Amid this uncertainty of events with indeterminate contexts, the rules of punctuation ask that we lift the comma from its steadfast, imaginary line at the bottom of words and flatten it to hold the two halves of the line apart: weeping of battle—many fresh ghosts. Weeping there is, and weeping is to be expected—so many recent dead to stir tears in their comrades, both those left living and the "old ghosts," fallen in earlier battles—recent dead who bring tears to their families in the capital and drive the poet to weep and write of their weeping. It is a general weeping, a "battle-weeping," *chan-k'u* 戰哭, two terms set side by side to show us that battle and weeping come together in too many ways.

What makes them weep most—that there was a battle, that so many have fallen, that the battle was lost? Out of the battle have

come "many fresh ghosts," weeping themselves and wept for by all. A "fresh ghost" is a "new ghost," *hsin-kuei* 新鬼, and though all ghosts must at some time be "new," they are best made from old bodies and not from the bodies of young men, "youth of the best families whose blood is the water in the marshes of Ch'en-t'ao."¹⁶

The poet sits staring out the window towards the west at sunset, facing the snow: where in the scene are these new dead? Does he simply assume their presence, out there beyond his field of vision on the fields of Ch'en-t'ao and Ch'ing-fan? Does he seem to hear them weeping in the winds of the growing storm? Or perhaps, just perhaps, does he see them here too, as shapes in the whirling snow?

He makes a poem, an old man lamenting the young: one alive and alone inside, many youthful dead out there. He repeats his oldness—an "old, aged man," *lao-weng* 老翁—as though emphasizing the incongruity: the young should be lamenting the old, many should lament a single death—it should not be like this.

The title gives a pattern of opposition, "Facing the Snow": something out there and a self in here confronting the outer world. The first couplet allows one line to each term of the opposition: out there are the dead; in here, the old poet reciting his poem. The second and third couplets develop one term each: the second couplet considers the snow scene; the third couplet looks in to the objects of the room. Then in the final couplet, inside and outside draw closer together for the last confrontation at the impermeable barrier on which the poet writes his invisible message.

Out there, "riotous clouds lower in sunset"—*luan* 亂 clouds, "riotous," "rebellious," "disorderly" clouds, as though in the tumult of cloud were appearing configurations of the empire's fate and the vague shapes of physical battle. But only perhaps this is so, as perhaps there are ghosts in the snow. The clouds are not metaphors, not symbols, but what is seen out there in the sunset; they pour snow in front of the poet's window, and if they seem metaphorical or symbolic, it is just a hint of delusion in the

poet's mind, so shaken by "weeping of battle." Down these clouds come in the west, from out where Ch'en-t'ao and Ch'ing-fan lie, darkening still more this scene already darkening with evening—clouds closing off the horizon, closing off the vista, enclosing a poet already enclosed in his room, facing the snow.

What kind of snow is falling?—*chi* 急 snow, a "swift and urgent" snow that moves with the "alarums" 急 of war, with the "hard-pressed" 急 advance of levies to the front; troops moving hastily, snow driven whirling in the wind—the hidden pattern of battle and dissolution. It is coming toward him: from the battlefields out beyond the horizon, to the tumult of cloud pressing down at the horizon, to the frenzied swirls of wind-driven snow before the window, disintegration and disorder are closing in upon the poet, advancing on the barrier across which he faces the snow.

It is the darkness of winter and winter's cold, the lowest point in the cycle of the seasons, when black Yin is dominant and mastered Yang flickers in the center, like a red fire in the brazier in the darkening night. It is the coldest time of the year, when men inside facing the snow need the warmth of wine and the forgetfulness of sorrow it brings. The wine is gone, the ladle cast aside, the purplish green lees are drained from the goblet. Something is gone; something endures: nothing is left of wine's forgetfulness, but some of its warmth remains in the fire of the brazier, a tiny spot of heat and color at the very center of the night.

All things converge upon this point of light. Here the poet is, and here, the barrier across which the poet faces the snow. This is the interface between darkness and light, between cold and warmth, between the bright red color of coming spring flowers and the grappling of black and white, Yin and Yang, in the night snow. Here is the point where the observing self meets the disintegrating world outside. Nothing comes in through the barrier: news is cut off, no communication, fragments of the empire fall away. And nothing goes out over the barrier: no way to find out what is happening there, no way to send a message of counsel to our armies—"hold on, wait till next year, don't be in a hurry."¹⁷ This is not the season for action; the light is still small now.

Spring and the next year promise change of fortunes, the light's dominion: "wait till next year."

There is a structural interface in the poem as well, an interface across which the poet looks out on the world and speaks to it. The thematic opposition in the poem between "inside" and "outside" corresponds to the essential structure of the Chinese lyric. So many poems were built upon the movement between exterior "world" and interior "response" that in later poetics it came to define the largest structural subclass of the Chinese lyric. The "lone old man" of the first couplet is the self seen as object, belonging to the outer world; the gesture of the last line is the true, first-person response to the experience of the preceding lines. The moving focus of the poem—from the horizon, to the window, to the room, to within the poet—belongs to a more general poetic process of internalizing. The response in "Facing the Snow" is problematic, speaking to the structure of the lyric as well as to the disintegration of cosmos and empire: it is an intense gesture of response which fails, which does not "come out" to cross the boundaries and touch the world. We cannot read the message he writes: we read only the intensity with which the message is given.

Watching from outside, we know the emotion but not the content that the emotion fills. If the poem is an act of setting the self in relation to the world, then it will be the emotions, the most emphatically interior aspect of the self, which represent inner life. The movement from outer world to emotion defines the vector toward manifest, articulate meaning in the lyric. The poet perceives meaning latent in the world but usually suppresses direct interpretation of it. Instead, he makes his comprehension internal by "responding" to the external truth he sees. That act of suppression is the rule of enigma: like the unreadable message written in air, enigma generates the energy of concealment which asks the reader to understand the poem. We readers perceive what he perceives; we know what he feels; between those two certainties, we try to penetrate the barrier of the self and know what he knows. As in the metaphorical mode of

Western reading, manifest understanding is a goal that is eternally deferred: it lies at the end of an endless process of association and correlation that occurs in the reader's mind.

Response, which makes the significance of what has been perceived internal to the poet, also engages a principle of sympathetic resonance in the reader. "Being stirred," *kan* 感, comes from reading, reciting, and hearing poetry: we readers also belong in that universe whose seasons touch the things of the world and the minds of poets. As we move toward articulate meaning, sympathetic resonance promises us that we will feel what the poet feels: the significance of experience will be internal and not a mere object of reflection. As we are drawn to learning "what" a manifest experience means, we are to instinctively be aware of "how" it means.

" Further Digression: Counterstatement on Self-dramatization

It is an illusion, of course. To assume that the poem embodies an experience of the world in historical time is a charming illusion, but an illusion nevertheless. The truth is well known and firm in our certainty: when the poet's self writes of an experience, that self is already distant from the experience. For this always later, retrospective self, the self of the creative artist, the experience of which he writes is irrevocably past. He has been changed by it; he is different from what he was while he was "in" the experience.

The act of writing a poem is no innocent and spontaneous production of a correlative for experience. The writing has its own ends, which lie entirely outside the experience. A poem is directed to a reader: words must be given form according to the laws of literature and representation, not according to the laws of the physical universe. Poets write couplets; nature does not. The poem is—unfortunately, but necessarily—an artficed construct. The poems we have read are distinguished by being artifacts which aspire to cast the *illusion* of immediate experience of the world.

These poems are carefully staged little dramas in which the stage surrounds not a group of actors but the consciousness of one actor. It is an interior drama which, in a remarkable way, offers you the best seat in the actor's mind. You may see what the actor sees, hear what the actor hears, perhaps even be brought to feel some semblance of the emotions which the actor evokes—but such artistic successes do not change the truth that the actor is no more than an actor, a simulacrum and not a person inhabiting a living world. You are the audience within; but outside both the actor and your field of vision stands the stage director, our poet, manipulating this simulacrum of an anterior self: "Look now on the horizon, now at the snow before your window, now at the ladle cast down—that's a nice touch!" It is a great and very special kind of drama, but the only difference between this and Western drama lies in the peculiar demand that the audience believe that the drama's actions are real and occurring right now. It is quite possible that something similar to the events of the poem did indeed once happen; but this matters not at all—the poem is a "reenactment," carefully staged and from a distance.

Someone asked me about this.

I said: I expected it—he always thinks of things like this. But I hope you realize that he has it all backwards. The creative artist is a charming illusion, obsessively bringing forth experiences time and again, while defensively disguising them and pretending to be in full control of his "creations." Nevertheless, both truths about the "real" status of the poet are irrelevant. Our interest lies in how the poem is to be taken, not in whether the way the reader takes it is an accurate or adequate reflection of the poetic act.

But so as not to seem evasive, I'll try to respond on the level to which our contentious interlocutor wishes to speak—the creative act itself. Even here his arguments about self-dramatization are not a true critique. No claim is made that the

poem is identical to the original experience; it is simply an organic correlative for it. The interlocutor would focus our attention on the productive mechanics of a poem; he locates the essentially "poetic" in the distance between the creating self and the prior historical self that had the experience. This Wordsworthian problem is central only if you grant it centrality: it was not central in the Chinese theoretical tradition, nor must it necessarily be so in a theory of poetry.

Someone answered: Always appealing to "correlation" is too easy an escape from these problems. There are serious implications in that bit of "productive mechanics." If the correlative theory were true, then the identity of the poem would be determined by the identity of the original experience. But a poet can make a vast number of poems from any given experience. I can accept that the poet may in good faith try to recreate what he *believes* to have been the original experience, but what determines the verbal form of the poem, the power of making and choice, lies in the creative poet and not in the experience.

I said: Again you force me to argue not how the poem is to be taken but how it actually is; so be it. First, I am by no means convinced that a "vast number" of poems can come from a given experience. The ability to create a variety of different versions of one experience implies that the poet is willfully *asserting* his distance from the experience, showing his power to manipulate and transform. In such a case, the poem is not about the ostensible experience at all but rather about the poet's capacity for invention. That is an interesting enough topic in itself, but it grows wearisome after a while.

But just suppose—and I am by no means convinced of it—that a "vast number" of poems can indeed come from one experience without a willful display on the poet's part of his power to manipulate. You have invoked a simple causal paradigm—one effect for one cause, one poem for one experience. I certainly never offered this model. If by "experience"

you mean the historical whole, then a number of patterns of attention and response could quite naturally grow out of it, as two or more trunks can grow out of one root. However, we would, in such poems, sense the shared ground very strongly. On the other hand, if by "experience" you mean the exact elements perceived and felt in the poem, then I cannot see how more than one poem could be written of them, for these elements are the poem.

Someone replied: Now we have tree metaphors—it is very difficult to be convinced by an argument based on tree metaphors. You are either exceptionally obtuse or stubborn. You either cannot or refuse to recognize the power of literature to shape an originating experience. How can you account for revision?

I answered: I am both obtuse and stubborn; I cannot understand these mysterious processes you speak of, unless you mean that when pre-articulate experience emerges as a poem, it becomes articulate and has the characteristics of language . . .

Someone muttered: I don't like the way this is turning out.

I continued: . . . in which case the subtlety of your observation astounds me. You seem to want to compare the seed and the tree that grows from it, saying "Look—one ceases to be when the other exists; one has branches, bark, and leaves, but the other has none!" The comparison can be made, but it is less interesting than the fact that one grew from the other, and that each belongs to a different *stage*, each stage having characteristics and a mode of being appropriate to it.

When you try to catch me up on revision, I can see the hidden presumptions of Western rhetoric in your argument—that there is some articulate "content" which is shaped into a literary form for certain ends, of persuasion or art. I cannot agree with this: the written poem is a version of nothing else

but the not-yet-written poem. You make revision the clear evidence of artistic manipulation—a peculiar thought! I think of revision as the mark of dissatisfaction: it occurs only when the poet senses something is wrong with the poem, that it is in some way inadequate. Revision is not gratuitous manipulation: the poet returns to the text for the sake of something, and I would suggest that “something” is adequate correlation. A historical distance does lie, as you noted, between the writing poet and the experiencing self: that distance is the time in which the poem “becomes.”

Someone muttered: It is impossible to hold an intelligent discussion with a person who uses tree metaphors. . . .

The world is a vast, fluctuating omenscape, and the poet is the omen-reader of the world. As portents and prodigies appear to the government, revealing the conditions of society, so the omen of the world is the true configuration of the present perceived by the poet. These omens are not prophecies (though one who knows the world's cycles may be able to read something of the future in them). They are latent marks of the governing structure of the present.

The turbulent phonetic migrations of Indo-European languages, with their hordes of prefixes, suffixes, and sound mutations, permit the uncontrolled proliferation of semantic entities which too quickly forget their ancestry. Unless the scholar reminds us, we do not take note of “literature's” link to the “letter.” But the more retentive process of compound formation in Chinese allows the creation of new semantic units, in which are embedded the older, one-syllable forms that have too many meanings. The term for “literature” in Chinese may be *wen-hsüeh* 文學 or *wen-chang* 文章, but it is also their moiety, *wen*, the “written word.”

In traditional Chinese thought we often find the same etymological impulse which leads the Western scholar to remember

"letter" in "literature." To think of the origins of literature (*wen*), we think of the origins of writing (*wen*). These origins were ultimately traced to the trigrams and hexagrams of the *Book of Changes*. Here in the disposition of broken and solid lines, the most basic situations of change are schematized. Out of these primal marks evolved all the finer distinctions of the written word.

It all began by observing the tracks made by birds: all things and events have schematic impressions. The marks of *wen* are not "signs" but outlines and impressions, evidences of what lies outside of language. In the first chapter of the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* 文心雕龍 Liu Hsieh locates the source of human *wen* in the "Configurations" or "Images" 象 of the *Book of Changes*.¹⁸ Under each hexagram in the *Book of Changes* there is a section entitled "Image"; but these written passages are not the Images themselves, rather they are the words manifesting the Images. In this difficult concept of Image, we discover the organic link between words, meaning, and the things of the world. The third-century philosopher Wang Pi explained Image thus:

An image is what brings forth concept [意]; language is what makes an image manifest [明]. Nothing accounts for concept as completely as the image, and nothing accounts for the image as completely as language. Language was generated out of image, so that we may consider the image by looking for it in language. The image originated out of the concept, so that we may consider the concept by looking for it in the image.¹⁹

An Image, such as the dragon for the primal hexagram Ch'ien, is the schematization of the thing—not the dragon you might encounter in the everyday world, but a schematized envisagement of "dragon." This Image *necessarily* mediates between words and meaning; the epistemological process seems to require it. The hexagram Ch'ien embodies a vital power and capacity for transformation, but such "meaning" appears only through the Image of the dragon. We may read words describing the dragon,

grasp the image, and come to understand the fullness of Ch'ien's significance. But to attempt to go directly from words to meaning—to talk about Ch'ien as the capacity for transformation—is somehow inadequate for the concept. Image, in turn, appears in *wen*, the marks of the written word. It is image that Tu Fu sees when he "faces the snow," and he helps the image become *wen*.

For the poet, this triad of meaning, image, and word appears upon the ground of a particular experience. Out of the sensible world images appear, fully accounting for some meaning (盡意), and asking to be made manifest (明) in words. Sometimes a poet may even perceive the Images of the hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* in a landscape, as Hsieh Ling-yün 謝靈運 (385-433) does, sailing into exile past Fu-ch'un Isle:

This night we crossed the pool of Fisherbank,

宵濟漁浦潭

And by dawn have reached the walls of Fu-ch'un,

旦及富春郭

Where Steady Mountain lies far in fog and cloud,

定山緬雲霧

Where Red Pavilion admits no mooring.

赤亭無淹泊

Up against current struck splashing swiftness,

逆流觸驚急

Came to headlands blocking, a tumult of crags.

臨圻阻參錯

.....
"Rushing water arrives where it will"—proper to be inured;

洄至宜便習

"Mountains ranged"—important to keep still, to hold on. . . .²⁰

兼山貴止託

In the landscape around Fu-ch'un, the Images appear, embodying the situation and giving silent counsel to the exile. Out there lies the Image of hexagram twenty-nine, the Gulf 坎: "rushing

water arrives (where it will)"; up there is hexagram fifty-two, Stillness 艮, "ranged mountains." For these Images the text of the *Book of Changes* teaches the proper response—endurance, stillness.

But the world is not always so easy to read, not easy for the poet and not easy for his reader. A world in which the fragmented images lead to no recognizable or unifying pattern can be a nightmare. In Tu Fu's poetry there is often such multiplicity in the possibilities of pattern and meaning that their sheer density leaves the world unintelligible and opaque, as though it lacked meaning altogether. Li Shang-yin 李商隱 (813–858) encounters worlds of hermetic and discontinuous fragments which are clues to some mystery that is never revealed. In the fragmentation he finds the correlative of a living disorientation—of dream, of madness, of passion—as he did "At Ch'ung-jang House, in the First Month of the Year" 正月崇讓宅:²¹

密 secret	鎖 lock	重 layered	關 gates	掩 close/ cover	綠 green	苔 moss
廊 (outside) corridors	深 deep	閣 high chamber	迴 far	此 this/ here	徬 pace-about-	徊 anxiously
先 before- hand	知 know	風 wind's	起 rising	月 moon	含 holds in	暈 halo
尚 still	自 of itself	露 dew	寒 cold	花 flower	未 not yet	開 open
蝙 bat	拂 brushes	簾 curtain	旌 sash	終 at last	展 toss-and-	轉 turn
鼠 rat	翻 turns over	窗 window	網 screen	小 a little	驚 startle-	猜 doubt awake
背 one's back	燈 to lamp	獨 alone	共 together- with	餘 remaining	香 scent	語 talk

不	覺	猶	歌	夜	起	來
not	aware/ awake	still	sing	"Night	Rise up	Come"

Locked away secretly, gate behind gate, closed by green moss,
Passages deep, the chamber far—here pace anxiously.

And know ahead that the wind will rise—halo close about
the moon;

The dew still cold, as it should be; the flowers not yet open.
A bat brushes the curtain sash, but at last only toss and turn;
A rat knocks over the window screen—a moment's shock,
wondering.

Now all alone, back to the lamp, speak to the fading scent,
And without knowing it, still to be singing "Rise Up Tonight
and Come."

One person alone; two might have been together, were together,
will be together, at some other place and at some other time—
but they are not together now. We guess they are lovers. The
occasional title tells us the speaker is the poet and not the
persona of a woman (though if the poem were *yüeh-fu*, it might
be otherwise). A woman (if it is a woman) is loved, but some-
where else—dead, lost, cloistered behind the tiers of gates.

It is a poem of barriers, of lockings—a series of gates in suc-
cession, at once leading to and sealing off something secret,
hidden within. The poet speaks of a secret, and he speaks of it
secretly: like the gates, the poem tells and hides, points insis-
tently to something while blocking vision. No passage—gates
covered with green moss of long time and disuse, a genital archi-
tecture that invites and forbids entrance.

Where is the poet?—inside waiting or outside these gates,
imagining someone closed within? Is he outside feeling the cold
as he stares at the moon and the unopened flowers; is he inside,
tossing in his bed, his attention going with every sound to the
openings in the room? Why is there this locking, and who lives
behind the barriers? Each moment, each scene seems to be
charged with portentous significance, but that significance is
hidden away, like the person.

Passageways around the outsides of the buildings set deep within the layers of walls, leading from room to room and to a far chamber set high. Someone is pacing back and forth, going nowhere—the poet, perhaps, pacing the corridors, perhaps pacing outside the gates, unable to enter, gazing toward the deepest corridors which lead to the far chamber. Linking passageways, a chamber to be entered, with barriers and blockages—crossing over forbidden, frustrated. But the why and the who and the where are all concealed, all part of the mystery. There is no ground of narrative space on which these links and blockages, goals and gestures, can arrange themselves and have meaning.

Set in this dreamlike puzzle of objects and movements, we try to look to the principles of cosmic order, the rules of reading, hoping in that way to piece together the fragments and find some pattern. Look to the halo around the moon; augur in it the coming of the wind, cold now in February, cold to one pacing outside the gates or circling through the outer corridors. And as the dew forms in the depths of the night—a dew which chills the person walking to the very bone—know that it is proper for this season of the year, and know that the buds of the flowers will not yet have opened, as neither the gates nor the mystery have opened.

Make all these connections, do the good reader's work, and learn nothing more than the growing chill of the night, the chill of the dew, and the coming of the wind. It is a cold that belongs to circles—of someone pacing around, thinking of the hard, round knots of the unopened buds, the icy circles of the dew, the circle of the moon with its encircling halo held tight about it, the corridors circling around the outsides of the buildings, set within ring after ring of circling walls.

Then we are in a room, surrounded by walls, anticipating an intrusion, a piercing of the barrier. There are hints, false evidence to interrupt silent desire, to tease you to suppose what is not true—illusions of entrance and someone coming in. The curtain sash stirs, the screen in the window opening falls—only a bat flying past, only a rat scurrying over. Someone is inside this room, tossing and turning, dozing off then startling awake at the least movement, expectant.

Tossing and turning, dozing and waking—could the lines before have been only a dream, a dream of a series of gates and pacing outside along the cold corridors in the February wind? Or were the lines the true events of waking life, but since that time something else has occurred—waking or in dream—which the poem passes over in silence?

There is someone awake now, the lamp at his back (or at her back—in fantasy, in memory, or in dream), casting his shadow before him as the silent companion of his talking. He speaks to shadow and fading scent, of woman or flower, the faintly lingering evidence that someone was indeed here and now has gone. Somewhere between the frustrated desire and this moment, something has been missed, passed over in silence. Except for this scent, it might have been a dream. The hard, unopened bud has blossomed, and only the fading traces of its scent remain. Again the barriers are in place: whoever it was that he or she did or did not meet, that someone is again back beyond the barriers, lost.

And amid all this, the words of a song come out unconsciously; emotions unspoken, blocked within, break out through the locking silence and give the commemoration or invocation "Tonight Rising," "Tonight Rise Up and Come," "Tonight She Rose and Came." The song, hidden emotions becoming manifest, speaks to us with passionate clarity but tells us nothing, offers no key to the mystery.

These illusions, born out of dream and passion, form a world of fragments that haunt the mind. The mind wants to seize them and penetrate the mystery, but it cannot. What has happened and what will happen remain concealed. And the song, the concluding response, manifests only bare desire, with neither the narrative nor the objects upon which the desire can come to rest.

Commentary by an unknown Taoist Master:

Truly great poetry is by nature passive; the essay is correct. The poet's mind moves with the course of things and thus the

words betray no trace of the axe and hatchet. He rests in the Way, and the poem comes of itself. In the highest craftsmanship there is no craftsmanship; the finest poetry is where there is no Poetry. No making, no forcing, no posing, no forming: the eye meets the world, and a poem emerges—this is Natural Process. Force it and it grows thinner; seek for it and it is gone; form it and it grows warped. Only when spirit, eye, and the writing hand are in perfect accord does the poem avoid becoming entangled in words—only then will the echoes linger in the mind without impediment.

Another, later commentary:

How foolish are the words of the Taoist master! To create the correlative world of the poem, the poet must act with the powers of *Continuous Creation*, *Tsao-hua* 造化. As all the myriad things were endowed with shape, so the correlative creation of a poem too must give shape and form. The poet is no passive vessel through which nature speaks; rather he is an equal power in a parallel realm. The vital intricacy of the poem requites the intricate order of Creation. This can be attested by the closing of Han Yü's 韓愈 (768–824) poem on the South Mountains 南山詩:²²

Mighty they stand between Heaven and Earth,

大哉立天地

In perfect order like the body's ducts and veins.

經紀肖營滕

Who was it first laid out their origin?

厥初孰開張

Who, in the striving and labor, urged it on,

僂俛誰勸侑

Creating in this place the simple and the artful,

創茲朴而巧

Joint efforts enduring long-suffering toil?

戮力忍勞疚

The axe and hatchet must have been used;

得非施斧斤

It could not have been done without spells, incantations.

無乃假詛呪

No traditions survive from that age of Chaos.

鴻荒竟無傳

But the deed was mighty—none can repay it.

功大莫酬儗

I have heard from the priest of the sacrifice

嘗聞於祠官

That the god descends to take the offer's scent:

芬苾降歆嗅

Finely wrought, I have made this poem

裴然作歌詩

So that I too may join in requiting him.

惟用贊報酌

Epilogue

With Li Shang-yin at Ch'ung-jang House, we are on the border of a fiction: only the thinnest line separates a fiction from delusion and dream. Fictionality may be the center of the Western literary art, but fiction-making is a human event which occurs in historical time. The poetry of dream and imagination is a border realm which pays allegiance to both the domain of fictional poetry and the referential realm of the Chinese *shih* 詩. This dual allegiance helps us to understand some of the distinctive characteristics of the Chinese lyric, the *shih*—the impulse to frame a visionary poem with the statement "I dreamed," "I imagined," "it seemed to me as if . . ." Metaphors and fictions tend to be revealed as subjective *acts*. Li Ho has a vision of the unappeased slain as he

passes over the ancient battlefield of Ch'ang-p'ing: the demonic interruption is securely located in a sublunary itinerary.

Past these fringes of the *shih* is a true fictional poetry, *yüeh-fu* 樂府, "ballads" (though the term *yüeh-fu* is sometimes applied to nonfictional poetry as well). Here conventional personae and figures from history and legend appear in a mode identical to that of their Western counterparts in poetry. But even here the power of the reading tradition of the *shih* makes the most obtuse readers yearn for some grounding biographical circumstances: the fiction is explained as a willful concealment, masking an experience so dangerous or painful that it cannot appear in the common *shih*. The mode of such reading is topical allegory, in which the surface text is only a veil whose shape is given by the historical body behind it. Fiction-making is neither divine, nor playful, nor natural, nor demanded by the essential hiddenness of Truth—fiction-making is quite the opposite, the defensive mark of pain, fear, and taboo.

TWO

TRANSPARENCIES

READING THE CHINESE LYRIC

The title of this essay, like that of the preceding, is based on a common formula in the titles of books, essays, and lectures. To name something, such as an essay on literature, is an act that reveals basic assumptions about the nature of the thing named, and a true formula of entitling is worth some consideration. The first term of the title is "transparencies"—at this stage more an opaqueness than a transparency. We read it according to the Western rules of metaphor, as a concealment and promise of significance deferred. Then there is a colon to mark simile, to control the metaphorical term by announcing a balancing half-title that will return us to the more secure world of conventional discourse on literature—"Reading the Chinese Lyric." But the metaphorical term is never entirely brought to control, and the interest of the title lies in the disjunction between the two sides of the colon, in the question raised about the relation between the two parts.

More important than the words of the title, and quite apart from whatever the content of this essay may be, the form of the title raises a question of value by engaging long-standing problems of metaphor. The construction of the formula is "X (metaphorical term): Y (longer, nonmetaphorical phrase, with strong metrical proprieties)." As a formula of entitling, its traditions can be found in the names of novels and romances, from which it spread into the domain of nonfictional discourse. The formula promises something speculative by its first term, and by its second term, it tries to reassure those who are wary of spec-

ulation. The formula tends to attract or repel readers strongly; and this question of value raised comes from the speculative, metaphorical term and from the threat posed by its escape from the domain of poetry and intrusion into the civilized world of academic discourse.

Our dismemberment of the title is not an exercise in wit: it illustrates modern codes of reading, which grow out of some of the oldest concerns of Western literary theory and hermeneutics. First, there is metaphor (in its broad sense), the primary mode of literary reading: the text does not mean what it seems to say, and its "true significance" is concealed, displaced elsewhere. The academic study of literature is devoted to stripping away the "veil of metaphor" and revealing that hidden meaning. Second, there is the illusion of "plain language," promising security against the untruth of the metaphorical term. Finally, there is an intense question of value that inclines readers to the domain of metaphor or to the domain of plain language, and often requires that a boundary be clearly marked between the two.

Rules of Reading

Within every literary civilization there are rules of reading which give form to the experience of a literary text as much as the inert elements of the text itself. It is only through such rules that a reader can know a literary text as an aesthetic event rather than as a mere document. In their creative use, these rules shape an art of reading, an instinctive and private art through which literature has its life. The rules themselves are an open and changing system, varying not only by the reading art of the individual, but more generally by the age, by the class of readers, and by the genre read. But through all their variety, there is a boundless—certain shared norms and fundamental presumptions in the process of forming meaning. These presumptions must be understood before we can consider the more specific categories (for example, period or genre) and before the rules can be raised to an individually enacted art.

Language is not only a set of conventional signs and generative rules of combination, it is also a set of instructions for use, a set of operations for understanding. The most consistent trait of literature and understanding literary language is an assumption that its processes of forming meaning differ from those of nonliterary language. The poet's assertion that his love is a red, red rose is formally identical to a nonliterary statement, but it is not understood as the admission of a rare sexual deviation. *Hamlet* is not read as a documentary source for early Danish history. The essential distinction between literary and nonliterary language lies in the different ways they are read, in the processes of forming meaning. Inevitably, literary language is read to mean something *other than* or *more than* the meaning which the same words would have in a nonliterary situation. And that strange body of texts called literature consists of those texts which have been produced for the sake of literary reading.

Different literary civilizations may presume quite different ways of moving from the text to that other, broader and deeper, significance. For all its historical and regional variety, the "West" constitutes a reasonably coherent literary civilization, with a shared body of literary texts, theoretical texts, and traditional interpretations to guide the evolution of reading's rules. China represents a different literary civilization. Each may borrow texts from the other; readers have a license to do with a text what they will. There is nothing morally odious about reading a Chinese text according to Western presumptions of literary reading, just as there is no prohibition against reading a Western literary text following the traditional Chinese art of reading. But in such exchanges we must recognize how much is changed and indeed how much is lost. Just as a text is written in a certain language, so it is also written *for* certain presuppositions about what literature is and how a literary text is to be read.

The differences between Chinese and Western modes of literary reading are centered in the related questions of metaphor and the presumed fictionality or nonfictionality of poems. Presumptions of a fictional text and of a metaphorical Truth run

throughout Western modes of literary reading. In the Chinese tradition of reading, the meaning of a poem as a whole is usually not taken as metaphorical (except in a limited number of subgenres). And within a poem, an image will be read as metaphorical only if generic codes encourage it and if the metaphorical reading is supported by a tradition of similar use of that particular image.¹ But the reader's first allegiance is to direct presentation of the physical world: when there is a "blossom-fragrance-stream" 芳泉 in an occasional poem, the reader understands a real stream filled with the scent of fallen blossoms rather than a metaphorical "stream" of fragrance blowing through the air.

The tendency to avoid metaphorical reading (except in a limited number of generic cases) is linked to the traditional Chinese reader's presumption that most *shih* subgenres were nonfictional. Poems were read as describing historical moments and scenes actually present to the historical poet. In contrast, "Ode to the West Wind" may have been occasioned by an actual experience of Shelley's, but the particularity of that historical experience is not essentially relevant in modern Western modes of literary reading.² Every reader knows, as Shelley himself knew, that a poet had license to add, subtract, and alter details of the occasioning experience. Whatever the experiential origins of the poem, the text is taken as a fiction, and its Truth is a metaphorical rather than a historical truth.

The traditional Chinese reader had faith that poems were authentic presentations of historical experience. Poets wrote, as readers read, under those assumptions. No one felt uncomfortable in constructing biographical chronologies from poems or in using poems as direct sources for cultural history. We speak here of the inclinations of readers and of a poet's anticipation of those inclinations: the actual truth or untruth of poems, authentic presentation or manipulation for art's strange motives, is not in question—these, in fact, are usually beyond recovery. Now and then, in a poem pretending to present authentic historical experience, a Chinese poet may include some geographical or historical improbability: the distress of commentators on such occasions is a mark of the reader's assumptions thwarted.

Linguistic Adequacy and Inadequacy: The Relation between Language and the World

Both traditional China and the West share the most basic principle of literary reading: the literary text is inadequately known as "plain language." The reader comes to the text with a distrust of language's usual function to discriminate and limit. But this shared presumption of linguistic inadequacy is less important than the particular modes of inadequacy that differentiate the two traditions of reading. To know intuitively the mode of inadequacy is to have the means of resolution, the way to move from the inadequate "plain language" in the text to the fullness of meaning to which it points.

A concept of linguistic inadequacy will inevitably be the counterpart of a concept of adequacy, and statements of textual adequacy can be found throughout the period of the later Warring States and Han. The classic formulation of linguistic adequacy is found in the "Great Preface" of the *Book of Songs* (first century A.D., but probably current earlier):

詩者志之所之也 在心爲志 發言爲詩

The Poem [of the *Book of Songs* or a poem in general] is that to which intention goes. In the mind it is intention; coming forth in language it is a Poem.³

This not only asserts a perfectly adequate correlation between a prelinguistic interior state and a poem, it also implies a virtual transfer of substance in producing the poem. The concept of "intention" is explained etymologically as "that to which the mind goes," an "ambition" or "obsession," something on which the mind is intensely and involuntarily fixed.

From this passage, from the rest of the "Great Preface," and from other early comments on literature, we can build a hypothetical model of adequation. Nowhere is the model set forth so clearly and mechanically as below, and it should be taken as no more than a phantom model, different parts of which drew the attention of writers at different times.

	External 外	Poet: Internal 內	External	Reader: Internal
Compo- sition	世 事 age → (event)	情 感(興) 志 + emo- → being → inten- tional stirred tion/ nature obsession	詩 → poem	興 → stirring ↓
Reading				觀 reflective consid- eration ⁴

The movement from the condition of the world or of the age, through the poet, into the poem, and finally to the reader was conceived not as a series of causes and effects but as an organic process of manifestation.

Out of this process of correlative transformation grew the theory of reading, which is most clearly enunciated in the "Understander," *Chih-yin* 知音, chapter of the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung*:

夫綴文者情動而辭發 觀文者披文以入情

沿波討源雖幽必顯 世遠莫見其面覘文輒見其心

In the case of composing literature, the emotions are stirred and the words come forth; but in the case of reading, one opens the literary text and enters the emotions [of the writer], goes up against the waves to find the source; and though it be [at first] hidden, it will certainly become manifest. None may see the actual faces of a faraway age, but by viewing their writing, one may immediately see their hearts/minds.⁵

The term used here to refer to the reading process is *kuan* 觀 "observe," a combination of the visual and the contemplative, as though there were an actual experience of the occasioning situation through the reading process. The reader is the *chih-yin*, the "true friend," literally the one who "knows the tone" and thus perceives the poet's true nature through its musical/literary manifestation in art. According to Liu Hsieh, reading is

a backward movement to the "source," following in reverse order the series of operations that produced the poem.

This state of affairs would be immensely comfortable were it not for complications that arise in the relation between the text and the combination of writer and world that produced the text. This complication is inadequation, and its classic formulation is found in the *Hsi-tz'u chuan* 繫辭傳 of the *Book of Changes*: 言不盡意 "Language does not exhaust concept [or 'what was meant']."⁶ The use of "exhaust," *chin* 盡, is of central importance: linguistic expression is conceived as somehow a diminution of a prior fullness.

To the knowledgeable reader, the *chih-yin*, the diminished text presented no barrier to understanding the fullness that lay behind it. Everyone knew that Confucius's disciple Tzu-lu could "resolve disputes having heard only a fragment of a statement" 片言可以折獄者.⁷ Mencius, by his "knowledge of language" (*chih-yen* 知言), knew not only the fact of various speakers' depravities but also the precise nature of their depravities.⁸ Although language may be limited and in itself fail to exhaust what was meant, there *are* ways to go from limited language to its fuller meaning—to the essence of disputes, to the moral aberrations of one's acquaintances, or to the secret meanings of the *Book of Changes* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (a Confucian classic and chronicle of extreme terseness whose authorship was ascribed to Confucius). Precisely how the reader goes from diminished texts to broader meanings is the beginning of a hermeneutic tradition, not simply in the limited sense of interpretation, but also in the immanence of deeper significance in the reading process itself.

Reading becomes a process of restoring fullness: the text is a synecdoche for the world (not as substitution, but as diminishment and loss). It leads not to the "other" meaning of metaphorical reading and the fictional text, but to the whole of which we see only a part in the text. Restoration of fullness depends upon presumptions of a stable language with intelligible relations, and through these there are various techniques for expanding the text.

The *Hsi-tz'u chuan* suggests that expansion can be accom-

plished by "natural categories": 其稱名也小,其取類也大 "[In the *Book of Changes*] the names given [to the hexagrams?] are small, but their implications by natural category are great."⁹ Both *lei*, "natural category," and the Western concept of metaphor (closest perhaps to the Chinese *yü* 喻) are ultimately based upon analogy; however, metaphor is fictional and involves true substitution, while *lei* is a shared category that is "strictly true," based upon the order of the world. Two functions are included in *lei*, the "implication by natural category": first, a term of proposition becomes "exemplary," referring the reader to the general category of which the term or proposition is a member; second, another particular case in the same category may be called to mind.¹⁰

Another mode of extending the diminished text can be found in the Kung-yang and Ku-liang commentaries to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*: here the cryptically terse text is expanded by negative inference, an interest in what is *not* said. This leads to a concept of implicit avoidance in word choice. The duke who is not called a duke, the unmentioned succession to a throne are significant silences that indicate Confucius's evaluation of an event. The reader's attention is constantly directed to a hidden world behind the text, and the writer's sentiments and judgments are known by the relation of the text to that inferred world.

Other relations involved in expanding texts can be found in couplets eighteen to twenty-two of the *Wen-fu* 文賦, in a section on the formation of "concept," *yi* 意. As the reader reverses the process by which the text was produced, he will look for relations like these: emanation (for example, sound to the producer of sound, or vice versa), implicating causes by effects or effects by causes (described as moving the branches to shake the leaves or following the waves to find the source), or value relations of context and contiguity (in the image of the abrupt appearance of the dragon or tiger). Such contextual relations are picked up later by Liu Hsieh in the chapter "Balanced Phrasing," *Li-tz'u* 麗辭, in the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung*: 事不孤立 . . . 高下相須,自然成對 "Events do not stand isolated . . . as high and low require one another, and by their own natures

form a parallel."¹¹ This develops into the couplet writer's intense awareness that things take on value by what they are set in relation to; the swallow juxtaposed with a hawk signifies differently than the swallow juxtaposed with a mosquito.

Following these and other processes of expansion, the reader moves towards the two ends of the reading process—the poet and the world that produced the text. The proposition that the poet and the world that produced the text were the goals of the reading process is wide enough to admit a great variety of distinct interests in reading. To the historically minded reader it led to biographical criticism and the search for topical reference. At another extreme, the idea that poetry was the "out-come" of a prelinguistic interior experience played an important role in the affective poetics of the Late T'ang and Sung, in the concept of *yen-wai* 言外, "beyond words," as the end of aesthetic experience. The possibility was already implicit in the "Great Preface": "in the mind it is intention; coming forth in language it is a Poem." Thus, if the creative process is reversed in reading, we move from language in the text to prelinguistic experience—the ineffable, what is "beyond words."

In the reading process the formation of meaning is necessarily individual; meaning is something "done" by someone rather than an object to be known. It is not "meanings" that are shared by readers at a given time and place, but a common language, a common context of culture and literary tradition, and above all, a common concept of poetry's nature and the rules of literary reading. The most basic presumptions of the reading process can be inferred from theoretical and interpretive texts, but these are only a hollow set of general and indeterminate rules. They have subsistence only in enactment, and in enactment they become determined and individual. We must somehow allow the reading tradition to unfold in texts without binding ourselves to the historical categories of reading: we will seek neither to discover a biographical truth behind the text nor to bring a fullness "beyond words" back into the diminished realm of words.

Let us call these readings "transparencies" to distinguish them from the disjunctive metaphorical operations of Western poe-

tics. In the nonfictional Chinese lyric, the text is a limited window on a full world, "obscure" from a distance but growing luminous and "manifest" as we approach it (to paraphrase Liu Hsieh on reading). In this reading process there are two primary objects of attention—reading the poet and reading the world.

Reading the Poet

There is a famous painting of Saint Sebastian by Antonello da Massina: the saint appears in a full-length frontal view, his body transfixed with arrows. If the painting were a T'ang poem, the traditional reader would recoil, not only at the grotesqueness of the subject matter, but also from the immediate recognition that the poet/painter was standing among the executioners. If what is seen is presumed to be historical experience, then the point of view is implicated in the view itself.

Consider Wang Wei 王維 (699–761): Western presumptions of the text as fictional artifice have generated the vocabulary of concepts that now surrounds his work—the neutral eye, the disappearance of the poet from the poem, the total absence of self-consciousness. Without dismissing such readings, we should realize that they are founded on a twentieth-century dissociation of the historical poet from his persona, and that they are also founded on a much older concept of the poem as a thing "made" (*poiesis*). But Wang Wei writes not "poems" in the Western sense but *shih* (詩 etymologically explained as 言寺 = 言志, "to articulate what is intensely on the mind"), verbal manifestations of inner states.¹²

In a tradition of reading that never ceases to point to the poet, such an escape from the poem is impossible. Indeed, the poet calls all the more attention to himself by trying to hide. Most T'ang and Sung landscape poems are not about "the world," but about "a particular experience of the world." From this point of view, Massina's painting becomes not "of Saint Sebastian," but "of seeing Saint Sebastian," implicating the painter as viewer.

Wang Wei's "Crossing the Yellow River to Ch'ing-ho" 渡河

到清河作 gives a strong but uncomplicated example of reading the poet:¹³

Sailing by boat upon the great river,
 汎舟大河裏
 Massed waters reach the sky's very edge.
 積水窮天涯
 Sky and waves suddenly split apart—
 天波忽聞拆
 The million houses of a district capital.
 郡邑千萬家
 Then further on, see walls and market,
 行復見城市
 There is mulberry, hemp right before me.
 宛然有桑麻
 Then peer back towards my homeland—
 迴瞻舊鄉國
 Vast floods stretching to the clouds.
 淼漫連雲霞

A journey is defined by two points in space, an origin and a destination. In a travel poem the point described is implicitly the point which draws the traveller's eyes, and the direction of his vision marks a state of mind. When the direction of vision shifts, as here from destination towards home, that shift may enact a sudden change of heart.

But vision is not free: what is seen grows out of a complex and ongoing interplay between the physical world, with its own forms and powers, and the interior state of the poet, which guides attention. Indifferent facts of topography can control vision; and here they assume a dramatic, protean form in the riverscape. With its power to conceal or expose, the riverscape has the capacity to generate interest and longing in the human

mind: the visual absences it contrives are the necessary conditions of desire.

We read the poet: his eyes strain over the water to the limits of his vision, looking toward something, but seeing only water. Then, at the line where sky and water meet, a form intrudes. The reader presumes that the fixity of the poet's vision marks something he is looking for; whatever intrudes will seem to be the object of his searching gaze. First there is a mass of houses, then the market, then the greater detail of mulberry and hemp on the bank. The scene resolves with ever-greater precision: reading the world we know that the poet is coming closer to Ch'ing-ho. Reading the poet, we know the curiosity of the traveller, his intense interest in whatever lies ahead.

His curiosity sated, the poet looks around suddenly and meets a second dramatic revelation—in this case, not a revelation of place but of loss of place. Through what is seen and what is not seen, we read loss and homesickness: as if in exchange for the vision of destination, the vast waters have taken away the starting point on the opposite bank, and beyond that, a home. The fixed gaze that is blocked embodies absence and desire.

"Crossing the Yellow River to Ch'ing-ho" has little to do with the riverscape in its own right; it concerns a subjective experience of the riverscape. Succinctly and without a word of emotion, the poet has recounted an interior experience of a particular journey and an experience common to all journeys. For the reader who looks to the hidden poet, the emotions involved are all the more intense for their concealment. In the language of medieval Chinese psychology, the emotions "swell up within and cannot come out." In the hermeneutics of the Kung-yang and Ku-liang commentaries, the question is raised, "And why does he not speak of the emotions he must feel?"

In this poem by Wang Wei, and probably in the majority of T'ang and Sung poems, reading the poet is relatively simple. In some poems, however, following the poet's senses becomes strenuous and disconcerting; no easy human poet emerges in the reading, but still the impulse to unify the poem in a perceiving subject is the key to aesthetic value. Li Ho 李賀 (791-817) is just

such a difficult poet, and it is possible that what made his work compelling and disturbing was neither his mythological apparatus nor his bizarre imagery (if it had been, then his bombastic contemporary Lu Tung would have been his peer), but rather the seduction of the reader into a mode of seeing that was not entirely human.

The "Fourth Month" 四月 comes from a series of thirteen poems on the months (including one intercalary month).¹⁴ Suppose the reader approaches this poem assuming a visual unity of experience, such as he had become accustomed to in reading Wang Wei. The hidden consciousness through which the reader apprehends the poem's world is not the simple, physical eye. The poet authentically reporting his experience is not found, but the possibility of such a presence is the lure by which our conventional and stable point of view is undone.

Cool of dawn, cool of evening,
trees like canopies,

曉涼暮涼樹如蓋

The rich, dark green of a thousand hills
appears beyond the clouds.

千山濃綠生雲外

Unclear and so faint, a fragrant rain,
blue-green hazily swelling,

依微香雨青氛氳

Glossy fat leaves and clustered flowers
shine against arched gate.

膩葉蟠花映曲門

Still waters of the golden basin
shake ripples of emerald,

金塘閑水搖碧漪

Aging spring light, heavy and somber—
no more breaking loose into flight:

老景沈重無驚飛

Fallen reds and ruined calyces
 in the darkness scattered about.

墮紅殘萼暗參差

It is early in summer's first month, between spring, with its bright light and red flowers, and summer, bringing heat and an oppressive lushness of green vegetation.

Disorientation is a process, a falling away from the comfortable human perspective; and to embody the process we require an illusion of security from which we may fall. The first two lines give us this secure, familiar world: the reader finds precisely what he might expect in a poem on the first month of summer. In the cool of dawn and cool of evening, in the comparison of trees to canopies we can read the poet's interest in escaping the heat of summer: we have a conventional poetic stance, *k'u-je* 苦熱, "suffering the oppressive heat." The eyes in the poem's opening are the eyes of a conventional poet, moving out to encompass huge vistas of clouds and mountains whose relations are clearly defined. The eyes of the poet (and of the reader who follows the poet's eyes), ever alert for analogical forms, see the repetition of the canopy-trees in the spreading green of the distant mountains, growing to fullness before him.

In the third line this familiar expansion of vision and upward growth dissolves. Movement is downward with the rain, so faint and fine that the drops cannot be distinguished, a rain that is somehow mixed in with the blossoms and becoming scented. Perspective, shapes, and boundaries disappear, as rain and trees merge into a "blue-green hazily swelling."

Out of this formlessness, shapes reappear in the fourth line—leaves, tangles of flowers defined against a gate. But we have lost the perspective that encompasses whole trees with crowns "like canopies." Then, in the fifth line, we are staring down into the pool and our disorientation is complete: the reflecting surface of the waters is still, yet at the same time has green ripples. If we disengage ourselves from the eyes of the poem and consider the image, the poetic tradition resolves the paradox: we are, in fact, seeing green foliage waving in the still waters. In

that movement we read the motion of the wind, and we know what that wind will do to the tangles of flowers in the fourth month.

Finally we come to loss of light and dissolution: darkness overtakes the reflections and the wind is dying down—the flowers are no longer breaking loose, “flying” and falling. We are left with the darkening waters of the basin on which scattered petals are floating, just beside the reflected (?) calyces from which they have fallen. The final word of the poem is *ts'en-ts'e*, a description of uneven ordering, loss of coherent relations, randomness.

Without the impulse to unify the poem as perceptual experience, the “Fourth Month” is merely descriptive, and descriptive in the worst sense. But when a consciousness is presumed to mediate between the reader and what is seen, the poem enacts a strange experience that corresponds to the fall and dissolution of the flowers in the fourth month. We share some of the experience of the fourth month flower: our stability falls loose; our realm of vision (眼界) shrinks as we fall from the trees; our world is broken up and we go into darkness.

Reading the World

The “Great Preface” of the *Book of Songs* sets forth the correspondences clearly: “The tones of a well-governed age are at peace and joyous, its rule balanced; the tones of an age of upheaval are bitter and angry, its rule perverse; the tones of a ruined state are mournful and yearning, its people suffering.”¹⁵ This is the canonical statement on the correlation between an age and its literature, but it is also instruction for reading: it instructs the reader what to find behind the various modes or “tones” of the *Book of Songs*; and their true meaning is easily accessible to the “understander,” the *chih-yin*, the one who “knows the tones.” This was one of the earliest forms of reading the world, but in the larger context of the history of poetry, the political condition of the age was only one aspect of the cosmic order that was immanent in the physical world. This order could be read through poetic description.

In reading the world there are basically two forms of expanding the limited text. One is close to the Western rhetorical tropes of metonymy and synecdoche (not as substitution tropes but as associative relations): here the reader completes the physical relations in the world at hand. The second form of reading the world lies in perceiving its correspondences; these appear in parallelism, poetic structure, and traditional associations. The movement toward general significance occurs through analogical repetitions, but it is often necessary to expand the metonymic relations of the physical world before the analogical correspondences can be discovered.

The complexity of this distinction is only superficial: the two processes are fundamental to the way meaning is formed in reading, and they operate even in the smallest units of reading. Consider the first line of Li Ho's "Fourth Month": "cool of dawn" and "cool of evening" are expanded in relations of synecdoche, but they are precisely *not* the Western substitution trope of synecdoche (in which case they would stand for an entire cool day). The limiting reference to dawn and evening calls attention to the silence about the intervening day; the "coolness" that qualifies the dawn and evening suggests that the intervening day was not cool. Thus the heat of the day is the unstated gap that must be filled in the process of reading.

Likewise, the "trees like canopies" are expanded to the shade those canopies project, and the boundaries of shadow mark the hot sunlight beyond. From these fundamental metonymic expansions, the reader proceeds to compare and isolate the analogical elements in the two halves of the line: an interest in cool times and cool places against a more pervasive heat and bright sunlight. From this "reading the world," we read the poet, finding motivation for the direction of his attention in *k'u-je*, "suffering the oppressive heat." But, of course, the educated traditional reader of Chinese poetry performs these operations with an instantaneous and intuitive grace that mocks this clumsy recreation of the process.

Such intuitive grace should be stressed to buffer the following comparison. There are some basic similarities between reading the world in Chinese poetry and the way in which Western

readers approach detective novels. Both focus attention on the "evidence" that can expose hidden truth, and both demand the presumption of a coherent order of empirical reality by which the evidence can expose that hidden truth. Both are texts of limitation that lead to fullness, and both are based upon epistemological models. However, in the Chinese case the empirical reality presumed in detective novels is supplemented by a further reality of correspondences and associations based on cosmology and the literary tradition.

Both genres engage the reader to decipher the world: the detective novel always succeeds within the text, but in the Chinese poem fullness lies outside the text, as the end of the reading process. At its least complacent, a T'ang or Sung poem moves toward a fullness that is never attained—an ambiguous reality, a world of unmanageable complexity, or a true failure of intelligibility. But the more complacent social poem and the detective novel have served their respective societies in fundamental ways: they are epistemological models that teach readers how to know, and at the same time reassure their readers of the world's ultimate intelligibility.

The question of epistemology in reading the world is raised beautifully in the first of three poems by Hsü Hun 許渾 (fl. mid-ninth century) on "Early Autumn" 早秋.¹⁶ The indefinite occasion of the title relates the poem to a *yung-wu* tradition (poems on "things"), and the reader enters the text expecting to find what is essential to an "early autumn."

Far in night floats a clear lute's sound,

遙夜泛清瑟

The west wind rises in azure vines.

西風生翠蘿

Last fireflies settle in jadewhite dew,

殘螢棲玉露

Early geese brush the metal river of stars.

早雁拂金河

Tall trees at daybreak still densely thick,
 高樹曉還密
 And far mountains, in clear skies, grow ever more.
 遠山清更多
 In Huai-nan one leaf falls—
 淮南一葉下
 You're aware of aging in misty waves.
 自覺老烟波

The poem begins at night, in a darkness where all things are hidden from sight. The music of the "lute" (a *se*) probably comes from some hidden other, rather than being music the poet plays himself. The "clarity," *ch'ing*, of its notes is the characteristic quality of all things autumnal.

The music of the lute, heard coming from "far" in the night, raises an epistemological question. It is a set poetic situation: the poet hears music by night from an unseen source, and he realizes that although he cannot know who is playing, he *can* know the musician's nature and emotions through the music itself. The listener becomes a *chih-yin*, one who "knows the tone," the "understander" of Liu Hsieh's chapter on reading. His faculties of perception and understanding sharpened by the music, the poet reads the scene to know autumn.

Autumn's omens are everywhere—in the west wind, in the last of summer's fireflies, in the white dew and the wild geese that have begun their migrations brushing the high skies of autumn, in the "river of stars" which has taken on autumn's Element to become "metallic." Multiple correspondences bind together these omens of autumn: coming from far in the night, the lute's music may float in with the west wind, which has its own music—*shang*, the note on the scale which belongs to autumn. In the second couplet there are coalescing dots of white light: blinking motes of fireflies touching lightly on drops of sparkling dew, specks of white geese brushing the glittering stars in passage. All are fugitive lights: dying fireflies, evanescent

dew, migrating geese. They are mere fragments of light surrounded by darkness, with all which that suggests in the seasonal interaction of Yin and Yang.

Then comes dawn's light, so often in T'ang poetry the condition of revelation: *ming* 明, "brightness" and "understanding"; or as here, *hsiao* 曉, "dawnlight" and "comprehension"; set against *an* 暗, "darkness" and "unknowing ignorance." But this dawn only exposes more substantial barriers to perceptual knowledge: the poet is hedged about with tall trees that block vision with their leaves and by the same token present the evidence that it is not yet high autumn—"still dense." Escaping this visual barrier near at hand, the poet looks out over vast spaces to discover that there too the light of dawn has created even more barriers: night's simple mountain outline becomes, in the clear skies of daytime, endless layers of mountains.

As the poet strains to look far into the distance, nearby a single leaf falls, either in a proverb remembered from the *Huai-nan-tzu*—"When one leaf falls, all the world knows it's autumn"—or here in the geographical *Huai-nan*, a real leaf from these dense trees, which reminds the poet of the proverb. By this one leaf, autumn can be known; the reader supplies the balancing half of the proverb—"and all the world knows it's autumn" 而天下知秋. The reader knows that the light breeze from the west which ruffled the vines last night will become hard winds that will strip the dense trees bare.

In the text as well as in the remembered proverb, the fallen leaf leads to awareness, *chüeh* 覺. But what the poet becomes aware of in the last line is a phenomenon qualitatively different from his perceptions earlier in the poem—"aging in misty waves" 老烟波. The phrase is supremely vague: its indefinite "growing old" encompasses the poet, the leaf (perhaps in the water), and the waves themselves. The closing image represents a kind of poetic diction particularly popular in the ninth century: the internal relations of a phrase and its referents are uncertain, open to several legitimate determinations. We do not and cannot know who or what is suddenly realized to be old, nor do we know how these misty waves came into a previously landbound scene.¹⁷ But the closing image is a final knowledge of

autumn, the end of the process of knowing; what is known is a poetic knowledge, an enigmatic truth that for the first time transcends the physical senses. The image is a fusion of mood and mutually exclusive possibilities in an openness that can exist only in words. The poet reads the physical world to a knowledge that is beyond the physical world.

Integrating Meaning: The Whole Poem

The simple distinction between reading the poet and reading the world is an illusion of convenience. Both goals of the reading process are known simultaneously: what we actually do is read the poet in the act of reading the world, see the world through his eyes. Because the poem is taken as a particular experience of the world, both the poet and the world can be known only through one another.

The art of reading we have constructed has one great gap: it can be enacted most easily in poems like the preceding, in which the poet does not expose himself or exposes himself only slightly. Most poems have a self-reflective element, however, usually at the end. Here we cease to read the world through the poet's eyes and confront his identity as separate from our own, as he thinks, acts, or responds to the scene with emotion. Through this gesture of reflection or response, we have evidence of how the poet has interpreted the scene we have just experienced together. Ideally we should share his response, but share it apart from him (in contrast to the previous joint perception of the scene). By writing the poem, the poet seeks such a *chih-yin*—one who “knows the tone,” the “true friend,” or in Vincent Shih's translation of the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung*, the “understanding critic.”¹⁸ This model of the good reader and critic is above all a personal relation, and a personal relation of a particular kind, belonging to the human world outside the experience of the literary text. As often in the poetry of Hsieh Ling-yün, the poet seeks a *shang-hsin* 賞心, one whose mind can “appreciate” both the scene and the poet's own mind, another who can share his experience of the world.

To weigh these two modes of reading—one, through the poet's senses; the other, of the poet's interior life—we may look to a poem equally balanced between exterior vision and interior revision, one of Tu Fu's finest regulated verses, "Pavilion for Travelers" 客亭.¹⁹

An autumn window, still daybreak's color,
 秋窗猶曙色
 Leaf-stripped trees, once again the tall wind.
 落木更高風
 Then the sun comes out beyond cold mountains,
 日出寒山外
 And the river flows on through last night's fog.
 江流宿霧中
 By our holy court no creature's cast aside,
 聖朝無棄物
 Frail now and sick, I've become an old man.
 衰病已成翁
 How many experiences in this remainder of life
 多少殘生事
 Are to blow on and fall with the rolling tumbleweed?
 飄零任轉蓬

Like many of Tu Fu's regulated verses, this poem divides in the middle, at the third couplet (the "turn" or *chuan* 轉 in the terminology of later poetics). The first four lines ask the art of reading described earlier: reading the poet in the act of reading the world. The last four lines emerge from Tu Fu's interpretation of the scene and its significance to himself; here we cease to see the physical world through Tu Fu's eyes and know Tu Fu apart from ourselves.

The first four lines are an elegiac tribute to the vanished poetry of the K'ai-yüan era, an age of brilliant poetry several decades before Tu Fu's "Pavilion for Travelers." Tu Fu echoes

several K'ai-yüan dawn poems, and no contemporary reader would have missed the second couplet's reworking of Wang Wei's famous²⁰

The river flows out beyond Heaven and Earth,

江流天地外

The mountain's color, half there, half not there.

山色有無中

The autumn mode and a world of remainders take on special depth against the backdrop of the history and poetry of the preceding half-century—the passing of the K'ai-yüan and T'ien-pao eras and of an age of poetry whose voice was Wang Wei's.

We begin by reading the physical world and the eyes that see it: we look out a window just brightening with dawn, a window that shows only the tops of bare trees blowing in the wind. The window becomes an "autumn window" by the scene it frames. We read the world: we know his eyes are on the treetops because he sees a *tall* wind. Sheltered, looking through the window from inside, he *sees* rather than feels the wind, sees it in the movement of the trees. But he does not simply see this wind, he sees that it has come *once again* and silently compares this wind that strips the last of the leaves to another wind that blew in the treetops before, treetops then fuller with leaves. These are not simply leafless trees; their leaflessness is known as loss and deterioration, known in the context of an earlier condition.

The sun comes out beyond the mountains to the east, and the eyes mark them as "cold mountains." We do not presume an omniscient poetic voice: the coldness of the mountains can be *seen* revealed now in full sunlight, in the leaf-stripped trees of their slopes. And in this succession of scenes we are aware of the movement of our vision—out through the window to the nearby trees, and on out to a larger, more-distant scene of the sun rising over the mountains. In contrast to the failed dawn of Hsü Hun's poem, this dawn does bring revelation, and its omens are clear—autumn, the cold winds, the barren trees. But then vision, moving upward to the treetops, to tall winds and the rising sun,

falls like the leaves and at ground level sees revealed the thing which is not revealed—the great river flowing on, still hidden in the fog of the preceding night.

In its hiddenness and constant movement, the river is the poet's world: he is the *k'o*, the "traveler" for whom the pavilion is a temporary resting place. The scene is the negative image of Wang Wei's famous couplet: Wang's mountain, its season-marking colors half-hidden in the mist, is here exposed in its autumn barrenness; Wang Wei's river that grandly flowed out beyond Heaven and Earth is here sunk in mist and fog, its destination lingering only in the memory of an old poem.

In the second half of his poem, Tu Fu responds to his interpretation of the scene. The all-revealing sun is parallel to the emperor and his all-seeing wisdom. The correspondence is reinforced by the play on *ch'ao/chao* in the fifth line, both "court" and "dawn." Under the pervasive and discerning light of sun and emperor, nothing is missed, nothing overlooked, essential natures are shown forth and all things useful are used. But the poet, exposed in his window by dawn and imperial grace, is shown to be precisely the thing that is useless—old, frail, and sick. If he describes himself in terms of poetic convention, it is because he strains to see what he cannot see, himself as he might appear, looked upon by another. He shares the light that shines on all things, but what it shines upon are barren trees and a landscape of autumn. His life is only a remainder, to be spent in constant travels, but possessing a pathetic dignity in the archaic emblem of the *p'eng*, the "tumbleweed" with its echoes from Chien-an and Wei poetry. The "tumbleweed" is the true metaphor, occurring where it belongs in the poem, not in the world of vision but in the interior world of meditation. Wind-blown and falling, he is linked to the leaves that blow around, just outside of our frame of vision, bounded by the window of the first couplet. Cast aside by the court that casts nothing aside, he belongs to the world of the river whose hiddenness is paradoxically revealed by the light of day. Vision moves out and rises, only to fall—to earth and the detritus of autumn, to dead leaves and the frail, aging self, to the hidden river that must carry the

traveler onward, to the tumbleweed-self driven on by the wind and falling.

The poem's readers know the rules of reading and the stable order of language and the world. They recognize, they "join" the poet in recognizing those patterns in the physical scene upon which the interpretation in the second half of the poem is founded. There are barren trees shaking in the wind and their leaves blowing about on the ground; there is the cold mountain and the fog-bound river—gaunt and stable things against fluid, moving things in dissolution, things revealed versus things hidden. Then Tu Fu enters the poem to make this general pattern his own: he *places* himself in the autumn world.

Through this two-part process can be seen the true meaning of poetry as an experience of the world, as interiorization, as an epistemological act—outer to inner, implicit to explicit, immanent meaning to reflective meaning. The poem becomes—and I believe Tu Fu would approve of this definition of his poem—a means to know Tu Fu. This concept of poetry lies behind the use of poetry in the examination; it lies behind the practice of presenting poems to a superior as a personal introduction; it lies behind the notion of poetry as a substitute for historical biography to make oneself known to future generations (as in Ts'ao P'i's 曹丕 "Discourse on Literature" 論文).²¹ Poetry was conceived as that by which a person could be truly known.

Balancing this knowledge of Tu Fu is the knowledge of autumn. Through a particular experience of the world, the poet perceives its immanent order, its *li* 理. It is not a metaphorical Truth but an immanent truth that can be known only through its empirical manifestations. This is the second function of literature, stated grandly near the closing of the *Wen-fu*:²²

伊茲文之爲用 固衆理之所因

The true function of literature/*wen* is to be the means by which all inherent order may come through.

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THREE

AN UNCREATED UNIVERSE

COSMOGONY, CONCEPTS, AND COUPLETS

If a poetry promises to make human experience manifest and lasting, to give the honest record of a particular process of perception and thought, then it has a special allegiance to nature; its truth is history and a lovely science, not human art. In contrast, a fictional poetry promises to obey only nature's essential laws in creating a second nature, a heterocosm more perfect, more intelligible, and ultimately less puzzling than the first nature:

Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection [to nature], lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature . . . : so as he goeth hand in hand with Nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit.

Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.¹

In their own distinct ways, the two versions of poetry—Sidney's "making" and the interior history promised by the *shih* poet—both must be known in their relation to nature and the "natural."

The poet's writings stand against the larger shapes and opera-

tions of nature, but those shapes and operations are themselves often indeterminate and uncertain. What the "natural" might be, how it is ordered and constituted, has inspired thousands to speculation and study; and yet the very object of speculation, "nature," is itself no more than a word, a fragment of language. The word points to something primordial, but as a word it appeared rather late: humanity's earliest texts show greater concern for gods, kings, and measures of grain. "Nature" refers to some quality and totality that existed before there was the word "nature" or before there was any word, a totality that still exists, independent of whatever names are given to it. Nature is "out there," but to know it, and even to reflect on how we might know it, we are condemned to work through language.

There is language; there is something that precedes and transcends language; between language and that "something," two relations are possible, and the distinction between them corresponds to a fundamental division in human concepts of nature. Either nature is independent of language, and language only blocks and distorts our knowledge of it; or the form and distinctions of language derive from nature and grant us the most perfect access to it.

In the first relation, nature appears as the Taoist *Tzu-jan* 自然, the "So-of-itself," all things being what they necessarily are, without distinction and without interference. This version of nature is stubbornly ineffable, and when we try to describe it (as with the term "ineffable"), we are using language to indicate something beyond the competence of language. Words about this version of nature are self-destructive paradoxes (on the model of "I always lie"). Thus the Taoist text *Lao-tzu* begins by discrediting itself, making a statement about the Constant Way: "A Way about which we can make statements is *not* the Constant Way." This nature can only "be": names are destructive and manipulative distinctions imposed on nature by a blind, civilized humanity. Nature stands opposed to the agency of any artificer, human or divine, and the wise sage-kings of antiquity showed their superiority over the later-born by leaving things alone and unsaid.

Though they differ in their loyalties, the ancient Taoist and

modern semiologist are here in strange accord: language is an autonomous system that informs perception and knowledge. Because "knowing" occurs only through the categories of language, what is beyond language cannot be "known" (in the conventional sense). Language is the supreme artifice, or even the Artificer himself, of whom humans are the unwitting agents. Foolish humanity believes that it made language and "uses" it; in fact, whatever tiny adjustments we make, we receive language—a complete system of orderly relations and distinctions—and rather than using it, we are used by it, operating according to its rules and within its boundaries.

We can transform this version of nature into a tragedy of distinction and differentiation. Nature was first; God came somewhat later in the Word, the differentiating Logos, and set in motion a lamentable process of division and deterioration. "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light": from the prior Word follows the differentiated world. In the Chinese tradition we have a short allegory from the Taoist text *Chuang-tzu*, recounting this first Fall in terms of sensory distinction:

The South Sea's ruler was Instan; Taneous ruled the North Sea. In the middle ruled Undifferentiation. Instan and Taneous once met in the land of Undifferentiation and were exceptionally well treated. Because of this, Instan and Taneous determined to repay the kindness of Undifferentiation: "Everyone has seven openings for seeing, hearing, eating, and breathing, but He has none. Why don't we try making a set for him?" Each day they made a new opening, and on the seventh day, Undifferentiation died.²

Nature's unity is violated by conscious distinctions, and the instrument of such distinctions is the Word. It took seven days to create this differentiated world as it took seven days to destroy nature's wordless unity.

A nature beyond language and all distinction is the ultimate Other, removed from human comprehension. To seek it leads to negation, blankness, and silence. Poets are lured by such a nature; but for a poet, a person of words, the idea of nature-

beyond-language can be only a lure, a possibility of extricating himself from the consuming world of words.

There is a second version of nature for the less dissatisfied: this nature *can* be known through language, and it assures us that the distinctions made by language are, in fact, the true distinctions of the sensible world. However, this nature-in-language carries with it peculiar problems all its own. No questions can arise over the validity of particular aspects of nature-beyond-language: that nature has neither aspects nor particulars nor distinctions of any kind. But orderly, differentiated nature, nature-in-language, will be rich in particular distinctions, and its very profusion will raise some disturbing doubts. Whatever primordial nature may be, its characteristics do not change across national boundaries. But different civilizations have conceived of orderly nature in radically different ways, and each has seen a necessary, organic bond between nature and its thought, language, and institutions. In the course of one civilization's growth, variant versions of nature's order are usually understood as progress or regression in the gradual unfolding of nature's true form. But between two independent civilizations, the different versions of orderly nature may be based on incommensurate assumptions. Then we encounter two versions of knowable nature, each alien to the other.

Nature-beyond-language does not disquiet us: we cannot imagine inhabiting a world of continuous blurrings and nameless, unclassified shapes. But the truly different versions of nature-in-language are difficult for us. The colors of Chinese are different from those of English: we can accept the information that our colors—not merely the sounds for the colors, but the categories of color—are only *linguistic* divisions of the spectrum, local words, the products of accident in the evolution of language. We may have an abstract toleration for the thought that all our categories of perception and reflection are no less linguistic, no less local and accidental. But we must dwell in our language as a truth and not as a mere convenience. Some languages, with their radically different embodiments of nature's order, must remind us how unnecessary our particular version of nature is. The lost clause of the myth of Babel is "and each

went off, certain that his alone was the true and original tongue."

Babel's curse was a true scattering of the tongues, affecting not only the sounds of words but their categories and distinctions. The damage is done. "Universal" languages, "basic" languages, scientific languages are no more than futile evasions, thinking to countermand Babel simply by agreeing to speak only one imperfect tongue. But the curse of Babel strikes even more deeply than local differences in languages' particular distinctions (though the sum of those differences is ominous enough). Babel touches the very fabric of language—the *way* in which language's categories are stabilized and the guarantees of their validity. Here we must ask the most basic questions—what makes a thing what it is? We may reasonably begin the inquiry in the past tense, asking what *made* things the way they are.

When God created the heavens and the earth, light, firmament, fish, fowl, and each living creature after its kind, the specifications for those things were His and His alone. When living creatures went forth and multiplied, they could do no more than replicate the original model. A vast flood might reduce the population for moral lesson and tighter control, but as long as one of each species and gender was preserved, the original model remained. Heaven was Heaven because it was created that way; all the attributes of Earth were in the original plan. Humankind was humankind not in its differentiation from the beasts, but had its identity from a divine model, which it replicated prolifically.

The science of Darwin was, of course, immensely threatening. Not only was the evolution of the species a lese majesty against the supreme creation of the created world, it also demanded that mankind consider its identity in terms of empirical contingency and differentiation from the rest of creation. But though the creative deity might be reluctantly abandoned, the concept of model was less easily displaced. Attention shifted from the primal maker of models to nature's implicit models, which shape plastic life—the teleology of environment, whose necessities have formed the entelechy of the human. Instead of having been shaped, humanity found itself being shaped. And perceiving the

plasticity of human nature, humans soon realized they might shape themselves, toward some immediate or ultimate end. But beneath these great changes lies a greater unity: all the definitions of nature and of the human are given in terms of models, models filled by divine, evolutionary, or merely human will.

But suppose the world began differently; suppose it simply happened, uncreated either by transcendent plan or empirical necessity. Suppose there was once a totality that quite spontaneously divided itself into balanced opposition, and out of that initial division there began a continuous process of binary subdivision that culminated in the manifold particularity of the universe in which we dwell. When the entities of the universe went forth to multiply, they did not mass-produce a model, but instead evinced a melancholy tendency to further division, a failure to replicate, an endless chain of increasing identities, each one threatened by further subdivision. It was in this way that the universe of the *Huai-nan-tzu* began:

Before Heaven and Earth had shape, all was roiling, surging, billowing, whirling—thus named the Visible. The Way began in nothingness; nothingness gave rise to the universe; the universe gave rise to vital stuff (*ch'i*), and vital stuff possessed limit and boundary. Whatever was light and transparent wafted upward and became Heaven; what was heavy and opaque gelled, becoming Earth. The confluence of transparencies and subtle things was marked by ease; the coalescence of opaqueness and heavy things was marked by difficulty. Thus Heaven took form before Earth. The confluent essences of Heaven and Earth were Yin and Yang, and from them the unifying essences made the four seasons. The dissolution of the essences of the four seasons became the things of the world. In the accumulation of Yang's hot vital stuff, fire was formed; and the essence of fire was the sun. In the accumulation of cold vital stuff, water was formed; and the essence of water was the moon.³

So the universe continues, on and on in constant change following the two primary lines of descent. Two basic principles

govern change: the formation of correlatives (Yang/fire/sun) and of counterparts (Yang/Yin; fire/water; sun/moon).⁴

Irreconcilable differences separate the mutating, uncreated world from the created world; the same differences also divide the lesser cosmogonies of literary "creation" and the *shih's* "un-creation." In the created world the little "makers," the poets, bear a strange relation to the primal Maker, and their vaunted singularity in humankind apes a divine singularity.⁵ With no creative deity to emulate, the poet of the *shih* does not think to make the world anew; he participates in the nature that is; and in being of this world, he lacks the "creative" poet's aura of isolated divinity. The "Great Preface" of the *Book of Songs* presents the process of composing *shih* as a universal human impulse, not as a mysterious and singular gift.

As the created world was formed by Will, so it can be ended by Will; endings and ultimate reckonings haunt all acts. Eschatology will be less a concern in the uncreated world.⁶ The model of a transcendent and hidden Plan, which may end the world as it was begun, authorizes the little "makers" to fabricate their fictions and metaphors, and the secret meanings of these lesser creations belong to the "makers" alone: theirs is the power to begin, direct, and end their stories, and their little creatures run through strictly guided paces under the guise of free will. The creations of the "makers" will always stand independently beside the first Nature (Sidney's "hand in hand")—as "imitation," as arrogant improvement, or as rebellious substitution.

In the uncreated world such willful fabrication is perverse, a mere deception: the poet is concerned with the authentic presentation of "what is," either interior experience or exterior percept. The *shih* poet's function is to see the order in the world, the pattern behind its infinite division; like Confucius, he "transmits but does not create."⁷

Then let us return to our question, "What makes a thing what it is?"—what stabilizes the names and categories of things? In the created world the power to define and give meaning lies in the act of creation. The most significant difference between the created world and the uncreated world is that in the former, any

entity or species is defined by the primal model which lies beyond the particular: the idea of autonomous model runs through most of the religious, philosophical, and scientific variations of Western civilization. But in the uncreated world, an entity is defined by its differentiation from a series of correlatives and counterparts; likewise, a totality is the combination of two essential parts. Thus we have "Ch'ien-and-K'un 乾坤, the two primary hexagrams of the *Book of Changes*, to comprehend the idea of "universe" or "world"; "vegetative life" is *ts'ao-mu* 草木, "plants-and-trees"; "brothers" disposes itself into "elder" and "younger," *hsiung-ti* 兄弟; the government's capacities are divided into *wen* 文 and *wu* 武, "civil" and "military" domains; "animals" are "birds-and-beasts"; and an ornamental term will match the paired compound—*fei-tsou* 飛走, "flyers-and-runners."

When God created the Heavens and the Earth, He made them quite independently. We would malign His omnipotence to claim that He was incapable of creating one without the other. But in the uncreated world, Heaven and Earth depend on one another *for their very existence*: the physical entities and their categories are defined by mutual antithesis, and that is what makes them what they are. No entity in the uncreated world has existence or identity apart from certain essential relations to other things. Those relations are the primary means by which a thing can be known, defined, or spoken of.

Like the physical world, the conceptual world is constituted of compound pairs. The relations between members of a pair may vary from the complementary to the antithetical, but the two terms are necessary to one another. "High" depends on "low"; "straight" depends on "warped"; all is composed of "inner substance" (*chih* 質) and "external pattern" (*wen* 文). In their combination, such pairs refer to a higher unity, a class concept which comprehends their differentiation, as in "high-low" as "height."

Cosmogony dramatizes the structure of nature, and the canonical cosmogonies of a civilization assure its members on what grounds rests the world which they inhabit. As the world was

formed, so it will be known and understood; an epistemology of the uncreated world must be based on correlatives and counterparts. A phenomenon is analyzed by progressively dividing and subdividing it into its paired components. Instead of essence and attribute, instead of cause and effect, we have a necessary sequence of interdependent parts. In the same way, a phenomenon is classified by combining it in the whole in which it has constituent significance.

To perceive the world well is to perceive its complex balances. The largest categories (for example Heaven-and-Earth) are given in the fixed compounds of the language and are easily confirmed in empirical observation. The more complex relations in the world at hand, with all its lush profusion, may be hidden and await discovery.

A poetry that promises to present the "natural" must embody these paired relations, and its genius will lie in the divinatory juxtaposition. Such a poetry will not have as its basic unit the sentence, the microstructure of Western narrative, dominated by agency, act, and completion. The unit of such a poetry will have to be a flexible form in which the complex patterns of the world can be set side by side—a parallel couplet. The parallel couplet may not have come easily to medieval Chinese poets—the true form of nature is not necessarily obvious and easily presented—but the parallel couplet was also not a "poetic device," a mere craft for superfluous embellishment, preserved by a conservative poetic tradition. Parallelism was the formal linguistic manifestation of the structure of the natural world.

Someone broke in: Come now—these claims you are making for parallelism are excessive. Every literary tradition uses parallelism and antithesis. I'm afraid you've gone off the deep end here. I suppose you will now try to convince me by telling me how pervasive parallelism is in Chinese poetry; I will answer by reminding you that parallelism is the primary formal device of Hebrew poetry, the very tradition in which you note that the models of things are given by God. Then

you will argue for the strict precision of Chinese parallelism, its word-for-word matching; I will reply that in inflected languages such precision would be intolerably monotonous. I am not convinced.

I replied: You anticipate me—fine, I won't waste time trying to convince you with those two arguments. But I do insist that parallel relations in Chinese poetry have a complexity found nowhere else. And there is another, crucial difference between Chinese parallelism and parallelism elsewhere: in other traditions you read the words and recognize a parallel construction in them; often in Chinese you first assume that the couplet is parallel, and the assumption instructs you how to construe the words. This distinction differentiates a "formal device" from a form that is inseparable from the act of knowing. But these arguments are beside the point: the true reason that Chinese parallelism has a unique force lies in its special relation to models of the natural order.

Someone said: I was content with your explanation of the prior assumption of parallelism in reading. Why must you go on to tweak my credulity by claiming this special relation to nature?

I said: I hazard your fragile credulity to show the possible relations between literary form and the larger patterns of nature's formal operation. Literary form derives much of its authority, its compelling power, from the assumption that it is in some way natural. We feel a peculiar satisfaction in passing through the set phases of a traditional Western narrative: the literary form reinforces a learned sense of how events ought to go together (even if we do not often see the form validated by experience). I would like to convince you that a similar satisfaction attends form in Chinese poetry and that the basic unit of form is the parallel couplet.

To satisfy you, all I need do is explain it as a phenomenon of language—such explanations have a sweet credibility to

modern ears. I hesitate to offer that explanation because you will then say, "Oh, then it's only a question of language." But early poets and readers saw language as secondary to nature and arising from it; to them it was not "only language," but nature and nature-in-language. Nevertheless, let me explain it as a linguistic phenomenon. In literary Chinese most conceptual categories occur in compounds of two characters (should we call these one or two words?). In a parallel couplet we often find these very compounds, or variations of them, aligned in parallel positions. Furthermore, each line of a parallel couplet can often be seen as the expansion of one term of a common compound. A frequent example occurs in couplets describing landscapes—in Chinese, *shan-shui* 山水, "mountain-and-water." The general category through which a poet conceives of his topic is not a unitary idea, a "landscape"; rather, the category is a *pair* of terms, and those terms dispose themselves each into one line of the couplet. The resulting couplet consists of one line on a "mountain" scene set in parallel to a line on a "water" scene. The world was conceptualized in paired terms, and those same terms serve as the basis of parallel relations in a couplet.

Someone said: Oh, then it's only a question of language.

I muttered angrily.

Someone went on: But it was *not* universally agreed that parallelism was natural. Now when I say this, I expect you to remind me how Liu Hsieh explained parallelism in terms of nature's bilateral symmetry—but there were others who disagreed. For example, many theorists felt that "old-style" prose was more natural than parallel prose because it "followed the long and short periods of speech."⁸ There you have quite a different criterion of "natural" writing—the rhythms of speech—and frankly, that criterion seems far more reasonable to me.

I said: You force me to confess it—there *were* competing versions of the "natural." Eventually, when competition grew

acute, the confidence in the old cosmology was shattered, and parallelism lost much of its authority. Most Sung couplets, however well wrought, seem to lack the grandeur of the great T'ang couplets; and that diminished grandeur comes, perhaps, from a failure of belief.

Someone interrupted: I am curious to know how "failed belief" manifests itself textually in a couplet?

I went on, ignoring his impertinence: Consider the coherent progression of events in a traditional Western narrative: narrative order bears little resemblance to lived, human experience. But suppose life's random, insignificant occurrences were to intrude into the traditional narrative order and a book were to stop "right in the middle" (as we say). A reader would feel that the author was presenting his story idiosyncratically, not naturally. The author of this peculiar narrative would then write a defense (just as the writers of "old style" prose wrote defenses to charges raised against them, charges of idiosyncrasy, strangeness, and difficulty); the author would show that his work was not at all "unnatural"—rather it embodied lived experience more naturally than conventional narrative (just as your "old style" prose theorist appealed to the criterion of "natural" speech). Thoughtful readers then begin to feel uncomfortable with the neatness of conventional narrative.

I suppose that ultimately the "natural" is what is habitually considered natural. But a modest effort of reflection will always provide us with a critique of any particular version of the "natural"; and we can be brought to see how any writing that promises to be natural is, in some way, unnatural. We reach a stage at which the only natural writing (in the sense of writing being as it necessarily is) is patently unnatural writing.

Someone objected further: Your sense of the "natural" ends as a quality of belief. In that case, natural writing will seek to

inspire that belief. Therefore your conclusion is wrong: patently unnatural writing is not natural at all.

I evaded: This word has gotten totally out of control. We were better off with Taoist undifferentiation.

Someone replied: Oh—do you mean the ones who assert that no valid assertions can be made about nature?

The Form

In strict parallelism, every word and phrase in one line of a couplet must be matched in the same position of the second line by a corresponding word in the same semantic category. In addition, the two lines must be parallel in a broader and looser matching of "sense" (*yi* 意). These two kinds of parallelism, of categories and of "sense," usually emerge as syntactic parallelism in translation. In "regulated verse" strict parallelism is reinforced by the antithesis of tonal categories in corresponding positions. In addition to strict parallelism, there are varying degrees of partial parallelism.

The following couplet by Tu Fu is strictly parallel:⁹

野	流	行	地	日
plains	flow	move-(on)-	earth	sun
江	入	度	山	雲
river	enter	cross -	mountain	cloud

Plains flow with sunlight, moving over the earth;
The river enters clouds as they cross the mountains.

"Plain" is a categorical parallel for "river," not because both are nouns, and not because they both are subjects of their respective verbs, but because they are both topographical features of roughly equal status in the scene. There is great latitude in paral-

lelism: "river" could be matched by the conventionally antithetical "mountain," or by a diminutive "creek," or by the visually analogical "road," or by hundreds of other terms. A catachresis is possible in parallelism as it is in metaphor, but the "far-fetched" depends in its "distance" upon a sure sense of what is categorically "near." A "bowl of soup," however, may be a noun that "flows" but it will fail as a parallel for "river."

Each word in each line matches the word in the corresponding position, and the relations within each line are roughly the same: "move-(on)-earth" is a joined phrase modifying "sun," just as "cross-mountain" modifies "clouds." It is the assumption of parallelism that forces "flow" (transferred from its more common subject, the river) into its peculiar transitivity: "flow" and "enter" are both motions (a set sequence of motions as the eye follows the "flow" of river and sunlit earth off "into" the clouds), and "flow" must be construed to link plain and sunlight just as "enter" joins the river to the clouds.

Even when it survives independently, a couplet is always *part* of a complete poem. Within that larger entity, the couplet is itself a whole, a complete unit of perception or thought; the couplet is the "sentence" of Chinese poetry—not the line and not the complete predicate. Its two lines face in upon one another, not forward or backward to lines from other couplets. Within the poem the couplet relates to other couplets as a whole, not as two lines. With its own aesthetic values, distinct from the values of complete poems, the couplet has subsistence and interest in its own right, and the couplet was often liberated from its poem as the object of critical discourse.

The Couplet as a Whole

It is easy to speak of Heaven and Earth and vast landscapes of "rivers" and "plains" in parallel couplets: to do so is no more than to use the compound terms most readily available. The parallel couplet shows its true dominion over literary expression in the more humble cases, such as sending Judge Yüan on his way back to his home in the mountains. In Chinese prose or in the

prose of any Western language, it is possible to assert simply, "Judge Yüan will travel for days through the mountains to reach his home." As we set this statement alone in the middle of a paragraph, it is a bare assertion, syntactically complete, but begging some context in which the assertion might be significant.

To make such an assertion a literary whole in the Western tradition, we might transform it into a "plot"—the judge's arduous journey through hardships met and overcome, struggles with dangers that threaten to keep the traveler from his destination, and finally a completion, the attainment of the deferred goal. To create a literary whole, an event is spread out in time, and its parts are fused by the venerable laws of narrative.

Chinese poetry has a different means to make the bare assertion a literary whole—not the "whole" of a poem, but a "whole" event. The judge must travel "for days" through the mountains: to describe this action "naturally," we must take note of its two parts—travel by day and rest by night. A journey through the mountains "naturally" requires that the good judge also cross the valleys and streams between the mountains. Even the purely narrative element has an inherent binary structure: a "going towards" and an "arrival." For Ch'ien Ch'i 錢起 (ca. 722–780), Judge Yüan's journey takes natural form in a parallel couplet:¹⁰

水	宿	隨	漁	火
water	spend-night	follow	fishermen	fires
山	行	到	竹	扉
mountain	travel	arrive	bamboo	gate

For night's lodging on waters, follow the fishermen's fires;
Travel through mountains to reach your bamboo gate.

A complete process is circumscribed by the antithetical components—rivers and mountains, movement and rest, the implied passage of day and night, following (that is, going toward) and arrival. By complementary counterparts, Ch'ien can speak of a whole experience.

Consider the structure of time in the couplet. In the cosmog-

ony of the *Huai-nan-tzu*, Heaven took form before Earth, but its precedence grew from the internal physics of its substance and was not the first event of a divine narrative. Sequence may be significant and necessary in a binary pair, but it is complete with the completion of the pair: thus "Heaven, then Earth; Yang, then Yin," but not "Heaven, then Earth, then Yang, then Yin." In Ch'ien Ch'i's couplet the sequence of "follows" and "arrives" is necessary, but it is not a truly narrative sequence: acts and events are structured, like the things of the world, in binary pairs.

The binding of two lines of a couplet not only corresponds to the binding of two characters in a compound, the matching in couplets is often accomplished by the diaeresis of common compounds. These established compounds are the terms in which nature's binary structure is manifest, and they are the general categories which classify the particularities of a given scene. The English poet often comments reflectively on the general category "landscape" when describing this or that prospect; the Chinese poet is more likely to embed a *shan* 山 and a *shui* 水 in corresponding positions within the couplet—giving a *shan-shui*, "mountains-and-water." Because such general categorical compounds participate in naming the particular features of a scene (rather than simply classifying them as a reflective comment on a "landscape" does), they mediate between the general and the particular in a unique way.

A *shan-shui* is neither an abstraction, the equivalent of the English term "landscape," nor does it simply perform an addition of random features. On the one hand, a *shan-shui* is a collective whole, a certain kind of scene: no painter will omit other elements in the scene besides "mountains and waters"—clouds, trees, perhaps birds or a human traveler. On the other hand, the term cannot abandon its constituent components and be shifted to any scene: in English there can be a desert "landscape," but unless there are both mountains and waters, there is no *shan-shui*.

The couplet on Judge Yüan's return may have been a perfect whole, even a "beautiful" whole (*li* 麗, "beautiful," but also "parallel"), but it is not a very interesting whole. According to

Aristotle, a plot is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end; but an interesting plot is a complex plot, involving "reversal" and "recognition." A complex couplet may have no space for reversal and recognition, but it can involve hidden relations that go far beyond the complacent compounding of a "mountain" with a body of "water." The couplet shows its sovereignty in governing the common—sending Judge Yüan home through the mountains—but it shows its greatness in concealments.

A couplet mediates between reductive generalities and the most complex particulars of concealed relations. In the generalities, the established compounds, we recognize what is familiar; the concealed relations draw us to the excitement of fresh discovery. Established compounds may align themselves in parallel positions, embodying the categories of a representative scene. Suppose "wind" is matched with "sun" to indicate the "atmosphere" of a spring day ("wind-and-sun" 風日); "birds" may be balanced by "flowers" as the common signs of a spring scene ("flowers-and-birds" 花鳥); "shadows" may be set in parallel to "voices," a variation on "sound-and-sight" compounds, to show the engagement of the two primary senses. Such a couplet might be classed as "representative sensations of representative phenomena of a spring day." Yet the couplet by Tu Hsün-ho 杜荀鶴 (846-904) defies the simple reduction: the representative scene is only a ground that carries a rich complication of hidden relations:¹¹

風	暖	鳥	聲	碎
wind	warm	bird(s)	voice(s)	shatter
日	高	花	影	重
sun	high	flowers	shadows	layered

The wind is warm, voices of birds shatter,
The sun is high, shadows of flowers in layers.

When our senses encounter the scenes of the living world, we are aware of a matrix of things and events; within that matrix of

sensations, intuition and reflection reveal the web of relations that binds things together and animates the scene. To reenact the authenticity of perception, the couplet leaves the relations between things as open and indeterminate as possible; sensory images are presented with the autonomy they possess in sensory experience. The reader, intuitively or in reflection, apprehends the contingent relations that lie hidden between the objects.

"The wind is warm, the voices of birds shatter"—the predicates are independent, the normal parataxis of the couplet style, but the reader knows immediately how the two statements come together, how the warm winds break up the songs of the birds. And in "The sun is high, the shadows of flowers in layers," we know in the same way that the sun, when high in the sky, casts the thickest, most concentrated shadows through the flowering trees. Reciprocal relations increase and complicate: wind's warmth follows from the height of the sun; and in that bright sunlight, the trees may provide shelter for the birds, now hidden in blossoms and new foliage, their presence known only by their voices. As the sun lends "warmth" to the wind of another line, so the wind borrows "height" from the sun, and we look up to see a voice-shattering wind that blows through the densely flowering trees of spring. In that wind the reader knows how the flowers will soon be blown loose, "shattered" like the voices of the birds. For the "layered" (*ch'ung* 重) shade is also a "heaviness" (*chung* 重), a lush weight of flowers ready to fall.

The couplet balances "scattering" and "massing," and in the sequence of the two terms, we read a secret movement of concentration. It is the movement of the morning, as the widespread shadows of the flowers are concentrated by the rising sun. But concentration is also the antithesis of the total dissolution which threatens the scene. From one "shattering" we move to a still point of massed flowers at the very moment when the sun is highest; this fragile stasis is set against a future when the declining sun will again spread and thin the shadows, as the wind strips away the shadow-casting flowers. Birds, flowers, and shadowy darkness all come together in this still mass and poised moment, framed by the luminous movement of the spring scene.

"Voices" and "shadows" are traces, not things in themselves. A trace is a mark which draws attention to something missing, a source; and a poetic world of traces teaches the indirectness of knowledge. The surface traces which fill a couplet have all the simplicity and autonomy of perception, but at the same time they embody all the determinacy of nature's order.

An Active Principle of Relation

We will change our procedures: be now convinced that literary parallelism grows out of nature's own parallelism and stands for nature's form in the world of words. We now say that parallelism *presumes* some natural relation, even where none may be obvious: parallelism asserts such a relation, and in doing so, it becomes an active principle by which to join the lines of a couplet. We feel assured that the poet has seen the necessity of the juxtaposition; we are dazzled by the possibility and strive to intuit nature's coherence in the unusual matching.

Nearby lies metaphor, the other great system of literary signification based on paired terms. Parallelism and metaphor are essentially different: unlike metaphor, parallelism supposes that both terms are present on the same level of discourse and that neither "stands in for" the other. Metaphor subordinates its terms: one points to the other (whether it is known or not). Parallelism is content to let its terms rest side by side. But both metaphor and parallelism are driven by the interplay of identity and difference. As the energy of metaphor lies in concealment, in discovering the grounds on which to relate its two terms, so an unexpected parallel juxtaposition begs the grounds of anti-thesis and unity.

In dead metaphor and dull parallelism, when the unity of the terms is habitual or obvious, the joining lacks interest—Heaven and Earth, for example. At the other extreme, if the parallel elements are too remote, they repel or amuse most readers, as with Heaven and pineapples. Complex parallel juxtapositions, like complex metaphors, either lie just on the threshold of compre-

hension, or more commonly, can be unified in many possible ways. In this latter case the multiplicity of possible relations seems to assure us of the need for the parallel but makes any single relation seem inadequate for the aggregate; multiple relations defer the closure of the link between the terms, the reduction of the parallel to the easily comprehensible.

A surprising couplet (*ching-chü* 警句) insists that we discover parallel pattern where none is immediately apparent. With Ku Fei-hsiung 顧非熊 (early ninth century) we may look into a valley and see:¹²

巖	狢	牽	垂	果
cliff	ape(s)	pull	hang-down	fruit
湍	禽	接	迸	魚
turbulent-water	bird	meet / touch	leap	fish

Apes of the cliff pull on hanging fruit;

In swirling torrent a bird meets the leaping fish.

Vestiges of established compounds lie hidden here: "bird" matches "beast," and in the "cliff" and "turbulent water" we read a *shan-shui*, a "mountain-and-waterscape." But here the background of the common compound only emphasizes the particular form of this opposition—sheer cliff and swirling water, shapes of precipitousness and danger.

Fruit follows the flowers and bears seeds for new growth; fish are scaly creatures that swim freely, nip at mosquitoes, and stir philosophers to meditation on their submerged bliss. But in juxtaposition, "fruit" and "fish" become "food," and suggest the distinction between gathering and killing, between plant and animal food. Suppose we are some later-born poet who abhors the violence of the second line: we change "meets the leaping fish" to "brushes falling flowers"; in this changed parallel, "fruit" takes on a new value and significance.

A downward vector, "hanging," is met by an upward vector, "leaping"; and the two lines of force come together at the point

where bird "meets" fish. The steady strain of "hanging" and "pulling" is set against the instantaneous movements of "leaping" and "meeting"; and we sense a tension and sudden release of tension in movement. On one side of the couplet we have the solid mountain, the steady hanging of the fruit, the tugging perseverance of the apes. The stability is fragile: everything strains on stalk and slope for the sudden rush downward. Set against this tense poise we see the turbulent flux of the stream, the sudden leaping of the fish, and the very instant of its deadly intersection with the descending bird.

Balancing alternatives, the couplet sets stolid labor against fortuitous accident; and in juxtaposing the violence of the killing blow with the steadier fruit-gathering of the apes, the two lines circumscribe two kinds of feeding. Death in the second line is granted a special grimness by the use of the wrong verb, as the bird "meets" or "touches" (*chieh*) the fish, a polite tangent that pretends to conceal talons piercing flesh.

The form of the couplet does double service—not only as balanced alternatives, but as a single sequence of movement. The downward tension of the fruit is the beginning of a vector completed in the downward strike of the bird. Hanging and tugging are part of the gatherers' work, thematic antitheses of the death blow; at the same time they structurally initiate the blow, and the eye descends swiftly with the secret snapping of the stalk.

Like metaphorical relations, parallel relations may work through the interplay of identity and difference; but parallelism is a broader principle, admitting sequence, complementary definition, and even uncertain illusions of substitution. At a parting, Li Po 李白 (701-762) drew on a full range of parallel relations for this couplet of perfect simplicity:¹³

天	晴	一	雁	遠
heavens	clear	one	goose	far
海	闊	孤	帆	遲
sea / lake	vast	lone	sail	slow

The sky is clear, a single goose afar;
The lake, vast—a lone sail moves slowly.

Two vast bodies of blue, each set with a speck of white—of wild goose and sail—are visual parallels and contiguous in the field of vision. Poets will often note how lake and sky seem to merge in the horizon, and there at the edge of our gazing, we may wonder to which domain of blue this white speck belongs. It may be that we distinguish both wild goose and sail in our gazing; or we may have made an error and correction ("a goose?—no, it's a sail"; or "a goose!—I thought it was a sail"); there is even the possibility of a metaphor, though we could never tell which speck of white might be the metaphor for the other. A lake is, in poetry, a mirror; and its rippling surface will reduce the white shapes passing above it to fleeting sheets of white. Moreover this lake, like all waters, will ultimately flow into the sea and up around into the heavens, so that a far journey on the lake's surface may become, in fact, sailing through the heavens.

Wild goose and sail are so much the same in our distant eyes that we might easily mistake one for the other; but when we are certain how to name the two specks, we think of them differently. We are perhaps indifferent to "one" wild goose, but a bond of human sympathy might make us feel that the sail is a "lone" sail. In this parting poem the sail carries the traveler away; but a wild goose is known to bring messages from far travelers (though to write out the traveler's most common messages more than "one" goose is needed—linear formations saying *yi* — "one", *erh* 二 "two," *jen* 人 "the person"—I am alone; we were two; from someone). The couplet is endlessly fertile, and the two lines complement one another in ways impossible for metaphor. The wild goose is not simply far, but in the distance borrows a slowness from the sail; and the slow sail, which carries the traveler too swiftly away, borrows distance from the wild goose. Distance is known, in part, from their apparent slowness; their slowness is explained by the distance.

A parallel relation is no more than the promise of *some* necessary connection between the balanced terms; but the precise nature of the connection remains open, awaiting discovery. The elements of a scene are presented with all the innocence of the uncritical senses, but we intuit in the scene the strict laws of

nature's order. Relations are "discovered" or intuitively sensed in the things themselves; they are not presented as the poet's assertions.

Parallel Balance in Poetic Structure

By a tradition carrying the authority of believed etymology, a *shih* was considered the authentic presentation of an experience. And when the theorists of the lyric set out to describe how an experience became manifest in poetry, they discovered that poetic experience, like the rest of the natural world, possessed an inherent antithetical structure. For every particular "scene" of the world (*ching* 景), there must be a subjective consciousness (*ch'ing* 情) to perceive it, reflect on it, and respond to it. Out of the structure of experience came the structure of a poem, moving through rhythms of scene and subjective reflections.¹⁴ Here and in many other traditional theories of lyric structure we find balanced ratios of couplets, each internally complete, following more-or-less-determined sequences.

On the less-theoretical level of compositional technique and practical interpretation, the internal form of the couplet is repeated in a poem's larger patterns: a couplet describing a "far" scene will often be followed by a couplet describing a "near" scene; a couplet on parting "here" will ask a couplet speculating on the traveler's state of mind "there." As they may define the relations between lines of a couplet, so the terms of established compounds often define the relations between couplets; and two couplets can be read in perplexing juxtaposition in much the same way that the lines of a single couplet are read.

In literal English translation almost any Chinese poem will appear as a string of independent statements, seemingly unrelated or related only loosely. But the English reader's sense of wearying fragmentation come from his education in a different reading tradition. For the traditional Chinese reader, the art of construing couplets teaches the art of construing poems. A poem may be easily unified by conventional antitheses and ratios of

scene and subjectivity; relations between the parts of a poem may be as rich and problematic as the relations between the lines of some couplets; the poem may even seem to be a string of loosely related fragments, whose incoherence betrays something of the poet's state of mind. But to be appreciated, the particular quality of poetic unity depends upon an art of parallel reading.

Consider how the great Ch'ing dynasty commentator Ch'ou Chao-ao 仇兆鰲 explained Tu Fu's "Gazing on the Peak" 望嶽:¹⁵

What is it like—Mount T'ai, the Great Peak?

岱宗夫如何

Across Ch'i and Lu a green unceasing.

齊魯青未了

Here Nature concentrated unearthly glory,

造化鍾神秀

Dark north slope, the sunlit south divide dusk and dawn.

陰陽割昏曉

Sweeping past breast growing layered cloud;

盪胸生層雲

Eye-pupils split, moving in with homing birds.

決眚入歸鳥

The time will surely come when I pass to its very summit

會當凌絕頂

And see in one encompassing vision how tiny all other mountains are.

一覽群山小

Ch'ou's commentary of 1689 outlines the structure of the poem:

Written when gazing on the Eastern Peak [Mount T'ai], the poem's meaning can be sketched in four layers. The first couplet is of its color when gazing from afar; the sec-

ond couplet is its stance seen from up close. The third couplet is the scene when gazing intently and minutely; the last couplet is the subjective response when his gaze reaches its limit.

Tu Fu's poem is on "gazing," and Ch'ou repeats the "gazing" throughout his interpretation. It is not a vain repetition; it reminds us to remember the gazer, especially his gazing in the first two couplets. A "far" couplet followed by a "near" couplet implicates a viewer to measure out the perspective; and the sequence of "far" and "near" is the secret approach of the human gazer to the mountain in his eyes.

Ch'ou's interpretation is a true "analysis," resolving the whole into its parts, its constituent antitheses. "Color" (*se* 色) is the most apparent quality in the mountain's spreading formlessness, seen from the distance; "stance" (*shih* 勢) is the complementary quality, a majestic height, now more striking as the poet draws closer. In the second half of the poem Ch'ou follows the same pattern: intent gazing toward is matched by attaining the object of the gaze (for "gazing," *wang* 望, is also a "desire" and "hope"). Scene (*ching*) is followed by subjective response (*ch'ing*).

The seventeenth-century commentator is telling his readers how to understand the relation between couplets—not as linear argument or narrative sequence, but as a pair of quatrains, each constituted of a balanced pair of couplets, which in turn are made up of a balanced pair of lines. The structure of the whole is formed of equal pairs within equal pairs.

A Western reading tradition might find a straightforward linear progression in the poem: a continuous approach to the mountain, first present and physical, then speculative and anticipated. Though writing almost a thousand years after Tu Fu, Ch'ou's art of parallel reading more perfectly accounts for the richness of the poem; and the poem continues to reward a reader who seeks an architecture of antitheses—in the opening balance of question and answer; in the first quatrain's impersonal voice set against the explicit presence of the poet in the second quatrain; in the present gazing *toward* matched by a

future gazing *from*. And in that future gaze from the summit, the poet may hope to behold the ultimate antithesis to answer the question posed in the first line: like Confucius, when *he* climbed Mount T'ai, Tu Fu may then realize the difference between the Great Peak and "all other mountains," which from that high perspective seem so small.¹⁶

Reconsideration

Form is not the sum of poetry; but without form, there is no poetry. Of all the aspects of poetry, form is the most difficult to convey. We learn an intense intuition of form's beauty in the poetry of our own language, but we find its explication tedious. How the intuition of form is passed from one generation to the next, or across oceans and languages, remains a mystery. When the form belongs to a poetry remote from our own, when explication cannot even assume some prior experience of intuition, then transmission becomes doubly difficult. In *shih*, the Chinese lyric, the parallel couplet is the basis of form; but its beauty is altogether unlike what the English reader has learned to enjoy in his own poetry. Perhaps we cannot expect to transmit the intense intuition of form, but we can at least hope to transmit an intuition of what such an intuition might be like.

When we recognize the beauty of form, it is always bound up with particular words and some particular significance; when we try to speak of it in itself, it is a mere geometry. In itself form means absolutely nothing; it "serves" meaning, often serves meaning so perfectly that it seems to possess some silent allegiance to this meaning or that; but, in fact, form is neutral. An accord may exist between nature's parallel symmetry and the parallel couplet; but this is only one possible truth. We have filled in form's abstract geometry so that it can be seen. But form is free: it will serve any master. Consider parallelism in Tu Fu's "I Stand Alone" 獨立:¹⁷

Beyond empty skies, one bird of prey;
空外一鷲鳥

A pair of white gulls between river's banks.

河間雙白鷗

Tossed by the wind, ripe for the striking,

飄飄搏擊便

All at their ease, they flit to and fro.

容易往來遊

And on the plants the dew is full,

草露亦多濕

The threads of spiders, still not drawn in.

蛛絲仍未收

Heaven's intimations, so close to man's affairs—

天機近人事

Amid thousands of sources of grim thought, I stand alone.

獨立萬端憂

Though nature may arrange itself in balanced pairs, here is someone who, in the title and in the ending, proclaims his isolation. Is the first couplet nature's parallel pattern or the form of the poet's desire, holding *apart* things which threaten destructive collision? Here a narrative is set in motion and blocked; the couplet holds it in suspension; closure is unconsummated.

Look closely to the progression of the first three couplets. Form becomes a means to oppose nature's order, to isolate a stage of process and delay its fruition. We do not need parallelism to know the potential relation between the bird of prey and the gulls; parallelism asserts not relation, but separation.

The destroyer is set in opposition to his victims. Strange barriers separate them—the destroyer is "outside" (*wai* 外, "beyond") the empty sky; the victims are "within" (*chien* 間, "between") the bounds of the riverbanks. These delicate barriers are mere words, generated out of the antithetical form of the couplet. We know that in the "natural" scene only emptiness lies between. The strike seems imminent.

The second couplet treats the gulls. The descending blow is deferred, held still in expectation. These two lines are related,

not by a potential kill but by a contrast of peril and unconcern. Their blindness to peril may heighten the pathos and fill the one who watches with chilling apprehension; but it also delays. The poet contemplates the scene, sets it in stasis, uses the couplet to "analyze" it, to break it into its constituent parts. Orderly nature is eager to scatter blood and feathers over the river; the couplet's order is to halt and consider; and behind that impulse of the form, we sense the powerful motives of the poet, motives opposed to the continuation of nature's narrative.

He looks elsewhere to find the pattern repeated—in the imminent death of the plants from the cold dew, in the webs of spiders awaiting *their* prey. He looks elsewhere to find the pattern repeated—how do we weigh that realization?—that nature reveals everywhere the replication of this sinister order of things?—or that *he looks elsewhere*? He averts his eyes to the earth; the descending movement of his eyes perhaps goes with another descent which he does not want to watch. He says no more in the poem about the gulls and the bird of prey.

He quickly turns his attention to things that less immediately ask our sympathy. He finds the pattern repeated. Perhaps he *seeks* the repetition; repetition generalizes, and in doing so, it diminishes the unique claim any one situation may make upon our attention. The pattern he sees is grim, but it is a pattern of incompleteness, of the deadly strike held in abeyance by being unnoticed.

These are "Heaven's intimations" 天機, the first, most subtle hints of movement and a process unfolding. It is this pattern that the parallel couplet raises up out of the lushness of the physical scene. But in this case, the pattern is of "intimations," of beginnings, and the repetition of pattern becomes an act of delay. The poet claims that he finds the patterns so pervasive and similar to the conditions of the human world that it becomes "thousands of sources of grim thought." But the poetic process is more complicated than a simple repetition that proves a universal threat; the form of the poem arrests danger at its first stage and allows the poet to contemplate it. As the danger approaches "man's affairs," the human poet too may be caught up in it. The form allows the poet to place himself "beyond" the pattern. Consider,

there are only two creatures in the poem that clearly "stand alone."

By itself, form is invisible; we see it only when it is filled, bearing some significance. Form seems to possess special affinities: the parallel couplet is comfortable when it embodies nature's parallel order, where all is poise and harmony and fruitful relation, a Noah's ark universe where everything lies down pair by pair in chaste tension. But form is promiscuous: the parallel couplet can serve as the means to thwart nature as easily as being nature's body. "I Stand Alone" shows the parallel couplet in service to a master who recoils from deadly nature; and the couplet's even balance becomes something more desperate and unsettling.

Let us say then the opposite, that nature is *not* ordered in couplets, and if couplets are "discovered"—either in cosmology or in poetry—there is strong reason for the labor. Empty scales hang even; that is mere "balance" and uninteresting. But a great weight skillfully set in equilibrium is "balancing," not "balance," and interesting for the forces held in check. And why a poet suspends such forces—that too is interesting.

In some cases and in some ways, the sweet vision of the couplet as nature's harmony is true; or it becomes true if we would have it be so. But when form serves some other purpose and cannot be brought to such harmony, then equilibrium is an act of will. A model of order receives its particular shape from necessity, its contours are molded against a particular shape of disorder. The couplet can be a form of control—not the security of nature's stability, but a delicate act of balancing.

What threat requires such willful balancing? There are many dangerous shapes controlled by the couplet. Consider the mutating uncreated universe, always changing and dividing, unchecked by any constant norms except the principles of change. The couplet holds this world in stasis: the fruit never reaches the ape's mouth, the fish never dies, the flowers are never scattered by the voice-shattering wind. Like Lessing's Laoköon and Keats's urn, the couplet is an art against time; it proposes to hold things in eternal poise, undying because they are unconsummated. Thus the couplet is so often concerned

with the things of the season and all that is transitory; it preserves. And opposing the dissolution of things in time, the form of the couplet may support the larger purposes of literature, which promise to take the place of a "good historian" and preserve the author's fame and the experiences of his life.¹⁸

With its pairings and repetitions, the couplet opposes a second threat—a vision of something standing alone.

FOUR

VOICE

*Language most shewes a man: speake, that I
may see thee. It springs out of the most retired
and inmost parts of us, and is the Image of the
Parent of it, the mind. No glass renders a mans
forme or likenesse so true as his speech.*

—Ben Jonson, *Discoveries*

*Word is the sprout from intent;
Acts are writing's root;
Thus as I read your poems,
I know the man you are.*

—Po Chü-yi, "Reading Chang Chi's
'Old Ballads'"

When someone speaks, the words are embodied in a voice. That is our first experience of language, and it remains forever the measure of true language. The voice is never "anyone's" voice: voice belongs to someone, identifying the person and imprinted with his nature. The voice usually has a name and a face, and as the voice grows familiar, hearing it brings back the silent history of our experience with the person. We respond to voice, and each voice stirs in us anticipations—perhaps of amusement, or of resentment, or of admiration and wonder. We can be passionately indifferent to a voice, but we can never be neutral; voice casts us into a relation with the speaker. A new voice is a stranger's voice; we listen to it with caution and curiosity. A familiar voice revives established bonds—to a friend, or to an enemy, or to a lover, or to a parent.

For the listener, voice has its own value, shaping and shading

the way we hear what is said. We can reflect and name the components of that voice—inflection, speed and phrasing, pitch, unconscious mannerisms. But when voice fuses all components, they are inseparable from the utterance: they are a way of knowing, the first context of understanding. There, in speech, a voice is the identity of the speaker; it asks for recognition, points to a person, and engages us in a relation.

Language without voice has about it something alien and incomplete. It is repulsive, as a mannequin is repulsive, bearing human features, yet inhuman because it lacks the features of anyone in particular. Anonymity intensifies its lifelessness. This is the effect of writing, in its most rudimentary form, upon language. Writing strips discourse of voice: gone are the inflections, the phonemic idiosyncracies, the habits of phrasing—all the qualities that enable us to locate the person in what is said.

Writing must be taught, and the discipline is more than the transformation of sounds to marks on paper. A child, learning to write, finds it difficult and painful to yield up all the traits of his speech: there remain unthinking word choices, colloquialisms, and provincialisms. As he begins to write "well," the student learns to excise these traits: the young Renaissance Latinist sacrifices his native word order for a Ciceronian construction; the student of English learns an anonymous expository *koine*; the young Chinese scholar studies to form written discourse out of the memorized phrases of earlier texts. The harsh sacrifice of the comfortable tongue has stirred nostalgia in many, and there is a class of writer whose idiom is formed by the desire to recapture the traits of speech; but such idioms are the late fruit of maturity—first we learn how different writing *must* be. This was our bargain with Thoth: words are only fleeting sounds, and the miracle that preserves them also strips them of their life.

The written word and the memorized word are promiscuous: they can be voiced by anyone. Yet the listener knows that this voice does not belong to the words. Once the word is committed to writing or memorized, recitation (even in the voice of the author) comes in sounds different from the voice of speech. Extension is the gift of writing—it can be carried afar, it lasts long—but at the same time, the written word bears the mark of a de-

ficiency: it has no immediate link to the voice in which the word is alive.

The long history of the literary word ("literary" in the old sense, encompassing the historian, the philosopher, the essayist, as well as the poet) has been an attempt to recover voice in writing, to repair the deficiency and outwit Thoth by making his gift whole again. Style in all its senses discriminates and recovers identity from blurring unities; and style has been one level on which voice has sought to return to language in writing. The cliché that "the style is the man" is precisely this: style aspires to silent voice, forging an organic bond between the written word and some person. Though it uses soundless words and refuses to mimic speech, stylistic voice, like voice in speech, asks to be recognized.

Written voice must promise a coherent identity, one with which we can grow familiar. But voice must also be genuine; it must bear an authentic relation to the person. In itself, a willfully fabricated voice always fails (though it sometimes can succeed if it implicates another, true voice trying to conceal itself in the fabrication). Readers are not deceived: a clever mannerism is not voice, neither is forced originality; these are everywhere the same and as anonymous as platitude and convention. Great poets have written work that is *hsin-ch'i* 新奇, "novel and unusual"; but thousands of bad poets have also written verse that is *hsin-ch'i*. Nor is voice achieved by capturing the liveliness of speech: it is possible for a great writer like Sterne to return to the spoken language and give it written voice; others attempting the same will fall into an anonymous, voiceless colloquial. Voice is the incarnation of identity in word: it can be fostered, but it cannot be constructed.

Great literature is possible without individual voice. Ballads, the *Book of Songs*, and some ways of reading Homer appeal to the negative counterpart of individual voice—a collective voice in which we can all participate while remaining wholly ourselves. Unlike the manufactured *koine* of rudimentary writing, this collective voice is strangely close to us and recognizable. A writer with an individual voice may yearn to speak only with

the collective voice, and we may recognize and appreciate that yearning in him; but it is still no more than a complicated, dissatisfied version of an individual voice. The collective voice necessarily belongs to a preliterate past or to an illiterate and lower social class; and it has one severe imperative: the collective voice must not betray the presence of a literate, individual writer. Even a hint of literary tampering calls into question the purity of the collective voice and makes readers recoil in distrust.

Although written voice is often realized through style, voice is distinct from style. Style, unlike voice, can be adequately comprehended in reflection. If we tabulate the percentage of verbs in an author's work, define his use of pronouns and the habitual construction of his sentences and couplets, we may expect to comprehend the stylistic whole in the accumulation of parts. But even the most complete description of stylistic traits would be, for voice, the wrong kind of knowledge. If we count and classify the linguistic features of an unknown poem and compare our computations to analyses of various poets' styles, we may be able to identify authorship with some certainty. But it would be cold comfort. To define the stylistic components of voice is not to "hear" it; to identify a voice is not to recognize it.

To acknowledge that stylistic analysis is somehow inadequate to understand voice is no sentimental distrust of the reflective dimensions of literary experience. But when voice, as it appears in a particular utterance, becomes the object of reflection, its nature is so radically changed that it is no longer voice, and the change corresponds to the first fall of voice into writing. With that change, the struggle to regain voice in writing is undone, and the debt to Thoth is honored. Hearing the silent voice of a text, like hearing spoken language, is essentially a process, an event unfolding in time. Voice is known as coming from outside the listener, in movement and not in completion: voice belongs to "someone else." In reflection a reader appropriates the text, makes it his own—stopping, comparing images, criss-crossing the text at his leisure, wresting secret meanings from their hiding places. That reflective appropriation of the text asserts that the

"someone else" is no longer in command of the words. The "meaning" of a poem, its images, its words are changed in reflection, but they are still accessible. Voice refuses reflection: to recover it we can only listen again, rereading the full text.

Identifying is not recognizing: identification matches known traits against unknown phenomenon to satisfy certain criteria; recognition assumes the prior experience of a coherent identity, someone or something familiar set in a new situation. And that prior experience which accompanies recognition is an inescapable part of how we hear all statements in voice.

Indulgence is a capacity that emerges only when voice is heard in writing. Boswell's Johnson (and the frame it creates for reading Dr. Johnson's own writings) is an obvious case in English. Many of the pronouncements given by Dr. Johnson in Boswell's *Life* would be boorish and irritating—that is, in any voice but Dr. Johnson's own. We have heard that voice be kind and judicious, and because we are acquainted with the fallible human to whom the voice belongs, we are apt to listen with benign amusement to the most unkind and injudicious tirades. Much in the *Lives of the Poets* and the *Rambler* essays becomes engaging as variation on the familiar voice. Indulgence grows from an acquaintance that has come to occupy a larger horizon than the opinion of the moment. This is not the "willing suspension of disbelief"; the indulgence is quite particular in its application: we hear the words through Dr. Johnson and appreciate them only because they are his own, given in his own inimitable voice.

Coming to know a person is a complicated process, requiring long time and a measure of tolerant respect for a fellow human. The "character" of a fiction asks no such respect; "it" is a mere projection of the author's constructive powers, and we are licensed to anatomize its words and deeds instantly. A text embodying true human voice may be very similar to a text bearing a skillfully fictional voice: often they differ most strongly in how we feel we ought to attend to them. To treat a fictional character as a living person is an unwarranted but comprehensible sentimentality; to treat someone who lives or has lived as a merely fictional construct betrays an uglier impulse in the reader.

There is a severe aesthetic education that teaches fear of voice. Voice comes from the poem, not from ourselves; but it first asks a willingness to listen. The refusal to listen will be confirmed by silence.

Distrust of voice has grown as the reading process becomes ever more strictly guided by traditions of interpretation, traditions whose roots in biblical interpretation are all too evident. A reader comes to the literary text as the faithful come to the Bible, assuming that the Maker is in full control of the Word, that the text is perfect as received. The weight of such perfection charges the reader with a responsibility to comprehend why the text takes the form it has.

If our reading proceeds with a constant sense that every word has a purpose in the whole, then we presume a unifying plan which transcends the text. This speculative unity may be accessible only through the text, but it is the ground on which every movement of the text has meaning. We no longer grant this unity a historical priority in authorial intention, but it still retains an epistemological priority through which every word becomes necessary.

The voice of God can assume different tones—gentleness, reproof, wrath—but it is not a human voice and has no identity. If we read a text as if it were governed by a transcendent and hidden Plan, no true human voice can be heard. In such reading the only possible form of voice is a fictional, dramatic voice, differing from true voice by a contingency on some end that can be considered only in the completed whole. As we are led through such a text, we do not grant it the freedom to turn this way or that: each turn occurs as if predetermined, made necessary by the whole to which it contributes. And our reading assumes a literary predestination, Aristotelian Necessity turned totalitarian.

To hear true voice is to grant a mortal fallibility to discourse—not the dim motives of a maker but the unmanageable promptings of a personality. To begin to hear true voice, we must listen for the irregularities in a text, the traces of fallibility that subvert our assumption of a governing plan—evasions, posturings,

pride in a perfect couplet, a masterful reaching back at a fortuitous moment to draw a poem together.

Speech as it unfolds is free: its continuity lies in passing from one word to the next; unity does not lie in the internal necessities of the whole. It must have the flexibility to respond to outer contingencies and the freedom to win for itself a rough coherence or to fail. We move along with voice, and each new word is often a surprise, both for us and for the speaker. Even when speech is finished and has become a memorized text a thousand years old, to move through it again is to reenact the process; even though we know what word will come next, we can still relish the past freedom with which the poet navigated the strong currents and winds of discourse. And even the best poets are blown where they had no intention or desire to go—poems may sail nobly in such storms.

There is no more apt parable for this freedom than the description of the clouds of Mount T'ai by Yeh Hsieh 葉燮 (1627–1703), in an attack upon contemporary theories of composition by "rule" (*fa* 法):

Within Heaven and Earth the greatest forms of *wen* [pattern / literature] are the wind and clouds, rains and the thunder. Their mutations and transformations cannot be fathomed and have neither limit nor boundary: they are the highest manifestation of spirit (*shen* 神) in the universe and the perfection of *wen*. But let me speak of them from one particular point of view. The clouds of Mount T'ai rise from the merest wisp, but before the morning is done, they cover all the world. I once lived half a year at the foot of Mount T'ai and grew familiar with the shapes and attitudes of these clouds. Sometimes, as I said, they rise out of the merest wisp and stream off flooding all the ends of the earth; sometimes all the peaks of the range seem to try to rise above them, but even the very summits disappear. Sometimes several months will pass in continuous shadow, but then the clouds will scatter in the short hour of a meal. Sometimes they are as black as lacquer; sometimes as white as snow. They may be as huge as the wings of the *P'eng*

bird, hanging over both horizons, or as wild as tangled tresses. Sometimes they sit suspended like lumps in the sky with no others following them; sometimes they are continuous and fine, coming one after another without interruption.

All at once black clouds will mount upward, and the natives of the region will read the signs by established rule: "It will rain," they say. And it does not rain. Then again some clouds, lit by the sun, will come out, and their established rule tells them, "It's going to be sunny." And it rains. The attitudes assumed by the clouds can be counted in the tens of thousands; no two are the same. Neither are any two manners of clouds the same by whose colors we might forecast their future movements. Sometimes all the clouds will come back; sometimes they will all go off for good, and never come back. Sometimes all come back; sometimes half will come back—no two situations are the same. This is the natural pattern of Heaven and Earth, its perfect work.

But let us suppose that the pattern of Heaven and Earth could be set according to a rule. When Mount T'ai was going to dispatch its clouds, it would first gather the troops of clouds and hold a conference with them: "I'm about to send you clouds out to make the Great Pattern of Heaven and Earth. Now you over there—I want you to go first—and you follow him. I would like you to rise up; you next to him—you sink down. You should try shining in the light, and *you* might try making a rippling motion. You back there!—you should turn around as you go out and come back in; and I think it would be especially nice to have *you* sort of roll over in the sky. This one is to begin; this one is to close; and this one here is to follow up the rear wagging its tail."

If the clouds were dispatched like this and brought back home like this, there would be no vitality in any of them. And if the pattern of the universe were made in *this* manner, then the universe would feel burdened by having a Mount T'ai, and Mount T'ai would feel burdened by having clouds, and no clouds would ever be sent out.¹

In a freely moving text there are rough guarantees of unity—the received unities of poetic structure, the unity of topic (though there is an exhilaration in a voice that wanders), and the unifying personality embodied in voice itself. An asymmetrical text allows voice to be heard most clearly, but a frightened, fastidious voice can be heard in even the most “impersonal” and symmetrical work.

To speak of the possibility of voice is easy; but it is difficult to describe the movements of voice in a particular text and convey how much voice matters. Our language of “mattering” has grown up around the question of meaning, once meaning has been extricated from voice. Like form, voice has no meaning in itself; it is the means by which meaning is made human: by locating meaning in someone else, voice lets meaning be known through the relation we bear to that other.

To consider voice in a specific text, begin with a condition in which voice is garbled, lost, and its absence all too apparent. Translation is particularly helpful here, possessing the singular capacity to conceal voice in even the greatest poetry. The following is a mute artifact, a fairly literal translation of Tu Fu’s “Broken Boat” 破船:²

All my life, my mind has been on the rivers and lakes;
 From long ago I had prepared a small boat.
 How could it have been only for, on the clear creek,
 Those daily excursions by my brushwood gate?
 In confusion I got away from the rebellious soldiery;
 Far away I longed for my former hill.
 My neighbors too already are no more;
 Wilderness bamboo alone grows tall, tall.
 I will not again rap the boat’s rim [and sing];
 It has been sunken away already through an autumn.
 I look up at the westward flying wings;
 Looking down I’m shamed by the current passing eastward.
 I might be able to dig up the old one,
 And a new one could be sought easily.
 What I am sad about is several times running away to hide;
 A plain cottage is hard to stay in long.

This is bad translation because it lacks something essential to the original—voice. The translation does Tu Fu a willful injustice, and unless I redeem the poem, I will be delivered over into a special bolgia of Inferno reserved for translators who, through laziness or wickedness, do not try to live up to the grandeur of their texts.

Voice requires a context: as voice links a poem to a person, so the person is, for the reader, embodied in a group of other texts and bits of knowledge that combine to form a human identity. In the Chinese reading tradition, a particular kind of biographical context frames the poem. Leaving the political and military turmoil of the heartland, Tu Fu has sought refuge in the west, in Ch'eng-tu, the main city of Szechwan. When the Ch'eng-tu garrison mutined, Tu Fu was again forced to flee, and in this poem Tu Fu has at last returned to his cottage near the now peaceful Ch'eng-tu. He thinks of the land of the lakes in the lower Yangtze valley, a region of beautiful landscapes untroubled by the constant warfare and instability that troubles the rest of the empire. The reader knows that eventually Tu Fu will set off down the Yangtze, and after a journey lasting several years (as the poet takes up residence in various towns along the way), he will die shortly after reaching the lakes region.

"All my life my mind has been on the rivers and lakes." The classic *Book of Documents* (*Shu-ching*) defines what poetry is to be: *yen chih*, telling what is intensely on the mind, the poet's goals and ambitions.³ What fulfills the poetic imperative more perfectly than the opening here?—a lifetime's ambition. But hear the voice's emphases—"my mind," or "my heart." The *Chuang-tzu* tells of another kind of person, a foolish person, whose *body* must abide by the "rivers and lakes" but whose heart and mind are fixed on the gate towers of the palace, yearning for the glories of public life.⁴ Tu Fu is the opposite: the dangers of a political animal seem to follow his body on all its wanderings, and he craves far retreat from the troubled public world. This desire is no fresh, passing whim; it has been his lifetime's desire, never changing and never fulfilled.

The boat was proof of the desire. He had it prepared for this journey long ago and kept it in readiness, awaiting the moment

when he could set off down the Yangtze to the land of the lakes. Hear in the voice the earnestness of his intent and the shock of his frustration, discovering the ruin of the boat.

With a hint of indignation he answers a charge against his earnestness; the charge had not been raised until he answered it. We can hear him raise the charge silently to himself, fearing that others might make the mistake: "Do you mean the boat you used to enjoy so much, rowing on the river near your cottage?" Someone might wonder why Tu Fu did not set off for the land of the lakes long ago. Someone might suspect that he was content to remain right there in Ch'eng-tu, spending his days boating on the river, dreaming of departures for the land of the lakes. "No," he answers, "it isn't so. I did intend the little boat for purposes larger than those daily outings." But the voice protests against these doubts too loudly and lays traps for itself.

All my life *my* heart has been set
on the rivers and lakes; some time ago
I put in readiness a tiny boat.

平生江海心
宿昔具扁舟

It wasn't just for those daily outings
on the clear creek by my brushwood gate!
豈惟清溪上
日傍柴門遊

Then came the Ch'eng-tu mutiny, and in his haste to escape—an urgency that neglects the most abiding desires for immediate safety—he seems to have forgotten to store the boat safely away. Finally, at a comfortable distance from Ch'eng-tu, Tu Fu, a poet always filled with many desires, is taken by a new desire—to return to his cottage in Ch'eng-tu and have things as they were before (a life which surely includes speculative longings to escape that life and set off for the land of the lakes).

He returns to find a wilderness. The neighbors are gone; the bamboo, growing up quickly, spreads over the cottage sites.

And there is the boat—submerged. Is his first thought that now he will not be able to depart for the land of the lakes?—no, he laments that no longer can he sail near his cottage, tapping a rhythm on the boat's sides and singing his poems (which probably tell of his longing to set off for the land of the lakes). There it lies, sunk in the mud and water, so long now that it must be rotting.

In desperate haste I fled the mutiny
and there at a distance longed to return
to these hills.

蒼惶避亂兵
緬邈懷舊邱

The neighbors are all gone now; only wild bamboo
remains, spreading, growing tall.

鄰人亦已非
野竹獨脩脩

Never again will I drift, rapping its rim, singing—
It's been submerged a whole autumn now.

船舷不重扣
埋沒已經秋

Somehow all the scene around him conspires to call back to his mind that lifetime wish: above him the birds, at his feet the river are moving off in passage to faraway places. It is the river that makes him feel a special shame, as *it* flows eastward into the land of the lakes, while he no longer has the boat to carry him away.

Yet in speaking of his flight from Ch'eng-tu and his return, the voice has changed. Earnestness, mock protest, and resigned melancholy give way to a painfully ironic laugh at himself, and Tu Fu realizes that the broken boat is not really a tragedy, or not the real tragedy. The broken boat might be repaired, and even if it cannot be, a new boat can be bought. The truth is—and we see the realization growing throughout the poem—that Tu Fu was

quite happy where he was in Ch'eng-tu, that the desire to flee to the land of the lakes was only a cherished, illusory desire. As the joy proposed in the land of the lakes was most enjoyed as the distant object of desire, so the joy he knew in his Ch'eng-tu cottage became clear only through loss and distance. He had not wanted to go far away at all; he only wanted to remain here.

I look up at the westward flying birds,
 then down, embarrassed by the stream
 that flows off to the east.

仰看西飛翼
 下愧東逝流

Well, I might be able to dig up the old one,
 and a new one's easy enough to buy,

故者或可掘
 新者亦易求

But what's really sad is this running away
 time and again, and that even here,
 in this simple cottage,
 I cannot linger long.

所悲數奔竄
 白屋難久留

In the second couplet there is a rhetorical question ("How could the boat have been only for excursions?"), and it means simply "It was not for that purpose." But there is a difference between the rhetorical question and the voice that articulates it. The voice, intense where it should not be, betrays an awareness of another attractive purpose for the boat; and in denying it, the voice grants that other purpose force. The rhetorical question occurs on the level of "style"; voice embeds style in a context of human motives and uncertainties.

To hear a voice in a poem is to grant the poem the freedom of process: we allow the poet to become aware of something as he speaks, and we share something of his surprise. We assume the

poet does not know his course when he begins, and if in that assumption the poet loses full control of the poem, he gains the freedom to move, as Tu Fu moves, with canny and wry self-awareness. Tu Fu also has the freedom to fail, to try to conceal his growing realization and cling to his old false dream of flight to the land of the lakes. A thousand poems of equal value might have been written by poets who fled such self-awareness in interesting ways; but in coming through the process as he does, Tu Fu gains special honor, seeing through self-deception and exposing it with good humor. Poetic greatness becomes allied to purely human greatness: to admit this alliance is not the foolish equation of a "good person" and a "good poem," that confusion of easy ethics and weak aesthetics; rather, those complex qualities that we find interesting in people are also to be found in the voices of poems.

Digression: On Translation

The distance that separates a modern English reader from an eighth-century Chinese poem can be crossed in only two ways—moving the reader or moving the poem. Either resettlement must be resolute. We may learn and assimilate a new poetics; or we may remake the Chinese poem to answer the established literary values of English readers. Do not worry that the resolute migration of either party will result in full assimilation; the true danger lies in making what *is* vital poetry in one language into what is *not* poetry in another—a peculiar project that has little attraction either for English readers or for the patient Chinese poems. These essays are devoted to moving readers; translation is not our concern. However, if we *were* interested in translation (as we may be in a short digression), we would have to consider voice.

Two languages contend for dominance in translation. It is a struggle that occurs all along the disputed text, and each language must yield points to the more forceful configurations of the other. But translation is also a contention between two individual voices, each embodying his language in his own peculiar

way. In translation from Chinese poetry into English, the general conflict and disparity between the two languages is so great that it engulfs and silences the combat between the individual voices. Yet in both reading traditions, the recognition of a distinct, individual voice is essential to a certain kind of poetry.

An individual voice can emerge only through a familiar language; and a poet's voice assumes its identity only against the voices of other poets. Lacking a body of kindred texts to frame and support it, the individual poetic voice will be silenced. Thus even the most powerfully singular voice of the Chinese eighth or ninth century disappears in English translation, and the identity of the individual poet is lost in the collective identity of the civilization as it is seen from the twentieth-century West.

If a poet's voice is woven into the fabric of a particular language and dissolves when removed from that fabric, it becomes the translator's task to reconstitute the voice and make restitution of the identity. The act is problematic and menacing to the translator, touching his own voice and identity. An individual voice is an unconscious idiom, a personal version of a shared language, and the coherence of the idiom is the coherence of the self: voice is precisely that dimension of discourse which cannot be feigned, which unites the disparity of assumed poses. The translator must consider what it means to rewrite someone else's poem, to create a voice other than his own.

The peculiar relation between a translator and a poet has alternate versions; perhaps:

In its very conception translation is the most self-effacing mode of writing, and the serious translator moves with less freedom than a writer in any other mode. In every line and in every word, the translator studiously subordinates what *he* would say to what someone else has already said. The translator works by approximation—Zeno's paradox in writing, always dividing the distance to his goal and never attaining it. Whether the translation promises to convey the "spirit" or the "letter" of the original, the "good" of translation is a contingent "good," a relation to the primary text. The translation may make use of the values of original poetry, but a "good translation" means something

qualitatively different from a "good poem." The translator gives himself over to something that is, at its very best, a lesser accomplishment, and his inferiority is measured in quantities of ink, as his name is set in smaller type beneath that of the original writer.

And another version:

Translation is the least self-effacing mode of writing: it is, at heart, a willful act of domination. The translator shapes the work of another into what he would have it be, then presents the work as the poem itself. Translation replaces the original text. Even face to face with the original poem in a bilingual edition, the translation dominates the original; intended for readers with an imperfect command of the original language, such editions carry the translator's text back to control the understanding of the original text. Some may try to hide the violence of translation by calling it no more than interpretation; in fact, interpretation and translation represent radically different impulses. Interpretation's claims are more modest: it respects the "integrity" of the original text. Like translation, interpretation sets out to control the meaning of the original text, but the interpretative form admits its difference in kind from a literary text: its life is "beside" the original rather than "in place of" it.

The great poet-translators are not subversive: their independent merits teach us to read their translations in a special way. We seek in them less the authentic original than one strong voice working through another. We read Chapman's or Pope's Homer for their own sakes; we listen for Lowell in the *Imitations*. The truly subversive translators are the others, whose names hide behind the names of great writers in a different language. Here the reader comes looking for the original writer; here the reader thinks he is reading Flaubert or Tu Fu or Cervantes—the name of the translator might, for a moment, escape him. The translation makes the tacit claim, "This stands for the original poem."

Such translators' relation to their original texts is a strange romance involving "fidelity" and "traduction" (the terms themselves suggest the dominant passion, jealousy). And theirs is a passionate subservience that usurps the place of the original and

speaks in its name. No poet ever aspires to write the final poem; but the translator, in the intensity of his desire to possess the original, longs for the elusive "definitive" translation which will forever represent the original text in the translator's language.

The vain aspiration to a final translation marks a threat, that someone more gifted will come to lure the fickle original away, take it for his own. To protect his own possessions, the scholar is scrupulous of the possessions of others, giving rise to the academic protocol of citing earlier translations rather than making one's own. But in the desire to possess and usurp there is a desperate insecurity, growing from the sure knowledge of the contingency and linguistic impermanence of the translator's art.

If we wish to escape this strange romance involving "fidelity" and "liberties taken," a field of warring identities and the erotics of power, we must conceive of the translator's art differently. First, acknowledge that the translator must remain irrevocably himself and that his voice is his own. Any art which asks the sacrifice of that voice demands a violence against the self, and such self-violence will be committed only out of fear. Driven to such violence against himself, the translator will surely have his revenge upon the text by usurping the original voice in its position of honor.

The dramatist's art, particularly as seen in Romantic interpretations of Shakespeare, offers a release from this destructive passion, a model whereby the translator can simultaneously encompass two identities. Of Shakespeare's particular gift, Hazlitt wrote:

He had only to think of anything in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it. . . . Each of his characters is as much itself, and as absolutely independent of the rest, as well as of the author, as if they were living persons, not fictions of the mind. The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to the other, like the same soul animating different bodies.⁵

A translator may foster a relation to the real, historical poet like that which the great dramatist bears to his characters. As translation from one literary tradition robs the original poet of voice, it is for the translator to return a new, coherent voice, but one that is neither the translator's own nor a forced construct. Two voices aspire to speak perfectly as one in this third voice of the autonomous character: the erotics of the endeavor remain, but they are the erotics of ecstasy (*ek-stasis*, standing outside oneself), rather than the erotics of power.

If we choose the way of translation, to move the poem rather than the reader, we must sacrifice Chinese poetics—the openness of relation between words, the parallel structures, the nonfictional poet speaking from a particular moment, moving with experience. But we will choose the best analogues from our own literature: the dramatic monologue, the confessional tradition, the diary. In these traditions the poetic text also points to a hidden (if fictionalized) speaker. Tu Fu's "Broken Boat" once again:

All *my* life I've had my heart set on going off
to the land of the lakes—the boat was built for it,
and long ago too. That I used to row
every day on the creek that runs by my rail gate
is beside the point. But then came the mutiny,
and in panic I fled far away, where
my only concern was to get back here
to these familiar hills.

The neighbors are all gone now,
and everywhere the wild bamboo
sprouts and spreads and grows tall.
No more rapping its sides as I sing—
It's spent the whole autumn underwater.
All I can do now is watch the other travellers—
birds sailing off in their westward flights,
and even the river, embarrassing me
by moving off eastward so easily.
Well, I *could* dig up the old one,

and a new one's easy enough to buy,
but it's really the running away that troubles me—
this recent escape and so many before—
that even in this simple cottage
a man cannot stay put long.

A Note

That good poetry must be compact and "condensed" is a bit of popular wisdom which, if not of Pound's coinage, was set in general circulation by him. The corollary is that translation from the Chinese ought to reproduce, as far as possible, the compactness of the original. We might begin by subjecting the idea of "compactness" to some scrutiny, but the concept is so volatile that it evaporates under even the gentlest beams of reflection. To say that poetry should use no more words than are necessary is a truism whose latitude embraces the ingeniously verbose ramble, and we will surely mire our considerations in the question of "necessity" long before we reach the question of "superfluity." The capacity to blot lines gives brevity rather than compactness, and while Ezra Pound's passion for deletions may have been a happy pruning of "The Waste Land," few would agree with Ben Jonson that Shakespeare should have blotted a hundred. Indeed, a quick review of the English poetic tradition will assure us, popular wisdom aside, that a stern terseness characterizes neither our language nor our poetry.

Chinese poetry uses fewer words than English poetry. One inevitable result is that in a line of Chinese, there are fewer determinations of the relations between words. And the Chinese poetic language makes fewer determinations than the language of Chinese prose. Therefore we should conclude that in its "compactness," Chinese poetry possesses the ultimate stylistic virtues—"density" and "ambiguity." We must also conclude that newspaper headlines and traffic signs are the perfection of English poetry.

Readers of Chinese poems and English traffic signs have

learned to comfortably use a dialect with fewer determinations than a full and precise artistic prose. A gloss translation into English of a poem by Po Chü-yi may sound like the imagist avant-garde of the early twentieth century; but the same poem probably struck a T'ang reader as the most delightfully rambling loquaciousness. Within the general traits of the Chinese poetic language, there is a full stylistic range, from poems that move with easy clarity to truly ambiguous poems in which the reader is unable to grasp the problematic relations between words. Translation which seeks to reproduce the apparent characteristics of the Chinese poetic dialect will collapse that range into a pidgin English as uniformly impersonal as it is unnatural. The consistent affection for such translation betrays a greater interest in the conventions of poetry as a whole than in particular qualities of poets and their poems.

The Traps of Voice: Surprising Oneself

When true voice is heard in the freely unfolding text, then an interesting possibility arises: voice may trap itself, may say what it had not really intended to say and find itself perplexed.

But first consider what human life is like:⁶

as sudden as the wind blowing a candle

奄若風吹燭

("Ballad of Resentment")

怨詩行

like unto the morning dew

譬如朝露

(Ts'ao Ts'ao, "Short Song")

曹操短歌行

as sudden as dust in the swirling wind

奄忽若飄塵

("Nineteen Old Poems")

古詩十九首之四
as brief as a bird in flight
roosting on a bare branch

忽如飛鳥棲枯枝

(Ts'ao P'i, "Ballad: Weeds on the Wall")

曹丕大牆上蒿行

or more elaborately:

Human life lies covered in dust—

人生在塵蒙

Just like an insect in a bowl:

恰似盆中蟲

We pass our days going round and around;

終日行遶遶

We never get out of the bowl.

不離其盆中

(Han Shan)⁷

There are hundreds of similes for the brevity and helplessness of human life. If a later-born poet like Su Shih 蘇軾 (1037-1101) offers yet another such simile, he will be travelling an old and well-worn path, no matter how original his particular simile may be. But value in poetry is equally indifferent to the commonplace of making *some* simile for human life or to the originality of one particular simile; value does not even lie in the process of winning originality out of the commonplace. Value resides in hearing the voice in which commonplace and originality are embedded. We know human life is painfully short—at least we've heard it said—but poetry is to hear a certain voice say so in a certain way.

Do you know what it's like?—
human life everywhere?

人生到處知何似

It must be like a wild goose flying,
then treading slush of melting snow;

應似飛鴻踏雪泥

By chance in the slush it will leave
the marks of its claws,

泥上偶然留指爪

Then it flies off—how can we tell
whether eastward or westward?

鴻飛那復計東西

The old monk has died;
a new pagoda is made;

老僧已死成新塔

On his cell's fallen walls we've no way to see
poems written there long ago,

壞壁無由見舊題

But do you still remember the rocky roads
we travelled then to meet him?—

往日崎嶇還記否

How the journey was long and we were worn out
and my lame donkey brayed?

路長人困蹇驢嘶

Some time before, Su Shih had gone with his brother Su Ch'e to visit the monk Feng Hsien at a temple in Mien-ch'ih County, and there they had written poems on the wall of the monk's cell. A closing note to Su Ch'e's poem informs the reader that Su Shih's horse died on the way and that Su Shih had been forced to ride a donkey on the journey. Su Shih's poem is written using the same rhymes as a poem by Su Ch'e, "Brooding on Former Experiences at Mien-ch'ih" 和子由澗池懷舊.⁸

Do you know what it's like?—
human life everywhere?

It must be like . . .

Brashness is one of our anticipations in reading Su Shih's poetry, and this is indeed a brash way to begin a poem. Tu Fu's question—"What is it like—Mount T'ai?"—was, by comparison, a modest query. Su Shih's question has too many answers, or none at all. The reader, who stands addressed in the position of Su Ch'e, can answer: "the wind blowing a candle?" "the morning dew?" "dust in the swirling wind?" or he can supply an answer of his own devising; but the reader knows that he cannot give Su Shih's answer and that Su Shih's question was no more than an occasion for the poet to present us a simile in which he takes particular pride. It is not, however, a limp rhetorical question from which all force of interrogation has gone—it asks *chih?* 知, "do you know?" and the vital interrogative dooms us to confess our ignorance, so that Su Shih can cast the radiance of a bright simile upon it.

The strongest sound of voice in the opening line is the colloquial "everywhere," *tao-ch'u* 到處. If we are to be served some fresh simile for the brevity of human life, we hardly expect one of only local application—"human life in Mien-ch'ih County is like . . ." It is a brash assertiveness which, by a false logic, promises a solution to the age-old question: "Others have told you only what human life is like, but *I* am going to let you know what it is like absolutely *everywhere*." "Everywhere" promises us a simile that is no mere generalization, like the similes of earlier poets; Su Shih will give us a simile that is applicable to every particular human life—a world that is a vast plain of melting snow marked *everywhere* by the fading tracks of wild geese.

"It must be like . . ." *ying-ssu* 應似: the second line continues this miniature drama of voice to frame the simile: a rich investment of voice is necessary to make such a tired form of simile fresh again. Su qualifies the proposed simile: it is an expression of private, speculative certainty which draws back from the confident universality we have been promised. Though we generally trust our poets, we do not take their similes for human life as absolute truth. Su did not need to inform us that this is his opinion; we knew that already. But Su Shih wants us to know that *he* knows it is his opinion, and in asserting the opinion's origins, he announces his pride in its conception. "Do you know what it's

like? No? Well, then let me tell you—it really must be something like . . .”

It must be like a wild goose flying,
 then treading slush of melting snow;
 By chance in the slush it will leave
 the marks of its claws,
 Then it flies off—how can we tell
 whether eastward or westward?

The opening fanfare tells us to prepare ourselves for a brilliant simile of Su Shih's devising; a poet who plays such games of voice must produce a simile whose excellence matches its promise. Su Shih fulfills the bargain admirably, and it is indeed a beautiful simile with those complications of detail that make a simile memorable. Su directs our attention to alight briefly on the ground, an imaginary field of melting snow where we know that the tracks of the great birds will soon disappear. Then we are asked to raise our eyes to the empty sky, and our ignorance of where the soul goes after death is confirmed by our ignorance of where the geese have gone. The consolation is equally rich (though strangely inappropriate for a Buddhist monk)—a continuation of life, alighting again somewhere else. Above is purity and freedom; below is a world not wholly foul, but something beautiful become foul in its dissolution.

It is a grand simile, but we must not forget who conceived it: the rhetorical question brings back direct address, and in the colloquial interrogative *na?* 那, “how can we tell?”, we and Su Ch'è are reminded that we are being spoken to. This simile is not simply given in a poem: it was *made* by a very clever someone.

The old monk has died;
 a new pagoda is made;
 On his cell's fallen walls we've no way to see
 poems written there long ago.

This couplet belongs to the fixed ceremonies of poetic elegy, but the voice unintentionally betrays the egotism that may ac-

company brashness. In his youth Su Shih was not a tender poet—perhaps he was never a tender poet as some other poets were. The death of the monk Feng Hsien, the ostensible topic of the poem, is scarcely in his mind: he's dead; a pagoda has been erected for his remains. But the couplet's second line remembers the simile: poems, probably written when the brothers visited the monk, are crumbling away with the walls. Recall the legendary origins of Chinese writing—in the tracks of birds. Snow melts and the marks of the wild geese disappear; walls crumble, threatening the effacement of poems (which may contain beautiful and memorably original similes on the effacement of traces). This is more disturbing than the death of monks. Where is the elegy directed?—the monk's traces are preserved in the pagoda; it is *our* writing that is melting away.

But do you still remember the rocky roads
we travelled then to meet him?—
How the journey was long and we were worn out
and my lame donkey brayed?

Rocky roads keep no traces of the beings who pass with such hardship over them.

Again there is direct address, reminiscence about the brothers' journey to see the monk. Again there is a question that wants no answer—we would be greatly surprised if Su Ch'è had forgotten. But Su Shih remembers, and in the question seeks occasion to offer a memory for general consideration. The voice has perplexed itself: the third couplet of an eight-line elegy often speaks of traces lost and surviving; in yielding to the ceremonies of the form, the poet has thought of something disturbing, disturbing in the context of the opening simile. The voice still queries, but its tone is changed—less brashly assertive, more elegaic, as if, confronted with the general effacement of traces, he is asking for confirmation of a memory and proof that it is shared. The clever voice is a victim of its own simile, and a confident assertion about "human life everywhere" narrows to a very specific case, a fragmentary image that needs reinforcement amid the universal melting away.

In all points the closing image stands opposed to the great opening simile: the hard roads we traveled are set against the ease of their flight; our slow pace is set against their lightness, their speed; our confinement stands against their freedom. The opening consolation is too successful, and the lovely flight of the monk's soul, the survival of *his* traces, galls those who remain behind, who suffer earth's hardships, and who care so much about their own traces crumbling away on the walls.

The final bray of the donkey is an ugly, intrusive noise, a cry of hardship and pain, and the wrong way to end a poem. It is a disturbing, enigmatic memory, and rather than the silence of completion in a regular, fixed poetic form, this ending seems more as if the poet had just recalled something that had given him pause, and left him silently considering it. Voice overwhelms the geometry of fixed form, and the poem ends with the three dots of ellipsis rather than the period of closure.

From the showy opening to the conventional third couplet (which somehow said the wrong thing) to the strangely pensive closing, this poem is driven by voice—the voice of a poet who conceives brilliant similes and then realizes that his simile encompasses its own effacement, a simile about the decay of all traces including similes. As in Tu Fu's "Broken Boat," the greatness of this poem hangs on a sense of process and realization: not only must we assume that when the poem begins, it does not yet know how it will end, we also find that when it ends, it has not yet fully understood the traps in which the poet has caught himself. As a process of speaking and thought, the poem's only unity lies in its movement.

Whispers

Su Shih catches his readers by the lapels and shakes them vigorously, so that they will keep in mind that they are being spoken to, and who it is that is speaking to them. Su Shih openly addresses someone—Su Ch'è and the later-born reader who, with the aid of Su Ch'è's note on the occasion, will be able to stand in

Su Ch'e's position. Su Shih is intensely concerned with how he will be heard.

We do not need to be so forcefully addressed to hear a poet's voice: there are cool voices and gracious voices, mocking voices and thoughtful voices, softer and more mellow voices overheard as the poet speaks to himself. It is easy to listen to a self-proclaiming, gaudy voice like Su Shih's (though it is nonetheless a rich and complicated voice). But soon we begin to hear the more subtle voices, voices so flat they scarcely seem like voices until we sense the maelstroms on which their brittle calm rides. In such a voice Wang Wei speaks as he "Sits Alone on an Autumn Night" 秋夜獨坐:⁹

Sorrowing over these two locks of hair,

I sit alone—

獨坐悲雙鬢

In the empty hall, almost the second watch.

空堂欲二更

This is not a voice that announces its originality: the first line is conventional to the point of anonymity; but when we know that the poet is the masterful Wang Wei, we hear a willfulness in the anonymity, as if concealing, in the commonness of the image, the unique pain of *his own* hair turning white. Alone at night, sitting in an empty hall, he does nothing, thinks on nothing except his condition, which is sitting alone in an empty hall 'at night—a reflexive emptiness that breeds hollow repetitions. And this consciousness, as it broods on itself, speaks to itself about itself. The object of its meditation is a moving frame of emptiness—time, "almost the second watch" (about nine o'clock), aging. Dimly awaited at the end of time's movement lies death, mirror of this moment's blankness—a stillness, silence, and darkness that differs from this moment only in the loss of death's expectation.

In the rain a fruit of the mountain falls,

雨中山果落

Insects sing in the grasses beneath the lamp.

燈下草蟲鳴

Were Wang Wei in the city, the sounding of a drum would announce the second watch: the senses which await this imminent mark of time's passage hear, instead of the drum, the thud of fruit falling from a tree, the sound distinct in the rain and silence of the night mountains. It is a dull sound, the sign of autumn's overripeness and rotting. And the insects, whose brief lives are tied to the seasonal cycle, sing out this autumn as *their* death approaches. The poet too sings out—not to speak to anyone, but because, like the insects, he is "stirred by the season." This is the darker side of nature's determinism acting through man in poetry; it is not nature's order manifest in words, but the uncontrollable singing of one of nature's creatures—in spring, mating songs; in autumn, the cry of the dying beast. In this darker, autumnal light read again the passage, quoted earlier, from the "Bright Countenances of Physical Things" 物色 of the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung*:

Springs and autumns follow on in succession, with the brooding gloom of dark Yin and the easeful brightness of Yang. And as the bright countenances of physical things are impelled in their cycles, so the affective capability of the mind (*hsin*) too is shaken. When the Yang force sprouts in the darkness of the twelfth month, the black ant scurries to its hole; and when the Yin begins to coalesce, the mantis feeds. It touches the responses of even the tiniest insects: the four seasons impel things deeply. . . . All the bright countenances of physical things call to one another, and how amid all this may man find stillness?¹⁰

Wang Wei should be crying out in grief, the grief he tells us of in the first line, sorrowing over his whitened hair. But read the second couplet again:

In the rain a fruit of the mountain falls,
Insects sing in the grasses beneath the lamp.

Where is the grief and where is the voice in this dry statement of the phenomena which the poet takes note of tonight? We know the compulsion to cry out; we read the flat, descriptive words; and in the space between, a voice is heard, a tightly controlled neutrality, a hard-won calm acknowledging these sounds of universal mortality. The voice refuses the histrionic, and it refuses to participate in the season: it is a voice that struggles for coldness, and yet we recognize it every bit as clearly as Su Shih's loud, self-proclaiming voice. In the potential hysteria of this dark isolation, we hear a brittle dispassion.

This white hair will never change its color,

白髮終難變

The golden elixir cannot be made.

黃金不可成

We first hear the irony, that in this world of change black hair will turn white—we must live in apprehension of that universal alteration which marks decline—but white hair is perversely reliable, constant, and will never turn again to the black. No magic elixir can bring back youth. The voice that refuses to fall and cry out with the season shows its indifference by saying the things most difficult to hear—plain words, hard statements of fact which cause pain to a body as it “sorrows over these two locks of hair,” now white.

If you would be rid of sickness and old age,

欲知除老病

There is only the study of Non-Life.

惟有學無生

The consolation is Buddhism's transcendence of the cycle of birth and death. This is a voice which whispers “No!” and as it will not participate in the cyclical movement toward death, it must also deny life. The voice's neutrality is a mastering of the self, refusing emotional response by speaking with flat precision about what hurts it most. It speaks to itself, sitting alone in the

lamplit darkness, refusing to cry out like a dying beast. Only a very human voice can so ruthlessly subdue the human and recoil from all intensity of desire and fear.

Sorrowing over these two locks of hair,
 I sit alone—
 In the empty hall, almost the second watch.
 In the rain a fruit of the mountain falls,
 Insects sing in the grasses beneath the lamp.
 This white hair will never change its color,
 The golden elixir cannot be made.
 If you would be rid of sickness and old age,
 There is only the study of Non-Life.

Concealments

Some birds can be named by the marks on their feathers; some beasts can be told by the patterns in their fur. Though it is not universal to the species, the hatred of being the creature one is is a scar that clearly identifies a human being.

Voice carries all the wanderings and mutations of human nature. We learn by gathering traits of voice from those we love and fear; out of these traits our own voice is formed; then a restlessness may drive us into movements of negation. Some, like Wang Wei, may deny the human creature; some, like Lu Yu 陸游 (1125–1210) or Yang Wan-li 楊萬里 (1124–1206), may embark on willful stylistic evolutions, always changing out of the self they were, burning or denouncing earlier stages of their poetic work. Some temporarily escape their identity in visiting another—these latter are the double voices, the possessions, of translation and imitation. Yet another form of these self-revealing flights from self is found in the posed voices. Unlike a dramatized, fictional voice, the voice of a pose pretends to *be* the self, and the fraudulence of the claim directs our attention to the difference between the surface tone and the voice behind the mask.

The assumed voice of a pose is the voice of a child in a man: it betrays a sense of vulnerability and doubt of intrinsic worth, a

silent conviction that no one will listen unless a certain role is enacted. It is ashamed to use simple, honest words, fearing they will expose some lack or deformity. Voices of pose are not self-reflective: they do not trap themselves nor do they change, as the voices of Tu Fu and Su Shih did. Posed voices seek consistency and reinforce their characteristics to the point of exaggeration: they hope to reveal only what the poet wants revealed. If the poem is a created object, such implicit intention is enough to comprehend the poem; but if the poem is a voice, then the mask of a pose reveals a fearfulness that no direct voice has. Each overemphatic self-characterization is filled with the fear of something wanting. And the ear of the good reader is sensitive to those subtle excesses in stress which call an assertion into doubt. Such a voice is primarily concerned with the self and how it will be known by others; the reader hears that concern, and because of it, knows the voice otherwise than it wishes to be known.

Good readers have a keen ear for the self-concern in such voices. And a keen ear is of consequence in Chinese poetry, where the customary grammatical openness leaves for the reader many of the most basic determinations of meaning. Since pronouns were usually omitted in poetry, pronominal referents were in most cases determined by the occasional context of a poem: if a parting poem (a *sung-pieh*, "sending someone off") contained a couplet on a landscape to be seen the following day, the reader intuitively knew that the scene is one which *you*, the traveler, will see. Parting poems are addressed to a *you*, and if the emotions of the poet or of a group of friends are presented, the presentation is *for the sake of* the person leaving. But consider Li Po's famous "At Hsieh T'iao's High Mansion in Hsüanchou: A Parting Banquet for the Collator Shu-yün" 宣州謝朓樓餞別校書叔雲:¹¹ a survey of translations and traditional commentary shows that in this case readers ignore the protocol of the parting poem. The famous lines

Drawing a dirk and cutting the waters—
the water keeps flowing on.

Lifting a goblet to melt away sorrow,
but sorrow continues in sorrow.

are inevitably taken to refer to Li Po himself: "drawing *my* dirk . . . lifting *my* goblet . . ."—not "drawing *your* dirk . . . lifting *your* goblet . . ." (even though the second person pronoun would be more appropriate for the occasion and provide a smoother transition to the closing lines which follow). Likewise the opening lines, potentially expressing a shared distress of the first person plural, are always taken as a first person singular, Li Po's private distress. The instinct of traditional critics and commentators is probably correct; the poet's pose is so exaggerated that it overwhelms the conventional sentiments of a parting poem and points to the self that strikes the pose. The reader's choice of pronoun is a symptom of how the poem as a whole is heard.

Has left me behind here—yesterday's daylight
could not be delayed;

棄我去者昨日之日不可留

Casts my heart in confusion—light of this day
full of troubles and sorrow.

亂我心者今日之日多煩憂

The long winds come from thousands of miles
bringing this autumn's wild geese—

長風萬里送秋雁

We face such a scene; the sight swirls drunkenly
high rooms of this mansion.

對此可以酣高樓

Poems like those of immortal isles, with hard bone
like the poets of Chien-an;

蓬萊文章建安骨

And here among us another Hsieh T'iao
sings out with his cool clarity.

中間小謝又清發

We all feel promptings beyond this low world,
 my sturdy yearning takes flight,
 俱懷逸興壯思飛

I want to rise up to the blue heavens,
 cast my eyes on the bright moon.
 欲上青天覽明月

But I draw my dirk and cut the waters—
 the water keeps flowing on.
 抽刀斷水水更流

I lift my goblet to melt away sorrow,
 but sorrow continues in sorrow.
 舉杯消愁愁更愁

Man's life in this world may never find
 what satisfies the mind—
 人生在世不稱意

Tomorrow at dawn let your hair flow down,
 for delight sail off in your tiny boat.
 明朝散髮弄扁舟

Many poets had taken note of nature's apparent indifference to human misery and our mortality; but here, indifference is puffed into a haughty scorn as the anthropomorphic sun "leaves" the poet behind, and the waters fail to acknowledge even the most exaggerated bid for attention—a plunged knife. The complaint exposes its own excess; and the reader, disposed to accept truth in a simple statement of nature's indifference, finds here less the commonplace itself than the poet's excess in the interpreting and reacting to it. Li Po knows how the reader will hear his ravings; the stances he adopts towards both nature and the reader are identical—the railing and wild gestures toward one, the posed voice toward the other both beg to be noticed.

There is something eternal and indifferent—the sun, heaven, the flowing water; there is someone mortal who seeks recognition. He is abandoned, then cast into confusion; he longs to rise

up and reach the heavens, and finding he cannot, he cuts impotently into the flowing water (that will ultimately reach the ocean and from there, flow up into the heavens). Finally he (or more properly, Shu-yün) will set off drifting on those same waters.

Here below is immortal genius which belongs in the heavens but which is perversely trapped in mortal form. Genius strains to make itself noticed by the remote, disdainful forces of the cosmos. In this primary relation we understand why the poet assumes the loud, mannered voice of a pose. In interpretation we may name those distant figures who are asked to take note of the poet—the divinities of a true heaven, the emperor and aristocrats of the court, parents indifferent to the poet-child, posterity which acclaims great poets—but all the variations of interpretation share the pattern of pleading for recognition from someone aloof and far removed (with the threat of impotent violence and the plunged knife if the pleader is ignored). Readers praised the voice of genius in Li Po; he was the “banished immortal”; but the true pleasure in hearing this voice may have been its desperate abjectness.

The voice of a pose always fears that the person will be left behind, unnoticed. There are quieter poses, no less anxious in their restraint, but here the voice yells and postures and capers. As in all poses, we sense excess and strain, and in the attitude proclaimed we hear most strongly his desire, a desire that reveals the depths of the poet's need, a shrill hope that he will be seen a certain way.

Voice endures in continuous mutations, negations, and concealments, unified by a distinct though often intangible identity which is the unity of the self. Voice proves itself and strengthens its identity in the variety of changes it undergoes, in the flexibility with which it asserts itself on diverse occasions. Great poetic voices achieve a victory of coherence, a mysterious unity that comprehends all the variation in a poet's work; and the coherence of voice corresponds to the coherence of a self that also emerges strangely out of a lifetime of change and contingent occasion. The Chinese editorial passion to date poems precisely

and to arrange collections chronologically reinforces the correspondence and sets the frame for coherence.

The victory of coherence occurs not only in one text or in a poet's entire oeuvre but also in the variety of readings. Because the voice necessarily engages the reader in a relation (and because readers, like poets, have strong identities), no two of these relations will be the same, no two readers will hear the voice the same way. The aesthetic severity that refuses to listen to the voice of a text grows from a pedagogic terror at an anarchy of reading—readers hearing voices in their own ways, understanding their own ways in idiosyncratic abandon until the established literary canon collapses. Our academies do what they can to curb such readerly waywardness.

The impulse to control the freedom of reading creates the very anarchy it most fears. Attacking the essential privacy of relation between the reader and the text, the academician forgets that *two* terms are involved in a relation—a reader, with his idiosyncratic disposition, and a voice out there speaking. The coherence of that voice from someone else is the one unity that ties together the multitude of readers and readings. True anarchy comes with the refusal to listen. Without the voice we have only an inert text, a mere thing, with the shared rules of literary reading. The respect accorded a canonical text is different from the more human respect implicated in the act of listening. In listening we acknowledge the presence of another person whose nature remains independent of what we would have it be; there is a peculiarly human responsibility to understand the speaker. But with a voiceless text we can do as we please.

ASIDE: ONLY A POEM

At this midpoint in our discourse on poetry, let us pause to wonder why there *is* discourse on poetry, discourse in such earnestness and volume. What sort of itch is it that will not let us pass through poems in silence? All the time spent in reflection and comment could be given, if not to some useful occupation, then at least to rereading and more reading. Yet the fact is that people *are* compelled to continual discourse on poetry; and there is some consolation in the knowledge that all great literary civilizations, on reaching a certain stage, have done the same. As poetry itself has often needed someone to speak in its defense, so prose discourse on poetry (a form of behavior even more suspect than poetry) requires its own justifications. Justification, offering the delightful prospect of yet more discourse, comes to us readily, and we have in hand our list of praiseworthy and honorable functions—teaching the fragile art of reading, preserving the tradition by continuous reinterpretation, and so on.

Though these are truths, they are the truths that conceal: accept them as genuine, and still they do not account for the peculiar passion to generate discourse on poetry. Friedrich Schlegel, the critic speaking for the poet, is more to the point: the reason is some inborn and promiscuous sociability in poet and reader alike:

Love needs a responding love. Indeed, for the poet communication, even with those who only play on the colorful surface, can be beneficial and instructive. He is a sociable being. For there has always been a great attraction in

speaking about poetry with poets and the poetically minded.¹

Poetry is an affectionate and ebulliently wordy pastime, a loving garrulousness that fruitfully multiplies down through the ages, talk begetting poems, and poems begetting talk. It is even possible that discourse on poetry comes inevitably when any reader first begins to hear a living voice in the written word, and finding himself or herself spoken to, feels the irresistible and human urge to speak back.

It is a problematic and embarrassing affection at best—all this loving babble across centuries. The poets are almost tolerable; we grudgingly grant them license to speak when and as they please; however, we let it be known that the privilege will be accorded to very few—the tales of their strangeness and aloofness from the rest of mankind may be told simply to curb the universal eagerness to utterance and keep the volume of sound within decent limits. But those who speak back to the poets in prose—we are asked not to enjoy them too much; and above all, we are not to join in the chain of chatter unless we must, and then only if we have the authority of a legitimate forum.

To speak back to a text we need a pretext; the joy of comment, argument, and friendly banter will not do. We devise magnificent functions and promise the public to answer the text only for some serious purpose—to illustrate some idea, explicate some meaning, derive some theory of poetry, illuminate some aspect of a poet's work. Discourse on poetry requires magistral robes to hide the nakedness of its interest.

In the Chinese tradition there is an alternative, a courageously inconclusive mode of discourse on poetry known as *shih-hua* 詩話 ("poetry discussion"). It may be true that a few very serious gentlemen arranged their notes in roughly chronological order, but in general, *shih-hua* presented utterly random comments on any text or literary topic that happened to come to the reader-critic's mind. Other genres were available for purposeful argumentation, but in *shih-hua* the writer could show the full measure of his disdain for system. The disorder of the form was willful, but for later readers it held its own peculiar aesthetic

pleasure—in the immediate and voluntary juncture of text and comment. The form was shameless about its author's delight in reading poetry, and perhaps as a result, the *shih-hua* was itself read with delight. Thereupon the delighted reader of the *shih-hua* might incorporate the original poetic text and *shih-hua* comment into his own equally random and inconclusive *shih-hua*. Opinions were disputed and applauded across nine centuries, and although we hear occasional complaints about the uncontrolled multiplication of voices, the complaints were no more than new voices added to the general babble.

Our tradition hopes to protect its readers from an excess of gratuitous words. I suppose I may not write on a poem simply because I am inclined to do so. I must find a reason—assert its remarkable importance, emerging out of inexplicable neglect, or discover its potent truth, previously veiled. I am not allowed the happy latitude of the *shih-hua* writer. I rebel: these functional restrictions are intolerable. What follows is only a poem. But as I rebel, I secretly obey the law I rebel against, proposing to talk on a poem for the sake of showing that talk on a poem need not be for the sake of anything.

This is only a poem, but I am startled to discover that this poem on which I am inclined to talk is strangely apposite to my point about no points: it is a blatant multiplication of words upon words, a poem written on an earlier poem, which in turn was written on a still earlier poem. The poem is by Huang T'ing-chien 黃庭堅 (1045–1105), and the title explains the peculiar occasion.

Li Cheng-ch'en of Hu-k'ou kept in his possession an unusual rock with nine little peaks. Su Shih called it "Nine Glories Mountain in a Jug," and wrote a poem on it. Eight years later, when Su returned to Hu-k'ou from his exile in the South Sea, the stone had been taken away by a collector, and Su wrote another poem, tongue-in-cheek, matching the rhymes of the earlier piece. This was on the sixteenth day of the fourth month of 1101, the first year of the Chien-chung Ching-kuo Reign. The next year, the first of the Ch'ung-ning Reign, on the twentieth of the fifth

month, I moored my boat at Hu-k'ou, where Li Cheng-ch'en brought Su Shih's poem to show me. The rock has never been seen again, and now Su Shih too has passed away. This stirred a sigh in me; but sighs were not enough, so I, in turn, have followed the rhymes of his earlier poems.²

Someone came at midnight
and carried the mountain away;
有人夜半持山去
All at once he realized it—the drifting mists,
warm azures were empty.
頓覺浮嵐暖翠空
Now tell me—is resting in unconcern
set in a splendid chamber
試問安排華屋處
The equal to lying, fallen and lost,
amid the wild clouds?
何如零落亂雲中
Someone to bring back Chao's ring of jade—
where is that person now?
能迴趙璧人安在
He's already gone into Southern Bough Land
where no dreams get through.
已入南柯夢不通
All we have now is that frosty Bell Mountain
which none can roll up in a mat;
賴有霜鐘難席卷
With bludgeon in sleeve, I'll go and listen
to its echoing, ring-ding-a-ling.
袖椎來聽響玲瓏

This may be only a poem, but it is clear that we have come in upon an urbane conversation which rests upon references that

escape us. Poems upon other poems, exchanged between friends whose rapport has grown over many years (even now, when one of the friends is dead), tend to develop a private language, not only in shared references, but also in the ability to call those references to mind by touching them only lightly. For all its apparent sophistication, which excludes those outside the friendship, a poem like this proclaims an intimacy. And because the poem is public, it also offers to draw within the circle any reader who breaks that barrier of wit and sophistication. Huang's poem has a double face, and it lives in the delicate balance between the soft interior and the glittering shell, intensely personal feeling and cool urbanity.

We have a whimsical, amusing poem on the death of a dear friend and greater poet, Su Shih. While he lived, Su had hoped to purchase an unusual rock, to keep it fast in his possession. When Su returned from exile in the far south, the rock was gone; and then Su Shih was gone as well, leaving for Huang only a playful poem on a rock, desired and lost, by a poet and friend now lost. And this grim play on clinging fast to things and loss—loss of precious things like a rock, or one's life, or a friend—stirs Huang to sighs. "Sighs are not enough" 感歎不足—the sorrow is too great—and this is the beginning of a poem, as the reader silently adds the next clause from the "Great Preface" of the *Book of Songs*: "when sighs are not enough [for my emotions], I sing them." Poetry is the "spontaneous overflow of emotion," sans recollection or reflection—emotion which has built to such an intensity that only a poem can carry it away.

But what is this that rushes out spontaneously?—urbane wit, allusion to half a dozen old poems and stories, clever echoes of Su Shih's poems using Su's own rhymes. Here is a voice as complicated and self-conscious as the most sophisticated member of any high civilization, a voice which commences elegy with an elaborate joke:

Someone came at midnight
and carried the mountain away.

The "someone" is the anonymous collector who has made off with Su's miniature "Nine Glories Mountain." To carry away a mountain is the act of "someone with strength," a titan. But since we know the true dimensions of Su's mountain, we know also that the necessary strength is an illusion, seen through and laughed at. And there is a more complicated relation between the cherished rock, the stolen mountain, and the lost life. We dwell amid change, and even the most durable things move on elsewhere, without our knowing. We might wish to cling to things, but we will find their instability exposed, as the "mountain" is exposed as a portable rock. Huang T'ing-chien's line speaks out of a famous parable in the *Chuang-tzu*:

The Great Mass of the Universe weighs me down with form, gives me travail by life, eases me with old age, rests me in death. So whatever it is that makes me love life so much may also be the way to love death. You hide a boat in a great ravine; you hide the ravine's mountain within a marsh; and you say to yourself that the boat is held fast. But one midnight something with strength comes and carries the boat away swiftly, and in your ignorance, you don't even know of it.³

"Something with strength," *yu-li-che* 有力者, is the swift river of the gorge which bears away the boat that the foolish mortal has "hidden" on it. But the phrase also means "someone with strength," a thief and secret opponent with strength enough to carry away not only the boat but the concealing mountain as well, even though it may be no more than a miniature "Nine Glories Mountain in a Jug."

Now read again the first line of Huang's poem, this time with the proper emphasis to catch the wit:

Someone came at midnight
and carried the *mountain* away.

And the boat is gone too: it carried Su Shih to Hu-k'ou, then to an exile on Hainan Island, then back to Hu-k'ou to find the

mountain gone; the boat and the person it carried are gone now too, and no one knows where.

There is blame and some anger in this wit which casts the impersonal forces of change in the shape of a human thief. The boat carried away in the *Chuang-tzu* is a life, and here it is the life of a dear friend carried away. To take the mountain as well is a parallel act and added outrage; and the offense is again doubled by the mountain's having been the heart's desire of the dear friend. The loss of the rock is followed by the loss of the friend: the two events are strangely bound together, and the thief who stole the first may, as one with the strength to steal mountains, be implicated in the second robbery. And yet the *Chuang-tzu*, through which we speak, counsels us against the foolishness of clinging fast to things that belong to change. Su himself knew this truth when he laughed at the loss of his rock. So conceal your anger: make it wit.

We can even imagine Su coming back to Hu-k'ou, going to look where the miniature mountain had rested in Li Cheng-ch'en's garden, and in satisfaction seeing there the azure mists that drift about and veil any mountain. But then, in a startling moment, Su realizes that the presence of the mist-shrouded mountain is only an illusion, that there is only the shrouding and nothing to be shrouded:

All at once he realized it—the drifting mists,
warm azures were empty.

Another irony, another smile at human folly—had Su not looked too closely, had he himself not wanted to carry the mountain away, he could have remained content, enjoying the mists playing around and hiding the mountain that was not there. But he looked too closely, and with the eyes trained by Buddhism to see through illusory surfaces, he "realized emptiness," "became aware of the Void," *chüeh-k'ung* 覺空. That terrifying truth of Buddhism exposes the void that lies beneath all sensuous illusions of this world—illusions of life and mountains, all coveted in our ignorance. This instant of realization is the moment of Su Shih's second poem, the poem which Huang

tells us is "tongue-in-cheek." Su Shih could laugh at his error; Huang himself must struggle for the smile—it is hard-won wit.

Here are arabesques of illusion: a mountain hidden by mists, which to the eyes is no different than the same mists hiding no mountain, a mountain that was no mountain in the first place, only a rock spoken of as a mountain—all *k'ung* 空, hollow, formless illusions, as the plastic and shifting formlessness of the mists is called *k'ung*, "insubstantial." And Su, the viewer, is *k'ung*, hollow illusion, gone now, his place empty. And there is Huang T'ing-chien, seeing in his mind's eye the illusory image of Su seeing the illusory mountain in the mists, which is not there and not a mountain. Too much illusion is frightening: make it play, imagine with a smile Su's surprise in discovering his error.

Illusion shifts like the mists over the emptiness at the heart of things. In this there are mutations of fortune whose seeming heights and depths are equally hollow and deceptive. A poet goes into the apparent humiliation of exile, to the very end of the earth, Hainan Island; there, "fallen and lost" 零落, he survives. The poet is pardoned and recalled to honor; he dies. A rock is left lying in someone's garden; it is carried off by a passionate collector to rest in a place of honor in his home. Let us interview the rock to find how it feels about its good fortune:

Now tell me—is resting in unconcern
 set in a splendid chamber
 The equal to lying, fallen and lost,
 amid the wild clouds?

By its contemplative silence we sense the rock's utter indifference both to its rise in status and to our question. We had hoped, by our leading question, to have the rock affirm a preference for the natural state, "fallen and lost" amid those veiling, now-empty clouds. We want a parallel to serve us properly: we are certain that Su was better off in the depths of his fortunes; recall to honor was followed by death, and even worse, by the discovery that his rock had been carried away. But perhaps our certainty was deceived, and the parallel does work, telling us something

about Su's stony indifference, laughing when he found his rock was gone—*an-p'ai* 安排, "resting in unconcern," "calm amid change."

Su and his miniature mountain run in parallel courses: sharing the calm that comes of "realizing emptiness" and each unseen by the other, they pass together into change. It is Huang who assigns blame, who hides in wit, who wishes life for his friend. Huang considers other possibilities, other endings for the story—the happy meeting of man and stone, in which Su Shih might have acquired his Nine Glories Mountain in a jug. Had that happened, then Su, shrinking to the dimensions of his mountain, could have entered the microcosmic landscape and become immortal, safe from change and harm, "fallen and lost" amid its tiny wild clouds. Huang T'ing-chien knows that such things occur with little worlds "in a jug."

During the Eastern Han there was a certain Fei Chang-feng who held the post of supervisor in the market district. One afternoon as the market was closing, Fei noticed an old herb-seller climb into a jug that was hanging in front of his shop and disappear. Astonished, Fei went the very next day to pay his respects to the old man, who realized that Fei must have observed him, must have recognized that he was, in fact, an immortal, living among mortals in disguise. His disguise penetrated, the herb-seller invited Fei to accompany him into the jug-world, and there Fei found a palatial dwelling with halls of jade and all the splendor appropriate to an exile from heaven.⁴

Worlds, even microcosmic ones, are weighty, and Fei next discovered that none of his men could lift this world-in-a-jug; only "someone with strength" could move it—the immortal herb-seller himself. But someone has lifted and carried away Su Shih's Nine Glories Mountain in a Jug; someone has stolen and set in a splendid chamber this jug-world which itself contains no palatial splendor but only a misty mountain landscape where, in another conclusion to the story, the immortal Su Shih might have spent his days "fallen and lost," avoiding the rise in fortunes that brings with it mortality. Some greedy man has made off with the mountain; Su missed the fated meeting; and now Su is gone. In

Huang T'ing-chien's mind there play arabesques of immortality and death, splendor and desolation, illusion and the void which lies beneath it all.

The anticipated possession of Nine Glories Mountain in a Jug had been Su Shih's heart's desire. Not only did the rock have an aura of promised immortality, its tiny mountainscape made Su immense; and the speculative shift in perspective had been Su's consolation in exile, finding himself tiny amid the mighty mountain ranges of the south. He found himself in the mountains on the first stage of his southern exile, immediately after he had first seen the rock in Hu-k'ou, and at that time he wrote the first of his poems on Nine Glories Mountain in a Jug.

Li Cheng-ch'en of Hu-k'ou kept in his possession an unusual rock with nine little peaks, sparkling and full of graceful curves like the latticework of a window. I had wanted to purchase it for a hundred in gold to be the match for the rock in my pool named The Mate. But then I was banished southward and had no time. I named this rock Nine Glories Mountain in a Jug.⁵

Its clear valley stream changed in a flash,
I lost those cloud-covered peaks,
清谿電轉失雲峰

But in my dreams still I startle, marvelling
how its azure sweeps sky's emptiness.
夢裏猶驚翠掃空

Here by Five Ranges grieve not so
that it lies past these thousand cliffs—
五嶺莫愁千嶂外

Your Nine Glories Mountain is resting now
there in its single jug.
九華今在一壺中

When the waters sink in its Heaven Pool,
its every layer appears;
天池水落層層見

On its peak the Jade Maiden's window is bright—
you can see through to every spot.

玉女窗明處處通

I'm concerned about my pool named Mate—
its rock is too much alone:

念我仇池太孤絕

With a hundred in gold I'll go back and buy
that emerald sparkling.

百金歸買碧玲瓏

From exile, Su Shih fondly recollected his Nine Glories Mountain in a Jug as a miniature utopia, discovered by chance and now lost, just as the ancient fisherman of Wu-ling first found, then lost, the mysterious village of Peach Blossom Spring. In the opening line Su echoes a long tradition of poems on Peach Blossom Spring. But the comparison is an ominous one: once the fortunate discoverer leaves his refuge behind, he is destined never to find it again. As Wang Wei wrote of the fisherman, after he had left Peach Blossom Spring:⁶

Coming out of the cave, well he knew
that streams and mountains would lie between;

出洞無論隔山水

But he planned someday to leave his home
and visit there forever.

辭家終擬長游衍

And he told himself he could never stray
from the route he travelled before—

自謂經過舊不迷

How could he know that the valleys and peaks
would change when he came again?

安知峰壑今來變

At that time all he recalled
was going deep into the mountains,

當時只記入山深

Where the blue stream, after several turns,
had led to a cloud-covered forest.

青溪幾曲到雲林

When spring came, everywhere
there were peach blossoms in the water,
春來遍是桃花水

And he could not tell where he might find
the immortal's Spring.

不辨仙源何處尋

The foreboding in Su Shih's use of the allusion came true: when Su came back to claim his Nine Glories Mountain in a Jug, his miniature world of the immortals was lost.

While in exile, Su could reach the stone in dream and memory; when he returned to Hu-k'ou, stood, and gazed into the mists, Su could imagine the stone was still lying hidden there. Su answers the worry stirred by the allusion to Peach Blossom Spring: don't grieve—the stone still lies there in Hu-k'ou. But the threat posed by the allusion is true, and the consolation is wrong: the little mountain is gone.

Change is impelled by some untouchable power: human freedom lies only in adjustments of value and perspective. In desire, the small becomes large: the rock is a complete mountain range, with peaks and pools named for counterparts on more monumental mountains. There is a "Heaven's Pool," a "Jade Maiden" peak with its high temple—divinity resides in the little rock. But the disparity between the grand names and the small stone reminds us that the shift in perspective is only a willful, playful act, an irony that undermines the magnitude of the vision.

As the rock's transformation to mountain is private, so the "mountain" is private—a commodity to be purchased and carried away. It is the mate for something too much alone, another stone called Mate, in the pool called Mate. As in Huang T'ing-chien's poem, a whimsical wit balances a secret intensity—in Su Shih's case, an intensity of desire.

Su may intend to carry the stone away; someone else may intend the same. Su may transform the stone into a mountain, a

utopian landscape of the imagination; other transformations are possible, transformations that disregard the poet's fondest desires. The mind's freedom to act is a freedom of reaction, the freedom to interpret in a certain way the world that moves on without us. So the mountain moves on, and Su has not the freedom to make it stay, only the freedom to see its nine little peaks as a herd of horses that have galloped off, making the miniature cragginess no more than a miniature plain. He loved the stone dearly, so he reconsiders its small absence as a large absence, the great pasturelands of Chi-pei without its famous steeds. And he mocks the loss by disproportionate hyperbole—return home to dwell in glorious and permanent solitude, like T'ao Ch'ien or Feng Yen, empty-handed, bringing no stone mate for the stone of Mate Pool.

Some time ago I wrote a poem on Nine Glories Mountain in a Jug. Now, eight years later, I have come by Hu-k'ou again and found that the stone has been taken by a collector. So I matched rhymes with my earlier poem to explain how I felt.⁷

By riverside a rank of horses
galloped its thousand peaks away;
江邊陣馬走千峰
When I ask what happened, I learn
that Chi-pei is empty now.
問訊方知冀北空
This most lovely creature is gone
with the end of those clear dreams,
尤物已隨清夢斷
But still the shape of the true mountain
remains in paintings.
真形有在畫圖中
Returning home in my later years,
the same as did T'ao Ch'ien,
歸來晚歲同元亮

Though, in cutting every tie to others, none
can accompany Feng Yen.

却掃何人伴敬通

All I have now for devotional gift
is the bronze basin's fine stone—

賴有銅盆修石供

That color of jade in the pool named Mate,
glistening all alone.

仇池玉色自璵璠

In the long title of his poem, Huang T'ing-chien has told us that this poem by Su is tongue-in-cheek; tongue-in-cheek it may be, but its laughter is painful laughter whose wit shades into somberness as the poem progresses. In an early poem, "Watching Mountains from the River" 江上看山, Su had used the strange comparison of mountains to horses effectively:⁸

From the boat I look at the mountains—
they seem horses galloping;

船上看山如走馬

And in a flash we've sailed on past
several hundred herds.

倏忽過去數百群

It is an unusual comparison, which needs the speed of the river to create the illusion in passage. In the later poem, gazing into an empty place in the mists, it is a melancholy cleverness, an awkward attempt to laugh away the sense of loss, a recollection of all the mountains that have galloped away.

Su provides the poem with notes; he must explain himself to us, worried that we will miss the references and personal associations which lie behind the poem. For the third line he tells us that Liu Yü-hsi (772-842) once called the real Nine Glories Mountain "one of the loveliest creatures in the world" (with all the dangerous beauty of woman, *yu-wu* 尤物). In line four he notes that diagrams of the major peaks can be found in

the Taoist canon. But Su's most revealing note is to the final line:

At home I have a bronze basin [Mate Pool itself] which holds the stone of Mate Pool—pure, dark green in color. The basin has a vent in the back to let the water in. Once I offered an unusual stone as a devotional gift to my friend, the monk Liao-yüan, and wrote a piece called "The Offering of the Unusual Stone."

Nine Glories Mountain in a Jug is lost, so tell about the stone of Mate Pool, the stone that remains; chatter about it proudly to turn attention from the true subject, the stone that has been carried away.

But beneath the series of almost random comments that comprise Su's second poem, there is an obsessive repetition of isolations and failed pairings—emptiness, endings, severed ties, "none accompanying," no mate for the stone of Mate Pool. The resolution is a defensive reaction against the loss of an object of desire—he considers "giving something up," "giving something away." It is to be a gift of Buddhist devotion, remembering the emptiness of all possessions, of all objects of desire. One coveted stone has been carried away, given up; in the same way another unusual stone was once given up as a devotional gift; and there remains yet one more stone to lose. The response to loss and to the fear of loss is renunciation.

This second poem by Su Shih is unsteady and uncomfortable; the poet is not in control. But Huang T'ing-chien cares more for how Su must have felt than for any sure mastery of craft; and what touches Huang most, what stirs him to respond, may be the very awkwardness and unhappiness that lie just beneath the cheerful façade.

Su's two poems and Huang's later poem all balance pairs of allusions in their third couplets; but Huang's allusions are of a different quality:

Someone to bring back Chao's ring of jade—
where is that person now?

He's already gone into Southern Bough Land
where no dreams get through.

The lost restorer of the lost jade is Lin Hsiang-ju. During the Warring States Period, King Hui of Chao obtained possession of a famous jade ring (*pi* 璧). The king of the powerful state of Ch'in heard about Chao's acquisition and offered King Hui fifteen cities in exchange for the jade. King Hui suspected that once Ch'in gained possession of the jade, the bargain would be broken and the cities kept. But Ch'in was as fierce as it was faithless: if he did not yield up the jade, King Hui knew that Ch'in would revenge itself on Chao. In this dilemma, Lin Hsiang-ju offered to take the jade ring to Ch'in, and either to obtain possession of the cities for Chao or to bring back the jade. Once in Ch'in, Lin realized that the king of Ch'in had no intention of giving up his cities; then, through a series of ruses, Lin Hsiang-ju managed to bring the jade safely back to Chao.⁹

The stone, once Nine Glories Mountain in a Jug, is now Chao's ring of jade: a hyperbole for size becomes a hyperbole for value. But Su Shih, the later-born Lin Hsiang-ju who might recover the jade, is gone. Where is he gone?—to Southern Bough, the kingdom of the ants. In a tale by Li Kung-tso, a sleeper once dreamed away a whole lifetime, a public career passing through all the commonplace shifts in fortune, then awoke to discover that his life had been only a brief nap. His dreaming spirit had slipped off to a kingdom of ants in the nearby Southern Bough of a tree.

Su is not dead but dreaming, and instead of the peace of death, Su finds himself in Southern Bough Land, where he must endure tempestuous swings in fortune no different from those he knew in life. Su lost that diminutive immortality promised by a landscape "in a jug"; instead, he has gone off into another diminutive land to repeat the turbulence of this human world. Does the allusion promise Huang that Su will awaken? Huang cannot know: across the boundaries of Su's dreaming no dreams can pass.

Huang's anger is scarcely hidden now: the impersonal forces of change, which carried away the boat in the *Chuang-tzu* parable, became a "someone," the mysterious "collector," *edax*

rerum, who now holds the position of Ch'in's insatiable king, breaker of compacts, thief of all that is most precious. A later king of devouring Ch'in will unify China and become First Emperor, swallowing Chao and all the feudal states; his ambition, in the words of the Han writer Chia Yi, was to "roll the world up in a mat"—just as one might roll up and carry away a stone in a garden. And gone now are Lin Hsiang-ju and Su Shih, the men who could outwit such a devourer.

Ch'in may strike, and Chao may fall; but "though the state may be broken, its mountains and rivers endure."¹⁰ Defying this potent and mysterious collector who makes off with kingdoms and Nine Glories Mountain in a Jug, Huang puts aside the false miniature mountain and turns to a greater Mountain, Stone Bell 石鐘. This mountain endures: it cannot be carried away, it cannot be changed. Its stones, when struck, echo across P'eng-li Lake, reminding collectors and would-be First Emperors that *this* interesting stone is beyond permanent possession.

After Lin Hsiang-ju escaped Ch'in with the ring of jade, Ch'in's king sent forth his armies against Chao; at Ch'ang-p'ing, Chao's army died in one of the most terrible battles of early Chinese history. And when Ch'in's army invested the Chao capital, Han-tan, the king of Chao begged for help from the state of Wei, whose king was allied to him by marriage. Then Wei's king sent his army out to the relief of Chao, but Ch'in sent Wei a stern warning not to interfere. And the king of Wei ordered his army to halt at the border.

But the king of Wei's brother, Wu-chi, Marquis of Hsin-ling, could not bear to let Han-tan fall, unaided by Wei, and he led his small band of retainers off to die along with Chao. Then an old counsellor, Hou Ying, suggested a means by which Wu-chi might take the insignia of command from the Wei general, and with it, lead Wei's army to lift the siege and save Chao. The plan was a good one; but there remained a danger that the present general of Wei's army might oppose this defiance of the king's authority and ruin the plan. Wu-chi would test him, see if the general would acquiesce. As a precaution Wu-chi had his strongest retainer, Chu Hai, carry a heavy iron bludgeon in his sleeve to kill the general if he did not agree. Wei's general refused; the

bludgeon was used; and Wu-chi led the army of Wei to relieve Han-tan, forcing Ch'in's army to retire out of Chao.¹¹

Carrying bludgeon in sleeve, Huang T'ing-chien becomes the hero who will help save Chao from Ch'in in the devourer—not by killing the loyal Wei general, but by striking Stone Bell Mountain and making it ring. Those ringing echoes prove the stability of this mountain, and yet the sounds of this Bell are like the sounds of all bells—*k'ung*, “empty,” formless and insubstantial, reminding the devotional listener of the void at the heart of things. The blow is a gesture of violence and wrath, a gesture of heroism, a gesture of commemoration, a gesture marking the emptiness beneath the forms of the world, and it is a hyperbolic gesture which undermines its own seriousness by grotesque exaggeration. The sound of this mighty iron bludgeon striking the enduring mountain is not a “boom” but the *ling-lung* of ringing jade, the sign of goodness and value tested. It is also the metaphorical sound of great writing, proof that it is as precious and durable as jade.

All we have now is that frosty Bell Mountain
 which none can roll up in a mat;
 With bludgeon in sleeve I'll go and listen
 to its echoing ring-ding-a-ling.

Since I have promised you that this is to be only a poem, I may refer the poem to other matters only with great care. The poem has been left hanging, still tentative and perplexing, but as we set the poem in those other matters, it begins to take on definite “meaning.” We could easily go from the poem to say something about Sung poetry, about Huang T'ing-chien, about regulated verse, about the theme of relativity in size and value, about elegy, about dozens of interesting and worthwhile topics. Were we to do so, the irresolute complexity would be stabilized by a definite function and given context.

It is a moral choice. On the one hand, the stability of function or a set of predetermined questions violate the experience of art in some essential way, and threatened with “use,” the voice of the poem will fall silent. One of the most famous parables in the

Taoist classic *Lieh-tzu* tells of a young man who loved gulls, and every day when he visited the seashore, the birds would flock around him without fear. One day his father asked the young man to gather the gulls so that he too could enjoy them; that day the gulls would not come.¹² I suspect that poems are very much like the gulls: they refuse to consort with people who, by harboring some motive, abuse their goodwill. On the other hand, we need those larger contexts silently within us when we come to poems; without them the voice of the poem has no resonance. Using a poem to describe the characteristics of Sung poetry is a dangerous subordination of poem to function; however, a fully developed "Sung of the imagination" adds much as we read Huang T'ing-chien's poem. To create a "Sung of the imagination" we may have to send some skittish poems whirring away in flight. Even the *Lieh-tzu* has a motive in telling a story about having no motives.

This is only a poem; we will not frighten our poem away by hanging it on some important point, but we might try gently to bring some larger concerns back to it. It is important that such concerns be large and flexible; pat contexts help us little in our reading, coming too quickly to the mind and tongue, categories and not questions. For example, there is an image of easy good cheer that surrounds Sung classical poetry, and this image might easily be set upon our poem of Huang T'ing-chien's; instead of perplexity, we would have a witty refusal to mourn. This cheerful image is, to a large extent, the creation of Sung writers themselves; but we must not be lured into taking their self-image too much at face value. Humans always invent new images of themselves, but human nature does not change so easily as images and dynasties. The Sung was no less emotional and intense than the T'ang, but Sung writers felt ill at ease with their intensities. They were no less impelled by the forces which are the common fate of the species, but they were conscious of being impelled and yearned desperately for an attitude through which they could rise above those forces. Many became ironic poets and found a voice to laugh at every genuine, disturbing experience and emotion they were doomed to live through.

In this poem by Huang T'ing-chien the laugh is brittle: irony

takes the shape of a sophisticated complexity which undermines the dangerous simplicity of any single emotion. Blame, wrath, and a violent heroism are masked in wit and laughter; the wit and laughter are framed by a melancholy sense of the emptiness at the heart of things; when that emptiness promises to become an easy philosophical consolation, the certainty of life's illusoriness cannot account for the power of Huang's feelings. It is a poem that begins with a clever laugh at a dead friend's foolish desire; it is a poem that ends with a grotesquely hyperbolic echo of a ruthless murder, transformed into a strangely violent bell-ringing. The poem says too many things, assumes too many attitudes, and in doing so, says nothing conclusive. But it is not required to be conclusive, being only a poem.

LEARNING LESSONS

We grow, we change and are transformed. Out of what we are and have been, we become something else. To nature we are mere things, the "straw dogs" of a sacrifice; and we are driven by nature as surely as the wind drives small gatherings of leaves.¹ Our humanity rests in one simple gift—to be the observers of our own metamorphoses:

Tzu-ssu, Tzu-yü, Tzu-li, and Tzu-lai were speaking together, each saying: "I will have as a friend whoever:
takes Nil as his head,
takes life as his spine,
takes death as his arse,
whoever knows life and death, existence and perdition
are one and the same."

The four men looked at each other and laughed: not one of them disagreed with these principles. It was thus that they became friends.

Suddenly Tzu-yü grew sick. Tzu-ssu went to ask after him, and Tzu-yü said "Magnificent, isn't it—the Fashioner of Things—turning me into this twisty tangle! A bent hump is coming out of my spine, my internal organs are way up above, my chin is hidden in my navel, my shoulders are higher than the top of my head, and my hair is pointing to Heaven in tufts."

The forces of Yin and Yang were all topsy-turvy within him, yet his mind remained calm and unperturbed. He simply hobbled over to look at his reflection in the well and said, "My, my, my! The Fashioner of Things is going to make me even more twisty!"

"Do you hate it?" Tzu-ssu asked.

"Not in the least!—why should I hate it? Suppose that it gradually reshapes my left arm into a rooster—well, then I'll know when the sun comes up. Or suppose it makes my right arm into a bit of shot for a sling—I'll have roast owl for dinner. Suppose it performs a metamorphosis, turning my arse into a wheel—my spirit will be the horse and I'll go for a ride—I'll never drive in a common carriage again. 'Getting' is just chance; 'loss' is just following along. Rest easy in whatever you chance upon; abide as things follow along; and neither joy nor sorrow can touch you. This is what they used to call 'Letting loose what is Dangling': if you can't let yourself loose, you get knotted up in things. But in the long run, things can't win out over Heaven. What do I have to hate?"

Then all at once Tzu-lai became sick; he gasped for breath; he was on the death's edge, and his wife and children formed a circle around him weeping. But when Tzu-li went to see how Tzu-lai was, he told the family, "Hey! Stand back there! Don't make the Transformation nervous!" Then Tzu-li leaned against the doorway and spoke to Tzu-lai, "Magnificent, isn't it—the Fashioner of Things. I wonder what it's going to make you into; I wonder where it's going to have you go. Will you be a rat's liver? A bug's arm perhaps?"²

In face of the most absurd and drastic transformations, the *Chuang-tzu* counsels benign amusement. The mere knowledge that we are in the midst of change is less of concern in the passage than an attitude toward the fact. Between the chuckling figures of parable and the expectations of true human response there is a distance which carries the painful humor of the passage and teaches us how far we must go in changing ourselves. The attitude proposed is no studied indifference, which would expose the strength of its fear in its refusal to be stirred; rather, with curiosity and laughter, we are enjoined to embrace change.

The parable promises a freedom from suffering through the cheerful acceptance of the fact that we are in change. But it secretly tells us that *we* are not in change at all: *we* need not be merely the objects of nature's acts. The passage asks that we locate the self in the one uniquely human trait—the capacity to observe. We are to consider our outer being as mere object; and in that disjunction, we transcend the processes that mold matter into grotesque, wondrous, and ultimately ridiculous shapes.

In enjoining us to become bemused observers, the parable gives us yet another guarantee that we need not be mere "straw dogs," the passive objects of greater forces. There is one true freedom of autonomous action, a "freedom to" rather than a "freedom from": this is our ability to learn and actively change our understanding. The philosophical positions of the *Chuang-tzu* may be indifferent to this freedom, but the existence of the *Chuang-tzu* as a text is predicated upon it. The book is presented for the sake of a reader; and in revealing how rudely he is being shaped by change, the book provides its reader with both motive and means to transcend that condition. Nature may make sport of our matter; but there is a free being beyond the matter who can freely shape his own understanding.

A philosophical text has its own assumptions, attitudes adopted both in composition and reading. We assume that the philosopher already knows before he writes; the impulse to communicate and teach (curious enough in itself) awaits only the means. The means may be various—the enacted dialogues of Plato; the outlandish parables of the *Chuang-tzu*; the precise, austere voices of Western philosophers from the past few centuries—but in all cases, we assume that the truth of the text has an existence independent of the written text; and we sense verification of that independence in assuming the historical priority of the knowing over the writing.

A poem, conceived as a moving process of speech, differs in its assumptions from the philosophical text. Because the living voice is *within* change, the self is denied the laughing distance of Chuang-tzu's heroes of parable: at best, such a distance can be achieved through the course of the poem. Whatever kind of

knowledge is embodied in the text, it will be achieved through the *process* of composition and reading. For those who write poems, the traditions of composition dispose them to inhabit the world in a peculiar way, anticipating occasions of composition, their attention fixed on those moments and events that seem portentous but whose significance awaits discovery. To learn composition is to learn how to learn; it does not concede that we are inert objects of nature, but it also does not assume the position of Chuang-tzu's parable, already outside of change (though it would accept one lesson from the *Chuang-tzu*—that we have the freedom to learn a lesson). Instead, composition teaches an attentive slowness in our transformations, an art of considering the world while *we* (and not simply our bodies) inhabit it.

The reader, in his turn, may attend to both the person reflecting and the act of reflection: he may find the person or process thin or evasive or profound or perplexing, but he learns a lesson from someone learning a lesson. Great evasions are attractive in being seen through; honest perplexity teases us to resolution; rushing to easy truths earns contempt. Writing and reading are alike acts of learning—not a simple didacticism, certainly not a self-sufficient aestheticism, not even the more appealing Western formulation of an oracular and problematic knowledge through fictions—rather they are considerations of curious and somehow important truths which are sensed in experience and arrest our attention.

Socrates: Well, Ion, you've caught yourself again in the old 'trap. When you write, what precisely do you know?

Ion: I've been thinking about this for several millennia now, and since I've given up Homer for Tu Fu, I think I can give you an answer.

Socrates: I've always known you were a clever fellow, and have been waiting curiously to hear what you have to say.

Ion: It seems to me, Socrates, that I don't know anything in the poem; I'm always coming to know.

Socrates: But Ion, what is it you are coming to know?

Ion: If I could give you the answer to that, I'd already know it.

Socrates: Come now, Ion, you must have been talking to the Sophists again. If you don't know what you are coming to know, then how do you know you are coming to know anything at all?

Ion: Quite the contrary, Socrates—if you know what you are coming to know, then you are no longer coming to know and already know it. Coming to know is a state of reflection. Surely that can exist independent of whatever knowledge may come out of it.

Socrates: Ah, but Ion—how do you know what to reflect on? I could suggest that you know what you don't know because you half remember it—but let that pass—I can see you have indeed been thinking over the past few millennia, or that the god who speaks through you has turned his interest to philosophy. It seems to me, however, that even if the poem is a process of coming to know, it still must end in knowledge (as when Chinese poems close with phrases like “now I understand . . .” or draw some easy moral lesson from an experience). So the poets do, in fact, end up knowing something.

Ion: That is an interesting point, Socrates. But I find that even when a poem does draw an easy conclusion, I often doubt that it is really what the poet has come to know; in fact, I confess that I can never tell exactly what it is that the poet has come to know—though the possibility that he has come to know something leads me on. But I am certain that whatever I come to know will not be the same as what the poet finally knows. It is often said that a good poem has “inexhaustible significance”; I suppose this means that its value lies in its capacity to hold a reader in a constant state of coming to know.

Socrates: That's all very well, Ion, but I can't see what good it is if you never actually arrive at a state of knowing something.

Ion: We rhapsodes may not be very talented in philosophy, but we can tell a great deal from the way a person speaks. I am very familiar with your voice, Socrates; and it is obvious to me, from the way you speak, that the reason you cannot understand the value of coming to know is because you *already* know.

First Consideration: T'ao Ch'ien, "The Sixth Month of 408: we had a fire" 戊申歲六月中遇火³

Of all the pre-T'ang poets, T'ao Ch'ien 陶潛 (365-427) was the most loved and imitated during the T'ang and Sung. Admiration of T'ao's poems contributed much to shaping the values of T'ang and Sung poetry. But the peculiar qualities of T'ao Ch'ien's poetry were beyond his admirers, and he remained, then and afterwards, a unique figure in the history of Chinese poetry.

In his own age too, T'ao was unique, isolated both as a poet and as a person. The poetry of T'ao's contemporaries depended on a finely polished rhetorical craft, gilding a limited repertoire of themes, images, and responses. But T'ao Ch'ien's sophisticated contemporaries were the true innocents: for all his vaunted simplicity and guilelessness, T'ao Ch'ien was burdened with an intense self-consciousness which led him through complex poetic acts of consolation, self-justification, and reflection. T'ao was surely not the first poet whose house had burned down, but he was the first to give the event serious consideration in a poem.

My cottage of thatch was lodged in a poor lane;

草廬寄窮巷

I willingly denied access to glittering coaches of the great.

甘以辭華軒

Everyone may have a house. A person may be born in a house, grow up in that house, dwell in it all his life, and there is nothing noteworthy in the fact. Significance comes by speaking on the fact and by how we speak on it. "Lodging" is a transitive act and limits residence with a hint of impermanence, a suggestion that the poet might once have lodged and might yet lodge elsewhere. By choice or by circumstance, T'ao finds himself in a humble dwelling, located in a lane so narrow it gives no access to grand carriages. Otherwise, he suspects, rich and powerful visitors would be thronging to trouble him in his retreat. He understands his poverty in relation to another, distressing possibility; and we almost imagine him turning frequently to the window to assure himself that no "glittering coaches of the great" have negotiated the narrow passage to intrude upon his solitude. It may be by accident that he finds himself in poverty, but he interprets it as a virtue—"willingly" he lodges here, "willingly" he refuses visits by the great (presuming, of course, their eagerness to call on him were he lodged in some more spacious avenue).

The attitude is entirely characteristic of T'ao Ch'ien—a willful variance from the common inclination of other mortals. And his contentment with little mitigates what might otherwise have been a double injustice—the fire that not only burned him out, but burned him out when he had so little. Yet when a person is burned out, it does not matter whether he was wealthy or poor: all such are alike in losing all, and are brought to the same condition of having nothing. In being burned out, only one sort of person may differ from the common experience: a person who is not only content with less than he might have but who even "willingly" chooses less. A fire abets the natural inclinations of this person, burning away the last dross of entangling possessions.

In high summer the wind blew steady and strong,

正夏長風急

My grove and house suddenly were burned up.

林室頓燒燔

The event is scarcely worth lingering over. There are circumstances which can explain the extent of the fire—a strong and steady wind—but no cause. The report has all the economy of a chronicle. A T'ang or Sung poet would revel in the description of the flames, anatomize his anxiety for the safe escape of the household, measure the extent of the destruction, and lovingly weep over each charred timber. But this matter-of-factness becomes a man who chooses to have little: the fire has unburdened him of a little more.

It is an accident—causeless, meaningless, uninteresting in the physical details, requiring only a note that it occurred. True interest lies in how we respond to such events, and in the process of reflection engaged in our response.

Of the whole house, none of the roofs remained,
一宅無遺宇

So we took shelter in a boat before the gate.
舫舟蔭門前

T'ao's lack of interest in possessions and opulence becomes credible through his pragmatism. Though he will not indenture his spirit to the physical man, T'ao is acutely aware of minimums, of the boundaries of "what is enough." There must be a roof over the family's head, and T'ao finds that the open shelter of the boat is enough. The need and the solution are something worth noting in the poem. It is not a true roof—only a *yin*, a "shading" or "covering"—but it will do. He has discovered a new boundary of "what is enough" even below the poverty of a thatched cottage, and therefore he finds nothing to lament, nothing to complain of.

There was a hint of impermanence in the "lodging" of the first line; here is a lodging that makes even less pretense to permanence. Human civilization, with all its millions of tendrils through human life, is devoted to creating illusions of stability and permanence. Should some accident strip away those illusions, we may discover that human life can exist "afloat," within mutating nature, while still retaining that essential trait of obser-

vation, of noting nature's changes and ourselves changing in them.

Far and clear, an evening of new autumn;

迢迢新秋夕

High above, the moon is almost full.

亭亭月將圓

The sixth month, the month of the fire, was the last of summer, the season whose element is Fire; autumn is coming on now, and it is time for T'ao to consider the approaching cold, time to secure better shelter than the boat. But in "exposure," T'ao notices only "openness": by stripping away the roof over his head, the fire has given T'ao an unobstructed vision of the sky. And looking up, T'ao may remember that the sky is often named "the Roof," *yü* 宇, and given the kenning "that which covers" 覆. This is the response of a fifth-century *Candide*. The thatch roof seemed durable, if humble; it proved mutable in the end. Heaven's "roof" passes through constant changes of weather, moon, and season; but it proves durable and dependable. Not only did his thatch roof hide the night sky from T'ao's sight, it was a possession, and like all possessions, it entangled a person in a relation—either active possessing or loss. This new, transparent roof is beyond possession or loss or any accident of fire.

T'ao's wonderment over his new roof lies in the seeing itself, in direct description rather than in self-reflective statement ("I marvel at . . ."). He is not the sort of poet to remark how nature has given him a new and better roof to replace the roof stolen away by the fire. Such wit is the very stuff of Sung poetry, and many T'ang poets too would have found it difficult to forego comment on the exchange. When Han Yü 韓愈 (768-824) "Loses His Teeth," the poet spins out the speculative advantages of toothlessness: we are delighted by the playful act of will involved, but we do not for a moment credit Han Yü's transformation of misfortune into good fortune.⁴ But we believe T'ao: he seems to see only the beauty of the scene and not the menacing

approach of autumn's chill. We might not even notice this imminent care, had T'ao not taken the care to remove his family to the shelter of the boat. We might wonder why he does not now think on procuring the minimum of food and shelter; but T'ao notes only the beautiful scene, change, and renewal.

Fruit and vegetables begin to grow again,

果菜始復生

Though the startled birds still have not returned.

驚鳥尚未還

Earth-bound nature begins to renew itself after the fire, following the cycle of the seasons. In the renewal there seems to be a hierarchy in the proximity to nature, diminishing as we ascend the commonly accepted hierarchy of living things (though capable of returning to nature on the highest level, in human consciousness, or more properly, in the human being perfected). The insensate fruits and vegetables come back, indifferent to such minor cataclysms as house fires—perhaps, at the same time, answering some of T'ao's unspoken concerns for the coming winter. But the birds are tainted by motives of self-preservation: they have been "startled." And although T'ao anticipates their eventual return ("still have not . . ."), the birds seem to lack the pure indifference of the vegetation.

In the middle of night I stand fixed in faraway brooding,

中宵佇遙念

One sweeping gaze encompasses all the heavens.

一盼周九天

The mundane roof would deny this breadth of vision: the fire has provided both the means and occasion to reflect on change. One continuous gaze takes in "all the heavens" (literally, the nine directions, or nine layers of heaven), and it is in the context of this revealed magnitude that the poet eventually reflects upon himself.

Since bobbed-haired youth I've clung to solitary
principles—

總髮抱孤介

Suddenly I'm past forty years.

奄出四十年

My form, the marks of my deeds pass on with change,
形迹憑化往

Yet the seat of my spirit is always alone and calm.

靈府長獨閒

True and steady, it has substance unto itself:

貞剛自有質

Neither jade nor stone can be so strong.

玉石乃非堅

There was a house; there was a person who owned the house and lived in it. The house burned away, and the person remained. In the burning away the person has come to know that the house was not necessary to him. In reflection he concludes that all which is outside—house, body, acts—all can change, wear away, burn up, and still what is within remains unchanged. A calm comes of this: occasion to contemplate the extent of outer changes reminds the person how different and durable he, the being within, is. This sense of self is no hard-won asceticism: it comes on its own, a resilience that someone might discover if left uncovered under the cover of the night sky. T'ao marvels at change and feels no menace from it. His reflective conclusion is the counterpart of the attitude enjoined by the parable of the *Chuang-tzu*; but because it is a discovery, growing out of an occasion, it differs from parable: it is a moment in the mind, at once more real and more complicated by contingent circumstances. The parable embodies a truth in stasis; the poem keeps moving, and the calm appreciation of inner resilience may be challenged and lost.

T'ao's principles are "singular," and their singularity indicates another, commonplace world where people cling to their fragile

outer husks—cottages, bodies, fame. In that world true loss *can* occur; there a burnt house is part of the self which is burned away. It is a metonymic world in which “glittering coaches” stand for their owners. T’ao differs from this world, but a singularity of principles (rather than a singularity for its own sake) admits the possibility of a community which might share T’ao’s values.

I speculate on the remote days of Tung-hu,

仰相東戶時

When extra grain was left at night in the fields.

餘糧宿中田

People patted full bellies and worried on nothing,

鼓腹無所思

Got up in the morning, went back to sleep at night.

朝起暮歸眠

In T’ao’s speculative antiquity, abundance follows directly from the absence of a rule of possession. This is T’ao’s spiritual homeland, but he dreams of it out of need—not freely. To a man satisfied with what he has and indifferent to loss, this dream of plenty in a primal community is a flight, an act of distress and dissatisfaction.

The harmony of the first lesson is broken; the calm is endangered. Conflict emerges between indifference to *all* external things and the idea of satisfaction with “what is enough.” A question is silently posed: if there is less than that bounded minimum, can the spirit’s independence be maintained? Rather than answer the question immediately, T’ao flees into “once upon a time.” Then, grain was left overnight in the fields; then, an individual “loss” was absorbed in the abundance of the collective. Behind T’ao’s vision of the legendary past, we must hear the whispered concern for hunger and want, a forgetfulness of the moon’s beauty in the night sky. The world is no longer so generous as it once was; no grain is left for the taking in these fields.

In that past world a general sufficiency made unconcern easy;

but T'ao finds himself an alien in a late world, threatened by the coming of winter, possible hunger, and a society of humans who foolishly, but nevertheless tenaciously, cling to possessions. In the days of Tung-hu, if one's house burned, it meant nothing: there were others who would share, who did not regard food and shelter as possessions. But now it is more difficult, and preserving an open, unpossessive spirit is a singular, vulnerable position.

Since I wasn't born in those times,

既已不遇茲

I'll just water my garden.

且遂灌我園

It is an uneasy, complicated answer, but like all great answers, it comes out in simplicity. It was Voltaire's answer. It refuses to worry or lament, but it does acknowledge the pragmatic problem which surrounds the poem, the unspoken hunger and want which threaten philosophic calm. The closing resolve maintains the promised calm, without hope or fear. It is an act that enters nature's processes and recalls the attention to vegetative renewal earlier in the poem; it serves the physical self without clinging to it.

Poems can reconcile, integrating inner life, its values and sentiments, with a sense of outer contingencies and limits. T'ao needs to know how much to yield to the physical man, threatened by want; but he must not allow that threat to touch and change him. His answer is a good one.

My cottage of thatch was lodged in a poor lane;
 I willingly denied access to glittering coaches of the great.
 In high summer the wind blew steady and strong,
 My grove and house were suddenly burned up.
 Of the whole house, none of the roofs remained,
 So we took shelter in a boat before the gate.
 Far and clear, an evening of new autumn;
 High above, the moon is almost full.

Fruit and vegetables begin to grow again,
 Though the startled birds still have not returned.
 Since bobbed-haired youth I've clung to solitary
 principles—

Suddenly I'm past forty years.

My form, the marks of my deeds pass on with change,
 Yet the seat of my spirit is always alone and calm.

True and steady, it has substance unto itself:

Neither jade nor stone can be so strong.

I speculate on the remote days of Tung-hu,

When extra grain was left at night in the fields.

People patted full bellies and worried on nothing.

Got up in the morning, went back to sleep at night.

Since I wasn't born in those times,

I'll just water my garden.

Second Consideration: Su Shih, "The Twelfth Month,
 Fourteenth Day, a Light Snow During the Night:
 the next day I went out early to South Creek
 and drank there a while, staying until evening."⁵

In learning lessons there is a precarious balance between the stubborn facts of the outer world and the received poetic tradition, with its favored objects of attention, its blueprints for action, and its easy responses. Past poetry and the entire written tradition intrude not only into present poetry but into life as well. The occasions of old and memorable poems sent people scurrying over fields and mountains, scouting apt scenes and anticipated experiences; favorite poems taught them how to construct poetic situations, as well as how to understand and appreciate them. The beauty of snow scenes must surely have caught the primitive, aesthetic eye long before a poem was ever written on the subject; but once a body of memorable snow poems had been written, those records of past experience became inextricably entwined with present and prospective experience. Old poems, new poems, and life's ongoing projects, from which

poems grow, came together in a dynamic exchange of proposal and limitation. Old lessons and pleasures generated new ones; whether the new lessons and pleasures were filial in repetition or rebellious and contrary, still they acknowledged their ancestry.

Fortunately the natural world has read no poems. It may, perversely, intrude itself into experience, complicating, thwarting, and undermining the most carefully proposed poetic occasions. Setting out to repeat the lessons and pleasures of his literary ancestors, a poet may be granted a rich opportunity for irony, as he watches his anticipated poem being fractured by a higher chaos. At such embarrassing visitations, lesser poets fall into confusion; great poets, like Su Shih, smile to discover their merely human poetry exposed, and they accept the infinitely more problematic poem that nature offers. But sometimes it is not easy to smile.

South Creek will have snow—
truly beyond all price!

南谿得雪真無價

So I galloped my horse to go look at it
before it melted away:

走馬來看及未消

All alone I pushed back the thorn bushes,
searching for prints of shoes—

獨自披榛尋履迹

I was first of all, at the breaking of dawn,
to cross the vermilion bridge.

最先犯曉過朱橋

But who pities these broken chambers?—
no place they have to sleep—

誰憐破屋眠無處

I realized it suddenly—the village was starving,
the usual raucous chatter was gone.

坐覺村飢語不囂

Only the crow this evening
comprehends what's in my mind:

惟有暮鴉知客意

It startles up into flight—a thousand flakes
fall from the cold bough.

驚飛千片落寒條

Here is a hard lesson for a local official. He should have secretly made this single poem two—one quatrain on the snow at South Creek, one quatrain on encountering the hardships of the villagers. Then our appreciation could have divided itself into comfortable categories: we might admire Su's lively aesthetic sensibility in the first poem, then in the second poem honor his public concern as a magistrate. But an honest poet lets nature write its wicked poem.

Were the first four lines composed before or after his evening return, before or after he saw the village? Values change in the course of the poem, and the significance of the opening differs at different moments in the day. If he left the creek with a quatrain in hand or mind, then his appreciative exclamation "truly beyond all price!" 貨無價 comes back to haunt him: a cliché of aesthetic "pricelessness" becomes an ugly and literal "valuelessness" in the context of the third couplet. We cannot know if nature has unwritten Su's lovely quatrain; but we, the readers, innocently snap up the lure of the pleasant occasional title; we follow the day's course of scenes and moods; and when the "pricelessness" becomes a literal lack of worth, we then discover that we have been hooked by the same error in values made by the poet.

Our poet is full of plans, rushing out to see the snow before it melts, jealously searching for footprints that might spoil his privilege of being the first person to the scene; his must be the first print in the snow on the red bridge, an aristocratic honor that recalls famous couplets of poets before him. It is a planned experience, with the composition of a poem as its natural outcome. We might sense a small and refined anxiety as he looks for

footprints, a worry that someone might mar his prospective poem with the heavy mark of a clog on the virgin snow. But the plan runs smoothly: the scene is entirely his to enjoy as other poets have enjoyed such scenes. And Su may write the planned poem.

That evening he returns. The rhetorial "Who pities . . .?" has the hard, ironic edge of guilt. The "raucous chatter" of the village—a vulgarity from which the refined scholar flees, seeking instead the silent purity and seclusion of snowy creeks—becomes horrible in its absence. The tranquility of *this* snow scene offers the poet no tranquility: its silence accuses him.

The point has been made; the poet has not so much learned a lesson as he has been taught a lesson, and the poem might end here. But nature does not write easy poems—it leaves that to poets who set off to enjoy snow scenes. The ill-omened crow, disturbed by the poet's presence, startles up; it is an ugly darkness rising from the snowy branch, shaking off the thin covering of lovely snow and exposing the dark wood underneath. This is an omen of the world—indeed, even an unsubtle emblem of the situation. But in this complicated moral context, the significance of the omen is compromised by its inescapable beauty. An ugly social reality and the guilt of a magistrate's neglect have all too quickly been translated into art—the kind of art which poets go off seeking at dawn in snowy creeks. "A thousand flakes fall from the cold bough"—we should shudder: nature treats people as "straw dogs"; poets treat them as the subjects of poems. Between callous nature and callous poets there is a harsh rapport, shaped like an evening crow who "comprehends what's in his mind." Instead of a hot meal from the public granaries, the villagers are served "objective correlatives."

We would like to believe that the poet has learned both lessons: the first, easy truth about neglect, and the second, more problematic truth. We would like to believe that in this last line he is only trying to hook us again, as he did the first time. We cannot know what he has come to know, but we will be wise and recoil, not from the emblem of exposed ugliness but from the callous beauty of its perfection.

Third Consideration: Wang An-shih, "A Visit to Pao Ch'an Mountain" 遊褒禪山記⁶

We learn in the act of writing, but we may incautiously allow those writings to escape us and be read by others. Reading the world, Su Shih may humbly accept the lesson he has been taught; but readers of poems do not like to be taught lessons by the writings they find: they want the freedom to learn as they choose, as in problematic lessons from evening crows scattering snow from the branches. Writing is an act of consideration, and when it is left for others, it becomes something for *their* consideration. The wise writer gives his work out not to teach but to commemorate—to make part of the common memory.

But the common memory may lose things, and the words of a commemoration may become blurred and indistinct. To confront such a fading commemoration may in itself be an act worthy of commemoration. In 1054 Wang An-shih 王安石 made a visit to Pao Ch'an Mountain, located in modern Anhwei Province, and composed a prose "record," *chi* 記, of the occasion:

Pao Ch'an Mountain is also called Hua 華 Mountain. The T'ang monk Hui-pao originally made his dwelling at the base of the mountain and was buried there. Thus the mountain later came to be known as Pao Ch'an, 'Pao' for Hui-pao, 'Ch'an' for his Ch'an Buddhism. What is now called Hui-k'ung's Retreat is actually Hui-pao's cottage and tomb.

The places we visit in this world have two aspects, one belonging to nature, the other belonging to human history. We may know that the natural world has something like "history"—trees grow from sprouts and fall in storms, rivers change courses, sheer cliffs become easy wooded slopes—but we see in the natural aspect of a place something which is both present and eternal, something which is out of human time. The aspect of a place which belongs to human history is its past use: like a biography, it begins with names and genealogies, the lineage of names. There may be those who know only the present names—

a place named Hui-kung's Meditation Garden—but do not know where the names come from. This is ignorance, and to the historian, it is a melancholy ignorance, reminding him how names and acts fade from the common memory. It can also be a dangerous ignorance, threatening blind repetition of past errors. He notes the name in common use and gives its origin, its true name.

Names carry a weight of significance because of human history. The last emperor of the weak Ch'en Dynasty (r. 573–588) composed a sensual song called "On Jade Trees, Flowers in the Rear Courtyard." When his advisors heard the song, they wept, recognizing in it the mark of decadence and the impending destruction of the dynasty. Shortly afterward, the Ch'en was conquered by the Sui Dynasty. Three centuries later, when the T'ang Dynasty was suffering its own internal troubles, Tu Mu 杜牧 (803–852) moored his boat on the Ch'in-Huai Canal 泊秦淮:⁷

Mist veils the cold waters,
moonlight veils the sand;

烟籠寒水月籠沙

By night I moor on the Ch'in-Huai,
near the wineshops.

夜泊秦淮近酒家

The singing girl does not understand
the sorrow of ruined kingdoms—

商女不知亡國恨

Across the river still she sings "On Jade Trees
Flowers in the Rear Courtyard."

隔江猶唱後庭花

To the singer there is only a song—sensual, an alluring surface. To the listening poet the song carries the full weight of its sad history, so much so that the poet is certain the girl does not understand: if she understood, she could not sing *that* song. In human history the song marks decadence, painful memories of fallen dynasties and ominous hints of present dangers. Her

ignorance is a menacing innocence, against which it is the historian's duty to trace the true history of the name.

Pao Ch'an Mountain has a name; it may not be the most famous of mountains, but in Wang An-shih's eyes it cannot be regarded as "just a mountain." The name and its history must be transmitted. Details are lost; their absence is important for the considerations of later ages.

Five miles east of the Retreat is an area known as the Hua Mountain Caves, so named because they are on the south slope of Hua Mountain. About a hundred paces away, there was a stele lying overturned by the road, and the writing on it was fading and indistinct. Of its inscription, the only part still recognizable were the words "Hua 花 Mountain." The character used for "Hua" nowadays (華, the *hua* of the phrase *hua-shih*) is, I suspect, a confusion of the two sounds.

Steles are incomprehensible to civilizations that have little concern for their reputations in future ages; civilizations that do feel such concern find in steles disturbing reminders of their mortality. Inscription in metal and stone is meant to be an act of enduring commemoration. But the territories of old civilizations are littered with steles from which the writing is fading or already effaced. These become, perversely, monuments to what is irrevocably lost and to the failed desires of our predecessors to leave messages of self-interpretation for the present.

To confront a fallen and worn stele leads to a response in which the writer learns about himself, and in which the reader learns about the writer. The writer may lament time's swift passage, "devourer of things," and grieve that the memory of man and his accomplishments is not much more durable than the physical creature. He may, like Tzu-ssu, Tzu-yü, Tzu-li, and Tzu-lai, laugh at human puniness amid the transformations kept in motion by the Fashioner of Things. Or he may, with a gruff, secular heroism, record the only two surviving words, note the corruption of the original name in contemporary usage, and correct this fragment of the mountain's human history.

The human aspect of the mountain is its history; but little survives, and even those fragments of the collective memory are continually being effaced, corrupted, and changed. The writer investigates and recovers what he can; he is not seeking eternal verities but performing an act of salvage. Eternal verities are always present and easily acquired; in greater jeopardy are those fragile details that make up the palpable past.

Just down below the cave the land is open and level, and there is a stream coming out from the side. Many have left records of their visits here. This place is known as the Fore-cave. But five or six miles up the mountain is the dark recess of another cavern, which is extremely cold when you enter it. Its depth is such that none who love travels have ever been able to reach the end of it. This they call the Back Cave.

When language and nature present their phenomena in pairs, we are inclined to compare the terms and draw distinctions between them. One cave is low, the approach level: it is often visited and often commemorated. The other cave is cold, set higher up, visited only by those who "love travels," but never penetrated to the end. The cognoscenti of excursions always prefer the spot which is remote and seldom visited; the very difficulty of the goal proves the intrepid and persevering nature of those who would try it.

There are two sorts of people: those who know only the present names of the mountain and those, like Wang An-shih, who are concerned with the origin and history of the names. There are two caves: one easily reached and often explored, one deep and remote, its end never touched. The two antithetical pairings secretly dispose themselves in parallel, each member of the antithesis discovering an affinity in the other pairing. We recognize immediately that Wang An-shih's allegiance is to the Back Cave.

Four other men and I took torches and entered the cave. The more deeply we entered, the harder it became to go on, but at the same time, the things that we saw grew ever

more wondrous. Among us there was one who, through indolence, wanted to back out. "If we don't leave, the torches will soon go out." So we all went out with him. We probably hadn't gone even one-tenth as far as someone who really loved travels might have gone. And when I looked around me, I discovered that on the walls there were very few notes left by those who had come before. I suppose that still fewer penetrated even more deeply into the cave. At that time my strength was still sufficient to have gone in further, my torch was still sufficient to light the way. When we made it out, someone blamed the person who had wanted to leave, and I too regretted having followed him and having missed the opportunity to enjoy the trip to the utmost.

The journey into the cave is the central experience of Wang An-shih's visit to Pao Ch'an Mountain, yet it is the record of a failure and of a fallible mortal's compromise in his allegiance. Had Wang An-shih continued to explore the cave, there might have been no "Record of a Visit to Pao Ch'an Mountain," or at best, a very different, less painful record. Though he firmly knew he could have gone on further had he but the will, Wang succumbed to temptation, to the crowd's opinion. The commemoration is also a confession, and confession demands that he consider the way in which his failure occurred. It is a thorn—a small thorn, but nevertheless painful—and the pain of it requires learning a lesson, making a synthesis of the experience of the cave and stele.

When Wang An-shih visits Pao Ch'an Mountain, he does not see nature; he sees human history and human relations. The natural beauties of the cave are summed up in a passing "wondrous," and even that "wondrousness" confines nature's beauties to the effect on the human observer.

At this point I found something to sigh over. When the ancients observed Heaven and Earth, the plants, trees, insects, fish, birds, and beasts, everywhere they learned

something from them. So deeply did they strive and brood upon such things, there was nothing they failed to find. If a place is level and closeby, visitors crowd there; if it is hard-going and far, few reach the place. And the magnificent, the rare, the wondrous sights are always in the places hard to reach and far, in places seldom attained by men. Unless we have the will, we cannot make it. Consider someone who does have the will, but stops before he can satisfy it—it might be, in this case, a person whose energy is insufficient for the task. But suppose someone has both the energy and the will, but does not carry on out of indolence: if he reaches dark and uncertain places and there is nothing to help him along, he too will not make it. But if someone's strength is enough to make it, and he still does not make it, that person is to be mocked by others and has in himself cause to regret. Had I tested *my* will to the limit and still had not been able to make it, I could have been without regrets, and who could have mocked me? This is what I learned.

The imperative is to learn, *te* 得 "attain": in commentaries on the Confucian classics, this *te* is understood as cognate with *Te* 德, the "inner virtue and power" of the Sage. Something is "attained" in experience, and the "attainment" is a part of the self-perfection that leads to sageliness. The ancients learned from nature, but the most marvellous forms of nature (from which, presumably, the richest knowledge could be attained) are out of reach. If someone, for whatever reason, fails to reach the dark places of nature's most wondrous forms, the failure in no way diminishes the imperative to learn. Instead, the failed voyager turns his reflections back upon himself to discover how and why he failed, to learn a lesson about learning lessons.

The magic word is "depth," and it applies both to the cave and to the most intense reflection—through which the ancients learned their lessons and through which Wang An-shih learned his. The depths of the cave are full of darkness and uncertainty, to be cleared away only by a torch and perseverance. If Wang

An-shih's cavernous darkness of unknowing lacks Plato's visionary alternative, it does ask a gritty doggedness of the spelunker to explore and know what he can.

Also concerning the fallen stele, I am distressed that the ancient books no longer survive. Later ages have erred in the transmission, and who can tell how many have been unable to call the mountain by its proper name? For this reason, those who would learn must ponder deeply and get what they can.

From personal failure and the lesson learned from that failure, Wang An-shih turns to personal triumph—the recovery of the mountain's proper name from the fallen stele. In the cave he did not go as far as he could have; with the stele he has reached the limits of what can be known—the barrier to knowledge is external. But both the failure and the success occur in the bounded world of detail.

The four men with me were Hsiao Chün-kuei of Lu-ling, Wang Hui of Ch'ang-lo, and my younger brothers, Wang An-kuo and Wang An-shang. Written on a day of the seventh month in 1054 by Wang An-shih of Lin-ch'üan.

In the Confucian tradition knowledge is fulfilled only in praxis. In the context of the lesson Wang has learned, the formal closing of the "travel note" (*yu-chi* 遊記) acquires special significance. As an aspiring Sage, Wang learns general lessons from the details of experience; as his own historian, applying the lessons learned, he records the proper names of his companions and the date. But somehow, perhaps by faulty memory or by some accident in the transmission of the text, the exact day in the seventh month, the day of the journey or the writing, seems to have been lost.

ASIDE: OF LAZINESS

(for the unnamed person who wanted to leave the cave)

True devotees of laziness will surely greet this topic with a flush of scorn which permits them to return to their accustomed inactivity; they will assume that anyone who would exert himself to write on laziness is proven, by the energy expended in the act, to lack deep insight into the condition. I would, on the contrary, contend that true appreciation of laziness is keenest in those for whom Sloth is a cultivated aspiration. The topic is, admittedly, an idle one, but it may serve as a charm against the terrifying industriousness proposed in Wang An-shih's essay and give us a defiant occasion to dawdle.

Sloth seems to have been something of an afterthought among the Seven Deadly Sins—neither sufficiently exciting to inspire much naughty writing nor dangerous enough to merit the extensive attention of graver moralists. The primary objections raised against it, as in Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living*, are that it is a relaxation of pious occupation, a vacancy through which the more appealing sins can creep in. Indeed, Sloth has been one of the most sadly neglected Sins, and has been given its due honors only sporadically in the English literary tradition—as in James Thompson's *Castle of Indolence*. The spell of sybaritic lassitude which Thompson's enchanter casts over unwary mortals is beguiling enough, and the flatness of the pious Knight of Industry suggests where the poet's secret allegiance lies; but even here Sloth behaves too much like his cousin License, and his indolent victims occasionally act with an unseemly vigor.

Confucian seriousness notwithstanding, the Chinese have a rich literature of laziness, a brisk and savory inactivity which, if

it lacks Thompson's steamy sensuality, is more easy-going and less sinful. One of the central texts of this relaxing canon is Po Chü-yi's 白居易 (772-846) "On Laziness" 詠慵:¹

I might have had office, but
 I'm too lazy to go for appointment;
 有官慵不選

I have fields but I'm too lazy to farm them.
 有田慵不農

The roof has holes—too lazy to patch it.
 屋穿慵不葺

Rips in my robes—too lazy to mend them.
 衣裂慵不縫

I've got wine, but I'm too lazy to pour it—
 有酒慵不酌

Just as if my cup were always empty.
 無異尊長空

I have a lute—too lazy to pluck its strings—
 有琴慵不彈

It amounts to the same as the "Stringless" one.
 亦與無絃同

My family tells me the rice is all gone—
 家人告飯盡

I'd like a bowl, but am too lazy to hull some.
 欲炊慵不舂

I get letters from friends and relations:
 親朋寄書至

Want to read them, but
 I'm too lazy to break the seals.
 欲讀慵開封

I've heard some say that Hsi K'ang
 當聞嵇叔夜

Spent his whole life in laziness,

一生在慵中

But he *did* play the lute and smelt iron—

彈琴復鍛鐵

Next to me, he

scarcely counts as lazy at all.

比我未爲慵

It might be objected in the poet (as in the essayist) that this writing is a precious waste of time which might be spent less actively. And surely there are those who will feel some impropriety in the energetic competitiveness with which Po pursues his Sloth. However, it might be said in Po's defense that even though he took the trouble to celebrate his laziness, he did so lazily, casually enumerating inconveniences avoided, without laborious justification of his condition. And Po's competitive comparison simply shows that the poet is attentive to the dangers of unconscious and habitual exertions: as Thompson's languid wraiths demonstrate, it is just as easy to become the busy slave of one's pleasures as of one's duties.

But in order to defer the next chapter and idly prolong our Aside, let us grow skeptical about this Sloth. Po Chü-yi is far too comfortable to mind if we mistrust his ease. It cannot escape our notice that Po is curiously diligent in his laziness: for him, Sloth is obviously a condition that admits degrees and requires a watchfulness to avoid even minor demands. Indeed, when keenly appreciated as a "cultivated aspiration," Sloth seems little better than any other object of desire—commanding our attention, filling us with anxiety lest we accidentally fall into the Un-slothful.

Not only is it a desire, Sloth is a peculiar kind of desire: it is negative, always avoiding some unpleasant alternative. In the object of avoidance, we find the most striking differences between Thompson's Arcadian indolence and Po's celebratory refusals. Thompson's wallowing swains are licensed to do whatever they please; they escape prohibitions as well as demands. Po excuses himself, item by item, from all the unpleasant labors

that accompany status and position, and even from the most trifling demands which would enable him to fulfill his desires—drinking, eating, reading letters from friends. Each item on his list of refusals has a corresponding desire: an attraction is proposed, then refused, as Po exposes the claim it will make upon him. Rather than suffer the claim, Po will forego the pleasure. Every refusal to act is at the same time a loss; but his revulsion against external demands—whether imposed by society or the simple nature of things—is more powerful than the common desires. The paragon of such lassitude aspires to the pure condition of vegetable; but since Po was born into the wrong order of being, it is an aspiration doomed to frustration—no matter how vigilant Po may be in uncovering and avoiding the secret demands of little pleasures. Even if his family waters him and places him in the sunlight, the human who will not hull his rice and tend his fields is in an endangered condition.

We wish we had not indulged in idle skepticism; it has led to an uncomfortable conclusion, one entirely out of harmony with this lazy Aside. Laziness is a powerful and negative impulse, stirred by revulsion against another, frightening mode of life. Thompson's sybaritic indulgence and Po's basking planthood are each flights from something hated. The former flees a world filled with prohibitions; the latter seeks release from a world of incessant and imperious demands. And lovely Sloth turns out to be no more than a masked shape of rebellion.

REBELLIONS

*Know well this one thing,
 Nothing else you know:
 To tremble and to be so careful,
 And if on the edge of a deep abyss,
 As if treading on thin ice.*

—Book of Songs cxcv

We go back to the beginning, to poetry's first principles: *shih yen chih* 詩言志, the poem gives voice to something intensely in the mind, some noble ambition or involuntary obsession. Poetry may show interest in the outer world, but only as it touches the perceiver's own complex concerns. The focal point of the *shih* is the self of the poet.

But we may wonder at the dimensions of the self which presents itself in *shih*; it often seems a poor, austere, restricted creature: it observes, reads the patterns of the outer world, reflects, and responds; sometimes it feels joy; more often it is wounded and feels pain. By some carefully framed consolation or resolution, the self may be able to exorcise its pain, but in doing so, it usually achieves no more than a fragile condition of equanimity.

In "learning lessons" the writer changes himself rather than the outer world: throughout medieval Chinese thought and literature the first impulse is to perfect or modify the knower rather than what is known. But the self rarely acts, rarely gives voice to more than the most modest desires, rarely seems to possess the power to strike back at what oppresses it. Opposition to a situation in the outer world is most commonly translated into the resounding "No!" of the recluse—a retreat, refusal to act,

participate, or desire. The canonical imperative is "Yield—do not contend" 讓而不爭.

A self like that of Li Po excites readers by the pretense of daring: he longs to climb to the heavens, stop the sun, slice rivers with his dirk. But a hyperbolic bluster in the voice undermines the seriousness of its frenzy and mocks the passion. In most poetry the self seems to inhabit a world in which there is misfortune, but no tragedy—no irreconcilable conflict between human will and mortal contingency, or between a merely human morality and some transcendent law that undoes the human ethical order.¹ Euripides' *Bacchae* has little place here: a destructive eruption of mystery and divine power into the human ethical world passes the imagination.

Poetry permitted a purgation of emotion; but the purgative acted upon the poet himself, rather than on his audience. Han Yü proposed that all sound (*ming* 鳴, "singing out") was the necessary consequence of some imbalance returning to equilibrium; poetry, the highest form of "singing out," promised a relaxation of tension and a restoration of inner balance.² A disturbed spirit was often described as swelling and puffing up within, unable to find a vent, until the pressure was released in a poem: the poet suffered from a kind of flatulence of the soul. Lu Kuei-meng 陸龜蒙 (?-ca. 881), building on an old etymological gloss for *shih* as *ch'ih* 持, "holding," described poetry as a "receptacle" to carry out these pent-up emotions and prevent them from "bursting forth violently."³ In contrast to the mysteries of ritual substitution involved in Aristotelian purgation, poetic purgation in the Chinese tradition was cheerfully physiological.

If the self were no more than a docile and ingenious victim, if all the problematic human emotions were so easily evacuated in verse, then there would be little to hold our interest in Chinese poetry. But the way in which these explanations are untrue teaches us the limits beyond which we can no longer give a simple credence to the interpretations of traditional poetic theorists and to the self-interpretations of the poets. The old interpretations of poetry's function and the self-interpretations of poets do not cease to be important for us; but their value be-

comes more complex: such explanations tell us only what poetry and the poet were *supposed* to be, what they were *enjoined* to be. Poetry ought to be the means to achieve a gracious equilibrium; the poet ought to display a mellow self-control. Behind the injunctions lies the fear that poetry might be more dangerous.

To understand the difficult relations between poetic proprieties and their constant companions, the vital and shadowy improprieties, we look to rebellions—those moments when forbidden forces threaten to break through and engulf the poem that “should be.” There are different qualities of rebellion—a small body of poems on violent willfulness, a somewhat larger body of poems in which rebellious sentiments undermine the most gracious intentions, and an even larger body of poems in which stillness is only the surface of an interior conflict. For this last and most common rebellion, we need only recall Wang Wei’s “Sitting Alone on an Autumn Night” (see pp. 134–137), in which stasis is the voice of iron control. There is a simple stasis when something is merely at rest; there is another, strenuous stasis in which two powerful forces in opposition cancel one another, and a stillness rides upon the interface. The two versions of stasis are formally identical: there is only that hint of strain in the second calm to remind us and make us appreciate the forces at play.

The proprieties and improprieties of poetry are obviously a microcosm of larger battles in the psyche. Some traits of the human animal are universal and irradicable—passionate desires, terror at the unknown, a selfish will, and a rebelliousness against all restraints placed on that will. These traits of the creature are natural enemies of the social order. Since the traits cannot be eradicated—society would gladly do so if it could—they must be brought under control or given some safe form of expression. In many civilizations literature has played a strange and important role in the conflict, serving both the dangerous human creature and society’s desire to keep it docile. The fictional displacements of the Western literary tradition have served the need grandly; and it may be that the Greeks fought in more disciplined ranks than their Persian cousins partially because they all admired an

undisciplined hero who, at a slight to his private honor, sulked in his tent and left the weakened ranks of his comrades to be broken by man-slaying Hector. When the Chinese fictional tradition developed in theater and particularly in prose narrative, frightening forces erupted with no less menace than their Western counterparts. However, the more closely the fictional tradition approached high "literature" (in the Chinese sense), the more ruthlessly those chaotic forces were brought under control.

What historical fact or fancy may allow others to commit, "I" may not so easily commit. When a poet speaks for himself, as he usually does in *shih*, violent gestures against social propriety cannot be blamed on the facts of history or received legend; they cannot be dismissed as harmless fictions. Here the primitive impulses of the self run against the same taboos that society imposes on the living world outside of poetry. And restraints on thought, act, and sentiment have a counterpart in the formal stylization of poetic discourse.

In taboos there are certain fundamental equations which cannot be altered, either in poetry or in human society: the more imperative and consistent the taboo, the greater potency and threat perceived in what is suppressed. As early Taoists obliquely pointed out, the creation of a taboo will make it, perversely, the focus of intense attention, and all the silent forces of the human spirit are mustered to its violation (though the violation must be ingenious and beyond blame).

To avoid blame was not easy: critics of poetry were ever vigilant to censure improper attitudes and indecorous emotions. The self *ought* to respond in authorized ways; poetry *ought* to perform a purgative function. The relation of criticism (including poetic theory) to poetic practice is always intense, but never simple and direct. Criticism is neither the adequate description of poetic practice, nor an ideal alternative to poetic practice, nor even an independent tradition, indifferent to poetic practice. But criticism and poetic theory always *do* carry an implicit prescriptive element: they teach poets what they *ought* to do in poems and readers what they *ought* to recognize.

What criticism and poetic theory tell readers they may legitimately recognize in poetry, however, may not be the full

measure of what attracts readers to poetry. The authorized recognitions in the surface of a text may be only the respectable coverings of more dangerous pleasures.

A Monster of the Will

To taste the undisguised force of rebellion we must turn first to poems on an "other," one who may act as no self would dare admit he had even inclination to act. Liberation of the rebellious will portends a violent extravagance, equal in force to its former restraints. The acts of such a will may be monstrous, and the ethical laws of literature demand that it be punished and destroyed. But the machinery of retribution in no way interferes with the fascination that readers have in the transgressor.

In a hierarchical society authority is continuously deferred upward, and the exercise of will greater than one's own is the prerogative of a superior. To conceive a human monster of will, the imagination runs to the summit of the human hierarchy—to an emperor. A cautious emperor wisely assumes the role of subordinate and acknowledges Heaven's greater authority; such emperors win from readers more reverence than interest. But there were other emperors who dared to act for themselves alone, to violate their moral and social responsibilities in the gratuitous application of power or in some overwhelming passion.

The more interesting imperial passions lay in activities that regally violated taboos and threatened the human social order—violence, lust for dominion, sexual craving, obsession with the quest for immortality. As the long fall of the great, from the heights to the lowest depths, seemed to Western readers somehow requisite to the pleasure of true tragedy, so Chinese readers delighted in poems and historical romances on King Mu of Chou and Emperor Wu of Han, on their frenzied and futile search for the secrets of eternal life. No less appealing was the sexual voraciousness of Emperor Yang of the Sui, and his unflinching transgressions were finally punished by the destruction of his dynasty. But the greatest imperial monster of the will was Ch'in

Shih-huang, the "First Emperor" and unifier of China. His draconian rule, his desire for absolute dominion, and his yearning for immortality were mocked by his mortality, by the speedy destruction of his dynasty, by the ruin of his monumental edifices. Heaven punished even his mortal remains: in the great tumult which the First Emperor raised for himself, the tomb chamber was consumed by a fire, accidentally started by the least of his ex-subjects, a herd-boy looking for a lost sheep.

A minor poetic tradition grew up around the memory of the megalomaniacal prince. A cautionary closing was mandatory to remind readers what consequences attend those who commit such acts of hubris; but the gleeful portrayal of the First Emperor's violent power suggests wherein lay the true satisfaction. The third poem of Li Po's "Old Style" series 古風 is a narrative of Ch'in Shih-huang's overreaching and its sudden reflux.⁴ Having conquered all rivals of his hereditary kingdom of Ch'in and out of his conquests formed the unified empire, the First Emperor commanded that the weapons of the feudal armies be melted down and huge statues be cast of the metal. Then with forced labor drawn from his new empire, he had a luxurious palace constructed on Mount Li. But he yearned for still more. A certain Hsü Shih spoke of isles in the Eastern Ocean, where an elixir of eternal life could be easily found; and the First Emperor dispatched Hsü on an exploratory voyage, accompanied by a thousand of Ch'in's young maidens and boys. Hsü Shih returned empty-handed; he excused his failure by reporting that a huge sea monster had risen before the ships just as the isles came within reach, and the expedition was forced to turn back. Soon afterward, the First Emperor dreamed he was grappling in combat with the God of the Sea; and when he awoke, he ordered his archers off eastward to the seashore to punish the temerity of any monsters that henceforward might dare to oppose the imperial will.

Ch'in's king swept the world's ends clear—

秦王掃六合

Such power in his tiger-gaze!

虎視何雄哉

Swung sword and split the drifting clouds:

揮劍決浮雲

Then other kings all came west to submit.

諸侯盡西來

His wise judgements came from Heaven's showing
him the Way,

明斷自天啓

Grand plans yoked men of talent in droves:

大略駕群才

He gathered all weapons, cast statues of metal,

收兵鑄金人

And Han-ku Pass opened its walls to the east.

函谷正東開

His deeds were inscribed on K'uai-chi Peak,

銘功會稽嶺

And his gaze sped on to Lang-yeh Terrace.

騁望琅邪臺

Then prisoners, seven hundred thousand strong,

刑徒七十萬

Raised up the earth in the folds of Mount Li.

起土驪山隈

But still he would gather herbs of deathlessness—

尚採不死藥

The hope he saw dimly —he told his heart's grief.

茫然傳心哀

Their crossbows in lines shot the fish of the sea,

連弩射海魚

But Leviathan rose, a towering mass

長鯨正崔嵬

Whose snout seemed like the highest mountains,

額鼻象五岳

Spewing thunder and cloud in the waves it stirred,

揚波噴雲雷

And its fins blotted sight of the blue heavens—

髻鬣蔽青天

How then could he see the immortal isles?

何由見蓬萊

Hsü Shih bore off the maidens of Ch'in

徐市載秦女

In towered galleys, never to return.

樓船幾時回

The only thing seen was underneath the soil,

但見三泉下

A golden casket of cold ashes buried.

金棺葬寒灰

The awesome power that Ch'in Shih-huang first wields is a power proper to a founding emperor, a power to bend disputatious mankind to a single will and break centuries of division—to open Ch'in's mighty fortifications at Han-ku Pass and allow free passage between royal Ch'in and the other states. Decisions come from Heaven and spread through the open land, now empty of weapons, to the natural geographic boundaries of his dominion. But the First Emperor lacks the essential knowledge of authorized limits, and the momentum of his growing power casts his ambition past mortality's strict bounds and past Lang-yeh Terrace, across the seas that border his empire. As he answered the recalcitrance of the rival states, so he responds to the Leviathan, a barrier raised by the Sea God. Against the barrier his expanding will is thwarted; he recoils, shrinks back into the extreme of limitation—a tiny pile of ash in a golden casket. The lesson is from the *Book of Changes*: when things attain their extreme, they must return; so the outward momentum falls back upon a single point, and the lost space is filled by the succeeding dynasty, the Han, whose tutelary element, Fire, reduces the mad king to ashes.

Li Po is said to have once quipped "Wine makes its own manners." Wine gives us license to violate decorum, to be what we would be—silent or tyrannical, melancholy or merry. For a brief moment, wine exposes the silliness of the rules that confine social beings. A little more wine may even reveal to us the silliness of our physical limitations, and we have the heady illusion that we may break free of nature's bondage. But we are natural beings and social beings both; our inebriate freedom is true, but true only until we see through its flimsy shapes.

The unrestrained will seems a kind of drunkenness; and if we hope to leap off into space with it, we must be brought to a similar intoxication. The poet spins a brilliant disorientation around us, and we fly from fragmentary image to fragmentary image with the inexplicable logic of a drunken soul. Li Ho gives us Ch'in Shih-huang again, not with the perspective of the ethical historian, but through the drunken eyes of hallucination.

The King of Ch'in Drinks Wine⁵

秦王飲酒

Ch'in's king rides a tiger,
roams to the ends of earth;

秦王騎虎遊八極

Beams from his sword shine through the sky,
the heavens turn emerald green.

劍光照空天自碧

Hsi-ho whips the sun-carriage onward—
it has the sound of glass.

羲和敲日玻璃聲

Ashes from kalpa fires fly and are gone:
present and past are levelled.

劫灰飛盡古今平

Wine spills from the dragon-head flagon,
he invites the Star of Wine,

龍頭瀉酒邀酒星

As lutes with bridges of gold
strum swiftly through the night.

金槽琵琶夜棖棖

Droplets of rain on Lake Tung-t'ing
come to the mouth-organ's piping—

酒酣喝月使倒行

Woozily he shouts to the moon,
making it run backward.

洞庭雨脚來吹笙

Silvery clouds pass in succession,
his palace of jade grows bright,

銀雲櫺櫺瑤殿明

And the herald of the palace gate
announces the first watch of night.

宮門掌事報一更

Upstairs, the flowers, phoenix of jade,
voices alluring and fierce,

花樓玉鳳聲嬌獍

On gauze of the sea, striped with pink,
a fragrance faint and clear.

海綃紅文香淺清

Yellow-robed maidens trip in the dance,
goblets toast "Live to a thousand!"

黃鵝跌舞千年觥

From immortals' shapes in candelabras
waxen smoke rises light—

仙人燭樹蠟烟輕

Clear notes of a zither, drunken eyes,
tears flooding.

清琴醉眼淚泓泓

In "The Great Man" 大人賦 the Han court poet Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju allegorically described the Han emperor Wu making

the circuit of the cosmos and soaring to apotheosis with a host of heavenly attendants and mythological beasts. The hyperbole of the ode becomes panegyric or satire according to the inclination of the audience: Emperor Wu was doubtlessly flattered; Han moralists saw a just portrait of excess (though some saw through the ambivalence). This ethical doubleness is the counterpart of intoxication's doubleness, in which an unbounded reality becomes, in dreary sobriety, only illusion.

He rides a tiger, the beast-emblem of unrestrained violence and of the west, the Ch'in heartland; he is Ch'in, and Ch'in was spoken of as a land of rapacious beasts, ruthless and dangerous as beasts. The tiger is unleashed; it swallows up the divided kingdoms of the other directions, and its rapacity carries it to the very limits of the cosmos. Li Po's First Emperor gave a metaphorical "tiger's glare"; here the metaphor becomes alive. Li Po's First Emperor merely split the drifting clouds with his sword; the sword of Li Ho's Ch'in Shih-huang lights up the night sky with the star patterns in its blade. Sunshine is supplanted by swordshine, a metallic power of violence and permanence, beside which the speeding sun-carriage seems as fragile as lashed glass. Li Po gives an excessive portrait of a man of excess; Li Ho exceeds the older poet and carries us so far into the demoniacal that we can only be standing somewhere beside the mad prince.

Passing beyond mere days, marked by the movements of a brittle and glassy sun, he sees the passage of those vast Buddhist aeons, the kalpas, when fires run across all the earth and reduce all to ash. Of all he is the "leveller," *p'ing* 平, combining the "flattening" powers of the kalpa fires and the "pacification" which is the work of the dynasty's founder. The First Emperor pacifies not simply rival kingdoms but the cosmos and all time, "past and present." He is the universal and eternal king; his conquest is a kalpa fire, and he rules a new aeon.

A poem on a military campaign calls for a great banquet to celebrate the victory. He feasts, but even as the banquet begins in the poem, there is a slovenly drunkenness, wine spilled and a presumptuous invitation issued to its tutelary star. In a famous poem Li Po once invited the moon and his own shadow to be the companions of his solitary drinking;⁶ the voice of Li Po haunts

the background of Li Ho's song, but it is Li Po's expansiveness turned sour, wearing a face of demoniacal madness. The sure sign of mad power or mad delusion—we have travelled with the First Emperor far enough now that we can no longer tell whether it is true power or delusion—is the command given the moon to run backward in its circuit, to violate nature's cycles. The passage of the moon over the sky measures night passing, and the First Emperor's order is directed against time's movement: he intends to prolong the pleasure of the feast. The efficacy of his order is uncertain, but the ghostly image of silvered clouds tells of the moon's continued presence; and as the clouds run past the moon's circle, he might believe—and we might believe along with him—that the moon is indeed speeding backwards.⁷ The palace herald announces the first watch: we are reminded that even hastening backwards, time continues to pass.

As the frenzy of the drunken feast builds, sexuality increasingly pervades the scenes. The female Yin force absorbs the aggressive energy of Yang, and everywhere are images of flowers, silks, scents, and eventual deliquescence. The commanding presence of the prince disappears: the sensory impressions are of an engulfing femininity. Intoxication grows to the point of collapse; maidens trip in their seductive dance, perhaps themselves spilling goblets to toast imperial longevity—a mere thousand years.

The last scene is, if not an awakening, at least a new perspective that destroys the illusion. Candelabras, cast in the shapes of immortals, watch the drunken prince. The immortals carry candles which, as they burn lower, run with droplets of wax, often described as shed tears. The shortening candles mark time's passage, the lateness of the hour, and their waxen tears perhaps run down over the eyes of the metal immortals. If he looks up, the emperor will see them, those firm, immortal beings whose eyes run with tears "in floods—perhaps weeping for him. Or perhaps the closing tears are real tears, his tears, as he wakes from his stupor and catches sight of the smoke, the candles, and the dim, bleary shapes of the immortal watchers who mock his wild dreams.

The sensual songs and the wild playing of the "lutes," the *p'i-p'as*, are gone; now he hears only the sobering, reflective music of the zither, the "clear" notes of a *ch'in*. The notes come sharply through the blur of smoke and drunkenness, where all is melting, dissolving, blowing away. And the great kalpa fires, perhaps seen only in dream, become the flickering candles in his waking eyes. This is not the formal, rhetorical structure of regulated verse; Li Ho's song follows sexual rhythms and the compressed rhythms of the dynastic cycle. Whether the First Emperor has realized his mortality or has discovered that his titanic conquests were only a drunken dream, the closing lines underscore the futility of it all, the spent egotism.

Overreaching recoils on itself. The possibility of commanding all one's wishes and violating all restraints fascinates. But the drunken prince must be destroyed and mocked. So the self, passing into excess, must turn against himself: the drunken prince in all of us must be dragged down and humiliated with an ironic laugh. There is in Chinese poetry a fierce capacity for self-mockery, which is the companion of desire and pride. But because the drunken prince is of ourselves, he will not submit so easily to destruction as the legendary Ch'in Shih-huang. In ostensibly humorous poems there are strange battles of pride and checks on pride—as when Mei Yao-ch'en 梅堯臣 (1002-1060) writes "On the Way Back from Ch'ing-lung: for Hsieh Shih-chih" 迴自青龍呈謝帥直:⁸

We've been apart now some three or four years,

共君相別三四年

And you're just as rugged and scrawny as ever;

巖巖瘦骨還依然

The only difference is your moustache—

fuller and blacker than before;

唯髭比舊多且黑

And it's been a long time since my learning

was up to the level of yours.

學術久已不可肩

Me?—I'm old now, no use for anything.

嗟余老大無所用

The white hair creeps on—almost over my forehead—

白髮冉冉將侵顛

And my writings turn out to be
quite out of tune with the times:

文章自是與時背

My wife goes hungry, my children cry,
and I have no money at all.

妻餓兒啼無一錢

At least there are the classics, the Poems and
Documents, to pass the days—

幸得詩書銷白日

No hope of riches or honor,
or of touching the blue heavens.

豈願富貴摩青天

Nowadays when I drink, it's not much at all—

而今飲酒亦復少

My stomach is frothing even before the second cup.

未及再酌腸如煎

When we were drinking a few nights ago, enjoying
ourselves,

前夕與君歡且飲

I fell asleep after just a few cups;

飲纔數錢我已眠

The crowing of roosters, the barking of dogs
made a terrible din in my ears,

鷄鳴犬吠似聒耳

And when I lifted my head, the whole room
went spiralling leftward.

舉頭屋室皆左旋

To get up and set my headband straight
just didn't suit my mood—

起來整巾不稱意

So I hoisted sail and sped off
to the grey sea's edge,

掛帆直走滄海邊

Then I wanted to ride Leviathan,
passing off ten thousand miles,

便欲騎鯨去萬里

And pealing thunders crashed—without use of
the usual Thunderwhip.

列缺不借霹靂鞭

My spirits flagged; I lost heart;
I thought it best to sleep,

氣沮心衰計欲睡

And my dreams went off ahead of me
to beside these isles of reeds.

夢想先到蘋渚前

I will never stay and get drunk with you again—
與君無復更留醉

In dying of drunkenness who could match
the Banished Immortal, Li Po?

醉死誰能如謫仙

It is a chatty, cheerful, rambling, and amusing poem, characteristic of the poet and of the age. But just beneath the jocular surface there is a painful sense of humiliation and self-mockery. Meeting a younger friend who is just reaching his prime, Mei Yao-ch'én is all the more reminded of how much he himself has aged. Mei's public career has been a failure; he lives in poverty and is ashamed that his wife and children must suffer the same. Anecdotes tell of Mei's capacity to be hurt by unkind reference to his low status.⁹ Worse still, Mei embarrasses himself as he

drinks with his friend: he falls asleep after only a few cups of wine and wakes later to enact a ridiculous version of the overreacher, setting off to the world's ends, riding on the back of Leviathan. Though he wrote with grave censure of the overreacher Ch'in Shih-huang, Li Po was himself a notorious overreacher; and Mei (whom we suspect of secret tendencies to overreaching himself) ironically echoes Li Po's boldly hyperbolic flights of fancy:¹⁰

A peal and rumble of thunder,
 列缺霹靂
 Cliffs and ridges shatter:
 邱巒崩摧
 Stone doors of gateways to Heaven
 洞天石扇
 Open booming in the middle.
 洶然中開
 A vast expanse of purple darkness,
 its end unseen,
 青冥浩蕩不見底
 Where sun and moon gleam
 on silver and golden terraces.
 日月照耀金銀臺
 Robed in rainbows,
 winds, their steeds,
 霓爲衣兮風爲馬
 The Lords of the Clouds
 descend toward me in their multitudes.
 雲之君兮紛紛而來下

Mei hears an echo of that wondrous thunder; but without the mythical Thunderwhip, Mei Yao-ch'en's "thunder" lacks all divinity—it is the mere "thundering" of a hangover, a self-mocking contrast to Li Po's visionary epiphany.

If someone else had written this description of Mei and his behavior, it would seem cruel and contemptuous. Coming from Mei himself, the description becomes "merry" and "playful"—a mirthful exercise of the license we all have for self-insult. But, of course, in writing the poem, Mei assumes a distance from that ludicrous figure of a few nights past; the self-mocker joins the laughing company and is no longer the contemptible creature he describes. Fearing he will be judged, Mei forestalls judgment by being his own harshest judge. On the other hand, because self-mockery is intolerable, Mei delicately evokes throughout the poem another, opposing set of values—the moral grandeur of old age, the virtues of poverty, a literary talent that proves itself "uncommon" by running contrary to the common inclinations of the age. And although he has given up all hope of "touching heaven's blue edge" (reaching court), his intoxicated fantasy testifies to an expansive capacity which still waits within him.

As the poem unfolds, two sets of values are in conflict—the worldly virtues and the virtues of being unworldly. But these antagonistic values are only hollow counters, moved here and there by the true and secret force in the poem—pride. Self-mockery is proof that Mei honors youth, wealth, fame, position, dignity; each failure here hurts him. The ceremonies of the occasion insist that he praise these qualities in his friend; but he had no ceremonial demand to so harshly anatomize their absence in himself. Yet, if his pride will be healed by doing so, Mei is equally willing to espouse contrary values: age, poverty, and the man of talent unappreciated in the blindness of these degenerate times. Even the distance Mei achieves in the voice of self-mockery is no more than a means to reassert pride.

In its own strange, agonizing way, Mei Yao-ch'en's poem is a rebellion against proper limits, answered by a brutal suppression of rebellion. The rebellion is complicated by the uncomfortable particulars of the situation. Mei wishes that he were more than he is and more than he appeared to be a few nights ago; he mocks the failure and hopelessness of the desire. Through the voice of modesty and mocking laughter, he tries to establish new values of dearth; but he is blocked from joyfully seizing these values by the social imperative that he praise his young, success-

ful friend. The overreacher scene reenacts the same pattern in miniature: expansive yearnings, suited to the genius of Li Po, are met by a retrospective mockery, and a strange new form of grey, ironic genius struggles to emerge.

All this cacophony of contrary voices is drawn to the surface by Mei's pained awareness that he is seen, known, and judged by others—both at the drinking party and in the poem. The anxiety that he has appeared foolish and contemptible to his friend turns to rising anger; anger closes the poem with a rejection of such meetings in the future and a perplexing assertion of the poet's own distinction. But anger against a friend is forbidden; assertion of self is unseemly; these sentiments must fight their way to expression in a jocular and socially acceptable statement:

I will never stay and get drunk with you again—
In dying of drunkenness who could match
the Banished Immortal, Li Po?

According to popular legend, Li Po drowned in drunkenness, reaching out to embrace the moon in the water. To imitate the mortal end of the "Banished Immortal" will fail, giving Mei only the humiliating death of a drunken mortal. The ironic poet, seeing through the overreacher's self-destructive silliness unleashed in wine, survives and laughs.

Someone said: You were proceeding with the necessary caution through a precarious topic, but here I'm afraid you've gone too far. You cannot dissect the psyche of a poet who wrote nine hundred years in the past.

I said: Is that improper?

Someone said: Indeed it is! And I cannot let it pass by without comment. There is absolutely no way for you to know what the poet's true state of mind was—this is all fanciful.

I said: When you speak to me, can I tell what your state of mind is?

Someone said: Of course not!

I said: Am I then to listen to your words as if there were no state of mind behind them?

Someone said: You're trying to trap me, but I'm not going to let you get away with it. You can assume I have some state of mind, but you can't know exactly what it is.

I said: But if I don't assume one particular state of mind—allowing for its complexity and the fact that it changes as you speak—how can I ever understand what you mean? Only by assuming your state of mind can I know how to take what you say.

Someone said: You may assume what you please, but you may also be quite wrong.

I said: That's true—I may be wrong; but since I can never know for certain what your state of mind really is, I can never *know* if I'm wrong.

Someone said: Well, I'm not sure I like having you guess at my state of mind as I speak to you.

I said: I'm not actually "guessing at" your state of mind or analyzing you motives—as you said, I can't *know* what your state of mind is. But as I listen, I make a tacit and conditional assumption so as to know how to take what you say. The assumption is entirely involuntary: I can't help sensing a complicated and shifting pattern of moods, motives, and uncertainties behind your words; and I know that without this, the words would lose all force. It's the same with written speech: an actor makes these assumptions when he takes a role and gives voice to a character's words; a reader makes

the same assumptions in a play or narrative. The fine discriminations of mood in traditional Chinese critical vocabulary often apply to precisely such "states of mind" sensed in reading poems. And certainly when we read Mei Yao-ch'én's poem, we become aware of vast complications in his inner life at that moment.

Someone objected: We may make tacit, even involuntary assumptions about a speaker's state of mind in an ongoing process of listening or reading. But you have given an "analysis" of Mei Yao-ch'én's motives, and "realized" his words as if they belonged to a fictional character. *I* am perfectly content to read Mei's words this way; *you* are the one who always objects to treating a historical person as if he were a fictional character.

I said: I suppose I did read Mei's poem that way. A fictional character has no "state of mind" until the reader grants it one. With a living voice, we must accept the gap between our assumptions and a true "state of mind," of which we can never be certain. The difficulty lies in the nonfictional written word—in diaries, in letters, in Chinese poems—where we must actively "realize" a full human behind the words, much as we do in reading fictional speech. But we cannot leave the words silent and disembodied . . .

Someone broke in: So you invent a state of mind for them?

I said: Who can tell whether I've invented the state of mind or whether it was there in the words, only waiting for the right quality of attention? But I do know that I *perceive* that state of mind as having been there in the words.

Someone said: There is a very thin line between how you read a fictional character and how you read these "persons" of nonfictional writing—and that thin line is held in place by your almost endless capacity for self-delusion.

I said: My reading is happier for it. You're really contentious today, even irritable.

Someone said: Not at all . . .

Rebellions against Graciousness: Saying the Right Thing the Wrong Way

Most poems on social occasions are almost as straightforward as they pretend to be, graciously saying what the situation requires without balking complication. Most poems on social occasions dare make no claim to greatness. The degree of identity between these two majorities awaits further exploration. However, in the most interesting occasional poems there is often a selfish creature in the soul that snarls beneath a surface of gentility. The reader, the poet, and the person addressed all agree to acknowledge only the gracious surface and pretend they hear no snarling. Such agreement is the only way to permit the poet to excuse his involuntary snarling, to allow the reader to enjoy it, and to force the person addressed to endure it. Yet the poem's vitality may depend upon that inner rebelliousness—against propriety, against docile modesty, against any form of restraint. It is not the snarling itself which animates the poem—snarling is, all in all, an uninteresting sound. The poem's vitality comes from the rich collision of the snarling impulses and the smooth surface of form, politeness, and an honestly generous intent.

As in all forms of discourse, a poem may escape the poet's conscious control: contradictions break through everywhere, undermining polite intent and accidentally violating proprieties, even as the poet believes he is most carefully observing them. Traditional interpretations of poems offer us no help here: neither the poet nor the old reader can acknowledge these rebellions—they are forbidden. But even unrecognized, the rebellions may have been one of poetry's great silent pleasures. We later-

born readers would, in our turn, continue tactfully to uphold the prohibitions, were it not for a new danger: the language and the voices of the poems have receded so far from us that we may no longer hear the subvocal snarling; we may now miss those happy moments when the poet says the right thing in exactly the wrong way; we may now be hearing only the "right thing," the thin and gracious surface.

We must sharpen our ears. Praise poems seem likely places to listen more carefully for rebellions: especially where someone is praised for the very excellence to which the praise poet aspires, praise may engage competitiveness, jealousy, and the uncontrollable impulse to assert the poet's own merit above the person praised. Tu Fu's adulation of the elder Li Po is legendary, and the legend grows out of a group of enthusiastic praise poems written for Li by Tu Fu. The reader of Tu Fu may pause at these famous poems: they possess few of the bold marks of genius found in Tu Fu's best work; their fame seems disproportionate to their intrinsic merit. But blandness in Tu Fu is restraint, and its presence may suggest the suppression of forbidden impulses. "Remembering Li Po on a Spring Day" 春日憶李白¹¹ is one of the most famous of these poems:

Po it is—no rival in poetry,

白也詩無敵

Wind-tossed, thoughts unlike the crowd's.

飄然思不群

Clear and fresh: a colonel Yü Hsin.

清新度開府

Noble, aloft: Pao Chao the officer.

俊逸鮑參軍

Trees in spring's sky, north of the Wei,

渭北春天樹

The clouds of sundown in Chiang-tung.

江東日暮雲

When shall we share a goblet of wine

何時一樽酒

And, together again, discuss fine points of writing?

重與細論文

What could be more innocent and straightforward than this little praise poem in which a young poet celebrates the unique genius of an elder master and expresses his wish that they can meet again? But, of course, Tu Fu is saying all the right things in the wrong way. There is no snarling hostility here—Tu Fu is above such common rebellions—still, young Tu Fu is softly undoing the master in the very act of praising him. To hear the undoing of Li Po, we must listen to the words very carefully—Tu Fu himself asks it, rashly inviting discussion of the “fine points of writing.”

“Po it is” 白也—a locution that belongs to the *Analects*, a strange and boldly prosaic locution in poetry. The poem runs on ahead, and we are carried along with it; but if we were able to halt for a moment the voice’s movement and consider where we had heard a similar phrase, *Analects* VI.9 would come immediately to mind; Confucius speaks of his favorite disciple Yen Hui: “Virtuous indeed, Hui it is, eating his meals from a single dish, drinking from a single gourd, dwelling in a narrow lane. Others could not bear the unhappiness of such a life, but Hui’s joy does not change. Virtuous indeed, Hui it is!” Yen Hui was the most gifted of Confucius’ disciples, but he died young and impoverished, never able to fulfill the promise of his great talents. He was the paragon of virtue and the only one of the disciples who might have grown to match the Master. This analogical echo in Tu Fu’s praise of Li is high tribute. Yet we also notice a strange inversion, how a young poet pays tribute to his senior in the voice of an elder who speaks with loving familiarity of a youth. And, as the phrasing casts the aura of the greatest disciple upon Li Po, we scarcely notice that Tu Fu has assumed the voice of the undisputed Master, Confucius. We know that voice well. We know the Master was always modest about his own capacities; when he is silent about himself or when he yields precedence to

another, we do not take his self-presentation at face value; instead we feel awe at his sincere modesty and give it high place among his many virtues. But it is only a tone of voice in Tu Fu's poem—take no note of it.

Yet that magistral tone of the *Analects* also disposes us to attend to subtle implications and distinctions in moral characterization. The Master often praised the unique but partial gifts of his various disciples, and when we hear the voice of Confucius or its later echoes, we know that praise of one ability may imply a corresponding deficiency in some other essential virtue. The Master spoke that way because he was generous, preferring to take note of the one exceptional trait, and allowing the hearer, according to his capacity, to recognize wherein he was wanting. Yen Hui was "virtuous indeed"; Li Po is "unrivalled in poetry." Somehow, in this voice from the *Analects*, we wonder how unqualified the unqualified praise of Li Po really is, especially as it echoes against the higher and more general excellence of Yen Hui. It is a fine thing for one poet to say of another, but the initial voice from the *Analects* sets the praise in a broader human context where poetry carries little honor in itself, except as a means to publish some greater inner worth. Even in the tradition of praise poetry, literary ability is usually treated as only one among a more comprehensive range of abilities. And our critical disposition, ever attentive to the precise wording of the Master, might sense that "lacking rivals" is a peculiar construction for praising excellence, raising questions of comparison and competition for uncertain reasons. Perhaps in all this the young master is being generous, choosing to mention only Li Po's single gift. Tu Fu benignly speaks down to Li Po, praising an ability that is relatively minor (as the voice of Confucius reminds us) among all the abilities that a person might have. The voice gives us a unique perspective on the words. But let us not notice it—recognize only that Tu Fu grants Li enthusiastic, superlative praise—the greatest poet of all.

He is "wind-tossed," *p'iao-jan*, like bird or leaf, moving freely or blown helplessly, drifting without the ties of position and family. It is an attractive lightness, differing from the sober lives of common mortals, just as his thoughts are "unlike the crowd's"

—unique or isolated. “Unlike the crowd” is a phrase from the *Li Sao* by the ancient poet Ch’ü Yüan, carrying the faintest overtones of Ch’ü Yüan’s expulsion from his king’s court and despairing suicide. The melancholy and ominous echoes are too light, beneath our notice: hear in the line only the highest praise for freedom of spirit and distinction.

The ceremonies of praise require comparison to exemplary masters of past poetry. We would receive the comparisons more comfortably if Tu Fu had not defined Li Po’s excellence as being “unrivalled” in poetry; we qualify the praise silently: in *this* age “unrivalled.” Nor is Li simply “like” or “as good as” these rivals from past centuries: the unique, unrivalled Li Po is a Yü Hsin, is a Pao Chao. But Tu Fu’s praise may have cost Li Po more than his distinction: Yü Hsin was “colonel” (*k’ai-fu*) when he lived in melancholy house arrest in the northern capital, a situation whose helplessness might call to mind the darker side of *p’iao-jan*, “wind-tossed.” Pao Chao was an “officer” (*ts’an-chün*) when he was killed in an army mutiny. If we were to describe an English poet as “wild and free, like Shelley the sailor,” the reader would wince; the references in the Chinese lines are not that strong—take no notice of them. Each echo in the poem is a mere wisp; in the aggregate they become menacing: in four lines Tu Fu has associated Li Po with someone who died unusually young, with a suicide, with a poet who spent all his later years in detainment, and with a poet killed by mutinous soldiers.

Perhaps in the association with Yü Hsin, Li Po has escaped too comfortably and still alive. We know that Tu Fu had a special fondness for Yü Hsin and that Yü’s captivity was in Ch’ang-an, from where Tu Fu is writing to Li (who wanders in the lower Yangtze region, the region in which Pao Chao was killed).¹² The couplet simply sets the two past poets in juxtaposition: suppose we read the lines as a contrast between Tu and Li Po—Tu as “clear and fresh” Yü Hsin, Li as the “noble, aloof” Pao Chao. But then the “unrivalled” Li Po will have a contemporary rival in Tu Fu; and Tu Fu’s exemplar, Yü Hsin, was, in comparison to Li’s Pao Chao, more famous, longer lived, and of better birth. Li Po’s comprehensive excellence is steadily being constricted: first, if not “virtuous indeed,” at least “unrivalled in poetry”; then

unrivalled only in his own day and only in poetry of certain moods; or perhaps rivalled and excelled in his own day by the praiser, Tu Fu. But let us notice none of this: remark simply that Tu Fu is amplifying his encomium of Li's poetry by comparing him to great poets of the past.

Trees in spring's sky, north of the Wei,
The clouds of sundown in Chiang-tung.

Commentators agree that this must refer to Tu Fu's separation from Li: "north of the Wei" is the capital region where Tu Fu is living, where Yü Hsin was detained by successive northern rulers, unwilling to part with his literary talents; Chiang-tung is the southern shore of the lower Yangtze Valley, where Li Po was wandering after his expulsion from the imperial court. Is this flat couplet of easy parallels by the great Tu Fu?—yet this is a moment in the poem when Tu Fu's careful control almost breaks into an arrogant malice. The message does not even require the subtle attention of an *Analects* reader. The northwest, the capital region, was commonly contrasted to the southeast, Chiang-tung: the former suggested public success, eminence; the latter was associated with solitary wandering and exile—there Ch'ü Yüan, noble but too much "unlike the crowd," ended his own life, there Pao Chao died horribly in a minor military post. Sunlight and spring were emblems of imperial favor, proper to one living in the capital region; clouds and sundown suggest favor lost and the approaching end of life. Is Tu Fu contrasting his own continued presence in the capital, sharing the warm spring of imperial favor, with Li Po, wandering in the southeast after being cast out of court? But suppose we differ from the commentators; we may take both lines as referring to Li Po: then Tu Fu reminds Li of his expulsion from the radiance of the capital into the somber, wind-tossed life of a wanderer in the southeast. And those who love the light of their ruler's favor and go south of the Yangtze cannot forget the model of that other unrivalled poet, Ch'ü Yüan, who killed himself in despair. But let us notice none of this: here Tu Fu expresses his sorrow at the great distance that separates him from his elder friend.

There are alternatives to the dangerous and despairing isolation of unique poets: as Yen Hui was content with his single gourdful, so Li Po might find contentment in a single goblet of wine shared with a friend. And holding out this promise, Tu Fu concludes by again assuming the voice of Confucius, in a strong echo of *Analects* I.15, where the Master says, "Tz'u it is, with whom I can begin to discuss Poetry [of the *Book of Songs*]." Here is another example of the locution "so-and-so it is" but this disciple is "Tz'u" or Tzu-kung; and Tzu-kung happens to have been a disciple often compared and contrasted with Yen Hui. Yen Hui lived in isolation and died prematurely; Tzu-kung was gregarious and lived long. Yen Hui was the most gifted of the disciples; Tzu-kung's special gift lay in his ability to recognize his own inferiority, as in *Analects* V.7:

The Master said to Tzu-kung: "Who is greater, you or Yen Hui?"

Tzu-kung answered: "How can I hope to match Yen Hui?! Yen Hui understands ten times more than he hears, while I understand only twice what I hear."

The Master said: "No, you're not his equal; I agree, you're not his equal."

Yet it was Tzu-kung with whom the Master could discuss poetry. Tzu-kung knew his level and honored his superiors, Confucius and Yen Hui.

The poem is framed with the mood of the *Analects*—the most careful judgments of human nature carried in the most subtle implications of words. It is a world in which we are enjoined to comprehend "twice" or "ten times" more than the words seem to say. There is no question where Tu Fu belongs in this *Analects* world: his is the voice of Confucius, the unrivalled Master, and the powerful authority of that voice transforms the great Li Po into the object of loving condescension. Two models are held out for Li Po. First there is Yen Hui, who alone of the disciples might possibly come to rival the Master. But with Yen Hui go echoes of poverty, isolation, and premature death—Ch'ü Yüan, Pao Chao, the sundown in Chiang-tung. In the closing, Tu Fu

offers Li Po a second model: Tzu-kung. This model permits return, long life, shared pleasures of drinking wine and discussing the subtle implications of poetry (which in the *Analects* world means allowing the Master to judge with approval or disapproval the disciple's comprehension of the poem). But adopting the comfortable role of Tzu-kung demands, first of all, a humility that acknowledges true superiors. Tzu-kung knew his own level in comparison to Yen Hui. Li Po is "unrivalled," *wu-ti* 無敵, literally "having no opponent," a condition commonly achieved by intimidating excellence; but one who withdraws from the competition and honors his masters also has "no opposition." All this should escape our notice, however; we will recognize in the last line only Tu Fu's great longing to be close to Li again, to repeat old pleasures in discussing writing with the "unrivalled" poet.

Do not misunderstand: Tu Fu means only to praise Li Po. He genuinely admires Li; he feels sincere sorrow at Li's dismissal from court and worries about Li wandering in the southeast; he wishes Li were back with him again. But while these cares may be real, the human mind carries few simple, unmixed emotions. There is a pride in self which rebels against too easily granting Li's superiority. Inside the simple praise poem, pride writes a very different poem—by a slight shift in tone of the written voice, by a certain allusion coming unbidden to mind, by a particular phrase forming itself by chance. Our pleasure in the text is in the simultaneous unfolding of the two contradictory poems—the generous, respectable outer text and the proud, difficult inner text. But let us take note only of the outer text.

An Emblem: Imprisoning Surfaces

Some unpleasant and rebellious voice may write the wrong poem in the middle of the heartfelt and generous poem we were writing. We have agreed not to notice the voice or its poem. But if the rebellion rises up too close to the surface, the challenge must be met and overcome. Yet the rebellious voice and the legitimate public voice both inhabit the same body, and the

reserves of talent and energy upon which both draw are perfectly matched. They achieve a curious immobility in their opposition: the rebellious voice never breaks free, but neither is it driven back down to snarl as an unrecognized subvoice. Such poems say truly "I grieve," "I resent," "I suffer bitterly," and we sense the impolitic strength of the emotion in the text; but it is held in a stillness that is the interface between the matched, antagonistic forces. To understand this strange stillness, we may consider its displacement into something external, where, as in a fiction, the self may distantly observe its own precarious composition with less painful interest. The emblem is conflict on a still plane.

Among the major Chinese poets, Wang Wei most often writes out of such violent stillness; and his poetry also contains those emblems of struggle on a still plane. In "Stopping by Hsiang-chi Temple" 過香積寺¹³ Wang Wei goes off into the mountains, and hearing bells, he discovers a Buddhist temple whose existence he had never known of before. He never mentions the edifice of the temple in the course of the poem; instead, he discovers in the natural landscape the stillness of the temple, its lessons, and the contemplative disposition which the temple fosters. The poem closes with a strange couplet:

Towards sunset, at the bend of an empty pool,

溥暮空潭曲

In meditation's stillness, mastering the dragon of passion.

安禪制毒龍

The clear pool ("empty" 空, "clear" of plants and debris, also "deserted") was an established Buddhist metaphor for the perfected mind, calmly reflecting all the world's illusory phenomena. But the pools of China might also be the dwellings of dragons, savage in their power and potentially destructive. In the "destructive dragon" 毒龍 there is another emblematic Buddhist metaphor—for human passion in all its disruptive force. In the couplet we see the poet, seated in the posture of meditation, by the reflecting surface of the pool in the growing darkness. He

masters the "destructive dragon" of the passions, the dragon that lives in pools and in the minds of men. Both the pool and the mind have a still, reflecting surface and some dangerous power imprisoned beneath it.

But the surface of the water (and perhaps the surface of the mind) does not reflect perfectly: often we see the reflections superimposed upon what lies beneath. The flat, immobile image reflected on the surface of this pool is Wang himself, in the stillness of meditation. But beneath that reflected body we may also see the dangerous dragon, of the depths of the pool and of the depths of the mind of the man, a writhing beast mastered by the flat surface.

Tu Fu was even more fascinated by these flattened but still dangerous powers. They drew his attention most in paintings of birds of prey, creatures whose very natures lay in the exercise of violent and mobile power, but which, by the painter's art, had been flattened on immobile surfaces. The height of art was to make the object "come alive," not simply in visible likeness but in the animate force that gives a creature being. Thus in the very perfection of the painting the bird of prey becomes a chained thing, fighting the surface of the painting that gives it life.

Painted Falcon¹⁴

畫鷹

From plain white silk, wind and frost arise:

素練風霜起

Grey falcon, the painting's work, wondrous.

蒼鷹畫作殊

It strains its body, desiring the crafty hare;

攬身思狡兔

Casts sidelong glances, like a mournful nomad.

側目似愁胡

Beams from its tie-ring can be pinched between fingers;

條鑷光堪摘

Hung on column or rail, it stands ready for your call.

軒楹勢可呼

Oh when will it strike the common birds?—

何當擊凡鳥

Sprinkling feathers and blood on the weeds of the plain.

毛血灑平蕪

It is an artist's genius that can transform plain white silk of a painting's ground into a vision of the cold steppes, of wind and blowing particles of ice. This is not the simple flatness of illusion but some more strenuous generation, "rising" out of the painting, sending shivers through lightly clad viewers, who find themselves in the falcon's steppe homeland this autumn, the season of killing and of the hunt. There, in its element, is the grey falcon—but this is too cold and too real—stop the vision, remind us it is only an illusion—"the painting's work, wondrous."

Trapped between animate reality and art's illusion, the bird stands impatiently, straining against the surface in desire to break free and be itself, to kill. In that "straining," absolute stillness and a powerfully mobile life combine. The eyes seem to move: in simile the desperate, imprisoned creature becomes human, a nomadic Tartar, the falcon's fellow-countryman and representative of savagery in man. The dangerous creature of the painting seems ready to break free, to intrude its alien violence into our civilized world and shatter the remote, appreciative calm with which we come to view a painting. Remind yourself it is only a painting; wreak upon it a civilized, miniature violence against the violence it threatens; show the contemptuous power of your mastery and *pinch* the silk between your fingers, the beams of light that seem to flash from its tie-ring. Yes, it is under our control, a painting of a tame falcon—tied securely to a ring, trapped in a painting. You are the master; hang it where you please, on a column or rail, and it seems a well-trained bird, ready to fly off and kill only at your deliberated bidding. But if the bird is set free, we may wonder whether it will remain under our control. We can foresee its

release, how it will fulfill its nature in an orgy of violence, shattering in their flight all the common birds—a storm of blood and feathers. There is a scornful nobility in this violent prisoner of the painting, and when it comes forth, all lesser, more docile creatures shall feel its power. The connoisseurs, the friends of the painter, are delighted; they remark on the particular success of certain brushstrokes; the falcon turns its eyes greyly upon them. They are sure they are safe: the rhetorical question “Oh when . . .?” has only one answer—“Never.”

The destructive power of rebellions fascinates and horrifies. The pleasure of the viewer is perverse and strange: the poet pinches the silk of the painting; a child taunts a caged lion in the zoo—each reassures himself of the beast’s captivity and, at the same time, mocks its impotence with an insolence linked to fear. The poet, like the painter, may master the destructive beast which he generates from within himself, and we readers—like Tu Fu viewing the hawk or children teasing the caged lion—are fascinated to see the beast flattened. There is a secretly savage and cruel pleasure in the powerfully civilized suppression of savage forces. We do not acknowledge the nature of that pleasure; we simply say, “We enjoyed the zoo today,” “We loved your painting,” “A very fine poem.”

A SPECIAL FORM OF
DISCOURSE

Against Greatness

Taking up the subject, then, upon general grounds, let me ask, what is meant by the word Poet? What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is to be expected from him?—He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.

—William Wordsworth, preface to the second edition
of *Lyrical Ballads*

“A man speaking to men”—as soon as it is uttered, we can sense his embarrassment. It is spoken on impulse, set down because the phrase is too potent and too grand to be sacrificed. It leaves him uncomfortable. Then reflection and the force of traditional poetic theory set in motion an involute dance of hedgings and qualifications, at first trying to redeem the noble utterance, at last giving way to the old truths about poetry—“and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.” Words-

worth's poet-speaker undergoes a painful metamorphosis into a poet-maker; one human among others eventually must put on the Western poet's ancient role of creative divinity.

Like many other bold positions in the famous preface, this rash proposal—"a man speaking to men"—was uttered out of a deep inclination toward a "basic poetry," poetry as a primal form of human discourse. Coleridge's objections were scarcely necessary: against that odd inclination was arrayed all the authority of a tradition two millennia in the making, a tradition which insisted that the poet was essentially different from common humanity: the poet is either tinged with divinity or, at the very least, master of a studious and deliberative craft. "No, the proposition is appealing, but it dissolves under scrutiny: there are simply not enough poets in common humanity to make it true; we had best qualify it—but the poet is more . . . he is greater . . . he possesses more . . . more . . ."

That the values of traditional poetic theory would run counter to Wordsworth's outrageous proposal is to be expected; more distressing is the fact that in itself the proposal so badly fails the impulse to a basic poetry. It was a misformulation and contained within itself the seeds of all the qualifications and hedgings. "A man speaking to men" addresses his fellow humans: he addresses everyone and therefore addresses no one. The formulation which *would* have satisfied the impulse for a basic poetic discourse should have been: "a person speaking to someone else."¹ Long and tenacious assumptions about the nature of poetry prohibit Wordsworth from coming to this formulation: "the very generality of "a man speaking to men" is the source of its appeal. But if we would be true to the desire for a basic poetry, we should realize that the primary situation of human discourse is to speak to someone in particular—someone you know, someone to whom you have some relation.

Each primary mode of literary discourse—except one—is sustained by a corresponding mode of ordinary discourse. We may be told a story (where the relation between teller and audience, the "I" and "you," is a professional relation of roles); we may overhear someone speak to another; we may be addressed by someone we know. But when we articulate the pronoun "I,"

speaking for ourselves, we seek a familiar "you." "I" do not speak of myself to anonymous eternity: "I" speak to someone, even if it is only to myself. When an "I" talks indiscriminately to the world at large, it places itself in an awkward, unnatural situation of address. Those who listen sense its strain.

A true occasional poem preserves an authentic situation of address and is sustained by it. "I" speak to someone in particular, or to myself, or to a diminutive audience of friends and acquaintances. The words are supported by a living relation and by a rich context of anticipations. If such a poem should, by chance, reach vast and faceless audiences, those audiences will be only a *secondary* readership: they have the poem, but the poem is not *for* them. Yet here too is a true situation of discourse—an overhearing.

There is a false occasional poetry which disguises itself in an authentic situation of address but which secretly looks about for anyone who will listen.² We recognize how fragile is this balance between address to a primary reader and the hope of vast attention from the secondary readership. We know how easy it is, as you write, to forget that you are speaking to your lover or your friend, and to shift your attention to those blank multitudes of futurity who may repeat your name with admiration. . . . Yes, there is something ugly in the first person speaker overlooking the human before his eyes and hoping to catch the notice of anyone and everyone: there is no honest address, no "to" and "for"; all that remains is the desire to be heard, attended, admired. The voice's demand that we listen is offensive.

In the true occasional lyric the poet may comfortably use the pronoun "I" for himself and be indifferent to whether we secondary readers listen or not. But the occasional lyric has had a sad and hard history in the West; it died some years ago, its true form shrivelling into doggerel, its false form abusing the respect due addressee and occasion in order to speak to eternity.

Our occasional poetry once flourished; but it was never at ease in a tradition of poetic theory which, being based on epic and drama, presumed the great, nameless audiences which properly belong to those fictional genres. It made odd compromises with accepted literary values, promising the primary reader to

make his or her name immortal, current among the inexhaustible hordes of secondary readers. But within the literary values of the Western tradition, the occasional poem always seemed tainted by mortality, impelled by social and empirical necessities which were intolerable to the "true" poet's free divinity. The occasional poem achieved legitimacy only by winning approbation from the wide audiences of the future, and then, only by proving it was not really for the moment but for all time. It is not certain that poets always cared for our approval: the sweet body of a certain *dompna* may have been more in a troubadour's lusty anticipations than our praise of his craft and the deeper significance of courtly love; charming his lady to bed may have been his song's sole intent, not the chilly thighs of posthumous fame.

From the T'ang on (and beginning earlier) the occasional lyric was the most common mode of Chinese poetry; but here the occasional poem was authorized and supported by a corpus of poetic theory that grounded a poem in the moment, in a particular place, and often in address to a particular person. Poetry was, first of all, a special form of solitary and social discourse. A poem was an act, and it came to be practiced by an ever-increasing range of literate men and women. It was a mode of discourse called forth to respond to certain kinds of situations occurring in life, and it promised a peculiarly intimate knowledge of the speaker, distinct from what might be heard in ordinary discourse. In its perfection, such a poetry would belong to humanity as a whole—as a means to speak to others and be spoken to.

This idyllic construction of the poetic act becomes immensely complicated by the intrusion of the secondary readership—we who read poems that were not really written for us. This second relation requires tact: we must receive the poem by chance, and whatever general interest the poem may have we must discover through the particular occasion. Our pleasure is dangerous for occasional poetry: the applause of later readers is a potent lure for poets. Promises of immortality were made in the Chinese tradition as in the Western, and the Chinese poet's eye would often stray to future audiences, hoping for a general honor. If

such lapses become the rule, the poem will slip from the living social circumstance that sustains it.

In the Chinese tradition too, many of the "greatest" poems are indeed addressed to anyone and everyone. But "greatness" means nothing more than the potential approval of the anonymous community of later readers and a traffic in general truths. Soon there is something frightful in poems that aspire too directly to greatness—thousands upon thousands of voices, each clamoring to be singled out from the others, proud voices and self-centered voices, wanting only to be heard and unwilling to speak *to* anyone. The lure of "greatness" becomes a curse for poetry. The poet may give himself over to the desire, and in doing so may even achieve "greatness"—but there is something repugnant in this passion, some too-easy sacrifice of the honor due to others in order to gain an oblique and private glory. Never again will his friends read the poems he sends them in quite the same way.

We secondary readers grow uneasy now at the direction this argument is taking: we are used to being the arbiters of literary merit—it is our privilege. Why else should a poet write, except for the greatness that only we can confer? Why should we want to read a poetry that does *not* aspire to greatness? that has more to say to a long-dead county magistrate than to us? that speaks to the immediate moment more than to eternity?

There have been poets who wrote for their friends and not for a niche in literary history. To read them, a change of heart is asked of secondary readers. If you come to poetry seeking greatness, there is nothing for you here—go away—there is a chill in your demands on the poem, a strange desire for private advantage which is kin to the hopes of the poets who write only for your approval. But if you take pleasure in listening to others, if you find that their identity interests you with never a thought of grading their utterances, stay.

As good secondary readers of an occasional poem, we hear the poem's address to someone, but we usually know very little about the person to whom the poem is given and the supporting circumstances. The person or persons for whom the poem is

written stand just beside us, somewhat to our rear and out of sight: the poem comes *toward* us but not *to* us. In this curious obliquity we learn how different a primary reader is from a secondary reader. The difference is both the beauty and difficulty of being the later reader of an occasional poem: the words of the text present themselves as being fragments of a greater whole, continually recalling to us how much is missing. Surrounding each text there was a full and intense circumstance, with its minor imperatives, its physical details, its complexities of personal relation, and accidents of mood and weather. Our aesthetic position toward such poems is one in which Keats's vision of the Elgin Marbles becomes the necessary condition of reading—always mingling “. . . grandeur with the rude / Wasting of old Time”; we are always confronted with the “shadow of a magnitude,” a human voice from the past. The very fact that such poems are only fragments becomes essential to their beauty: we would not have them self-contained; rather we are astounded that bright, living splinters do survive.

Someone interrupted: I caught you there—you've been talking about greatness.

I said: Rude fellow—you're always catching me up like that.

Someone said: That's my function.

I answered: Well, I suppose I shouldn't have brought in Keats's lines: he was referring to the fragmentary survival of an *aesthetic* whole, “greatness” in the common sense. I am speaking of the fragmentary preservation of a human moment, with all its lost complexities only guessed at.

Someone countered: It seems to me that your “human moment” possesses all the allure of “greatness in the common sense.” And I am suspicious that you are indulging in an

aesthetic antiquarianism—that the allure is the mere fact of survival, rather than the particular qualities of what survives.

I said: A danger—yes, that's a danger. Still, the sense of the fragment is strongly felt by a good secondary reader. An elegiac resonance always follows an awareness of art's continuities with a full life, now lost. If you are educated to regard only art's discontinuities with life, you can enjoy a comfortable confidence in the remarkable durability of the aesthetic object. But the response to a Chinese occasional poem was often "To have known such a person!"—as the poem embodies the person, so it also reminds the reader of things past and lost.

Someone said: It is obvious to me that you have simply transferred "greatness" from the art to the person.

I said: Tomorrow I might; but today you miss my point. If a poem comes from a person at a particular moment, a person not seeking your approval but open to your understanding, the question of "greatness" does not arise. You no more demand "greatness" from such a poem than you demand it when someone you know and like speaks to you. You are being very slow-witted about this question of greatness.

Someone said: Well, you should have made yourself clearer.

I said: All right, if you want clarity, you'll have it. "Greatness" asserts unconditional worth: to say a poem is "great" affirms that it is "good" for everyone and for all time. It is no local judgement for New England, or for Ch'ing China, or for the late twentieth century. The category "great" is value in its raw abstraction—not "good" in regard to any particular set of aesthetic conditions, but absolutely "good." Therefore, we must weigh an idea of aesthetic value which is historical and local, irrevocably "in the moment," against a notion of absolute aesthetic value . . .

Someone muttered: Listen, you don't have to go on—I'm sorry I brought this up . . .

I continued obliviously: . . . but suppose that we discover the idea of absolute aesthetic value to be itself no more than a local and historical phenomenon of valuing. Considered as a historical phenomenon, absolute aesthetic value (reading for "greatness") is quite simply an idealization of the innocent ahistorical experience of value in literature. The idealization is a melancholy attempt to restore the conditions of such experience, but only after one has become aware of the historicity of literary value. As he grows aware of the historical relativity of his acts of valuing, the reader tries to recapture the unconditional, ahistorical experience of literary value by an idea of absolute value. But absolute value must define itself in the transcendence of all that is merely historical, all the values, conditions, and imperatives of the moment. "Greatness" is thus a mode of negation rooted in a fear of limitation. It is a local value that arises at a particular historical moment, a value which feeds on the hope that we need not be merely local and historical creatures. But if aesthetic value is *necessarily* historical and local, then the idea of greatness can be immensely destructive, proposed either in composition or in reading. Its curse is the refusal to be interested in limiting identities—of past persons or past values—and instead to ransack poems for whatever confirms a prior (and secretly historical-contemporary) opinion of what is universally good. "The sad result is first, to miss the limiting, historical values in which a text has its life, and second, by continually expanding the conditions of "universal" literary value, to so dilute aesthetic experience that it lacks all force.

Someone broke in: Enough! Enough!

I said: Let me explain it another way. Imagine a shoemaker

Someone interrupted: There are no shoemakers any more.

I replied huffily: Precisely because of this parable I'm about to tell you. Imagine a shoemaker who made such fine shoes for his customers that he became known far and wide for the mastery of his craft. The shoemaker became aware of his fame and soon wanted to make fine shoes.

Someone said: Is that all? Do you call that a parable?

I said indignantly: It's just too subtle for you. The relation perceived between value and the thing changes, as does the meaning of excellence, both for the maker and for the user. If you want, I can explain it in terms of the relation between money and value in things . . .

Someone said: Please, please don't!

A Modest Poetry

A poem was conceived primarily as an act in literate society, embedded in the continuity of a person's experience and his relations to others. To define a poem as "giving voice to something intensely in the mind" was to make the poem a *stage* in a certain kind of experience. The poem was rooted in an immediate past, the circumstance which stirred composition; and it formed links to the future, as a means to make the poet known and as "intention" (one aspect of *chih* 志, "what is intensely in the mind"). Unlike Western art's assertions of its discontinuity with non-art, the Chinese occasional poem proclaims its ties to a life beyond poetry.

Consider the strategems of recent Western art to renounce its uncomfortable privileges. Avant-garde movements may give the unsuspecting passer-by "street theater," or enter an audience, or draw members of an audience onto the stage. These are impulses to cross the boundaries between art and life, to have art erupt into the world of non-art. They are invasions: transgressing the

boundaries only intensifies our awareness of the boundaries. "Performer" and "audience" are fixed, opposing roles; even if we force an individual to cross from one role to another, the disconcerting transition reminds us how remote the roles really are.

In Chinese classical literature the poet and his reader were on the same level—"someone speaking to someone else." In the continuity of extrapoetic experience, the poem asked for participation and response. To cross roles from listener or reader to poet was not an anomalous invasion: it was expected. This was generally true for primary readers, and often true even for secondary readers. The person spoken to was called upon to respond: a companion's celebration of visiting a temple asked the listener to produce a parallel poem. The occasional poem was not simply "speaking to" someone; it was often part of a social exchange.

Solitary poems were not necessarily "private" poems, secretly destined for the grand audience of present and future; they might be a special category of social poetry, for circulation among friends and only incidentally for wider circulation. Often friends answered such solitary poems, matching the rhymes and speaking to the sentiments of the earlier poem. The poetic articulation of inner life and outer experience established an essentially social relation between poet and reader.

The poetic text is the transcript of the art: because texts can be carried far and last long, they eventually reached those who felt no direct social relation to the poet. The sense of relation falls away by degrees. Someone of the next generation may find a poem written upon some wall and answer it; a Sung poet, though aware of the distinction of his own age, may still feel kinship with a T'ang poet; the son of a nineteenth-century Szechou merchant may love Wang Wei's poetry, but the alterations of time, space, and class have been too great. But even as the poem falls away from us, social relation remains the governing model of reading, even in its impossibility: the immediate response of later readers is not "such a poem!" but "to have known such a person!"

We can conceive the richness of such a poetry in the lives of

poets and readers a thousand years in the past; we might even wish we had such a poetry. And as later-born readers, we might come to sense a peculiar magnitude in some of the poems—poems that have, unintentionally, become great in spite of their modesty, winning the loud applause of a millennium of readers. But also in that millennium there are millions of poems, neither inept nor falling accidentally into a greatness; such poems live quite cheerfully in the local bounds of their composition. Yet such poems *were* read with enjoyment by later generations, and the joys they offered differed in degree, not in kind, from the pleasure of the great poems.

Consider a performance by Po Chü-yi in a social situation that encouraged the composition of a poem; someone had sent Po a gift. "It's the very thing I needed" may be the universal response to such situations; and there is already some interest in the infinite ingenuity with which that response can be varied. There is wit in this poem; and a witty poem may be a good beginning for us, recalling to English readers the modest pleasures of their own, now-dead social poetry.

Po Chü-yi has been given some stones to put in his landscape garden: as he tries to explain to the donor why they are "the very thing he needed," he finds a greater appreciation of their value: they are not simply two stones but the illusion of an entire landscape.

The Censor, Mr. Nan, has presented me with some
stones to add a bit of sound to my stream: I
thank him with this quatrain:³

南侍御以石相 贈助成水聲因
以絕句謝之

Stones jutting out of my stream—
the sound they make, like music of lute,

泉石粼粼聲似琴

While I rest, tranquil listener,
dust washed from my heart.

閒眠靜聽洗塵心

Don't undervalue these two stones
all covered with green moss:

莫輕兩片青苔石

Their nightful of splashing's worth
a thousand in gold.

一夜潺湲直萬金

In the early ninth century metropolitan Ch'ang-an was the largest city in the world, and the wit of Po's quatrain hangs upon the urban version of that universal human longing to be somewhere else: the city-dweller thinks lovingly of living among the mountains and streams as surely as the outlander is drawn by the enticements of the city. A good city-gift takes us out of the city.

"A nightful of splashing": in the darkness of the night, hearing gains a preeminence among the senses, and sound comes to define the apprehended world. Before, with a silent, stoneless garden stream, Po was condemned to live in the city both day and night. Now, though he still must live in the city by day, night's blindness brings him only the sound of water running over stones: he can indulge in the illusion that he is, in fact, living far away beside some mountain stream, far from the urban rattle and the pressures of his government post. As the water rushes over the stones, cleansing them of the dust that has settled on them from the daytime traffic, so their sounds wash over him, cleansing him of the city's "dust," the cares and anxieties of an urgent public life. By night Po is "somewhere else," transported by this gift of two stones.

The sounds he hears are of a "lute," the *ch'in*, which plays the music of nobility and solitude, or of intimate understanding between two friends. It was hearing Po-ya play the *ch'in* which let his friend Chung-tzu-ch'i know what was in Po-ya's heart and thus become the first *chih-yin*, "the one who knows the tone." And this illusory music of a *ch'in*, which creates the illusion of a mountain landscape, is also a means to know another person and a sign of the goodwill of the giver.

The charm of the poem is, however, not so easy. When wit

dominates a social exchange, it unsays what it says in the act of saying: as he tells you of his illusion, Po also tells you that he sees through it. Social necessity demands that the gift be appreciated; under this imperative the poet hones his senses and discovers a delight (or a degree of delight) which perhaps did not exist until the poem asked that he explain why the gift was "the very thing he needed." The necessity to discover exceptional value in the gift instantly suggests a possibility that someone might "undervalue" it—some sluggish, unimaginative fellow who sees here only two rocks.

The donor of the stones is to be delighted: the poet has discovered the proper value in the gift, and the donor is spared the embarrassment of that dullard who would write: "Dear Mr. Nan: Thank you for the two rocks." The quatrain compliments a shared sensibility, a subtle awareness of stress and its alleviation, a sensibility that disposes life's problems by making gardens and quatrains. It is not the stones which are worth "a thousand in gold," that crass equivalence of value; value lies in the convergence of stones and wit, to know where to place them and how to appreciate them. And to make a gift of these stones is thus to trust the wit of the receiver to value them properly.

Receipt of the gift creates a debt; the poem, a socially valid token of exchange, repays the debt. To keep accounts equal, the finer the gift, the finer the answering poem must be. Po's poem magnifies the gift and the degree of indebtedness, and in the wit of his appreciation, repays the account that he himself has inflated. We never forget for a moment the disparity between the gift—two rocks—and the value Po gives them (though a later Chinese reader might mistake these stream stones for the expensive and wondrously shaped rocks of the landscape gardener—"Nine Glories Mountain in a Jug"). The poem shows this is all an act of the imagination, both the assigning of value and the repayment. The social situation is as simple as the gift; the poem complicates everything and exults in the complications.

The poem's complications become vital only in the occasional context, in our secondary reader's anticipation of Mr. Nan's receipt of the poem. We may suppose that the generous censor originally entertained only modest hopes that Po would enjoy

his gift. But we can anticipate his amusement and pleasure on receiving this poem, with its implicit compliments to their shared sensibilities and appreciation of each other's natures: each knows the worth which certain things may possess for men of discernment. Moreover, Po's overvaluing of the gift can be accepted without the taint of insincerity: the tone is too playful and extravagant to take its statements seriously, except where we choose to do so.

The poem is part of a playful and complex relation between two people; it is for us and eternity only afterward. Had there been no occasion in the title, the poem would lose much of its interest and be no more than a gratuitous exercise of poetic wit: the wit comes alive in address, when it is *for* someone.

It is a modest poem (even the most generous reader cannot allow it the honor of "greatness"), yet it is a poem we would regret to pass over; it is even a poem that merits rereading and reconsideration. It has not the sort of wit which uses itself up in a guffaw or a titter. It is not (unless we squeeze it too hard) a profound comment on human relations. The quatrain moves on a plane of values equally distinct from simple wit and greatness. This modest poetry has the same teasing incompleteness as great poetry, a focus of intriguing perplexity which commands our attention. But its incompleteness is intensive rather than generalizing: meditation throws us back again and again on the opaqueness of the moment.

Some might say that in discussing this poem I am making a mountain out of a molehill, or a landscape out of a pair of stones, but our debt of gratitude is no less in receiving a delightful quatrain than in a gift of two rocks, and if, in reflection upon the poem, we emulate a cheerful extravagance, we do no more than join in the chain of exchange.

Reading In Situ

An occasional poem is addressed to an audience more stubbornly definite and of a more fixed disposition than the "ideal reader" (who is, I am certain, a woefully dull character and not

the sort of person anyone would want to write a poem to). We are to understand the poem in relation to this "target" (often a target in more ways than one), but we do not define the poem as an intended "message": too many cross-purposes of accident and intention, both overt and implicit, are fused in poetic address to permit us to hope for anything as simple and lucid as a message. Such poems, like speech, embody in a word contradictory and disparate threads of moods and meaning. In the richest discourse there are so many cancellings and qualifications that all possibility of unifying intention is buried in the multiplicity; accident and involuntary promptings crowd in beside artistic conception.

I plan a surprise party for a friend. I casually invite him to drop by after dinner. He protests: he has work to do, I have work to do, he doesn't want to disturb me. He meets every stratagem I can raise with brilliant evasions. Finally I grit my teeth and with a harsh laugh of exasperation say, "Please come, damn you!" I did not intend the excess of urgency that is heard. And if we unravel the various strands of strident amusement, anger, exasperation, desperation, and so forth which are fused in the utterance, we will find no unity but the economical utterance itself. A third party (the secondary reader), observing the exchange and knowing the circumstances, will relish both my consternation and the anticipation of how the utterance will be heard by my friend.

Or suppose we are lounging at home amid monuments to our untidiness, with scarcely a bite to eat in the house; a well-liked but none-too-familiar friend drops in, wearing his best suit. Hear the voice saying, "Hello, I'm delighted to see you." Thus Tu Fu:

A Guest Comes (original note: delighted that
Magistrate Ts'ui has dropped in)⁴

客至 (原注:喜崔明底相過)

North of my cottage, south of my cottage,
on both sides, the floods of spring:

舍南舍北皆春水

All that I ever see coming here
are the daily flocks of gulls.

但見群鷗日日來

My path's covered with flowers—I never
have swept them away for guests,

花徑不曾緣客掃

And for you today, for the very first time,
my wicker gate stands open.

蓬門今始爲君開

The market is far, thus for dinner
no complicated cuisine,

盤飧市遠無兼味

And my household's poor—our wine
will be only last year's brew.

樽酒家貧只舊醅

If you're willing to let the old fellow next door
join us for a drink,

肯與鄰翁相對飲

I'll call to him across the hedge,
and we'll finish the last of the cups.

隔離呼取盡餘杯

"A Guest Comes" is a *very* famous poem, one of those occasional performances that somehow attained the status of a major canonical text. Through reading poems such as this, a young Chinese reader developed his first, implicit sense of poetic values; later, having developed a mature, individual taste, the same reader might return to reflect on the same poem and find in it satisfactions he never guessed in the first reading. That is how we learn to read poetry. Thus, if an English reader finds here only a pleasant verse welcoming a friend, he must begin anew, begin with the belief that this is a rich and masterful poem, and allow a new sense of poetic values to grow from the belief.

"A Guest Comes" is so familiar to traditional readers that its dissonances and harmonies may escape conscious attention. Yet

in the title and note, we find a peculiar distribution of general and particular cases. When the specific occasion of a poem is known and stated, the statement usually belongs in the title. Titles of indefinite occasion (for example "A Guest Comes") suggest that the specifics of the occasion are either forgotten, insignificant, or being ignored for the sake of a more general statement.⁵ But the form of this title indicates that the poem gives a general case, of which the note specifies only the occasioning instance. Why should Tu Fu introduce in this manner a poem so clearly addressed to someone in particular? The form of the title is explicable only as an assurance to Ts'ui and later readers that the poet would respond in this way to any "guest coming"; the need for such assurance, in turn, prepares us for some subtle dissonances in the address of the poem.

Traditional critics applaud Tu Fu's spontaneity and unceremoniousness in this poem; but "unceremoniousness" is a precarious virtue, separated from slovenly incivility by a syllable, a stress, a slight movement of hand or eye. Uncomplicated delight in insouciant ease becomes tangled in self-consciousness when an unexpected visitor of rank "catches" Tu Fu unprepared; the poet suddenly perceives his little world as it will be seen from the outside. The self-deprecation ordinarily due to a guest is somewhat too perfectly provided by the surroundings.

Tu Fu speaks for his dwelling and for himself with perfect composure, balancing self-deprecation, praise of the simple life, and welcome for his guest. However, beneath the surface of excellent manners there is a social situation that challenges Tu Fu's sense of self-worth (and, as we have seen before, Tu Fu often rebels in such situations, silently and with strength). The poem will proclaim the superiority of Tu Fu's life and aggressively draw Ts'ui into it. There is a secret duel between ceremony and natural behavior; the hidden shape of Magistrate Ts'ui, the primary reader, is the necessary representative of ceremony, who is doomed to be overcome. The first six lines are a lovely feint; the duel is won in the last couplet: "if you are willing" 肯. Let us suppose the good magistrate—in order to maintain reasonable decorum and prevent the poet from loudly shouting "come on over" to his rustic neighbor—answers 不肯,

"No, I am *not* willing." Primary and secondary readers alike recognize that in the refusal Ts'ui would become stuffy, rank-conscious, altogether unlikeable. Tu Fu has trapped his visitor and in the most beautifully gracious way.

North of my cottage, south of my cottage,
on both sides, the floods of spring:
All that I ever see coming here
are the daily flocks of gulls.

Allow Tu Fu's neighbor to disappear for a while: we have the poet living in seclusion. Tu Fu has not yet established the conditions whereby his neighbor can be "someone" in the same way that Ts'ui is "someone." Tu Fu is isolated, surrounded by water on all sides, visited only by the gulls, which come to him (as they came to the young man in the *Lieh-tzu* parable) because he "lacks motive" 忘機 and lives in innocent harmony with the natural world. "Lack of motive" often applies to social situations, a virtuous forgetfulness of the ceremonies of rank and relation which are observed by too civil humanity; the implication is that ceremony seeks advantage. Already Tu Fu's "naturalness" is a self-conscious stance; and it is indeed such a polite "naturalness" that a local magistrate might come seeking on his day off.

My path's covered with flowers—I never
have swept them away for guests,
And for you today, for the very first time,
my wicker gate stands open.

Tu Fu assumes a studied social virginity which, in proclaiming its inviolate beauty, knows that beauty to be a powerful lure. The poetic charm of the flower-strewn path attracts the guest, while letting him know that his visit was unexpected. And if Magistrate Ts'ui honors the rusticity of a wicker gate by his visit, so he too is honored by being its very first visitor. All this is very gracious and balances a disparate cluster of polite sentiments: there is an isolation that hopes for and welcomes visitors, though none have yet deigned to come; there is the naturalizing

power of dwelling in nature, raising the poet above ceremonious and motive-tinged humanity; there is the careful presentation of the "natural" person and his world in order to draw the visit of someone like Magistrate Ts'ui.

The market is far, thus for dinner
 no complicated cuisine,
 And my household's poor—our wine
 will be only last year's brew.

Magistrate Ts'ui crosses the threshold into the simplicity of Tu Fu's world—plain food and old wine (in the case of Chinese wine, the newer the better). As conditions become plainer, the poetic style becomes more elegant; literally:

For supper—the market is far—
 no multiple flavors;
 For wine—the household is poor—
 only the former brew.

And Magistrate Ts'ui is to be assured by such courtliness of phrasing that the plainness of his provision is the simplicity of a man of taste, not a mere peasant crudeness. But—

If you're willing to let the old fellow next door
 join us for a drink,
 I'll call to him across the hedge,
 and we'll finish the last of the cups.

We do not know the social standing of Tu Fu's neighbor; the appellation "old fellow next door" sounds uncomfortably familiar. But we do know it was most improper to indiscriminately mix guests of different social classes. The very elegance with which Tu Fu has treated Ts'ui's "visit to the recluse" makes the poet's final proposal all the more striking—literally, "if you are willing to drink *face to face* with the old fellow next door." Previously, Tu Fu's gracious tact suggested one kind of relation to Ts'ui; the final couplet suggests a very different, disarmingly

familiar relation. By agreeing to Tu Fu's tasteful presentation of the "natural life," Magistrate Ts'ui is compelled to participate in a genuinely natural gesture and the dissolution of the social hierarchy. Beneath the mask of virginity, lusty and gregarious humanity breaks out.

There is a compact Shakespearean comedy in "A Guest Comes": the satisfied reader smiles at the inevitable victory in this interplay between arbitrary formality and naturalness in human relations. But the comedy occurs in a literary mode entirely different from a dramatic fiction: everything here depends upon the voice and tone of address to an unseen listener. The comedy is enacted neither in telling stories nor in presenting stories on stage, but in a visit paid by a real magistrate. And our magistrate—sensing, no doubt, that his honored status has somehow fallen away—is gently reassured by the title: "If I shout across the hedge, it is not meant as disrespect towards you; I will act with such free informality whenever 'a guest comes.'" Ts'ui cannot object; he must sit there, waiting for some old commoner to come bounding over the hedge and sit down face to face with him. But Ts'ui must feel, as we do, that somewhere in the poem the virginal deference of his first reception has been lost.

Quotidian Alchemy

Ts'ui smiles; Tu Fu smiles more broadly. The poetic capacity, with its fine verbal adjustments of pleasure and vexation, smooths our slow passage through the world at hand. It would be a shame if such a companionable art had always to wait upon infrequent social occasion. Poets grow less and less willing to wait until "a guest comes," and the range of solitary occasions steadily increases from the T'ang through the Sung. The addition of a new occasion for composition was a gift to the tradition of inestimable worth: poetic precedent opens the occurrence to all. Eventually almost anything might be an excuse for a poem.

The multiplication of occasions, the habit of reading poetry and its encouragements to composition had inevitable conse-

quences in the lives of a growing number of literate men and women. Poetry fostered an appreciative and systematic attention to the quotidian; and there was a delight in transmuting everyday experience into something rich and strange. The vector of address in such poetry has its closest analogue in Western diary (though usually differing from diary in the greater proximity of occasion and composition). Like diarists, such poets were aware that their writing might possibly be read by others, but the attention of posterity was, at best, a tenuous expectation. The act of composition was its own peculiar satisfaction, speaking to oneself with even more comfortable familiarity than the social poem speaks to others. Even the most remarkable of such poems are redeemed from the curse of greatness by a pervasive tone of pastime.⁶

Nothing so complicates a literary tradition as the spread of printing. Through the course of the Sung Dynasty printing became widespread indeed. Poets, in increasing numbers, published their collections (if not the poets themselves, then filial descendents and friends), consigning private moments to the pleasure of the world at large. Such collections were, as might be expected, often immense, and with their immensity, a new factor entered reading: around any single poem were so many other poems of approximately the same quality that it became very difficult to grant to any one poem the "specialness" essential to greatness.⁷ A poem by Lu Yu 陸游 (1125-1210) belongs to a collection of over nine thousand poems, four out of five of which will probably prove equal in merit to the poem in question. An anthologist can reduce the bulk of Lu Yu's work to a thousand or five hundred poems (about the length of an average T'ang collection); after the immediate inclusion of ten famous poems, the choice become arbitrary: the poems are all delightful, all on the same happy, unpretentious level. Lu Yu is a "major poet" without "major poems" (in the same way that Tu Fu or Wang Wei or Li Po have "major poems"). The reader who approaches Tu Fu's work with awe is compelled to treat Lu Yu's poems more casually, taking most of his works in the spirit in which they were written—as modest and diminutive celebrations of the moment.

Consider Lu Yu one New Year's morning. That night the cold was so intense Lu couldn't get to sleep; as dawn was just breaking, he rose and went to the door or window to look out on the snow scene. He works an alchemy on the simple incident. Officials customarily went to court to pay their respects to the emperor at dawn on New Year's morning; here the New Year's greeting is offered in the imaginary snow palace of the "God of the Void."

New Year's Eve: Snow⁸

除夜雪

Surprised my thick covers
can't keep out the cold,

只怪重衾不禦寒

I get up to watch the swift snow,
dry flakes of jade.

起看急雪玉花乾

Ready at daybreak to pay respects
in the God of the Void's palace:

遲明欲謁虛皇殿

Wearing his blanket, the horse of the stable
stands in the last of the night.

廐馬蒙氈立夜闌

There is discomfort: the poet has been driven from his bed in the last, coldest moments before dawn by a chill so sharp that even thick blankets cannot defend against it. The discomfort is perhaps the kind of disequilibrium which, as Han Yü said, makes a creature "sing out." It is a special dawn, the coming of the New Year, with centuries of New Year's poems to urge this shivering poet to compose. Lu Yu takes the occasion, encouraged by tradition and the cold; he transforms the miserable scene before his eyes into something marvellous: the snowflakes become "flakes" (or "flowers") of jade and the vista becomes a

spacious edifice, a palace presided over by the deified emptiness of the scene. The ending gives us pause:

stable(yard) horse(s) wear blanket stand night end

As he stood there in the early morning cold and looked out into his yard, Lu Yu knew very well whether there was one horse or many, whether the "stabling" was under a roof or out in a corral, whether the blankets were true fabric or a fanciful fabric of snow. Lu Yu knew these things and wrote only one ending for his poem—the referential determinations were there in his eyes. But we have many endings for the poem, too many, and their excess recalls to us the circumstances which have been lost. Each of our endings is good; each ending is fanciful; each ending is ironic.

The Sung poet delights in metaphors and little fictions; but they are usually ironic, exposed as specious, the actions of fancy in the historical poet. Fancy is dangerous; metaphors seem to have a life of their own, spreading out into conceit unless we keep them under tight rein. Our cold and sleepy poet seems to lack strength to govern his metaphor: the "jade flakes" build a palace, and there the poet will offer New Year's greetings, like a reverent official, to a heavenly emperor of emptiness. Suppose he sees many horses: there they stand, robed and in their ranks, officials waiting in the last of the night for the dawn session of court. The distance between a divinity in its jewelled palace and his beast-officials makes us smile. The metaphor is hollow, as void as its god.

But suppose, in an open stable or in the yard, the horses have been exposed to the snow and their "blankets" are no less fanciful than the palace in which they stand. The poet's real quilts failed him; they could not keep out the cold. But fancy restores new blankets to replace the blankets cast off—an imaginary god greeted in imaginery robes covering real horses. The opening scene and the phrasing of the last line expose the deception of fancy's actions: Lu Yu leashes his metaphor with a sharp irony: something is terribly wrong with these imaginary robes on a real

horse. We are half-charmed by the metaphorical "blanket of snow," but we see through the illusion to the real cold the horse(s) must be suffering, now standing in the last moments before sunrise; it is the coldest time of all, driving poets from their beds to compose clever New Year's poems. A false loveliness is stripped away, the palace dissolves, and the poet sees fellow creatures, suffering a cold even harsher than that which set the poem in motion. And the counterfeit blanket becomes an ironic emblem of the poetic imagination, of its cruel insensitivity.

Someone broke in: I can't allow you to go on like this any longer. Out of this common "quotidian" poetry, you have plucked a very complicated irony of the imagination. Shall I tactfully remind you that your celebration of poetic modesty draws its examples from Po Chü-yi, Tu Fu, and Lu Yu?—this may be a poetry of common human experience, but the poems were not written by common humanity. Perhaps it is true that a large number of literate men and women were in the habit of composing poems on incidents in their daily lives. And perhaps it is true that Lu Yu often composed poems on incidents in *his* everyday life. But make a quick trip to the library; begin opening volumes; look at the library's book-plates to see how often a volume has been borrowed. This crassly empirical experiment will assure you that Lu Yu's poems are still read, while poems by thousands of other writers, from the Sung through the Ch'ing, are scarcely ever read at all. If what you said were true—that poems were read without looking for greatness—then this disproportionate neglect of thousands of poets is a literary historical accident of the first magnitude. I'm afraid you've gotten carried away and muffed it up rather badly.

I said: Really?

Someone said: Yes, you have. But fortunately I'm here to clear things up for you. Here is the distinction you would like

to make: in the Western tradition the poet presents the practice of his vocation as different from the common experience of humanity at large—it is not simply uniqueness, but a quality of otherness. Anyone may cut a thumb peeling an onion; Sylvia Plath's poem on the subject asserts its literary distinction from the everyday kitchen wound: what "occurs" in a poem is an event of art. These Chinese occasional poems of which you have been speaking represent only one strand in the whole tradition; but in them, value seems to depend upon a sense that the reader *could* have had the experience and *could* have written such a poem; that is, a uniqueness of voice, but one which presents itself as *within* the common human scope. Am I right?

I said: Yes, yes, that's exactly what I would say.

Someone answered: Then why didn't you say it yourself? But you accept my formulation, and I'm afraid you've caught yourself in a trap very much like the one in which you caught poor Wordsworth. You said that "greatness" was simply the approbation of a community of readers with common values (who perceive their approval as a universal good). Your "modest" poetry simply includes a special (and I might say, a most peculiar) clause in the criteria of greatness—the quality of distinction that inheres in greatness must be concealed. It is a studied ease and unpretentiousness which produces complicated ironies of the imagination, as in the Lu Yu poem, while implicitly telling readers: "This experience could occur to anyone, and anyone could write this poem." It is a poetry that tells flattering lies to its readers.

I said: But because such poems tell readers they too are capable of such poetry, the tradition fosters a rich attention to the world in which the readers live.

Someone scoffed: A delightful social consequence, producing, no doubt, vast quantities of poetry; but it does not make a world of first-rate poets. I can accept the humble virtues of

writing for primary readers, but primary readers are notoriously easy to please. However, when you speak of interesting that vast secondary readership, there is only reading for greatness—even if it is a secret greatness, so well concealed that it seems within everyone's grasp. Everyday occurrences and common social situations with their direct address help preserve the illusion that such poetry is close to us; Tu Fu's welcome poem lulls us by its intimacy—but don't be deceived—it is *not* within our grasp. I admit it is an attractive illusion, and I can see that you have become completely entangled in it, so much so that I think it best that you let *me* finish up the essay for you.

I said: All right, if you think it best . . .

The Imaginary Interlocutor's Conclusion

The author's contention that the lyric "I" has no authority to address anyone and everyone has one important exception in Western poetry—the prophetic mode, that rare sense of election in which the first-person voice is enjoined to speak to all the people. The mode is easily abused. It is essential to the prophetic profession that its members make their appearance very seldom. We are naturally inclined to be suspicious of prophetic voices—it has been noted that they bear no official signs of their election⁹—and like citizens of Jerusalem, we tend to ignore them when too many speak at once. They are—let us be frank—difficult to understand, and we need strong faith in their command of "hidden significance" to trust their mystifications. They speak through metaphorical fictions, and their meaning is always uncomfortably "other."

Throughout his essays the author stresses the differences between a fictional and nonfictional tradition; but, in fact, the Chinese occasional lyric has much in common with Western narrative fiction, especially with "realistic fiction." The Western lyric may assume the prophetic "I" and speak in cryptic metaphors, but the Chinese lyric and the Western narrative both signify

through mediation, the immanence of the general truth in the particular—an idea as old as Aristotle, as heavy as Hegel, and as commonplace as a textbook introducing the study of literature. The concept of mediation admits great latitude in balancing ratios of general truth (the “exemplary” being the extreme case) and the randomness of historical accident, the mark of particularity. Readers show a distressing ingenuity in running too easily to the general truths, and a good literary text does what it can to conceal and complicate general truths by dissolving them into the particular.

The Western narrative fiction is taken as a motivated construct; the reader knows to assume some general import. Such texts assert the particular by becoming extensive, by multiplying detail to replicate the detail of the unmotivated and accidental world. The Chinese occasional lyric asserts the particular differently—by proclaiming its nonfictionality and insisting on what is random, spontaneous, contingent, and unpretentious. Here the necessary ratio of general truth is embedded in the assumption that the poem is a vector of attention, “what is in the mind intensely.”

The Chinese occasional lyric does indeed present itself as non-fictional, but it is not merely nonfictional—a historical essay, a travel guide, and a tax register are equally nonfictional. The occasional poem presents itself as an *ongoing* relation to what is external to the poet, the act of mediation itself as the mind struggles to understand and contend with outer fact, beyond its control.

This brings us back to the “special form of discourse,” the question of address in occasional poetry. By rooting the poem in present circumstance—as a mode of composition and as an assumption in reading—the poet asserts such an ongoing relation to the external world, imperatives of the moment to which he must respond. As Lu Yu’s little quatrain so eloquently shows, there is a mistrust, even a fear of the autonomous actions of the mind. The constant interplay with the external world defends against that menacing autonomy: something outside always interrupts—insisting, mocking, undermining what the poet wanted to say. We must wonder about the alternative: without

that continual intrusion of demand and contingency, the mind might be cut loose, cast into a solitude, a frightening and fantastic instability.

Someone said: There, I've pulled it together for you.

I said: It's all right . . . a bit heavy . . . not my style . . . and I'm not sure I agree with everything you say . . .

Someone said: If I finish the essay for you, you have to let me present my own thoughts. You can't expect me to agree with you all the time . . .

EIGHT

ALONE

"Thus as I read your poems, I know the man you are" wrote Po Chü-yi on "Reading Chang Chi's 'Old Ballads'"; and undoubtedly, in the composition and circulation of his poems, Chang Chi had hoped to become known in exactly this way.¹ Poetry was the means by which a person's true nature might be recognized, both by his contemporaries and by coming generations. Such external means were necessary: the Chinese tradition offered no constant and divine witness of the human soul, who saw instantly into the hearts of men and measured their worth.² To receive knowledge of human nature there could only be mortal witnesses, *chih-yin*, the "understanders"; and for a *chih-yin*, the poem was the most perfect means to reveal the inner man.

To see how the poem provides the means does not explain the need, why men felt such strong desire to be known and to have the qualities of their nature recognized. We must grasp the precise form of that desire—not for mere fame or honor or vindication, but for understanding and the appreciation of true worth, for someone to "know the man you are." We cannot believe an easy explanation of the desire as no more than a pragmatic interest, seeking employment and advancement in civil office, individual worth measured in titles and bushels of rice. The poet may also seek an unremunerative understanding from future ages; and the desire to be known was no less strong in men disposed against civil office, who sought in poetry to explain *why* they could not or would not serve.

Although the need to be known existed on many levels of experience, there *was* often a special bond between the need and public office. To seek recognition through a poem was an act for

others, a public act, and it often referred the reader to the largest public context of all, the imperial government. Traditional Chinese literature and civilization cannot be understood without grasping the unique *emotional* power which government and public service exercised over men's lives and imaginations. That power is sometimes expressed directly; sometimes it is only implicit; it lurks behind the celebration of drunken insouciance or the joys of retreat no less than it dominates the plea for preferment. If invisible in the text itself, the public context will often be supplied as the secret frame of reference by commentators and readers.

The insistent recurrence of the public context, whether explicitly in the poems themselves or in their later interpretations, demands that we not take it for granted. There are many other satisfying ways in which a person might spend his life; there are other rich possibilities for human desire—love, military glory, honor, adventure, wealth, steamy dissipation. We must be startled that these play so small a role in the poetic presentation of self, and that when they do appear, they are often set in the framework of possible public service. We must wonder what fears and what rewards fixed the attention of so many on this one focal point of existence, either struggling furiously to advance, to procure and protect public office, or voluminously celebrating and vindicating a disinclination to serve.

It is not enough to ascribe such investments of self to the power and importance of government in traditional China: a government is no more nor less than what the collective members of a society agree it should be. The imperial government of China did what all governments do—fought wars and collected taxes. But other governments in other civilizations fostered poets and thinkers who were genuinely unconcerned with the passions and fulfillments of public life, and who did not care enough even to apologize for their lack of interest. The peculiar importance of government in Chinese intellectual life was no more than a willing investment of lives, energy, and concern. We must conclude that whatever its collective validation, it was the *idea* of government which held a *private* significance for

individuals, a significance far exceeding the mere necessities of managing men's public affairs. To understand the emotional significance of government, we must look beyond government.

In poetry it was neither the pragmatic operations of the state nor the system itself which stirred anxiety and desire: emotional concern turned almost exclusively on one facet of public life—the question of the individual's inclusion or exclusion from service, and the role which recognition played in that concern. We have gone beyond a truly political frame of reference to the individual's relations with others—not as individuals, but as a group, members of a sanctioned institution. Whether the poet shuns the group or seeks to join it, in the very act of raising the question, the poet shows that an uneasiness exists, a sense that he does not truly belong, that he is in some essential way alone. Here we can grasp the emotional power of the need to be known, with all the accompanying desires and fears which permeated every aspect of an individual's life.

Let us consider the fears: every great literature has a version of hell. In the minds of men hells hold a strange fascination: they are imaginative prospects of what men most fear, but from which they cannot avert their attention. It is all very well for uncomplicated mortals to fear agonies of the senses, provided by demons with ingenious instruments of torture; Buddhism brought to China a chamber of horrors as melodramatic as any Christian hell. But the educated members of a civilization often devise for themselves more refined agonies that can be enacted without demons and in a plausible topography.

In rare cases one of these complicated hells may be reached by tragedy, when some arbitrary necessity defeats justice or the human will, and when the person defeated has the intellect and leisure to consider the significance of his ruin. The desire to be known, and thereby to be included in the organized society of others, carries with it the seeds of a particular tragedy: goodness and worth are manifest, but are either not known or ignored; the man is expelled or left in solitude; then loyalty and the desire to be known spend themselves in vain, even to self-destruction. The labor has no reward.

Ch'ü Yüan

"In all the land no one knows me"

—Ch'ü Yüan, *Li Sao*

(early third century B.C.?)

This is the legend: Ch'ü Yüan 屈原, the virtuous minister of the ancient kingdom of Ch'u, is slandered by enemies jealous of his goodness and high position. The king withdraws his favor. Ch'ü is expelled from court and wanders through the jungles of south-eastern Ch'u, there in his bitterness composing rhapsodies like the *Li Sao* 離騷.³ Finally, overcome by despair, Ch'ü drowns himself in the Mi-lo River. The *Li Sao*, the most famous of the works attributed to Ch'ü Yüan, is an obscure, passionate monologue, understood as an allegorical response to the events of the legend. The poet describes his lineage, his purity, his rejection and desperation, then tells of flights through an allegorical heaven in search of the perfect mate/prince. The allegory is given in terms of the relation of lovers, specifically the love of a goddess (though the sexual identities of both the seeker and the person sought change).⁴ For over two thousand years Chinese readers have been fascinated by both the Ch'ü Yüan legend and the *Li Sao*; at times this fascination seems out of all proportion to the simplicity of the legend and the frenzied obscurity of the poem.⁵

Having the fullness of inward beauty,

紛吾既有此內美兮

I double it with excellent abilities.

又重之以脩能

I apparel myself in selinea and seldom-seen angelica,

扈江離與辟芷兮

Braid autumn's orchids to hang from my sash.

綴秋蘭以爲佩

Rushing on, as though I might not reach it,

汨余若將不及兮

I fear that the years will not stay with me.

恐年歲之不吾與

By dawn I took the magnolia of the hill,

朝攀阨之木蘭兮

By evening culled the curling sedge of isles.

夕攬洲之宿莽

Days and months sped on without slowing,

日月忽其不淹兮

Springs and autumns turned in succession;

春與秋其代序

And I brooded how leaves fell away from the plants
and trees,

惟草木之零落兮

Feared that the Lovely One would go also into
darkness.

恐美人之遲暮

If you cleave not to your prime and cast off pollutions,

不撫壯而棄穢兮

How will you change the measure of your acts?

何不改此度

I harnessed my fine steeds and went galloping—

乘騏驥以馳騁兮

Come, let me lead you on the paths ahead.

來吾道夫先路

*Li Sao*⁶ (ll. 9-24)

The rhapsody moves with striking discontinuities of mood, topic, and action: at first the voice speaks in an almost feminine role, adorning "herself" so that she will be desired; suddenly the voice changes, gives reproof, and dashes off leading the beloved, the Lovely One, on the path ahead. At times in the rhapsody the voice is timorous and uncertain, fearing neglect; at other times it

is a passionate seeker, driving his carriage across the universe in search of a worthy mate. An anxious ritual purity and fear of pollution shade into more commonplace public ethics; he culls and dresses himself in symbolic plants, and later in the poem passes with familiar ease through a landscape of mythological creatures and strange divinities. The significance of each brooding and act, of each deity and each flower, might have been perfectly clear to an audience of old Ch'u; but once we enter the mainstream of imperial civilization, the text of the *Li Sao* alone would have been linguistically difficult, and its larger significance, virtually unintelligible. But the *Li Sao's* frenzies and obscurities are set against a background of simple explanation, a prose commentary that always accompanies the text. For a T'ang or Sung reader, the commentary would have been that of the Eastern Han scholar Wang Yi (perhaps supplemented by later commentaries), and that commentary possessed an authority almost equal to the text itself. In reading, the commentary could not be ignored: it followed each line of the rhapsody with philological glosses and interpretation. Here is how the first lines of the extract above were presented to a reader:

Having the fullness of inward beauty ("Fullness" is an amplitude), *I double it with excellent abilities* ("Excellent" means far-reaching. He is saying that from birth he had within himself the finest vital spirit of Heaven and Earth, and in addition, he had the most far-reaching abilities—different from those of ordinary men. His words were adequate to bring stability to the royal government; his wisdom was adequate to redeem the state from disaster; his authority could fend off challenges of usurpation; his kindness was such that he could concern himself with people far from him). *I apparel myself in selinea and seldom-seen angelica* ("To apparel oneself" is to wear, clothing being called "apparel" in Ch'u. Selinea and angelica are sweet-smelling plants. "Seldom-seen" is hidden in secret places. When angelica is hidden, it is sweetest), *Braid autumn's orchids to hang from my sash* ("Braid" is a rope. An orchid is a sweet-smelling plant. In autumn he adorns his sash with

the fragrance of blossoms, thus giving the image of his virtue. For those whose actions are pure wear fragrant blossoms in their sash; those whose virtue and kindness are manifest wear jade. . . . This all means that, having kept himself pure, he uses selinea and angelica for his clothing and braids autumn orchids for his sash ornament: he has culled widely from all good things to gird himself about).⁷

A heavy and repetitious clarity is the virtue of the commentary, and the authority of its allegorical interpretations is reinforced by their free mixture with necessary philological glosses (whose necessity may be less obvious in translation). The commentary never attempts to reduce the rhapsody's discontinuities to a coherent argument, but it does refer them to the coherent situation of the legend—Ch'ü Yüan's perfect purity, his merit and goodness, his desire to have these qualities recognized (by his symbolic apparel and by the rhapsody itself), and his hatred of all pollution and evil. As in all allegories, the link between the two levels of discourse is problematic, and even more so here, where the text and authoritative explanation alternate in reading. The biographical frame, with its reference to ethics, political relations, and history, gives a distance and legitimacy to the passion of the rhapsody. But this passion, at times on the thin edge of madness, seems often to mock the calm of ethical exegesis and the historian's stabilizing frame.

The *Li Sao* was written in a remote age of disintegrating feudal civilization and constant warfare, written in a peripheral kingdom whose history and customs have largely been lost. Whether there actually was a Ch'ü Yüan, and if there was, whether he in fact wrote the *Li Sao*, will surely remain forever in doubt. The truth of the Ch'ü Yüan legend and the original context of the *Li Sao* are probably beyond recovery; but "original" truth is not our concern here, nor is the reception and interpretation of the *Li Sao*. Our concern is that pattern of relations in the Ch'ü Yüan legend that so fascinated later readers and its recurrence in later poetry.

The desperation of the *Li Sao*, punctuating the legend and embodying the poet's state of mind, is that refined version of hell

which we seek. In the rhapsody, Ch'ü Yüan asks the reader to know his true worth and to know that "in all the world no one knows me." The desire to be known and the fear of being misunderstood reveal a potential disjunction between outward appearance and inner truth. To defend against this possibility, some robe themselves in flowers, and all compose poems to make the outer, manifest version of the self correspond to inner worth. Likewise, in reading the *Li Sao* with its commentary, there is an "inner" text and an "outer" text: the "inner" text is dark, turbulent, in danger of being misunderstood; the outer text, the commentary, makes everything painfully clear and respectable. In the sequence of our reading, the movement is always outward, from the linguistically difficult and emotionally painful inner text to the steady, unsurprising public text. And on yet another level, there is an inner and outer truth in the individual's relation to the social body: the outer truth is an easy, respectable ethics in a political and historical frame of reading; the inner truth is darker, more violent and emotional—far too private for a dispassionate interest in the polity.

This is the general case: someone who possesses great worth finds that his worth is unrecognized, either by chance or by the active machinations of evil men; he is expelled from society and finds himself in a wilderness, alone and in despair. Death seems imminent. This basic pattern admits numerous variations. Close to the Ch'ü Yüan legend itself, the pattern extends to those who saw themselves reenacting the legend—exiles and the unsuccessful. The pattern appears, faintly concealed, in the classic formulations of reclusion—going off to live alone in the wilderness, often at an age when death seems near. A poetic account of a visionary flight through the heavens may be read as a consequence of political disappointment. Even the most simple journey outside the capital can evoke elements of the theme. Both in the most direct and in the most subtle variations on the theme, there is often mingled a haunting guilt, a righteous anger, and a sense of impending death. Poems are written about the other miseries of human fate—war, disease, death of kin—but few have the special agony of the pattern behind the Ch'ü Yüan theme.

The pattern is, without a doubt, that of a family romance. The analogies between family and state are explicit enough in the classic texts of Chinese political theory (with the qualification that the two institutions are, by nature, "of the same kind," without the essential difference implied by the word "analogy"). In the Ch'ü Yüan legend this "family romance" is schematized into an archetypal narrative—like Joseph and his brothers, but more terrifying, lacking that just and providential power to bring the narrative to a happy conclusion.

This particular "family romance" has certain distinct characteristics. First, we are in a world composed entirely of males: the sexual ambiguity of the *Li Sao's* protagonist usually disappears in later versions of the theme. There is a senior, a prince whose "favor" (*en* 恩, the same word used for the "love" of a parent for a child) is desired. The condition of such love is service. But many others also compete for the "love"/"favor"; they gain the confidence of the senior and cause him to turn away his affection. Love is *ming* 明, "understanding," a light which "makes bright." Loss of the senior's love is a darkness, ignorance, the image of a cloud or a bowl over the head. Loss of love/favor leads to expulsion from the center, from the world of one's fellows, out into some demon-haunted hinterland. The demons of the wilderness have many shapes: they may belong to the mythology of archaic ritual, as in "The Summons to the Soul" (attributed to Sung Yü, calling back the wandering spirit of Ch'ü Yüan); they may be private and visionary demons, as in Li Ho's "Don't Go Out the Door!"; they may solidify into a demonic landscape, as in Meng Chiao's "Laments of the Gorges"; they may be naturalized in the pestilential exotica of the far south in the poetry of exile. But away from the center and the protective proximity of the senior, there is isolation and terror.

This story has many endings. Some await hopefully the return of the senior's love, and with it, a return to the community of the center. Others learn to embrace isolation and thus free themselves from the oppressive cycle of desire, love frustrated, and loss. The grimmest ending is death, drowning oneself in despair like Ch'ü Yüan or falling prey to the demons of wilderness, consumed by fevers and stung by poisonous insects.

All the various endings for the narrative of expulsion preserve some relation, even a negative one, to the senior in the center. Forgiveness and return, suicide, death, Buddhist renunciation or secular rejection of public service—every possible resolution is exhausted; but always the resolution is a relation to the senior. We can conceive of a range of activities and attitudes which would simply abrogate the relation: these possibilities are not considered. And if the choice is to reject service to the senior, a torrent of written vindication is demanded—how much I enjoy being alone, how I disdain the trappings and struggles of office, how a simple life in the mountain wilderness is adequate for my pleasure.

As every great literature has its version of hell, so each may be driven by its own version of thwarted love. This need to be recognized, favored, and have one's worth acknowledged by the remote senior (whose remoteness is ritualized because the pattern requires it) may have been a primary force not only in much classical poetry, but even in the workings of imperial civilization as a whole. For centuries men exhausted their lives in the struggle for that love and favor, and the fervor of the need mocks the blandness of the ethical commonplaces that pretend to explain it.

In the post-classical Western tradition a distant woman anchors countless variations on desire and loss. The lover persuades and praises, cajoles and bares the secrets of his soul. Here it is a remote male. The goal is not possession but to receive love (*en*, "favor," "parental love"). It is not a homosexual passion, but an anxious hope to remain the child, supported in an eternal exchange of obedient service for acceptance and love. Lao-lai-tzu, the paragon of filial piety, offers the emblem: in his old age he dressed up as a child and capered foolishly to please his even-more-aged parents. In other social relations the poet may balk at the polite subordination of the self, but here the impulse to rebellion is rare (that the senior might even suspect the existence of such impulses is terrifying). It is no calm desire: the child-official lives in constant fear of being misprised or of unintentionally committing some wrong, to be followed by expulsion, isolation, and death. The image of that fear is Ch'ü Yüan, proclaiming his

rage, desperation, and self-abasement with a fury that has close kin in the voice of the distraught lover of the Western tradition.

To understand the anxieties of service as a "family romance"—father, son, and too many competing siblings—is not the awkward imposition of a Western psychological model. Family terms were embedded in the language of service, its dangers and rewards; and the duty due to a parent was the acknowledged model of the official's relation to his emperor.

Recognizing the primal, familial relation helps us to grasp the depth of the "inner text" that runs behind the decorous commonplaces of service; it also sketches for us the poetry of hell, a seemingly disparate group of texts which embody the fear of expulsion and being alone.

(Someone was ill at ease with this; he did not like the explanation as a "family romance." I offered to present it differently. I said: If you wish, disregard the archetypal narrative of expulsion. Let us explain it in a modern version of a classical Chinese essay, analyzing the antithetical components of the idea itself, "alone.")

Let us say that Alone, in all its manifest singleness, is constituted of antitheses. "Alone" is a relation to others, a negative relation; and in this we find the first antithesis: "alone" as an active opposition to others, versus "alone" as the simple absence of others. "Alone in opposition to others" can be further divided: since the solitary self is the good human, the alien other must be either "not good" or "not human"—the self alone may be surrounded by slandering enemies or by beasts and demons. "Alone as the absence of others" can be divided into a state, absolute solitude, and an event, the loss of others.

To be alone is to be unique, at the extreme, the lowest or the highest, death or apotheosis; the solitary man may drown, going down into the abyss, or he may rise to the heights of the heavens. Ch'ü Yüan did both. The person alone may be at the very center—the emperor's kenning is "The Lonely Man"—or at the farthest edge, an exile banished to the empire's most remote outpost.

To be alone is to be the best of men or the worst, to be certain of one's virtue or to be haunted by one's guilt. And if the best is cast out, isolated not at the center but on the farthest border, he must protest his innocence and rage at the barriers which separate his peripheral solitude from the imperial solitude at the center. The isolation of the best or worst implies an epistemological problem, of knowing and recognition—the worst, most guilty person is exposed and cast out, or innocent virtue is unrecognized. In these possibilities appears the great epistemological antithesis: *ming* 明, light and discernment, versus *an* 暗, darkness and ignorance. For the ears, this antithesis becomes hearing and being heard versus a silence.

These antitheses may dispose themselves in three possible structures: in sequence as narrative; in alternation as variation; or simultaneously as contradiction. In a narrative disposition an antithetical pair becomes a movement from fellowship to solitude ("alone as loss of others"), or from the enmity of evil men to being beset by wild beasts: this is the banishment narrative. In different texts or as recognized possibilities at a certain stage in one text, a variant disposition might allow death or apotheosis: cast out of society, the solitary person may die (by his own hand or devoured by beasts); or he may ascend, to a genuine heaven or to the figurative "heaven" of court, in a return. A contradictory disposition of antitheses might be the presence in a single text of *both* guilt and bitterness at wronged innocence: these two emotions often contend in exile poems. The particular disposition in which an antithesis appears is less significant than the antithesis itself; and there is only one insistent unity that comprehends all the multiple variations—being alone.

This crude declension of solitude is the motion of the human mind, discovering rich variation in the repetition of a single thought—its own isolation. Like a composer who returns again and again to the same melody or passage, the poet may perform the obsessive thought of his solitude simply, in inversion, in snatches. He may play it slowly, or quickly, in fragments hidden in other tunes, in disguised rhythms, in a massive harmony or in a dissonance. A great composer raises his obsessive repetition to a high art, yet in all the brilliance of variation we so admire there

remains a boundedness in the recurrence of the theme, a sense of limit and the inability to escape. In the poetry of being alone, we must know what part is freedom and the latitude of talent; we must also know what part is involuntary, the pain that makes him say the same thing over and over again. It is a strange imperative: he speaks to be heard out of a certainty that he will not be heard: "in all the land no one knows me." But still he must speak, and he cannot break free of the fear or the certainty that he is utterly and absolutely alone.

Demons on All Sides

Return, soul, return!

You are leaving the trunk where you have always dwelled—
 Why go to earth's ends all around?
 You leave behind you the places of joy,
 To run upon misfortune.

Return, soul, return!

There is no resting place for you in the east:
 Giants a thousand cubits tall
 Search out only souls to eat;
 Ten suns come out in succession,
 Metals flow, stones melt:
 There, all are inured to this,
 But you, soul, if you go, will surely dissolve.
 Return, return,
 There is no resting place for you there.

Return, soul, return!

There is no place to halt in the south:
 With tattooed foreheads and black teeth
 They make sacrifice of the flesh of men,
 And of their bones, a paste.
 Pythons and serpents in writhing masses
 And giant foxes that range a thousand miles,
 Stag-cobras with nine heads

Passing in a flash—
 Swallowing men, their satisfaction, their pleasure.
 Return, return,
 You cannot wander there lazily long.

Return, soul, return!

The harms of the west
 Are sands drifting a thousand miles.
 You will be whirled into the thunder-gulfs,
 Shattered apart, and you cannot rest;
 And if you are so lucky as to escape,
 Beyond is a vast wilderness
 With red ants big as elephants
 And bees as big as gourds.
 No grains grow there;
 Thorns and brambles are their food.
 The earth scorches a man,
 And nowhere is the water you seek.
 You wander hither and thither with no place to stay
 In an immensity without limit.
 Return, return,
 For I fear you will give yourself over to ruin.

Return, soul, return!

There is no place to halt in the north:
 Layers of ice tower like mountains,
 And the snow goes blowing over thousands of miles.
 Return, return,
 You cannot stay there long.

Return, soul, return!

Do not try to rise up to heaven:
 Tigers and leopards lie at its nine gates;
 They rend men from earth below.
 A being with nine heads
 Tears up nine thousand trees;
 Jackals and wolves set their eyes on you,

Padding back and forth in packs:
 They string men up for sport,
 Let them hang down over a deep abyss,
 They set his fate before the god—
 And only then can he rest in darkness.
 Return, return,
 For I fear that there you will be in peril.

Return, soul, return!

Go not down into the city of darkness:
 Earth's Warden has nine folds
 And his horns are razor-sharp,
 A lumpy back, bloody thumbs,
 Loping relentlessly after men,
 Three eyes, a tiger's head,
 His body like a bull's.
 All find men tasty.
 Return, return,
 For I fear you will give yourself over to destruction.

"The Summons to the Soul" 招魂

(attributed to Sung Yü, 宋玉, third century B.C.)⁸

Either based on ritual practice or perhaps itself a true liturgical text, "The Summons to the Soul" hails a nameless soul which, because of death, sickness, or some disorder of the spirits, is wandering away from its body. Wang Yi's commentary (alternating with the text as in the *Li Sao*) gives the summons a historical occasion: Sung Yü is speaking to the distraught soul of Ch'ü Yüan, first warning it of terrors lying all around, then (in a long, untranslated section) luring it back by a lush description of its home.

The geometry of spiritual ease is clear: englobed by hostile forms in an alien topography, the soul finds rest only in a central point; and rest is its happiest condition. The rhapsody's cardinal geometry is a prayer for immobility, an admonition to stay put. In the opening section the only creature with kindly intentions toward the soul is the summoner, presumably standing securely

in the center, close to the body from which the soul takes its flight. Communality and the warmth of kin is to be found only in that fixed central point.

Such centered immobility is the shape of a utopia. In the *Lao-tzu*, the ideal polity is a village whose inhabitants never even visit the neighboring villages.⁹ In T'ao Ch'ien's "Peach Blossom Spring" the dangers of the larger world require that a mountain range be raised around the utopian village, so that it may remain eternal, invulnerable, and invariable.¹⁰ And the poet Po Chü-yi discovers a strangely claustrophobic utopia in "Chu Ch'en Village" 朱陳村 whose two clans (the Chu's and the Ch'en's, a pair being necessary to avoid incest taboos) intermarry for generation after generation, never straying and never changing.¹¹

The summoner's speculations on the dying soul's flight to the cardinal points of a monstrous and hostile universe is the negative version of the cosmic journey in the *Li Sao* and other rhapsodies: death and apotheosis constitute a primary antithesis in the declension of solitude. According to Wang Yi's version of the legend, Sung Yü would have been issuing his summons to Ch'ü Yüan's soul at the same time that that soul was making its giddy circuit of the heavens in the *Li Sao*: the itineraries of journeys through heaven and hell are superimposed. In the *Li Sao* Ch'ü Yüan's quest for a heavenly mate is a desperate exogamy, forced upon him through rejection by the comfortable mate in the center; if called homeward kindly (as in the untranslated section of "The Summons to the Soul"), the spirit should have no desire to wander, no desire to remain alone.

"The Summons to the Soul" is set in macrocosmic proportions, with large buffering spaces between the alien outer world and inner repose. But a macrocosm of terror can close in upon the soul, becoming a microcosm of surrounding menace, giving no respite even in stillness, and forbidding even the least going forth.

Li Ho Don't Go Out the Door!¹²

公無出門

Heaven eludes us, eludes us;

天迷迷

Earth keeps her secrets close, so close;

地密密

Stag-cobras feed on men's souls;

熊虺食人魂

Snow and frost snap a man's bones.

雪霜斷人骨

They growl in suspicion—dogs—
after him, after him!

嗥犬唁唁相索索

Palm-licking was his due,
who wore orchids in his sash.

舐掌偏宜佩蘭客

The god sent him his carriage to ride,
all suffering was done;

帝遣乘軒災自滅

Jade stars dotted his sword,
the carriage yoke was of gold.

玉星點劍黃金軛

But I, though I prance forth on my horse,
can never come back:

我雖跨馬不得還

The waves of Lake Li-yang
are huge as mountains;

歷陽湖波大如山

Deadly dragons eye me,
shaking their golden rings;

毒虯相視振金環

Lions and panthers drool.

狻猊貔吐嚙涎

Pao Chiao spent a whole age sleeping in open grass,

鮑焦一世披草眠

At twenty-nine Yen Hui's locks were streaked with white.

顏回廿九鬢毛斑

Yen Hui's blood was not growing old,

顏回非血衰

And Pao Chiao had not crossed Heaven's will;

鮑焦不違天

Heaven feared they would be torn to pieces,

天畏遭啣嚙

So it brought them to those states.

所以致之然

So clear it is, yet still I fear

you do not yet believe:

分明猶懼公不信

Just look—see the man who shouts at the wall,

demanding answers from Heaven.

公看呵壁書問天

Among the poems attributed to Ch'ü Yüan is a work called "Questions for Heaven" (*T'ien-wen* 天問, "Heavenly Questions," a polite inversion of the harsher *Wen-T'ien* 問天, "Questioning Heaven," "Demanding Answers of Heaven"—Heaven in this context being the god rather than the place). According to Wang Yi's commentary, "Questions for Heaven" was written on the wall of a temple where the exiled Ch'ü Yüan found paintings of "Heaven and Earth, mountains and rivers, gods and spirits."¹³ As the title claims, the poem consists entirely of questions without answers—on cosmology and history, but including many ethical questions concerning the operations of cosmic justice in history. It is this latter category of question that touches Li Ho's imagination.

The good Ch'ü Yüan was beset on all sides by slanderers, snarling dogs, who should have instead fawned on him and

licked his palms; the virtuous Pao Chiao spent a lifetime in poverty; Yen Hui, Confucius' favorite and most-promising disciple, died young and poor, his hair turning white while he was still in his twenties (as Li Ho's own hair was said to have done). Heaven destroys the best, and why? Li Ho gives an answer that is both ironic and unconvincing—Heaven destroys good men to protect them. All around are growling dogs, the soul-devouring demons of "The Summons to the Soul," "deadly dragons shaking their golden rings": all the earth is the enemy of the good man, and he finds himself alone. Do not move, do not stir, "don't go out the door!" In this context the recluse's determination to remain immobile (*ch'u* 處, "to stay put," and *yin* 隱, "to keep hidden," are among the most common terms for reclusion) has new force. It is no wonder that the hermit "shuts his gate" and keeps it forever closed. The god's power to protect virtue is the power to grant early death. At first we accept Li Ho's speculative explanation, that Ch'ü Yüan was carried off to the heavens in the carriage of the god; but in face of consistent and recurrent injustice, the promise of apotheosis weakens to a mockery: the god destroys to preserve. It is so clear, but it is also so unacceptable: the violent anger of the closing image (facing a wall, not going out the door) shatters the fragile rationalization.

Li Ho's poem raves chaotically, moving toward a sentiment with a taboo so strong that it garbles expression: the questions shouted at the wall, rudely put to Heaven, expose a rage at Heaven and a suspicion of malice in Heaven's workings—"Why . . .? Why . . .?" The good man, beset and seeing the destruction of all that were good and alone, doubts the essential benevolence of the god, of personified Heaven, of the senior. The destruction of the best may not be redemption from an evil world, but rather a cold indifference, or worse, an active cruelty on the part of Heaven itself. Li Ho died at twenty-six.

The explicit imperative of the title is identical to the silent imperative of "The Summons to the Soul": do not go forth. But here there is no summoner, no promise of rest and companionship against surrounding enmity. There can only be a warning, given to others who will surely find themselves similarly alone. Ch'ü Yüan faces a wall and sees painted there examples of soli-

tary goodness destroyed: you know the doom of recurrence; you will be destroyed whether you go out or not; but don't go out the door. The need to warn and the certainty of the warning's futility is a contradiction born out of pain, a contradiction which corresponds to making known to all that "in all the world no one knows me."

If the pattern were confined to the gaudy demonology of the *Ch'u-tz'u* world, we might be able to regard it with no more than a shudder, as if recalling some archaic truth. But the pattern takes a shape in the human world: the mythical demons and malevolent redeemer are gone, and we are left with only the bare, secular condition—the good man, the poet, surrounded by a community bearing him unremitting and inexplicable malice. Thus Meng Chiao 孟郊 (751–814) in "Despair" 懊惱:¹⁴

If you hate poetry, you'll have office;

惡詩皆得官

But love it, and you'll cling in vain to the hills,

好詩空抱山

Cling to the hills, cold, on the verge of death,

抱山冷歿歿

The whole day spent in bitter sorrow.

終日悲顏顏

Worse, if you love poetry, they'll be jealous:

好詩更相嫉

Swords and pikes will grow in their teeth.

劍戟生牙關

The ancient sages have long been dead,

前賢死已久

But we are still chewing them over.

猶在咀嚼間

With this dying twig of a body,

以我殘杪身

Pure and austere, I fostered a noble calm;

清峭養高閑

I sought that calm, did not reach that calm—

求閑未得閑

Glaring and roaring, the crowd mocked me.

衆誚瞋齷齪

Like other poets, Meng Chiao gives a declension of solitude, but its antitheses are set forth in an unusual, disturbing sequence. An expulsion narrative begins the poem: the times are awry; office, a place in the community of the center, is reserved for those who "hate poetry." But poetry is the mark of talent and the means to publish worth; through it the best are recognized and advanced; therefore loving and understanding poetry is essential to the maintenance of the polity. Values are inverted: the good poet is cast out.

Surrounded by snarling jealousy, the good poet is driven forth to isolation in the hills. The narrative is too familiar; its end is despair and death. The poet attempts the only possible escape from the inevitable conclusion: he makes the "reclusive conversion," a change of his own values by which vertiginous isolation becomes peaceful solitude. This is the freedom of "learning lessons," the capacity to change our understanding if we cannot change outer necessity. Tradition assures him that a renunciation of his desire to join the society of others will bring peace of mind and release from suffering. But in Meng Chiao's poem, the reclusive conversion fails, as it is *never* supposed to fail. The hostile crowd reappears; they gather around the noble recluse; glaring and roaring like beasts, they tear apart his hard-won calm.

Through all these poems runs the faintly concealed threat of being eaten. To become alien, "of a different species," removes the taboos of cannibalism, and the man alone becomes prey. In "The Summons to the Soul" and "Don't Go Out the Door!" the threat is explicit: demons eat souls; fierce beasts eye you, slavering; the man alone is hunted down. In "Despair" the teeth of the

poetry-haters become weapons, the ancient sages are chewed (rolled in the mouth as they are recited), and in the end, the poet-prey is cornered. The fear is primitive: with expulsion society's precarious restraints break down.

As the man alone becomes a creature of prey, so for him the inimical society becomes alien and beastlike. There is a community of brothers, but once the man is separated from the flock, the others undergo a metamorphosis. They become creatures of a different species; and even if they do not tear and rend you, they will no longer recognize you as kin: they are utterly indifferent to your solitude. It can happen by the slightest straying.

Tu Fu Lone Goose¹⁵

孤雁

Wild goose, alone, neither eats nor drinks;

孤雁不飲啄

It flies crying out, voice longing for the flock.

飛鳴聲念群

Who is it pities that single shadow

誰憐一片影

Now lost in a thousand folds of cloud?

相失萬重雲

Gaze as far as you can—as if still in sight.

望盡似猶見

Many calls of lament—as though still heard.

哀多如更聞

Crows of the wilderness pay it no heed—

野鷄無意緒

They squawk and caw in their multitudes.

鳴噪自紛紛

When the creature of isolation is set in opposition to the community of others, metamorphoses clarify the antithesis. At first, the community to which the solitary goose belongs is a specula-

tive flock of great white birds in flight. In the goose's eyes, their shapes dissolve into masses of white clouds, blocking all sound and sight. A community reappears, "of a different species," multitudes of black crows, diminutive and earthbound. As the native flock of wild geese seems to have had no care for the loss of one of their own, so the crows of wilderness pay the great bird no heed.

But Tu Fu is the master of transformations: in its solitude the wild goose has secretly gained a peculiar victory over those who have abandoned it; there is beauty and nobility in its pathos, a grandeur confirmed by its contrast to the flock's second shape—ugly and raucous crows. A flock desired becomes a flock to be scorned. But, of course, we are not supposed to recognize the metamorphosis of the flock; that is a dark truth; instead we should note only how intensely the bird longs for its kind, how it finds itself among strangers, "of a different species." The traditional interpretation of the poem is that Tu Fu here expresses longing for his distant brothers.

In all the land no one knows the bird, and the bird is nobler than them all. It is not true: someone does know the bird—the solitary poet who also wanders separated from *his* kind. *He* is the bird's true mate; *he* hears the goose's cries and recognizes in them longing for the flock—he is the *chih-yin*, the one who "knows the tones," the true meaning behind the sounds he hears; he is the "understander."

Who is it pities that single shadow

誰憐一片影

Now lost in a thousand folds of cloud?

相失萬重雲

Gaze as far as you can—as if still in sight.

望盡似猶見

Many calls of lament—as though still heard.

哀多如更聞

There are sustained uncertainties here. "Who pities?"—the answer is "none," no bird of the flock; the answer is "I do." Who

gazes?—the lone goose gazes after the flock, cries out and listens for their cries; Tu Fu gazes too, watching the single bird disappear, listening to its fading cries. Within the ambiguity, the second, prospective community of two (bird and its *chih-yin*) dissolves as the bird's last hope to regain the flock fails: the flock fades from the single bird's sight and hearing; the single bird is lost to the poet. The bird's condition is understood; its nature is "known"; but the bird will never know that it has been known and appreciated. Such is the fate of the poetry which speaks of being alone. Both the bird and the poet remain in their essential isolation.

In Dark Silence, Alone

Hell and paradise share a common border: the terrain and customs of the provinces that lie on either side are so close that only the most subtle shifts in perception let us know that we have passed from bliss into torment. There is a paradise of solitude where the spirit takes its ease, released from the insistent demands of society; there we find an austere simplicity, a reduction of those lures of the senses which stir desire in us and thus make us feel the crampings of want. The plainness of this corner of paradise is a refuge from excess—too many pleasures and pains, too many connections with others, an overload of activity and emotion. Just over the border in hell, conditions are much the same—a blank darkness, an intense and palpable nothingness in which the human consciousness is utterly isolated and seeks desperately the confirmation of something outside itself.

Recall the aggressive celebration of indolence in Po Chü-yi's "On Laziness":

I might have had office, but
 I'm too lazy to go for appointment;
 I have fields, but I'm too lazy to farm them.
 My roof has holes—too lazy to patch it.
 Rips in my robes—too lazy to mend them.

In Po Chü-yi's *Collected Works*, "On Laziness" is appropriately located in a section known as "Easeful Contentments." But the poem which follows it seems an uneasy and discontented member of the section; it lies exactly on the border of the neighboring province of hell. Here too is inactivity and the lack of both connections and duties.

Winter Night¹⁶

冬夜

My household is poor, kin and those I care for
have gone their ways;

家貧親愛散

In sickness I have quitted all friendships and companions.

身病交遊罷

Not a single person is before my eyes,

眼前無一人

As I lie here in this village, shut up in my study.

獨掩村齋卧

Fading, dropping, the fire in my lamp grows dark,

冷落燈火暗

The tattered curtains are drawn open,

離披簾幕破

And rustling, rapping, outside my window

策策窗戶前

I can even hear the new snow coming down.

又聞新雪下

As the years advance, I am gradually sleeping less;

長年漸省睡

I get up at midnight, sit straight and alert.

夜半起端坐

If I had not taught my mind "sitting in oblivion,"

不學坐忘心

How could I have endured brooding stillness like this?

寂寞安可過

The body, insensate "thing," is cast into this world,

兀然身寄世

The mind, in full freedom, is given over to Change.

浩然心委化

It has been like this for four years now—

如此來四年

One thousand, three hundred nights.

一千三百夜

The consolations of nihilistic self-discipline—an oblivious yielding oneself to change and regarding the body as a mere insensate "thing"—ring hollow in a man who counts one thousand three hundred nights, who seems aware of every single one of them with the same acuteness as that which makes him hear the new snow falling. Here all the contentments of nearby paradise find their negative counterparts—solitude becomes isolation, freedom from bonds to others becomes abandonment, lazy immobility becomes confinement. The lamp grows low; darkness and cold intensify; in the silence the senses fix upon the faint sound of the snow. Infirmities of sickness and aging lead not to dullness but to a nervous alertness—shallow sleep from which he wakes involuntarily in midnight's black stillness. His detachment is wrested from the hunger of unsatisfied senses, and he repeats the old truisms—my body is a thing, my mind passes on freely. That movement of the mind, severing its ties with the body-thing, is the soul's flight—but here, not into demon realms but into an opaqueness. Counting the nights shocks us from belief in the success of his studied oblivion. And yet without that art of forgetting, "how," he asks, "could I have endured?" He must have endured it, and it was clearly unendurable.

A poetry of pure nothingness is impossible. The experience of falling away from the world is more perfectly embodied in the distortions which occur as the starving senses seize upon things, ears and eyes focussing on the faintest movements and sounds.

In the disorder of proportions, the reader recognizes the depths of the poet's disorientation. Just over the border in paradise, these shifts in proportion are a mark of the perfected and philosophical mind, the capacity of an unclouded consciousness which is open to all things; in hell's province these same sensations can be nightmarish, the din of battling ants.

Meng Chiao An Old Man's Bitterness¹⁷

老恨

With no son to copy out the words,
無子抄文字

Poems chanted by an old man mostly flutter,
fall away.

老吟多飄零

Often I spit them out into my bed,
有時吐向床

But pillow and mat don't know how to listen.
枕席不解聽

These battling ants are so very tiny, yet
鬪蟻甚微細

In sickness I hear them with perfect clarity:
病聞亦清冷

When large things and small cannot be told apart,
小大不自識

It's the state of Nature, perfection of our being.
自然天性靈

Proportion, a sense of relative size and value, implies standpoint and measure; society enshrines the merely human measure of things and calls it truth. But in nature, where the infinite and infinitesimal are equally valid measures, relative proportion becomes meaningless: there is no large or small, no significant or insignificant. Such is the lesson repeated again and again in the

Chuang-tzu. The diseased sharpness of his senses should be proof of release from the blind human measure. He is free of the false stability which accompanies ties to others; isolation and childlessness should have no meaning. But the title and the tone of the first two couplets let us know with what bitter irony he praises his spiritual perfection: it is a mock resolution.

Distorted impressions enter the poet's mind, and the words that emerge from his mind also miss their mark. Isolation joins with sickness to generate hallucinatory shifts in proportion; communication and human presence might restore the common measure of things. But there is no one to hear his poems, no son to copy the poems, no one to read the poems which the son might have copied.

A poem bursts from turbulent inner silence and crosses empty spaces toward others so that the poet can be known. The old man's poems are a vain wind, composed orally, unheard by others and never written down: he "spits out" the words, down into his sickbed to be lost in the inanimate ignorance of pillow and mat. They "flutter and fall": the phrase describes leaves, as if, in disgorging the poems, there were some strange deterioration, a futile spending of substance that will at last bring him to the condition of a bleak and barren autumn tree (which is, throughout Meng Chiao's poetry, a frightening counterpart of the self).

The man who is unheard hears all too well; he hears the contention of ants in a microcosm of the raucous human world. In the T'ang tale "Governor of Southern Bough," a young man fell asleep and in dream entered a kingdom of ants; there he passed a lifetime of government service and political struggle, advancing and retreating in the rhythms of traditional biography, only to awake and find that all his consuming desires and fears had been nothing more than a brief dream. A delirium of bitterness and sickness can transport Meng Chiao to the scale of the ant kingdom; he achieves that relativity of perception cultivated by so many; he discovers not freedom but the repetition of an alien ugliness.

The solitary soul set upon by ravenous demons changes into a man alone in emptiness: roaring creatures all around diminish

into roaring ants, then fade into silence and darkness. Confinement, isolation, darkness, and cold have the fascination of horror. The good man whose worth is unrecognized may find himself in a blankness rather than in a wilderness. King Wen, father of the Chou Dynasty's founder (1122 B.C. is the traditional date of the dynasty's establishment), was a blameless man; yet the tyrannical last ruler of the Shang Dynasty cast King Wen in prison. In a "Lute Song" 琴操 Han Yü imagined that ancient imprisonment ('Darkness of Captivity' by King Wen in Yu-li 拘幽操 文王姜里作):¹⁸

Eyes in darkness,

目窈窈兮

Fixed they are, blind.

其凝其盲

Droning in my ears,

耳肅肅兮

Listen but no sound.

聽不聞聲

Dawn never rises,

朝不日出兮

See no moon, no stars by night.

夜不見月與星

Knowing there is, and knowing nothing:

有知無知兮

I am dead, I am alive.

爲死爲生

Yaaaa!

嗚呼

My crime must be punished—

臣罪當誅

Our Heaven-supported king is sage, discerning.

天王聖明

The final word of the poem is *ming*, "discernment," "brightness," "clarity" of the senses. *Ming* is the antithesis of the poem's darkness, and though King Wen piously attributes *ming* to the Shang king (for the ruler, the senior, is always presumed to be *ming*), it is Wen in his darkness who is, in fact, *ming*; it is the Shang tyrant who is, in fact, in darkness. Strange inversions occur between the best and worst, and admission of guilt may be the distinguishing mark of virtuous innocence. Though wrongly punished, the good man assumes his own guilt: the ruler's sage discernment does not err (and indeed it *was* King Wen's son who later overthrew the same Shang king, a peculiar moral circularity in which rebellion is punished before its commission, and the punishment helps engender the crime). Readers often responded with hostility to the strident self-righteousness in the poetry of Ch'ü Yüan and Meng Chiao; the poetry of expulsion more often mingled proud vindication with self-abasing confession. The two contrary sentiments are the Janus faces of the same emotion: the best and worst are joined in the singleness of being alone.

The person in darkness may cry out like King Wen; like Meng Chiao he may speak in bitter irony at being unheard; he may count the nights he has been alone in darkness. But if he possesses a certain kind of talent and a special grace, he may, by a delicate adjustment of the senses, transpose the melody from a minor to a major key. Lu Yu performs such an adjustment, slips back over the border into paradise, when he "Draws Water from the Well by Night and Makes Tea" 夜汲井水煮茶 :¹⁹

I rose from my sickbed, done looking through my books;

病起罷觀書

The cool night grew longer; I drew my hands into my sleeves.

袖手清夜永

From the neighborhood all around, stillness—not a voice—

四鄰悄無聲

And the fire in the lamp was just then growing dim and chill.

燈火正淒冷

Even my servant boy from the hills was sleeping soundly,

山童亦睡熟

So I drew my own water to boil for tea.

汲水自煎茗

There was the sound of the well-pulley creaking,

鏘然輓轆聲

Then a hundred feet down the ancient well sang.

百尺鳴古井

Within me every organ shivered from the cold:

肺腑凜清寒

From hairtips into my bones I was revived, aware.

毛骨亦蘇省

I went back in: moonlight filled the corridors;

歸來月滿廊

And I hated to tread on the plum tree's thin, sparse shadows.

惜踏疎梅影

Here are the familiar conditions of a soul going into darkness: the gathering cold, silence, the confinement of sickness, a dying lamp, isolation from others. But as the poet takes note of his servant boy's sound sleeping, the transposition of solitude's melody into a major key begins: absence of company is construed to be within the poet's own choice; allowing the boy to sleep on is an act of generosity that draws Lu Yu into activity and the restoration of his fading senses. Out of silence Lu Yu makes and appreciates sound; out of cold and darkness, he goes to heat and light in the fire where he boils water for his tea; confined to his bed by sickness, he chooses to go forth. The final image—moonshadows of those thin and complex branches from which the flowers have fallen—fixes the attention of senses made so fine and sharp that if he listens very closely, he might just hear the din of ants. His heightened awareness brings him to the very edge of a hallucinatory grotesque; but the boundaries are not crossed; he treads cautiously across an image of exquisite beauty.

The soul may have the freedom to transform a solitary hell into a solitary paradise, to make a successful conversion of values—but to be drawn out of its solitude, back into the community, the soul requires a summons. A first-person voice does not speak of itself to anyone who will listen; but in the unnatural pressure of isolation, this unnatural direction of voice becomes natural: the man alone does speak to anyone who will listen; he blindly seeks a *chih-yin*; he asks a summons.

Tu Fu passed the last years of his life traveling down the Yangtze toward the land of the lakes; during that journey he made his home for a while in K'uei-chou, the "city of the White Emperor" (god of the west). The T'ang prefecture of K'uei-chou lay just within the boundaries of what had once been Ch'u, the homeland of Ch'ü Yüan. The town of K'uei-chou was located at the western mouth of the Wu Gorges, whose cliffs rose up darkly on either side of the river downstream. Also to the east of K'uei-chou was Wu Mountain, where legend told that a king of old Ch'u had met the mountain's goddess in a dream, and haunted by the memory, he had erected a temple in her honor (probably the "royal lodge" referred to below). As the poet gazes east, then west at dusk from K'uei-chou's stucco battlements, the landscape might assume the topography of ritual: a flickering soul surrounded by the terrors of darkness, or someone alone in a dark room with a fading candle, or here, on the white battlements of White Emperor City, as the last sunlight is cast back eastward along the river's course through the mountains, and sparkling in the water before him.

Tu Fu Sunlight Cast Back²⁰

返照

North of the Ch'u king's royal lodge,
this moment, yellowing dusk;

楚王宮北正黃昏

West of White Emperor City,
the marks of a passing rain.

白帝城西過雨痕

Sunlight cast back falls to the river,
topples the cliffs of stone,

返照入江翻石壁

Returning clouds hug to the trees,
mountain villages disappear.

歸雲擁樹失山邨

Frailty of age and sickness of lung
permit only resting aloof:

衰年病肺惟高枕

At this last frontier in grief for these times,
I have early shut my door.

絕塞愁時早閉門

Amid the tumult of tigers and jackals
I cannot linger long—

不可久留豺虎亂

Here in the Southland there is indeed
the unsummoned soul.

南方實有未招魂

In his dream the Ch'u king and the goddess bedded together, and as she took her leave of him, she said: "At dawn I am the clouds of morning; at sundown I am the moving rain."²¹ And this evening, a thousand years later, rain still passes before the poet's eyes, recalling solitudes and losses—the loss of mate which left a king of old Ch'u in the time of his sorrow and which, in the *Li Sao*, drove forth Ch'ü Yüan's soul in its desperate solitary quest. The soul goes into darkness; the forms of the pattern are everywhere present: flickers of light in gathering darkness, immobility of sickness, the locked gate, clouds which swallow villages and block sight, a "tumult" of beasts and violent men all around. The poet looks out into this scene of last sunlight cast back; he recognizes the pattern clearly and sums it up: "Here in the Southland there is indeed the unsummoned soul."

Civilizations live in their repetitions, playing the same melo-

dies over and over again in countless variations. From this pattern of isolation—repeated in landscapes, in dark rooms, and in the quiet imagination—there forms a strange community of the solitary, who, if they cannot reach and summon one another, can at least offer a “libation of tears.” Nearly half a century after Tu Fu, Meng Chiao saw in the Wu Gorges the same play of shattered light in the darkness. But Meng Chiao saw a landscape of nightmare, an undisguised hell, where, in nature’s grisly punning, the bones of the “upright” dangle “upright.” Here the ghostly flashes of light are the community of solitary souls, wrongly exiled and never summoned from a palpable blackness amid stone and seething water.

Meng Chiao Laments of the Gorges IV²²

峽哀

Three gorges, a single thread of sky;

三峽一線天

Three gorges, thousands of cables of streams.

三峽萬繩泉

Slanted above, shattering sunlight and moonlight,

上仄碎日月

Below it constrains a wild frothing.

下掣狂漪漣

One or two dots of smashed souls

破魄一兩點

Left hundreds of years in this hardened gloom.

凝幽數百年

For radiance the gorges admit no noon,

峽暉不停午

But for perils it has much hungry foam.

峽險多饑涎

Tree roots lock in bare coffins,

樹根鑲枯棺

And the upright bones hang dangling, dangling.

直骨裊裊懸

On the boughs of trees a weeping frost roosts,

樹枝哭霜棲

Tones of wailing—faint and far, far away.

哀韻杳杳鮮

The exile, fallen, a sinking in his gut,

逐客零落腸

Reaches this point to simmer in the boiling fires:

到此湯火煎

His fate is like a spun thread,

性命如紡績

And his path follows along a rope.

道路隨索緣

A libation of tears to mourn spirits in the waves—

尊淚弔波靈

The spirits in the waves take them flashing.

波靈將閃然

EPILOGUE

Someone said: You can't end it that way—it's too dark.

I answered: I couldn't help it—that was where it went.

Someone said: Well, it won't do. You have to have a Colonus to take us beyond the blindness.

I said: If you think it's necessary . . .

Someone said: It certainly is necessary. You left us there in the gorges' blackness, staring down at souls flickering in rough waters. Now take us out of there.

I said: Don't worry—you'll come out quite naturally. The Yangtze's waters flow on downstream, past White Sands Station, then out into the ocean and up around into the River of Stars, where you see those same spots of light flickering in the darkness. Every scene in Chinese poetry goes through a metamorphosis and appears elsewhere, its quality changed, the forms of the first scene still half hidden inside its new shape. There's something in it like the metamorphosis of the P'eng and K'un in the *Chuang-tzu*.

Someone queried: The P'eng and K'un . . . ?

I said: I'll tell you a story: "In the dark Northern Deeps there is a fish called K'un, or 'Roe,' so huge that no one knows how many thousand leagues long it is. It changes into a bird, and the bird is called P'eng. And how many thousand leagues long

its back is—no one knows that either. But when it stirs into flight, its wings are like a cover of cloud all across the sky. The seas move in their courses, and then this bird sets off for the dark Southern Deeps, known also as Heaven's Pool." So, to take us out of the gorges, all we need is a metamorphosis; and our poet can sail from one dark deep to the other, down the river and around up into heaven, where he will be a wandering star in the night sky. There's a story about that too, how every year a man noticed a raft floating past on the river, until finally one year he got on it and found himself carried off into the Milky Way: to earthbound men he seemed a "wandering star."

Someone said: You have something in mind, don't you?

I said: Yes—Tu Fu, after he left K'uei-chou and travelled on downstream, "Spending the Night at White Sands Post Station" 宿白沙驛:¹

水宿仍餘照
人烟復此亭
驛邊沙舊白
湖外草新青

萬象皆春氣
孤槎自客星
隨波無限月
的的近南溟

After nights spent on water,
now still in last shining, the smoke
from men's dwellings, and then, this pavilion.
Beside the station, sands white as ever,
past the lake grasses
recently green. A million forms
all animate by spring's breath; but I,
on the lone raft, still
the wandering star.
Along with the waves, moonlight
infinite, and on its sparkling
they grow closer now—
the Southern Deeps.

NOTES

INDEX

NOTES

Essay One

- 1 Hiraoka Takeo *et al.*, *comps. Tōdai no shihen* (Kyoto, 1964-65) [hereafter *Tōdai*], no. 11433; *Chiu-chia chi-chu Tu-shih*, vol. 2 of William Hung, ed., *A Concordance to the Poems of Tu Fu*, Harvard-Yenching Sinological Institute Series no. 14 (rpt. Taipei, 1966) [hereafter *Chiu-chia*], 27/10, p. 415. Note that in line 7 I read 飄飄 in place of the *Chiu-chia* 飄零. For another extensive and rather different discussion on this poem, see Shuen-fu Lin, *The Transformation of the Chinese Lyric: Chiang K'uei and Southern Sung Tz'u Poetry* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 100-106.
- 2 "Miscellaneous Sonnets" XXXVI, "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802," William Wordsworth, *Wordsworth Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, new ed. rev. Ernest de Selincourt, Oxford Standard Authors (Oxford, 1978), p. 214.
- 3 Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *The Theory of Literature* (New York, 1956), p. 25.
- 4 The correlative structure of traditional Chinese cosmology is a complicated area of study unto itself. Recommended are Joseph Neeham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2, *History of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge, 1956), and Hellmut Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth, and Man in The Book of Changes* (Seattle, 1977).
- 5 The semantic range of *wen* is presented most fully in English in James J. Y. Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature* (Chicago, 1975), pp. 7-9.
- 6 E.g. *Shih* 285. For a discussion of this and related issues, see Wang Ching-hsien, "Towards Defining a Chinese Heroism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 95.1 (1975), pp. 25-35.
- 7 *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* (*Ssu-pu ts'ung-kan* ed. [hereafter *SPTK*]), 1.1a-1b.
- 8 In other texts, music is given its own privilege as the form in which the cosmic order is most perfectly embodied: as in the West, music was associated in early China with cosmic harmony. Note, also, interesting parallels between Liu Hsieh's argument in favor of literature here and Hegel's privileging of literature in the *Philosophy of Fine Art*, III.2, introduction.
- 9 There were, of course, sophisticated works on the theory of painting, but even in these we find a strong tendency to reject the imitation of merely visible forms.

- 10 *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* (SPTK), 10.1a-2a.
 11 *Ibid.*, 10.10b.
 12 *Wen fu*, in *Liu-ch'en chu Wen hsüan* (SPTK), 17.14a.
 13 *Ibid.*, 17.14a-14b.
 14 Li O, *Shang Sui Kao-tsu ko wen-hua shu*, in *Ch'üan Sui wen*, 20.8b in Yen K'o-chün, ed., *Ch'üan shang-ku San-tai Ch'in Han San-kuo Liu-ch'ao wen* (Kuang-ya shu-chü, 1893; rpt. Taipei, 1963).
 15 *Tōdai*, no. 10973; *Chiu-chia*, 19/5, p. 295. For full notes to this poem, see Stephen Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High T'ang* (New Haven, 1981), pp. 390-91. In several cases in these essays I have revisited poems discussed in *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry*, and in at least one case I have pointed out many of the same features. I hope that this will not strain the patience of my readers—that they will recognize the difference in the two tours.
 16 *Tōdai*, no. 10538; *Chiu-chia*, 2/22, pp. 44-45.
 17 *Tōdai*, no. 10539; *Chiu-chia*, 2/23, p. 45.
 18 For a fuller discussion of the Images, see Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth, and Man*, pp. 190-221.
 19 Wang Pi, *Ming Hsiang*, in *Chou Yi lüeh-li*, in *Chou Yi* (SPTK), 10.8a.
 20 *Liu-ch'en chu Wen hsüan* (SPTK), 26.33a-33b.
 21 *Tōdai*, no. 29574; *Li Yi-shan shih-chi* (SPTK), 5.21b.
 22 *Tōdai*, no. 17790; *Chu Wen-kung chiao Ch'ang-li hsien-sheng chi* (SPTK), 1.16a.

Essay Two

1 As we will see throughout these essays, the case of metaphor is extremely complicated in the *shih* tradition. True metaphorical operations of meaning do occur, but because their assumptions and history are their own, it is essential not to confuse them with metaphor as it has developed in the Western literary tradition. When the ground of meaning of the poem as a whole is metaphorical, the mode is usually allegory or a single paradigm of culturally determined substitutions. For example, *yung-wu*, "poems on things," is a subgenre coded with the possibility of metaphorical reference. Within this subgenre, a poem on flowers may be taken as referring to women: the equation is supported by a long tradition of the mutual substitution of women and flowers. On the other hand, it is equally possible to write a *yung-wu* on flowers which is indeed about flowers but which draws on the associations of female beauty. Furthermore, a poem on flowers which might be taken to refer to women might also be taken to refer simply to flowers. But without such a tradition of prior use, a metaphorical referent is unlikely.

The case of *yüeh-fu*, an independent category only loosely contained within the generic scope of the *shih*, is singular. This was usually a fictional genre, treating the experiences of conventional "types." *Yüeh-fu* were often taken as referring cryptically to the poet's own situation or to some other

situation in the poet's historical world. Moreover, *yüeh-fu* allowed particular license in the use of metaphor within the text.

Metaphor within poems (as opposed to a metaphorical ground of meaning for the poem as a whole) tended also to be subgenerically coded and supported by a tradition of prior use; for example, the "pine" of a *ku-feng* points more strongly to a metaphorical condition of rectitude than to a botanic phenomenon. Metaphorical operations, unsupported by a tradition of past use, *may* occur within nonfictional occasional poems, but they tend to be taken as subjective acts on the part of the poet—showing playfulness, confusion, or some other state of mind that might bring the *person* to call things by their wrong names (cf. Longinus's discussion of the propriety of diction in *Peri Hupsous*). This latter case is of crucial importance in reading metaphor in *shih* and applies equally to metaphorical operations which *are* supported by a tradition of use: metaphor usually refers the reader to the poet's state of mind at a certain moment.

Various attempts have been made to recover such an attractive notion as metaphor for the general mode of meaning in Chinese poetry. I recant my earlier formulation "metaphor of displacement" (see "Praise Poetry in the T'ang," in Ronald Miao, ed., *Studies in Chinese Poetics* [San Francisco, 1978], pp. 129-62). The best of these attempts to recover metaphor have been Kao Yu-kung and Mei Tsu-lin, "Meaning, Metaphor, and Allusion in T'ang Poetry" (*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 38, no. 2 [Dec. 1978]), and Pauline Yu, "Metaphor and Chinese Poetry" (*Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 3, no. 2 [July 1981]). In both cases, the eternally elastic term *metaphor* has been stretched to account for accurate presentations of the operations of meaning in the *shih*. I prefer to keep *metaphor* in the tradition of a substitution trope—not simply as any relation between two terms, but as a subordinate operation of reference in which the first term has subsistence only in that subordinate relation. The danger of extending *metaphor* to relations of juxtaposition is that it will assimilate the Chinese case to Western modes of metaphorical reading. This danger is apparent in the use of the term in application to *shih* by some others who have a less firm grasp of the operations of meaning in Chinese poetics than is evidenced in the two articles cited above.

- 2 Modern modes of literary reading have grown out of a long tradition of literary theory and hermeneutics, but there have been other modes of reading in the Western tradition, and in some of these, the biographical circumstances of the author have been taken as the ultimate referent of the poem. Though such reading traditions are much closer to the Chinese tradition than purely metaphorical modes of reading, they still presume fictionality and the irrelevance of direct historical truth in the surface of the text. We might take "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" as referring ultimately to Keats's nature, but should we prove that in fact Keats never saw Chapman's Homer, it would not discredit the personal truth of the poem. "Sincerity" (in the Western sense) is not the same thing as factual "honesty."
- 3 *Mao Shih* (SPTK), 1.1b.

- 4 See *Analects*, XVII.9: "By the Poems one may stir and one may allow reflective consideration" 詩可以興可以觀. In one special case, the "reader" may be the ruler or Heaven, who, as a result of what they have observed in the poem, may act upon the age to change the equation.
- 5 *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* (SPTK), 10.8a. See Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, I.viii.6: "It is not possible to have true pictures or statues of Cyrus, Alexander, Caesar, no nor of the kings or great personages of much later years; for the originals cannot last, and the copies but leese of the life and truth. But the images of men's wits and knowledges remain in books, exempted from the wrong of time and capable of perpetual renovation." So much for the striking similarities; the next sentence makes clear that this knowledge is not of persons but of ideas: "Neither are they fitly to be called images, because they generate still, and cast their seeds in the mind of others, provoking and causing infinite actions and opinions in succeeding ages."
- 6 *Chou Yi* (SPTK), 7.10b.
- 7 *Analects*, XII.12.
- 8 *Mencius*, IIA.ii.7.
- 9 *Chou Yi* (SPTK), 8.6b. See also 7.1a: "Tendencies cluster according to natural category" 方以類聚.
- 10 While *lei* is primarily "natural category" and while the operations of *lei* in the *Yi-c'i:ing* involve the sharing of impulses by things of the same category (e.g., that many kinds of plants sprout in spring), *lei* may also serve as the basis of truly metaphorical operations. In this latter case, one notes less the categorical identity than the *difference* of the entities which share the category. When Wang Yi writes of allegory in the *Li Sao*, he notes that Ch'ü Yüan "draws on things of the same category for allegorical reference" 引類譬諭. When Liu Hsieh writes of *pi*, "comparison," in the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung*, it is "when in things of contiguous principle a [shared] natural category is discriminated in order to refer to some matter" 附理者切類以指事; i.e., the metaphorical "third term" has a basis in nature.
- 11 *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* (SPTK), 7.8a.
- 12 The canonical statement of this is in *Shang Shu* (SPTK), 1.11a.
- 13 *Tōdai*, no. 05848; *Wang Yu-ch'eng chi* (SPTK), 6.3b.
- 14 *Tōdai*, no. 20671; *Li Ho ko-shih p'ien* (SPTK), 1.6b.
- 15 *Mao Shih* (SPTK), 1.2b.
- 16 *Tōdai*, no. 28565; *Ting-mao chi* (SPTK), 2.1a.
- 17 An interesting footnote to this closing image is that the *T'ang-shih san-pai shou* (a popular anthology of the Ch'ing Dynasty) changes the closing line to "the waves of Lake Tung-t'ing" 洞庭波. The falling leaf casts the visual eye westward, beyond the physical limits of vision, to an awareness of autumn's hard winds raising storms in their eastward movement. But "aging in misty waves" is more true to the Late T'ang.
- 18 Vincent Shih, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (bilingual ed., Taipei, n.d.), p. 368.
- 19 *Tōdai*, no. 11267; *Chiu-chia*, 24/25, p. 384.
- 20 *Tōdai*, no. 05980; *Wang Yu-ch'eng chi* (SPTK), 5.18b.

- 21 *Liu-ch'en chu Wen hsüan* (SPTK), 52.9b.
 22 *Ibid.*, 17.14a.

Essay Three

- 1 Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester, 1973), p. 100.
- 2 *A Concordance to the Chuang Tzu*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series, Supplement no. 14 (Cambridge, 1956) [hereafter *Chuang-tzu*], 21/7/33-35.
- 3 *Huai-nan-tzu* (SPTK), 3.1a.
- 4 See also the discussion of correlative cosmology in Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth, and Man*.
- 5 The relation between divine and poetic creation was a commonplace in Renaissance literary theory, and it continues in the Western tradition in many disguises. The most widely known and obvious example of the Renaissance position is in Sidney, *An Apology*, p. 101. A few favorite later elaborations of the theme: Henry More disagrees with the Aristotelian distinction between the arbitrariness of history and poetic necessity on the grounds that only in the world's last act can we judge how well the divine Maker of plots has constructed the great play of human history; likewise John Dennis, in his critique of Addison's *Cato*, links "poetic justice" and the Last Judgment. Some of the later modifications of the theme can be seen in the introduction to Friedrich Schlegel's *Dialogue on Poetry* and in Hegel's attempt to reconcile necessity and free will (an old theological issue) in the *Philosophy of Fine Art*. Nor let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to note the contemporary interest in biblical hermeneutics as a ground of literary hermeneutics.
- 6 For the relation between eschatology and narrative, see Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford, 1966).
- 7 *Analects*, VII.1.
- 8 Liu K'ai, *Ying-tse*, in *Ho-tun hsien-sheng chi* (SPTK), 1.11a.
- 9 *Tōdai*, no. 11861; *Chiu-chia*, 35/25, p. 548.
- 10 *Tōdai*, no. 12167; *Ch'ien K'ao-kung chi* (SPTK), 5.2a.
- 11 *Tōdai*, no. 38415; *Ch'üan T'ang shih* (Peking, 1960) [hereafter *CTs*], p. 7925. In Ou-yang Hsiu's *Liu-yi shih-hua*, this couplet is attributed to Chou P'u 周朴.
- 12 *Tōdai*, no. 27160; *CTs*, p. 5781.
- 13 *Tōdai*, no. 08364; *CTs*, p. 1788.
- 14 See Siu-kit Wong, "Ch'ing and Ching in the Critical Writings of Wang Fuchih," in Adele Rickett, ed., *Chinese Approaches to Literature from Confucius to Liang Ch'i-ch'ao* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 121-150.
- 15 *Tōdai*, no. 10498; *Chiu-chia*, 1/5, pp. 5-6; Ch'ou Chao-ao, *Tu-shih hsiang-chu* (rpt. Taipei, 1974), 1.3a-4a, pp. 117-119. For full notes to this poem and discussion in another context, see Owen, *Great Age of Chinese Poetry*, pp. 187-88, 380-81.

- 16 Mencius, VIIA.24.
- 17 Tōdai, no. 11080; *Chiu-chia*, 20/26, p. 328.
- 18 Ts'ao P'i, *Lun-wen*, in *Liu-ch'en chu Wen hsüan* (SPTK), 52.10a.

Essay Four

- 1 Yeh Hsieh, "Yüan-shih," in Ting Fu-pao, ed., *Ch'ing shih-hua* (Shanghai, 1963), p. 577.
- 2 Tōdai, no. 10747; *Chiu-chia*, 10/21, pp. 144-45.
- 3 *Shang Shu* (SPTK), 1.11a.
- 4 *Chuang-tzu*, 79/28/56.
- 5 William Hazlitt, "On Shakespeare and Milton," in *Lectures on the English Poets* (London, 1910), pp. 48, 50.
- 6 For the examples that follow in the text, and many more, see Suzuki Shūji, *Kan Gi shi no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1967), pp. 364-72.
- 7 Tōdai, no. 44042; CTs, p. 9092.
- 8 *Su Wen-chung-kung shih p'ien-chu chi-ch'eng*, ed. Wang Wen-kao (rpt. Taipei, 1979) [hereafter *Su*], 3.1b-2a, pp. 1628-29.
- 9 Tōdai, no. 05987; *Wang Yu-ch'eng chi* (SPTK), 6.9b.
- 10 *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* (SPTK), 10.1.
- 11 Tōdai, no. 08454; CTs, p. 1809.

Aside: Only a Poem

- 1 Friedrich von Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, trans. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (University Park, Pa. 1968), p. 55.
- 2 In *Yü-chang Huang hsien-sheng wen-chi* (SPTK), 11.6b-7a.
- 3 *Chuang-tzu*, 16/6/24-25.
- 4 *Hou-Han shu* (Peking, 1965), pp. 2743-44.
- 5 *Su*, 38.1a-1b, pp. 3333-34.
- 6 Tōdai, no. 05880; *Wang Yu-ch'eng chi* (SPTK), 1.8b-9a.
- 7 *Su*, 45.17a, p. 3659.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 1.8a, p. 1559.
- 9 *Shih-chi* (Peking, 1959), pp. 2439-41.
- 10 Tōdai, no. 10977; *Chiu-chia*, 19/9, pp. 295-96.
- 11 *Shih-chi* (Peking, 1959), pp. 2377-82.
- 12 *Chung-hsü chih-tê chen-ching* (Lieh-tzu) (SPTK), 2.6a.

Essay Five

- 1 For the "straw dogs," see *Lao-tzu*, V.
- 2 *Chuang-tzu*, 17/6/45-56.
- 3 *Chien-chu T'ao Yüan-ming chi* (SPTK), 3.7a-7b.

- 4 *Tōdai*, no. 17866; *Chu Wen-kung chiao Ch'ang-li hsien-sheng chi* (SPTK), 4.10a.
- 5 *Su*, 4.18a, p. 1715.
- 6 *Lin-ch'uan hsien-sheng wen-chi* (SPTK), 83.2a-3a.
- 7 *Tōdai*, no. 28243; *Fan-ch'uan wen-chi* (SPTK), 4.6a.

Aside: Of Laziness

- 1 *Tōdai*, no. 21999; *Po-shih Ch'ang-ch'ing chi* (SPTK), 6.8b.

Essay Six

- 1 There is a special exception: the group may turn upon the man of virtue and cast him out. See essay 8, "Alone."
- 2 *Chu Wen-kung chiao Ch'ang-li hsien-sheng chi* (SPTK), 19.6b.
- 3 *CTs*, p. 7207.
- 4 *Tōdai*, no. 07867; *CTs*, p. 1671.
- 5 *Tōdai*, no. 20685; *Li Ho ko-shih p'ien* (SPTK), 1.9b.
- 6 *Tōdai*, no. 08651; *CTs*, p. 1853.
- 7 Compare Chia Tao, "Spending the Night in a Mountain Temple," *Tōdai*, no. 31733; *Chia Lang-hsien Ch'ang-chiang chi* (SPTK), 8.1b: "The hurrying moon goes against the direction of the moving clouds" 走月逆行雲.
- 8 *Wan-ling hsien-sheng chi* (SPTK), 10.8a-8b.
- 9 See especially the anecdote given in the *Liu-yi shih-hua*, translated by Jonathan Chaves in his *Mei Yao-ch'ên and the Development of Early Sung Poetry* (New York, 1976), pp. 45-46.
- 10 *Tōdai*, no. 08332; *CTs*, pp. 1779-80.
- 11 *Tōdai*, no. 10928; *Chiu-chia*, 18/11, p. 280.
- 12 The construction of this couplet depends on how we take the third couplet. "North of the Wei" picks up the third line, on Yü Hsin; conversely Pao Chao spent his days in Chiang-tung. This reinforces the second interpretation in which Yü Hsin refers to Tu Fu, presumably then detained in the northwest for his literary talents.
- 13 *Tōdai*, no. 05958; *Wang Yu-ch'eng chi* (SPTK), 4.19b.
- 14 *Tōdai*, no. 10922; *Chiu-chia*, 18/5, p. 277.

Essay Seven

- 1 The failure lies in not clearly distinguishing between general address (a person who, when he speaks, addresses fellow humans) and a collective statement of particular instances (many cases of one person speaking to someone else).
- 2 The distinction is put polemically to call attention to the deterioration of rela-

tion between the poet and those to whom he speaks: the way we read a poem is conditioned by tacit assumptions of whom the poem is "for." But in fact, this radical distinction does not perfectly distinguish Chinese and Western lyric modes, even the Western lyric as it has been written in the past few centuries. Many *shih* (and most *yüeh-fu*) look to a general and indefinite audience. And I, for one, am convinced that when Swift wrote a birthday poem for Stella, he was indeed writing *for* Stella and did not give a fig for the approbation of humanity at large.

- 3 *Tōdai*, no. 24436; *Po-shih Ch'ang-ch'ing chi* (SPTK), 69.14a.
- 4 *Tōdai*, no. 11139; *Chiu-chia*, 21/46, p. 355.
- 5 It is possible that the "original note" was the title of the poem in another text; if that is the case, then the note would be the correct title.
- 6 We suspect a disingenuousness in voices that claim to speak only for their own pleasure and end up with millions of listeners. Our suspicions are firmly rooted in the late-twentieth-century conviction that writing is not very much fun.
- 7 This is a crude statement of "Owen's First Law of Literary History": in any author, group, or age, a given measure of quality is assumed; that measure of quality will be evenly divided by the amount of material available to determine the average amount of value we can afford to grant to any single text.
- 8 *Chien-nan shih-kao*, p. 344, in *Lu Fang-weng ch'üan-chi* (rpt. Taipei, 1963).
- 9 See Sermon VI, Preached at St. Paul's, Christmas 1628, in John Donne, *LXXX Sermons* (London, 1640), pp. 54-55.

Essay Eight

- 1 *Tōdai*, no. 21744; *Po-shih Ch'ang-ch'ing chi* (SPTK), 1.1b.
- 2 The assurance of continual understanding differs from the anticipation of a moral reckoning after death before a Rhadamanthos or a Yama. To be "alone" in the Hellenic and Judaeo-Christian tradition can never be quite the same thing that it was in the Chinese tradition: in the West there is always an Other. The condition becomes, in the words of Plotinus (VI, ix, II), *phugē monou pros monon* ("a flight of the solitary to the solitary"), in the Cambridge Platonist John Smith's beautiful and revealing translation, "a flight of the Soul alone to God alone" ("The Excellency and Nobleness of True Religion," in C. A. Patrides, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists* [Cambridge, 1970], p. 180).
- 3 The term "rhapsody" is here used to refer to the various meters and styles of the *Ch'u-tz'u*, the anthology of Ch'u poetry and its imitations in which the *Li Sao* is preserved. These "rhapsodies" are metrically and linguistically distinct from the *shih*, though in the case of the *Li Sao* and other *Ch'u-tz'u* texts, they are no less *yen-chih*, "giving voice to what it intensely on the mind."
- 4 See David Hawkes, "The Quest of the Goddess," in Cyril Birch, ed., *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres* (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 42-68.

- 5 Western readers too have shown considerable interest in the *Li Sao* and other early poems of the *Ch'u-tz'u*. The difference between their interest and the interest of traditional Chinese readers is instructive: for Chinese readers the value of the *Li Sao* has been inextricable from the Ch'ü Yüan legend; Western readers have often been interested in the *Ch'u-tz'u* as an embodiment of shamanistic ritual. That interest in shamanism has inevitably resulted in muting or severing the poems' connections with Ch'ü Yüan; even when they accept Ch'ü Yüan's authorship of the rhapsodies attributed to him, there is little interest, scholarly or emotional, in the legend itself.
- 6 *Ch'u-tz'u pu-chu* (SPTK), 1.5a-7b.
- 8 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid., 9.2a-6a.
- 9 *Lao-tzu*, LXXX.
- 10 *Chien-chu T'ao Yüan-ming chi* (SPTK), 5.1a-2b.
- 11 *Tōdai*, no. 22186; *Po-shih Ch'ang-ch'ing chi* (SPTK), 10.1a-1b.
- 12 *Tōdai*, no. 20831; *Li Ho ko-shih p'ien* (SPTK), 4.6a.
- 13 *Ch'u-tz'u pu-chu* (SPTK), 3.1a-1b.
- 14 *Tōdai*, no. 19755; *Meng Tung-yeh chi* (SPTK), 4.5b.
- 15 *Tōdai*, no. 11777; *Chiu-chia*, 29/28, p. 457.
- 16 *Tōdai*, no. 22000; *Po-shih Ch'ang-ch'ing chi* (SPTK), 6.8b-9a.
- 17 *Tōdai*, no. 19716; *Meng Tung-yeh chi* (SPTK), 3.8b.
- 18 *Tōdai*, no. 17784; *Chu Wen-kung chiao Ch'ang-li hsien-sheng chi* (SPTK), 1.11a.
- 19 *Chien-nan shih-kao*, p. 236, in *Lu Fang-weng ch'üan-chi* (rpt. Taipei, 1963).
- 20 *Tōdai*, no. 11659; *Chiu-chia*, 28/22, p. 433.
- 21 *Liu-ch'en chu Wen hsüan* (SPTK), 19.1b.
- 22 *Tōdai*, no. 20059; *Meng Tung-yeh chi* (SPTK), 10.7b.

Epilogue

- 1 *Tōdai*, no. 11848; *Chiu-chia*, 25/9, pp. 543-44.

INDEX

Page numbers in italics denote pages containing extracts from the entry.

- Allegory*, 53, 254, 256-58, 294
Analects, 213-14, 217-18, 249
Analogy, 18, 26, 31, 34, 61, 67, 69, 213, 259
Aristotle, 94, 114, 192
- Book of Changes (I ching)*, 20, 45-47, 60-61, 85, 198
Book of Documents (Shū ching), 117
Book of Songs (Shih ching), 110, 191, 217; "Great Preface" of, 58, 62, 68, 84, 147
- Canon*, 9, 142, 238-39
Chi ("record"), 180, 186
Ch'ien Ch'i, 92-93
Chih-yin ("the one who knows the tone," "the understander"), 59, 68, 71, 73, 234, 251, 273-74, 282
Ch'in Shih-huang (the "First Emperor" of Ch'in), 158-59, 195-203
Ching ("scene"), 100, 102
Ch'ing ("subjective consciousness," "the affections"), 100, 102
Chin-shih examination, 27-29, 77
Ch'ou Chao-ao, 101-2
Ch'ü Yüan, 215-16, 254-59, 260-61, 265-66, 268, 280, 283
Chuan ("turn" in classical poetics), 74
Chuang-tzu, 80, 117, 148-49, 158, 163-66, 173, 278, 286-87
Confucius, 60-61, 84, 103, 213, 217-18
- Correlatives*, concept of, 18, 23-24, 26-34, 39, 42, 46-47, 68, 84-85
- Fa* ("rule"), 114-15
Feng, 17
Fictionality, 14-15, 34, 52-57, 60, 78, 84, 112, 125, 137, 166, 194, 210, 225, 242, 245, 248-49
Government service, 27-32, 251-53, 259-60
"Great Preface." *See Book of Songs*
- Han Shan*, 128
Han Yü, 51-52, 171, 192, 244, 279-80
Hazlitt, William, 124
Historical reality, 13-15, 30, 57, 63, 210
Hsieh Ling-yün, 46-47, 73
Hsin ("mind"), 19-20
Hsü Hun, 70-73, 75
Huai-nan-tzu, 72, 83, 93
Huang T'ing-chien, 145-62
- "Image" of the *Book of Changes*, 45-47
Imitation. See Mimesis
- Jonson*, Ben, 108
- Ku Fei-hsiung*, 97-98
Ku-liang Commentary, 61, 65
Kung-yang Commentary, 61, 65
- Lao-tzu*, 79

- Lei* ("natural category"), 18, 61, 294
Li ("natural order"), 77
 Li Ho, 33, 52, 65-68, 69, 199-203, 259, 266-70
 Li Kung-tso, 158
 Li Po, 33, 98-100, 138-41, 196-99, 201-2, 206, 208, 212-18, 243
Li Sao, 254-59, 265-66, 283
 Li Shang-yin, 30, 33, 47-50, 52
Lieh-tzu, 161, 240
 Liu Hsieh, 18-19, 20, 21-22, 23, 45, 59, 61, 63, 71, 73, 88
 Liu Yü-hsi, 156
 Lu Kuei-meng, 192
 Lu Yu, 137, 243-46, 247, 249, 280-81
 Lyric, 14, 39, 52, 63, 225, 248

 Manifestation, theory of, 19-21, 24-26, 34, 59, 63, 77-78
 Mei Yao-ch'en, 203-8
 Mencius, 60
 Meng Chiao, 259, 270-72, 277-78, 280, 284-85
 Metaphor, 15, 26, 34, 37, 39, 52, 54-57, 61-62, 77, 84, 91, 96-99, 201, 245-46, 248, 292-93
 Mimesis, 20-21, 84

 "Nineteen Old Poems," 127-28

 Occasional Poetry, 211-12, 225-42, 249

 Pao Chao, 215-16
 "Peach Blossom Spring," 153-54, 266
 Plato, 20-21, 165
 Po Chü-yi, 108, 127, 188-90, 233-36, 251, 266, 274-77
 Pound, Ezra, 126

 "Questions for Heaven" (*T'ien-wen*), 268

 Reclusion, 29-30, 32-33, 191, 239-41, 253, 260, 269, 271

 Schlegel, Friedrich, 143-44
 Shih ("poetry"), 3, 52-53, 57, 63, 84, 100, 103, 191-92, 194
Shih-hua ("poetry discussion"), 144-45
 Sidney, Sir Philip, 14, 78, 84
 Simile, 26-27, 130, 132-33
 "Southern Bough," "The Governor of" (T'ang tale), 158, 278
Spring and Autumn Annals (Ch'un-ch'iu), 60-61
 Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju, 200
 Su Shih, 128-33, 134, 136, 138, 145-51, 152-57, 176-79, 180
 "Summons to the Soul" (*Chao-hun*), 159, 263-66, 269, 271
 Sung Yü, 259, 263-66

 T'ao Ch'ien, 168-76, 266
 Taylor, Jeremy, 187
 Thomson, James, 187, 189-90
 Translation, 116-17, 121-26
 Ts'ao P'i, 77, 128
 Ts'ao Ts'ao, 127
 Tu Fu, 12-17, 23-27, 35-39, 46-47, 74-77, 90-91, 101-7, 116-21, 123, 125-26, 130, 138, 212-18, 220-22, 237-42, 243, 248, 272-74, 282-83, 287
 Tu Hsün-ho, 94-96
 Tu Mu, 181-82
Tzu-jan ("nature," "So-of-itself"), 79
Tzu-kung, 217-18

 Wang An-shih, 180-86, 187
 Wang Pi, 45
 Wang Wei, 63-65, 66, 75, 134-37, 153-54, 193, 219-20, 243
 Wang Yi, 256-57, 265-66, 268
Wen ("aesthetic pattern"), 18-21, 44-46, 85
Wen fu, 61, 77
Wen-hsin, tiao-lung, 18-19, 21-22, 45, 59, 61, 73, 135. *See also* Liu Hsieh

Wordsworth, William, 13-14, 42,
223-24, 247

Yang Wan-li, 137

Yeh Hsieh, 114-15

Yen Hui, 213-14, 217, 269

Yi ("concept," "sense"), 61, 90

Yin/Yang, 21, 38, 83-84, 202

Yü. *See* Metaphor

Yü Hsin, 215-16

Yu-chi. *See* Chi

Yüeh-fu, 48, 53, 292-93

Yung-wu ("poems on things"), 70

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