

Visual Poetics and the Poetic Unconscious: Bridging the Gap Between Classical Chinese Poetry and Anglo-American Modernist Poetry

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the relation between classical Chinese poetic language and the "ideogrammic" method of the Anglo-American modern poets beginning with Pound and Fenellosa, by tying both to Freud's theory of latent and manifest "dream-text" in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and Lacan's "semiotic" view of the human unconscious. That is, classical Chinese poetics in a sense grounds modern poetics because the former is a more direct and unmediated language of the unconscious, in which time-logic and space-logic are combined in the rebus-or puzzle-pattern of condensation and displacement. This insight is necessary to our search for a common poetics across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

KEY WORDS

imagism
condensation
dream-work
time-logic
representation

rebus
displacement
desire
space-logic
abstraction

With its initiation by Ernest Fenollosa and promotion by Ezra Pound, classical Chinese poetry and modern English poetry had a successful dialogue in the first half of this century. The dialogue left behind valuable insights as well as intriguing questions for comparatists. One central issue is that given the general negative response of Sinologists represented by James J.Y. Liu's comment that Fenollosa's introduction of Chinese poetry, "seriously misleading" at least, is a "misconception," (3) how can we view the great impact of Chinese poetry upon Anglo-American modernist poetry, through Pound's promotion, in a meaningful way? People may, of course, resort to sweeping rationalizations by saying that poetry as human expression started from the song and defies cultural barriers. After all, don't scholars like Vico, Condillac, Warburton, Rousseau, Jespersen, and Derrida believe that poetry (song) is not only the first literary expression of humanity but also its first language?¹ This vague generalization, however, does not help our inquiry, especially when we consider concrete issues like poetic forms. Although the Western lyric appears analogous to the Chinese *Shi* in nature, Pauline Yu argues convincingly that the underlying assumptions of each poetic form differ radically in ontological, representational and methodological concerns. What, then, is the common ground that bridges the historical, linguistic, and cultural gap between classical Chinese poetry and modernist English poetry? I suggest: It is a visual poetics which aspires to the conditions of visual art and seeks to get to the roots of poetry. Predicated on an unconscious poetical structure, this visual poetics cuts across poetry of different literary traditions.

I

Early Anglo-American modernists evinced a strong tendency to aspire to the conditions of visual arts: painting, sculpture, photography and

film. Hulme, the "father of Imagism," exhorted poets to strive for the conditions of plastic art:

This new verse resembles sculpture rather than music; it appeals to the eye rather than to the ear. It has to mould images, a kind of spiritual clay, into definite shapes. This material, the $\mu\lambda\eta$ of Aristotle, is image and not sound. It builds up to a plastic image which it hands over to the reader, whereas the old art endeavoured to influence him physically by the hypnotic effect of rhythm (75).

What is the underlying motive here? The widely accepted opinion is that in their search for appropriate means to express the reality of modern times, the imagists thought it necessary to turn to other forms of art for inspiration. This, of course, is true. In my opinion, however, the underlying reason lies in the fact that the Modernists, in their reaction against the dominance of abstract systems in literature that had become increasingly separated from concrete existence from Plato to Hegel, felt that they needed to return to the roots of literature.

Their move was endowed with a subversive potential from the outset and anticipated Derrida's subversion of the Western tradition which had privileged phonetic writing over graphic writing from the pre-Socratics to Heidegger. Derrida, who views the Western tradition as dominated by what he calls "logocentrism," (3) highly praises the poetic revolution initiated by Fenollosa and promoted by Pound. "This is the meaning of the work of Fenollosa whose influence upon Ezra Pound and his poetics is well-known: This irreducibly graphic poetics was, with that of Mallarme, the first break in the most entrenched Western tradition. The fascination that the Chinese ideogram exercised on Pound's writing may thus be given all its historical significance" (92). By stressing the visual qualities of Chinese ideograms for poetic representation, Derrida believes, Fenollosa and Pound reversed the ethnocentric prejudice which views alphabetic writing as superior to graphic writing.²

The significance of Fenollosa's and Pound's understanding goes far beyond what Derrida has suggested. It touches the deep structure of poetic representation that knows no cultural or linguistic bounds. Although literature is not a visual art, as a language art, its roots are buried deep in pictorial representation. Wang Pi, an ancient Chinese scholar (226-249), ob-

served that images of objects are an intermediary between language and thought and responsible for the genesis of language:

The Image is what brings out concepts [thought]; language is what clarifies (*ming*) the Image. Nothing can equal Image in giving the fullness of concepts [thought]; nothing can equal language in giving the fullness of Image. Language was born of the Image, thus we seek in language in order to observe the Image. Image was born of concept [thought], thus we seek in Image in order to observe the concept [thought]. Concept [thought] is fully given in Image; Image is overt in Language (33).

In the West, scholars like Vico, Condillac, Warburton, Rousseau, Jespersen, and Derrida hold a similar view with regard to the relationship between writing and visual representation.³ It is, therefore, not improper to say that writing and literary representation originated from the visual picture. Needless to add, language art functions in a way very similar to that of visual art — it appeals to the senses through concrete imagery rather than to the intellect through abstract ideas.

Anglo-American poetry was believed to be sick before the Modernist revolution, because of what Eliot called the "dissociation of sensibility," which set in during the 17th Century, and from which English poetry had "never recovered" (64). Pound diagnosed the sickness as the "method of abstraction, or of defining things in more and still more general terms." To restore English poetry to health, Eliot advocated that the English poet needed to invent a sensory language with "a network of tentacular roots reaching down to the deepest terrors and desires" and rife with suggestive images which would penetrate to those "primitive" levels at which all human beings experienced alike (Eliot, *Ben Johnson*, 155). In other words, English poetry needed to abandon the Romantic way of expression and return to the old way of appealing to the senses, which would make "direct communication with the nerves." In striving towards concrete existence and in getting to the root of poetry, there is, perhaps, no better way than conning the internal mechanism of the visual arts which are literature's siblings, or to be more exact, ancestors in the case of painting and sculpture. Hence the Modernist fascination with visual arts.

The arts of painting and photography appealed to Modernist writers most. This is true both of prose and poetry. As Hugh Kenner puts it, "A

dream of the Twenties" is to make prose "as absolute as paint" (123). In prose, Gertrude Stein is an innovating pioneer interested in painting with words. Her now seldom-read story *The Good Anna* is a prominent example. Instead of narrating the story of her heroine in a linear development, Stein attempts to present the life of Anna as if she were painting her fate with words. To read the story in the conventional linear narrative mode does not make much sense, but one has to treat the story as a painting. Through incremental blocks of description, extraordinary repetitions of words and phrases and other literary devices (to be more exact, lack of conventional devices like dramatic plots), Stein forces the reader to read the story in a way similar to that in which he views a painting, with the eye moving across the canvas, now to the right, now to the left, now from the top to bottom, now from the center to the border. As a result, the reader's eye functions like a shifting camera lens (3-41).

Stein admitted that she was heavily influenced by painters, especially Cezanne, Matisse and Picasso, from whom she learned how to treat words as brush strokes on the canvas. These artists happened to exert a great impact on Modernist poets, too. As fiction and poetry are primarily a narrative art, to borrow the techniques of visual arts turned out to be almost impossible. Pound, Eliot, Williams, Cummings, Stevens and other Modernist poets turned in other directions for inspiration. In their effort to approach the conditions of the visual arts, they discovered classical Chinese poetry through Fenollosa's study of Chinese language and poetry. Classical Chinese poetry, written in classical Chinese and retaining many characteristics of pictorial representation, proved to be genuinely inspirational. In their search for a modern poetics, the Modernists were inspired by classical Chinese poets who were entrenched in the conviction that "Poetry is painting without shape while painting is poetry without sounds," and who were primarily concerned with painting scenes with words.

The stress on visual quality is, without doubt, a hallmark of classical Chinese poetry. A random venture into any anthology of classical Chinese poetry will leave the reader with the impression that most of the poems are paintings in words. The Chinese language which evolves out of pictorial representation retains its pictorial qualities and produces a unique art-*Shu Fa*, or Chinese calligraphy, which is in essence an intermediate form of art between poetry and painting. In Chinese history, painting and poetry were treated as twin arts; their connection, as Francois Cheng observes, is as direct and natural as that which united painting and calligraphy (12). Many

painters were poets, many poets painters; some were both. In art criticism, painting and poetry were lumped together as "shi-hua" (Poetry and painting). Chinese artists created one art form called "zi-hua," which is a painting accompanied by a poem. A good painting accompanied by a good poem or a good poem inscribed on a good painting complement each other and bring into full play the strong points of language art and visual art, enabling the reader (viewer) to feel the blood-relations of these two forms of art.

The parallels that have been drawn between poetry and painting are not alien to Western literary tradition. Based on the Aristotelian conception of mimetic representation, the Western tradition had long thought of poetry and painting as sister arts devoted to the portrayal of human life and the external world. It was with the mimetic function in mind that Aristotle discussed the similarities and differences in the medium of the various arts at the opening of the *Poetics* (48-49). Some Western theorists even uttered remarks with amazing similarity to those of their Chinese counterparts. Horace suggested in his *Art of Poetry*: "As with the painter's work, so with the poet's" (73). The closest resemblance to the Chinese parallel between poetry and painting is a remark attributed by Plutarch to Simonides of Ceos, who called poetry a "speaking picture" and painting a "silent poem." Even after the appearance of Lessing's *Laokoon*, which formulated the fundamental differences of poetry, sculpture and painting, based on a distinction between the temporal and spatial arts, the Western tradition of criticism did not cease altogether to be fascinated with the relations between poetry and painting. In the light of this tradition, the Anglo-American Modernist fascination with visual arts and Chinese ideograms was but a resurgence of interest in the common roots of the various arts.

Classical Chinese poets were not interested in abstractions. Even in their philosophical introspection, they were preoccupied with painting in words. Su Shih, the famous poet of the Northern Sung dynasty, wrote a philosophical poem which has been popular since its first appearance:

A frontal look yields a mountain;
 while a side look reveals a peak.
 As a far sight differs from a near view;
 so a high angle from a low perspective.
 I fail to know the true features of Mount Lu,
 Because I am immersed in the mountain itself.⁴

The poet meant to convey the philosophical idea: Different perspectives bring with them different impressions, and one engrossed in a state of affairs is unlikely to see its true nature. Instead of putting across his idea in abstract terms, the poet painted a series of pictures, connected them as a modern cinematographer does and succeeded in achieving his objective in an easily understandable and philosophically profound way.

It seems that the classical Chinese poet intuitively grasps the fundamental scholastic principle: "Nothing is in the intellect that is not first in the senses" (Kenner, 76). He seems to know how to avoid the error of describing an abstract notion to someone else through abstract ideas.

The Chinese poetic imagination is essentially pictorial in nature, which can be seen from the *Book of Songs*, the first anthology of Chinese poetry and one of the oldest anthologies in the world. It is a collection of songs composed in the period from 1100 B.C. to 600 B.C. In roughly the same period, ancient Greece saw the birth of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; ancient Babylon and ancient India saw epics of similar nature. A brief comparison of these ancient literary texts shows that the Chinese poetic imagination is quite different from that of other civilizations. While all the above-mentioned civilizations produced epics featuring the depiction of heroes of super-human power and long narratives running to tens of thousands of lines, the Chinese anthology is a collection of lyric songs which mostly portray the life and feelings of real people, and the longest of which runs to no more than a few hundred lines. The notion of "epic" is alien to these poems; the longest poems, narrating the founding history of dynasties, can only be called "dynastic legends." The preference for the real life of real people to the description of a non-existent mythic world seems to indicate that the ancestors of the Chinese nation were more preoccupied with what they saw with their own eyes. Of the 305 songs, the majority are short lyric songs composed in two, three or four stanzas. Usually there are four stanzas. Whatever the difference in stanza number, these poems have one dominant feature: Each stanza resembles the others in number of characters, number of lines and structure, each differs from the other in insignificant details. The famous song *Reeds* is a typical example:

Reeds are gray upon gray.
The white dew turns into frost.
It is said that my sweetheart

Lives on the other side of the river.
 To seek her by going upstream,
 The road is perilous and long.
 To seek her by going downstream,
 She seems in the middle of water.

Reeds are white upon white.
 The white dew is not yet dry.
 It is said that my sweetheart
 Lives on the opposite river bank.
 To seek her by going upstream,
 The road is perilous and rugged.
 To seek her by going downstream,
 She seems on the isle amid water.

Reeds are thick upon thick.
 The white dew still drips.
 It is said that my sweetheart
 Lives on the opposite waterside.
 To seek her by going upstream,
 The road is perilous and tortuous.
 To seek her by going downstream,
 She seems on the sand amid water.

This is believed by many scholars to be a love song, in spite of various allegorical interpretations. It depicts the hope and expectation, disappointment and distraction of the poet who longs for his/her sweetheart. The poem is vague and mysterious, for the person sought is like a phantom. There is no way to decide whether it is a woman or a man. The structure and content of the poem is exactly the same with variations only in some characters which have similar connotations. It seems as if the poet were writing down his impressions on observing a morning scene. He seems more concerned with spatial factors than with temporal factors. In the first stanza, the white dew becomes frost. It may indicate the time of late night or early morning. In the second stanza, the frost melts but the dew is not yet dry. In the third stanza, the dew is still dripping, indicating that not much time has elapsed. In these three stanzas, the road is described as "perilous and long," "perilous and rugged" and "perilous and tortuous."

The location of the person sought is also the same, despite the variations of "in the middle of water," "on the isle amid water," and "on the sand amid water." For these reasons, we may say that the three stanzas describe the same scene or a picture. They produce an impression as if one were observing a painting. The three stanzas represent the results of three eye movements. Each time, the theme is the same with slight variations. The pictorial quality of the song adds much to the phantom-like nature of the person sought, who, like a figure in a painting, can be observed but cannot be reached. In general, the poet was using the same techniques of incremental blocks of description, repetitions of similar words, phrases and sentence structures, with which Stein experimented in *The Three Lives* three some three thousand years later. Or it might be said that the poet, like a modernist, wants his readers to apprehend his poem spatially, in a moment of simultaneity, rather than as a sequence.

The minor changes with regard to "frost" in the *Reed* poem indicate that the poem inhabits not only space but also time as well. In fact, it displays an interpenetration of spatiality and temporality. The Chinese poem stresses space, but as Francois Cheng aptly puts it, "This space is not an abstracted, limited, or confined space, but rather a place where human signs and signified things are taken in a continuous multidirectional play. Just as with the 'cavalier perspective' of a Chinese painting, where no fixed or privileged point of view is offered and the spectator is constantly invited to penetrate for himself both the presented and the hidden places, the signs of a poem are not content to be simple intermediaries. By their spatial organization, they constitute a world of presences where it is good to dwell, and through which one may travel, encounter, and discover" (14).

The *Book of Songs* is one of the "Five Classics" for Chinese scholars. It has had an inestimable influence on Chinese poets throughout history. It may account largely for the innate visual qualities of classic Chinese poetry. Moreover, it may account, to a certain extent, for other special features of classic Chinese literature: lack of long narrative at the inception, dominance of the lyric mode in poetry, episodic structure of fiction and perfunctory interest in the psychological study of characters' inner world.

The visual qualities of Chinese poetry may be classified into three categories: 1.) the pictorial qualities of Chinese characters; 2.) the visual qualities of poetic typography; and 3.) the visual qualities of Chinese poetic concepts for making images. For Fenollosa, Pound and many others, the Chinese character — the medium of Chinese poetry — is intrinsically

visual in the sense that it bears "its metaphor on its face" (Fenollosa, 25).

The visual qualities of classic Chinese poetry fascinated modern Anglo-American poets in the first decade of the 20th Century. They were somehow bogged down in what Eliot called "dissociation of sensibility" as evinced in Tennyson's, Browning's and Swinburne's poetry. This fascination accelerated the transformation in Anglo-American poetry from Romanticism to Modernism. Pound, who discovered in Fenollosa's manuscript the visual poetics of classic Chinese poetry, considered it appropriate for the spirit of the age and promulgated his insights among English poets. Following his lead, many Anglo-American poets carried out experiments with language as if they were painting pictures with words.

Pound's and Williams' experiments with poetic typography are exemplary of the aspiration for a visual poetics. Even before their encounter with Fenollosa's manuscript and Chinese poetry, they had shown an enthusiasm for poetry as painting. In a letter to Williams dated October 21, 1908, Pound exhorted Williams to write poetry like a painter: "To paint the thing as I see it" (6). This is one of the earliest exhortations to make poetry approximate the qualities of painting. In another occasion, in 1991, Pound said, "The artist seeks out the luminous detail and presents it. He does not comment" (130). Here the "luminous details" are words borrowed from painting. After Pound came into contact with Chinese poetry, his interest in approximating the visual arts was given added impetus, for he saw in Chinese poetry illuminating examples of painting with words.

Pound was fascinated with the structure of Chinese characters. He was intrigued by the analytic qualities of Chinese grammar, especially its syntax: freedom from restraints of number, case, gender, tense and verb conjugation; omission of subject and linking verbs, fluidity of parts of speech — all this was discussed in detail in Fenollosa's essay. Pound and his contemporaries were much impressed by the visual qualities and analytic qualities of Chinese language and tried to emulate Chinese poetry by carrying out experiments with English. The final result was the birth of a new poetic mode of expression.

Although Pound met with little success in his experiments with English poetic language, his quest for the rebus quality immanent in Chinese poetry, he did gain a lot of ground with his the innovations in poetic typography. Pound's new view of poetic typography may be illustrated with a long note he attached to Fenollosa's essay. It is an annotation of a Chinese quatrain. Pound gave a paraphrase:

The moon's snow falls on the plum tree;
Its boughs are full of bright stars.
We can admire the bright turning disk;
The garden high above there, casts its pearls to our weeds.

He made a brief comment on the typography of the quatrain: "You have not understood the poem until you have seen the tremendous antithesis from the first line to the last; from first character, diagonal, to the last tremendous affirmative, sun under tree under enemies" (42). His annotation may be inaccurate or erroneous in terms of Chinese language, but it reveals the inspiration he gains from studying the original Chinese poem: "Loss in interaction being apparent on study of the ideograms, their interrelation, and the repetition or echo of components, not only those used but those suggested or avoided. A poem of moonlight; the sun element is contained five times; once in three lines, and twice in the second" (130). Pound's appreciation of the typographical arrangement of the Chinese poem (horizontal, perpendicular and diagonal) coincided with some principles of structural poetics and semiology. Not only was Pound able to perceive the poetic tension generated by the binary oppositions in structural poetics but he also intuitively grasped the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations in semiotics. It is no mere accident that Pound's reading of the Chinese poem anticipated ideas in Roland Barthes' *Elements of Semiology* (58-59) and Jonathan Culler's *Structural Poetics* (13-14).

In trying to achieve the typographical effect of Chinese poetry, English poets were faced with the obstacle of the language itself. Before Pound, Hulme advocated a poetics in which English poets should do away with the rigid syntax of English with its elaborations and connections. He virtually advocated for the destruction of English syntax to achieve a direct contact between words and nature, which coincided with Fenollosa's understanding of Chinese characters. Pound and his contemporaries found in Chinese poetry support for Hulme's view and for typographical innovation. The rearrangement of conventional English by Pound and his fellow poets marked a radical departure from the traditional mode of poetic presentation. If the frequently quoted *In the Metro* marks the beginning of typographical innovation, Pound's contact with Chinese poetry strengthened his obsession with visual order and the act of perception. A systematic typographical innovation was first established in his translation of *Cathay*, in which

we can find an amazing resemblance of visual order to Chinese syntax.

By studying Chinese poetry, Pound and his fellow poets succeeded in finding a visual prosody. Although words cannot do what other forms of visual arts do much more effectively, yet by organizing language in lines, abstract typography is able to produce not only subtle creations of visual order, but also subtle creations of thematic order. In this respect, classical Chinese poetry and the modernist poetic typography come close to a general law of structural poetics succinctly summed up by Terry Eagleton: "The belief that the individual units of any system have meaning only by virtue of their relations to one another" (94).

Classical Chinese poetry is informed by a structural poetics without the Chinese poets being aware of it. In his discussion of two Chinese poetic lines, "Swiftly the years, beyond recall./Solemn the stillness of this spring morning," William Empson pointed out the structural signifying process, although he was not a structuralist critic:

[T]hese lines are what we should normally call poetry only by virtue of their compactness; two statements are made as if they were connected, and the reader is forced to consider their relations for himself. The reasons why these facts should have been selected for a poem is left for him to invent; he will invent a variety of reasons and order them in his own mind. This, I think, is the essential fact about poetical use of language. (25)

Indeed, many of the classical Chinese poems have to be read in the way suggested by Empson. Otherwise, they do not seem to make sense. More of this anon. Citing Empson's example, Jonathan Culler discusses the Chinese poetic lines from a structural perspective, discovering the binary oppositions of "swiftness" and "stillness," "years" and "this morning" as thematic devices for generating poetic tension within each of the two lines and between the two lines (126-27).

As a painter, Williams achieved more success in his visual experiments. The painter in him enabled him to recognize the ordering, measuring power of typography in Chinese poetry more readily. Williams composed many of his poems to achieve the visual qualities of a picture. Apart from the often quoted *Red Wheelbarrow*, his poem *Figure 5* is an outstanding example:

Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red
firetruck
moving
unheeded
to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city.

The poem captures the visual simultaneity and immediacy of a fire engine with the figure 5 occupying the center and the wheels and other parts radiating out from the center.⁵ Williams manipulated the typographical arrangement in such a way that English syntax almost has no restraining force. The words and lines are arranged in such a perfect order that the poem has achieved the conditions of Chinese poems. It can be literally read (as if viewed in the mind) like a painting. One can move from top to bottom, or from below upwards, or start from the center, or begin with any line or even any word. The sequential order has no significant role to play in our appreciation of the poem, just as it makes no difference where the viewer of a picture starts his scanning of a painting on a canvas. As far as typography is concerned, this poem achieves the same freedom from restraints of syntax as some Chinese poems. As Bram Dijkstra puts it, "Movement is stilled within time, but continues on a new, strictly limited, plane outside of time, determined no longer by actual progression but by visual tensions. The poet now analyses the details of his unit of perception onto paper in the order of their visual importance. The poem is the painting which results, its words are the pigment" (77).

Admittedly, it is impossible for poetry to aspire to the status of the visual arts, because poetry is not primarily a visual art, but a verbal one. Verse written in English does not have the same inherent visual qualities that Chinese verse does. A Chinese character is already a mimetic representation, or as Fenollosa rightly or wrongly claims, "a vivid shorthand or picture of the operations of nature." Nevertheless, Pound went beyond the formation of single words to develop a poetic method for larger discourse

blocks. The ideogrammic method Pound formulated in his study of Chinese ideogram and poetry revolutionized Anglo-American poetic perception and creation. The essence of Chinese ideogram-formation and Pound's ideogrammic method rests with the technique of juxtaposition. Since any two words whatsoever may be juxtaposed on the basis of some equivalent feature, a poetic expression based on such juxtaposition has the possibility of continually enriching and transforming the dictionary meaning of the words juxtaposed. According to structural poetics, this possibility is more or less unlimited. According to Jakobson's famous saying, "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination."⁶ In creating poetry, the poet pays attention to equivalences in the process of combining and selecting words as a painter combines and selects pigment in painting a picture. He strings together words which are semantically, rhythmically, phonetically or in some other way equivalent. Words are strung together not just for the sake of conveying thoughts, as in ordinary speech, but with an eye to the visual pattern of similarity, contrast, parallelism and so on created by their sound, meaning, rhythm and connotations. In this way, the poem becomes "overdetermined" as in psychic overdetermination.

In Pound's *Cantos*, the ideogrammic method became one of the dominant creative principles. Pound frequently imposed the mimetic representations of Chinese poetry on the abstract typography of his poems. The ideograms, as fusion of the verbal and visual, sanction the typographical arrangements in those poems. We as readers can see in his poems an analogy between the visual power of Chinese characters and that of English words set in lines or clusters of lines. Moreover, with the ideogram, as Laszlo Gefin points out, "Pound intends to show that the plastic arts, music, philosophy and religion have an essential basis in nature: They all derive from a deeper, unseen source" (37).

II

What is that deeper, unseen source? It is the source of creativity: the unconscious thought. When he was unable to find the right word for his poems, the Indian poet Tagore would resort to "doodling" and try to find the visual equivalent of the word he sought. The pictures he drew resemble abstract art and reveal the amorphous and nondescript mental state that verbal language failed to express (La Plant, 74-75). By going from the

visual to retrieve the sought-after word, he was employing the visual art as the medium for the language of thought, thus shedding some light on the link between poetic representation and unconscious thought. In quite a similar fashion, the unconscious, because of its poor techniques for representing what it has to say, must confine itself largely to visual images and often craftily translate a verbal significance into a visual one.

Vico said that the progress of language follows the progress of articulation. The more articulate a language is, the less poetic it becomes: "The language of the gods was almost entirely mute, only very slightly articulate; the language of the heroes, an equal mixture of articulate and mute; ...the language of men, almost entirely articulate and only very slightly mute" (178). Of the three languages Vico named, the language of men is the common, everyday language; the language of the heroes corresponds to the language of poets; and the language of the gods corresponds to the unuttered poetic passion located in the mind, which is incommunicable, not only to others but also to the poet himself. It is the language of poetic passions, belonging to the domain of the unconscious.

Lacan emphasized even more the kinship of poetry, dream, and the unconscious. For him, reading poetry is the closest one can come to reading the unconscious. His ideal of poetry is Joyce's masterpiece *Finnegan's Wake*, which exhibits distinct dream qualities: scraps and fragments of literature of historical particulars are incorporated and are used by "dreamwork," not for their content, but as pure signifiers pointing to something else. For Lacan, poetry is a kind of dream through which the poet gets to his unconscious desires. Poetry gives to the poet not its own meaning, but rather a plethora of signifiers with which the poet attempts to construct a rebus of his own meaning, to paint a disguised and scrambled portrait of his unconscious desires. In this sense, classical Chinese poetry, Pound's *Cantos*, Eliot's *The Wasteland*, and many modernist poems share this common basis of "dreamwork" and fit the never-ending quilt of the Lacanian unconscious.

How does the unconscious function? Lacan, who gained insights from the science of linguistics, viewed the signifiers as the symbols that relate the subject through the structure of desire to the unconscious. He warned against returning to the notion that the unconscious is merely the seat of the drives. In "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud," he proposed an idea central to his view of the unconscious: "what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious

is the whole structure of language" (*Ecrit*, 147). He believed that if the unconscious, as Freud described it, exists, it functions linguistically, rather than symbolically or instinctually. Convinced that the unconscious is structured like a language. Lacan referred to the unconscious as a language: "The unconscious is the discourse of the Other" (*The Function of Language*, 27). The key to understanding this language is the technique of dream interpretation formulated by Freud. In his comment on Freud's discovery of the unconscious language, Lacan said: "Thus in *The Interpretation of Dreams* every page deals with what I call the letter of the discourse, in its texture, its usage, its immanence in the matter in question. For it is with this work that the work of Freud begins to open the royal road to the unconscious" (*Ecrit*, 159).

Compared with Freud, Lacan emphasized less the topography of the unconscious, as divided into the id, ego and superego, and put more stress on listening literally to what the unconscious "says" and to its relationship with language as common to both reason and the unconscious. In dream interpretation, however, he reiterated that he was only following the trail blazed by Freud. The dream language differs from ordinary language in its lack of recognized grammatical rules and logical order.

The Chinese language, especially poetic Chinese, resembles the dream language in its lack of hard and fast syntax, looseness in logical order and openness to different interpretations. Many scholars of Chinese poetry have demonstrated in their studies that in a Chinese poem, a word does not always have one clear-cut, fixed meaning but often covers different meanings, through association. Some of the them are mutually compatible, while others are mutually exclusive. I.A. Richards in his *Mencius on the Mind* demonstrated this *embarras de choix* presented by ambiguous words in Chinese. While this may be a serious drawback in discourse which requires precision and accuracy, as in legal documents, it can be an advantage in the making of poetry, because it makes possible the expression of thoughts and moods with the greatest economy of words. The poet can compress several meanings into one word, and the reader has to choose the meaning which seems the most likely choice on the part of the poet, and which, at the same time, falls in line with his own mind-set and mood, his thoughts and identity, in the context in question. This, of course, also occurs in phonetic languages, but not to the same extent as in poetic Chinese. It is in this sense that Fenollosa claimed that Chinese written characters are a good medium for poetry, and that Pound agreed with him for the

same reason. And with the inspiration of Chinese language, Pound and his contemporaries started what Hugh Kenner called “[a] 50-year reshaping of the American language” and “rethought, and altered, permanently, the novel and especially the poem” (xviii).

The linguistic economy and flexibility of Chinese language is, in the final analysis, the functional economy and flexibility of the psychic mechanism. Freud’s interpretation of the dream language and Lacan’s famous aphorism, “the unconscious is structured like a language,” offers a glimpse into that which bridges that language barriers between Chinese and English poetics. Chinese and English poets have different cultural backgrounds and use different language media, but as human beings, their psychic mechanism is basically the same and their minds’ way of communicating the most complex and subtle emotions (which becomes poetry when uttered or transcribed in words) with admirable economy and elegance shares a natural logic that transcends time, space and culture.

Roman Jakobson developed a theory of the relation of similarity and the relation of contiguity which identified the two primary operations of human language in general and of literature in particular: metaphor and metonymy (55-82). These two basic operations cross linguistic and cultural boundaries and correspond to the two most essential principles of the unconscious — condensation and displacement, also discovered by Freud in his theory of dream interpretation. It was the constant condensation and displacement of meaning in the process of signification that moved Lacan to say “the unconscious is structured like a language.” From this point of view, Freud’s discovery of the unconscious language may not only provide a psychological basis for the Modernists’ interest in visual art and account for Chinese poetry’s catalytic impact on Anglo-American poetry, but also shed much light on the possibility of finding a cross-cultural poetics. In his monumental work, Freud points out the relation of dreaming to creative work, as he calls the dream an individual art work. He gives a lucid account of dream-work whose characteristic features can all be found in Chinese poetry and in modernist innovations. First of all, Freud stresses the visual form of dreams. All dreams occur in the form of visual images which must be translated into words, concepts and logical relations in order for us to understand them. This translation of visual images into words and concepts is the very *sine qua non* of our comprehension of unconscious mental process, and of an adequate understanding of classical Chinese poetry and Modernist poetry. If, for Freud, to be conscious and thus

be rendered intelligible to our rational mind means to be able to be put into words, then for readers of modern poetry, to be able to understand a specific poem is to be able to synthesize a dominant idea from the clusters of images woven in the poetic scene.

The dream language shares with the drawings of primitive man the fundamental quality of imitating nature. While the primitive drawings of primitive man can be regarded as the primeval written language of mankind, the dream language is at the core of such a language. As mankind tended to impose logic and order on nature, in the course of their development, languages became more and more denatured. This is especially so with alphabetic languages. Poetic Chinese, because of its mimetic characters and lack of prescribed syntax, retains much of its imitative quality, common to dream language. The ideogrammic method Pound had discovered in Chinese written characters is, in essence, one of the six principles of creating Chinese characters. Here, I venture to suggest that all six principles of Chinese character-formation share with dream language their basic rationale.

The six graphic principles are: 1.) *Xiangxing* — simple pictograms: a pictorial representation which creates a sign to represent an object by imitating its salient features; 2.) *Zhishi* — simple ideograms: a diagrammatic representation which uses an existing pictorial sign and stresses part of its characteristic so as to make a new sign with new meanings; 3.) *Hueiyi* — composite ideograms: a suggestive form of representation which combines a few related pictorial signs to produce a new sign whose meaning is abstracted from the components; 4.) *Xingsheng* — sound-pictogram: a picture-sound combination which borrows the sound of an existent sign and adds a pictorial sign to it as a radical, so that the combination makes a new sign with new meaning; 5.) *Zhuanzhu* — mutual defining: to add new meanings to an old sign; and 6.) *Jiajie* — borrowing: to borrow a homophone to represent a word that does not have a written form (Liu, 4-6). The first four methods are for creating new symbols. They are all based on pictorial representation. The last two differ from the first four in that they cannot produce new signs and hence are in reality methods of using words. These principles are capable of producing the effects Pound tried to achieve in his poetry, which include, among other things, the qualities in William Yip's summary: "Simultaneity, montage, and visual perspicuity" (162).

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud listed four major techniques

employed by the dream-work of the psychic apparatus to distort the psychic content to produce the pictographic script of the dream: condensation, displacement, considerations of representability, and secondary revision. A collation with the six principles of Chinese character formation reveals that Freud's four techniques of dream representation are all used. The first principle resembles a dream image in that it copies from reality but distorts the salient features to achieve representability. The second principle resembles the technique of dream distortion for emphasis. The third principle, like a dream scene, uses the dream technique of condensation by juxtaposing related elements to create an abstracted meaning. The fourth principle again employs the technique of juxtaposition, but what are juxtaposed are auditory and visual elements. For poetic expression, the third and fourth principles are most useful. They form what can be considered the essence of Pound's ideogrammic method. The fifth and sixth methods both employ the technique of displacement. The fifth principle is close to a dream's representation by symbols. The sixth principle resembles a dream's *klang* association through homophones.

The dream language, like primitive drawings, cannot express abstract ideas. It has only one mode of expression, i.e. juxtaposition. Whether two things are the same, similar, different or opposite, the dream language can only put the two things compared or contrasted in juxtaposition. The relationship between the two things is to be deduced from the whole context. Ancient Chinese poetry retains this quality. Many of the poems in the *Book of Songs* widely employ this technique of juxtaposition for comparison and contrast. The first poem in this anthology has such a stanza:

Kuan, kuan: cry the ospreys
 On the island in the river.
 Lovely is this noble lady,
 Fit bride for our lord. (81)

"Kuan kuan" imitates the mating call of the osprey. Hence the first two lines refer to the animal instinct for sex. The third and the fourth lines shift to the human world. They refer to a nobleman's desire for a fair lady. The first two lines and the last two lines form a relation of comparison: the animal instinct of the bird is the same as the human instinct for a mate. Instead of using a connective such as "like" or "resembles" to link the two natural phenomena, the poem simply puts the two conditions in juxtaposi-

tion. The analogical relationship is to be drawn by the reader. The way the analogy is drawn is exactly the same as in a dream scene.

Dreams cannot express the idea of contrast or opposite. The relationship of difference or contrast between two objects is shown through juxtaposition. Again, the actual relationship has to be decided from the context. Classic Chinese poetry often employs this method of presentation. For example, one of the *Nineteen Ancient Poems* reads:

Green, green: cypress on the tomb;
 Solid, solid: stones in the valley.
 Man, born between heaven and earth,
 Is transient like one on a distant journey. (31)

This poem is good stuff for structural and psychoanalytical analysis: The binary oppositions between "green" and "solid," "cypress" and "stone," "tomb" and "valley," "heaven" and "earth" are obvious thematic devices which produce poetic tension. The "green cypress" and "solid stone" offer a contrast between organic life and inorganic substance. In psychoanalytical terms, the "valley" may be construed as a symbol of the "womb." Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* offers a similar understanding (62).⁶ Thus the contrast between "valley" and "tomb" signifies the opposition between birth and death. Just as meaning arises from oppositions, man is born between the opposition of heaven and earth, but his existence is as fleeting as the transience of a traveler. He is destined to travel the distance from the womb to the tomb as surely as heaven and earth are immutable. This poem reveals a truth which can be said to be universal. In both thematic representation and formal presentation, it touches the poetical unconscious as well as the collective unconscious of the human race.

This poem may be viewed as a structured entity, but the underlying structural law is the simple method of juxtaposition of images. Primitive as it may seem, juxtaposition is the fundamental method for visual representation by dream-work and unconscious discourse. It may also be considered the primal method for poetic representation, for it satisfies the formal needs of the poet who searches for a medium to order his compulsions, emotions, and unconscious desires in the most economical way. By using the method of juxtaposition, ancient Chinese poets and Anglo-American modernist poets were consciously following the primal method of unconscious discourse. Fenollosa was perfectly right in pointing out: "Poetry

only does consciously what the primitive races did unconsciously. The chief work of literary men in dealing with language, and of poets especially, lies in feeling back along the ancient lines of advance" (27).

Juxtaposition has its advantages in creating greater potential space for interpretation. Juxtaposition of images involves placing two objects side by side without any indication of a clear relation, leaving the reader to imagine any connection between them, thus giving the poem a potential space in which the reader can exercise his imagination. Take two Chinese poetic lines for example: "Green, green, the riverside grass;/Endless, endless, longing for the one far away." From the whole context, it is clear that the speaker is a woman whose husband is away from home. The poet does not compare her longing for her husband with the grass on the riverbank, but simply puts the two together, leaving the reader to make any connection. We can offer two relations: one of analogy and one of contrast. In the former relationship, we may say that the endless expanse of grass resembles the woman's endless longing for her husband. In the latter, we may say that the green grass signifies the return of spring and contrasts with the husband's failure to return.

The *Book of Songs* abounds in juxtapositions of this kind. Pound was fascinated by the anthology and took the trouble to render all 305 poems into English. Perhaps Pound understood intuitively that by studying these poems, he could get to the roots of all poetry. Indeed, as this anthology contains poems as ancient as six thousand years old, it comes close to the roots of poetry, when poetry was spontaneous and uncorrupted by logic and intellect. To a great extent, it may even retain many characteristic features of the primal mind of the Chinese nation (perhaps all nations), features preserved only in the unconscious which can be recovered only through dream interpretation.

Classical Chinese has its unique advantage as a medium for poetry. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud uncovered the inherent relationship between of dream language and ancient language such as Chinese and Egyptian hieroglyphics. One common characteristic of dream language and ancient languages is their lack of syntactic connectives which explain the relations between words or between images. Classic Chinese bears some resemblance to dream language in that highly abstract and logical relations such as whether/or, if/then, because, although, just as, as well as concepts associated with time, are not clearly marked, and the intended logical implications must be recognized in the process of interpretation. The ancient

Chinese texts do not have punctuation as might be the case with all primeval texts. Since all punctuation — comma, full-stop, dash, quotation mark, paragraph, etc. — determines meaning, the invention of punctuation in the West represents a further step in the process of denaturalization through alphabetic languages. By contrast, Chinese texts remained without punctuation until modern times, hence retaining their close tie to the workings of the psychic mechanism.

In terms of Lacan's theory of "glissement" and Derrida's theory of "différance," the process of signification is marked by a constant sliding of signifiers on the chain of signification, or the act of "freeplay" which has no "center" or "*point de capiton*." In Lacan's "Subversion du Sujet et Dialectique du Desir" (1966), the *point de capiton* is defined in linguistic terms as the way in which the signifier brings the indefinite *glissement* of signification to a stop. Lacan suggests that there are some privileged points in a sentence like the buttons on a mattress or the intersections in quilting, where there is a "pinning down" of meaning. Until its final term, including punctuation, the signification of a sentence, like heat of the unconscious, remains "open."

In classical Chinese texts, the so-called *point de capiton* is difficult to locate because of the lack of punctuation. Hence, the signification of a classical Chinese text is open to different interpretations. While the *point de capiton* in a Western text is often marked by a punctuation mark, the Chinese counterpart has to be located through juggling the adjacent words, phrases, and context — a mind-boggling process called "Ju-Dou" (How to punctuate a text). In order to be able to read ancient Chinese texts, one has to master this technique. But different readers may punctuate the same text in different ways. This explains why there are various interpretations of the same poem or text. In this sense, the ancient Chinese texts share some qualities with some modernist texts written in the stream-of-consciousness fashion extensively used by Joyce, Proust and Faulkner. The difference is that while Modernist writers employed the technique of stream-of-consciousness in a conscious manner, our Chinese ancestors wrote non-punctuated texts by following the natural order of things. Chinese punctuation came into being as a result of learning from the West. Its invention is similar to that of Chinese grammar, which was the result of borrowing Western grammar and applying it to Chinese language. The lack of punctuation gives classic Chinese poetry a literary vagueness that subjects a poem to several interpretations. There are many jokes about the lack of

punctuation and how it creates different, often highly amusing interpretations of the same poetic lines.

Poetic Chinese with its richness of images, highly elliptical syntax and flexible parts of speech, comes close to the dream language. Freud notices the affinity of dream language to Chinese language: "They [dream symbols] frequently have more than one or even several meanings, and, as with Chinese script, the correct interpretation can only be arrived at on each occasion from the context. This ambiguity of the symbols links up with the characteristic of dreams for admitting of 'over-interpretation' for representing in a single piece of content thoughts and wishes which are often widely divergent in their nature" (388-89). In this passage, Freud was using Chinese language as an illustrating example to show how a dream can be interpreted in various ways. I want to reverse the analogy to demonstrate the inherent poetic qualities of classic Chinese and to reveal the reason why Chinese poetry caught the imagination of Anglo-American poets. Freud compared a dream scene to a picture-puzzle, a rebus, whose idiosyncratic arrangement of visual elements possesses extraordinary poetic qualities: "The words which are put together in this way are no longer nonsensical but may form a poetical phrase of the greatest beauty and significance. A dream is a picture-puzzle of this sort" (312). Literary Chinese endows both the poet and the reader with a state of mind which Keats called "negative capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (193).

Freud maintained the notion that dreams may treat "words" as "things," a notion which fascinated Derrida and left a visible impact on Part II of *Of Grammatology*. In a dream scene, dream images are natural symbols. The meaning of a cluster of dream images has to be ascertained from each one's relation to the other. In the same way, the fluid syntax of classic Chinese poetry made possible by the natural representation of the characters seems to suggest that the classical Chinese poet tends to treat words in his poem as real things. As most of the notional words represent things that can stand on their own, like dream symbols, they can be juxtaposed like things without the poet having to worry about their parts of speech. The total meaning of a group of characters results from the reader's mental synthesis of the juxtaposed characters. A character's exact part of speech and meaning arises from its relation to other characters.

When I say poetic Chinese comes close to the Freudien dream lan-

guage, I do not mean that it is as enigmatic as the dream language, but that because of its uninterrupted connection with its ancient past, classic Chinese preserves many characteristics shared by the language of dream-work. The dream language is highly ambiguous; so is poetic Chinese, though to a lesser extent. Because of this, words in an ancient Chinese poem are often subject to various interpretations. This may seem like a shortcoming but proves to be a source of poetic richness, because it allows the poet to express his personal experience in its spontaneity and immediacy, without subjecting it to a logical analysis of reason and intellect. This quality may largely account for the (somewhat naive) view of some scholars and poets that Chinese is a better medium for poetry. Fenollosa is of that opinion; so is Pound. Some other Sinologists hold the same view.⁸ This may explain why Chinese poetry had a lasting appeal to Pound and caught the imagination of Western poets in the first quarter of the 20th Century. Pound and his contemporary poets certainly misread the Chinese poetic tradition, but they did discover in the Chinese tradition some qualities which enabled them to fulfill desires their tradition failed to satisfy, and to engage in what might be called Orientalist "othering."

As poetic Chinese resembles the dream language more closely than highly inflected alphabetical languages, it comes nearer to the language of the unconscious which is the ultimate source of dream syntax. Chinese poetry has a critical dictum: "Good poetry must have unexpected features." Some of these features may, at first sight, look illogical and even border on absurdity. Some other features cannot be explained or imparted from one person to another. Hence the Chinese saying, "One can feel the intent by intuition, but cannot express it in words." All these features fall in line with C.G. Jung's remark on the relation between art and dream: "A great work of art is like a dream; for all its apparent obviousness it does not explain itself and is never unequivocal" (171). In a dream scene, images, events and actions do not follow the logical order of cause and effect, but they combine to impart a total meaning which needs holistic analysis.

A dream may be viewed as something halfway between a poem and a painting. In *Night Mooring At Maple Bridge*, by the Tang Poet Zhang Ji, we can find an instance of transmutation between a dream and a poem. This poem has been on the lips of Chinese people for over a thousand years, yet it remains an enigmatic poem whose meaning defies interpretation. People love to recite it, but do not care what is exactly meant. The poem has a series of riddles bordering on absurdities:

The moon sets, crows cry, and the sky full of frost.
River maple and fisherman's fire confront sleeping sorrow.
The Cold-Mountain Temple is outside Su-Zhou city.
A guest boat arrives at the midnight tolling of the bell.

Since Ouyang Xiu (1007-72), the famous literary scholar of the Song Dynasty, raised his doubt about some contradictory features of the poem in his critical essay *Liuyi Shihua*, for nearly a thousand years Chinese critics have been arguing about the incongruous details in the poem. When the moon sets and crows cry, it should be daybreak, but the midnight tolling of the bell contradicts this idea. Researchers also doubt whether there had ever been maple trees in that area. That the Cold-Mountain Temple is located outside Su-Zhou City is a fact, but did the temple have the practice of striking bells at midnight in contravention of the Buddhist norm of striking bells only in the morning? And why did guest boats arrive at midnight to the accompaniment of the temple bell? To use the critical theory of deconstruction, one may say that this poem has truly deconstructed itself. So far, no one can find a satisfactory answer. Critics have to be content with the explanation that images in poetry come from life, but they do not have to be true to life. In my opinion, perhaps, since it is about a night mooring, the poet, in a half-awake and half-sleeping state, took images from various sources and assembled them into a poem without the daytime alertness to logic and common sense. The result is a poem with a dream-like scene which has a large potential space. It is vaguely suggestive of a mood or moods which vary depending on the perception of an individual reader's unconscious mind. The classic interpretation has it that the poem expresses a vague homesickness of the Tang intellectuals who felt physically and emotionally tired on their way to their official posts.

This poem may serve as a good illustration of visual poetics. It is modernistic in that narrative and syntactic sequence is given up for a structure depending on the perception of relationship between disconnected words. To grasp the proper meaning, one needs to juxtapose these words each with the other and perceive them simultaneously. Although the words follow one another in a sequence, their meaning does not depend on their temporal relationship, but rests in a total grasp of the implications of all the words: the yearning for emotional and spiritual consolation under conditions of stress. The poem contains within itself an inchoate conflict be-

tween the time-logic of language and the space-logic implicit in the modern conception of the nature of poetry.

Lacan maintained that "the linearity that Saussure holds to be constitutive of the chain of discourse, in conformity with its emission by a single voice and with its horizontal position in our writing... is not sufficient" (154).

The linearity of speech, like the horizontal position in writing, imposes a mainly temporal orientation. But in addition to this horizontal, syntagmatic axis, there is a vertical axis, or paradigmatic axis: "All discourse is aligned along the several staves of a score. There is in effect no signifying chain that does not have, as if attached to the punctuation of each of its units, a whole articulation of relevant contexts suspended 'vertically' as it were from that point" (Lacan, *Ecrit*, 154). The vertical component indicates that there is always a downward movement through which words cross the bar of repression separating the signifier and the signified and enter the domain of the unseen. This is especially the case in poetry where there is a "polyphony to be heard" (Lacan, *Ecrit*, 154). Thus, poetry as characterized by Lacan is a form of writing which exposes the signifying chain by drawing one's attention precisely to the multitude of signifiers to which each single signifier points. By analyzing a verse by Valery, Lacan viewed the movement from the seen to the unseen in the signifying chain as the heart of poetic representations across cultural and linguistic boundaries: "For this modern verse is ordered according to the same law of the parallelism of the signifier that creates the harmony governing the primitive Slavic epic or the most refined Chinese poetry" (155).

To return to my analysis of that Tang poem, I think the poem, with its interpenetration of time-logic and space-logic, integrates the horizontal and vertical axes and works in the same way as a dream does. Freud said, "A dream is a conglomerate which, for purposes of investigation, must be broken up once more into fragments... A psychic force is at work in dreams which creates this apparent connectedness, which... submits the material produced by the dream-work to a 'secondary revision'" (449). If we treat the poem as presenting a visual scene like a dream, and "suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity," (49) we may smooth out the discrepancies and still have a poem faithful to the original spirit. First, let us translate the poem literally and dissect it into sense groups:

moon set/ crows cry/ sky full of frost/
 river maple/ fisherman's fire/ face sleeping sorrow/
 outside Su-Zhou city/ Cold-Mountain Temple/
 at midnight/ bell tolls/ arrive guest-boat/

The we treat those sense groups as if they were details in a dream. In a dream, as Freud shows, the logic of sequence is unimportant. Very often, the beginning is put at the end or in the middle. Nevertheless, a dream is not static like a picture. It has a time factor as well as space factor. The literally rendered details form a meaningful painting in terms of dream interpretation: The Cold-Mountain Temple is located outside the city of Suzhou; at midnight, a traveler's boat moored at the river bank of the temple; the traveler falls asleep in his sorrow while a fisherman's fire is burning nearby; early the next morning, the moon sets, crows cry, and the sky is gray with frost; the temple bell tolls and heralds a new day's journey. If we rearrange the details in this order, the poem can be rendered as follows:

The Cold-Mountain Temple was outside Suzhou.
 At midnight, a traveler's boat came.
 Maples on the bank and fisherman's fire
 accompanied him in his sleeping sorrow.
 The moon set, crows cawed, the sky full of frost,
 Resounded with the tolling of the temple bell.

III

Darwin once quoted Jean Paul as saying: "The dream is an involuntary kind of poetry." My comparative study of Chinese poetry and Anglo-American modernism seems to warrant an inversion of the saying. In my opinion, poetry, especially modernist and postmodern poetry, is a voluntary kind of dream. In other words, poetry is the result of consciously using the unconscious language.

Roycroft, a noted psychologist of dreaming, points out: "The clinical evidence in respect of dreams and literary evidence in respect of poetic imagination suggests that the apparently novel images appearing in dreams and poems are not created out of nothing, are not conjured out of nowhere, but are produced by the fragmentation of images derived from external

objects and recombination of the resulting frangment" (38). The raw materials Anglo-American Modernists use in their poetry are the same as those of dreams. The way a dream fragments and recombines material objects to create a dream-scene is exactly the same as the manner in which modernist poets dissolve human existence into fragmented images, then juxtapose them to generate new and original images and scenes. Freud called this process condensation and Coleridge called it "secondary imagination," which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate." This is true of Chinese poets, and of the creative works of Pound, Eliot, Williams, and other Modernist poets. Superb examples of this include Pound's *Cantos* and Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

The key to the formation of Chinese characters, the juxtaposition of words, phrases and verse lines in classic Chinese poetry and the Modernist technique of juxtaposition, the ideogrammic method, the Image, objective correlative and total metaphor, is a spatial perception and holistic generalization of relations between disparate elements. This is also the key to any Modernist hieroglyphics of poetic language. It is the same as the key to the interpretation of dream-language, as Rycroft observes: "Dreaming obeys the rules of non-discursive symbolism. Unlike discursive language in which permanent, conventionalized units of meaning are successfully understood and gathered together to form an overall meaning, that of sentences understood as a whole, dream 'language' consists of transient, private images which derive their meaning from their relations within the total structure from which the remembered, reported dream has emanated; this total structure being in principle the dreamer's whole mind or being" (63). The dream interpretation pioneered by Freud and developed by other psychoanalysts offers a promising way to a method of analysis for reading poems of different languages. It is the hermeneutic circle of the humanist, the pattern explanation of the social scientists, or as Norman Holland simply puts it, "holistic analysis" (22).

The Modernist emphasis on the visual qualities of literature can be accounted for by the language of the unconscious. It is well known that a dreamer presents his imaginings not in the discursive language we use in everyday life to convey meaning to others, but in non-discursive sequences of images. Since the unconscious language does not follow the syntax of the everyday language, dream-work has to conjure up evocative imagery and relate the particular images evoked to each other spatially as well temporally. As a result, dreams tend to resemble moving pictures more than

literary texts. Anglo-American Modernist poets may have gotten their inspirations for visual prosody and typographical innovation from Chinese poetry, but intrinsically they were answering to the call of modern times. Freud made public his great discovery of the unconscious at the turn of this century, with the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. To a certain extent, Anglo-American Modernism is the result of modern poets' response to Freud's discovery.

Visual form is not the only quality Chinese poetry possesses. As a verbal form of art, it has the qualities of temporal arts. By combining the characteristic features of time arts and space arts, it became a multimedia art form before the invention of movies and television. Fenollosa adequately sums up the advantages of Chinese poetry when he says: "Chinese poetry has the unique advantage of combining both elements [visual art and time art]. It speaks at once with the vividness of painting and with the mobility of sounds. It is, in some sense, more objective than either, more dramatic" (13). The mode of expression in Chinese poetry comes close to the technique of cinematography which came into being with the advance of modern technology and is the most effective medium for capturing the spirit and tempo of modern times. By no mere accident, Sergei Eisenstein claimed he invented cinematic montage after studying Chinese ideograms.⁹ It is the multimedia quality of the Chinese character and Chinese poetry that appeals to the imagination of Modernist poets. Though poetry cannot rival other multimedia arts, Modernists tried to approximate their effects. Thus Modernist and post-modern poetry resembles both dreams and the dream-like technique of multimedia arts.

Before modern times, drama which used language, music and acting may be the only art form that could rightfully be called "multimedia art." There was another unintentional multimedia art form: dreams. I venture to suggest that a dream is the prototype of all forms of art: time art—poetry, fiction, music; space art—painting, dance, sculpture, photography; multimedia art—drama, opera and film. Creativity lies in dreams. Creative writers like Shakespeare, Blake, Yeats, Wilde, Valery and Wagner; thinkers like Nietzsche, Freud, Jung, Cassier, and Lacan; critics like Frye, Babbitt, Ransom, Trilling, and Jacobson—all concur on the intrinsic relationship between dreams and creativity. Nietzsche wrote, "It was in a dream, according to Lucretius, that the marvelous gods and goddesses first presented themselves to the minds of men. That great sculptor, Phidias, beheld in a dream the entrancing bodies of more-than-human beings, and likewise,

if anyone asked the Greek poets about the mystery of poetic creation, they too would have referred him to dreams" (636). He greatly appreciated a verse line in Richard Wagner's opera, "All poetry we ever read/Is but true dreams interpreted"¹⁰ and believed that the dream is a precondition of Apollonian form in plastic art, and poetry (636).

The ultimate roots of poetry, then, lie in dreams and in the discourse of the unconscious. Levi-Strauss, who was indebted to psychoanalysis and to Saussure's structural linguistics, and was in turn a major influence on Lacan, thought that the unconscious was responsible for imposing structural laws upon basic inarticulate elements, such as emotions, memories and impulses — the raw materials of poetry (203).

If, as Lacan claimed, the discourse of the unconscious functions linguistically rather than symbolically or instinctually, Freud's interpretation of dreams, Saussure's structural linguistics, Lacan's analysis of the discourse of the unconscious, Chinese character-formation and poetic expression offer valuable insights in our search for a common poetics across linguistic and cultural boundaries. If dream interpretation is the royal road to the unconscious, the language of the unconscious might be a royal road to our goal. In the final analysis, what bridges the gap between the poetry of different literary traditions may be the poetic unconscious. This dynamic deep, signifying structure that governs and shapes the communicating of psychic (un) pleasure, needs to be more fully explored in relation to works such as C. G. Jung's collective unconscious, Vico's "mental language" (*The New Science*), Levi-Strauss' grammar of myth (*The Savage Mind*), Northrope Frye's archetypes (*Anatomy of Criticism*), and the structural model formulated by Vladimir Propp (*Morphology of the Folk Tale*), and A.J.Greimas (*Semantique structurale*).

Notes:

¹ These scholars either explicitly or implicitly stated their opinion in their respective works—William Warburton's *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated*, E.B.D. Condillac's *An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, Giambattista Vico's *The New Science*, Rousseau's *On the Origin of Languages*, Otto Jespersen's *Language, Its Nature, Development and Origin*, Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. For details, please see relevant pages in the present paper.

² For example, Rousseau thought that signs of words belong to a barbaric people, the alphabet to civilized people (*Essay on the Origin of Languages*). Hegel was of the opinion that "alphabetic script is in itself and for itself the most intelligible" (*Enzyklopadie*).

³ See, for example, Jacques Rousseau, "Essay on the Origin of Languages" (*On the Origin of Language*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1966: 11-13); E.B.D. Condillac, *An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1971: 273-79; William Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated: On the Principle of a Religious Deist*, Vol. 2, London: Fletcher Gyles, 1742; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Pt. II, 3, II: 195-228.

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, the translations of Chinese poems quoted in this study are all rendered by myself. My renderings are not meant as a challenge to existent versions, but as substitutes more appropriate for my purpose.

⁵ It is worth mentioning that Charles Demuth, a painter-friend of Williams, once drew a picture based on the poem and executed in association with Williams. The picture shows the engine in motion with the figure 5 occupying the center and the wheels and other parts of the engine radiating out from the center.

⁶ Quoted from "Closing Statement: linguistics and poetics," in Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), *Style in Language*, Cambridge, MA, 1960, p.358.

⁷ The symbolic meaning of "valley" as an illustration of the principle of Tao in the *Tao Te Ching* corresponds to the psychoanalytic insight: "The spirit of the valley never dies./ This is called the mysterious female. The gateway of the mysterious femals/ Is called the root of heaven and earth" (62).

⁸ Professor James Liu, for example, contends in his *The Art of Chinese poetry*, that "Chinese is a better language for writing poetry" (8).

⁹ Sergei Eisenstein admitted that he recognized the linguistic possibilities of cinematic montage after studying Chinese ideograms, as is revealed by the title of his 1929 essay, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideograph." Hugh Kenner has an account of how Eisenstein was influenced by Chinese ideograms in his *The Pound Era* (1971), p.162.

¹⁰ Richard Wagner, *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg*, III. i, pp.99-104. The line is taken from a stanza which runs, "My friend, it is the poet's work/Dreams to interpret and to mark./Believe me that man's true conceit/In a dream becomes complete: /All poetry we ever read/Is but true

dreams interpreted."

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