Period of Division

220 - 589

On Seclusion: Two Letters, a Dream, and a Satire

This section is prefaced by a letter from a Han official who in some ways anticipates the mood of the period of division. Burton Watson writes: "Yang Yün was the son of a prominent statesman and grandson of Ssu-ma Ch'ien. He rose to a position of importance at the court of Emperor Hsüan (74-48 B.C.), and because of the part he played in exposing the plot of the Ho family to dethrone the emperor he was enfeoffed as a marquis. In time, however, he was accused by a rival at court of various treasonable acts and utterances. The emperor forbore to impose the death sentence but stripped Yang of his position and title. Yang retired to the country, where he devoted himself to farming and speculating in grain. Some time later he received a letter from a friend, Sun Hui-tsung, reprimanding him for his way of life. A gentleman in disgrace, Sun wrote, should live in humble and abject seclusion instead of entertaining friends and engaging in that most disgraceful of human activities, the pursuit of material gain. The letter is Yang's reply."

Where Yang Yün celebrates the joys of private life, the poet Hsi K'ang (223-262) in his letter to Shan T'ao indulges a Taoist sense of fun by listing the afflictions to be endured by those who aspire to polite society. Both men, however, bear unmistakable witness to the ideal of seclusion.

"Peach Blossom Spring" rapidly became the classic expression, constantly quoted in later writing, of the longing for an earthly

utopia. Some of T'ao Ch'ien's poems would suggest that he succeeded in finding his way there in spirit.

That seclusion served sometimes as a cloak for the poseur is evident from the satirical "Proclamation" by K'ung Chih-kuei (447-501). In this essay the devices of parallel prose are used to great effect to pillory the pretensions of a would-be recluse, Chou Yung (d. 485), dignified by the writer as Chou Tzu, "Master Chou." This man built a retreat he called Grass Hut on the Bell Mountain named in the opening sentence of Kung's essay. He suffers at the writer's hands by comparison with various genuine immortals and sages whose names dot the piece, e.g. Wu Kuang who threw himself into the river rather than accept the throne when it was offered to him. Other names mentioned, e.g. Chang Ch'ang, Chao Kuang-han and the rest, are those of model local officials.

In explanation of the allusion to Mo Ti and Yang Chu, early philosophers: "Yang Chu wept on seeing a crossroad, because one could turn north or south; Mo Ti cried on seeing them dye plain silk, because it could become yellow or black."

Cranes were used by Taoist adepts for steeds in their flights through the air.

•

Yang Yün

Letter to Sun Hui-tsung

[*Pao Sun Hui-tsung shu*]

I am a man of paltry talent and unworthy actions, possessing neither refinement nor native ability. Yet I was fortunate enough, because of my father's achievements, to win a post in the palace guard, and later, happening upon a time of plotted disaffection, I gained the title of marquis. But I deserved neither of these, and so in the end I met with misfortune. Moved to pity by my stupidity, you have been good enough to write me a letter teaching me my shortcomings and how to correct them. Your heartfelt concern is truly generous. I am disturbed that, because you perhaps have not examined deeply enough into the circumstances of my case, you may be misled by the judgments of the common run of people, though I realize that if I speak out my unworthy thoughts too frankly I may appear to be contradicting you and attempting to gloss over my own errors. Nevertheless, if I were to remain silent, I fear I would be ignoring Confucius' injunction to let "each man speak his mind." Therefore I have ventured briefly to set forth my ideas in the hope that you will give them your consideration.

When my family was at the height of its power, ten of us rode about in the vermilion-wheeled carriages of high officials. I held a place in the ranks of ministers and was enfeoffed as a marquis. I had charge of the officials who waited upon the emperor and I took part in the handling of affairs of state. And yet at that time I was unable to contribute anything to the advancement and glorification of imperial rule, nor did I succeed in joining my efforts with those of my fellow officials in repairing defects and oversights in the government. For a long time I was guilty of stealing a post I did not deserve and enjoying a salary I had not earned, coveting my stipend, greedy for power, and quite unable to check

myself. Then I met with a sudden change of fortune and found myself faced with unbridled accusations. I was confined to the North Tower of the palace and my wife and children were thrown into prison. At that time I concluded that even the death penalty would be insufficient to atone for my guilt. Surely I never thought that I could keep head and body together and serve once more the grave mound of my father. And yet the mercy of our sage ruler knows no bounds!

The superior man practices the Way and delights in forgetting his cares. The mean man seeks to prolong his life and loves to forget his faults. Considering that my errors had been great and my actions far from what they should have been, I decided that it was best for me to end my days as a farmer. So I took my wife and family to the country where, pooling our strength, we plow, tend the mulberries, water the garden, and so produce enough to pay our taxes to the state. It never occurred to me, however, that such activities might arouse your censure.

One cannot put a stop to human emotions: even sages do not try. Therefore, although rulers or fathers command the greatest honor and affection, when they die the period of mourning for them must eventually come to an end. And it has already been three years since I incurred disgrace.

My family and I work hard in our fields, and when the summer and winter holidays come, we boil a sheep, roast a young lamb, bring out a measure of wine and rest from our labors. My own family came originally from Ch'in and so I can make music in the Ch'in style, while my wife is from Chao and consequently plays the lute very well. In addition we have several maidservants who sing. After I have had something to drink and my ears are beginning to burn, I gaze up at the sky and, thumping on a crock to keep time, I give a great *ya-al* and sing this song:

> I sowed the southern hill
> But I could not keep back the weeds.
> I planted an acre of beans
> But they fell off the vine, leaving bare stems.
> Man's life should be spent in joy;
> Why wait in vain for wealth and honor?

At such times I flap my robes in delight, wave my sleeves up

and down, stamp my feet and dance about. Indeed it is a wild and unconventional way to behave, and yet I cannot say that I see anything wrong in it.

I was lucky enough to have a little of my stipend left over, and with the amount I bought up grain cheap and sold it dear, making a ten per cent profit. This is a vile and merchantly thing to do, a sordid undertaking, and for me to engage in it personally places me among the lowest ranks of society and makes me the butt of censure. Though the weather is not cold, I tremble to think of the disgrace. Even you, who know me so well, appear to have followed along with the rest in reprimanding me. Under such circumstances, what business would I have trying to win a fair reputation?

The philosopher Tung Chung-shu has said, has he not: "To strive with all one's might for benevolence and righteousness, fearful always lest one fail to educate the people—this is the ambition of a statesman. To strive with all one's might for goods and profit, fearful always of poverty and want—this is the business of ordinary people." So, as Confucius said, "those who do not follow the same road cannot lay plans for each other." Why, then, do you come with the ideals of the statesman and use them to censure a person like *me*?

The old region of Wei west of the Yellow River, from which you come, prospered under the rule of Marquis Wen, and its people still retain something of the ways of the sages Tuan Kan-mu and T'ien Tzu-fang. All of them are men of the most lofty virtue, capable of clearly distinguishing right from wrong. Now, however, you have left your native land and are acting as governor of Ting-an. Ting-an is a mountainous region, the old home of the K'un-yi barbarians, and its sons are greedy and uncouth. How can you hope to change the customs and habits of such people?

I fully understand from your letter what your ambitions are. Now, when the Han is at the height of its glory, I hope you will pursue them with utmost diligence, and not spend too much time in talk.

TRANSLATED BY BURTON WATSON

Hsi K'ang

Letter to Shan T'ao

[Yü Shan Chü-yüan chüeh chiao shu]

Some time ago you spoke of me to your uncle, the Prefect of Ying-ch'uan, and I must say I found your estimate of me just. But I wondered how you could have come to so accurate an understanding without really knowing what my principles are. Last year when I came back from Hotung, Kung-sun Ch'ung and Lü An said you had proposed me as your successor in office. Nothing came of it, but your proposal made it obvious you really did not understand me at all.

You are versatile: you accept most things and are surprised at little. I, on the other hand, am by nature straightforward and narrow-minded: there are lots of things that I cannot put up with. It was only chance that made us friends. When recently I heard of your promotion in office, I was upset and unhappy, fearing that the cook would be shy of doing the carving by himself and would call in the Impersonator of the Dead to help, handing over a kitchen knife soiled with rancid fat. Hence I am writing to make clear what may and may not be done.

It used to be that when in my reading I came across people resolutely above the world, I rather doubted their existence, but now I am convinced that they really do exist after all. One can be so constituted that there are things one cannot endure; honest endorsement cannot be forced. So it is perhaps idle to talk about the familiar "man of understanding" who can put up with anything, who takes no exception to vulgarity around him but who still preserves his integrity within; who goes along with the vacillations of the times without ever feeling a twinge of regret. Lao Tzu and Chuang Chou are my masters: they held mean positions. I would hardly criticize *them*. And Confucius, out of his love for all, was ready to hold a coachman's whip; and Tzu-wen, with no desire for

the job, was thrice prime minister: these were gentlemen whose minds were bent on saving the world. This is what is meant by "in success, he shares the benefits with all and does not vacillate; in obscurity, he is content and not depressed."

From this point of view, Yao and Shun's ruling the world, Hsü Yu's retirement to the hills, Tzu-fang's helping Han and Chieh-yü's singing as he walked all add up to the same thing. When you consider all these gentlemen, they can be said to have succeeded in doing what they wanted. Hence all the various modes of conduct of the gentleman take him to the same goal by different paths. He acts in accordance with his nature and rests where he finds his ease. Thus there are those who stick to the court and never emerge, and those who enter the wilderness and never come back.

Moreover, I am filled with admiration when I read the biographies of the recluses Shang Tzu-p'ing and T'ai Hsiao-wei and can imagine what sort of men they were. Add to that the fact that I lost my father when young, was spoiled by my mother and elder brother and never took up the study of the classics. I was already wayward and lazy by nature, so that my muscles became weak and my flesh flabby. I would commonly go half a month without washing my face, and until the itching became a considerable annoyance, I would not wash my hair. When I had to urinate, if I could stand it I would wait until my bladder cramped inside before I got up.

Further, I was long left to my own devices, and my disposition became arrogant and careless, my bluntness diametrically opposed to etiquette; laziness and rudeness reinforcing one another. But my friends were indulgent, and did not attack me for my faults.

Besides, my taste for independence was aggravated by my reading of Chuang Tzu and Lao Tzu; as a result any desire for fame or success grew daily weaker, and my commitment to freedom increasingly firmer. In this I am like the wild deer, which captured young and reared in captivity will be docile and obedient. But if it be caught when full-grown, it will stare wildly and butt against its bonds, dashing into boiling water or fire to escape. You may dress it up with a golden bridle and feed it delicacies, and it will but long the more for its native woods and yearn for rich pasture.

Juan Chi[1] is not one to talk about people's faults, and I have tried to model myself after him, but in vain. He is a man of finer

1. See his poems below, pp. 179-181.

character than most, one who never injured another. Only in drinking does he go to excess. But even so the proper and correct gentlemen with their restrictions hate him as a mortal enemy, and it is only thanks to the protection of Generalissimo Ssu-ma Chao that he survives. But I, without Juan Chi's superiority, have the faults of being rude and unrestrained, ignorant of people's characters and blind to opportunity, not careful like Shih Fen, but driven to carry things to their end. The longer I were involved in affairs the more clearly would these defects show. I might want to stay out of trouble, but would it be possible?

Furthermore, in society there are prescribed courtesies, and the court has its rules. When I consider the matter carefully, there are seven things I could never stand and two things which would never be condoned. I am fond of lying late abed, and the herald at my door would not leave me in peace: this is the first thing I could not stand. I like to walk, singing, with my lute in my arms, or go fowling or fishing in the woods. But surrounded by subordinates, I would be unable to move freely—this is the second thing I could not stand. When I kneel for a while I become as though paralyzed and unable to move. Being infested with lice, I am always scratching. To have to bow and kowtow to my superiors while dressed up in formal clothes—this is the third thing I could not stand. I have never been a facile calligrapher and do not like to write letters. Business matters would pile up on my table and fill my desk. To fail to answer would be bad manners and a violation of duty, but I would not long be able to force myself to do it. This is the fourth thing I could not stand. I do not like funerals and mourning, but these are things people consider important. Far from forgiving my offence, their resentment would reach the point where they would like to see me injured. Although in alarm I might make the effort, I still could not change my nature. If I were to bend my mind to the expectations of the crowd, it would be dissembling and dishonest, and even so I would not be sure to go unblamed—this is the fifth thing I could not stand. I do not care for the crowd and yet I would have to serve together with such people. Or on occasions when guests fill the table and their clamor deafens the ears, their noise and dirt contaminating the place, before my very eyes they would indulge in their double-dealings. This is the sixth thing I could not stand. My heart cannot bear trouble, and official life is full of it. One's mind is bound with a thousand cares, one's

thoughts are involved with worldly affairs. This is the seventh thing I could not stand.

Further, I am always finding fault with T'ang and Wu Wang, or running down the Duke of Chou and Confucius. If I did not stop this in society, it is clear that the religion of the times would not put up with me. This is the first thing which would never be condoned. I am quite ruthless in my hatred of evil, and speak out without hesitation, whenever I have the occasion. This is the second thing which would never be condoned.

To try to control these nine weaknesses with a disposition as narrow and niggling as mine could only result in my falling ill, if indeed I were able to avoid trouble with the authorities. Would I be long in the world of men? Besides, I have studied in the esoteric lore of the Taoist masters, where a man's life can be indefinitely prolonged through eating herbs, and I firmly believe this to be so. To wander among the hills and streams, observing fish and birds, is what gives my heart great pleasure. Once I embarked on an official career, this is something I would have to give up forthwith. Why should I relinquish what gives me pleasure for something that fills me with dread?

What is esteemed in human relationships is the just estimate of another's inborn nature, and helping him to realize it. When you see a straight piece of wood, you do not want to make it into a wheel, nor do you try to make a rafter of a crooked piece, and this is because you would not want to pervert its heaven-given quality, but rather see that it finds its proper place. Now all the four classes of people have each their own occupation, in which each takes pleasure in fulfilling his own ambition. It is only the man of understanding who can comprehend all of them. In this you have only to seek within yourself to know that one may not, out of one's own preference for formal clothes, force the people of Yüeh to wear figured caps, or, because one has a taste for putrid meat, try to feed a phoenix a dead rat.

Of late I have been studying the techniques of prolonging one's life, casting out all ideas of fame and glory, eliminating tastes, and letting my mind wander in stillness: what is most worthwhile to me is Inaction. Even if there were not these nine concerns, I could still pay no attention to your wishes. But beyond this, my mind tends toward melancholy, increasingly so of late, and I am personally

convinced that I would not be able to stand any occupation in which I took no pleasure. I really know myself in this respect. If worse comes to worst and there is no way out, then I shall simply die. But you have no grudge against me that you should cause me to lie lifeless in the gutter.

I am continually unhappy over the recent loss of the company of my mother and elder brother. My daughter is thirteen, my son eight years old—neither grown to maturity, and I am in ill health. This is another fact that pains me so much I cannot bear to speak further of it.

Today I only wish to stay on in this out-of-the-way lane and bring up my children and grandchildren, on occasion relaxing and reminiscing with old friends—a cup of unstrained wine, a song to the lute: this is the sum of my desires and ambitions.

If you keep on relentlessly nagging me, it can only be because you are anxious to get someone for the post who will be of use to the world. But you have always known what an irresponsible, bungling sort of person I am, not at all up on current affairs. I know myself that I am in all respects inferior to our modern men of ability. If you think me unlike ordinary men in that I alone do not find pleasure in fame and distinction, this is closest to my true feelings and deserves to be considered. If a man of great ability and endowments, able to turn his hand to anything, were able to be without ambition, he would be worth your respect. But one like me, frequently ill, who wants to stay out of office so as to take care of himself for the remaining years of his life—in me it is rather a deficiency. There is not much point in praising a eunuch for his chastity. If you insist on my joining you in the king's service, expecting that we will rise together and will be a joy and help to one another, one fine day you will find that the pressure has driven me quite mad. Only my bitterest enemy would go so far. The rustic who took such pleasure in the warm sun on his back, or the one who so esteemed the flavor of celery that they wanted to bring these things to the attention of the Most High: this showed them to be well-meaning, but it also showed their complete ignorance. I hope you will not do as they did. This being the way I feel about it, I have written to explain it to you and at the same time to say farewell.

TRANSLATED BY J. R. HIGHTOWER

T'ao Ch'ien

[*T'ao hua yüan chi*]

Peach Blossom Spring

During the reign-period T'ai yuan [326-97] of the Chin dynasty there lived in Wu-ling a certain fisherman. One day, as he followed the course of a stream, he became unconscious of the distance he had travelled. All at once he came upon a grove of blossoming peach trees which lined either bank for hundreds of paces. No tree of any other kind stood amongst them, but there were fragrant flowers, delicate and lovely to the eye, and the air was filled with drifting peachbloom.

The fisherman, marvelling, passed on to discover where the grove would end. It ended at a spring; and then there came a hill. In the side of the hill was a small opening which seemed to promise a gleam of light. The fisherman left his boat and entered the opening. It was almost too cramped at first to afford him passage; but when he had taken a few dozen steps he emerged into the open light of day. He faced a spread of level land. Imposing buildings stood among rich fields and pleasant ponds all set with mulberry and willow. Linking paths led everywhere, and the fowls and dogs of one farm could be heard from the next. People were coming and going and working in the fields. Both the men and the women dressed in exactly the same manner as people outside; white-haired elders and tufted children alike were cheerful and contented.

Some, noticing the fisherman, started in great surprise and asked him where he had come from. He told them his story. They then invited him to their home, where they set out wine and killed chickens for a feast. When news of his coming spread through the village everyone came in to question him. For their part they told how their forefathers, fleeing from the troubles of the age of Ch'in, had come with their wives and neighbours to this isolated place, never to leave it. From that time on they had been cut off from the outside world. They asked what age was this: they had never even

heard of the Han, let alone its successors the Wei and the Chin. The fisherman answered each of their questions in full, and they sighed and wondered at what he had to tell. The rest all invited him to their homes in turn, and in each house food and wine were set before him. It was only after a stay of several days that he took his leave.

"Do not speak of us to the people outside," they said. But when he had regained his boat and was retracing his original route, he marked it at point after point; and on reaching the prefecture he sought audience of the prefect and told him of all these things. The prefect immediately despatched officers to go back with the fisherman. He hunted for the marks he had made, but grew confused and never found the way again.

The learned and virtuous hermit Liu Tzu-chi heard the story and went off elated to find the place. But he had no success, and died at length of a sickness. Since that time there have been no further "seekers of the ford."

TRANSLATED BY CYRIL BIRCH

K'ung Chih-kuei

Proclamation on North Mountain

[*Pei shan yi wen*]

The Spirit of Bell Mountain,
The Divinity of Grass Hut Cloister,
Hasten through the mist on the post road
To engrave this proclamation on the hillside:
    A man who
Incorruptible, holds himself aloof from the vulgar,
Untrammeled, avoids earthly concerns,
Vies in purity with the white snow,
Ascends straightaway to the blue clouds—
    We but know of such.
    Those who
Take their stand outside things,
Shine bright beyond the mist,
Regard a treasure of gold as dust and do not covet it,
Look on the offer of a throne as a slipper to be cast off,
Who are heard blowing a phoenix flute by the bank of the Lo,
Who are met singing a fagot song beside the Yen-lai—
    These really do exist.
    But who would expect to find those
Whose end belies their beginning,
Vacillating between black and yellow,
Making Mo Ti weep,
Moving Yang Chu to tears,
Retiring on impulse with hearts still contaminated
Starting out pure and later becoming sullied—
    What impostors they are!
    Alas!

Master Shang lives no more
Mister Chung is already gone
The mountain slope is deserted,
A thousand years unappreciated.
At the present time there is Chou Tzu
An outstanding man among the vulgar,
Cultured and a scholar
Philosopher and scribe.
But he needs must
Imitate Yen Ho's retirement
Copy Nan-kuo's meditation,
Occupy the Grass Hut by imposture
Usurp a hermit's cap on North Mountain,
Seduce our pines and cassia trees
Cheat our clouds and valleys.
Although he assume the manner by the river side
His feelings are bound by love of rank.
When first he came, he was going to
Outdo Ch'ao-fu
Surpass Hsü-yu
Despise the philosophers
Ignore the nobility.
His flaming ardor stretched to the sun
His frosty resolve surpassed the autumn.
He would sigh that the hermits were gone forever
Or deplore that recluses wandered no more.
He discoursed on the empty emptiness of the Buddhist sutras
He studied the murky mystery of Taoist texts.
A Wu Kuang could not compare with him
A Chüan-tzu was not fit to associate with him.
But when
The belled messengers entered the valley
And the crane summons reached his hill,
His body leapt and his souls scattered
His resolve faltered and his spirit wavered.
Then
Beside the mat his eyebrows jumped,
On the floor his sleeves danced.

He burned his castalian garments and tore his lotus clothes
He raised a wordly face and carried on in a vulgar manner.
Wind-driven clouds grieved as they carried their anger
Rock-rimmed springs sobbed as they trickled their disappointment.
Forests and crags appeared to lack something
Grass and trees seemed to have suffered loss.
When he came to
Tie on his brass insignia
Fasten the black ribbon,
He was foremost of the leaders of provincial towns
He was first among the heads of a hundred villages.
He stretched his brave renown over the coastal precincts
He spread his fine repute through Chekiang,
His Taoist books discarded for good
His dharma mat long since buried.
The cries and groans from beatings invade his thoughts
A succession of warrants and accusations pack his mind.
The Lute Song is interrupted
The Wine Poem is unfinished.
He is constantly involved in examinations
And continually swamped by litigation.
He tries to cage Chang Ch'ang and Chao Kuang-han of past fame
And seeks to shelve Cho Mao and Lu Kung of the former records.
He hopes to succeed the worthies of the Three Capital Districts
He wants to spread his fame beyond the governors of the Nine Provinces.
He has left our
High haze to reflect the light unwatched
Bright moon to rise in solitude
Dark pines to waste their shade
White clouds with no companion.
The gate by the brook is broken, no one comes back
The stone pathway is overgrown, vain to wait for him.
And now
The ambient breeze invades his bedcurtains
The seeping mist exhales from the rafters.
The orchid curtains are empty, at night his crane is grieved
The mountain hermit is gone, mornings the apes are startled.

In the past we heard of one who cast away his cap-pin and retired
to the seashore
Today we see one loosen his orchids and tie on a dirty cap instead.
Whereupon
The Southern Peak presents us with its scorn
The Northern Range raises its laughter
All valleys strive in mockery
Every peak contends in contempt.
We regret that this vagrant has cheated us
We grieve that no one comes to condole.
As a result
Our woods are ashamed without end
Our brooks humiliated with no reprieve.
Autumn cassia sends away the wind
Spring wisteria refuses the moon.
We spread the word of the retirement to West Mountain
We broadcast the report of the resolve to East Marsh.
Now today
He is hurrying to pack in his lowly town
With drumming oars to go up to the capital.
Though he is wholly committed to the court
He still may invade our mountain fastness.
How can we permit our
Azaleas to be insulted again
Pi-li to be shameless
Green cliffs again humiliated
Red slopes further sullied?
He would dirty with his vagrant steps our lotus paths
And soil the cleansing purity of the clear ponds.
We must
Bar our mountain windows
Close our cloud-passes
Call back the light mist
Silence the noisy torrent
Cut off his approaching carriage at the valley mouth
Stop his impudent reins at the outskirts.
Then
Massed twigs shall be filled with anger

Ranked buds shall have their souls enraged
Flying branches shall break his wheels
Drooping boughs shall sweep away his tracks.
Let us turn back the carriage of a worldly fellow
And decline on behalf of our lord a forsworn guest.

TRANSLATED BY J. R. HIGHTOWER

3

Inscribe on your heart
Every inch of the time at sunset.
Adjust your sleeves, unsheathe a slender sword,
And look up at the passing clouds.
Among them a dark stork
Raises its head and rattles its beak;
Darting aloft, it vanishes into the sky.
Never again will it be heard.
It is no company for the cuckoos and the crows
That circle round the Court.

4

Day and night
Revolve,
While my face wrinkles
And my spirit wanes,
But the sight of injustice still pains me.
One change induces another
That cannot be dealt with by tact or wit.
The cycle goes on for ever.
I only fear that in a moment
Life will disperse in the wind.
I have always trodden on thin ice.
Yet no one knows!

5

His influence—
    the scorching sun or a torrential river—
Extends a myriad miles.
His bow hangs in the tree
    on which the sun rests.

His sword leans
    against the place where the sky ends.
Mountains are his whetstones;
And the Yellow River just long enough to be his belt.
But in the eyes of a wise recluse,
Size is of the least importance.
For a giant corpse
Only feeds more vultures.
Perhaps it is only for this
That heroes and aspirants achieve fame and merit.

6

I will not learn to ride a winged horse,
Fearing it will leave me to weep at a lonely roadside.
I dive low or fly high
To avoid the trap of a net.
I float a light boat
And gaze into the boundless waves.
It is better to forget in a river or a lake
Than to wet one another with bubbles on stony dry land.
Seldom can I be arrayed to look elegant,
My way is to be sincere and prudent.
The ancient immortals
Will help me
To survive this long and fearful night.

TRANSLATED BY C. J. CHEN AND MICHAEL BULLOCK

T'ao Ch'ien

Two Poems on Returning to Dwell in the Country

[*Kuei yüan t'ien chu*]

1

In youth I had nothing
    that matched the vulgar tone,
For my nature always
    loved the hills and mountains.
Inadvertently I fell
    into the Dusty Net,
Once having gone
    it was more than thirteen years.
The tame bird
    longs for his old forest—
The fish in the house-pond
    thinks of his ancient pool.
I too will break the soil
    at the edge of the southern moor,
I will guard simplicity
    and return to my fields and garden.
My land and house—
    a little more than ten acres,
In the thatched cottage—
    only eight or nine rooms.
Elms and willows
    shade the back verandah,
Peach and plum trees
    in rows before the hall.
Hazy and dimly seen
    a village in the distance,

Close in the foreground
    the smoke of neighbours' houses.
A dog barks
    amidst the deep lanes,
A cock is crowing
    atop a mulberry tree.
No dust and confusion
    within my doors and courtyard;
In the empty rooms,
    more than sufficient leisure.
Too long I was held
    within the barred cage.
Now I am able
    to return again to Nature.

2

Long I have loved to stroll among the hills and marshes,
And take my pleasure roaming the woods and fields.
Now I hold hands with a train of nieces and nephews,
Parting the hazel growth we tread the untilled wastes—
Wandering to and fro amidst the hills and mounds
Everywhere around us we see dwellings of ancient men.
Here are vestiges of their wells and hearthstones,
There the rotted stumps of bamboo and mulberry groves.
I stop and ask a faggot-gatherer:
"These men—what has become of them?"
The faggot-gatherer turns to me and says:
"Once they were dead that was the end of them."
In the same world men lead different lives;
Some at the court, some in the marketplace.
Indeed I know these are no empty words:
The life of man is like a shadow-play
Which must in the end return to nothingness.

Written While Drunk

I built my house near where others dwell,
And yet there is no clamour of carriages and horses.
You ask of me "How can this be so?"
"When the heart is far the place of itself is distant."
I pluck chrysanthemums under the eastern hedge,
And gaze afar towards the southern mountains.
The mountain air is fine at evening of the day
And flying birds return together homewards.
Within these things there is a hint of Truth,
But when I start to tell it, I cannot find the words.

On Reading the Classic of the Hills and Seas

By the early summer
    grasses and trees have grown
And around my roof
    the spaced trees join branches.
The flocks of birds
    are glad to have their refuge,
I no less than they
    love my little house.
Ploughing is done
    and also I have sown—
The time has come
    to return and read my books.
The narrow lane—
    deep ruts on either side—
Rather deters
    the carriages of friends!
Contentedly I sit
    and pour the new spring wine,
Or go out to pluck
    vegetables in my garden.
A gentle shower
    approaches from the east

And a pleasant wind
    comes along with it.
I read at length
    the story of King Mu,
And let my gaze wander
    over pictures of hills and seas.
Thus with a glance I reach
    the ends of the Universe—
If this is not a pleasure
    where could I ever find one?

A Song of Poor Scholars[1]

The snow lay deep
    before Yüan An's door,
But he was "far away"
    and it did not concern him;
And when Duke Yüan
    saw the contributions
On that very day
    he resigned from office.
A bed of straw
    was always warm enough,
And fresh-gathered yams
    were good enough for breakfast.
What they suffered
    was the *real* pain,
Hunger and cold
    they did not feel at all.

---

1. Allusions: In the *Chin History* it is related that there was a great fall of snow in Loyang. The governor passed by Yüan An's door and seeing no footprints in the snow thought that he might have died. Going in he found Yüan An sitting at his ease. When he asked him why he was so unconcerned he replied: "When there is a blizzard like this everybody would be equally hard put to get enough to eat; how could I think of bothering anyone!"

Duke Yüan was noble but poor; when he was appointed to office some of his friends took up a collection for him, whereupon he resigned.

The *real* pain is the pain of realizing that the Way does not prevail in the world.

Poverty and wealth
will always war within us,
But when the Tao prevails
there are no anxious faces.
Utmost moral power
will crown the village entrance
And purest chastity
shine in the western gateway.

Written in Imitation of an Ancient Bearers' Song

There were often times
when we had no wine to drink,
However, this morning
we fill the empty beakers.
Over the new spring wine
midges hover—
When will we ever
taste its like again?
Tables with funeral meats
stand piled high before us,
Old friends and relatives
come and weep beside us.
We try to speak
but cannot utter words,
We try to see
but our eyes are dim.
Once he used to sleep
within the lofty hall,
Now he will spend the night
out on the lonely moor.
Leaving the city gate
we accompanied him thither
But *we* were back again
before midnight had come.

Putting the Blame on His Sons

White hair covers my temples—
My flesh is no longer firm,
And though I have five sons
Not one cares for brush and paper.
Ah-shu is sixteen years of age;
For laziness he surely has no equal.
Ah-hsüan tries his best to learn
But does not really love the arts.
Yung and Tuan at thirteen years
Can hardly distinguish six from seven;
T'ung-tzu with nine years behind him
Does nothing but hunt for pears and chestnuts.
If such was Heaven's decree
In spite of all that I could do,
Bring on, bring on
"the thing within the cup."

Written on the Ninth Day of the Ninth Month of the Year *yi-yu* (A.D. 409)

Slowly, slowly,
the autumn draws to its close.
Cruelly cold
the wind congeals the dew.
Vines and grasses
will not be green again—
The trees in my garden
are withering forlorn.
The pure air
is cleansed of lingering lees
And mysteriously,
Heaven's realms are high.
Nothing is left
of the spent cicada's song,

A flock of geese
goes crying down the sky.
The myriad transformations
unravel one another
And human life
how should it not be hard?
From ancient times
there was none but had to die,
Remembering this
scorches my very heart.
What is there I can do
to assuage this mood?
Only enjoy myself
drinking my unstrained wine.
I do not know
about a thousand years,
Rather let me make
this morning last forever.

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM ACKER

Pao Chao

Three Poems from "Tedious Ways"

[*Hsing lu nan*]

1

Riding through the northern gate
Sorrow suddenly seizes me.
On looking around, I can only see
Pines and cypresses growing on desolate tombs.
In their blue gloom
A nightjar perches.
It is said to be the spirit of an ancient king.
Its dirge never ceases
And its dishevelled feathers
Bristle like the hair of a convict.
It flies from branch to branch
Searching for worms and ants.
Has it forgotten its majesty?
Many changes are not to be expected.
My heart, overladen with grief,
knows no answer.

2

Five peach trees grow in my garden.
One of them has begun to bloom.
It is now the charming third moon
And the wind blows the petals
to a neighbour's home