Transparencies: Reading the T'ang Lyric

STEPHEN OWEN
Yale University

THE title of this essay represents a modish formula in academic critical writing, and as a true formula of entitling, it merits less our contempt than our scrutiny: naming something, such as an essay on literature, is an act which reveals basic presumptions about the nature of the thing named. The first term of the title is "Transparencies"—at this stage more an opaqueness than a transparency. It is read according to the western rules of metaphor, as a concealment and promise of significance deferred. Then there is a colon to mark simile, to control the metaphorical term by providing a balancing half title that returns us to the more secure world of conventional academic discourse—"Reading the T'ang Lyric." However, the metaphorical term is never entirely controlled, and the interest of the title lies in the disjunction between the two sides of the colon, in the question raised about the relationship between the two parts.

More important than the words of the title, and quite apart from whatever the content of this essay will be, the particular form of the title raises questions of value precisely because it engages long-standing problems of metaphor. The formula is constructed as "X (metaphorical term, preferably abstract): Y (longer, non-metaphorical phrase, with strong metrical proprieties). As a formula of entitling, its traditions can be found in the names of early novels

and romances, and it has become common at the head of lectures and essays. The formula promises something speculative by its first term, and by its second term, it tries to reassure those who are wary of speculation. The formula tends to attract or repel readers strongly, and the question of value it raises is linked to the speculative, metaphorical term and to the threat posed by its escape from the domain of poetry and intrusion into the civilized world of academic discourse.

The dismemberment of the title is not an exercise in wit: it is an illustration of modern codes of reading that grow out of some of the oldest concerns of western hermeneutics. First, there is metaphor (in its broadest sense), the primary mode of literary reading: the text does not mean what it seems to say, and its "true significance" is concealed, displaced elsewhere. The academic study of literature is devoted to stripping away the "veil of metaphor" and revealing that hidden meaning. Second, there is the illusion of "plain language," promising security against the untruth of the metaphorical term. Finally, there is an intense question of value that inclines readers to the domain of metaphor or to the domain of plain language, and often requires that a clear boundary be marked between the two.

RULES OF READING

In every literary civilization there is an art of reading which is as much a part of literary experience as the inert elements of the text itself. That learned art of reading is the means by which a reader can aesthetically know a literary text. Even within a single culture there is great variety in the rules of reading, differing by the age, the class of readers, and the genre read. However, there are also certain shared norms, the fundamental presumptions in the process of forming meaning, and these must be understood before one can consider more specific rules, such as generic expectations.

Language is not only a set of conventional signs and generative rules of combination, it is also a set of instructions for use, a set of operations for understanding. The most consistent trait of literature and literary language is that the processes of forming meaning (rules of reading) operate differently than in nonliterary language.

The poet's assertion that his love is a red, red rose is formally identical to a nonliterary statement, but it is not understood as the admission of a rare sexual deviation. *Hamlet* is not read as a documentary source for early Danish history. The primary difference between literary and nonliterary language lies in the different ways they are read, in the processes of forming meaning. Inevitably, literary language is read to mean something *other than* or *more than* the meaning which the same words would have in a nonliterary situation. Moreover, that strange body of texts called "literature" are those texts produced for the sake of literary reading.

The problem is that different literary civilizations presume different ways of moving from the text to that other, broader and deeper significance. There is nothing morally wrong about reading a Chinese text according to the western operations of literary reading, just as there is no prohibition against reading a western text following medieval Chinese presumptions in reading. However, just as a text is written in a certain language, so it is also written *for* certain presuppositions about what literature is and how a literary text is to be read.

The differences between Chinese and western modes of literary reading are deeply connected to the question of metaphor and the reader's presumptions about the fictionality or nonfictionality of poems. Presumptions of fictionality in the text and of a metaphorical Truth run throughout our modern western modes of literary reading. In Chinese poetry metaphor is more truly a "device," most comfortable in simile and usually confined to certain emblematic traditions and to certain subgenres; e.g., the pine of a *ku-feng* 古風 poem points more strongly to a metaphorical truth than to a botanical phenomenon. However, in an occasional poem when there is a "blossom-fragrance-stream" 芳泉, the reader understands a real stream filled with the scent of fallen blossoms rather than a metaphorical "stream" of fragrance blowing through the air.

The general tendency to avoid metaphorical reading (except in the limited number of situations suggested above) is linked to the traditional Chinese reader's presumptions of the nonfictionality of most *shih* subgenres. Poems are read as describing historical moments and scenes actually present to the historical poet. In contrast, "Ode to the West Wind" may have been occasioned by an

actual experience of Shelley's, but the particularity of that historical experience is of no relevance or of minimal relevance in modern western modes of literary reading. Every reader knows, as Shelley himself knew, that the poet had license to add, subtract, and alter details of the occasioning experience. Whatever the experiential origins of the poem, the text is taken as a fiction, and its Truth is a metaphorical rather than a historical truth.

On the other hand, the traditional Chinese reader had faith that poems were authentic presentations of historical experience. Poets wrote, as readers read, under those presumptions. No one felt uncomfortable about constructing biographical chronologies from poems or about using poems as direct sources for cultural history. However, it should be stressed that this was an impulse in reading and not necessarily a fact in the texts themselves: poets often spoke of revision and occasionally produced poems which could not have represented historical experience. Moreover, there were patently fictional genres such as *yüeh-fu*; but even in these poems, an impulse to nonfictional reading led to interpretation in terms of topical allegory: the interpreter sought to "read through" such texts to the historical situations that motivated them, and saw their fictionality as a willful "concealment," itself motivated by some danger in historical experience.

Accepting these presumptions of the nonfictionality of poetry, the question of literary reading can be carried to its next stage: how were language and the reading process conceptualized, and from that, how did traditional readers move from the text to that broader, more general significance?

LINGUISTIC ADEQUACY AND INADEQUACY: THE RELATION BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND THE WORLD

Let us formulate our normative concept of literary reading in more precise terms: both in traditional China and in the west, literary reading is based on the reader's presumption of the inadequacy of the text as plain language. The reader brings to the text a distrust of language's usual function to discriminate and limit. However, our interest lies less in this fact of presumed linguistic inadequacy than in the particular modes of inadequacy that

differentiate the two reading traditions. To know the mode of inadequacy leads to the means of resolution, the way to move from the inadequate "plain language" in the text to the fullness of meaning to which it points.

A concept of linguistic inadequacy will inevitably be linked to a concept of adequacy, and statements of textual adequacy can be found throughout the later Warring States and Han. The classic formulation of linguistic adequacy is in the "Great Preface" to the *Shih*:

詩者志之所之也. 在心爲志, 發言爲詩.

> The Poem [of the *Shih* or a poem in general] is that to which intention goes. In the mind it is intention; coming forth in language it is the Poem.

This is not only a statement of a perfectly adequate correlation between a prelinguistic interior state and a poem, it also implies almost a transfer of substance in making the poem.

From this passage, from the rest of the "Great Preface," and from other early comments on literature, we may build a hypothetical model of adequation. Nowhere is the model set forth as clearly and mechanically as below; rather it should be taken as a phantom model, different parts of which drew the attention of different writers at different times.

	External 外	Poet: Internal 內			External	Reader: Internal
Composition	世 事 age → (event)	情 感(興) 志 + emotional nature → being stirred → intention/obsession			詩 → poem	興 → stirring[1]
Reading	↖ ↖	↖		↖		觀 reflective consideration[2]

This movement from the state of the world or age, through the poet, into the poem, and finally to the reader was conceived not as a series of causes, but as an organic process of manifestation.

[1] In one special case, the "reader" may be the ruler or Heaven who may, as a result, act upon the age to change the equation.

[2] See *Analects*, XVII. 9.3–4: 詩可以興可以觀.

Out of this process of correlative transformation grew the theory of reading which is most clearly enunciated in the "Understander," *Chih-yin* 知音, chapter of the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* 文心雕龍:

夫綴文者，情動而辭發；觀文者，披文而入情，沿波討源；雖幽必顯. 世遠莫見其面，覘文輒見其心。

In the case of composing literature, the emotions are stirred and the words come forth; but in the case of reading, one opens the literary text and enters the emotions [of the writer], goes up against the waves to find the source; and though it be [at first] hidden, it will certainly become manifest. None may see the actual faces of a faraway age, but by viewing their writing, one may immediately see their hearts/minds.

The term here used to refer to the reading process is *kuan* 觀, "observe," a combination of the visual and the contemplative, as though there were an actual experience of the occasioning situation through the reading process. The reader is the *chih-yin*, the "true friend," the one who "knows the tone" and thus perceives the poet's true nature through its musical/literary manifestation in art. According to Liu Hsieh, reading is a backward movement to the "source," following in reverse order the series of operations that produced the poem.

This state of affairs would be immensely comfortable were it not for complications that arise in the relationship between the text and the combination of writer and world that produced the text. This complication is inadequation, and its classic formulation is found in the *Hsi-tz'u chuan* 繫辭傳 of the *Yi*: 言不盡意 "Language does not exhaust concept [or 'what was meant']." The use of "exhaust," *chin* 盡, is particularly significant: linguistic expression is conceived as somehow a diminution of a prior fullness.

To the knowledgeable reader, the *chih-yin*, the diminished text presented no barrier to understanding the fullness that lay behind it. Everyone knew that Confucius's disciple Tzu-lu could "resolve disputes having heard only a fragment of a statement" (片言可以折獄者, *Analects*, XII, 12). Mencius, by his "knowledge of language" (*chih-yen* 知言) knew not only the fact of various speakers' depravities, he also knew the precise nature of their depravities (*Mencius*, IIA, ii. 7). Although language may be limited and in itself fail to exhaust what was meant, there *are* ways to go from limited language to its

fuller meaning—to the essence of disputes, to the moral aberrations of one's acquaintances, or to the secret meanings of the *Yi* and the *Ch'un-ch'iu*. Precisely how one goes from diminished texts to broader meanings is the beginning of a hermeneutic tradition, not simply in the limited sense of interpretation, but also in the immanence of deeper significance in the reading process itself.

Reading becomes a process of restoring fullness: the text is synecdoche for the world (not as substitution, but as diminishment and loss). It leads not to the "other" meaning of metaphorical reading and the fictional text, but to the whole of which we see only a part in the text. Restoration of fullness depends on presumptions of a stable language with intelligible relationships, and through these there are various techniques for expanding the text.

The *Hsi-tz'u chuan* suggests that expansion can be accomplished by analogical categories: 其稱名也小, 其取類也大 "[In the *Yi*] the names given [to the hexagrams?] are small, but their implications by categorical analogy are great." Both *lei* 類, "categorical analogy," and the western concept of metaphor (closest perhaps to Chinese *yü* 喻) are based upon analogy; however, metaphor is fictional and involves true substitution, while *lei* is an association that is "strictly true," based upon the order of the world.

The Kung-yang and Ku-liang commentaries to the *Ch'un-ch'iu* often expand the text by negative inference, an interest in what is *not* said. This leads to a concept of implicit avoidance in word choice. The Duke who is not called a Duke, the unmentioned succession to the throne are significant silences that indicate Confucius's evaluation of an event. The reader's attention is constantly directed to a hidden world behind the text, and the writer's sentiments and judgments are known by the relation of the text to that inferred world.

Other relationships involved in expanding texts can be found in couplets eighteen to twenty-two of the *Wen-fu* 文賦, in the section concerning the formation of "concept," *yi* 意. As the reader reverses the process by which the text was produced, he will look for relationships like these: emanation (e.g., sound to the producer of sound or vice versa), implicating causes by effects or effects by causes (moving the branches to shake the leaves, following the waves to find the source), or value relationships of context and contiguity (the abrupt

appearance of the dragon or tiger). Such contextual relationships are picked up later by Liu Hsieh in the *Li-tz'u* 麗辭 chapter of the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung*: 事不孤立 . . . 高下相須, 自然成對 "Events do not stand isolated . . . as high and low require one another, and by their own natures form a parallel." This develops into the intense awareness of the couplet-writer that things take on value by what they are set in relation to; e.g., the swallow juxtaposed with a hawk and the swallow juxtaposed with a mosquito signify differently.

Following these and other processes of expansion, the reader moves toward the two ends of the reading process—the poet and the world that produced the text. By directing our inquiry to the ends of the reading process, we avoid the burning (and here, irrelevant) issues of modern western literary theory—whether texts are "really" about the world or the internal order of language. Furthermore, the "New Critical" distinction between historical poet and persona is less significant than the reader's presumption that the poem was an authentic expression of the historical poet.

The proposition that the poet and the world that produced the poem were the goals of the reading process is wide enough to admit a great variety of distinct interests in reading. To the historically minded reader it led to biographical criticism and the search for topical reference. At another extreme, the idea that poetry was the "out-come" of a prelinguistic, interior experience of the world surely played an important role in the affective poetics of the Late T'ang and Sung, in the concept of *yen-wai* 言外, "beyond words," as the end of aesthetic experience. This possibility was already implicit in the "Great Preface": "in the mind it is intention; coming forth in language, it is a Poem." Thus, if the creative process is followed in the opposite direction in reading, we move from language in the text to prelinguistic experience—the ineffable, what is "beyond words."

It remains for us to read T'ang poems through these presumptions about the formation of meaning and to observe ourselves in the process. We will seek neither to discover the historical truth behind the text nor to bring a fullness "beyond words" back into the diminished realm of words. Nor are we trying to relate poems to contemporary criticism: criticism has its own tradition with its own specific interests, and while those interests grow out of the presump-

tions of reading, they are much narrower. Rather we have described what would have been a T'ang reader's most basic presumptions about the operation of literary language (the ideas in the pre-T'ang sources cited above were often repeated in the T'ang), and we will see what happens when those broad rules are applied to texts.

"Validity in interpretation" is not our concern here: the stability of meaning is an illusion. The formation of meaning in the reading process is necessarily individual: it is even legitimate to say that meaning is something "done" rather than an object to be "known." It is not "meanings" that are shared by readers of a given time and place, but a common language, a common context of culture and literary tradition, and above all, a common concept of the nature of poetry and the rules of literary reading. Since these are instruments and processes, they can be adequately explored only in their use; to know them abstractly, as they have been set forth in the preceding pages, is to know only a hollow form.

I call these readings "transparencies" because they are qualitatively different from the disjunctive metaphorical operations of western poetics. In the non-fictional Chinese lyric, the text is a limited window on a full world, "obscure" from a distance but growing luminous and "manifest" as we approach it (to paraphrase Liu Hsieh on reading). In this reading process there are two primary objects of attention—reading the poet and reading the world.

READING THE POET

There is a famous painting of Saint Sebastian by Antonello da Massina: the saint appears in a full-length frontal view, his body transfixed with arrows. If the painting were a T'ang poem, the traditional reader would recoil in horror, not only at the grotesqueness of the subject matter, but also from the immediate recognition that the poet/painter was standing among the executioners. If what is seen is presumed to be historical experience, then the point of view is implicated in the view itself.

Consider Wang Wei: western presumptions of the text as fictional artifice have generated the vocabulary of concepts that now surrounds his work—the neutral eye, the disappearance of the poet from the poem, and the total absence of self-consciousness. Without dismissing

such readings, we should recognize that they are founded upon a twentieth-century dissociation of the historical poet from his persona, and that they are also founded on a much older concept of the poem as a thing "made" (*poiesis*). But the poems are *shih* (詩/言–寺/言志), verbal manifestations of inner states.

In a system of reading that never ceases to point to the poet, such an escape from the poem is utterly impossible. Indeed, the poet calls all the more attention to himself by trying to hide. Most T'ang landscape poems are not about "the world," but about "a particular experience of the world." From this point of view, Massina's painting becomes not "of Saint Sebastian," but "of seeing Saint Sebastian," implicating the painter as viewer.

Wang Wei's "Crossing the Yellow River to Ch'ing-ho" 渡河到清河作 provides an immediately intelligible example of reading the poet:

汎舟大河裏　積水窮天涯　天波忽開折　郡邑千萬家
行復見城市　宛然有桑麻　迴瞻舊鄉國　淼漫連雲霞

Sailing by boat upon the great river,
Massed waters reach the sky's very edge.
Sky and waves suddenly split apart—
The million houses of a district capital.
Then further on, see walls and market,
There is mulberry, hemp, lush and full.
And peer back towards one's homeland—
Vast floods stretching to the clouds.

A journey is defined by two points in space, a starting point and a destination. In a travel poem whichever point is described is implicitly the one that draws the traveller's eyes, and that direction of vision marks a state of mind. And when the direction of vision shifts, as here from destination towards home, that shift defines a sudden change of heart.

But, of course, vision is not free: what is seen is a complex interaction between the physical world, with its own forms and powers, and the interior state of the poet. The indifferent facts of topography can control vision, and here they assume a dramatic, protean form in the riverscape. With its power to conceal or expose, the riverscape

possesses the ability to generate interest and longing in the human mind: the visual absences it contrives are the necessary stimuli of desire.

Thus we read the poet: his eyes strain over the water to the limits of his vision, trying to see something but able to see only water. Then, at the interface between sky and water, something intrudes. The reader presumes that the poet's fixed vision marks something he is looking for and that whatever intrudes is the object of his visual search. First there is a mass of houses, then the market, then the greater detail of mulberry and hemp on the bank. Reading the world, we know that the poet is coming closer to Ch'ing-ho as the scene resolves in ever greater detail. Reading the poet, we know the curiosity of the traveller, his intense interest in whatever lies ahead.

His curiosity sated, the poet looks around suddenly and meets a second dramatic revelation—in this case, not a revelation of place but of loss of place. Through what is seen and what is not seen we read loss and homesickness: almost as an exchange for the vision of destination, the vast waters have taken away the starting point on the opposite bank and beyond that, a home. The fixed gaze that is blocked is the mark of absence and desire.

"Crossing the Yellow River to Ch'ing-ho" has little to do with the riverscape in and of itself: rather it concerns a subjective experience of the riverscape. Succinctly and without a word of emotion, the poet has recounted an interior experience of a journey and a normative experience of all journeys. And for the reader who looks to the hidden poet, the emotions involved are all the more intense for their concealment. In the language of medieval Chinese psychology, they "swell up within and cannot come out." In the hermeneutics of the Kung-yang and Ku-liang commentaries, the question is raised: "And why does he not speak of the emotions he must feel?"

In this Wang Wei poem, and probably in the majority of T'ang poems, reading the poet is a relatively simple matter. Reading the poet is most interesting in the problematic cases where it is only partially appropriate: in some difficult poems, the impulse to unify the poem in a perceiving subject is the key to their aesthetic value. Li Ho is just such a difficult poet, and it is possible that what made Li Ho a disturbing and compelling poet was neither his mythological apparatus nor his bizarre imagery (if it were, Lu T'ung would have

been his peer), but rather a seduction of the reader into a mode of seeing that was not entirely human.

The "Fourth Month" 四月 is from a series of thirteen poems on the months. Suppose the reader approaches it presuming a visual unity of experience, the sort of thing he was accustomed to from reading Wang Wei. The hidden consciousness through which the reader apprehends the poem's world is not the easy, physical eye. The authentic poet reporting his experience is not found, but the possibility of such a presence is the lure by which our conventional and stable point of view is undone.

曉涼暮涼樹如蓋　千山濃綠生雲外　依微香雨青氛氳　膩葉蟠花映曲門
金塘閑水搖碧漪　老景沉重無驚飛　墮紅殘萼暗參差

Cool of dawn, cool of evening, trees like canopies,
The rich, dark green of a thousand hills appears beyond the clouds.
Unclear and so faint, a fragrant rain, blue-green hazily swelling,
Glossy fat leaves and clustered flowers shine against arched gate.
Still waters of the golden basin shake ripples of emerald,
Aging spring light, heavy and somber—
  no more breaking loose in flight,
Fallen reds and ruined calyces in darkness scattered about.

The seasonal location is essential for understanding the poem: it is early in the first month of summer, between the bright light and conventionally red flowers of spring on the one hand, and on the other hand, summer's heat with its oppressive lushness of green vegetation.

To disorient the reader and lure him away from human perspective, the poet must first establish an illusion of security, a comfortable frame of reference to be lost. The first two lines serve this purpose admirably as the reader finds precisely what he expects in a poem on the first month of summer. In the cool of dawn and evening, in the comparison of the trees to canopies we can read the poet's interest in escaping the heat of summer: we have a conventional poetic stance, *k'u-je* 苦熱, "suffering the oppressive heat." The eyes in the poem are the eyes of a conventional poet, moving out to encompass huge vistas of clouds and mountains whose relationships are clearly defined. The eye of the reader/poet, ever alert for ana-

logical forms, sees the repetition of the canopy-trees in the spreading green of the distant mountains, growing to fullness before his eyes.

In the third line this comfortable expansion of vision and upward growth dissolves. Movement is downward with the rain, so faint and fine that the drops can't be distinguished, a rain that is somehow mixed up with the blossoms so that it is scented. Perspective, shapes, and boundaries disappear, as rain and trees merge into a "blue-green hazily swelling."

Out of this formlessness, shapes reappear in the fourth line—leaves, tangles of flowers defined against a gate. But we have lost the perspective that encompasses whole trees with crowns "like canopies." Then in the fifth line we are staring down into the pool, and our disorientation is complete: the reflecting waters are still, yet at the same time have green ripples. If we disengage ourselves from the eyes of the poem and reflect, the poetic tradition resolves the paradox: we are, in fact, seeing the green foliage waving in the still waters. From that movement we read the wind, and we know what that wind will do to the tangles of flowers in the fourth month.

Finally we come to loss of light and the final dissolution: darkness overtakes the reflections and the wind is dying down—the flowers are no longer breaking loose, "flying," and falling. We are left with the darkening waters of the basin on which scattered petals are floating, right beside the reflected (?) calyces from which they have fallen. The final word of the poem is *ts'en-ts'e*, the description of uneven ordering, loss of coherent relationships, randomness.

Without the impulse to unify the poem as perceptual experience, the "Fourth Month" is merely descriptive, and descriptive in the worst sense. But when a consciousness is presumed to mediate between the reader and what is seen, the poem enacts a strange experience that corresponds to the falling and dissolution of the flowers in the fourth month. We share some of the experience of the fourth month flower: our stability falls loose; our realm of vision (眼界) shrinks as we fall from the trees; our world is broken up and we go into darkness.

READING THE WORLD

The "Great Preface" of the *Shih* announces that "the tones of a

well-governed age are at peace and joyous, its rule balanced; the tones of an age of upheaval are bitter and angry, its rule perverse; and the tones of a ruined state are mournful and yearning, its people suffering." This is the canonical statement on the correlation between an age and its literature, but it is also instruction for reading: it tells the reader what to find behind the various modes or "tones" of the *Shih*, and its truth is easily accessible to the "understander," the *chih-yin*, the one who "knows the tones." This was one of the earliest forms of reading the world, but in the larger context of the history of poetry, the political condition of the age was only one aspect of the cosmic order that was immanent in the physical world. This order could be read through poetic description.

In reading the world there are basically two forms of expanding the limited text. One is close to the western rhetorical tropes of metonymy and synecdoche (not as substitution tropes, but as associative relationships): here the reader completes the physical relationships in the world at hand. The second form of reading the world lies in perceiving its analogical links; these appear through parallelism, poetic structure, and traditional associations. The movement to general significance occurs through the analogical repetitions, but it is often necessary to expand the metonymic relationships of the physical world before the analogical links can be made.

The complexity of this distinction is only superficial: the two processes are fundamental to the way meaning is formed in reading Chinese poetry, and they operate even in the smallest units of reading. Consider the first line of the Li Ho poem above: "cool of dawn" and "cool of evening" are expanded in relationships of synecdoche, but they are precisely *not* the western substitution trope of synecdoche, in which case they would stand for an entire cool day. The limiting reference to dawn and evening calls attention to the silence about the intervening day; the "coolness" that qualifies the dawn and evening suggests that the intervening day was not cool. Thus the heat of the day is the unstated gap that must be filled in during the process of reading.

Likewise, the "trees like canopies" are expanded to the shade those canopies project, and the boundaries of shadow mark the hot sunlight beyond. From these fundamental metonymic expansions,

the reader proceeds to compare and isolate the analogical elements of the two halves of the line: an interest in cool times and cool places in contrast to a more pervasive heat and bright sunlight. From this "reading the world," we read the poet, finding the motivation for his direction of attention in his *k'u-je*, "suffering the oppressive heat." But, of course, the well-trained reader of Chinese poetry performs these operations with an instantaneous and intuitive grace that mocks this clumsy recreation of the process.

Such intuitive grace should be stressed to put the following comparison in perspective. There are some basic similarities between reading the world in Chinese poetry and the way in which western readers approach detective novels. Both focus attention on the "evidence" that can expose a hidden truth, and both demand the presumption of a coherent order of reality by which the evidence can expose the hidden truth. Both are texts of limitation that lead to fullness, and both are based on models of cognition. Of course, the empirical reality presumed in detective novels is supplemented in the Chinese case by a reality of analogies and associations based on cosmology and the literary tradition.

Both genres engage the reader to decipher the world; the detective novel always succeeds within the text, but in the Chinese poem the fullness lies outside the text, as the end of the reading process. At its least complacent, the T'ang poem moves toward a fullness that is never attained—an ambiguous reality, a world of unmanageable complexity, or a true failure of intelligibility. The more complacent social poem and the detective novel have served their respective societies in certain fundamental ways: they are models of cognition that teach readers how to know, and at the same time reassure them of the world's ultimate intelligibility.

The question of cognition in reading the world is raised beautifully in the first of three poems by Hsü Hun on "Early Autumn" 早秋. The indefinite occasion of the title relates the poem to a *yung-wu* tradition, and the reader enters the text expecting to find what is essential to an "early autumn."

遙夜泛清瑟　西風生翠蘿　殘螢棲玉露　早雁拂金河
高樹曉還密　遠山晴更多　淮南一葉下　自覺老烟波

Far in night floats a clear lute's sound,

The west wind rises in azure vines.
Last fireflies roost on the jadewhite dew,
Early geese brush the metal river of stars.
Tall trees at daybreak still densely thick,
And far mountains, sunlit, grow ever more.
In Huai-nan one leaf falls[3]—
You're aware of aging in misty waves.

The poem begins at night, in a darkness where all things are hidden from sight. The music of the *sse* is, I suspect, music heard by the poet rather than music he is playing himself. The "clarity," *ch'ing*, of its notes is strongly associated with autumn.

The music of the *sse*, heard coming from "far" in the night, raises the question of cognition: it is a set poetic situation. The poet hears music by night from an unseen source, and he realizes that although he cannot know who is playing, he *can* know the player's emotions and nature through the music itself. The listener becomes the *chih-yin*, the one who "knows the tone," the "understander" of Liu Hsieh's chapter on reading. His faculties of perception and understanding sharpened by the music, the poet reads the scene to know autumn.

Autumn's omens are everywhere—in the west wind, in the last of summer's fireflies, in the white dew and the wild geese who have begun their migrations brushing the high skies of autumn, in the river of stars that has taken on autumn's Element to become "metallic." Multiple analogies bind together these omens of autumn: coming from far in the night, the *sse*'s music may float in with the west wind, which has its own music, the note *shang* for autumn. In the second couplet there are coalescing dots of white light—blinking motes of fireflies touching lightly on sparkling drops of dew, specks of white geese brushing the glittering stars in passage. All are fugitive lights: dying fireflies, evanescent dew, migrating geese. They are fragments of light surrounded by darkness, with all that suggests in the seasonal interaction of Yin and Yang.

Then comes dawn's light, so often in T'ang poetry the condition of revelation: *ming* 明, "brightness" and "understanding"; or as here, *shao* 曉, "dawnlight" and "comprehension"; set against *an* 暗,

[3] *Huai-nan-tzu:* "When one leaf falls, all the world knows it's autumn."

"darkness" and "unknowing ignorance." But this dawn exposes only more substantial barriers to perceptual knowledge: the poet is hedged about with tall trees that block vision with their leaves and by the same token present counterevidence that it is not yet high autumn—"still dense." Escaping this visual barrier near at hand, the poet looks out over vast spaces and finds that there too the dawn light has created even more barriers: night's simple mountain outline becomes in daylight endless layers of mountains.

As the poet strains to look far into the distance, nearby a single leaf falls, either in remembered proverb or here in the geographical Huai-nan, with all that means through the quotation in the *Huai-nan-tzu*. By that one leaf, autumn can be known; the reader supplies the balancing half of the proverb—"and all the world knows it's autumn" 而天下知秋. The reader knows that the light breeze from the west which ruffled the vines by night will become hard winds that will strip the dense trees bare.

In the text as well as in the remembered proverb, the fallen leaf leads to awareness, *chüeh* 覺. But what the poet becomes "aware of" in the last line is a phenomenon qualitatively different than his perceptions earlier in the poem—"aging in misty waves" 老烟波. *Lao yen-po* is supremely vague: its indefinite "growing old" encompasses the poet, the leaf (perhaps in the water), and the waves themselves. The closing image represents a kind of poetic diction particularly popular in the ninth century: the internal relationships of a phrase and its referents are uncertain, open to several legitimate possibilities. We do not and cannot know who or what is suddenly realized to be old, nor do we know how these misty waves came into a previously landbound scene.

An interesting footnote to this closing image is that the *T'ang-shih san-pai-shou* changes it (on no textual evidence I can discover) to "the waves of Lake Tung-t'ing" 洞庭波: the falling leaf casts the visual eye westward beyond its physical limits to an awareness of autumn storms raising the waves in their movement eastward. But "aging in misty waves" is truer to the Late T'ang: it represents a final knowledge of autumn, the end of cognition, but what is known is a poetic knowledge, an enigmatic truth that for the first time in the poem transcends the physical senses. It represents a fusion of mood and mutually exclusive possibilities in an openness that can

exist only in words. The poet reads the physical world to a knowledge beyond the physical world.

INTEGRATING MEANING: THE WHOLE POEM

The simple distinction between reading the poet and reading the world is an illusion of convenience. Both goals of the reading process are known simultaneously: what we actually do is read the poet in the act of reading the world, see the world through his eyes. Because the poem is read as a particular experience of the world, both the poet and the world can only be known through one another.

The art of reading we have constructed has one great gap: it functions most consistently in poems like the preceding, in which the poet does not expose himself or exposes himself only slightly. However, most poems have a self-reflective element, usually at the end. Here we cease to read the world through the poet's eyes and confront his identity as separate from our own, as he thinks, acts, or responds to the scene with emotion. Through this element of reflection or response we know precisely how the poet has interpreted the scene we have just experienced together. Ideally we should share his response, but share it apart from him (i.e., in contrast to the previous joint perception of the scene). By writing the poem, the poet seeks such a *chih-yin*—one who "knows the tone," the "true friend," or in Vincent Shih's translation of the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung*, the "critic." Like Hsieh Ling-yün, the poet seeks a *shang-hsin* 賞心, one whose mind can "appreciate" both the scene and the poet's own mind, another who can share his experience of the world.

To weigh these two modes of reading—one, through the poet's senses; the other, of the poet's interior life—we may look at a poem equally balanced between exterior vision and interior revision, one of Tu Fu's finest regulated verses, "Pavilion for Travellers" 客亭.

秋窗猶曙色　落木更高風　日出寒山外　江流宿霧中
聖朝無棄物　衰病己成翁　多少残生事　飄零任轉蓬

An autumn window, still daybreak's color,
Leaf-stripped trees, once again the tall wind.
Then the sun comes out beyond cold mountains,

And the river flows on through last night's fog.
By our holy court no creature's cast aside,
Frail now and sick, I've become an old man.
How many experiences in this remainder of life
Are to blow on and fall with the rolling tumbleweed?

Like many of Tu Fu's regulated verses, this poem divides in the middle, at the third couplet (the "turn" or *chuan* 轉 of late classical poetics). The first four lines belong to the art of reading described earlier: reading the poet in the act of reading the world. The last four lines comprise Tu Fu's interpretation of the scene and its significance to himself; here we cease to see the physical world through Tu Fu's eyes and know Tu Fu apart from ourselves.

The first four lines are an elegiac tribute to the vanished poetry of the K'ai-yüan: they echo several K'ai-yüan dawn poems, and no contemporary reader would have missed the second couplet's reworking of Wang Wei's famous:

江流天地外　　山色有無中

The river flows out beyond Heaven and Earth,
The mountains' color, half there, half not there.

The autumn mode and a world of remainders take on special depth in the context of the history and poetry of the preceding half century—the passing of the K'ai-yüan and T'ien-pao and of an age of poetry whose voice was Wang Wei's.

We begin by reading the physical world and the eyes that see it: we look out a window just brightening with dawn, a window that shows only the tops of bare trees blowing in the wind. The window is made an "autumn window" by the scene it frames. We read the world: we know his eyes are on the treetops because he sees a *tall* wind (*kao feng*). Sheltered, looking through a window from inside, he *sees* rather than feels the wind, sees it in the movement of the trees. But he does not simply see this wind, he sees it has come *once again* and silently compares this wind that strips the last of the leaves to another wind that blew in the treetops before, treetops then fuller with leaves. These are not just leafless trees; their leaflessness is known as loss and deterioration, known in the context of an earlier state.

The sun comes out behind the mountains to the east, and the eyes mark them as "cold mountains." We do not presume an omniscient poetic voice: the coldness of the mountains can be *seen* revealed now in full sunlight, in the leaf-stripped trees of their slopes. And in this succession of scenes we are aware of the movement of our vision—out through the window to the nearby trees, and on out to a larger, more distant scene of the sun rising over the mountains. In contrast to the failed dawn of Hsü Hun's poem, this dawn does bring revelation, and its omens are clear—autumn, the cold winds, the barren trees. But then vision, moving upward to the treetops, to tall winds and the rising sun, falls like the leaves and at ground-level reveals the thing which is not revealed—the great river flowing on, still hidden in the fog of the preceding night.

In its hiddenness and constant movement, the river is the poet's world: he is the *k'o*, the "traveller," for whom the pavilion is a temporary resting place. The scene is the negative image of Wang Wei's famous couplet: Wang's mountain, its season-marking colors half-hidden in the mist, is here exposed in its autumn barrenness; Wang Wei's river that grandly flowed out beyond Heaven and Earth is here sunk in mist and fog, its destination lingering only in the memory of an old poem.

In the second half of the poem, Tu Fu interprets the scene. The all-revealing sun is linked analogically to the emperor and his all-seeing wisdom. This analogy is reinforced by the play on *ch'ao/chao* in the fifth line, both "court" and "dawn." Under the pervasive and discerning light of sun and emperor, nothing is missed, nothing overlooked, essential natures are shown forth and all things useful are used. But the poet, exposed in his window by dawn and imperial grace, is shown to be precisely the thing that is useless—old, frail, and sick. He shares the light that shines on all things, but what it shines upon are barren trees and a landscape of autumn. The poet's life is only a remainder to be spent in constant travels, but possessing a pathetic dignity in the archaic emblem of the *p'eng*, the "tumbleweed" with its echoes of Chien-an and Wei poetry. The "tumbleweed" is the true metaphor, occurring where it belongs in the poem, not in the world of vision but in the interior world of meditation. Wind-blown and falling, he is linked to the leaves that blow outside the framing window of the first couplet. Cast aside by a court that

casts nothing aside, he belongs to the world of the river whose hiddenness is paradoxically revealed by the light of day. Vision moves out and rises only to fall—to earth and the detritus of autumn, to dead leaves and the frail, aging self, to the hidden river that must carry the traveller onward, to the tumbleweed-self driven on by the wind and falling.

The poem's readers know the rules of reading and the stable order of language and the world. They recognize, they "join" the poet in recognizing those patterns in the physical scene upon which the interpretation in the second half of the poem is founded. There are barren trees shaking in the wind and their leaves blowing about on the ground; there is the cold mountain and the fog-bound river—gaunt and stable things against fluid, moving things in dissolution, things revealed versus things hidden. Then Tu Fu enters the poem to make this general pattern his own: he *places* himself in the autumn world.

Through this two-part process can be seen the true meaning of poetry as an experience of the world, as interiorization, as an act of cognition—outer to inner, implicit to explicit, immanent meaning to reflective meaning. The poem becomes—and I believe Tu Fu would accept this definition of his poem—a means to know Tu Fu. This concept of poetry lies behind the use of poetry in the examination; it lies behind the practice of presenting a poem to a superior as an introduction; it lies behind the notion of poetry as a substitute for historical biography (Ts'ao P'i 曹丕) to make oneself known to future generations. Poetry was conceived as that by which a person could be truly known.

Correlative to this knowledge of Tu Fu is a knowledge of autumn. Through particular experience one perceives the immanent order of the world, its *li* 理. It is not a metaphorical Truth but an immanent truth that can be known only through its empirical manifestations. This is the second function of literature, stated grandly near the closing of the *Wen-fu*:

伊茲文之爲用　　固衆理之所因

The true function of Literature
[and of all *wen*, aesthetic pattern manifest]
Is to be the means for all patterns of
inherent order to come through.