

CHOU TSO-JEN AND CULTIVATING ONE'S GARDEN

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Mr. C. T. Hsia, in his *History of modern Chinese fiction*,¹ has called attention to the important role of Chou Tso-jen in the New Literature movement in modern China, and at the same time bemoaned the fact that "his splendid and varied contributions to the Literary Revolution and the new culture movement have never been given due recognition" (p. 609, n. 16). As the according of such recognition would naturally require a sympathetic attitude it cannot be looked for at present either in the People's Republic or in Formosa, for Chou's collaboration with the Japanese occupation forces debars much show of sympathy in either place. Nor was any large-scale study of his work undertaken before the war; all there was was a number of essays, some of which were published in *Chou Tso-jen lun* (周作人論).² Among the latter that of Su Hsueh-lin (蘇雪林) is the most substantial; the majority are merely flattering or abusive. There are one or two Japanese monographs in existence, but these are difficult of purchase. In the West there exists, as far as I know, only a brief sketch of Chou's life and works prepared by Prof. William Schultz for the *Men and Politics in Modern China* series. The present article does not aim to fill the gap indicated by Mr. Hsia; it is indeed only concerned with one of the problems that Chou has had to face in his long life. But in view of the dearth of information on Chou it would be as well to offer some preliminary generalizations on Chou's place in modern literature.

I think it would be true to say that in his maturity Chou was more appreciated for what he was than for what he wrote. His chosen form of literature was in fact that which revealed most directly the character of the author: the short personal essay. He belonged to a type which has had its representatives in all periods of Chinese history, the sane, aloof, scholarly, humanitarian, unimpressionable, sceptical observer of the oddities and idiocies of his age; unlike his predecessors he had a thorough grounding in Western culture which provided a standard of comparison for his comments, though he had less and less recourse to Western works in middle age, and correspondingly more to the works of "outsiders" in Chinese and

Japanese letters, not to mention the democratic tradition in Confucianism. At times he even ironically affected the manner of those who sigh for the heroic past. As this was the face he turned to the world, during the thirties particularly, he came to be regarded as playing the hermit to his brother's rebel; such a casting was not altogether uninvited, for Chou had quite early on discussed himself in such terms. He seemed temperamentally unable to embroil himself in unmannerly polemics as Lu Hsun could, which might not be unconnected with the fact that it was Lu Hsun who, as elder brother, had to take the initiative and the knocks in their childhood. And yet there was a basic community of interests between the two brothers, both in similarity of taste in Chinese literature and in their agreement on the aspects of Chinese life that had to be changed and the vicious practices that had to be eradicated. Chou's well balanced and intelligent and erudite essays made him a leader of opinion during the period of their co-operation which lasted into the first years of publication of the periodical *Yü Ssu* (語絲). However, the two went their different ways after 1926; Lu Hsun left Peking for the south and eventual leadership of the League of Left-wing Writers, while Chou Tso-jen stayed in Peking and withdrew into private life, contributing from time to time relatively harmless essays to Lin Yutang's magazines.³ In this situation it is impossible to estimate the influence Tso-jen exerted in the world of Chinese letters; certainly he aroused some antipathy on account of his eremitism, but equally inspired devotion in some young people, to judge from adulatory essays in *Chou Tso-jen lun* and *Wen-t'ang shih-liao* (文壇史料).⁴ In any case the free development of Chinese literature was soon cut off short, and orthodoxy, which had always been the central target for Chou's criticism, was effectively imposed.⁵

It has been noted in the various brief cultural histories of the inter-war period that exist that many of the intellectuals who so enthusiastically espoused the aims of the May Fourth movement soon fell by the wayside; but so far as I know no real attempt has been made to follow the fall from grace of any of these individuals. Chou Tso-jen held on longer than many others (Cheng Chen-tuo 鄭振鐸 once praised him for "carrying on an unceasing effort", together with Lu Hsun, after the main energy of the May Fourth movement spent itself⁶) but his experience can still be allowed to shed some light on the general problem. What I have tried to do here is to show mostly through Chou's own words the gradual contraction in his theoretical sphere of activity which took place immediately following the

³ This period of Chou's life has been summarized by C. T. Hsia, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-4.

⁴ Edited by Yang Chih-hua 楊之華, Shanghai 1944.

⁵ Since Chou's release from prison soon after the People's Republic was founded, he has been living quietly in Peking engaged most notably in providing biographical information on Lu Hsun's early years.

⁶ In the Introduction to Vol. 2, 中國新文學大系, ed. 趙家驊, Chao Chia-pi, Hong Kong reprint, p. 426.

¹ Yale U.P., 1961.

² Edited by T'ao Ming-chih 陶明志, 1934.

May Fourth period. Naturally this will require some explanation of what he saw as his province during that period.

I

Let us first briefly recall the situation of the would-be renovators of the fabric of Chinese life, the foreign-trained academics whose focal point was the Peking University that Ts'ai Yuan-p'ei (蔡元培) had rehabilitated after his appointment as chancellor in December 1916. Their experience abroad had made them forcibly aware that China would never take her place among the great nations of the world or be self-respecting until there had been a basic change in the habits of thought of her people. The task of modernizing and humanizing China was immense, and if they appeared undaunted by it, it was due to their faith in their morally unchallengeable principles and to the promise of the social and scientific theories, formulated in a robust and confident period in the West, that they had learned (the influence of Dewey is of course relevant in this connexion). These taught them that history was on their side and that problems were amenable to solution if the scientific laws of cause and effect could be understood and applied. Cultural problems were not excluded from this general rule; Hu Shih wrote in his *Science and the Philosophy of Life* (科學與人生觀):

On the basis of the biological and psychological sciences, we should recognize that *all psychological phenomena are explainable* through the law of causality. On the basis of biological and historical knowledge, we should recognize that morality and religion are subject to change, and that the *causes of such changes can be scientifically discovered*.⁷ (my italics)

It is only a short step to conclude that the possessors of such knowledge could effect a remarkable cultural transformation. One might take as a further token of faith in guided evolution towards a future of sweetness and light Ts'ai Yuan-p'ei's belief that an aesthetic education could replace irrational religion.

The academics set about their task by disseminating modern ideas through teaching, publications and lectures, and also by attempting to direct the course of creative literature. To this end they published a mass of immodest proposals for the establishment of a "new literature". Philosophically the proposals were designed to satisfy two requirements: the new-found demands of the individual, and conscience for the fate of the group — whether society or mankind. These requirements are reflected in the "philosophies of life" expounded by the leading reformers.⁸ With Ch'en Tu-hsiu (陳獨秀) they are married in the view of society as the collective memory which lends the transitory individual immortality, and with Hu

⁷ In *Hu Shih wen-t'ui* (胡適文存), Vol. 2, Ch. 1. The translation is from *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, ed. de Bary, p. 843.

Shih they coalesce in the concept of the Individual (the small self), who is subject to death and extinction, and Mankind (the large self), which does not die: "to live for the sake of the species and posterity is religion of the highest kind".

In the initial phase of the New Literature movement the programmes for reform show near-unanimity, the different approaches being complementary rather than contradictory. Hu Shih's dry and sensible prescriptions deal mainly with the technical aspects of renovation while the flamboyant proclamations of Ch'en Tu-hsiu look to a moral crusade. There is general agreement that the subject-matter of the New Literature should expand to admit the real world of the average man and should explore social problems. Balancing the call for realistic writing based on personal experience was the stress on the need for a constructive optimism in literature,⁹ a support for which item is to be found in Hu Shih's discussion of Pragmatism:¹⁰

"The philosophical method for solving human problems . . . must enable people to have creative intelligence, to envisage a bright future on the basis of present needs, and must be able to create new methods and tools to realize that future."

However, literature should equally provide a means of self-expression.

The best summary guide to ideas popular with the pioneers of the Literary Revolution, though it does not purport to be so, is Hu Shih's essay on Ibsenism, printed in *New Youth* (新青年) in June 1918. The contributions to the student magazine *New Tide* (新潮)¹¹ attest to their wide currency. These are some of the views of Ibsen that Hu Shih chooses to present: people must be made to face the truth, a prerequisite for any improvement; social morality is merely entrenched custom, countenancing much cruelty; religion is an empty shell which cramps and misshapes human nature; the individual and organized society are at odds, as the latter exists to suppress free action and independence; politics and politicians are despicable: the most important thing is the great revolution of the human heart; the idea of nation will be replaced by the idea of mankind. Ibsen, Hu states, uncovered social evils, but did not lightly recommend cures, being aware of the complexity and variety of the problems involved; however, he did take one positive stand: the individual must fully develop his talents, must fully expand his individuality. On the question of the

⁸ The most important of these are translated in de Bary, *op. cit.*, Ch. 28.

⁹ An early reference to the constructive element in fiction is found in Liu Pan-nung's "Spiritual renewal in poetry and fiction" (劉半農：詩與小說精神上的革新) in *New Youth*, July 1917, where he states that the *Shui-hu chuan* (水滸傳) points to a socialist world, *Robinson Crusoe* proves man's independence of an evil society, Victor Hugo spurns evil laws and creates a new world based on natural goodness, etc.

¹⁰ *Hsin ch'ing-nien* (新青年), April 1919.

¹¹ Founded 1 January 1919.

individual in society, Ibsen wrote to Brandes that to be useful to society he should forge his own metal into a tool. And Hu Shih himself adds that there are two conditions for the development of individuality: aspiration to freedom, and acceptance of involvement and responsibility; and that society and the state need people of independence. It will be seen that most of these ideas informed the work of Chou Tso-jen, who from 1918 played an active and dutiful part in the campaign to demolish Confucianism and to find an acceptable modern substitute. They are also typical of the liberal humanism that was pushed aside in the march of modern China.

II

In 1918 Chou was 33 years of age. He had behind him a creditable amount of translation work and had read widely in Western literature, ranging from Homer to Frazer and Havelock Ellis (including the latter's *Psychology of Sex*). He had learnt English at the Naval Academy in Nanking which he attended from 1901 to 1906, and had spent six years in Japan, benefitting from the Imperial government's plan to train technicians, but acquiring in fact a set of values inimical to his patrons. In Tokyo he came under the influence of the great nationalist Chang T'ai-yen (章太炎), and through him, according to his own account, acquired an enthusiasm for revolutionary literature, which led in turn to the literatures of the great cultures. (In fact he had translated Poe's *Gold Bug* and *Ali Baba* while still in Nanking, which rather indicates an earlier interest in literature.) With his brother Chou Shu-jen (周樹人) he published a collection of translations entitled *Stories from Abroad* (域外小說集) in 1909. After the 1911 Revolution Chou returned to China and took up a career in education, which led eventually to a professorship at Peking University in 1917. There he continued his study of foreign literature and in 1920 published *Drops* (點滴)¹², a further collection of short stories in translation which was heavily weighted in favour of Russian and East European authors. The reason for this bias is evidently sympathy with peoples who felt themselves oppressed like the Chinese; Chou in fact remarked in 1920 on the similarity of the political situation in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century to the current situation in China, and deduced that China too would produce a literature that would deal with society and human life.¹³ He also expressed sympathy with Russian humanism: he took Andreyev's statement that literature's "supreme achievement is to erase all barriers and distances

¹² The title is taken from Zarathustras Vorrede. It reads: "Ich liebe alle Die, welche wie schwere Tropfen sind, einzeln fallend aus der dunklen Wolke, die über den Menschen hängt: sie verkündigen, dass der Blitz kommt und gehn als Verkündiger zugrunde."

¹³ See "Rusia and China in Literature" (文學上的俄國與中國) in *Art and Life* 藝術與生活, Shanghai, 1930, pp. 139-40.

(between people)" as the manifesto of Russian humanist writers,¹⁴ and approved this sentiment in the following passage, dated April 1920:¹⁵

"Among these stories of quite dissimilar schools there is a common spirit—and this is humanist thought. Whether they are optimistic or pessimistic, they take an earnest attitude towards life and seek for a complete solution. Tolstoy's universal love and non-resistance, for example, are undoubtedly humanist and Solgrub's eulogy of death must also be allowed to be humanist. They only acknowledge that the single unit is oneself and the sum is mankind: the general solution to mankind's problems embraces me, and the solution to my problems is the first step of that great solution. This humanist thought that assumes similarities on the large scale and differences on the small scale is the special characteristic of modern literature. As uniformity according to a rigid model is neither possible nor tolerable, this many-faceted, multifarious humanist literature is quite the proper ideal literature."

This passage which explains the guiding thought behind the selection of the stories translated introduces us to the issue in Chou Tso-jen's writings of the relationship between the individual and the group. The frequency with which he returns to this question is a mark of his preoccupation with it. Three months previously he had written:

"Differences like those of race or country, previously thought to be heaven-ordained, are now known to be icons. So the view of the enlightened man of the present age is roughly this: I just acknowledge that this only is true, that on the large scale there is mankind, on the small scale there is myself."¹⁶

Chou asserts that differentiation among people arose because of the belief that one could only profit oneself at the expense of others, which led those closely related to band together. Now it was known that benefit and harm were common to all, that when profiting oneself one profited others.¹⁷ All men are of common stock and differences are superficial.

"This belief in mankind is the product of the blend of emotion and reason, and is the theme of the literature we require."

That the phrasing here is so close to the preface just quoted supports one's impression that Chou was in the latter case more intent on working out a problem of his own than weighing up his authors objectively.

This whole issue is summed up most succinctly in one of Chou's earliest critical pieces, "The development of the novel in Japan over the last thirty

¹⁴ See his comment on Andreyev's "Toothache", recorded in October 1919 (in *Drops*).

¹⁵ In the preface to *Drops*.

¹⁶ "Requisites for the New Literature" (新文學的要求) in *Art and Life*, p. 39

¹⁷ This principle was probably proved to Chou's satisfaction in the work of Kropotkin.

years",¹⁸ where he simply says, "With regard to thought of all complexions, the more inclined towards mankind and the world it is, the better." So there is no lack of evidence that Chou Tso-jen was at this early stage deeply committed to an active type of humanism, and furthermore held his views rather optimistically. He did not indeed omit the element of optimism from his proposals for the new literature: a clear direction is contained in his comment (dated April 1919) on Olive Schreiner's "Three Dreams in a Desert", in *Drops*, vol. 2:

"Modern writers in their attitude to life are mostly inclined towards optimism. In literature idealism is in the ascendent. In Mrs. Schreiner's approach to the feminist question, when she looks back at the past and from close to at the present (she sees) naturally mostly darkness; but looking afar to the future, she cherishes unbounded glorious hopes. So the tenor of her work is quite different from that of the negative naturalist school. She like them bases herself on actuality, but is by no means content with this; through her ideals she seeks for a complete solution."

The enlistment of the cause of modernity in this comment is consistent with Chou's general outlook. He is sure that an education in modern Western thought for the intellectual class is the first necessity for the revitalization of China, and that literature is one of the ways of getting through to the mass of the Chinese sheltered from the wind from the West.¹⁹ He writes in "Russia and China in literature":²⁰

"If we can absorb new thought and through it express and interpret our special national character, we can look forward to the advent of a new literature, and can also through the world of art influence real life."

and then adds,

"The social background is reflected in literature; at the same time the influence of this literature makes the background gradually change, and this is why we value literature highly."

For a piece of sustained reasoning which goes back to first principles, and which will explain Chou Tso-jen's basic philosophy, let us turn to his celebrated essay, "A Literature of Man" (人的文學).²¹ Apart from its

¹⁸ Originally a lecture to the Research Institute of the School of Literature of Peking University in April 1918. Printed in *Art and Life*, p. 265.

¹⁹ A view shared by Shen Yen-ping (沈雁冰). See his "The Responsibility and Efforts of the Researchers of the New Literature" (新文學研究者的責任與努力) in *小說月報* February 1921: "Our task is to introduce Western literature—partly for its literary art, partly for modern world thought—which is the more pressing thing. The approach of introducing all good Western literature does not coincide with our aim."

²⁰ *Art and Life*, p. 147.

²¹ Celebrated for Western readers in C. T. Hsia, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-21. It originally appeared in *New Youth* in December 1918.

intrinsic interest it will provide a frame of reference in Chou's debate with himself on the function and scope of literature. The essay starts with a bold exposition of his view of biological man, which he has substantially maintained ever since:

"The sort of 'man' we are talking about is . . . 'man who evolved from the animal' . . . We recognize that man is a type of creature; the phenomena of his life are in no way different from those of other creatures. So we believe that all man's vital instincts are good and beautiful and should be completely satisfied; all unnatural customs which are at variance with man's nature should be eradicated . . . We believe that man's animal life is the basis of his survival, yet his internal life has gradually distanced itself from the animal and can eventually aspire to a lofty and serene sphere. All vestiges of beastly nature and those of the ancient rules of conduct which obstruct the upward development of human nature should be cast off or corrected."

Early philosophy was based on the dichotomy of flesh and spirit, elevating either the one or the other;²² but

"Blake, in his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, puts it very well: Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that called Body is a portion of Soul discerned by the five Senses."

What then follows from this scientific view of man?

"He is all mankind, but also one among mankind; therefore he should plan for a life that would profit himself and others as well."

Chou argues that the ideal life based on love, knowledge, faith and courage would benefit everyone and that anyone of wealth or standing who might resist this philosophy should realize that he would be gaining a *full* life;

"This is the new gospel for the twentieth century, but it is known by only a few men, and cannot immediately be put into practice. Therefore we must promote it in literature."

But he also makes it clear that the new morality sees things in terms of individuals, not universal pity:

"The individual loves mankind, because mankind includes himself, and is related to him."²³

There are in literature two courses to pursue that follow from such assumptions. They are:

²² It is interesting that Chou later found this dichotomy resolved in Chinese thought; see "The tradition of Chinese literature" (漢文學的傳統) in *Yao-t'ang tsa-wen* (藥堂雜文) 1940. The depreciation here is probably due to neglect rather than ignorance.

²³ To clothe this abstraction a little, one might refer to Chou's poem, "Little Child" (小孩) of January 1922, printed in *Life passing by* (過去的生命), 1929: Only because of my own offspring do I love children; Only because of my own wife do I love women; Only because of myself do I love others.

(1) to describe the ideal life, that which men are capable of achieving; and

(2) to describe "inhuman" life, or life as it is usually led.

The first course would be direct, the second would be oblique, but the goal would be the same. Literature which describes "inhuman" life may still be "human", depending on the attitude of the author. Examples of "human" literature in China are very few: works deriving from Confucianism and Taoism are almost all disqualified. Examples of the opposite include: sensual stories, stories of slavish mentality, about robbers and thieves and precious lovers, low grade comedy, and so on.

"According to our theory, these should be done away with, though there is no harm in educated people reading them."

"Human" literature, in the case of love between the sexes, would stress the equality of woman and marriage for love (the positive models here being *A Doll's House*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and *Anna Karenina*, among others), and in the case of the parent-child relationship, would stress the natural bonds and mutual obligations (the models here include the parting of Hector from his children in Homer and Euripides, Sudermann's *Heimat*, and Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*).

Chou concludes his essay with the thought that since we are involved in the fate of mankind as a whole we should admit the lives of all peoples into our frame of reference. He hopes that through the translation of foreign works this world-wide perspective will "nurture the morality of man, and realise the life of man".

"A Literature of Man" does not aim at originality so much as wide acceptability. It is meant to appeal to the younger generation who are at once more receptive to new ideas and potentially the active elements in the intellectual life of the nation. It therefore tries to make out as modern and rational (or "scientific") a case as possible for the ideal that Chou felt had to be worked for if China was to become a fit place to live in. Traditional mystique about the nature of man is banished and the argument is based on biological science. The ideal life that is attuned to essential human nature is defined, but because so few people have an understanding of it, the aid of literature must be enlisted to propagate its philosophy. In this context it is naturally the educative affective role of literature that is brought into prominence; a writer should deal positively with the normal human environment, and his work should be meaningful for the average man, a point implicit here, but made explicit in "Literature of the Common People" (平民的文學)²⁴ of December 1918, where Chou says,

"We should not record the deeds of heroes and bravos, the bliss of precious lovers, we should only convey the common mundane sorrows

²⁴ Published in *Art and Life*. This passage is on p. 4.

and joys, reverses and gains of men and women. Heroes and bravos and precious lovers are rarely met with, whereas ordinary men and women compose the vast majority, and we are of their number, so their affairs are more common, and also more pertinent to ourselves."

"A Literature of Man" does not ask for what one might call a "sociological" literature, in wide demand at the time from other reformers. The choice of the theme is entirely up to the writer; it is his attitude which is the crucial thing. What Chou is in fact asking for is a serious moral literature, only of a certain circumscribed nature. The limits of his tolerance are marked in his criticism of Yu Ta-fu's *Sinking* (郁達夫: 沈淪),²⁵ which was commonly condemned as obscene. He writes (in 1922),

"(The story's) value lies in subconsciously revealing the self, in artistically describing sublimated sex, and this is where 'sincerity' and 'universality'²⁶ are present. As to the so-called obscene parts, . . . I feel that if the author felt that he had to write in that way to express his condition, then of course there is nothing to object to."

But this does not apply where the sex-matter is secondary, not central, and the attitude is not sincere. Chou goes on,

"*Sinking* is an artistic work, but is 'literature for the initiated', and not reading matter for the man in the street . . . For minors in need of sex education these books are most unsuitable."

How the "initiated" are to be distinguished from the innocent is not explained. Though paternalist, Chou's theoretical restrictions would not be unduly repressive, as the morally beneficial literature that he wants would be the natural expression of the essential man. The question of differing values does not arise either:

"Since there is only a uniformly equal mankind, there is naturally also a uniformly equal morality."²⁷

All the emphasis at this stage is on the common ground, not on the exclusive problems of any individual. There is no conflict envisaged between the individual and the group.

Holding such firm views on the moral obligations of the writer, Chou was bound to enter into the current controversy over the rival claims of the "Art for Art" and "Art for Life" schools of thought. This he does in another seminal essay called "Requisites for the New Literature" (新文學的要求), which was read to the Peking Youth Study Society in January 1920. Chou discusses, with a more typical modesty of expression, the standpoints of both schools, and finds both wanting. With the "Art for Art" school he feels that emphasizing skill in technique and neglecting feeling

²⁵ "Ch'en-lun" (沈淪) in *One's Own Garden* (自己的園地) 1923, p. 79.

²⁶ "Sincerity" and "universality" are the virtues Chou discerns in popular literature in his essay "Literature of the Common People" (see note 24).

²⁷ In "Literature of the Common People", *Art and Life*, p. 4.

and thought hinders the aim of self-expression, to the point where life exists for art. With the rival school he feels there is a danger of art becoming the tool of ethics, a sort of enthroned dogma.

"The correct view is that art should remain the final aim, but should convey the author's feelings and thoughts and have contact with human life. In other words the author should by means of art express his sentiments about life, so that the reader gets aesthetic enjoyment and an interpretation of life."²⁸

The historian should give each school its due, but

"we who want to create works of art, or seek spiritual nourishment in art, have to take sides to ensure we have a guide line to follow; so we adopt the 'art of life' school."

Chou recognizes that commitment to one or other school is a matter of environment and temperament, and suspects it is his subconscious that dictates his choice:

"living in this age, we naturally cannot have much sympathy with aestheticism or hedonism."

On the evidence of this confession it would seem more appropriate to talk about fixity of purpose rather than narrowness of vision among the heralds of the Literary Revolution.

The conviction found in "Requisites" that the aim of art is self-expression is one which Chou has held, in face of much opposition, throughout his life.²⁹ It can be fitted in the framework of "A Literature of Man", but it probably derives from early acquaintance with the Preface to the *Book of Odes*, which Chou was much given to quoting. The individual is in fact given pride of place in this essay, but still it is the individual in concert with the group, a concept reinforced by more evolutionary theory. The thesis is that literature should be individual according to the pattern of history: literature was once of mankind, then of class, now of individual. In ancient times the ballads expressed simple aspirations that were held in common; now the man of advanced sensibility expresses things ignored or felt indistinctly by people, but these are still common experiences. The individual is, to reduce the argument to a commonplace, the representative of mankind.

The fact, as the Preface to the *Book of Odes* has it, that literature originates in emotion is of particular significance for its educative role. The preface to *Drops* (1920) states:

²⁸ *Art and Life*, p. 32.

²⁹ Chou stated uncompromisingly in a short preface to his translation from H. R. Haggard in 1907 (in *K'u-yü-chai hsü pa wen* 苦雨齋序跋文, 1934, p. 3): "Study is for improving the mind; literature is for moving the feelings; if the feelings are moved, the job of literature is done. All other benefits are extraneous." If the other benefits became for a time central for him, the basic proposition remained firm.

"Usually when we rely solely on reason to discuss all sorts of elevated doctrines we feel we have got to the bottom of things; but if the emotions have not changed, then our words will be always empty and our thoughts forever vain; they can never be realized. True literature can influence people's feelings; it can certainly transmit humanist thought to us, and can also transfer our subjective thought from the rational to the emotional plane; it can carve deep imprints on the heart, and be the pivot on which thought turns to fact. This is our greatest hope for and trust in literature."

In 1921 Chou still cleaved to this optimistic view. It was he who drafted the manifesto of the Society for Literary Research (文學研究會), which read,

"To think of literature as an amusement when elated or a distraction when despondent is now out of date. We believe that literature is a kind of work like that of workers and peasants."³⁰

And the same month (January) saw reaffirmation of the dual allegiance that we have been discussing:

"False, imitative, unnatural works, whether old or new, are equally valueless; this is because they have no genuine individuality . . . individuality is the sole possession of the individual, yet has something basically held in common with mankind."³¹

We have seen how up to this year of 1921 Chou Tso-jen had been concerned both with making a case for the transforming power of literature, partly one suspects to assure himself that his chosen sphere of activity was worth while, partly to encourage others to write, and, as a conscientious reformer and constructive critic, defining and commending the humanist literature which was both proper for his time and consonant with universally valid principles of the human spirit. A few years later the same Chou Tso-jen was asserting that literature was "useless", and was stigmatized by the left wing for his defeatism and petty self-concern. One cannot presume to know how this change came about, but the path of the transition can be made out faintly with the aid of our subject's lack of reluctance to talk about himself.

The year 1921 seems to have been a turning point on more than one level. According to Mao Tse-tung, it marked the second stage of the May Fourth movement, when the majority of the bourgeois intellectuals came to terms with their enemies and took a reactionary stand.³² It was the year when a counter-attack on the New Literature of some pertinence was preparing under the auspices of *The Critical Review* (學衡) (it had an

³⁰ In *Hsiao-shuo Yueh-pao*, January 1921.

³¹ In "Individual Literature" (個性的文學), reprinted in *T'an lung chi* 談龍集 1927.

³² *On Art and Literature*, Peking, 1960, p. 23.

easy target in the crowds that came limping after the innovators, and indeed among the innovators themselves), and when many intellectuals took to undramatic academic research. It was certainly the end of an era for Chou Tso-jen:

"Before 1921 I was very green, and had a lot of idealistic, optimistic things to say, but afterwards I came gradually to understand things—at not a little cost."³³

It was in 1921 that Chou underwent a long and serious illness, and left the city of Peking to convalesce in the Western Hills. From his letters³⁴ it is clear that he used this period of enforced idleness to take stock of himself, and seek for an answer to his spiritual problems. There are signs that he came to construe the idea of the "full life" in more personal terms, and to be jealous of the peace and quiet away from the irritating factional disputes of public life which would allow him to formulate his own destiny, to the limited extent possible in a country under despotic rule and racked by civil wars.³⁵ Such a change would of course be slight and gradual, but it is to be seen in the collection *One's Own Garden* (自己的園地), the pieces for which were written between January and October 1922. The essay from which the collection gets its name reflects the belief (or hope) that the individual in pursuing his own bent is still performing a service for society:

"to plant flowers is still cultivating our garden; though different in kind from planting food and herbs it is equally valuable".

Society needs to be fed and doctored, to be sure, but it also urgently needs the uplift of the beautiful, Chou argues:

"if there is a society which despises these things, it is crass, a society with outward form but no spiritual life, and we need not take it into account".

Apart from its jarring note, it will be noticed that this last sentence contains a new and so far untypical reservation, namely that the artist works for the society of his own choice. Chou had no illusions about his own society; he had been attacking it for years for a multitude of sins. The term of reference in his optimistic essays had been "mankind"; "society" as a concept had always been rather unsavoury, but it had not so far been suggested it could be abandoned.

In the same essay Chou re-examines the question of "Art for Art's sake" versus "Art for Life's sake", and comes to roughly the same

³³ In the postface to *T'an hu chi* (談虎集), 1928.

³⁴ "Shan-chung tsa-hsin" (山中雜信) in *Yü-t'ien ti shu* (雨天的書), 1925.

³⁵ The personal philosophy he evolved is illustrated in "The Wayseeker" (尋路的人) of July 1923, printed in *過去的生命*, a piece prompted by the sight of a prisoner on the way to the execution ground: "Which of us does not go along in an open cart? Some think it's going to heaven, and rejoice; some think it's going to hell, and mourn; some are drunk, and sleep. But I just intend to go gently along, looking at wayside scenes, listening to other people's conversations, and embrace the troubles and pleasures which are my due. As to which way the road goes, what does it matter?"

conclusion as before, but there is a slight shift in emphasis. His premise is that art cannot be set apart from life; he now stresses the distinction between art *for* life and art *of* life. Two years previously he had given his general blessing to the "life" school; now he rejects one specific interpretation of the idea, that of art *for* life. His judgement is:

"art is independent, yet it originates in human nature, so there is no call to make it separate from human life, nor to make it serve human life; it only needs to be allowed to become an all-embracing art of life".

The whole purpose of the essay is to defend the personal nature of art and condemn writing to rule. It can be seen as a qualification of Chou's bold earlier statements, which did outline a framework within which the writer was to work.

The essay "One's Own Garden" contains the first of Chou's many declarations of intention peacefully to cultivate his garden which were not sustained. It is, however, still outwardlooking, still concerned with the public dimension as well as the private. But now compare the Preface to the collection,³⁶ written in July 1923:

"If we are over-anxious to gain a place in history, and to profit society, we efface ourselves too much; in fact a place in history is not the aim of writing, to profit society is by no means the duty of the writer: because to speak as one thinks is the sole basis of all literature . . . I am a devotee of literature, I want in literature to understand other people's feelings, and to find the pleasure of my own feelings being understood . . . I don't at all think these essays could be of much use to others, or could give much enjoyment."

If we discount the modesty obligatory for someone introducing his own work, this preface still marks an important change of attitude. To say that profiting society is not the *duty* of the writer is not inconsistent with previous arguments, for that would imply writing to rule. What is different is the omission of any reference to the cultural role of the writer in society. The extent of Chou's hopes is apparently to strike a sympathetic chord in the like-minded reader, which is again to look at literature from the other end of the telescope. Furthermore, his concluding statement (not quoted) that because of a feeling of desolation he had sought comfort in literature accords ill with the Society for Literary Research proclamation that "to think of literature as a distraction when despondent is now out of date". This relapse, whatever Chou's private situation may have been, must be seen against the background of general disillusionment as the "new tide" spent itself, as the social transformation which the reformers had looked for and for which the Russian Revolution had recently shown the way, failed to materialize. But let us for now return to our text, *One's Own Garden*.

³⁶ Reprinted in *T'an lung chi* (談龍集), pp. 50-2.

III

The essay, "Aristocratic and Plebeian" (貴族的與平民的) signals a shift away from the straightforward democratic view to a more sophisticated social attitude. In his essay of 1918 called "Literature of the Common People" (平民的文學) Chou had defined its characteristics as "universality" and "genuineness", whereas "aristocratic" literature had been dismissed as ornamental, hedonist, and restricted in scope. He now considers it wrong to draw the line according to social class, as both types of literature reflect values that are widely shared, not the monopoly of a certain class. The popular spirit he now identifies with Schopenhauer, the aristocratic with Nietzsche; the first seeks "a limited, ordinary existence", the second "an unlimited, surpassing development". Chou is firmly in favour of the popular spirit as a basis, but as it tends to be satisfied with conventional ideals, it needs a leavening of the aristocratic spirit, which is a questing one: it spurs one to achieve "the full and beautiful life". The free play of the mind one might add, seems to have gained a place in the "full life" that it did not occupy when "A Literature of Man" was written. Chou warns that pressure for cultural conformity should be resisted:

"If the transitory class struggle in society were transferred to art, with the aim of instituting the dictatorship of workers and peasants, the result would without doubt be the reverse of that in economics and politics, it would be retrograde."³⁷

It is the pressures from the left that he was more sensitive to at this time, as these stemmed from the heresies of natural allies. Another piece³⁸ written about the same time illustrates our point. In it Chou takes issue with one Ma Ch'ing-ch'uan (馬慶川), who recommended to writers the feelings common to mankind and discounted personal feelings, which he thought irrelevant to human life. As this is the sort of aberration that his own earlier writings might have encouraged, Chou was understandably anxious to cut it off short, which he does with arguments about the origins of literature being in emotions felt personally that we are familiar with.

A similar kind of anxiety is present in "The Function of Poetry" (詩的效用). Here Chou writes:

"From first to last I have recognized that literature is individual, but because it can give voice to words which Everyman wants to speak but is distressed at not being able to speak, I also say it is of mankind."

The individual only

"subjectively gives voice to what he himself wants to say, he does not objectively appraise the state of mind of the multitude and

consciously act as their interpreter . . .³⁹ Utilitarian criticism can be partly justified, but it overestimates the social import of art, and neglects its original artistic character; though it purports to call on writers to be the pioneers who lead society, in fact it might easily drive them to be the minstrels who wait upon the masses."⁴⁰

In the next year Chou recalls the traditional polarization between "poetry expressing the heart's wishes" and "literature as a vehicle for the way", committing himself wholeheartedly to the former concept.⁴¹ (He was later to analyse the whole history of Chinese literature on the basis of this antithesis,⁴² so dogmatically that he then had to go to much subsequent trouble to explain himself.) He calls attention to the fondness for abstraction in the new arts of China:

"Clinging to the requirement of universality, they strive to give form to predetermined concepts, instead of giving genuine and forceful expression to their own personality, which results in monotony."⁴³

He recollects that the May Fourth movement was launched precisely against a stifling orthodoxy, in that case one of classicism; what he fears is that they have exchanged one orthodoxy for another:

"The code of the 'pharisees' and classicists is able to create a sort of universal thought and style of writing, but inside this universality there are no variations, and so no artistic value . . . in the contemporary intellectual and literary world there is exactly a type of bondage of universality, a fixed new outlook on life and literary style, which if passed down will become a new school of phariseism and classicism."

He continues, in a key as rhapsodic as can be found in his work,

"what we hope for is to escape from all bonds, to sing at will; no matter how dignified the writings of others may be, how optimistic their thought, how much they might talk of patriotism and obligations, if I want to write light and romantic or satirical and disparaging things, that is my freedom. Moreover, no matter whether the content is escapist or defiant, as long as it is my heartfelt view produced by the interaction of heredity and environment, as long as it is not deliberately created out of prejudiced allegiance to factional standpoints, then it is all worthy and rightful to be published."⁴⁴

³⁹ Contrast Ch'eng Fang-wu (成仿吾), "The Mission of the New Literature" (新文學的使命) in 創造週報, No. 2: "We should consciously grasp and express the age", etc.

⁴⁰ cf. note 38, pp. 17-18.

⁴¹ Ch'en Tu-hsiu had touched on the obnoxious doctrine of 文以載道 in "On Literary Revolution" (文學革命論), in *New Youth*, February 1917.

⁴² In *Chung-kuo hsin wen-hsiieh ti yüan-liu* 中國新文學的源流, Peking, 1932.

⁴³ In "Place and Literature" (地方與文學), of March 1923, reprinted in 談龍集, p. 12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁷ *One's Own Garden* 自己的園地, 1928 edition, p. 16.

³⁸ "The Unification of Literature" (文學的統一), in *One's Own Garden*.

The "others" might almost have been following his previous instructions. We can see the mounting emphasis on the freedom of the writer to follow his own interests by comparing a much less vehement statement from the previous year:

"As I see it, it would be best to let each one freely create his own poems; if it is done well, and from an individual poet he become a national poet . . . that is certainly greatly to be hoped for; but if not, it is still a good thing to allow everyone to give rein to their feelings and satisfy their needs."⁴⁵

It would be repetitious to quote further pronouncements from Chou Tso-jen on the role that literature has to play in life, as they all insist in similar fashion on its personal nature and on its autonomy. Chou does concede in his introduction to his translation of 嬰兒殺害 (*Eiji-goroshi*) by 山本有三 (Yamamoto Yüzō), which he published in *Yü Ssu*, Vol. 4, No. 38 (1928) that "anti-imperialist thought" if it has "soaked into the heart" and become "incandescent" can produce good literature. But literature is *not* propaganda. The type of literature he shows appreciation for is that which enjoys life in all its manifestations, and prizes man's imperfections (the so-called 趣味文學).⁴⁶

Chou's contributions to the magazine *Yü Ssu* (語絲), which he helped found in 1924, reflect growing disillusionment with the course of the cultural revolution; the true light is being hidden, the independent spirits are caught in a cross-fire between the old and new traditionalists. As the military leaders increasingly patronize reactionary movements, he foresees a "return to the ancient ways" and the exclusion of foreign cultural influence. If he is perhaps too ready to accept defeat on the broader front, in order to withdraw to piece together some sort of personal life, the throttling of independent thought is by no means a figment of his imagination. Hu Shih, a less emotional observer (and always eminently quotable) saw things in the same light:

"One great concern of the New Culture Movement was liberation of thought. We then criticized Confucius and Mencius, opposed Confucianism, denied God, in order to overturn a uniform orthodoxy, to liberate Chinese thought, to promote a sceptical attitude and a critical spirit—that was all. But the result of the co-operation between the Communist Party and the Kuomintang was to create an absolutely autocratic situation, and the freedom of speech and thought was lost. God could be denied, but Sun Yatsen could not be criticized; worship

did not need to be practised, but the President's Testament had to be read, and his memorial day has to be observed . . ."⁴⁷

and so on in the same vein. Chou himself cites such things as the suppression of modern learning "one day's journey from Peking",⁴⁸ and a teacher being forced out of his job by the pressure of an uninformed but implacable public opinion,⁴⁹ among a host of other things, in his lamentations on the losing struggle of the man who would be free against the arbitrary actions of despots and crowd alike. He sums up in 1927:

"For the last six years I have daily feared the advent of the reactionary movement, and now it has come at last: I strongly share K'ang Hsi's feeling: 'Alas, my words have come true'. What is this reaction? It need not be 'conserve the old and restore the ancient'; it applies to all bullying for conformity of thought. The extermination of the Reds in the north goes without saying; the purge in the south is also one of the kinds of reaction that I fear, because it condemns not only crimes of action, but also crimes of thought: to execute a person for his ideas is I feel the most terrible thing."⁵⁰

If we might recall the terminology introduced at the beginning of this essay, we can say we have witnessed in Chou Tso-jen's published views on the place of Literature a gradual but complete shift of sights from the "large self" to the "small self".⁵¹ In a minor way the shift was a gauge of the failing hopes of liberal Chinese intellectuals. The leading intellectuals of the May Fourth movement drew their philosophical inspiration mainly from the French and American revolutions⁵² (Chou once said that he felt he belonged to the eighteenth century), and these philosophies were displaced by newer and harder ones, which left their adherents rather isolated. Chou's ideas and ideals did not change radically, but their complexion varied with the demands of the times; there was little point in talking about improving mankind (after his model) if that now seemed unrealizable. The logical conclusion for him was to accept the argument of Havelock Ellis (which he did in 1924) that a society's morality was too complex in its origins to admit of purposive reform.⁵³ His position therefore shifted to the

⁴⁷ "The New Culture Movement and the Kuomintang" (新文化運動與國民黨) in *Symposium on Human Rights* 人權論叢, 1930, p. 124.

⁴⁸ In "A letter opposing the New Culture" 一封反對新文化的信, of May 1924, reprinted in *T'an hu chi*.

⁴⁹ In "Whether Old Books should be read or not" 古書可讀否的問題, in *T'an hu chi*.

⁵⁰ In the Postface to *T'an hu chi*, pp. 623-4.

⁵¹ For a discussion on these polarities as represented in Chin Sheng-t'an and Yuan Mei respectively, see James Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, pp. 73-6. Resemblances in their phrasing to Chou Tso-jen's are sometimes striking.

⁵² See Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement*, Ch. 12.

⁵³ See "The Uselessness of Instruction" 教訓之無用, in *Yü-t'ien ti shu* 雨天的書, 1925.

⁴⁵ "On the short poem" (論小詩) in *One's Own Garden*, p. 62.

⁴⁶ This point is made by Ts'ao Chü-jen 曹聚仁 in *Wen-t'ang Wu-shih nien* 文壇五十年, Hong Kong, 1955, pp. 57-8.

defensive; the aim of his topical essays seems thenceforth to have been to reinforce the resistance of the individual to corrupt practices, with his remaining hope now in the superior man, through whom alone social progress will come, according to his new theory that progress among the Chinese is vertical, not horizontal.⁵⁴ But more typical than any reference to progress in his subsequent work is the sentiment that the use of history "is to teach people that the same will happen again" (the phrase is adapted from Bakunin), an outlook which had been combated in the May Fourth period. Chou came more and more to feel the deadening weight of the past from which he felt the Chinese could not free themselves; he even characterized his enemies as ghosts from the past that take possession of living people.⁵⁵

The underlying imperative in Chou's advocacy was that the man and the writer should be true to his real self. A man who would say that he "tasted soap"⁵⁶ when his words were disingenuous must, with the growth of propaganda in his country, have shared the sentiments of Doctor Zhivago who wrote in similar circumstances:

"It was then that falsehood came into our Russian land. The great misfortune, the root of all evil to come, was the loss of faith in the value of personal opinions. People imagined it was out of date to follow their own moral sense, that they must all sing the same tune in chorus, and live by other people's notions, the notions which were being crammed down everybody's throat. And there arose the power of the glittering phrase, first tsarist, then revolutionary."⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See his reply to the article "Havelock Ellis and Forel" in *Yü Ssu*, No. 26 (May 1925).

⁵⁵ See "Our Enemies" (我們的敵人), in *Yü Ssu*, No. 6 (December 1924).

⁵⁶ He did so in "My Chi-nan Journey, No. 3" 濟南道中之三, in *Yü-t'ien ti shu*.

⁵⁷ Fontana Books, 1962 edition, p. 396.