

The question of the relationship between the author and his audience is the topic of the fourteenth essay.²⁶³ Zhu Guangqian begins by making self-criticism of his past Crocianism: is it correct to claim—as he used to do—that "the most illustrious works are only monologues"?²⁶⁴ On the basis of an abstract logic, it seems possible to distinguish between a purely artistic and creative activity, limited to intuition-expression, and a practical activity, which consists in the recording-communication of images conceived in the mind. However, in reality, can it happen that the artist, when creating, is not influenced by practical purposes? Art is language, and like language it cannot be separated from the interlocutor. The desire to move and convince derives from sympathy, which is one of the oldest and most universal feelings of man.

Perhaps there existed a Buddha who did not leave a written tradition, or a Beethoven who did not record notes on a score, or a Du Fu who did not write any work, intent only on contemplating a world in secret, a world sublime and marvelous, or to be secretly pleased with one's own greatness; but [if this is the case] we can only include them in the category of self-centered or mentally adjusted: they have nothing to do with the art we are talking about. The art of which we speak must be based on the works, and the authors of these works must possess in large copies the feeling of sympathy, they must give life to a change and a communion of thoughts and feelings between man and man, they must expand the little self in the great self, or cancel it in it, so as to become one with a multitude of men.²⁶⁵

Factors that make possible the understanding between a writer and his readers are essentially two: the value of the feelings and thoughts that are communicated, and the communication technique, which is mostly conditioned by the way in which the writer behaves toward the public. Zhu Guangqian identifies four types of attitude: the first is of total carelessness, the second of inferiority, the third of superiority, while the last is of complete equality. The first attitude belongs to the worst authors or those of the first magnitude. In the case of the latter, the neglect is only apparent, and in fact derives from a universal vision, which goes beyond a certain environment, or a certain country or a certain era: this applies, for example, to Shakespeare, whose works seem to come from the void and turn to the void, and for this reason they can be appreciated by all men, whatever culture or social stratum they belong to. The second attitude hardly avoids flattery and pandering, while the third easily falls into arrogance: Zhu Guangqian bitterly observes that since half of people love to be venerated and the other half trampled on, both can lead to success. However, from the artistic point of view, they must be detested and avoided. Finally, the last attitude

²⁶³ "Zuozhe yu duzhe" 作者与读者 (Authors and Readers), pp. 120-131.

²⁶⁴ Zhu Guangqian draws the quotation from the "open letter" (*Lun xiaopinwen* 论小品文, "About Writing Essays"), contained in *Mengshi wenchao* and reprinted in *Wo yu wenxue ji qita*, cit., pp. 145-154.

²⁶⁵ Same as the previous footnote.

is common to the majority of the most established writers, and is based on the belief that there is a commonality of feelings between the author and his readers: the writer seeks a friend to confide in and the reader shares the intimacy, finding his deepest voice within his works. Zhu Guangqian then explains what he means by the sociability of art:

Artistic language is an instrument of social communication: therefore, if it is affirmed that art and literature have a social character, one does nothing but repeat an extremely obvious truth, as if we were saying that man is an animal. Although, however, I consider this aspect of art important, my position is very different from that of those who treat it from a sociological perspective. According to them, politics, economics and all sorts of social forces would have a decisive influence on artistic trends. In my opinion, these forces may also play a secondary role in changing a costume or tradition, but the main factor remains the authors' attention to the public nonetheless. In every age and in every school there are different artistic tendencies, because the level and taste of the readers are different.²⁶⁶

In the essay that follows,²⁶⁷ Zhu Guangqian again insists on the “concreteness” of artistic expression. The further the language moves away from the representation of concrete images, the more it loses its vitality. Scientific and philosophical writings, due to their high degree of abstraction, can hardly take on a literary guise; their limitation lies precisely in the fact that they are able to appeal only to the intellect and not to the sensitivity of the reader. Works such as the *Great Norm*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the *Laozi*, *Mozi*, Buddhist treatises, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* or Spinoza's *Ethics* inspire reverence for their depth, but rarely can they be appreciated. Sometimes, however, the same philosophical texts, when they make extensive use of metaphors or concrete examples to illustrate abstract principles, manage to obtain the same effects as purely literary writings: this is the case of Plato's *Dialogues* and of *Zhuangzi* or, in modern times, of works by Bergson and William James. Of course, an exhibition based on metaphors and parables is less direct and more extensive than a simple definition, but it is more effective because it responds to a typical process of the human mind, which starts from the concrete to get to the abstract. It is also true, on the other hand, that the concrete expression is not necessarily verbose: the value of a literary work is also measured in relation to its implicit meanings. The secret lies in grasping, in a complex situation, few elements rich in individuality and allusive ability, and in fusing them in a complete form, such as to stimulate the reader's imagination. In order for an image to be defined “concrete”, it must be new and original and not an empty and stale cliché. In everyday life there are no such “real” and “concrete” situations or characters as those we find in the *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史记), in the *Water Margin* (*Shui hu zhuan* 水浒传), in *The Dream of the Red*

²⁶⁶ *Tan wenxue*, p. 129.

²⁶⁷ “Juti yu chouxiang” 具体与抽象 (Concrete and Abstract), pp. 132-139.

Chamber (*Hong lou meng* 红楼梦) or in Shakespeare's tragedies. In this sense, the ideal nature of the world created by art can be affirmed.

In the sixteenth essay Zhu Guangqian returns to the problem of the relationship between feeling and language.²⁶⁸ After reaffirming that art is always "lyrical", because it cannot avoid expressing a state of mind anyway (even some philosophical, historical or scientific texts, due to the fact of having an "intellectual conviction" can fall under this definition), he quotes the words of Liu Xie, linking them directly with the Crocian vision: "When you conceive a literary work, there are three criteria to follow: to start well, you must first establish which feeling you want to express; secondly, the correct move is to think of something concrete that by analogy recalls this feeling; finally, all that remains is to find the right language to give the right importance to the most important parts."²⁶⁹ Zhu Guangqian intends to draw attention to the second phase of this process, which implies the creative intervention of thought on the raw material represented by feeling. Indeed, the latter can only be understood as part of "nature", and as such a necessary foundation of any artistic creation; but it is only with its conversion into image and language that we have the expression, and therefore the creation. Everyone has feelings and emotions, but only artists are able to turn them into art. Wordsworth's definition of poetry - "emotions recollected in tranquility" - is recalled again to reiterate that in literature feelings must be objectified, and therefore undergo a process of refinement and purification by thought.

In literature, either feeling and language can be perfect balance, or they can prevail over each other from time to time.²⁷⁰ The classical ideal of Hegel is that feeling should be completely exhausted in language. This does not convince Zhu Guangqian. He maintains that language has its limits; it is not always able to record all the implications of a feeling, and, even if it could, that would result in the feeling itself lacking depth: the task of art is not to declare, but to allude. On the other hand, Zhu Guangqian does not feel like denying totally the value of those works in which

²⁶⁸ "Qing yu ci" 情与词 (Emotions and Language), pp. 140-147.

²⁶⁹ *Wenxin diaolong*, XXXII, "Rongcai" 熔裁. In my version of the passage by Liu Xie, I took into account the interpretation given by Zhu Guangqian. It should be noted, in particular, that the character *shi* in the phrase *ze zhuo shi yi qu lei* (think of something concrete that by analogy refers to [this feeling]) Zhu attributes the meaning of "concrete image", through which it can express the feeling itself. Vincent Yu-chung Shih's version is completely different: "We establish three criteria to be considered when a literary piece is contemplated: a good beginning, consisting in choosing the correct genre as the appropriate medium for expressing the inner feeling; as the next proper step, the collection of material which is relevant to the theme; and as the final step, the creation of linguistic patterns forceful enough to raise the important points into relief." *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons, A Study of Thought and Pattern in Chinese Literature*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1959, pp. 179-180.

²⁷⁰ Zhu Guangqian traces the same distinction to Hegel, of which he mentions the theory of symbolic, classical and romantic art forms, placing sentiment in place of idea and language in place of matter. Also, the reference to Liu Xie and his analysis of the relationship between emotion and literary forms is evident. In *Wenxin diaolong*, XXXI, "Qing cai", it is said that the ancient poets "created the literary forms for emotions" ("wei qing er zao wen"), while later the authors of *ci* and *di fu* began to "create the emotions to fit literary forms" ("wei wen er zao qing"). For the former the sentiment came before the text, while for the latter the text came before the sentiment.

language prevails over sentiment—among which most of the texts in parallel prose or *pianwen* must be counted. Even formal embellishments and ornaments of language sometimes deserve to be appreciated as such, as a landscape or an elegant decoration. However, only a great artist is able to raise a castle in the void; many pompous and refined texts are unbearable because they dwell in the void without being able to build any castle.

In the next essay Zhu Guangqian deals with the relationship between reality and imagination. After mentioning the historical contrast between romanticism and realism in Western literature, he affirms that each work of art, being a new synthesis of previous experiences, can only be based on reality and imagination: the previous experiences (reality) constitute the material used by the artist in the creative process, while the imagination consists of the new organization (synthesis) of this material. The problem arises when giving the meaning to the term "reality".

The extreme realists then have another drastic way of understanding "realism": it should not be based simply on the experiences of life, but should also faithfully preserve its original appearance, without any interference from the subjective imagination. As far as I know, the great masters of the realist school, such as Flaubert and Turgenev, have never put this theory into practice, while a series of third or fourth category authors have used it in defense of their artistic failure. It seems that their influence has begun to damage the Chinese literary scene: several works of the so-called "*reportage* literature" are muddled and without any artistic value. We must first clarify what is the "real" that realists speak about.²⁷¹

There are three types of "reality" or "truth" (the term used here by Zhu Guangqian - *zhenshi* 真实 - has both meanings): historical or phenomenal one, which refers to facts that occurred in the human or natural world; the logical one, which derives only from reasoning; and finally the poetic or artistic one, which is an expression of the organic unity and internal coherence of each individual work. The mistake made by realists is to seek only historical "truth", ignoring poetic truth. However, poetic "truth" is higher than historical "truth".

In the natural world, innumerable facts are linked together in a complicated and confused way. Although there is an order in their relationships, it can only be glimpsed indistinctly: sometimes we grasp its principle and sometimes only its end, but we are unable, with a single glance, to trace the path of a single fact within a complex situation, so that it can be seen as a harmonious and unitary whole. The works of art have their own central or "core" theme, around which each character and each episode, each feeling and each action revolve: only what can be connected with this central theme is incorporated within them, while it is rejected what has no relevance to it; moreover, within the same material that is assimilated, everything finds its place according to its importance. Therefore, in works of art, facts and their relationships present not only

²⁷¹ "Qing yu ci", p. 150.

a clearer but also a more coherent structure, and the disorder and "randomness" that are so frequent in natural phenomena are missing.²⁷²

Art cannot fail to have a relationship with reality, which takes place in the creative process through three phases:

At the beginning the artist must penetrate into life to live it, because only in this way he can fully understand its joys and pains; then he must come out to contemplate it, because only in this way he can clearly grasp its form; and lastly, after subjective experience and objective examination, he must organize the impressions he has received. Only at this point, following this work of organization, life and nature can be transformed from raw material into a harmonious and unitary world. Realism accentuates the first moment, while idealism accentuates the third, but in truth none of the three phases can be left out.²⁷³

In the second to the last essay²⁷⁴ Zhu Guangqian talks about the literary training, and compares it to the calligraphic one. He identifies four stages. In the first, called the "imperfection" (*cijing* 疵境), it is necessary to acquire the technical rudiments of the composition, modeling oneself on the classics and turning to the help of others to correct the defects and errors that you are not yet able to recognize on your own; at this level the rules are extremely important, and constant and tireless commitment and application are indispensable. In the second phase, called "security" (*wenjing* 文靜), a certain mastery of the composition techniques and a good knowledge of the rules are achieved. However, if one does not make the effort to broaden one's horizons, one inevitably remains on the threshold of mediocrity. It is necessary to learn to correct one's mistakes, with a strong sense of self-criticism and a rigorous artistic conscience. The next step is the phase of "purity" (*chunjing* 纯净), in which you are able to create your own particular style and reach mastery in craftsmanship. In the last phase, called the "creation" (*huajing* 化境), "it is not possible and it is even useless to speak": at this level the rules lose all effectiveness, and also every opposition between art and nature is lost.

²⁷² "Qing yu ci", pp. 152-153.

²⁷³ "Qing yu ci", p. 154.

²⁷⁴ "Jingjin de chengxu" 精进的程序 (The Refinement Process), pp. 155-161.