

PL
2997
L67
L8
1952

陸游文集

陈去非撰

陸
機
文
選

陳
去
謙
譯
序

ESSAY ON LITERATURE

WRITTEN BY THE THIRD-CENTURY
CHINESE POET LU CHI

TRANSLATED BY SHIH-HSIANG CHEN
IN THE YEAR MCMXLVIII

REVISED 1952

To

DR. WALTER MUIR WHITEHILL

Poetry is the language of a state of crisis.

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

*Criticism, carried to the height worthy
of it, is a majestic office, perhaps an art,
perhaps even a church.*

WALT WHITMAN

Introduction

Medieval China had very dark ages. People struggled to search for light. The search took various forms in religion, in art, and in literature. Lu Chi's *Essay on Literature* (*Wen Fu*) is the consummate expression of one of the results of this search. I came to this belief in my study of the *Essay* and of Lu Chi's life, published, together with this translation, for the semicentennial anniversary of Peking University in 1948 under the title "Literature as Light against Darkness." Translations of the *Essay* exist in two other languages.¹ Mine, as far as I know, is the first rendition in English. It was aided by the music of the thought and the rhyme remembered of the *Essay* from early youth, as well as by adult study and experience of literature. After mine, two other English versions, in different manner and spirit, I might say, have successively appeared.² With the present reissue of my translation, making it available to a greater number of readers than was the limited, now hardly accessible, Peking edition, it is cheering to think that the years 1951 and 1952 have seen such a burst of interest in this medieval work of extraordinary beauty and wisdom.

I have translated the *Essay* into verse, for I believe that although in later history the *Essay* has been rightly acclaimed as having marked the beginning of Chinese literary criticism, Lu Chi in the year A.D. 300 wrote it as poetry. And only as such can its vision, language, and truth be fully grasped and appreciated.

It is not really so long ago that English poets wrote first-rate poetry later to be considered criticism. Shelley wrote:

You will see Coleridge; he who sits obscure
In the exceeding lustre and the pure
Intense irradiation of a mind
Which, with its own internal lightning blind,
Flags wearily through darkness and despair—
A cloud-encircled meteor of the air,
A hooded eagle among blinking owls.

¹ In French, by G. Margouliès, in *Le Fou dans le Wen-siuan*, Paris, 1926; also a second version, Paris, 1948. In Russian, by B. M. Alexéiev, in *Bulletin de l'Académie des Sciences de l'URSS*, 1944.

² E. R. Hughes, *The Art of Letters*, Bollingen Series xxix; Pantheon Books, Inc., 1951; and Achilles Fang, in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. xiv, Nos. 3 and 4, December, 1951.

Of this passage Arthur Symons said, "Criticism, at such a height, is no longer mere reasoning; it has the absolute sanction of intuition." Here we gain an insight into the mind of a genius at work, toiling in sublime desolation, with the senses indrawn amidst the radiance of inner light. This is one poet's intimate experience, which it takes another poet's experience and his "intuition" and language to portray so well.

There are comparable passages in Lu Chi, telling also of this experience:

In the beginning,
All external vision and sound are suspended,
Perpetual thought itself gropes in time and space;
Then, the spirit at full gallop reaches the eight
limits of the cosmos,
And the mind, self-buoyant, will ever soar to new
insurmountable heights.

When the search succeeds,
Feeling, at first but a glimmer, will gradually
gather into full luminosity,
Whence all objects thus lit up glow as if each
the other's light reflects.

.

Now one feels blithe as a swimmer calmly borne
by celestial waters,
And then, as a diver into a secret world, lost in
subterranean currents.

The dominant imagery and general drift of thought are remarkably similar, though the points of view be differently addressed. There is in one case the romantic exaltation of the tragic height which became a predicament for too brilliant an individual genius, towering into the clouds; and in the other, the medieval Chinese teaching of meditation to set the mind free and suffuse it with light against the dark outside.

But what interests us here more is that both of these, Shelley's passage and Lu Chi's entire *Essay*, are poetry held in high esteem as criticism. That poets, if they choose, make the best and most proper critics has always remained true. Occasional disputes notwithstanding, we have enough living

examples in our contemporary literature. True, our conception of criticism and what it connotes has changed, and our poet-critics today as a rule write their criticism in prose. But I think the latter fact is to be explained by the change also of our poetry, perhaps mainly of its sources of inspiration and how they are used. The moon, the sea, and love, for our poetry, are no longer what they used to be. Other erstwhile goodly subjects now cease to inspire at all.

But it is not quite one and a half centuries ago when the person of one poet caused in another the high excitement of “a cloud-encircled meteor,” and an old translation of Homer conjured wonders of a “new planet,” or of a new continent richer than the “realms of gold.” Still further back, in one of the darkest ages in man’s history, in third-century China, the whole meaning and function of creative literature, for the individual and for civilization, inspired the poetry of Lu Chi’s *Essay*.

This poetry sprang from a critical period in Chinese history, and a fateful year of the poet’s personal life. As criticism, from a historical point of view, its vital importance is to set up new standards of value for creative literature. Like a hymn, it chanted into the creative mind a new consciousness of itself and of its relation to man and the universe. To assess fully these two aspects of the *Essay* needs must take long expatiations on history and literature. But there are concise statements of general truth on poetry and on certain classes of criticism that we can apply here. “Poetry is the language of a state of crisis,” said Stéphane Mallarmé. And for the high regard the *Essay* received in Chinese tradition, as criticism, there are words we can borrow from Walt Whitman: “Criticism, carried to the height worthy of it, is a majestic office, perhaps an art, perhaps even a church.”

Lu Chi wrote the *Essay* three years before his death. History tells us of a somber day, with rising hurricanes followed by heavy snow, in the tenth month of the year 303, when he was executed. He ended his life as a mistrusted commanding general of two hundred thousand men in the field, an “outsider” of a conspiring clique, a tool of an internecine war among royal cousins. Little could anyone at the time have realized that three years before he had accomplished the task of a high priest in the domain of ideas on Chinese *belles lettres*.

Lu Chi had indeed played many roles. Each role in its brilliant, tormented way bore the incidences of an ominous age of gathering gloom. In the magnitude of those roles we see him as perhaps the most regular yet the oddest man of his time. He was closely identified with each important vicissitude, yet in

the last analysis he did not quite belong with it. To his last day he was involved *in the world* as a hero with many tragic flaws, and yet detached as a poet to look away and beyond with sublime vision.

This seems to have been predestined since his birth. Lu Chi's forty-three years of life, in fact, about equally divided into two distinct periods, coincided with two opposite phases of medieval Chinese history in quick conflux and transition. He was in and out of two worlds. And both worlds were constantly slipping. He was a survival of his native Wu kingdom, which fell at his twentieth year of age. This downfall concluded an age of magnanimous spirit and the contest of heroic forces, and began the feeble, ephemeral unification of the Chin empire, sapped by the worst confusion of moral values as well as political misrule. Had Lu Chi lived fourteen years more, to the age of fifty-seven, he might have seen collapse again, this time of an empire overrun by barbarian invasion.

At the downfall of his native Wu, he was a young soldier, already with literary fame, and with his brothers, the brave but futile last defender of the southern kingdom. There followed ten years of study, writing, and contemplation in sequestered life at his country home. Then he arrived north in the capital of his conqueror, ruler of the Chin empire. An expatriate seeking to "belong" must needs make double effort to do his best. He was meticulous in his moral conduct, dutiful in government service, and industrious in his literary work.

But, although he tried so hard, we see him in his immediate milieu as nonetheless a "misfit." The whole moral cosmos was confounded, and his scruples were only backwash from a cursed night ship heading for doom. His sedulous public services amidst the dark labyrinth of court intrigues invited jealousy and rancour, or made him an unwitting partner in clandestine evil design. His sense of honor, inherited from the bygone glory of a great family, now dispossessed, made him look only presumptuous and vain. His literary fame was indeed skyrocketing. But many of his works had to cater to a taste for the florid and pompous, then in high vogue at the capital. How much better he knew is well revealed in the *Essay*.

There are indeed times in history when existence becomes utter absurdity and the mind seems at the end of its tether. Many of Lu Chi's contemporaries were driven to spiritual escapism or religious otherworldliness, with prevalent Taoism nourishing the former, and Buddhism encouraging the latter. Lu Chi stood out distinctly by contrast. It is no perfunctory labelling, as it might

be in the cases of other great Chinese, that history sets him down as a conformed Confucianist. In a sense we may say that he is the last Confucianist of his age. We see in his unshakable Confucian "this-worldliness" his tragic flaw, but ultimately also that peculiar Confucian way of redemption. The redemption comes from an adamant faith in the utmost of human possibilities. It is a faith which, if frustrated by immediate worldly affairs, will in its single-hearted dedication and pursuit be realized, and thus rewarded, by the inspired vision that effects an expansion and a sublimation of one's ego, or super ego, into all humanities of all time, into human history and the humanistic arts, which prove immortality as humanly possible. Knowing the circumstances under which it was produced, we shall see the *Essay on Literature* as a full expression of this spirit.

That "poetry is the language of a state of crisis," in the case of the *Essay*, may well be taken fully in a literal sense. There was a personal as well as a world crisis in the background of its creation. I have, by historical and biographical evidence, decided that the *Essay* was written in the year A.D. 300. The intricate problems of the dating and my determinant conclusion have been presented in full detail in my Peking publication. I am even more convinced of this date now.³ In the year 300 disaster smote the Chin empire like a thunderbolt. There at the court, in the heart of trouble and fatally involved, Lu Chi snatched at an opportunity to write the *Essay*. On the third day of the Fourth Month the catastrophic blow had struck. A coup d'état at the court shook the empire to its foundation. It set forth chain reactions of raging civil wars, until the empire's downfall and its devastation by barbarian hordes on the north. One of its direct results was the battle among royal cousins in which Lu Chi was executed as a "foreign" commanding general.

The coup d'état of 300 led by Prince Lun of Chao was exceedingly bloody, and turned out to be an indiscriminate massacre overnight of both heroes and villains. This was typical of many like incidents at the Chin court, ending in confusion worse confounded. History records Lu Chi's part in it. He was rewarded with the title *hou*, "marquis," for helping effect the execution of a villainous leader, which the perpetrators of the coup d'état claimed was an act of loyal vengeance. But reckless murderous plots were also carried out. Among the best men killed were pillars of the empire, one of whom was Lu Chi's great friend. There was madness in the air. The empire was crumbling. Chaos and delirium reigned.

³ See Supplementary Note.

After the tempestuous days, the rest of the year was a brief lull, as darker storms were gathering, before the oncoming usurpation and more bloodshed that was to drain the country. By midyear Lu Chi's brother, Lu Yun, suddenly received six manuscripts. Among them was the *Essay on Literature*. The time chosen for these to be written, the speed, and their extraordinary qualities all took Lu Yun by surprise. In his letter he expressed wonder and admiration, but somehow with a portentous undertone. Lu Yun wrote: "Brother, all of a sudden you have created so many pieces, and each one of them so new and extraordinary, that you make me really feel terrified. Perhaps I should not talk any more of writing." After these, Lu Chi probably wrote very little, however hard he might have tried. For in another letter, estimated to be of a later year, Lu Yun advised and consoled him: "Brother, your literary works of course have already been well known the world over. It matters not whether there be more or less. And it wears one out to task one's thought so. You may as well disengage yourself from this toil." In these six pieces it is as if his last important word had been said.

The pieces include, besides the *Essay*, two written *in memoriam* of people deceased shortly before, of which one was, history tells us, addressed to his friend sacrificed at the coup d'état. The other reads, in part:

Alas, the quick of my heart is wounded again and again,
I have no more strength to bear this immense sorrow.
If the "road thither"⁴ is perilous,
Here my day is also near dusk.
Truly, how long have we been together?
Now we are two worlds apart.
The light before me is but the length of a foot,
I have only the pang in my inch-sized heart to hold.

There is *The Fan*, in a lighter mood. But the fan is a traditional Chinese symbol of the inconstancy of fate, being a mere tool that serves the purpose of a passing season. Another piece is *The Water-Clock*, in exuberant praise of the invention to control time. Both works extol the human creation of marvelous things out of the humble, slight, and crude, be it bird feather or bamboo stalk. In both there are several similar figures and phrases also employed in the *Essay*, where, it seems, at last he spoke out loud of creative literature:

⁴ The "road thither," the road to the world of the dead.

... it is Being, created by tasking the Great Void,
 And 'tis sound rung out of Profound Silence.
 In a sheet of paper is contained the Infinite,
 And, evolved from an inch-sized heart, an endless
 panorama.

But more revealing of the state of mind which produced the *Essay*, and which perhaps made his brother feel the works so “new,” “extraordinary,” and “terrifying,” is the last accompanying piece, *Lament for Fleeting Life*. Let us see two passages from it:

Alas, water runs for the river to last,
 But water itself wave after wave must away,
 Men live for the world to continue,
 But men themselves one by one must to the dusk.

And

Let me halt my journey and lay my heart at peace,
 And contemplate only the subtle ways of Creation.
 My spirit will float above and my soul drift below,
 Suddenly I am beyond the phenomena of the world.

We have mentioned that Lu Chi is a true Confucianist. For him the human world is positive. Hence his grand vision of it after utter self-resignation, a high buoyancy sublimated from deep sorrow. There comes self-redemption, which is beyond the apparent temporal existence, yet is nevertheless *in this world*. This is to be seen as at least a part of the underlying spiritual attitude that furnishes the *Essay on Literature* the necessary detachment, yet, rejecting transcendence and strongly reaffirming human values, gives it such emotional depth and benignancy.

No more need be said here of the *Essay*, which will henceforth speak for itself.

It has been my hope to be able to present this work, first of all, as poetry, inspired as it was by the contemplation of creation at a sublime hour of detachment from the world's chaos and gloom. The subject of this poetry is literature as an ever-living thing, spoken of in concrete, sensuous imagery, and as passionately regarded as love. Thence is uttered the wisdom and acumen of criticism to perform a “majestic office.” The wisdom is no doubt of the an-

cient kind. The work has become scriptural in Chinese tradition, its parts quoted out of context, and paraphrased in very different ways to satisfy individual needs.

But it nonetheless deals with both perennial and specific problems which are still being discussed with lively interest by critics today. Comparative studies of these points, together with some details on translation, have taken up one particular chapter in my Peking publication which cannot be entirely reproduced within the limited space of the present edition. But for those who may feel interested in further inquiry into these and other related matters, positive microfilms of the entire Peking edition will be easily available by applying at the library of the Boston Athenæum, where, through the great kindness of Dr. Vernon D. Tate, Director of Libraries of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a microfilm negative has been deposited.

I wish this were the occasion for me to elaborate more on some of my views formerly expressed, and to amend others. But in this small volume the translation, slightly revised, has to stand by itself. Even the footnotes have to be cut to the very minimum. As to such technicalities of the translation as what textual variants were favoured, what lexical meanings chosen, semantic associations noted, and contextual overtones observed, how the incompatibilities of medieval Chinese and modern English grammar were reconciled, and, above all, where expansions or contractions of sentences were made to recapture the effects of the imagery and burden of thought of the original, I beg my sinological friends' pardon for the lack of room here to discuss them. But I point out these briefly, and trust that those who understand and appreciate Lu Chi's *Wen Fu* as well as I do will quickly perceive the intricate processes, and, I hope, will read the result of the translation with sympathetic comprehension.

In preparing my Peking publication in 1948, I benefited greatly from the expert knowledge of my friends and colleagues in Peking and California. My indebtedness to them was acknowledged then, and I wish to renew it here now. I dedicate this re-issue to Walter Muir Whitehill of the Boston Athenæum, custodian of many treasures of world letters, lover and connoisseur of all the best in world literature, who, never letting a single "phoenix feather" (to borrow a Chinese expression) drop unnoticed, made it possible to bring out this small volume. I wish to thank with profound sincerity and affection my dear friend Chang Ch'ung-ho, who undertook laboriously with her excel-

lent calligraphic art to adorn the volume with the full Chinese text⁵ of the *Essay*. She has imitated the medieval style with admirable likeness. I might say, as people of that period said of ancient poetry, "Each word a thousand gold." My deep gratitude also goes to several other esteemed friends. These are John and Phyllis Wheelock, in many ways my beloved mentors in life and work; and Allen Tate and Mark Schorer, whose own works I so greatly admire, and who have been so kind in advising the publication. My deep appreciation also of the generosity of The Anthoensen Press and the Meriden Gravure Company in giving both the English translation and the Chinese text of Lu Chi such appropriate dress.

⁵ As edited by Ku Shih-cheng, in the *Wen-hsuan liu-ch'en hui-chu shu-chieh*, published in 1687, this, with other authoritative texts consulted, being the working text for my translation.

余每觀才士之所作竊有以得其用心夫其放言遣辭良多變矣妍蚩好惡可得而言每自屬文尤見其情恒患意不稱物文不達意蓋非知之難能之難也故作文賦以述先士之盛藻因論作文之利害所由他日殆可謂曲盡其妙至於操斧伐柯雖取則不遠若夫隨手之變良難以辭逮蓋所能言者具於此云爾

佇中區以元覽傾情志於典墳遵四時以歎逝瞻萬物而思紛悲落葉於勁秋喜柔條於芳春心慄以懷霜志耿而臨雲詠世德之駿烈誦先人之清芬游文章之林府嘉麗藻之彬兮慨投篇而援筆聊宣之乎斯文

其始也皆收視反聽耽思傍訊精鶩八極心游萬仞其致也情曠曠而彌鮮物昭晰而互進傾羣言之滙液漱六藝之芳潤浮天淵以安流濯下泉而潛浸於是沈辭怫悅若游魚銜鈎而出重淵之深浮藻聯翩若翰鳥纓繳而墜曾雲之峻收百代之闕文採千載之遺韻謝朝華於已披啟夕秀於未振觀古今之須臾撫四海於一瞬然後選義按部攷辭就班抱景者咸叩懷響者畢彈或因枝以振葉或沿波而討源或本隱以之顯或求易而得難或虎變而獸擾或龍見而鳥瀾或妥貼而易施或咀晤而不安聲澄心以凝思眇象慮而為言籠天地於形內控萬物於筆端始躑躅於燥吻終流離於濡翰理扶質以立幹文垂條而結繁信情貌之不差故每變而在顏思涉樂其必笑方言哀而已歎或操觚以率爾或含毫而邈然

伊茲事之可樂固聖賢之所欽課虛無以責有叩拜莫而
求音函綿邈於尺素吐滂沛乎寸心言恢之而彌廣思按
之而愈深播芳蕤之韻發青條之森祭風飛而葦豎
鬱雲起乎翰林

體有萬殊物無一量絃絃揮霍形難為狀辭程才以效伎
意司契而為匠在有無而僂倪當淺深而不讓雖離方而
遯員期窮形而盡相故夫誇目者尚奢恆心者貴當言窮
者無隘論達者唯曠詩緣情而綺靡賦體物而瀏亮碑披
文以相質誄纏綿而悽愴銘博約而溫潤箴頓挫而清壯
頌優游以彬蔚論精微而朗暢奏平徹以閑雅說煒燁而
譎詭雖區分之在茲亦禁邪而制放要辭達而理舉故無
取乎冗長

其為物也多姿其為體也屢遷其會意也尚巧其遺辭也
貴妍暨音聲之迭代若五色之相宣雖逝止之無常固崎
錡而難便苟達變而識次猶開流以納泉如失機而後會
恆操末以續顛謬元黃之秩序故洪湏而不鮮或仰逼於
先條或俯侵於後章或辭害而理比或言順而義妨離之
則雙美合之則兩傷攷殿最於錙銖定去留於毫芒苟銓
衡之所裁固應繩其必當或文繁理富而意不指適極無
兩致盡不可益立片言而居要乃一篇之警策雖衆辭之有
條必待茲而致績亮功多而累寡故取足而不易或藻思
綺合清麗芊眠炳若綉繡悽若繁絃必所擬之不殊乃閤
合乎義篇雖杼軸於子懷休他人之我先苟傷廉而愆義

亦雖愛而必損或苔發穎豎離衆絕致形不可逐響難為
係塊孤立而特峙非常音之所緯心牢落而無偶意徘徊
而不能掃石韞玉而山暉水懷珠而川媚彼榛楛之勿剪
亦蒙榮於集翠綴下里於白雪吾亦濟夫所偉

或託言於短韻對窮迹而孤興俯寂莫而無友仰寥廓而
莫承譬偏絃之獨張合清唱而靡應或寄辭於瘁音言伎
靡而弗華混妍蚩而成體累良質而為瑕象下管之偏疾
故雖應而不和或遺理以存異徒尋虛而逐微言寡情而
鮮愛辭浮漂而不歸猶絃么而徽急故雖和而不悲或奔
放以諧合務嘈囂而妖冶徒悅目而偶俗固聲高而曲下
寤防露與桑間又雖悲而不雅或清虛以婉約每除煩而
去濫闕大羹之遺味同朱絃之清汎雖一唱而三歎固既
雅而不豔

若夫豐約之裁俯仰之形因宜適變曲有微情或言拙而
喻巧或理樸而辭輕或襲故而彌新或汙濁而更清或覽
之而必察或研之而後精譬猶舞者赴節以投袂歌者應
絃而遺聲是蓋輪扁所不得言故非華說之所能精
普辭條與文律良予膺之所厭練世情之常尤識前修之
所淑雖濬發於巧心或受嗤於拙目彼瓊敷與玉藻若中
原之有菽同橐籥之罔窮與天地乎並育雖紛藹於此世
嗟不盈於子掬患挈瓶之屢空病昌言之難屬故蹇踔於
短韻放庸音以足曲恒遺恨以終篇豈懷盈而自足懼蒙
塵於叩岳顧取笑乎鳴玉

若夫應感之會通塞之紀來不可過去不可止藏若景滅
行猶響起方天機之駿利夫何紛而不理思風發於胸臆
言泉流於唇齒紛葳蕤以馭選唯毫素之所擬文微以
溢目音冷而盈耳及其六情底滯志往神留兀若枯木
豁若涸流攬營魂以探賾頓精爽而自求理醫而逾伏
思軋其若抽是以或竭精而多悔或率意而寡尤雖茲
物之在我非余力之所勦故時撫空懷而自惋吾未識夫
開塞之所由

伊茲文之為用固衆理之所因恢萬里使無闕通億載而
為津俯貽則於來葉仰觀象乎古人濟文武於將陞宣風
聲於不泯塗無遠而不彌理無微而不綸配霑潤於雲雨
象變化乎鬼神被金石而德廣流管絃而日新

右陸士衡文賦一首錄為

石湘學長兄

一九五二年五月二十五日克和

試方子魯一五二年所製九子龍

墨於柏克集



Essay on Literature

(*) prefatory remarks

Often have I studied the works of talented men of letters and thought to myself that I obtained some insight into their minds at work. The ways of employing words and forming expressions are indeed infinitely varied. But, accordingly, the various degrees of beauty and excellence achieved needs must bear criticism. When I compose my own works, I am more keenly aware of the ordeal. Constantly present is the feeling of regret that the meaning apprehended does not represent the objects observed; and, furthermore, words fail to convey the meaning. The fact is, it is not so hard to know as it is to do.

I am therefore writing this essay on literature to tell of the glorious accomplishments of ancient men of letters, and to comment on the causes of failure and success in writing. Perhaps some other day the secret of this most intricate art may be entirely mastered. In making a handle of an axe by cutting wood with an axe, the model is indeed near at hand. But the adaptability of the hand to the ever-changing (circumstances and impulses in the process of creation) is such that words can hardly explain. Henceforth follows only what can be said in words.

* The *Essay* in this translation is divided into twelve sections, according to its original rhyming patterns and obvious paragraphings of thought. The small headings for each section are added by me. (S. H. C.)

(1) *the motive*

Erect in the Central Realm the poet views the expanse of the whole universe,
 And in tomes of ancient wisdom his spirit rejoices and finds nurture.
 His lament for fleeting life is in observance of the four seasons that ever re-
 solve,
 His regard for the myriad growing things inspires in him thoughts as profuse.
 As with the fallen leaves in autumn's rigour his heart sinks in grief,
 So is each tender twig in sweet spring a source of joy.
 In frost he finds sympathy at moments when his heart is all frigid purity,
 Or far, far, into the highest clouds he makes his mind's abode.
 The shining, magnanimous deeds of the world's most virtuous are substance
 of his song,
 As also the pure fragrance which the most accomplished goodness of the past
 yields.
 The flowering forest of letters and treasuries of poetic gems are his spirit's fa-
 vourite haunts,
 Where he delights in nothing less than perfection of Beauty's form and mat-
 ter.
 Thus moved, he will spread his paper and poise his pen
 To express what he can in writing.

(2) *meditation before writing*

In the beginning,
 All external vision and sound are suspended,
 Perpetual thought itself gropes in time and space;
 Then, the spirit at full gallop reaches the eight limits of the cosmos,
 And the mind, self-buoyant, will ever soar to new insurmountable heights.
 When the search succeeds,
 Feeling, at first but a glimmer, will gradually gather into full luminosity,
 Whence all objects thus lit up glow as if each the other's light reflects.

Drip-drops are distilled afresh from a sea of words since time out of mind,
 As quintessence that savours of all the aroma of the Six Arts.
 Now one feels blithe as a swimmer calmly borne by celestial waters,
 And then, as a diver into a secret world, lost in subterranean currents.

Hence,

Arduously sought expressions, hitherto evasive, hidden,
 Will be like stray fishes out of the ocean bottom to emerge on the angler's
 hook;
 And quick-winged metaphors, fleeting, far-fetched
 Feathered tribes, while sky-faring are brought down from the curl-clouds
 by the fowler's bow.

Thus the poet will have mustered what for a hundred generations awaited
 his pen,
 To be uttered in rimes for a thousand ages unheard.
 Let the full-blown garden flowers of the ancients in their own morning glory
 stand.
 To breathe life into late blossoms that have yet to bud will be his sole en-
 deavor.
 Eternity he sees in a twinkling,
 And the whole world he views in one glance.

(3) *the working process*

Henceforth,

To obtain choice ideas in close observation of things in categories,
 And elect expressions that will fall in happy order,
 All objects visible under the sun or moon will the poet in experiment strike
 aglow,
 All that can give out a sound he will ring to test their resonance.

He makes barren twigs put forth luxuriant foliage as they sway,
Or by endless waves he traces to the remote fountainhead.
He may either work from the obscure to the obvious,
Or, following an easy course, find the hardly obtainable.
Shapes of tame animals by the sudden shining forth of a tiger are illuminated,
Or amid the surf-tossed gulls the vision of a dragon emerges.
Sometimes with sure touches and smooth rhythm his ideas in utmost ease
 flow on,
At other moments, as if beset by mountainous obstacles, he is in a fret.
But not until the heart attains calm transparency does thought crystallize
Into such words as no man before fancied or pronounced.
Then, both heaven and earth find new embodiment in the shape desired,
And all things become plastic under the tip of his pen,
Which after all parching anxiety and hesitations
Is saturated and sweeps forth in a wave.

When the substance of a composition, trunk of a tree, is by Truth sustained,
Style aids it to branch into leafy boughs and bear fruit.
Indeed, feeling and expression should never fail to correspond,
As each emotional change wears a new complexion on a sensitive face.
Thought that swells with joy bursts into laughter;
When grief is spoken, words reverberate with endless sighs;
No matter if the work be accomplished in one flash on the page,
Or is the result of the most deliberate pen.

(4) *the joy of writing*

Writing is in itself a joy,
Yet saints and sages have long since held it in awe.
For it is Being, created by tasking the Great Void.
And 'tis sound rung out of Profound Silence.
In a sheet of paper is contained the Infinite,

And, evolved from an inch-sized heart, an endless panorama.
 The words, as they expand, become all-evocative,
 The thought, still further pursued, will run the deeper,
 Till flowers in full blossom exhale all-pervading fragrance,
 And tender boughs, their saps running, grow to a whole jungle of splendor.
 Bright winds spread luminous wings, quick breezes soar from the earth,
 And, nimbus-like amidst all these, rises the glory of the literary world.

(5) *on Form*

The forms of things differ in a myriad ways,
 For them there is no common measure.
 Jumbled and jostled in a ceaseless flux,
 Living shapes to all their imitations bid defiance.
 Words, each with inherent limitations, do only partial service.
 It is the all-harmonizing force of Meaning that integrates and bodies forth
 features supreme.
 How the poet's mind toils between Substance and the Void,
 And every detail in high and low relief he seeks to perfect,
 That the form, although it may transcend the dictates of compasses and ruler,
 Shall be the paragon of resemblance to all shapes and features imitated.
 To ravish the eye, rich ornaments may be prized,
 But such precision must be wrought that it appeals to the heart as true.
 Words may in time be exhausted, but not so that their sense is immured
 withal;
 A far-reaching thought attains its object only in the realm of the infinite.

(To be specific),

The Lyric (*Shih*), born of pure emotion, is gossamer fibre woven into the
 finest fabric;
 The Exhibitory Essay (*Fu*), being true to the objects, is vividness incarnate;

In Monumental Inscriptions (*Pei*) rhetoric must be a foil to facts;
 The Elegy (*Lai*) tenderly spins out ceaseless heartfelt grief.
 The Mnemonic (*Ming*) is a smooth flow of genial phrases, succinct but pregnant;
 The staccato cadences of the Epigram (*Chen*) are all transparent force.
 While the Eulogy (*Sung*) enjoys the full abandon of grand style,
 The Expository (*Lun*) must in exactitude and clarity excel.
 The Memorial (*Tsou*), balanced and lucid, must be worthy of the dignity of
 its royal audience,
 The Argument (*Shuo*) with glowing words and cunning parables persuades.
 Meticulous as these classifications are,
 Lest passion and thought, given free rein, may wantonly go astray,
 The maxim holds: Let Truth in terms most felicitous be spoken,
 While of verbiage beware.

(6) *the making of a composition*

A composition comes into being as the incarnation of many living gestures.
 It is (like the act of Tao) the embodiment of endless change.
 To attain Meaning, it depends on a grasp of the subtle,
 While such words are employed as best serve beauty's sake.
 The interactions of sounds and tones are like
 The five colours that each the others enhances:
 Although they dwell and vanish by no common rule,
 And their tortuous, intricate ways permit no liberty,
 Yet if a poet masters the secret of change and order,
 He will channel them like directing streams to receive a fountain;
 But once a false move leads to reckless floundering,
 The end and the beginning are thrown into confusion,
 Celestial blue and earthy yellow confounded,
 Dull mud and dregs to chaos return, all light fails.

(A composition is ruined)

When a later passage swells to engulf its forerunners,
 Or a downright statement encroaches on all that follows.
 Apposite truth in words too ill expressed,
 And pleasing phrases which utter senseless cant,
 To redeem virtues of both, must be set apart
 From the harmful company they keep.
 For literary merits high and low are by grains and scruples measured,
 The elect and the forsaken are separated no wider than a hair's breadth.
 After the choice is made on the most accurate balance,
 The Master Carpenter's tape it must also fit.

Lavish expressions may contain abundant truth,
 But fail to direct and drive the Meaning home.
 For the highest perfection to be attained will exclude duality,
 And consummation admits of no surfeit.
 A pithy saying at a crucial point,
 May whip all parts into a whole.
 Though all the words are in nice order arrayed,
 Such a "rallying whip" is needed to make them serve.
 The utmost is achieved at slightest cost,
 When the kernel, unequivocal, suffices.

Sometimes inspired thoughts weave themselves into the finest fabrics,
 And grow ever fresher and more comely as they expand,
 Glistening with colours of the most exquisite embroidery,
 And tuned to the poignant music of a thousand strings.
 But the accomplished piece of imitation must be so perfected
 That it is in the ancient tradition, yet remains a nonpareil.
 Even though all the warp and woof are of my own heart's tissue,
 In constant fear must I be lest others before me have spun the same.
 When honor and integrity are menaced,
 Even gems most cherished must I sacrifice.

Or a thought may, like a lone plant, burst and burgeon with a life all its own,
So individual that on this earth it seems to have no species,
Until it becomes mirage-like, forever a fugitive from form,
Or a phantom voice that no sound audible can echo,
A being isolated from all contexts, a singular eminence,
That no common words or vocables can express.
The heart then feels like a forlorn lover, doomed to desolation,
Yet haunted by a Meaning evasive, intangible, but never to be shaken off.
Let it, then, be contained like jade in rocks, that a mountain loom in radiance,
Or cast it like a pearl in water that a whole river gleam with splendour.
For even shrubberies, when allowed to flourish,
Will by their opulent verdure claim a share of beauty.
In humble tunes that may mingle with the most exalted strains,
I find resources, too, for any grandeur they may augment.

(7) *five shortcomings*

A verse limps and falls short
When it is a single train of thought by too indigent vision hampered.
'Tis then like one in bereavement around whom the world is mute,
And heaven above, out of reach, empty and vast:
A weak string plucked alone,
Without resonance, its sound into thin air vanishes.

Or a composition is so marred by languid tones
That its words may flash but never rise to glory.
Fair is confounded with foul,
And qualities are drowned in blemishes:
'Tis as if pipers down the Hall pipe hurried notes at random,
Resonant but out of tune, that only throw the hymn into discord.

Or, to attain the unique at truth's expense,
 The poet is so bent on a search for the illusory and the minuscular
 That his words, lacking true emotion and void of love,
 Will waft and drift, homeless, nowhere to return:
 'Tis like a zither, too high-strung and hard pressed by rapid fingers;
 Although the melody is played in tune, it fails to move with pathos.

Or, a work may swing itself into such a symphony
 That it rings and clangs with many bewitching colours.
 It may thus please the eye and win popular acclaim,
 While its lowly tunes are exalted by loud performance.
 Beware of resemblance to the "Dew Shelter" and "Mulberry Grove,"¹
 Which, though full of pathos, are an offense to grace.

Or, aerial purity and simple elegance are so cultivated
 That the work is rid of all trimmings and ornaments,
 A rarefied feast without relish of seasoned gravy.
 A concert of wrought-silk strings that twang with too pure a tone,
 Although it trills on with endless reverberations,
 For all its grace, is innocent of glamour.

(8) *the secret of artistry*

Luxuriance and terseness of style,
 And the different aspects of form,
 Vary according to laws of propriety,
 Whose intricacies hinge upon a feeling so subtle:
 Once grasped, uncouth language may divulge clever parables,
 A truism by light verbal touches is turned into epigram,
 The older the model, the fresher the imitation,

¹ Allusions to ancient folk tunes typified as very lowly.

The duller the beginning, the more brilliant the final illumination.
 Whether this superb artistry becomes apparent at first sight
 Or is comprehended only after arduous toils of wit,
 It is like the dancer's, whose each whirl of the sleeve is borne by a rhythm,
 Or the singer's, whose each note responds to the twang of the string,
 Guided by a force which even the Master Wheelwright Pien² could not express in words;
 Therefore its secret lies beyond smoothest speech.

(9) *the source of literature and discipline*

To the all-pervasive law of word order and literary discipline
 I have devoutly dedicated myself.
 In its light I have seen much of the ills in vogue today
 And perceived the merits of masters of the past,
 Although an art truly wrought from the depths of a master mind
 Is oft by untrained eyes with ridicule regarded.

Coral gems and jade filigrane, however, are in their origins none too rare,
 But common as wild beans of the Central Plain that all can gather:
 Thus the source of poetry is like the air from the Bellows, the eternally generative Void,
 And it will forever breed with Heaven and Earth.

But be it soever bounteous and ubiquitous in this world,
 Alas, how much of it can my fingers mold?
 Dismayed as the holder of a vessel that is too often empty,
 I feel harassed by the thought that Great Eloquence is hard to achieve.
 Hence limping verses, born dwarfed, are let live,

² Who, in one of Chuang-tzū's fables, in *T'ien-tao*, chided book learning and prided himself on making the perfect wheel by complete union of heart and hand, which no words can express or teach.

And perfunctory notes are fiddled to round out a vapid tune.
Often have I finished my work with pangs of remorse;
When has my heart rejoiced with self-content?
Always fearful am I lest mine were the earthenware, dust-muffled and jarring,
A coarse mockery of tinkling jade.

(10) *of inspiration*

Such moments when Mind and Matter hold perfect communion,
And wide vistas open to regions hitherto entirely barred,
Will come with irresistible force,
And go, their departure none can hinder.
Hiding, they vanish like a flash of light;
Manifest, they are like sounds arising in mid-air.

So acute is the mind in such instants of divine comprehension,
What chaos is there that it cannot marshal in miraculous order?
While wingèd thoughts, like quick breezes, soar from depths of the heart,
Eloquent words, like a gushing spring, flow between lips and teeth.
No flower, or plant, or animal is too prodigal of splendour,
To be recreated under the writer's pen,
Hence the most wondrous spectacle that ever whelmed the eye,
And notes of the loftiest music that rejoiced the ear.

But there are other moments as though the Six Senses were stranded,
When the heart seems lost, and the spirit stagnant.
One stays motionless like a petrified log,
Dried up like an exhausted river bed.
The Soul is indrawn to search the hidden labyrinth;
Within oneself is sought where inner light may be stored.

Behind a trembling veil Truth seems to shimmer, yet ever more evasive,
 And thought twists and twirls like silk spun on a clogged wheel.
 Therefore, all one's vital force may be dispersed in rueful failure;
 Yet again, a free play of impulses may achieve a feat without pitfall.
 While the Secret may be held within oneself,
 It is none the less beyond one's power to sway.
 Oft I lay my hand on my empty chest,
 Despairing to know how the barrier could be removed.

(11) *the use of literature*

The use of literature
 Lies in its conveyance of every truth.
 It expands the horizon to make space infinite,
 And serves as a bridge that spans a myriad years.
 It maps all roads and paths for posterity,
 And mirrors the images of worthy ancients,
 That the tottering Edifices of the sage kings of antiquity may be reared again,
 And their admonishing voices, wind-borne since of yore, may resume full ex-
 pression.
 No regions are too remote but it pervades,
 No truth too subtle to be woven into its vast web.
 Like mist and rain, it permeates and nourishes,
 And manifests all the powers of transformation in which gods and spirits
 share.
 Virtue it makes endure and radiate on brass and stone,
 And resound in an eternal stream of melodies ever renewed on pipes and
 strings.

Supplementary Note

The date of the *Essay on Literature* has become duly recognized as an important issue only in very recent years. In fact one of the two earliest publications to go into great detail on this matter, as far as I know, is my own. The other is that of Professor Lu Ch'in-li of Kwangsi University, formerly Assistant Research Member of the Academia Sinica. In two different countries, without consulting each other, we have independently and with different methods arrived at nearly the same conclusion in refutation of a claim, transmitted from the eighth century, that the *Essay* was written some twenty years earlier. The truth had thence somehow for over a millennium remained on a literary-historical blind spot. Both Professor Lu's work and mine were published in the year 1948. I am more convinced that the correct date is A.D. 300 after a correspondence with Professor LU, who kindly sent me his reprint from *Hsueh Yuan*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1948, which I had not seen when my Peking publication came off the press. While Professor Lu's learned article pointed to a year very close to 300, he wrote me of what he considered a difficulty in deciding that it was precisely 300. The letter of Lu Chi's brother, Lu Yun, commenting on the *Essay* probably soon after its receipt, is one of the most important bases from which to ascertain the date of the *Essay*. That the two brothers in the year 300 both held official titles in the Chin capital seemed to be Professor Lu's sole difficulty in deciding that the letter could have been written in that year, because, he supposed, they must be all the time in the same city and would not have to write each other; though Professor Lu, in his thorough-going manner, kindly said in his letter of February, 1949, that my proofs (all detailed in my Peking publication) which placed the *Essay* in 300 rather than in any other year were "superior" to his if only this difficulty could be solved. I must say here that Professor Lu's method and mine in proving the date are basically different in that while his concern was to decide the date of the *Essay* mainly on the circumstantial, and of course important, evidence of the possible date of the letter, mine was to judge from what was being said in the letter, together with other historical and biographical material, however intricate. Of course it is agreed that the letter could not be very much later than the *Essay*, allowing for a necessary interval between the completion of the *Essay* and Lu Yun's receipt of it for comment. I placed the writing of the *Essay* about midsummer of 300. As to whether the letter could have been written later that year when the Lu brothers were both supposedly officials in the capital city (provided historical records are complete in this regard), I say yes, and the explanation of that answer may be of some interest. Official titles in the same capital do not always require a person to live in the capital all the time, either now or in the past. For instance, Lu Yun's *Sheng-tê sung*, "A Eulogy," tells explicitly that while holding the title *T' ai-tzū shê-jen*, "Steward to the Heir-Apparent," he was travelling far from the capital, in the region of the Ssü River. And even when people stayed in the same city, in the middle

ages, they still often wrote each other. It is curious how we sometimes pride ourselves on certain conveniences and comforts as if they were exclusively modern, while they were enjoyed millenniums ago. There are numerous examples of frequent exchange of letters by people living in the same city in China during the third century, or even earlier. Witness the famous letters, discussing literature and daily trifles too, by people of a generation before Lu Chi's time. Among these are the ones, for instance, between Ts'ao Chih and his friends Yang Hsiu and Ch'en Lin, preserved in these authors' collected works, and even the familiar *Wen-hsuan*, where the *Essay on Literature* is also found. These letters show that the correspondents might be seeing each other almost every day. Another presumption might be that the Lu brothers, holding official titles in the same capital, must stay in the same house. I felt, on the contrary, that their official positions, quite high and in different departments in the year 300, were, if anything, more likely to separate their domiciles than as if they were private citizens. All these might be sufficient reasons for convincing my friend Professor Lu. But there is a document which may serve as material evidence that the Lu brothers in the year 300 were in fact separated. This is a fragment quoted in the *Ch'u-hsueh chi*, an early eighth-century encyclopedia. The fragment is a part of Lu Chi's *Chien-yuan-hou hsieh-piao*, "An Official Letter in Gratitude after Being Pardoned." I would rate this document even more highly had I not the suspicion after scrutinizing four editions that the text might be slightly corrupted. But the recension in Chang-P'u's *Pai-san ming-chia-chi*, edited by P'eng Mao-ch'ien in 1879, helps make the following sense unmistakable. Referring to the plotting of usurpation by Prince Lun in the year 300, Lu Chi wrote, "I was afraid that there might be pressure upon me [to draft the decree of the emperor's forced abdication], so, pretending to attend my wife's sister's funeral, I went out to join my brother Yun." We can be sure that this event occurred in 300. For the usurpation materialized in the very beginning of 301. And, accordingly, Lu Yun in 300 must have maintained a separate household sufficiently distant for his brother to hide in.

I am grateful to Professor Lu's cautious query, whereby an elaborate point in this problem can be aired. From the profitable discussions with him it also dawned upon me why, as the study of Lu Chi has recently become somewhat popular, there has been the claim that the date of this important *Essay* is 302. The misapprehension that Lu Yun's letter must have been written only when the brothers were in different cities can easily lead to this conclusion, by a narrow way of reasoning, based on slippery grounds indeed. For then all one would have to do would be just to look for the year of the brothers' separation, settle on that year for Lu Yun to write the letter, and Lu Chi, the *Essay*. Conveniently, there happens to be only one such year which can be selected easily, from the autumn of 301 to the autumn of 303: 301 is too short, and 303 is the year of Lu Chi's death, so—302, here we have it, open sesame! And with this facile conclusion all other important details of evidence are disregarded.

But I must say, however, that I am not referring here to Professor E. R. Hughes's Bollingen publication, *The Art of Letters*, where he marks down the date as 302. With due respect, I make no conjectures as to his reasoning and proof, which are not given in his over two hundred and sixty pages of interesting expatiation on this work of Lu Chi. Only one single sentence, on page 54, refers to Lu Yun's letter as "dated 302." Dated by whom or how, he does not mention. But I am sure, though that sentence inadvertently might do so, Professor Hughes does not want to give the impression that the letter was dated by the correspondent himself. In this connection I might add that Professor Lu Ch'in-li in his article in *Hsueh Yuan* has succeeded in dating sixteen (in his letter to me a year later he added two more) of Lu Yun's thirty-five extant letters. But the important one in question, which Professor Hughes has referred to, was to Professor Lu among those that were undatable as to the exact year. The eighteen letters dated, on generally sound bases, are of 302. But no sufficient reason can convince me that the other seventeen undatable ones *therefore* must be also of the same year. Professor Lu, in fact, in his conclusion has tried to place the *Essay* close to 300. He supposed 301, barring the possibility that the letter could have been written in 300. For he at the time of writing that article was still held by the scruple of believing that the brothers were all the time in the same city that year, and would not write each other.

生 南
靖 榮

This translation of Lu Chi's *Essay on Literature* by Shih-hsiang Chen, originally published for the semicentennial anniversary of Peking University in 1948, is now reprinted in revised form in an edition of four hundred copies as a Keepsake for the friends of The Anthoensen Press and The Meriden Gravure Company. The Chinese text, specially written for this edition by the skilful calligrapher, Chang Ch'ung-ho, has been reproduced in offset by The Meriden Gravure Company. The book has been designed by Fred Anthoensen, whose imprint in the Chinese transliterations above also signifies "Gentleman of the Peaceful Apple Orchard," and has been printed in the spring of 1953 at The Anthoensen Press, Portland, Maine.

