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A Monologue of the Senses

We should begin by recalling an easy, familiar truth, that "description" is a regional term, born and fostered in a single tradition, shipped easily across the language boundaries of Europe, to its periphery, and out to its colonies. Although we may have no certain precision about the term's "meaning," we feel confident in its serviceable aptness as a category. The term grows and validates itself in the interplay of a complete set of functions—describing a kind of discourse, silently guiding the production of that kind of discourse, and instructing readers how to take the areas of discourse to which it lays claim. The term's local, historical life seems thus to possess a sweet inevitability. But the term has certain constituent peculiarities that make it less obvious and inevitable than it might seem. The traditional Chinese theorists of literature, who were usually thoughtful in such matters, had no term quite like it. They did have, of course, many other terms that could do partial service, and we might lamely translate them as "description" in a particular context. But these terms belong to another literary system and carry none of the broad authority of "Description."

I suspect that if we explained our tentative comprehension of the term, the old Chinese theorists would have found it strangely disturbing, as if it overlooked some distinction that seemed essential to their own literary system. They might even have felt that the term institutionalized and perpetuated a blindness to that distinction. We will raise their objection: either we may attempt to speak of how things "are," of their properties and changes indifferent to the senses of a particular perceiver; or we may speak of how things are perceived, and in doing so, fix a supremely local perceiver, belonging somewhere and sometime. "Description," which lightly spans this division, fails to notice the harsh limits imposed on mortal senses.

They might have found particular difficulty in the relation between perception and description. Within a text "description" presents itself as being, in some way, the counterpart of perception: its language is of the senses or modelled on a sensory paradigm. But perception is, in fact, a mutually defining relation of perceiver and percept; description is not. To pretend to reconstitute perception in the literary code of description breaks apart that primary relation, and establishes a new, very different relation. On the most obvious level, description is taken as a motivated reconstruction of percepts, and the reader looks to the relation between the structure of percepts and hidden, literary motivations. On another, more secret level, the act of description raises the possibility of perceiving sensuous determinations without oneself being determined in the process. This strange siting of the reader promises a kind of apotheosis, and the reader finds himself on the plane of a Being who can *perceive* how things are from nowhere in particular, who is not himself fixed by what he perceives.

We receive the act of description without excitement: one can become habituated even to the stance of a divinity. But the Chinese poetic reconstitution of perception was quite different, and that difference may prod the wearily divine observer to remember where he is (or more precisely, where he is not). The traditional Chinese poetic system was reconciled to the finite, mortal world and was attentive to mortal limitations.

The great division that should sunder the unity of "description" separated two distinct Chinese poetic genres. To consider how things "are" there was the *fu*, exhaustively treating the structure and ontogeny of one particular topic—"snow" or a particular tree or a mood. The *fu* was concerned with categories—their range, variations, and physical forms. It was the epideictic physics of the Thing, and although it gives the impression of a "descriptive" poem, it was not truly grounded in perception (or rather, like a strange scientific text, it decomposed the matrices of percepts to reconstitute them according to the presumed laws of the natural order).

However, we shall consider the *shih*, the complementary genre

and the genre that presents the more interesting alternative to "description." In *shih* the lived matrix of percepts is reconstituted in scenes, and these scenes do determine a perceiver, whose limitations are inferred in a narration of percepts, a "monologue of the senses." First, a warning against intellectual imperialism: we wish secretly to transcend the historicity of our terms and make them universally applicable—which is to say that we wish to account for everything in our own terms. The impulse will be to extend "description" to include this narration of percepts. The impulse is dangerous: it will teach us to assimilate unfamiliar texts to a familiar art of reading, to translate the assumptions involved in a narration of percepts into a seat in the divine audience. The Chinese texts were written for a particular system of reading, and to compromise the essentials of that art of reading will make them fade and become uninteresting. To have them "in our own terms" is to subjugate them.

The canonical etymology of the word *shih* reminded the traditional Chinese reader what this mode of discourse was: the character for *shih* was divided into two components—*yen* and *chih*. *Yen* is "to speak," "to make articulate"; *chih* is "intention," "obsession," "that on which the mind is intensely fixed" (which may be something in the mind itself or in the outer world). Though we use the word "poem," a *shih* is not really a "poem," a thing "made." *Shih* is the "articulation of that which the mind is intensely fixed on." Statements in *shih* are usually taken to be direct external manifestations of the interior life of a mediating subject, located somewhere and sometime. The direction of attention implicates the subject's inner concerns, and all perceptions are presumed to be bound by the subject's historical and physical limitations. To speak of a "persona" here is inappropriate; the readers of *shih* are disposed to take the form as non-fictional, the authentic presentation of a historical moment. Moreover, venerable Western issues of the reflective distance from experience do not occur: the *shih* is not "representation" but "manifestation," the final stage in a natural epistemological process.

The visionary mode, from which the complacently divine stance

of "description" evolved, is not absent in Chinese poetry (though it is less common than in Western poetry); however, it does signify differently. When a Chinese poet rides through the cosmos or sees the spectres of ancient princes emerging from ruined palaces, there is a heady sense of transport and perhaps a whiff of madness emanating from the mediating subject. And if the poet neglects to ground his preternatural vision by saying "I dreamed," "I imagined," "it seemed to me," then the reader supplies the qualification, and from the omission, draws his own conclusions about the poet's state of mind.

In yet another way the presumptions of "description" are inappropriate for the reconstitution of perception in *shih*: this is the relation of "description" to its paired term, "narration." Since Lessing, whatever significance "description" may have, the term has been forced to shape itself in opposition to "narration." Once the polemical distinction was made between the temporality proper to an art of words and the atemporality of the visual arts, narrative assumed a privileged position in the art of words. Poetic description was left in a precarious, not altogether legitimate position: it was a temporal art which was dissatisfied with its social standing and aspiring vainly to the atemporal.

The traditional novelist often enacts this disjunction: when he senses a worthy description approaching, he stops the vehicle, gets out, and takes a look. The term "setting" betrays an assumption of transient figures "set" upon a ground that is larger and more permanent. Even the description of movement will be "framed" and granted an essentially static subsistence. In description the author sloughs off the mortality of his little characters, and often with a distinct glee, enters God's time. There are rare exceptions, writers such as Robbe-Grillet who have an instinct for what it means to be finite and mortal. However, in Western literary discourse, description rarely carries events. Discourse divides itself in rhythms of pause and movement; and those rhythms separate the eternal, created world from those little beings who hasten to their appointed ends under the guise of free will.

Traditional Chinese poetics has its own paired terms involved

in the reconstitution of perception. One term with illusory similarity to description is *ching*, some particular "scene" of the external world. The paired term is *ch'ing*, often translated as "emotion," but in the breadth of its use more properly rendered as "subjectivity." Any disjunction between narration and description disappears or recedes far into the background; in the presentation of an act, event, or thing, the essential question raised in *shih* is the presence and quality of subjectivity through which it is known. The problems inherent in such an antithesis should be immediately obvious: insofar as *shih* "articulates what is intensely on one's mind," all scenes necessarily engage the subjectivity of the poet—a fact that Chinese theorists noted almost as soon as *ching* and *ch'ing* came into common use.[1]

The theoretical clarity of the distinction between *ching* and *ch'ing* is as fragile as the distinction between narration and description; but the value of such distinctions may be primarily productive. Instead of unfolding in rhythms of movement and pause, the *shih* developed in rhythms of scene (with implicit subjective value) and explicitly subjective response or comment (in which the reader disjoins himself from the consciousness of the poet). Another pair of terms allied to *ching* and *ch'ing* is even more suggestive: poems formed ratios of "solid" and "empty" couplets, allowing a kinetic epistemology of exterior matter and interior space.

To come to this poetry, certain radical adjustments are necessary: the intricate system of antithetical categories in Western literary discourse no longer apply. The *shih* lives by different questions: it presents an ongoing relation to the outerworld, with the continual intrusion of external necessities to remind the subject what it is not. It is a poetry grounded in epistemological problems—of poets knowing the outer world and of readers knowing poets. Our assumptions of fictionality may tempt us to ferret out the motivations of a maker or the determinations of a language: the temptation

[1]A good English discussion of *ching* and *ch'ing* can be found in Siu-kit Wong's "*Ch'ing* and *Ching* in the Critical Writings of Wang Fu-chih," in Adele Rickett, *Chinese Approaches to Literature from Confucius to Liang Ch'i-ch'ao* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 121–150.

violates the historical contract of the text, how it is meant to be taken.

The *shih* is interior action: every percept, act or thought implicates a subject—his history, his nature, and the physical world that surrounds him. To lure the Western readers into this assumption, we need strong examples, violated taboos: imagine a painting depicting a nude, framed by a window, which is in turn framed by the shimmering circle of a telescope lens. First, what is seen is inextricable from the conditions under which it is seen and the motives of the person (not the poet) by which it is seen. Second, we are aware of being placed in precisely the same position, and as an audience, we uncomfortably disjoin ourselves from the motives of the mediating subject. A "scene" is that point in which the nature of a particular subject and the stubborn externality of the physical world meet. Out of that meeting the perception becomes manifest in the received literary language.

The Western lyric poet says he averts his eyes from some scene; we read the unfathomable motives of the poet-god behind the index of pain. We cannot deny the beauty which emerges in the action of the Appolonian illusionist, but it *is* possible (*pace* Nietzsche) to have a great literature without the bright god (though it will not be "Poetry" in the Western sense). In his most direct mode, the writer of *shih* moves neither by narration nor reflection, but by the shift of percepts:

> Fierce tigers lie ahead of me:
> The grey cliffs split when they roar.
> Chrysanthemums hand their flowers of this autumn,
> And the stones bear the ruts of ancient carriages.
>
> Tu Fu (712–770), "Journey North" (11.31–34)

We are asked to engage in a different art of reading, to join the subject in the movement of his senses: travelling along through the wilderness he hears the roaring, and in fear, casts his eyes to the ground. Attention to the beauty of the season's flowers is the refusal to fear; the sight of the ruts assures the possibility of safe passage. The shift in scenes is an index of pain and small

victories. In the *shih* we are instructed not to look for the motives of a manipulative illusionist, but instead to read the credible determinism of nature in the eyes' flinch, opposed by a human freedom (but not the poet's freedom of invention) in what the eyes choose to note. In short, the *shih* promises a kind of direct access to the human consciousness.

There are some remarkable characteristics of the Chinese poetic language and reading traditions which abet this quixotic project. The Western reader, whose attention is given largely to the autonomous motions of mediating language, may be suspicious of such claims to transparency. However, in the case of the *shih*, the conditions of reading and the nature of the mediating language are singular.

In our conventional notion of "reading," we confront an external object, a text. *Shih*, of course, were also read in books, but favorite texts were committed to memory—with greater facility and in greater numbers than even in the Western traditions of classical studies. One of the most characteristic modes of "reading" (if it can still be called that) was the reproduction of a memorized text. The "reader" knows that the text comes from another, but the text loses its externality. This, in turn, affects the central epistemological issues: the relation between standing in the place of the other (producing his text, knowing the percepts that define his interior life and exterior position) and knowing the other as an other. Internalization substantially changes the relation between "reader" and text.

The poetic language further weakens the barrier between text and reader. Poetry conventionally omits a wide variety of distinctions that seem so necessary in Western languages—distracting indications of person (the omission of pronouns and lack of person in the verb), tense, mood, number, conjunctions, prepositions. Space prohibits the truly forceful illustrations of this; however, since such determinations *are* necessary to language, the reader becomes implicated in the basic construction of the text, with silent ease assuming determinate relations when they are needed. Without going further into this complicated subject, we may say that

the relation between the openness of the text and constructive determinations in reading was to correspond to constructive processes of the mind operating on the bare sequence of percepts in lived experience.

Another consequence of this stripped language was the failure to discriminate between past and present, or between general cases and particulars. Poetic Chinese makes no formal distinction between "Birds fly in the sky," "A bird was flying in the sky," and "A bird is flying in the sky." As the reader moves through the text, general statement, the past of the poet's statements of historical experience, and the reader's present are formally the same. (It *is* possible to indicate person, relative tense, and mood; but such indications are infrequent and mark the line as *ch'ing*, "explicitly subjective," or *hsü*, "empty.")

The fact that poetic Chinese generally omits this array of linguistic distinctions is not to say that the *shih* exists in a timeless, impersonal state, or in the first person of the reader's present.[2] Readers cling to the assumption that the poem was written by a certain poet under a precise set of physical and historical circumstances. But there are no formal barriers—of tense between "now" and "then," of person between "me" and "him," or of reflective structuration which subordinates events beyond the mere sequence of words. Thus the relation between the poet's voice and that of the reader becomes, to say the least, problematic. The presumption of the historical poet and his determinate circumstances may have been, to some degree, a defense against the memorized text becoming too much the reader's own. (In translation I will use a first person present or past to avoid a grotesque pidgin English which is as unnatural as the Chinese is natural, and which still must make too many distinctions.)

[2]For contrary views see Wai-lim Yip, *Chinese Poetry: Major Modes and Genres* (Berkeley, 1976), pp. 1–24, and James J.Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (London, 1962), pp. 39–42.

Consider a fairly straightforward poem, containing the kind of pleasant "description of Nature" which readers of translations from the Chinese have come to expect. Meng Hao-jan (689–740) writes this on a journey down the Yangtze River past Lu Mountain, famous as the site of a Buddhist temple complex founded by the great monk Hui-yüan.

On P'eng-li Lake, Gazing at Lu Mountain
The Great Void generates a halo round the moon,
The boatman knows that heaven's wind will come.
To hoist the sail, await dawn's breaking;
The floods of this lake spread vast and wide.
Mid-current see K'uang's hill,
Its stance weighing down the force of Nine Rivers.
Its utter blackness lets in clear sky's colors,
Towering it occupies the morning sky.
When the sun first rises over Incense-Burner Peak,
The cascade spurts out in a rainbow.
Long I've wished to follow Shang P'ing the recluse;
Now here, even more, I am moved by Hui-yüan.
I have come, constrained by public duty,
With no private time to ease this self.
The journey's half done, to Huai and the sea,
Stars' positions mark the near ending of the year.
I send word to those who lodge on those cliffs—
When this impulse is done, I'll come join you.

The lameness of this translation might easily have been cured by magic words, clarifying the relations and making it sound like English poetic discourse. But the magic words of the cure are precisely the words which conceal the peculiar venture of a Chinese poem. "The Great Void generates a halo round the moon." Both Chinese and Western reading traditions assume special significance in the particular words of a poem; that assumption is the closest we will ever come to a universal definition of literature. Thereafter the two reading traditions diverge, as soon as the assumption of *some* special significance becomes the assumption of one particular kind of significance.

"Description" in the Western sense is creating again in words the created world; in this second creation, "Great Void" is chosen by art for its own concealed motives, which can be guessed at

only in consideration of the poem as a whole. There are other words for sky: this is the code of cosmology, or more properly of cosmogony, allowing poems and universes to commence together. Our tradition has made us wondrously subtle in the search for hidden purposes and order; we have as many versions of the quest as the early Church had heresies. Suppose the Word, once spoken, rolled forward under the impulse of its own inexorable physics, ungoverned by Will after the beginning: we can then generate a text from the first line, a system of circling and never touching, of poets who sail away promising to return, drawn in elliptical orbit around the luminous mountain.

On this point of the "Great Void" it is simpler for the Chinese reader, but it is also different. To say the "Great Void" is to behold the Great Void rather than ordinary "sky." The words mark a subjective awe confronting cosmological processes. It is not so much a "description" of the predawn sky as a quality of attention, an earnest and steady gazing that is the index of some personal rather than poetic motivation—to be awake and alert so early on this chilly morning.

The awe may reward the faithful gazing, but it does not explain how the poet happened to be awake here, staring into the sky. The second line draws us down, gives us a sweetly pragmatic reason for the gazing—the boatman, taking a weather reading in those titanic forces of darkness and light, augurs the coming wind. It is the boatman who has a legitimate reason to be awake and gazing, and we may suspect that the poet's gaze was no more than an imitation, his eyes drawn to the sky where the boatman's eyes have been so intently fixed. This reading tradition asks us to intuit all the circumstances that our own reading tradition discourages: the wakeful eagerness of the traveller, the wonder at the night sky, the promise of a good wind for the day's journey ahead.

Awaiting the first light to raise the sail is mere fact; in the *shih* it becomes active expectation. Since it will not be the poet who raises the sail, in his waiting as in his watching the poet's senses are directed by the professional concerns of the boatman. We move uneasily between the pragmatic and the visionary. All of a

sudden there is a vast expanse of waters: to say it is to see it, and the lake's full presence is enough to embody both the watching and the growing light. A "then" at the beginning of the fourth line would help the English reader, but it would also betray the Chinese poem.

When we presume the presence of a unifying subject in description, we are asked to intuit the contingencies, motives, and relations that inform and join scenes. The reader becomes implicated in the monologue of the senses, and the relations between phenomena are as if discovered, not given in the created poem. At first our participation may be awkward, the reconstruction and detective work we engage in above; eventually the process becomes internalized, an autonomous form of literary reading.

By ancient kenning Lu Mountain is "K'uang's hill," and the kenning is apt in this distant perspective, where the mountain seems only a hill. Though Lu Mountain is still only a "hill," we are "mid-current" now, well out upon the lake. Our seeing may be merely a "noticing," the gaze accidentally arrested as it sweeps the boundaries of the vast lake, and even in that there is some fixing of vision. But seeing may also be a "looking for and finding," and such a famous mountain might well draw an expectant traveller's gaze. In either case the poet's attention has detached itself from the pragmatic concerns of the boatman, and what he sees now, named by the archaic kenning known to poets but not to boatmen, is for himself alone.

Staring at the "hill" in the distance, suddenly we are much closer and see its stance (*shih,* an untranslatable term implying a form with some directed energy or potential movement—not the same *shih* as the poetic genre), immobile and in its height seeming to press down on the turbulent confluence of the famous Nine Rivers. A series of "descriptions" embodies complex movements of attention and carries us, through the growing light of early morning, across the lake.

We read the rising of the sun and the simultaneous rising of the mountain as the poet draws ever closer. What was before a dark, looming, and amorphous shape now admits the streaming rays

of direct sunlight through the crevices and forests of the range, burning away the early mists. The mountain takes on ever greater height and definition until it occupies the whole sky, "towering" above the poet. The description enacts revelation, as the object of vision becomes *ming*—both "bright" and "known." Finally in full morning the sun breaks over the peak, and the cascade becomes a prism, transforming a word of darkness and light into one of color.

The final section of the poem is *ch'ing*, the subjective complement to the scenes, *ching*. As the Western narrator might halt the pace of a fiction to frame some object of view,the Chinese poet stops descriptive action to reflect and comment. The initial response is ceremonial and expected: the poet has always wanted to be a recluse like Shang P'ing, but here, seeing the grandeur of Hui-yüan's mountain, that desire to quit the world is doubled. But the currents of the river and lake, which bore the poet toward the mountain, do not dispose themselves for neat poetic structures, and they keep on flowing, carrying the poet, mumbling his apologies, right past the mountain. The opening balance between the visionary and the pragmatic here becomes conflict. The *shih* often involves such collisions between human projects and the contingencies of the world, but their embryonic tragedies are dissipated in the quotidian. As he passes the mountain, the poet lamely explains that he is presently on a mission, but that as soon as his task is done, he will return. The response is awkward and ungainly, and the reader knows it as such: the failure of the circumstantial human to be worthy of the mountain is exposed. In this elemental poem of light, stone, and water, stone's stability is the object of desire, but the poet is indentured to the world of water.

As soon as we switch to the explicitly subjective mode, we are disjoined from the poet's senses. We retain the presumption of empirical necessity: through it we know that the poet is being carried past the mountain. But reflective subjectivity now mediates between us and the poet's condition, and we are asked to know the poet as Other: he is worthy of contempt, sympathy, or laughter—these are all within the scope of our readerly freedom—but no longer are

we bound inside his senses. The *shih* was often thought of as a means to know a person, and this movement from interior participation to exterior judgment is part of that special epistemology.

Description is an extension of the most essential presumptions about the nature and operations of language. Medieval Chinese poets generally considered language to be an adequate and organic manifestation of nature's categories through and for mind, a distillation of nature's pattern. This presumption is necessary for the poetic system, and to accept the poetry is to conditionally yield yourself to its presumptions about language. Written language has the priority and is discovered in the world with the formation of human consciousness.[3] In this system language was neither created nor did it exist prior to creation in the infinite vocal chords of a Being who said "Light" in order to produce it.

If we presume that the patterns of the written word emerged spontaneously with full human consciousness of the world, then the process of poetic description replicates the primal process of forming language (just as the fictional poet replicates the Fiat). Moreover, the received language is constituted of memorized utterances, and there is no basic disjunction between Language and its referential use; the fact that it is received in specific uses is only a validation of its adequacy. In contrast, concepts of grammar and "meaning" (beyond the *ad hoc* gloss in a specific context) point to a Language that transcends utterance, and utterance becomes only the limited, referential exercise of language.

The "Fiat" which commenced in the language-structured Mind, located in the solitary darkness, problematizes the relation between language and the world: the unseemly flux of things embarrasses the transcendent Word. The little "fiats" of the later makers lacked even the authentification of tangible result, and when these lesser makers measured their barren fictions against the potency and physical outcome of the first Fiat, the problem of language and the world was exacerbated. But Chinese poetry is more an art of noticing than an art of words.

[3]See Liu Hsieh (465–522), *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wen-hsin tiao-lung*), trans. Vincent Shih (New York, 1959), pp. 8–11.

Description, in a Chinese sense, would be that art of noticing pattern incarnate in the sensible world: pattern is neither the excessively lush totality of a scene nor disembodied abstraction: it is a medial form in which the general case and the particular case are one.

Pattern is reinforced and complicated by repetition and variation, but patterns are not cumulative components of an atemporal and "framed" scene, *ut pictura poesis*. Since description is interior action, the briefest sequences mark significant process. Chang Pa-yüan (eighth century) writes:

> Snow-clouds clear, ridge-spines of mountains appear;
> Where shallow water was on sand, wave-tracks cross.

The movement of eyes from distant mountains to the sands by one's feet marks a change of magnitude, not only in the percept, but in the relative size of the perceiver as well. Ripple marks in the sand, left by receding waters, echo the shapes of rough, snow-covered mountains after the clouds have drawn back. A diminutive poet faces immense and rugged barriers which promise the greatest hardship of passage; "reseeing" the essential pattern simultaneously magnifies the poet and reduces those shapes to transitory configurations that will dissolve as soon as the waters pass over them again. The reader comes to this couplet in a poem entitled "Travelling by River," and what the eyes notice celebrates the chosen means of travel and the victorious ease of passage.

There are dangerous temptations when a poet has a readership that will assume the senses of the empirical poet in all description. The greatest temptation is a poetry of persona and fictionality (or in the Chinese form, "fantasy," implicating the subjective act). Taking his place in the poet's consciousness, the reader can be lured into seeing what he should not see, what he never wanted to see, what no one should see. The possibilities for disorientation are rich—drunkenness, passion, madness, dream, even unmarked shifts of memory. And the very steadiness, the presumption of a secure empirical order that sails us to a mountain and past it, becomes the means of our undoing. We may find ourselves in the

senses of some being who perceives a thousand years of suns hurtling over the sky's arc with furious speed; in doing so we will find that we have slipped out of human seeing and time. We cannot tell if these disorientations are achieved by the coolness of fiction or through genuine passion, dream, and madness. But such subversive poets did exist, and around them hung an aura of immortality and danger.

It is cumbersome to present such poems, particularly the most difficult. They ask a thorough knowledge of the poetic tradition and highly developed skills of reading; most often they take the form of fragments whose coherence appears only in flashes; they contain confused misnamings (the parallel of metaphor) whose true shapes the reader can only dimly guess. To the Western reader they will often seem only incoherent strings of images.

Our purposes are best suited by a modest hallucination, where the unifying poet is still easily within reach. Li Ho (791–817) visits the tomb of the long-dead courtesan Little Su. In the background is an old song, put in the mouth of Little Su:

> I ride a carriage with varnished sides,
> My love rides a blue-spotted horse.
> Where shall we tie hearts in a love knot?
> Under the cypress and pines of Western Mound.

Cypress and pines are tomb trees, and Li Ho picks up the expectation of love fulfilled only after death:

> The Tomb of Little Su
> On secret orchids dew
> Like weeping eyes,
> No object to tie the heart to,
> Flowers in mist, cannot bear to cut.
> The grass like the coach seat,
> Pines like the canopy,
> The wind is her skirt,
> The water, her sash jewels.
> The carriage with varnished sides
> In the evening awaits.
> Cold azure torch
> Strains bright beams.
> Beneath Western Mound
> Wind blows the rain.

Similes are cheap; a Western poet could have offered us the opening lines easily. But the Chinese poet is making a statement more closely related to "it seems to me like . . ." without the "seeming" to assure us of the illusion. Still the barriers of explicit similitude will protect us for a while, and it is their dissolution later in the poem which marks the transition from uncanny resemblance to apparition.

We are in someone's consciousness, but we do not know whose: here the absence of tense and person markers creates a genuine uncertainty. It may be Li Ho visiting the tomb; it may be Li Ho, either at the tomb or not, indulging a fantasy of some scene in the far past. Little Su's lover searching for her in vain, or Little Su herself waiting in vain. We hang between these possibilities—three descriptive actions in which Li Ho, the lover, or Little Su pass through the spectral scene with nothing "to tie the heart to." Each separate plot reorders the relations in the poem: is it is Little Su who had nothing "to tie the heart to," then it would have caused her tears, and the interred weeping becomes diffused into orchids of the present scene. Or if it is the poet that has "no object," then he assumes the position of her lover, unable now to locate her, only dimly sensing that she is dispersed through the tombscape.

But suppose we read through with the poet's consciousness. He does not say why he cannot bear to cut the flowers, but we accept that the flowers' resemblance to eyes was no idle art, and that the similitude is the seed of the real, though spectral, thing. And the proposed violence is disturbing, even though he "cannot bear" to commit it: even in death and transformation she is vulnerable.

The multiplication of resemblances is not the poet's craft of conceit but ghost-work. The tombscape becomes a simile of the waiting carriage, whose cushion and canopy take shape in the vegetation. Then the similes are gone: her skirt *is* the wind, the sound of waters *is* the tinkling of her sash pendants. Finally the carriage is there, bearing the blue flickering of ghost-light, constant in her waiting through these centuries. But the light is vulnerable, struggling to maintain itself. The description enacts

apparition, and the apparition goes dark, the last light goes out, in a sudden gust of rain.

We should not have seen this: we have no strong fictional traditions to tell us to set it aside and consider it as a "work of art." Perhaps we do not have to believe that Li Ho is mendacious, utterly mad, or that he did indeed see Little Su; we can take this as a fantasy if we choose. Yet as the fantasy of a historical person rather than an artist's creation, it is uncomfortable. A fantasy can be indulged, but it is not invented; it happens *to* someone, as if impelled from without.