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Ts'ao Chih and the Immortals

Ts'ao Chih 曹植 (192–232 A.D.) has left us a number of remarks, including a whole essay, in which he denies the existence of immortals (*hsien* 仙) or of immortality in general, and he does so with such scorn that it seems strange to find ten ballads (*yüeh-fu* 樂府) in his works that take immortals as their theme and present them in a very favorable light. This anomaly has struck generations of critics who have tried, often contradicting one another, to explain it away. My aim here is to present the complete dossier, that is, all of Ts'ao Chih's prose and verse concerning immortals, and attempt to see which, if any, of the various explanations accounting for the existence of these contradictory works is the right one. In other words, I will attempt to discover just how we are to interpret the ballads in question, in order to find out what Ts'ao Chih was actually getting at. His poems of immortals have the added interest of being one of the very first treatments by a known author of a theme that would become a permanent fixture of Chinese poetry.

TS'AO CHIH'S ESSAYS ON IMMORTALS

Perhaps the best way to begin our study is to read what Ts'ao Chih has to say about immortals in a prose essay he must have written sometime between 217, when his brother was established as crown prince, and the death of his father in 220. I deduce this because he speaks in the essay of "the crown prince" and his father ("the king") as if they were both still alive.

My translation is based on the new (and now indispensable) edition of Ts'ao Chih's works by Chao Yu-wen 趙幼文,[1] which takes as its basic text the standard edition by Ting Yen 丁晏 (1794–1875).[2] This text, in its turn, is actually a rifacimento by Sun Hsing-yen 孫星衍 (1753–1818),[3] who used as his basic text the version given in *Pien-cheng lun* 辨正論 by Fa-lin 法琳 (572–640),[4] to which he added fragments from *Kuang hung-ming chi* 廣弘明集

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[1] Chao Yu-wen 趙幼文, ed., *Ts'ao Chih chi chiao-chu* 曹植集校注 (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh, 1984; hereafter cited as *TCCC*), pp. 186–96.

[2] Ting Yen, comp., *Ts'ao chi ch'üan-p'ing* 曹集銓評, pref. dated 1865.

[3] Included in Sun Hsing-yen, comp., *Hsü ku-wen yüan* 續古文苑 (pref. dated 1807), *ch.* 9, pp. 462–68 of the Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng edn.

[4] Included in *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, no. 2110, pp. 500c–01a.

by Tao-hsüan 道宣 (596–667)[5] and from the commentary to *San-kuo chih* 三國志, *ch.* 29.[6] As Ting Yen says,[7] Sun Hsing-yen's editing is extremely well done and it is hard to see where one text is joined to another. Ts'ao Chih's essay was used by Buddhists in their polemics against Taoism, but there is no reason to believe that it was fabricated by them.

Here is a translation of the essay. It will give us a good idea of what Ts'ao Chih thought of immortals and of the search for immortality when he was in his late twenties.

An Analysis of Tao[ism]

We find the following in the Taoists' books about immortals: Fu Yüeh 傅說 rose up to become a star in the lunar mansion of the Tail[8] and the year star (Jupiter) came down to earth to become Tung-fang Shuo 東方朔;[9] the prince of Huai-nan, Liu An 劉安, was executed in his fief, but these books say he obtained the Way (*tao* 道) and ascended in an apotheosis;[10] [Lady] Kou-i 鉤弋 died in Yün-yang and these books say her corpse passed on, leaving her coffin empty.[11] What is all of this but a pack of lies!

[5] *Taishō*, no. 2103, pp. 118c–19b.

[6] Ch'en Shou 陳壽 (233–297), *San-kuo chih* 三國志 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1975; hereafter *SKC*) 29, p. 805.

[7] Ting Yen, comp., *Ts'ao chi ch'üan-p'ing* (Peking: Wen-hsüeh ku-chi k'an-hsing-she, 1957), *ch.* 9, p. 155.

[8] See *Chuang-tzu* 6; trans. Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1968), p. 82. Fu Yüeh is said to have been minister of the Shang king Wu-ting 武丁 (r. 1324–1266 B.C.) and to have been translated to the heavens as a star in the constellation Scorpio (i.e., Wei 尾, the Tail, in China). See also *Ch'u-tz'u*, "Yüan-yu"; David Hawkes, trans., *Ch'u Tz'u, The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology* (London: Oxford U.P., 1959), p. 82.

[9] See *Lieh-hsien chuan*; trans. Max Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-sien tchouan* (Peking: Univ. de Paris, Centre d'Etudes Sinologiques, 1953), p. 138: "The scholars suspected he was the spirit, *ching* 精, of the planet Jupiter." Chao Yu-wen, *TCCCC*, p. 190, n. 3, quotes *Feng-su t'ung-i*, which says Tung-fang Shuo was popularly thought to have been the spirit of the planet Venus, but the *Feng-su* cannot be in Ts'ao Chih's mind here because it is not one of the "Taoist" books.

[10] This is the version of *Shen-hsien chuan* 4; trans. Sawada Mizuho 沢田瑞穗, in *Chūgoku koten bungaku taikei* 8 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1969), pp. 374, 378. Wang Li-ch'i's 王利器 *Feng-su t'ung-i chiao-chu* 風俗通義校注 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1981) 2, pp. 115–18, explodes this myth as being the fabulation of Liu An's followers ashamed of the fact that their master, as seeker of immortality, had actually died. It is impossible today to know exactly to which of the "Taoists' books" Ts'ao Chih refers in these examples; the work *Lieh-hsien chuan* may well have been in existence during his lifetime, but *Shen-hsien chuan* is attributed to Ko Hung 葛洪, who lived a century later.

[11] Yün-yang 雲陽 was probably another name for the Sweet Spring Palace, northwest of the present Ch'un-yang 淳陽, Shensi. Ssu-ma Ch'ien 司馬遷 (145–86? B.C.), *Shih-chi* 史記 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1962; hereafter *SC*) 49 (in Edouard Chavannes, trans., *Les mémoires historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien* [Paris: E. Leroux, 1895–1905; rpt. Paris: Adrienne-Maisonneuve, with supp. vol., 1969; hereafter *MH*] 6, pp. 62–64) says Lady Kung-i was allowed to commit suicide there by

Among the serious essayists who lived at the time of the restoration [of the Han dynasty] was one called Huan Chün-shan [Huan T'an],[12] whose writings are often quite good. Liu Tzu-chün 劉子駿 [i.e., Liu Hsin 歆, d. 23 A.D.] once asked him: "If a man can truly repress his desires, and close his ears and eyes [to external distractions], can he preserve himself from physical decay?" At the time, there was an old elm tree in the courtyard; Huan T'an pointed to it and said: "This tree has no sentiments it could suppress, no ears or eyes to close, and yet it will wither and rot; thus when Liu Hsin says it is possible to preserve oneself from physical decay, he is speaking nonsense!"

Huan T'an was not quite right to use the elm tree for his comparison. Why?[13] ... "I [Huan T'an] was grandee of the Directorate of Music under Wang Mang.[14] There were documents on the musicians there which said that Emperor Wen [r. 180–157 B.C.] was able to procure the services of the musician named Aged Tou 竇公, who had been a musician attached to the Marquis Wen of Wei [424–387 B.C.]. He was 180 years old[15] and blind in both eyes. The emperor was amazed and asked him what he had done [to be able to live so long]." Aged Tou answered: "I lost my eyesight at the age of twelve, and my parents, distressed by the fact that I could not cope with any business, taught me

Emperor Wu, who feared she would dominate her young son, the future Emperor Chao (cf. Pan Ku 班固 [32–92 A.D.], *Han shu* 漢書 [Peking: Chung-hua, 1962; hereafter *HS*] 97A, pp. 3956–57). But *Lieh-hsien chuan* (and not *Shen-hsien chuan*, as said by Chao Yu-wen, *TCCCC*, p. 190, n. 5), adds that "her corpse remained warm and fragrant for a month and when later the Emperor Chao had her reburied they found only silk slippers in her coffin" (trans. Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-sien tchouan*, p. 140).

[12] Huan T'an (Chün-shan) 桓譚 (君山) was a well-known thinker born toward the end of the Western Han; he died at the beginning of the Eastern Han. He has been studied by Timoteus Pokora, *Hsin-lun (New Treatise) and Other Writings by Huan T'an (43 B.C.–28 A.D.)*, Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies 20 (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan P., 1975); for a translation of another version of this section, see Pokora, *Hsin-lun*, no. 156, p. 156 and p. 162, n. 34. This section about Huan T'an is quoted and discussed in Hou Wai-lu 侯外廬 et al., *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung-shih* 中國思想通史 (Peking: Jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1962) 3, pp. 339–40.

[13] As Sun Hsing-yen points out (*Hsü ku-wen yüan*), something has dropped out here because the following words obviously quote Huan T'an himself. This whole section has a number of versions all showing differences; see Pokora, *Hsin-lun*, pp. 74–75, n. 82, for all references and translations.

[14] The official title given, *tien-yüeh ta-fu* 典樂大夫, did not refer to the Directorate of Music under Wang Mang's reign but to the Directorate of Foreign Affairs; cf. *HS* 99B, p. 4103 (trans. Homer Dubs, *History of the Former Han Dynasty* 3 [Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1955], p. 269). Either there is an error in the text here or the title used is an anachronism, but I believe the reference is to Huan T'an's appointment in the Directorate of Music.

[15] He was at least 200 years old. If he served the marquis in the last year of his life, 387 B.C., and the emperor in the first year of his reign, 180 B.C., he would have been 207 years old at the time.

to play the zither. I do not know Taoist gymnastics (*tao-yin* 道引),[16] nor do I know what strength has enabled me to live so long!"

Huan T'an discussed this and said: "He was helped by the fact that he was rather young when he became blind. He was able to concentrate on his inner self and not let his feelings be influenced by exterior things." Previously, when criticizing Liu Hsin, Huan T'an said inner concentration was to no avail, but here, on the contrary, when discussing Aged Tou, he invokes the fact that the latter had no external influences as a reason for his achieving longevity. I just wonder what his final judgment on this subject was.

Huan T'an has also said: "There was a magician named Tung Chung-chün 董仲君 who was imprisoned because of a crime he had committed. He pretended to die and, after a few days, his eyes sank into his head and worms came out of them. He had died and was reborn. Later he finally died once and for all." A superior man knows full well that what is born must die: why try to explain it further? Even the most godlike of the things of the universe[17] could not be greater than the universe itself; it could not make insects who hibernate in the winter hide away in summer, nor produce a peal of thunder in winter. It is seasonal changes that make the creatures in nature bestir themselves, and movements in the [*yin* and *yang*] breaths of the atmosphere that elicit responses in nature. Isn't it simply too strange to believe that this fellow named Tung Chung-chün was able to conceal his breathing, turn his body into a corpse, make his skin rot, and let worms come out of him?

All the magicians that can be found today have been brought [to the capital] by our king [Ts'ao Ts'ao 曹操]: Kan Shih 甘始[18] of Kan-

[16] Some texts say, on the contrary, that Tou did practice Taoist gymnastics (*HS* 30, p. 1712; and *Kuang hung-ming chi* 廣弘明集), while two texts in the *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 383, p. 10b and 740, pp. 5a–b, agree with the version translated here.

[17] According to the "Hsi-tz'u" (the "Great Treatise" commentary to the *I-ching*), it is the *I-ching* that is "the most god-like thing under heaven"; see James Legge, trans., *The Yi King* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), p. 370. In these sentences Ts'ao Chih is presenting a mechanistic view of the universe which has no place for the occult or for the supernatural prowesses claimed by Taoist magicians.

[18] Kan Shih shares a three-line biography with two other magicians in Fan Yeh 范曄 (398–445), *Hou Han-shu* 後漢書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1963; hereafter *HHS*) 82B, p. 2750. Trans. in Ngo Van Xuyet, *Divination, magie et politique dans la Chine ancienne* (Paris: Presses Univ. de Fr., 1976), pp. 141–42, and Kenneth J. DeWoskin, *Doctors, Diviners and Magicians of Ancient China: Biographies of Fang-shih* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1983), pp. 87–88. The portion of Ts'ao Chih's essay concerning Kan Shih is quoted in the commentary and is translated in DeWoskin, *Doctors, Diviners*, pp. 151–52. Scholars from the Hunan Provincial Museum and from the Institute for Chinese Medicine, writing in a booklet devoted to the painting found in

ling (Hopei), Tso Tz'u 左慈[19] of Lu-chiang (Anhwei), Ch'ieh Chien 郄儉[20] of Yang-cheng (Honan). Kan Shih knows how to circulate his breath through his body and perform Taoist gymnastics; Tso Tz'u is versed in the arts of the bedchamber; Ch'ieh Chien excels in abstaining from eating grain. All of these men declared they were centenarians many times over. The main reason they were gathered together in Wei was in fact because it was feared that they and men like them would band together with wrongdoers and liars to cheat the masses, and carry out their magical evil to befuddle the people. That is why [Ts'ao Ts'ao] has gathered them together and restrained them from action. It is not that he too, [like the First Emperor of the Ch'in dynasty], wanted to see the immortals on the Isle of Ying or seek An-ch'i on the seashore,[21] or that he rejected the royal golden carriage looking for an [immortal's] coach made of clouds and threw away the six coursers [used by a king] in envy of the flying dragons [used by immortals]! From the king in our family [Ts'ao Ts'ao] and the crown prince [Ts'ao P'i 曹丕] down to me and my brothers, we all consider these men to be laughable and do not believe in them at all!

But Kan Shih and the others know that they can depend upon regular treatment from the authorities: their salaries will not exceed those of the lowest officials and they will receive no rewards without rendering services. [They know that at the time of the First Emperor of Ch'in the men he sent out found it] hard to swim to the isles [of the immortals] in the sea, and that it would be hard to wear the six cords for official seals [like those given to Luan Ta by Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty],[22] and so in the end they have not dared present their empty and fallacious words to the throne or hold forth any extravagant discourses.

Ma-wang-tui showing Taoist gymnastics, called *Tao-yin-t'u lun-chi* 導引圖論集 (n.p.: Wen-wu ch'u-pan-she, pref. dated 1978), p. 13, refer to Ts'ao Chih's remarks on Kan Shih, whom they cite as an example of a Han dynasty practitioner of Taoist gymnastics.

[19] Tso Tz'u's "biography" is also in *HHS* 82B, pp. 2747–48. It contains nothing but examples of his magical powers; trans. in Ngo, *Divination*, pp. 138–39 and DeWoskin, *Doctors, Diviners*, pp. 83–86.

[20] The name Ch'ieh 郄 or 郤 is sometimes written Hsi 郗. There seem to have been two men of this name. One was governor, *tz'u-shih*, of I-chou (Ssu-ch'uan) who was killed in 188 A.D., before Ts'ao Chih was born. The other is our magician who appears in the commentaries to *SKC* 1, p. 54 (which quotes Chang Hua's *Po-wu chih*) and 29, pp. 805–06 (quoting Ts'ao P'i's *Tien-lun* and this essay).

[21] The Isle of Ying and An-ch'i refer to the search for immortals by the First Emperor; see *MH* 3, pp. 465–66.

[22] *MH* 3, pp. 481–82.

I once tried to test Ch'ieh Chien to see if he could refrain from eating grain for one hundred days. I personally stayed with him [even] while he slept [and saw] that he was able to live normally [without eating]. Now, a man dies when he doesn't eat for a week, but Ch'ieh Chien was actually able to [live on] as described! This does not mean, however, that he was necessarily able to live any longer, even if, by his art, he could cure his sicknesses and not fear hunger during times of famine. Tso Tz'u excelled in the practice of the arts of the bedchamber, which should enable him, more or less, to accomplish his allotted span of life. But one cannot carry out [these arts] if one does not want it with all one's might.

The man named Kan Shih was old, but he looked like a young man. The other magicians all looked upon him as their master. Kan Shih talked a lot but had little real accomplishment to show for it. He was quite a weaver of tall tales. I once got rid of the people around us and talked to him *tête-à-tête*, asking him questions about his activities. I made myself as pleasant as I could to draw him out, leading him on with fine words. Kan Shih told me the following:

"My first master was named Han Shih-hsiung 韓世雄. I once was with him at the Southern Sea making gold. All in all, from the beginning to the end of our work, we threw tens of thousands of pounds of gold into the sea." He also said: "At the time of the Liang 梁 [influential family around 150 A.D.], a foreigner from Central Asia presented belts of perfumed wool and knives that cut jade to the court.[23] At the time I regretted not having taken them." He said again: "In the Western Country of Chü-shih 車師,[24] when a boy is born, they open his back and take his spleen out, so that he will eat less and work harder."[25] He said again: "Take a pair of carp around five inches long and put a drug in the mouth of one of them; then throw both of them into boiling oil. When the one that has swallowed the drug is still wriggling its tail and working its gills, swimming about up and down as if it were in a deep pool filled with water, the other carp will be cooked and ready to bite into." At the time I asked him: "Can all this be tested?" He answered:

[23] This is the famous *k'un-wu* 昆吾 knife; see Joseph Needham et al., *Science and Civilisation in China* 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1959), pp. 656, 667–68.

[24] Chü-shih was a confederation of six states in what is now Sinkiang.

[25] The idea that the removal or shrinkage of the spleen permits men or animals to run fast seems to be very old and may actually have come to China from the West via Chü-shih; see Pliny, *Natural History* 26.83.13. It would seem that at the end of the 16th century surgeons attempted to remove the spleens of dogs to see if they would run faster!

"This drug is over 10,000 *li* from here, beyond the frontiers. Only I could get it." And that's not all he said; it would be very difficult to write down all of it, so I have sketched in only the most extraordinary of his stories. If Kan Shih and the others had lived during the times of the First Emperor of the Ch'in and Emperor Wu of the Han, they would have been followers of Hsü Shih and Luan Ta.[26] [The arch-villains] Chieh 桀 and Chou 紂 lived in different periods but were equally bad; the dynasty may change, but dishonest behavior is equally false whatever the period, and so it is with these [charlatans of our own times]!

And, now, we have theories about immortals based on thin air. What is an immortal? Is it a kind of ape? Are men who obtain the *tao* transformed into immortals? When pheasants go into the sea they become clams.[27] When, [before their transformation], these birds flew around, flapping their wings together,[28] they recognized one another still. But once they had plunged headlong into their spiritual and material transformations and become members of the race of turtles, how could they remember the joy they had soaring over the forests or nesting in hedges and roofs? Niu Ai fell sick and became a tiger. When he met his elder brother, he ate him.[29] When confronted with such examples, what can we find to esteem in such transformations?

Now an emperor's position is higher than that of any of his innumerable vassals; his riches comprise the entire universe; his majesty is clear to all, his brilliance the equal of the sun's and moon's. His palaces and courtyards sparkle like the stars in heaven. Why should he long for the palaces of the Queen Mother [of the West] or the K'un-lun region [where the immortals' palaces are found]? Her three [blue] birds on

[26] Hsü Shih 徐市 (*SC* 6; *MH* 2, pp. 151–52, 180, 190) and Luan Ta 欒大 (*SC* 28; *MH* 3, pp. 477–81) were both magicians. The former tried to delude the First Emperor, the latter Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty.

[27] These two transformations are typical prescientific attempts at explanations of natural phenomena; there is some confusion as to which bird becomes which bivalve, and I doubt that it would serve any useful purpose to try to clear up the confusion. The *Huai-nan-tzu* 5, p. 11a (SPTK edn.) says "a pheasant entering the sea becomes a clam 蛤." The Chu-tzu chi-ch'eng edn. of the *Huai-nan-tzu* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1954), p. 79, has "sparrow." The *Li chi*, "Yüeh-ling" section (trans. S. Couvreur, *Li Ki, ou mémoires sur les bienséances et les cérémonies*, 2nd. edn. [Ho Kien Fou: Impr. de la Mission Catholique, 1913] 1, p. 385) also says "sparrows ... become clams." It is in the apocrypha quoted in the *TCCCC* notes to Ts'ao Chih's essay that we find confirmation of his statements. There is an interesting discussion of similar theories of transmutation by Joseph Needham and Lu Gwei-djen, "Ancient Chinese Oecology and Plant Geography: The Case of the *Chü* and the *Chih*," in F. Aubin, ed., *Etudes Song, Sér. II* (*Civilisation*) (Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1984), pp. 249–65.

[28] These lines are near quotations of *Shih ching*, Poem 28.

[29] Cf. *Huai-nan-tzu* (Chu-tzu chi-ch'eng edn.), p. 20.

mission are not as fine looking as the whole corps of his officials;[30] the White Girl or Ch'ang-o were not as beautiful as the [women] in the pepper room [of his palace];[31] cloud robes and feather skirts cannot compare with the *fu-fu* 黼黻 embroideries that ornamented [imperial uniforms]; to drive a hornless dragon bearing a rainbow [as a flag] is not so splendid as to ride in the imperial carriage; carnelian pistils and jade flowers are not as pure as jade scepters. And yet [emperors] let themselves be duped by ignoramuses, accepting falsehoods, giving credence to misleading theories. They heap up presents to invite men who are not their subjects,[32] and dilapidate their goods to seek for vanities. They distribute royal titles to glorify [these charlatans] and clean great halls to house them. This they do year in and year out, with nothing to show for it. One of them, [the First Emperor of Ch'in], died at Sha-ch'iu [Hopei]; another, [emperor Wu of the Han], died in the Palace of Five Oaks [Shensi]. When the time came, [the emperors had these charlatans] put to death with their entire families, causing the whole empire to laugh out loud!

If the various colors of the spectrum are there to delight the eyes, if there are musical sounds to give pleasure to the ears, if there are beautiful wives to perpetuate our family lines, meats of grass- and grain-fed animals to please our palates, why must we satisfy ourselves with tastes that have no taste, listen to music that has no sound, or look at beauty without color?[33] But the truth of the matter is that each person's

[30] Hsi-wang-mu 西王母 is a famous figure in Chinese folklore; in his commentary to *Shan-hai ching* 16 (SPPY edn.), p. 3b, Kuo P'u says the three "blue birds" on the Wang-mu mountain of the West were all in attendance upon Hsi-wang-mu's messengers. In *ibid., ch.* 12, p. 1a, it is said that three blue birds nourished Hsi-wang-mu; see also the references by R. Mathieu, *Etude sur la mythologie et l'ethnologie de la Chine ancienne: traduction annotée du Shanhai jing*, Mémoires de l'IHEC 22 (Paris: Coll. de Fr., 1983) 1, p. 100, n. 3, to which should be added Homer H. Dubs, "An Ancient Chinese Mystery Cult," *Harvard Theological Review* 35 (1942), pp. 221–40.

[31] The White Girl, Su-nü 素女, and Ch'ang-o 嫦娥 are both well-known Taoist immortals; the former was famous as a musician (see *Ch'u-tz'u*, "Chiu huai" and "Chao shih"; trans. Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u*, p. 145) or as a specialist in the bedroom arts (cf. R. H. van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961], pp. 74–75). The latter (originally Heng-o 姮娥) was the Lady in the Moon (see *Huai-nan-tzu* 6, p. 98 and Edward Schafer, "Ways of Looking at the Moon Palace," *AM* 3rd ser. 1.1 [1988], pp. 1–14). The "pepper room" was a bedchamber in the palace in which the walls were plastered wih mud and pepper, creating warmth and a pleasant odor. See *HS* 66, p. 2885, n. 8 by Yen Shih-ku, who treats the term as the name of a Han palace.

[32] This is an allusion to *SC* 28 (*MH* 3, pp. 478, 481), according to which Luan Ta, who said he was despised by the immortals he met "because he was a subject" (and thus not an absolutely free man), was given an official seal in a strange night ceremony "to show that he was not a subject."

[33] These are of course allusions to Taoist mysticism as found in *Lao tzu* 63 and *Chuang tzu* 12 (Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu*, p. 128, etc.).

longevity has a predestined limit, just as his body has just so much strength. Those who nourish themselves intelligently will reach the limit allotted to them; those who tire themselves out or are dissolute, will cut that limit in half; and those who neglect to use what was given to them[34] die young. This is the truth of the matter!

It would be difficult to write a more thorough, or a more contemptuous demolition of the idea of Taoist immortality. Whatever we may think of the literary quality of this essay,[35] Ts'ao Chih here shows not only that he does not believe in the possibility of achieving Taoist immortality, but that the very idea of transformation into some sort of winged creature, half-human, half-ape, is distasteful to him. He is contemptuous, too, of the "miracles" performed by Kan Shih, although he does seem to believe in Ch'ieh Chien's ability to go without eating. Furthermore, he extends this aversion to his whole family, insisting upon the fact that Ts'ao Ts'ao's assembling of the magicians in the capital had been for political reasons — to keep them from fomenting the kind of disorder that had occurred under the Taoists' Yellow Turban Rebellion just before the writing of this essay. He insists at such length, that indeed some critics have seen this disavowal of imperial interest in immortality-seeking as the main motive for writing the essay.[36]

Actually, we know from other texts and from some of Ts'ao Ts'ao's own writings that his interest in the quest for immortality was more complex than Ts'ao Chih's essay would have us believe, and we will soon see that Ts'ao Chih's attitude toward immortals became more complex and less categorically negative as he grew older.

Complaints against immortality-seeking were already commonplace by Ts'ao Chih's time, as were immortals in literature. Seeking immortality, in fact, although often decried, had become a legitimate aim in life. Just

[34] Chao, in *TCCCC*, suggests that 虛用 is inspired by *SC* 30, p. 3289: "Too great usage 大用 of the spirit brings on exhaustion." I believe Ts'ao Chih's usage of the word 虛 is closer to that in *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 3, "Yüan-tao" (see Ch'en Ch'i-yu 陳奇猷, *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu chiao-shih* 呂氏春秋校釋 [Shanghai: Hsüeh-lin, 1984], p. 172), in which it is said that "it is wrong to concentrate on only one of man's 'nine orifices' [organs of the senses and private parts] to the exclusion of the eight others; to leave them 虛, 'empty,' 'unused,' leads to death."

[35] Liu Hsieh 劉勰, *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* 文心雕龍, rpt. of the Fan Wen-lan 范文瀾 commented version (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1960) 18, p. 328, is extremely harsh: "Ts'ao Chih's 'Analysis of Taoism' is no more than a series of extracts from other books; when one's talents are not up to holding an argument, it is better to stop, and not to write at all!"

[36] Chao, *TCCCC*, and Ch'ing Hsi-ta'i 卿希泰, *Chung-kuo tao-chiao ssu-hsiang shih-kang* 中國道教思想史綱 (Ch'eng-tu: Ssu-ch'uan jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1981) 1, pp. 167–71, insist upon this. T'ang Ch'ang-ju 唐長孺, *Wei Chin Nan-pei-ch'ao shih-lun shih-i* 魏晉南北朝史論拾遺 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1983), p. 219, on the basis of Ts'ao Ts'ao's poetry, states rightly, I believe, that Ts'ao Ts'ao's motives in assembling the magicians in the capital were not just political. See also Ngo, *Divination*, pp. 61–62.

when men began to pursue immortality it is hard to say. There is evidence of it as early as the end of the fourth century B.C., although the word for "immortal," *hsien* 僊 or 仙, seems to appear for the first time in the *Ch'u-tz'u* and there seems to be no evidence of a cult of the immortals much earlier than the earliest of the poems in that collection.[37] The word does not appear in "Li-sao," although the end of the poem sees Ch'ü Yüan off on a quest for immortals and long life; but in the later poems in *Ch'u-tz'u* the word "immortal" appears frequently, as do the names of the most famous of them: Wang Ch'iao 王喬, Ch'ih-sung-tzu 赤松子, and the others. At the very beginning of the Han dynasty, Chang Liang 張良 (d. 189 B.C.), one of the dynasty's most important founding generals, said late in life: "I would like to put aside the affairs of men and spend all my time following Ch'ih-sung-tzu." Pan Ku 班固, the author of the *Han shu*, adds: "He then studied the *tao* with the desire to rise into the air" as an immortal.[38] Moreover, it is well known that Emperor Wu of the Han and many other emperors were fervent immortality-seekers. In fact, since its inception and until the time of Ts'ao Chih, searching for the immortals accelerated rather than diminished.

Proof of this acceleration of interest in immortals can be seen in the importance given to them in tomb decorations and more clearly still in the images and inscriptions on the bronze mirrors that abound during the Han dynasty. Most of these inscriptions are in verse, and some of them can be seen as forerunners of the ballads by Ts'ao Chih that I discuss here. Former Han mirror inscriptions do not mention immortals and limit their interest in immortality to wishes of long life for the recipient of the mirror. But beginning with the Later Han we find more and more mirrors that supplement these wishes with evocations of the immortals, in particular of Hsi-wang-mu and, later, Tung-wang-fu 東王父 (or Tung-wang-kung 公).[39] In fact the end of the Later Han dynasty would seem to be the most flourishing period for mirrors that depict immortals, and the period that corresponds with Ts'ao Chih's essay and other poems that doubt the existence of the immortals

[37] There is a good résumé of the origins of the cult of the immortals in Needham, *Science and Civilisation* 2, pp. 93–113. See also Yü Ying-shih, "Life and Immortality in Han China," *HJAS* 25 (1964–65), pp. 88–107.

[38] *HS* 40, p. 2037. Chang Liang is said to have been the eighth-generation ancestor of Chang Tao-ling (2nd century A.D.), the founder of the T'ien-shih sect of Taoism; see *MH* 2, p. 157, n. 1.

[39] See Tamada Tsugio 玉田繼雄, "Kandai ni okeru gafu no shinsen kaji to kyomei" 漢代における楽府の神僊歌辞と鏡銘, *Ritsumeikan bungaku* [Shirakawa Shizuka 白川静 Festschrift] 430–43 (1981), pp. 310–36. Translations from two of these poems engraved on mirrors can be found in Michael Loewe, *Ways to Paradise* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979), p. 200.

represents a sudden, sharp decline.[40] The end of the Han was surely *the* crucial period in the formation of the Taoist religion, and we should not be surprised to find reflections of this religious activity in contemporary poetry.

Ts'ao Ts'ao 曹操 and Ts'ao P'i 曹丕, Ts'ao Chih's father and elder brother, both wrote poems about immortals, and both show a certain ambiguity in their attitudes. Ts'ao P'i in his *Tien lun* 典論 insists, like his brother, that the idea of human physical immortality is a myth.[41] But Ts'ao P'i devotes the first half of one poem, sometimes called "Breaking Off a Willow Branch" and sometimes called "Wandering Immortals," to the description of his transformation into an immortal, and the last half to a complete negation of immortality-seeking, ending in an affirmation of the "Way of the Saints" of Confucianism.[42] Ts'ao Ts'ao's ambiguity seems even more pronounced. He surrounded himself with magicians and immortality-seekers, but his poems sometimes show him sympathetic to the search for immortality and sometimes show him hostile to it. Ch'en Tso-ming 陳祚明 (fl. 1670) contrasts the two by saying that Ts'ao Ts'ao "pondered seriously" about immortals, while Ts'ao P'i's usage of them in his poem is decorative and insincere; he has, therefore, produced inferior poetry.[43]

Ts'ao Chih is equally ambiguous, and, to complicate matters even more, he seems to have mellowed later in life and to have written an essay called "Resolving Doubts," "Shih-i lun" 釋疑論, in which he refutes many of the ideas he put forward in his "Analysis of Taoism." This essay is found only in *Pao-p'u-tzu* 抱朴子 by Ko Hung 葛洪 (fourth century) and it contains a certain number of anomalies, but let us read it before attempting to decide whether or not it is trustworthy. I begin with Ko Hung's prefatory remarks on Ts'ao P'i.

> Emperor Wen of the Wei [Ts'ao P'i] had seen all there was to see and heard all there was to hear and said there was nothing he did not know. He said there was no such thing as a knife that cuts jade or a cloth

[40] Tamada, "Kandai," pp. 332–33, believes the falling off in the number of inscriptions describing immortals should be attributed precisely to the kind of skepticism found in the works of Ts'ao Chih, Ts'ao Ts'ao, and Ts'ao P'i.

[41] See Yen K'o-chün 嚴可均, *Ch'üan shang-ku san-tai Ch'in Han San-kuo Liu-ch'ao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (rpt. Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1958), *ch.* 8, pp. 5a–7b.

[42] Reproduced in Lu Ch'in-li 逯欽立, *Hsien Ch'in Han Wei Chin Nan-pei-ch'ao shih* 先秦漢魏晋南北朝詩 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1983), pp. 393–94.

[43] Ch'en Tso-ming, *Ts'ai-shu-t'ang ku-shih hsüan* 采菽堂詩選, *ch.* 5; quoted in Ho-pei Shih-fan hsüeh-yüan chung-wen-hsi ku-tien wen-hsüeh chiao-yen tsu 河北師範學院中文系古典文學教研組, comp., *San Ts'ao tzu-liao hui-pien* 三曹資料彙編 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1980; hereafter, *San Ts'ao*), p. 79.

cleansed by fire,[44] and then included both these declarations in his *Tien-lun*. Before long both these objects arrived [in China]. The emperor sighed and hastily destroyed his essay on the subject. One may apply here [the prescriptions of Confucius in *Analects* 9, 4]: "Be not obstinate; have no foregone conclusions."

The Thoughtful Prince of Ch'en [Ts'ao Chih] said in his "Shih-i lun," "At first I said that it was certain that the arts of the Taoists were simply words without meaning aimed at fooling the unenlightened common people. But when I saw Emperor Wu [Ts'ao Ts'ao] experiment with Tso Tz'u and the others, keeping them in an enclosed space and having them stop eating cereals for a whole year, and when I saw that the color in their cheeks did not diminish, nor did their vitality, and that they said repeatedly that they could go on like that for fifty years, then really what doubts could I still harbor that these arts were not real?"

He said again: "He [Ts'ao Ts'ao] had Kan Shih give medicine to live fish and then had them fried in boiling fat. When those fish who received no medicine [and were fried at the same time] were cooked and ready to eat, those who had absorbed the medicine were still happily swimming about as if they were in water. [Kan Shih] also fed silkworms on mulberry leaves powdered with medicine and the silkworms lived for ten months without becoming old [i.e., without turning into chrysalises]. He also gave a medicine that stops aging to chicks and new-born puppies and they all stopped growing. A medicine for changing the color of white [hair] was fed to white dogs whose fur turned completely black in one hundred days.

"Thus we can see that we cannot know all there is to know in the world, and that we cannot allow ourselves to decide arbitrarily whether things exist or not. My only regret is that I cannot renounce the pleasures of the flesh and give myself up wholeheartedly to the study of the way of long life."

These two Ts'ao [brothers] had read all there was to read and were famous in their generation for their talents, and yet they both first said all these things did not exist, admitting late in life that they did. This shows how difficult it is "to get to the bottom of all truths and exhaust

[44] Ts'ao P'i's skepticism about the existence of a jade-cutting knife (see n. 23, above) seems to appear only in *Pao-p'u-tzu*; for the fire-cleaned cloth, see Yen K'o-chün, *Ch'üan San-kuo wen* 8, p. 14b, and n. 47, below.

all that can be known of human nature."[45] It is not surprising that men who do not come up to these two do not believe in immortality.[46]

Can we believe Ko Hung? Did these two Confucian rationalists actually recant later in life and become "believers in immortality"? It is obvious that Ko Hung has got much of his information wrong. Ts'ao P'i did not himself destroy his essays on asbestos and the jade-cutting knife; it was his son, Ts'ao Jui 曹叡, Emperor Ming 明, who in 239 had the engravings of the essay concerning asbestos scraped off the tablets that had been set up in front of the Ts'ao family ancestral temples when real asbestos was brought to the court as tribute from the Western Regions.[47] We have seen, too, that it was not Tso Tz'u who refrained from eating grains, but Ch'ieh Chien, and for one hundred days, not "a whole year."[48] Ts'ao Chih also seems to have been skeptical of Kan Shih's "fish preserver," and in general of all his nostrums.

But are these anomalies sufficient to invalidate Ko Hung's testimony altogether and prove the "Shih-i lun" an out-and-out forgery? Certainly Ts'ao Chih's firsthand observation of Tso Tz'u's ability to live without eating grain (which probably means without eating at all) must have been striking. It is possible that he was haunted by the thought ten years or so later, even to the extent of accepting many of the "miracles" he refused to believe earlier; but Ko Hung's judgment as to the value of historical texts is so manifestly bad (as can be seen by his belief that Liu Hsin wrote *Hsi-ching tsa-chi* 西京雜記), that it is probably better to treat this text with caution.[49] But let us not condemn the work utterly. Ko Hung has not made an immortality-seeker out of Ts'ao Chih, as he most probably would have if he had created this essay out of his own mind. The essay does not ring false and only shows us that Ts'ao Chih mellowed when he became older.

[45] *I-ching*, "Shuo-kua," sect. 1; Legge, *The Yi King*, p. 422.

[46] *Pao-p'u-tzu* 2, p. 15; cf. James Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, and Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei P'ien of Ko Hung* (rpt. New York: Dover Publications, 1981), pp. 39–40, and Honda Wataru 本田濟, *Hōbokushi* 抱朴子, in *Chūgoku koten bungaku taikei* 8, pp. 10–11, but I have followed the Tun-huang ms. given in Wang Ming 王明, *Pao-p'u-tzu nei-p'ien chiao-shih* 抱朴子內篇校釋 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1980), pp. 14–15 and notes pp. 28–29, which makes my translation differ from the others at a few places.

[47] See Donald Holzman, "Literary Criticism in China in the Early Third Century A.D.," *Etudes Asiatiques* 28.2 (1974), p. 126.

[48] It is the Tun-huang ms. version of *Pao-p'u-tzu* that reads "a whole year" 朞; the other versions read "one month" 一月.

[49] Chung Yu-min 鍾優民, *Ts'ao Chih hsin-t'an* 曹植新探 (Ho-fei: Huang-shan shu-she, 1984), pp. 73–77, thinks the "Shih-i lun" is an out-and-out forgery, typical of Ko Hung, and he refers to a similar attempt to enroll a dyed-in-the-wool Confucianist, Chung-ch'ang T'ung 仲長統 (179–219), in the immortality-seekers' ranks (see *Pao-p'u-tzu* 5; in *Pao-p-u-tzu nei-p'ien chiao-shih*, p. 104; and Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, and Religion*, pp. 107–08).

In fact, aside from this essay, Ts'ao Chih seems to have been an unbeliever. All his works show him to be a rationalistic Confucianist and there are couplets and phrases denouncing or rejecting immortality. The most famous is probably the couplet in the last stanza of his masterpiece, "To Piao, Prince of Pai-ma," dated 223, in which he says: "It is in vain that we search for the immortals; / [Ch'ih]-sung-tzu has cheated us for a long time" 虛無求列仙 / 松子久吾欺.[50] In another, probably fragmentary, work called "Ch'iu-ssu fu" ("Autumn Thoughts"), he ends with the lines:

> We live in a single generation,
> The days of our youth pass on.
> It is hard to emulate [Chih]-sung-tzu and [Wang-tzu] Ch'iao:
> Who can become an immortal?
> Our destiny has a certain length;
> Who can add to it?[51]

It is possible that in his essay he is particularly severe against the Taoists because he is eager to disassociate himself, his father, and the dynasty in general, from the taint of immortality-seeking that had been associated with the imperial court since the First Emperor of the Ch'in and Emperor Wu of the Han. But the fact is that Ts'ao Chih in all his works that treat the subject, except the "Shih-i lun" and those we are about to read, is hostile to immortality-seeking, and we must take that hostility into account when we read his ballads on the theme of the immortals.

TS'AO CHIH'S TEN BALLADS ON IMMORTALS

The ten ballads on the theme of the immortals are written within a fairly tight-knit tradition which stems from the *Ch'u-tz'u* and in particular from the poem in the *Ch'u-tz'u* entitled "Distant Voyage" ("Yüan yu" 遠遊). Whatever date is ascribed to that poem,[52] Ts'ao Chih probably thought the original attribution to Ch'ü Yüan correct, and he knew that the poem was, by his time, many centuries old.

Did he believe in the traditional interpretation of the poem by the compiler of the *Ch'u-tz'u*, Wang I 王逸, who died fifty or so years before Ts'ao Chih was born? That is something more difficult to determine. Wang I tells

[50] *TCCCC* 2, p. 300.
[51] *TCCCC* 3, p. 471.
[52] The most complete and best discussion is in Yves Hervouet, *Un poète de cour sous les Han: Sseu-ma Siang-jou*, BIHEC 19 (Paris: Presses Univ. de Fr., 1964), pp. 288–302, who suggests an early Han date.

us, in his preface to the poem,[53] that the "distant voyage" is only an allegory. Ch'ü Yüan, he says, although pure and honest, was calumniated and rejected from the court. Although he still "wanted to save the world, he felt frustrated in his heart and, with baroque splendor, set forth his marvellous thoughts. He pretended to accompany the immortals in their playful wanderings, traveling through the entire universe, visiting every corner. But he kept his native country of Ch'u in his heart and thought longingly of his old friends and relatives: he was truly loyal, thoroughly good and righteous."

When we read the poem today we find some support for Wang I's interpretation, but also room to wonder if he has not "Confucianized" what is, at bottom, a mystical, Taoist voyage of the soul to the absolute. It is true that the poet begins with a rejection of the corruption of the world and turns toward a mystical leap into the heights as an escape, and that later in the poem, when the poet is close to his mystical goal, he remembers his loved ones with sadness,[54] but the rest of the work is in a purely mystical vein, and it ends in a true apotheosis, a state of union with the cosmos. It is hard for us today to agree with Wang I and see "Distant Voyage" as a pure allegory showing Ch'ü Yüan as a politician manqué out on an imaginary jaunt simply to proclaim that he wants to keep out of the corrupt world of politics. Did Ts'ao Chih see the poem as we do, or was his understanding closer to Wang I's? Perhaps it would be better to attempt to answer that question when we have studied his own adaptations of "Distant Voyage."

In a way, this whole "tight-knit tradition" of ballads taking immortals as their theme is made up of adaptations of "Distant Voyage," just as that poem itself is a mystical version of the shamanistic, heavenly wanderings described earlier in the "Li-sao." Originality shows up (as is often the case in Chinese poetry) only as small variations that only the reader practised in the genre can appreciate. Just how many poems on the theme existed when Ts'ao Chih sat down to write, and just when the first were written, are of course impossible to know. The earliest ones still extant in which elements of the tradition can be observed seem to be the sacrificial hymns composed for Emperor Wu and conserved in *Han shu, ch.* 22.[55] A few of these poems only hint at the theme here and there, but the filiation with the later tradition seems clear. It can be seen in such poems as "Hymn No. Ten," which celebrates the capture of "Heavenly Horses" in the Western Regions in 101

[53] In Hung Hsing-tsu 洪興祖 (fl. Sung), ed., *Ch'u-tz'u pu-chu* 楚辭補注, rpt. of SPPY edn. (Taipei, 1978) 5, pp. 1a–b.
[54] *Ch'u-tz'u pu-chu* 11, pp. 69b–71b; cf. Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u*, p. 85.
[55] *MH* 3, pp. 605–29.

B.C. At the very end of this poem the horse and its rider are said to "reach the K'un-lun, . . . wander in the gates of Heaven and see the Jade Terrace" of the Emperor-on-High.[56] In these poems the immortals do not actually appear, but the desire to reach their abodes (the K'un-lun or P'eng-lai) and wander through the heavens is very much the same as in the later ballads.

Such ballads are extremely difficult to date, our earliest text for some of them being the monograph on music in *Sung shu* (c. 500 A.D.)[57] and some of them are found for the first time only in the Northern Sung *Yüeh-fu shih-chi* 樂府詩集. They show us the immortal Wang-tzu Ch'iao, mounted on a carriage pulled by a white deer, riding among the clouds over the Four Seas and the Five Peaks ("Wang-tzu Ch'iao"),[58] or another unnamed immortal, mounted on a white deer, who distributes drugs in a jade box that give health and blacken white hair ("Ch'ang ko-hsing" 2),[59] or a hermit who, together with Ch'ih-sung-tzu, can drive us up to heaven ("Pu ch'u hsia-men hsing").[60] These are all themes that appear again and again in the "wandering immortals" poems and, whether they are older or younger than Ts'ao Chih's poems, they are surely written in the same tradition. In their rusticity and naiveté they seem closer to Ts'ao Ts'ao's ballads of immortals than to Ts'ao Chih's, which makes me feel that they are earlier.

These different themes that appear and reappear in Ts'ao Chih's poetry could probably be traced to their origins and catalogued. This would provide us with a convenient method of formal analysis.[61] But an analysis will not tell us enough about just what Ts'ao Chih is getting at. I know I am treading on delicate ground even to suggest such a question, but I believe I

[56] *MH* 3, pp. 620–21. For a discussion of these early "immortals" ballads, see Konishi Noboru 小西昇, "Kandai gafushi to shinsen shisō" 漢代楽府詩と神仙思想, *Mekada Makoto hakase kanreki kinen: Chūgoku gaku ronshū* 目加田誠博士還暦記念中国学論集 (Tokyo: Daian, 1964), pp. 137–60, esp. pp. 140–49; and Sawaguchi Takeo 沢口剛雄, "Kan no gafu ni okeru shinsen dōka no shisō" 漢の楽府における神仙道家の思想 *Tōhō shūkyō* 東方宗教 27 (1966), pp. 1–22.

[57] From the observance of the taboos for the names of the late Ch'i and early Liang emperors, it can be seen that the monograph on music in the *Sung shu* was not completed in 488 with the biographical part of the work: see Su Chin-jen 蘇晋仁 and Hsiao Lien-tzu 蕭煉子, *Sung-shu yüeh-chih chiao-chu* 宋書樂志校注 (Shan-tung: Ch'i Lu shu-she, 1982), p. 4.

[58] Trans. in Sawaguchi Takeo, *Gafu* 楽府, Chūgoku koten shinsho (Tokyo: Meitoku shuppansha, 1969), pp. 114–17. Sawaguchi (p. 117) suggests that this poem dates from the time of Emperor Wu of the Han. The text can also be found in Lu, *Hsien Ch'in*, pp. 261–62.

[59] Lu, *Hsien Ch'in*, p. 262; trans. in Obi Kōichi 小尾郊一 and Okamura Sadao 岡村貞雄, *Kogafu* 古楽府 (Tokyo: Tōkai daigaku shuppansha, 1980), pp. 130–31.

[60] Lu, *Hsien Ch'in*, p. 267 (under the title "Lung-hsi hsing" 隴西行); Obi and Okamura discuss the problems this poem presents in *Kogafu*, pp. 158–63, and translate it on pp. 163–65.

[61] This has been done by Funazu Tomihiko 船津富彥, "Sō Shoku no yūsenshi ron: Toku ni setsuwa no tenkai o chūshin ni shite" 曹植の遊仙詩論(特に説話の展開を中心にして), *Tōyō bungaku kenkyū* 東洋文学研究 13 (1965), pp. 49–65, in order to date the poems, without much success in my opinion.

can prove, in the words of the poetry itself, that Ts'ao Chih's interest in using the theme of the immortals is not always simple or straightforward, that he is not always interested in immortals as such, and that his main interest in the theme is complex, sometimes satirical, sometimes personal and emotional. It is only by a close reading that we can arrive at a conclusion, and although I agree that extraneous biographical material cannot be used to explain or even to contradict what the poem itself tells us, I do believe that it is only against what we know of Ts'ao Chih's biography and what he tells us in his other poetry that we will be able to approach the true meaning or, more exactly, the true "feeling" of his ballads that deal with immortals.

About half of Ts'ao Chih's ten "immortals" ballads seem clearly to be satires, that is, they seem to use the *Ch'u-tz'u* tradition to describe not a mystical journey or wandering immortals, but the political concerns of their author. The clearest of these is the only one of the ten that can be dated with any assurance. It is a ballad describing a trip to Mount T'ai in Shan-tung which, as Chao Yu-wen has shown, can only have taken place after Ts'ao Chih had become Prince of Tung-a 東阿 in 229, and probably shortly after he was granted the title.[62] Only the last six lines of the ballad conform to the "immortals" poetic tradition; the first twenty-two lines are concerned more with a description of Mount T'ai and a history of the *feng* 封 and *shan* 禪 ceremonies held upon it.

I Speed in My Carriage

I speed in my carriage, urging on my aging nags,
And in the east arrive at the walls of Feng-kao.
How divine is Mount T'ai,
The most preeminent of all the Five Peaks!
5 Its exalted heights thread the clouds and rainbows,
And jut into the Vast Purity of the heavens.
A dozen watchtowers surround it completely,
And twelve relay stations are placed at intervals about it.

[62] *TCCCC*, p. 406. The poem concerns the performance of the great *feng* and *shan* rituals on Mount T'ai which had been suggested by Chiang Chi 蔣濟 to Emperor Ming in 228 (*SKC* 25, p. 717). Ts'ao Chih became Prince of Tung-a in 229 and would only then have been close enough to have been able to voyage to Mount T'ai, some 55 miles east of Tung-a, although even this voyage would have been considerably longer than the "thirty *li*" allowed to feudal lords for their hunting expeditions. (For this see *Yüan-tzu* 袁子, quoted in *SKC* 20, pp. 591–92, trans. A. Fang, *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms* 1, Harvard-Yenching Institute Studies 6 [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1952], p. 114; also p. 100.) One gets the impression from *SKC* that the discussion of the opportunity for holding the ritual on Mount T'ai was halted in 230 with the death of the Empress Dowager, Mme. Pien 卞, Ts'ao Chih's mother, so that 229 is the most probable date for this poem.

Above and below sweet springs gush forth,
10 Where rough jade stones shine brightly.
[From?] the northeast we look toward the wilds of Wu;
And [from?] the west we contemplate the sun's rays far away.
It is here that our souls will be bound;
So that those who pass away feel moved that they too will voyage hither.

15 It is here our rulers place their trust in heaven
And here they [announce] that their great work has been achieved.
For dynasty after dynasty all have followed this custom,
Their rituals and sacrifices performed according to proper number and order.
Here the divining sticks may predict a long or a short life:
20 Only the virtuous will enjoy advantage and constancy.
Seventy emperors have performed the *feng* ceremony,
But the first and only to become a spirit was the Yellow Emperor.

He ate rosy vapors and rinsed his mouth with midnight dew;
Feathers covered his body.
25 He rose up and trod upon the void,
Straightway ascending to the empyrean.
His longevity was like that of the Father of the East,
Prolonging his life for generation upon generation.[63]

Feng-kao 奉高, literally "offering to the heights," was located to the east of Mount T'ai in Shan-tung. A sacred hall, Ming-t'ang 明堂, was located there, for imperial sacrifices to the sacred mountain.[64] The description of the mountain emphasizes its height and circumference (since the watchtowers and relay stations were placed at regular intervals, to say there were twelve of each presupposes a circumference of something like 120 *li*). I do not understand why Ts'ao Chih, in lines 11 and 12, speaks of the "northeast" and the "west." I have attempted to account for this in my translation by implying that Mount T'ai is to the northeast of Wu (actually it is to the northwest), and that the sun's rays are looked at from the west, for the tradition (still observed) is to watch the sun rise from the top of Mount T'ai.[65] But I fear I have not understood something here; Chinese poets seldom confuse their directions in this way.

[63] *TCCCC*, pp. 404–06. [64] *MH* 3, pp. 510–11.
[65] See the *Han kuan-i* 漢官儀 and *T'ai-shan chi* 泰山記, quoted in *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 39, pp. 6a–b. Different "observatories" or "towers," *kuan* 觀, are mentioned from which one can see Ch'ang-an, Wu, Ch'i, and the Yellow River.

Beginning with lines 13–14, Ts'ao Chih describes the spiritual role of Mount T'ai, which housed the souls of the dead[66] and was the scene (lines 15–21) of the all-important *feng* and *shan* ceremonies, during which emperors who founded a dynasty or achieved great peace were to announce their deeds to the gods.[67] According to one account, Emperor Wu of the Han had his fortune told while on Mount T'ai (line 19): he learned he would live another eighteen years.[68] Line 21 refers to a remark attributed to Kuan Chung 管仲 in *Shih-chi* where he says that seventy-two men had performed the *feng* and the *shan* sacrifices.[69] The following line also refers to a passage in this chapter of *Shih-chi*[70] which says (contradicting the previous passage) that the Yellow Emperor was the only one of the seventy-two kings who performed the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices to do so on Mount T'ai. The passage continues by describing his apotheosis as a Taoist immortal.

The last lines of the poem ostensibly describe the Yellow Emperor, but can be taken as a form of flattery for Ts'ao Chih's nephew, who was thinking of performing the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices on Mount T'ai at the time this poem was probably written. It is possible, of course, that the poem was not written during an actual trip to the sacred mountain and that Ts'ao Chih wrote it before he became Prince of Tung-a, but unless the *feng* and *shan* ceremonies were envisaged at some other period during Ts'ao Chih's life, it would be hard to imagine that this poem could have been written at any other time or for any other reason.

In spite of its "wandering immortal" ending, then, "I Speed in My Carriage" is not basically a poem that takes immortals as its real subject. In the following poem, on the contrary, it is the ending that shows us the real meaning; the rest, including the title, is in fact, strictly in the "wandering immortals" tradition.

Immortals

I

The immortals hold the six counters in their hands
And play face to face on the slopes of Mount T'ai.
O, the nymph of the Hsiang, strums the zither,
As the Princess of Ch'in blows the reed organ.
5 The jade jars are filled with osmanthus wine;
The Count of the Yellow River has offered divine fish.

[66] See Edouard Chavannes, *Le T'ai Chan: Essai de monographie d'un culte chinois* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1910).
[67] Described in *SC* 28; see *MH* 3, pp. 413–519. [68] *Feng-su t'ung-i chiao-chu*, p. 65.
[69] *MH* 3, p. 423. [70] *MH* 3, p. 487.

2

How narrow the confines of the Four Seas seem to me!
There is nowhere to go in the Nine States!
Han Chung and Wang Ch'iao
10 Invite me on the road to Heaven.
I cover infinite distances in less than a pace
As I float upward, high into the Great Void.

3

Flying in a single leap beyond the many-colored clouds,
I am blown about by the winds on high.
15 I turn my carriage to pass through the celestial region of Tzu-wei
Where I will join my magic tally to the Emperor's.
The Heavenly Gates jut high into the firmament,
Their two towers looming up without end.

4

Jade trees grow on either side of the road;
20 White tigers flank the hinges of the gate.
Driving the wind I wander over the Four Seas;
In the east I pass before the hut of the Queen Mother.
Looking down among the Five Peaks,
The men there seem to be no more than passing guests.

5

25 I will hide my light and try to grow my wings,
And proceed slowly, slowly,
Until I see the Yellow Emperor
Come out from Cauldron Lake mounted on a dragon,
I shall pace back and forth above the Nine Heavens,
And await his coming as long as it takes.[71]

This poem divides itself nicely into five sections of six lines each. The first section describes a scene commonly depicted on Han bronze mirrors and bas-reliefs which Ts'ao Chih must have seen since his childhood: two men or (more often) immortals surrounded by other mortal or immortal personages,[72] playing at a game which superficially resembles backgammon, called

[71] *TCCC*, pp. 263–65.

[72] See the two articles by L. S. Yang, "A Note on the So-called TLV Mirrors and the Game *liu-po*," *HJAS* 9 (1947), pp. 202–06, and "An Additional Note on the Ancient Game of *liu-po*," *HJAS* 15 (1952), pp. 125–39; rpt. in Yang's *Excursions in Sinology*, Harvard-Yenching Institute

liu-po 六博. Here the accompanying figures are ancient gods and goddesses: O 娥, the nymph of the River Hsiang 湘, was the elder daughter of Yao and wife of Shun who, after his death, drowned with her sister in the Hsiang and became a goddess or nymph.[73] The princess of Ch'in was named Lung-yü 弄玉 and was the daughter of Duke Miao (659–621 B.C.), who married her to the virtuoso of the panpipes, Hsiao-shih 蕭史. They were carried off by phoenixes.[74] The Count of the Yellow River, Ho-po 河伯, is a famous and fearful ancient deity who appears in many texts.[75]

The sight of this idyllic group of immortals and deities seems to provoke an epistemological shock: Ts'ao Chih realizes that ordinary life in the ordinary world is narrow and useless. He decides to attempt to follow the immortals and roam with them to the ends of the universe. Han Chung 韓終 (also written 衆) was an adept at the time of the First Emperor of the Ch'in[76] and Wang Ch'iao (or Wang-tzu Ch'iao) we have already seen. They will teach Ts'ao Chih to navigate in the heavens where he will be able to see the celestial emperor who resides in the region of Tzu-wei 紫微, "Purple Subtlety," north of the Big Dipper (thus including the Pole Star). The tally he joins to the emperor's is the proof of his status as a vassal. The description of the heavenly scenery is stereotyped; still, it is strange, in line 22, to see the Queen Mother, Wang-mu 王母, presumably Hsi 西 Wangmu, the Queen Mother of the West, in the east. Chao Yu-wen quotes *Wu-yüeh ming-shan t'u* 五岳名山圖, otherwise unknown to me, which says that the Queen Mother's palace was in the eastern corner of the K'un-lun Mountains. But the K'un-lun are in the west and this line is obscure unless Ts'ao Chih is attempting to show that his cosmic view of the universe is so all-enfolding and unifying that east and west no longer have any meaning.

The first four stanzas present no real problems: Ts'ao Chih declares that he is opting for the life of a Taoist immortal in order to leave the impermanence and relativity of the ordinary world. But the last stanza is strange.

Studies 24 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1969), pp. 138–65. L. S. Yang quotes the first two lines of the poem by Ts'ao Chih on p. 206 of his earlier article. Ts'ao Chih is credited with the invention of a *liu-po* gameboard in *Hsü shih-shih* 續事始, quoted in Hu San-hsing's commentary to the *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1956), *ch.* 162, p. 5006. See also Loewe, *Ways to Paradise*, pp. 145–46, nn. 40–46.

[73] See the numerous references to O found in Mathieu, *Etude sur la mythologie* 1, pp. 363–64, and Yüan K'o 遠珂, *Chung-kuo shen-hua ch'uan-shuo* 中國神話傳說 (Peking: Chung-kuo min-chien wen-i ch'u-pan-she, 1984), p. 272, n. 17, p. 276.

[74] See Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-sien tchouan*, pp. 125–27. Ts'ao Chih has presented her here as a mouth organist, while her hagiography mentions her only as a panpipe virtuoso.

[75] Given in Mathieu, *Etude sur la mythologie*, p. 492, n. 3, and Yüan K'o, *Chung-kuo shen-hua ch'uan-shuo*, p. 306, n. 6, and other references in his index.

[76] *MH* 2, pp. 167, 180.

His conversion, which seemed complete and sudden, here becomes something to be achieved slowly and in secret, and it is only after he sees the apotheosis of the Yellow Emperor, described in *Shih-chi*,[77] that he will cease his "pacing back and forth," that is, his inactivity far above mundane existence, above the highest heavens. However we interpret the earlier stanzas (his journey to the celestial court could be wishful thinking, an imaginary journey to his brother's or nephew's court), this waiting and pacing back and forth in the last stanza suggests some kind of allegory. Ts'ao Chih is saying he will retire from politics and wait until a wise sovereign appears who will be worthy of his services.[78] This poem would thus be very much in the allegorical tradition of the *Ch'u-tz'u*, and the "religious" quality of Ts'ao Chih's "conversion" should accordingly be taken with a grain of salt, although it would be wrong to discount the religious element entirely.

The previous poem, "I Speed in My Carriage," with its allusions to the *feng* and *shan* ceremonies could, I believe, be dated; can this poem? A Ch'ing critic, Sung Ch'ang-pai 宋長白, rather incongruously, gives the date as "when Ts'ao Chih moved from Jen-ch'eng to Tung-a." Ts'ao Chih was in Jen-ch'eng in 221 and moved to Tung-a only in 229, after three other removals.[79] Chao Yu-wen assigns it to the middle of Ts'ao P'i's reign when the latter put into force his restrictions against his brother.[80] These dates seem fairly convincing. One would expect Ts'ao Chih to have written such a poem when he realized that he could expect no cooperation from the reigning monarch and that he would have to wait for a succession before he would be able to serve. I doubt that one can get closer than that. He was disappointed by both his brother and his nephew, but would he have had the courage and the hope to serve another sovereign after the death of his nephew?

The following poem is in irregular meter and rhyme. I think it is also a statement of Ts'ao Chih's feelings about his place in the world of politics.

Hard Thinking

The green creeper hugs the tree of jade;
They shine together, glittering brightly.

[77] *MH* 3, pp. 488–89.
[78] See Chu Ch'ien 朱乾, *Yüeh-fu cheng-i* 樂府正義, quoted in *San Ts'ao*, p. 202. Wang Yün-hsi 王運熙, *Yüeh-fu shih lun-ts'ung* 樂府詩論叢 (Shanghai: Ku-tien wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1958), pp. 137–38, criticizes Chu Ch'ien's forced readings of these texts, but still concludes that his work is the richest in material and in insights among all the works dedicated to the study of the *yüeh-fu* written during the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties.
[79] Sung Ch'ang-pai, *Liu-t'ing shih-hua* 柳亭詩話 *ch.* 2, quoted in *San Ts'ao*, p. 172.
[80] *TCCCC*, p. 265.

Below there are two Perfect Men
Who raise their wings to beat them and fly in the heights.
5 How my heart leaps up for joy!
I would like to climb the clouds and follow them.
How verdant is the summit of the Western Peak
Whose dark blue stone caves reach to the heavens!
In one of them lives an ancient hermit
10 Whose beard and hair are all shining white.
Leaning on his staff he follows me as I roam,
To teach me that I must "forget about words."[81]

The first two lines of this poem may simply be a short description that introduces the world of the immortals with its eternal "jade trees," or it may be more significant, a metaphor (*hsing* 興) that gives the clue to the meaning of the whole poem. If it is the latter, then I suspect that the "creeper," *lo* 蘿, in line 1, whatever it may be in the natural world (perhaps some kind of dodder — which is not green — or spanish moss?) has symbolic significance derived from Poem 217 of the *Shih-ching*. In that poem the "creeper" symbolizes a sovereign's brothers or close relatives who cling to him as the *lo* clings to the pine tree. These first two lines, if they are metaphorical, would thus be a message to his brother or nephew, saying that the emperor would gain added luster by surrounding himself with his brothers and uncles.

The Perfect Men are immortals whom Ts'ao Chih does not seem to be able to follow when they fly off to heaven (or the imperial court?). Instead he finds an ancient wise man on Mount Hua (the Western Peak) who teaches him Chuang-tzu's lesson that "words are there to preserve meaning; when you get the meaning, you must forget the words."[82] But in the context of the poem, and especially of a poem entitled "Hard Thinking," "forgetting words" must mean "learning to keep one's mouth shut to avoid calamity." In fact it is these two characters that give the poem its "hard" or "bitter" meaning, as the Ch'ing critic Cho Erh-k'an 卓爾堪 (Pao-hsiang shan-jen 寶香山人) has pointed out.[83] The title is a *yüeh-fu* title and therefore may not actually be meaningful, but, since it is the only *yüeh-fu* with such a title,[84] it is probable that he chose it to tell us something about the

[81] *TCCCC*, p. 316; previous trans., George W. Kent, *Worlds of Dust and Jade* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1969), p. 79.
[82] *Chuang-tzu* 26; see Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu*, p. 302.
[83] Quoted in *San Ts'ao*, p. 165. See also Chang Ch'ao 張潮, quoted in Chao Fu-t'an 趙福壇, *Ts'ao Wei fu-tzu shih-hsüan* 曹魏父子詩選 (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1982) 63, p. 205.
[84] Kuo Mao-ch'ien 郭茂倩, comp., *Yüeh-fu shih-chi* 樂府詩集 (mod. edn.; Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1974), *ch.* 63, p. 919.

poem. A straightforward reading of the poem, seeing it as a description of a man who yearns to follow immortals, but makes do instead with an ancient professor of Taoist philosophy, simply does not live up to the title. The first two lines, if my theory is correct, hinting at the joy of fraternal union as described in Poem 217 of the *Shih-ching*, are contradicted by the end of the poem. There the poet must learn to keep silent. The subtlety of the allusion in line 1 is already an application of "disguising," if not exactly "forgetting," his words.

The last ballads exalting immortality which I believe not to be "pure" poems both have the title "Ascending to Heaven."[85] They should be treated as separate poems, but they both concern mythological themes and share a slightly melancholic mood.

Ascending to Heaven

1

I will mount on my stilts to follow the magicians
Far away to Mount P'eng-lai.
On the sacred waters white waves fly up;
The magnolias and osmanthus grow to the heavens.
5 The black leopard roams at the foot [of the mount],
And soaring cranes play at its crest.
Rising on the wind I suddenly leap into the sky
And it is as if I could see the immortal throng.

2

Where the Fu-sang tree grows,
Is in the Morning-bright Torrent.
The tree's trunk rises to the blue heavens;
Its leaves cover all to the ends of the earth.
5 When the sun rises, it climbs the eastern trunk,
And as night falls, the sun sinks into the western branches.
I would like to be able to turn the reins of the sun's [chariot]
And make it rush back toward the east![86]

[85] Two lines of the first poem, reduced to tetrameters, under the title "K'u-han-hsing" 苦寒行 are quoted by Li Shan in *Wen-hsüan*, rpt. of a Sung edn. (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1974), *ch.* 21, p. 27a.

[86] *TCCCC*, pp. 266–67; previous trans., Kent, *Worlds of Dust and Jade*, p. 80, and Ronald C. Miao, *Sunflower Splendor* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor/Doubleday, 1975), p. 42 (second poem only).

The "stilts" of the first poem are *ch'iao* 蹻 which all the commentators understand as some kind of seven-league boots or magic sandals.[87] Whatever they are, they allow the poet to travel to the legendary haunts of the immortals in the Eastern Sea. Here he sees fantastic plants and animals and seems to see the immortals themselves. It is in the "seems" that the melancholy of the poem lies, for the word reminds us of the attempts made by the First Emperor of the Ch'in and Emperor Wu of the Han to reach this island mountain, which they "seemed" to see floating on the sea but were always unable to find.[88]

The second poem is even more melancholic. It begins with an innovative description of the famous mythological Fu-sang tree, which the *Shan-hai ching* and all other sources consulted claim to have been in the east, "where the sun rises." However, Ts'ao Chih wants us to believe it is a tree whose leaves reach to the eastern and western ends of the earth and in whose branches the sun both mounts to the heavens in the morning and sinks to the earth at the end of day. The "Morning-bright Torrent" in line 2 also seems original; the Fu-sang is usually said to rise in T'ang 湯 or Yang 暘 Valley.[89] The belief that the Fu-sang has more than one trunk is, however, not unique to Ts'ao Chih, for it appears also in *Hai-nei shih-chou chi* 海內十洲記, a work attributed to Tung-fang Shuo, but probably by an author from the Six Dynasties period; there the Fu-sang is said to have two trunks on a single root.[90]

But the most striking part of this poem is the last couplet. It is wrong for the true Taoist immortality-seeker to want to turn back the sun, to alter nature in any way. His immortality comes from living in harmony with nature, not from stopping the sun (and time). If Ts'ao Chih wants to turn back the sun (and the clock) it can only be, as Chao Yu-wen says,[91] because he felt "the times were against him." His plea to set back the sun is one made by a positive, active man who desires to accomplish something in society, not by a religious spirit attempting to save his soul.

[87] They refer to *Pao-p'u-tzu* 15 (*nei-p'ien*); cf. Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, and Religion*, pp. 258–59. See also the excellent remarks on this subject by Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-sien tchouan*, pp. 46–47, 111–14, and his "Un procédé de vol magique dans le taoïsme," in *Suzuki hakase koki kinen tōyōgaku ronsō* 鈴木博士古稀記念東洋学論叢 (Tokyo: Meitoku shuppansha, 1972), pp. 5–13.

[88] *MH* 3, pp. 436–38, 465–66.

[89] Cf. Mathieu, *Etude sur la mythologie*, p. 439, n. 6.

[90] Cf. *Shih-chou chi* as quoted in *Wen-hsüan* 15, p. 6a. For the date of the composition of the *Hai-nei shih-chou chi*, see *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu t'i-yao* 142, p. 71 (Wan-yu wen-k'u edn.). I accept the emendation made by Chao Fu-t'an, *Ts'ao Wei fu-tzu shih-hsüan*, p. 92, of 兩 into 幹 of the text of the *Shih-chou chi* quoted in *Wen hsüan*; the original has 兩兩同根.

[91] *TCCCC*, p. 267.

These two poems, then, both seem to be the kind of "distant roaming" that Taoists like to describe, full of extravagant braggadocio and exotica. But, more precisely, they are lamentations, the first for a paradise impossible to find, the second for time, which leaves Ts'ao Chih behind. It seems to me that Chu Ch'ien is reading too much into the second poem when he says that Ts'ao Chih shows his "unflagging devotion to his sovereign." But I think he is right in underlining the fact that Ts'ao Chih is lamenting his lack of success in the world of politics (and thus his failure to achieve merit for the dynasty).[92] Or has Chu Ch'ien put his finger on an explanation of Ts'ao Chih's innovative mythology: that Ts'ao's extended Fu-sang tree is a symbol of universal sovereignty?

In the six remaining poems one looks in vain for the kind of "allegorical" or satirical elements seen in the preceding poems. Here Ts'ao Chih speaks the language of immortality-seekers, as if he were one of them. The following translation is the first example; in it his conversion is still conditional.

Wandering Immortals

The life of man does not last a century.
And year after year his joys diminish.
I would like to stretch out the shafts of my wings
And pushing aside the mist, rise up to the purple void.
5 I would slough off my old form as Ch'ih-[sung-tzu] and [Wang-tzu] Ch'iao did,
Leave behind all traces of my former self and rise up from Cauldron Lake,
Soaring above the Nine Heavens,
Loosening the reins to undertake a long wandering.
In the east I will observe the brightness of the Fu-sang tree;
10 In the west approach Jo River's current;
In the north I will go as far as one can go and climb up the Dark Islands;
In the south I will soar and mount Cinnabar Hill.[93]

The first line is a near quotation of line 1 of Poem 15 of the Nineteen Old Poems and, in the reading I have followed, the second line seems to be a comment, or a revision of the second line of that "old poem" ("And yet we keep within us one thousand years of woe"). A textual variant would read "we live in solitude with few joys."

[92] Chu Ch'ien, *Yüeh-fu cheng-i* 12, quoted in *San Ts'ao*, p. 201.
[93] *TCCCC*, pp. 265–66; previous trans., Miao, *Sunflower Splendor*, p. 48.

It is because of the first two words in line 3, *i-yü* 意欲, literally, "In my mind I would like to . . . ," that I have put parts of the poem into the conditional tense. We have already seen almost all the elements in the lines that follow: Ch'ih-sung-tzu, Wang-tzu Ch'iao, Cauldron Lake, the Nine Heavens; but here the Fu-sang tree regains its traditional site in the east, and the River Jo, while it has many locations according to different sources, here probably refers to the river of the immortals in the K'un-lun Mountains.[94] The Dark Islands, Hsüan-chu 玄渚, appear in the "Hsi-ching fu" of Chang Heng, in a context full of allusions to immortal haunts,[95] and the Cinnabar Hill, Tan Ch'iu 丹丘, in the "Distant Voyage" of the *Ch'u-tz'u*.[96]

On first reading, I found the last four lines of this poem rather abrupt and wondered if it were not fragmentary. But, although both Pao-hsiang shan-jen and Ch'en Tso-ming think this ending particularly satisfying,[97] the poem seems to elicit questions like the following. Why has Ts'ao Chih chosen this theme for his poem? Is it, as Ch'en Tso-ming says, "again" simply "a pretext" or allegory?[98] What in the poem tells us that Ts'ao Chih was thinking of something else when he wrote? Line 3, as I have said, makes one think that this is a poem of wishful thinking, but even "wishful thinking" would be a complete reversal of Ts'ao Chih's scorn of the immortals and would seem to show that he adopted a new attitude toward them in some of his (late?) poems. It may very well be that the near-misery of his life after his brother's accession made him want to renounce the world and seek solace in religion, but this is not to take immortality-seeking as a "pretext" or "allegory;" it may be a last resort, but then religion often is.

Another poem shows this same positive attitude toward immortals with, as far as I can see, no conditional tense implied in the words of the poem itself. This poem is in tetrameters.

The Flying Dragon

In the morning I wandered on Mount T'ai
When the mist made all silent and mysterious.
I suddenly met two youths,
Whose faces were fresh and fair.

[94] See *SC* 123, pp. 3163–64, for a discussion of the location of the River Jo.
[95] *Wen-hsüan* 2, p. 12a; trans. David Knechtges, *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature, Volume One: Rhapsodies on Metropolises and Capitals* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1982), p. 201.
[96] Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u*, p. 178. [97] *San Ts'ao*, pp. 164, 195.
[98] Ch'en Tso-ming, *Ts'ai-shu-t'ang ku-shih hsüan* 6, quoted in *San Ts'ao*, p. 195.

5 They rode white deer
And bore magic mushrooms in their hands for shade.
I knew they were Perfect Men,
So I fell to my knees and asked them about the Way.
In the west we climbed to the Hall of Jade
10 With its golden towers and two-tiered galleries.
They gave me drugs of immortality
Prepared by the Divine Emperor,
And taught me how to take them,
And to turn backward my sperm to restore the brain.
15 I shall live as long as metal or stone,
Generation after generation I will not grow old![99]

Why has Ts'ao Chih given this little fantasy the title "Flying Dragon" when no dragon appears in it? Kuo Mao-ch'ien 郭茂倩 suggests that the title comes from the "Li-sao," and that the search for immortals is the common bond that ties the two together.[100] Is he also suggesting that Ts'ao Chih's poem, like the "Li-sao," has political overtones? He does not say so specifically and it would be hard to follow him if he did, because the poem seems so straightforward and transparent, perhaps too transparent for the traditional critic's taste. Ting Yen says, "this poem is a satire against (*sic*) the immortals. In the closing lines he does not speak out clearly [against them] and that is the most remarkable thing of all: you must seek his meaning beyond his words." There are two fragments, one of four words, one of four tetrameter lines,[101] which do not appear in the poem as we have it and do not seem to have much to do with it, but I don't think they are sufficient reason to doubt the poem's authenticity, or perhaps even to doubt its being complete as it stands. The poem does not present any difficulties, except perhaps line 14 which refers to sexual techniques aiming at preventing emission of semen ("essence") and sending it back up through the body to the brain.[102]

[99] *TCCCC*, pp. 397–98.
[100] *Yüeh-fu shih-chi* 64, p. 926.
[101] Found in the commentary to the *Wen-hsüan* 28, p. 14b; and in *Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao* 北堂書鈔 (Taipei: Wen-hai ch'u-pan-she, 1962), *ch.* 158, p. 23a.
[102] Ts'ao Chih's line appears verbally in *Pao-p'u-tzu* 8, p. 137, and 5, p. 101; cf. Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, and Religion*, pp. 140, 103. It is briefly discussed by Henri Maspero, *Le Taoïsme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 575. The poem has been translated by Hugh Dunn, *Cao Zhi: The Life of a Princely Chinese Poet* (Peking: New World Press, 1983), pp. 51–52. Line 8 does not mean (as Dunn would have it) "long knelt," but refers to kneeling with the torso erect, less honorific than bowing the head to the ground from a kneeling position on the floor. He has not caught the allusion in l. 14, which he translates, "to renew your spirit and remake your mind." He gives the second half of the poem, from l. 9, as the answer of the two youths to the questions "about the Way" in l. 8. This is clever and can be defended, but the first-person pronoun in ll. 11 and 13 makes me translate as I have.

The poems that I have put into the next group present the same straightforward, unsatirical descriptions of immortals as were seen above. The next short poem in irregular lines speaks twice of "flying dragons," making that phrase much better suited logically to be the title, ironically unlike the case of the previous poem.

East of P'ing-ling

The celestial gates unfold
Opening the Road to Heaven.
I don my feathered robe and mount the flying dragon.
I mount the flying dragon
5 To meet with the immortal.
In the east I climb P'eng-lai and gather magic mushrooms,
Gather magic mushrooms that can be eaten
To make our years, like the King Father [of the East's], without end.[103]

The title of this poem is taken from an old ballad which, according to traditional commentaries, describes the sadness of the local population when an official loyal to the Han was arrested by Wang Mang's policemen. As far as I can see, the title has nothing to do with this poem, although the prosody of the two poems shows some similarity.[104] The poem, like the preceding, is a fantasy showing the poet's achievement of Taoist immortality.

The following poem in irregular lines is again exactly in the same vein.

Isabelle Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire du Taoïsme*, Publications de l'EFEO 137 (Paris: Ecole Française d'Etrême Orient, 1984) 1, p. 158, n. 1, remarks that this line and other lines of poetry from this period date some of the Taoist practices for the first time. She here and elsewhere (e.g., p. 151, n. 2) takes me to task for ignoring the esoteric meanings given to terms used by poets of this period (Chi K'ang in particular). But many of these meanings appear only centuries later and she is wrong to attempt to extrapolate them anachronistically. The term *nieh-ching* 躡景, as she would have it, is not used in a mystical sense by Chi K'ang or by Ts'ao Chih. In the latter's "Ch'i-ch'i" 七啓, for example (*TCCCC*, p. 9), it is used in reference to the hunt, exactly as it is in Chi K'ang's poem. (Erwin von Zach, *Die chinesische Anthologie*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Studies 18 [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1958], p. 621, translates: "Plotzlich galoppieren wir so schnell, wie wenn die Sonnenstrahlen verfolgten.") This proves, to me in any case, that Chi K'ang's use of this term is not mystical and that his poem at this point describes a hunting scene. The term is also said to have been the name of one of the horses of the First Emperor of Ch'in (see Ts'ui Pao 崔豹 [*ca.* 300], comp., *Ku-chin chu* 古今註, *chung*, Pai-tzu ch'üan-shu edn. [Shanghai: Sao-yeh shan-fang, 1931], p. 2b), again underlining its original hunting overtones. We are in for some surprises if this kind of naive interpretation of early terms by later esoteric usage catches on.
[103] *TCCCC*, p. 400.
[104] Chu Ch'ien would have us believe that Ts'ao Chih is using this title to tell his brother (or nephew) that if the court ("celestial gates") were open to him (and he were not taken away, as the official in the old ballad was), he and the emperor would protect one another and preserve their longevity. See his *Yüeh-fu cheng-i* 5, quoted in *San Ts'ao*, p. 196.

The Osmanthus Tree

The osmanthus tree,
The osmanthus tree,
How beautiful it has grown!
Unfolding crimson blooms and blue green leaves
5 It wafts its fragrance to the ends of the earth.
In its branches nests the phoenix
And at its foot coils the dragon.
At the osmanthus tree
The Perfect Men who have attained the Way all come to discourse
on the immortals
10 And to teach us how to swallow the sun's rays.
The essence of the Way is very simple, uncomplicated:
Tranquility, inactivity, spontaneity.
Riding on stilts we go beyond the longest distances,
Leaving or staying according to the heart's desire.
15 Either in the highest spheres, reaching beyond all things,
Or in the lowest, reaching to the ends of heaven and earth.[105]

I have translated "osmanthus" instead of "cinnamon" or "cassia," because in line 4 its flowers are described as "crimson,"[106] whereas cassia flowers are white. Why has Ts'ao Chih chosen this tree for his poem? Chu Ch'ien, Chu Hsü-tseng 朱緒曾, and Huang Chieh[107] all believe Ts'ao Chih is alluding to the poem "Seeking for the Hermit," "Chao yin-shih" 招隱士, in the *Ch'u-tz'u* in which the first line refers to the osmanthus (or cassia) growing in the recess of the mountains. Wang I glosses this by saying that the osmanthus's fragrance symbolizes Ch'ü Yuan's loyalty and steadfastness, and the fact that it grows in the wilderness, his exile from the court. It is impossible to prove or disprove this kind of symbolism, but it is very possible that Ts'ao Chih had both "Chao yin-shih" and such personal matters in mind when he chose his title.[108] But does this "explain" the whole poem? Are

[105] *TCCCC*, pp. 399–400; previous trans., Kent, *Worlds of Dust and Jade*, p. 77.

[106] This is also the reasoning of Itō Masafumi 伊藤正文 in his translation of this poem in *Sō Shoku* 曹植, Chūgoku shijin senshū 中国詩人選集 3 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1958), p. 158.

[107] The first quoted in *San Ts'ao*, p. 200; the second in Itō, *Sō Shoku*, p. 185; the last in Huang Chieh 黄節, *Ts'ao Tzu-chien shih chu* 曹子建詩註 (Peking: Jen-men wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1957), p. 100.

[108] The title of this poem is said by Chao Yu-wen (*TCCCC*, p. 400) to be based on a ballad of the P'i-wu ko-tz'u 鞞舞歌辭 category named "The Osmanthus Grow before the Hall" (Tien ch'ien sheng kuei-shu 殿前生桂樹), a poem Ts'ao Chih had already imitated, according to *Sung shu* 22 (Chung-hua edn.), p. 626, with his "Ling chih p'ien" 靈芝篇, a poem on filial piety in regular pentameters.

the references to Perfect Men, Taoist philosophy, and all the rest simply allegorical statements of the fact that Ts'ao Chih has left the world of politics? I find it hard to believe this.

"Swallowing the sun's rays" in line 10 refers to actual Taoist regimen, to the adepts' penchant for nibbling the rosy vapors of the early morning, and the other references to Taoist practices and thought in the poem are equally coherent. There is a serious, meditative strain, and the last four lines seem pathetic in the context of Ts'ao Chih's life. Soon after the establishment of the dynasty in 220, Ts'ao Chih and his brother princes had been assigned to their fiefs in what amounted to house arrest, surrounded by spies sent by the central government.[109] As he said in a famous memorial: "I live like a bird or a beast . . . ," like an animal fed in a pen.[110] The absolute liberty of movement expressed in the last two couplets takes on added meaning in the context of his life, and the "Taoism" in lines 9–12 becomes more credible as a true search for some kind of liberation when we know he was a near-prisoner at the end of his life.

The following poem is again one that sings of freedom of movement; it seems to continue the last poem.

The Five-fold Wandering

The Nine Provinces are too small for my steps;
I want to be able to soar in the clouds
And wander beyond the world's eight directions,
Letting my eyes roam over the distant wildernesses.
5 I put on a tunic made of rosy clouds
And a skirt made of a colorless rainbow.
My flowered parasol embalms the air about;
My six dragons raise their heads and gallop toward the heavens,
And before the sun moves its bright rays
10 We have, in a twinkling, reached the blue sky.
The Gates of Heaven open their vermilion doors;
The twin jade towers shine with a reddish glow.
I walk to and fro in the Wen-ch'ang Palace
And ascend to T'ai-wei Hall.
15 God on high leans upon the railing
While his vassals gather in the eastern chambers.
They give me a sash of precious jade

[109] See *Yüan-tzu*, cited in n. 62, above.

[110] *TCCCC*, p. 370; memorial dated 228.

And have me rinse my mouth with midnight dew.
I dally, playing with magic mushrooms
20 And loiter, handling perfumed flowers.
Wang-tzu offers drugs of immortality,
Hsien-men presents rare nostrums.
By taking them I will enjoy a long lifetime,
Longevity prolonged without end.[111]

The "five" or "five-fold" of the title can be explained by the first couplet: the four directions of the known world are not enough, so the poet decides to leave in a fifth direction, straight up into the sky. Almost all the critics are agreed that here Ts'ao Chih is imitating the "Distant Voyage" of the *Ch'u-tz'u* and that his interest in immortals is only allegorical.[112] In the very first line they find evidence that Ts'ao Chih, unable to find satisfaction in the world, has written this poem to tell us his sorrow. The whole poem, according to this view, should be read "ironically," that is, with opposite intent, just as Wang I would have us read "Distant Voyage." Such an attitude can only be held by men who have a very monolithic view of life, who feel that we can realize our lives only by devoting them to public service, to the state, to the emperor. Once we have been obliged to renounce such service, *tout le reste n'est rien*, and whatever solace we attempt to find is not even second best; it is misery, failure, a kind of moral suicide. Ts'ao Chih's sidereal swooping would thus be his way of telling us how sad he is not to be able to participate in the government. As improbable as this sounds, it is not impossible, especially since, from all we know of Ts'ao Chih, he was a very single-minded, Confucianist, "monolithic," committed public servant, and such an interpretation would explain away nicely what we know to be Ts'ao Chih's low esteem of immortals.

There is, however, another explanation that has been put forward for these poems, first by Yü Kuan-ying 余冠英 in 1956, and in a more elaborate form by Hsü Kung-ch'ih 徐公持 in 1979.[113] This explanation says that these poems are actually written as drinking songs; if they speak of immortals and

[111] *TCCCC*, pp. 400–02. There are translations of this poem in Arthur Waley, *Chinese Poems* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1948), pp. 80–81, Hans H. Frankel, "Fifteen Poems by Ts'ao Chih," *JAOS* 84 (1964), pp. 6–7, and Frances LaFleur Mochida, "Structuring a Second Creation: Evolution of the Self in Imaginary Landscapes," in R. E. Hegel and R. C. Hessney, eds., *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1985), pp. 97–98.

[112] *San Ts'ao*, pp. 191, 201–02.

[113] Yü Kuan-ying, *San Ts'ao shih-hsüan* 三曹詩選 (1956; rpt. Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1979), p. 55. Hsü Kung-ch'ih, "Ts'ao Chih shih-ko te hsieh-tso nien-tai wen-t'i" 曹植詩歌的寫作年代問題, *Wen shih* 文史 [Peking] 6 (1979), pp. 158–60. Itō, *Sō Shoku*, p. 185, agrees with their interpretation of "The Osmanthus Tree."

of long life, it is a way of pledging the health of one's guest or host. Hsü Kung-ch'ih singles out the preceding three poems ("East of P'ing-ling", "The Osmanthus Tree," and "Five-fold Wandering") as of this type, and therefore belonging to the early period of Ts'ao Chih's life, when he caroused with his friends in Ts'ao Ts'ao's capital of Yeh. Hsü Kung-ch'ih stresses the fact that the Wen-ch'ang Palace, while actually the name of a celestial, stellar palace, was also the name of a hall in the Yeh palace.

At first glance, this theory is appealing. Some of the songs of immortals may very well have been used as drinking songs (the dream of immortality goes well with intoxication), and the poem by Ts'ao Ts'ao singled out by Hsü Kung-ch'ih does end in the description of guests and hosts pledging one another in the palace of the Queen Mother of the West. But is this scene in Ts'ao Ts'ao's poem proof that the poem itself was used as a drinking song? One of Ts'ao Ts'ao's three poems, moreover ("The Osmanthus Tree," explained by Yü Kuan-ying as a drinking song), does not end in, nor indeed does it contain, wishes for long life, which seems to me to make it the least likely candidate for a "drinking song." One wonders, too, how Hsü Kung-ch'ih divided these "wandering immortal" poems into "early" (drinking songs) and "late"; surely "Flying Dragon" is as good a candidate as any for an "early" drinking song, and yet he declares it to be late. However *ben trovato*, I find it difficult to admit the "drinking song" theory.

But before we look into another explanation, we have one more poem on immortals to read, a poem that clearly refutes the ending of Ts'ao Chih's "Analysis of Taoism," and indeed the whole of his Confucian aspirations.

Distant Voyage

On a distant voyage over the Four Seas
My eyes follow the gigantic waves as they rise and fall.
Great fish, like winding hills,
Pass one another on the billows.
5 A magic tortoise holds Mount Fang-chung on its head
As the sacred mountains rise soaring into the sky.
Immortals swoop about their crags;
Jade maidens play upon their slopes.
Carnelian flowers appease my hunger;
10 Lifting my head, I suck in the rosy mists of morning.
The K'un-lun Mountains are my native land;
The Middle Kingdom is not my home.
When I return to visit the Eastern Father,

In one bound I will jump over the deserts.
15 Flapping my wings and dancing in the seasonable wind,
I shall whistle and pierce the air with my vibrant song.
Metal and stone decay so fast:
My splendor shall vie with the sun and the moon.
For one who can live as long as heaven and earth,
20 The wealth of an empire is as naught.[114]

This poem can again be divided into quatrains. The first sets the stage: heroic scenery on the edge of the world (which is, in traditional geography, surrounded by four seas). The Isles of the immortals, Mount Fang-chung (and P'eng-lai) among them, are said, in the *Lieh-tzu* and other texts[115] to rest on the heads of giant tortoises. "Jade maidens" are variously identified, sometimes simply as immortal maidens, sometimes as the goddess of Mount Hua.[116] The Eastern Father is the King Father of the East whom we have already met. The "deserts" in line 14 are presumably the Gobi, which lies between the K'un-lun and the east. Metal and stone are of course things that decay most slowly, but they are also the material upon which the most ancient texts were preserved. Ts'ao Chih here not only renounces any desire for political glory (in line 20), but even suggests that in becoming an immortal he will have more lasting and more brilliant glory than the greatest historical figures whose high deeds are inscribed on stone and bronze. In the last couplet he rejects even the imperial rank, which previously (in "An Analysis of Taoism") he said was superior to any "immortality." The whole poem can thus be read as a triumphant declaration of liberation from and transcendence of the world as we know it.

Or can it? As far as I have been able to see, no critic sees the poem in that light. They all insist that it is a sad poem, a poem whose title, "Distant Voyage," shows that Ts'ao Chih was thinking of Ch'ü Yüan when he wrote it, and that his "distant voyage" was undertaken because, as Wang I said of Ch'ü Yüan, he was "rejected by society," calumniated and left without any possibility except "to throw in with the immortals and roam with them throughout the universe." There can be no doubt that Ts'ao Chih's condition resembles Ch'ü Yüan's. He has been rejected from the court and totally

[114] *TCCCC*, pp. 402–03. There are translations by Dunn, *Cao Zhi*, pp. 87–88, Mochida, "Structuring a Second Creation," p. 96, Kent, *Worlds of Jade and Dust*, p. 68, and J. D. Frodsham and Ch'eng Hsi, *An Anthology of Chinese Verse: Han Wei Chin and the Northern and Southern Dynasties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 44–45.

[115] *Lieh-tzu* 5; trans. in A. C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu* (London: John Murray, 1960), p. 97. Cf. *Ch'u-tz'u*, "T'ien wen"; trans. in Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u*, p. 51.

[116] See the references in David Knechtges, *The Han Rhapsody* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1976), p. 130, n. 50.

frustrated in political activity, but where, in these six poems, does he give us any hint of his dissatisfaction, as he did in the title and last two words of "Hard Thinking," or in the last quatrain of "Immortals," or when he very un-taoistically tried to stop the sun in the second of the "mounting to heaven" poems? Should we light on lines 1 and 2 of "Five-fold Wandering" and lines 11 and 12 of "Distant Voyage," as so many critics have, and say that Ts'ao Chih can only be satirical when he says he cannot live in China, which, after all, is the only civilized country in the world? The problem may seem an artificial one to the Western reader, and even an improper one to the New Critic, but it is a problem we must face when we read any of the innumerable poems of immortals that were written after Ts'ao Chih's times.

I believe three answers have thus far been given to the question, "what was Ts'ao Chih getting at when he wrote his 'immortals' poems?" (1) He was satirically expressing dissatisfaction with his life, his interest in immortality being secondary or of no importance. (2) He was writing drinking songs. (3) He actually was searching for immortality and fervently hoped to achieve it.

Those who hold the second view actually believe in the first as well. Yü Kuan-ying adds, after giving his new interpretation: "Ts'ao Chih wrote this kind of poem as a means of pouring out his anguish."[117] He, as well as Hsü Kung-ch'ih, adheres to traditional interpretations of these poems as allegories mourning the sad state of the world and of Ts'ao Chih's own affairs in it. Thus, our three answers are actually two: either satire or religious conviction.

As far as I have been able to see, *all* the commentators except one have subscribed to the first answer. Perhaps the very earliest critic to have commented on this poem actually combines the two attitudes. This is what Wu Ching 吳兢 (670–749) does in his work on *yüeh-fu* ballads, *Yüeh-fu ku-t'i yao-chieh* 樂府古題要解 (*Explication of the Essential of Old Ballad Titles*). Under the title "Mounting to Heaven" he lists seven ballad titles by Ts'ao Chih: "Flying Dragons," "Immortals," "Five-fold Wandering," "Distant Voyage," and three others that no longer exist. He says that "all these poems," and another by Lu Chi, "lament the fact that man is not eternal, that the sentiments of the common run of mankind are pernicious and dangerous; they believe we must seek the immortals to swoop beyond the universe. The model for these texts can be found in 'Distant Voyage' of the *Ch'u-tz'u*."[118]

[117] Yü, *San Ts'ao shih-hsüan*, p. 55.

[118] Wu Ching, *Yüeh-fu ku-t'i yao-chieh*, pt. 3, pp. 3a–b, in Ting Fu-pao 丁福保, *Li-tai shih-hua hsü-pien* 歷代詩話續編 (pref. 1915; rpt. I-wen yin-shu-kuan, n.d., n.p.). The last sentence does not appear in the version of this extract given in *Yüeh-fu shih-chi* 63, p. 919.

Wu Ching cannot be said, when read in the context of Chinese criticism, to be suggesting that Ts'ao Chih's motives are purely religious, but he is at least not ignoring the religious aspect of Ts'ao Chih's turning away from the inconstancy of man and time. Another relatively early critic, Cho Erh-k'an, commenting on Ts'ao Chih's "Distant Voyage" says: "Men of superior intelligence talk freely about death and grieve much about life. When they think of these things, it is not simply because 'they have been rejected by society' [as Wang I said of Ch'ü Yüan]."[119] The way Cho Erh-k'an has phrased this comment shows that he is speaking against critics who held too strictly to the first attitude and who attempt to reduce this poetry to pure political allegory.

But it is the allegorists who seem to have won out during the Ch'ing dynasty, and even in our own day. Chu Ch'ien,[120] Ch'en Tso-ming, and in our own day Chao Fu-t'an 趙福壇, Hsü Kung-ch'ih, and Yü Kuan-ying all hold this position. As far as I know, only Chao Yu-wen in the invaluable notes to his new edition of the complete works of Ts'ao Chih has come out resolutely in favor of a new interpretation. He has attempted to present Ts'ao Chih's work in a chronological sequence and places those poems that I have considered lacking in allegory toward the end of Ts'ao Chih's life, after the essay "Resolving Doubts."[121] Of "East of P'ing-ling" he says: "This poem contains sentiments of longing for long life (i.e., Taoist immortality)."[122] Of "Five-fold Wandering" he says, "Ts'ao Chih has taken elements that he has assimilated from ancient stories of immortals to write this poem, using them to express his longing for long life."[123] Of "The Osmanthus Tree," he refers to the bas-reliefs of religious motifs found in I-nan that are probably contemporary with Ts'ao Chih and says that the poem "reflects the governing class's ardent desire to seek long life."[124]

This explanation seems to me to correspond very well to what we know of Ts'ao Chih's biography, especially if we accept the authenticity of the essay "Resolving Doubts." But it is not completely satisfying. In the first place, at the end of this essay Ts'ao Chih says he is too attached to carnal pleasures to be able to "give himself up wholeheartedly to the study of the way of long life" (see the full translation above). In the second place, most of his works at the end of his life show him to have remained passionately

[119] Quoted in *San Ts'ao*, p. 165. [120] See above, n. 92.

[121] With the exception of "Wandering Immortals," which he places after "Immortals," *TCCCC*, pp. 263–66, probably because of superficial resemblances in vocabulary between the two poems. Chao does not call into question the authenticity of "Resolving Doubts," *TCCCC*, pp. 396–97.

[122] *TCCCC*, p. 400. [123] *TCCCC*, p. 402. [124] *TCCCC*, p. 400.

attached to political life and to have desired to serve his dynasty to the end. Finally, the *tone* of his "immortals" ballads sets them apart from his other poems and makes them seem at first reading like set pieces (thus the appeal of the "drinking songs" theory).

Komori Ikuko 小守郁子 has underlined this last aspect of Ts'ao Chih's ballads. She insists upon the fact that the tone of the poems is too glib, that there is no "expression of doubt about the reality of the way of the immortals," no "expression of the inevitable and natural complications in his thinking that would accompany the change in his aspirations when he was removed from the center of political life. . . . It is all so single-minded. . . . The poem lacks sincerity . . ." She goes so far as to say that the last couplet of "Distant Voyage," which is the poem she uses as her example, is "the expression of his attachment to the values of the real world turned inside out . . . no more than an empty, vain bluff. Ts'ao Chih himself was probably conscious of its emptiness and that is why there are no contradictory complications in his 'wandering immortals' poems and why they lack urgency, poignancy."[125]

Komori Ikuko has done us great service in underlining the fact that these poems simply do not give the impression of describing a sincere religious conversion to Taoism. But is she right in reading these poems as meaning the opposite of what they say? Is this Taoist fantasy a proof of "Ts'ao Chih's attachment to the values of the real world"? This sounds very much like the reasoning of the traditional critics who read "white" for "black" simply because "white" agrees better with what we know of Ts'ao Chih's biography.[126] Are these poems really so glib and superficial? As we shall see, the critics have given them fairly high marks, and the poems seem to me to express real, heartfelt yearnings for liberation. I cannot help finding her analysis of these poems as "empty bluff" gratuitous, not clearly enough based upon what we know of Ts'ao Chih's ideas and upon the poems themselves.

[125] Komori Ikuko, "Sō Shoku ron" 曹植論, *Nagoya daigaku bungakubu kenkyū ronshū (Tetsugaku)* 名古屋大学文学部研究論集(哲学) 69 (1976), pp. 293–94.

[126] Mochida, "Structuring a Second Creation," pp. 95–100, studies "The Five-fold Wandering" and "Distant Voyage," which she contrasts with songs in the *Ch'u-tz'u* to show how Ts'ao Chih's attitude toward religion differs from the attitude expressed there: Ts'ao being an "alchemist" "restructuring the world," not a "shaman-poet," like the *Ch'u-tz'u* narrators. Her arguments are very sophisticated attempts at placing Ts'ao Chih's poems in the perspective of intellectual history, but her conclusions as to Ts'ao Chih's attitudes in the poetry are very traditional; for her, in Ts'ao's wandering immortal poems, it is "conviction that is lacking" (p. 99). Concerning ll. 11–12 of "Distant Voyage," she comes very close to Komori's paradox: "But the mention of the Central Land belies the poet's attachment to earth. In his vociferous denial, he in a sense asserts it."

TAOISM IN TS'AO CH'IH'S LATE WORKS

What do we know of Ts'ao Chih's last years? Chao Yu-wen lists fifty pieces as having been written after "I Speed in My Carriage" (220 A.D.). I find most of his datings quite convincing, the inevitable room for debate notwithstanding. Among these pieces there are memorials that concern current politics and in which Ts'ao Chih shows clearly that he has by no means lost all interest in serving his dynasty and that he remains, indeed, very clear-sighted about the events at court and the disastrous effects they could have in due course.[127] These memorials are hardly the work of a man who has turned his back on the world and who has been converted to religious Taoism. But there is a short piece that does give us some idea of what he thought about Taoism; it is a piece that Chao Yu-wen assigns, most likely correctly, to this period.

Freedom from Melancholy

Suffering from melancholy, I walked along the roadside sighing. I was emaciated and sick at heart with my sadness when Master Dark Emptiness saw me and asked: "What malady has brought you to such an extremity?" I answered: "My sickness is melancholy." "What is melancholy that it has made you so sick?"

"Melancholy
"Is undefinable:
"It comes without calling
"And does not leave when chased away.
"Seek it and you will not see even its outline;
"Hold it in your hand and it will not even fill your palm.
"When I am solitary during the long night
"It assails me in hordes and droves,
"Coming and going irregularly,
"Wracking havoc with my nervous stamina.
"When it comes, it is hard to chase away;
"When it leaves, it comes back so easily!
"When I eat, it makes my throat contract;
"When I am beset by worries, it worsens them with headache.
"Try to disguise it with ornaments and it will not shine;

[127] Extracts from two of the best known of these memorials are translated in Dunn, *Cao Zhi*, pp. 78–86; the complete original texts can be found in *TCCCC*, pp. 436–54.

"Fine food will not make it pleasant to bear;
"Warm it with a flint, and it will not disappear;
"Massage it with divine salve and it will not lessen.
"With it, clever smiles give no happiness
"And the music of strings and woodwinds only augments sadness.
"Even if the physician Ho put all his mind to it, he would not know how to set about curing it:
"How could you, Master, hope to be able to diagnose it?"

The master colored and said: "I only remarked idly on your melancholy air; I did not then know for what reason you were melancholy, but [now] I can tell you how it came about.

"Today the great Way is hidden:
"You live at the end of an era.
"You have succumbed to the prevailing vulgarity
"And become infatuated by fame and rank.
"You have washed your hat strings and dusted your bonnet,
"And tried to acquire glory and high position.
"You were unable to sit quietly in your seat
"Or even finish a meal.
"Restless, agitated,
"You became morose and withered.
"You sought after fame
"Seized profit.
"Having long followed the primrose path,
"You have wasted away your vital breath.
"I am going to give you the drug of Non-activity,
"Make you a decoction of Tranquil Indifference,
"Prick you with acupuncture needles of Dark Emptiness,
"Cauterize you with a prescription of Pure Simplicity,
"Place you in a room of Great Vastness,
"Seat you on the couch of Silent Solitude,
"Have Wang-[tzu] Ch'iao take you by the hand and go off wandering,
"Or the Yellow Duke take you walking and singing.
"Chuang-tzu will furnish you with food to nourish your spirit;
"Lao Tan will give you a prescription that will enable you to preserve your nature.

"You will follow a long road and live hidden from the world,
"Mount the light clouds and soar on high."
His words left me
With my spirits jolted and my thoughts dispersed.
My mind and my aspirations had changed;
I wanted to take these perfect words to my heart
And revere these arcane rules.
Then suddenly all the melancholy that had beset me
Went away without taking leave.[128]

In the opening lines of this work the vocabulary shows that the author is thinking of Ch'ü Yüan in the brief piece in the *Ch'u-tz'u* called "The Fisherman," and like Ch'ü Yüan he is going to consult a Taoist to learn how to cope with his problems. Ch'ü Yüan was worried that he was unappreciated in a corrupt world; Ts'ao Chih is more introspective and tries to find a solution to his melancholy. The "physician Ho" was an ancient wise doctor who appears in the *Tso-chuan*.[129] The Master, whose name and whose remedies (capitalized in my translation) are all part of Taoist vocabulary, mainly culled from the *Lao-tzu*, analyzes his sickness and prescribes Taoist seclusion as a remedy. Wang-tzu Ch'iao, Chuang-tzu, and Lao-tzu are all well known. Chao Yu-wen suggest that the Yellow Duke could be the mysterious old man in the *Shih-chi* who gave Chang Liang a book called the *Great Duke's Art of War* and said he would appear as "a yellow stone" in thirteen years' time.[130]

If we took this piece at face value, it would prove that Ts'ao Chih had actually been converted to Taoism at some time, probably fairly late, in his life, since the sadness expressed in it certainly makes it seem to be from the period after he realized he would never achieve his ambitions. That one should not quite accept the piece at face value seems clear to me from the fragment of a *fu*, "Autumnal Thoughts" ("Ch'iu ssu" 秋思), which is written in the same elegiac vein, and in which Ts'ao Chih says: "It is difficult to emulate [Ch'ih]-sung-tzu and [Wang-tzu] Ch'iao: who could become an immortal?"[131] The conversion described in "Freedom from Melancholy"

[128] Like *TCCCC*, I have followed the version of the text in *I-wen lei-chü* 35, p. 622, in those rare cases of a variant reading.

[129] Chao 1; trans. James Legge, *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*, in *The Chinese Classics* 5 (London: Trübner & Co., 1872) pt. 1, p. 580.

[130] *SC* 55, p. 2035; trans. Burton Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1961) 1, pp. 135–36. Wolfgang Bauer, "Der Herr von gelben Stein," *OE* 3 (1956), pp. 137–52, shows that the Yellow Duke is often associated with Taoist immortals.

[131] *TCCCC*, p. 471.

seems abrupt: the last six lines show Ts'ao Chih's receiving sudden enlightenment from the words of the Master, words that expressed ideas with which Ts'ao Chih had surely been familiar since his youth, for they are a combination of philosophical and religious Taoism every educated man had studied. But here Ts'ao Chih is surely imitating the "Seven Stimuli" of Mei Ch'eng 枚乘 (d. 140 B.C.), so that the abruptness is not a proof that he is being satirical.[132] By its very existence the piece does show us that Ts'ao Chih had really become interested in Taoism. Moreover, the way it is worded and the appropriateness of the philosophy in relation to Ts'ao Chih's own life should cause us to consider it seriously.

All of these texts, the "wandering immortal" poems, "Resolving Doubts," and "Freedom from Melancholy," form a pattern and fit in so well with what we know of Ts'ao Chih's last years that I find it hard not to believe they show us a man seriously considering Taoism as an answer to his anguish and sorrows. But there is perhaps one other possibility that we should consider before ending: what if none of these texts were by Ts'ao Chih?

Hans H. Frankel in an important article[133] expresses skepticism about the authenticity of many, perhaps even most of the works now going under Ts'ao Chih's name, because Ch'en Shou 陳壽 (233–297), at the end of his biography of Ts'ao Chih, says that Ts'ao's works "total a little more than one hundred pieces,"[134] while some current editions contain close to 200 pieces and others as many as 340. This is disturbing and would amply justify Frankel's skepticism. But Chao Yu-wen in the preface to his edition (which appeared two years after Frankel's article), shows that there must have been at least two editions of Ts'ao Chih's works at the time of his death or shortly thereafter, one actually a "selected works" chosen at the command of the emperor, and another, a complete works, assembled by the poet himself.[135]

[132] See "Ch'i fa" 七發 (*Wen-hsüan* 34, pp. 1a–13b). This imitation does not mean that "Freedom from Melancholy" is simply a conventional piece with no relation to Ts'ao Chih's life; see Hans H. Frankel, *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1976), pp. 186–211, and Knechtges, *The Han Rhapsody*, pp. 30–33, for illuminating remarks about Mei Ch'eng's work, applicable also to Ts'ao Chih's piece.

[133] Hans Frankel, "The Problem of Authenticity in the Works of Ts'ao Chih," *Essays in Commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of the Fung Ping Shan Library (1932–1982)* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 1982), pp. 183–201.

[134] *SKC* 19, p. 576.

[135] The fact that Ts'ao Chih himself speaks of including 78 *fu* alone in his works after weeding out many more (*TCCCC*, p. 434), is already an indication that the figure of "over one hundred" works is much too low. But in the anecdote told in *Chin shu* (mod. rpt.; Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1974), *ch.* 50, p. 1390, in which Ts'ao Chih 志, son of Ts'ao Chih by a concubine, is asked by the Chin emperor to verify whether or not an essay was by his father, the young Ts'ao goes home to look it up in an autograph table of contents prepared by his father and proves that the edition in the palace was not complete.

It seems to me that all the works attributed to Ts'ao Chih that I have translated in this article are in fact genuine; they are of good quality and show, in their use of vocabulary and expressions, many similarities with his well-attested works. They have been highly praised. Chang P'u 張溥, at the beginning of his preface to Ts'ao Chih's works, singles out four of the "wandering immortal" poems for praise.[136] Cho Erh-k'an praises five of them and says, of "Immortals," that it makes later poems in the same tradition superfluous.[137] Sung Ch'ang-pai sees lines 7–8 of "The Immortals" as having inspired Tu Fu and Meng Chiao. Fang Tung-shu 方東樹 (1772–1851) places "Distant Voyage" above the poems by Kuo P'u 郭璞 (276–324) on the same theme and goes so far as to compare Ts'ao Chih's talent in it with that of the Duke of Chou and Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju.[138] Recent anthologists have included most of these ballads in their collections of Ts'ao Chih's works: Yü Kuan-ying includes six of them, Chao Fu-t'an seven, Itō Masafumi two; only "Flying Dragon," "East of P'ing-ling," and "I Speed in My Carriage" have been ignored.

The material we have read here seems to me to describe a real and meaningful, albeit hypothetical, evolution in Ts'ao Chih's thinking. Hostile to religious Taoism and to the charlatan immortality-seekers in his youth, his near incarceration and his despair of achieving some kind of merit in his maturity obliged this pure Confucianist to seek spiritual satisfaction in his life outside of Confucianism. The myth of the immortals, omnipresent in contemporary art and religion, represented a way to achieve a kind of imaginary freedom that real life denied him. Four of Ts'ao Chih's ballads on the theme of the immortals are allegorical complaints against his fate, but the six others contain almost no satire. It is hard to follow Chao Yu-wen all the way in his belief that in these poems Ts'ao Chih is expressing his ardent desire to achieve Taoist immortality, but I do believe, with him, that these poems are serious and that they show Ts'ao Chih more sympathetic to the immortals than he was in his youth. In these poems he is finding release from the frustrations of his everyday life, from what he must have considered the absolute failure of all his ambitions. He uses the tradition as myth, no longer only as allegory for his disappointment in politics, but also as a release in fantasy from the narrow confines of his fief and prison.[139]

[136] *San Ts'ao*, p. 144. [137] *San Ts'ao*, pp. 164–66.

[138] Sung Ch'ang-pai, quoted in *San Ts'ao*, p. 172. Fang Tung-shu, *Chao-mei chan-yen* 昭昧詹言 (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1984) 2, p. 72. Fang also gives similar praise to "I Speed in My Carriage" on the next page. (These remarks are not contained in *San Ts'ao*.)

[139] Chu Kuang-ch'ien 朱光潛, "Yu-hsien shih" 遊仙詩, *Wen-hsüeh tsa-chih* 文學雜誌 3-4 (1948), p. 2, divides the "wandering immortals" genre into three categories and says Ts'ao Chih

Is it too far-fetched to see his use of Taoist imagery as similar to Goethe's use of medieval Catholic imagery at the end of the second *Faust*? Goethe did not believe in the doctrine behind the imagery; Ts'ao Chih may not have believed in the doctrine behind the Taoist imagery he used, but it enabled him to escape in art, much as Catholic imagery enabled Goethe to give Faust his ultimate apotheosis. In both cases these great artists have made us "suspend our disbelief" and have ennobled their persona: Faust is exalted and Ts'ao Chih convinces us of his yearnings for some kind of immortality. These ballads, in any case, cannot be considered purely conventional works, variations on a theme dashed off to show Ts'ao Chih's virtuosity or simply to supply lyrics for a catchy tune. Anyone familiar with the high seriousness, not to say monomaniacal obsession with Confucian values characteristic of Ts'ao Chih's other works, will realize that such an interpretation of these ballads is simply unacceptable.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HHS	*Hou Han-shu* 後漢書
HS	*Han shu* 漢書
MH	*Les mémoires historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien* 司馬遷
SC	*Shih-chi* 史記
SKC	*San-kuo chih* 三國志
TCCCC	*Ts'ao Chih chi chiao-chu* 曹植集校注

fits into the second category of poets who, like Lu Chi, Pao Chao, and Yü Hsin, use the theme as an "artistic fiction" because of its intrinsic beauty. He then refines his definitions by saying Ts'ao Chih and Yü Hsin can also be placed in the first category of poets who express their frustration in allegories, without really believing in the immortals. When he discusses Ts'ao Chih in more detail, pp. 6–7, he says Ts'ao uses "the immortals as allegories to express his frustrations." Chu Kuang-ch'ien's article is full of sensitive insights and useful information, but I believe he errs in placing Ts'ao Chih, even partially, in his second category. Cheng Meng-t'ung 鄭孟彤 and Huang Chih-hui 黃志輝, "Shih-lun Ts'ao Chih ho t'a-te shih-ko" 試論曹植和他的詩歌, *Wen-hsüeh i-ch'an tseng-k'an* 文學遺產增刊 5 (1957), pp. 95–109, is a general introduction to Ts'ao's verse. In the good short paragraph, pp. 103–04, devoted to his "immortals" ballads, they, like the traditional critics, insist on the negative side. They are, according to them, "a form of forlorn consolation," "a cry of anguish against oppression." I believe this reading goes against the *tone* of these poems, which are not sad, but make us feel a kind of religious liberation.