

Li Shang-yin's "The Ornamented Zither":
Plaisir or Jouissance?

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That is the pleasure of the text: (*Le plaisir du texte, c'est ça*) value shifted to the sumptuous rank of the signifier.

— Roland Barthes

I

In his *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin* James J. Y. Liu describes phenomenologically the poetic worlds of this poet, noting that many of his poems are concerned with love. He argues that these are generally not simple, straightforward love poems addressed to the beloved, but explorations of different worlds of love seen in different lights. Often they are mixed with doubt and despair, a kind of love which is so intense and all-consuming that it becomes self-destructive, arousing thoughts of death. An interesting facet of these worlds of passion is that they are sometimes seen from the man's point of view, sometimes from the woman's point of view, and sometimes from both, but the perspectives are kept separate, as in the sequence entitled "The Terraces of Yen." As long as these perspectives are kept separate Liu's methodology can account for the poetic logic of the poems quite well: "In each instance we are enabled to enter sympathetically in this world of hopeless passion and to taste its bitter-sweetness, its *plaisir d'amour* as well as *chagrin d'amour*."¹ Problems begin to multiply, however, for such a phenomenological view of desire, when the amorous speaker may be confused about what he believes or sees. In discussing Li's poems involving Taoist nuns, for example, Liu is led to make statements about the ambivalence of the speaker which lie beyond the boundaries of a phenomenological analysis:

It seems to me, this ambiguous attitude is possibly the

result of an unresolved conflict in Li Shang-yin's mind: on the one hand, his conscious convictions oblige him to disapprove the secret and licentious love of Taoist nuns; on the other hand, his subconscious desire for them cannot be suppressed, whether he actually had affairs with them or not.²

Phenomenology assumes a subject present to itself in the fullness of meaning, but clearly, such a subject is not what is being discussed here. World and language are not connected in any immediate way in these poems. Rather, we should seek to analyse a desiring subject who is exploring a logic of contradiction in his poetic language. Now, the only contemporary theory which deals with desire, the subject and language in a non-phenomenological way is the Freudian critique which has been developed and extended by Jacques Lacan. Lacan's seminars in turn have influenced a whole generation of French literary critics and philosophers, including Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes whose *The Pleasure of the Text* is the first attempt that I know of to go beyond a poetics of the text to an erotics of the text. In this paper I am going to present a reading of Li Shang-yin's "The Ornamented Zither" in terms of this erotics of the text. I shall argue that the pleasure that can be derived from reading the poem is more in the nature of a violent loss of meaning for the subject than a phenomenological presence. It seems to me that the poem sets up and invites through its conventions a climactic moment of bliss when that order breaks down, when the overt linguistic program is suddenly subverted and the subject is "deconstructed" in a crisis of his relationship to language. I shall have to discuss the Lacanian perspective in linguistics as background to Barthes, but first here is Li's poem and my reasons for selecting it:

錦瑟無端五十絃 滄海月明珠有淚

一絃一柱思華年 藍田日暖玉生煙

莊生曉夢迷蝴蝶 此情可待成追憶

望帝春心託杜鵑 只是當時已惘然

chin se wu tuan wu-shih hsüan
ornamented zither no reason fifty strings

yi hsüan yi chu ssu hua nien
one string one bridge think flower year

Chuang Sheng hsiao meng mi hu-tieh
 Chuang master morning dream confuse butterfly

Wang Ti ch'un hsin t'o tu-chüan
 Wang Emperor spring heart entrust cuckoo

ts'ang hai yüeh ming chu yu lei
 vast sea moon bright pearl have tear

Lan-t'ien jih nuan yü sheng yen
 Indigo-field sun warm jade produce smoke

tz'u ch'ing k'e tai ch'eng chui-yi
 this feeling may await become memory

chih shih tang shih yi wang-jan
 only is that time already confused

The Ornamented Zither

Why should the ornamented zither have fifty strings,
 Each reverberating with echoes of a bygone year?
 How can you tell the dreamer from the dream, the man
 from the butterfly,

Or the Emperor's amorous heart in spring from the cuckoo's cry?
 Go and seek the moonlit mermaid shedding tears of pearl,
 Then burn with the jade in the sun till you vanish in smoke.
 All this could have become a memory to be cherished
 but for the bewilderment you felt even at the time.

(trans. James J. Y. Liu)

I have singled out "The Ornamented Zither" for two reasons. First, Liu feels that it serves as a sort of introduction to Li's collected works. It is here then that we would expect to find the "truth" about Li Shang-yin as a desiring subject. Liu argues that the zither may be a fitting symbol for these works. Written probably towards the end of Li's life, the poem shows, according to Liu, the poet looking back on his entire life, seeing the past years extending in a row like the strings of a zither, feeling they are all like a dream. All his loves and sufferings, his hopes and disappointments, are gone like music played on the zither, and only the strings remain — these are his poems. Liu writes: "Just as the zither, for no reason, is given fifty strings, on which all kinds of music can be played, so the poet

for no reason is given a number of years to live, *to which Fate has attached a variety of experiences from which it has elicited various kinds of poetry in response* (my underlining)."³ Just what the nature of this Fate is, identified by Liu with language and the zither, I hope to show by arguing that it is language itself to which Li is subject and that he recognizes this in the poem. My second reason is that the poem is seen to be erotic by another of its translators, A. C. Graham, who provides us with his own associations (Liu is content to say that the poem is simply a statement of the old theme that life is a dream, and doesn't discuss, not surprisingly, any "Freudian" associations the poem might arouse). Thus we can say that it also embodies the many worlds of pleasure with which Li was familiar. I find Graham's description of this world (which we will want to define in terms of Barthes *plaisir / jouissance* distinction later) to be more sensuous than Liu's, so I quote from it here:

From about 800 poetry began to move indoors, in particular behind the doors of the courtesans, from which the *tz'u* was emerging. Nature is seen increasingly in terms of the artificial; Tu Mu's ducks wear crimson coats, his pool is covered with brocade of chickweed, he hears the crackle of forming ice as the tinkle of jade. In some poems of Li Ho there is already a foretaste of the feminine, silken, flower-decked, phoenix-infested imagery of the ninth century, glittering with pearls and jade, heavily scented with cassia or incense, dripping with the tears of wax candles. Women are at the centre of this sumptuousness, if only as the most luxurious article of all; and the love of women is the major theme of the one great poet of the period, Li Shang-yin.⁴

According to Roland Barthes, it is the signifier which inscribes this sumptuous realm into poetry, and not any activity of consciousness. As in the epigraph to this paper, the signifier is also the unconscious (*c'est ça, le ça* being the word for the unconscious in French). Of course Barthes is not a psychoanalyst and he does not discuss the linguistic background to his pronouncements in *The Pleasure of the Text*. He prefers to call himself an *amateur* of the text, bearing in mind that the French word can also mean lover. All of this word play reveals that Barthes is not interested in a science of the text, one that would seek to control and delimit the meanings of a text. Nevertheless his semiotic and linguistic notions do derive from Lacan

who grants primacy to the signifier, and not the signified which only means because it bears the mark of the signifier. In his seminars Lacan has argued that the Freudian unconscious is structured as a language which deploys specific rhetorical devices in producing its desire. In particular, metaphor and metonymy are the condensation and displacement of the Freudian dreamwork. Further, Lacan claims that the unconscious itself is constituted in an act of primal repression (*Urverdrängung*) in which the signifier "falls" into the unconscious and remains beneath the bar of signification. Lacan takes literally the bar in the formula of de Saussure: $\frac{S}{s}$ where the signified is under the signifier and cannot cross it. The bar is resistant to signification and communication, a point whose implications we will take up in a moment. There are many Lacanian algorithms which develop this basic formula in various ways, but I shall not repeat any of them here. Suffice it to say that metonymy is a kind of sliding of meaning which attempts to escape this repression. It allows the signified to slide under the signifier which also floats forming chains of signification in which the desire of the subject is animated. Metaphor, on the other hand, is the principle agent demonstrating language's relative autonomy from meaning, for it is possible that in using it we may say something other than what is being said. To put it very schematically (as Lacan often does) desire is a metonymy, metaphor is repression.

It is here that the Lacanian perspective in linguistics also adds something which is absent in the foundations of linguistics as a science and which is of great importance to Barthes: non-sense. The unconscious is notoriously resistant to signification and communication in any direct way. Freud insisted that the dream was not a communication, and Lacan has analysed Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream, one of the allusions in Li's poem, in connection with Freud's analysis of the Wolf Man in one of his seminars.⁵ In this analysis he tries to locate the exact point at which sense emerges from non-sense, when the Wolf Man was marked for the very first time by the signifier which formed the grid of his desire (symbolized by the beating of the butterfly's wings). Thus the analyst in his interpretation does not search for meaning as such, but for a signifier lodged in the unconscious. This disabling non-meaning embedded in a primary unconscious signifier (in the Wolf Man's case, the Roman V, the hour of the primal scene) constitutes a lack in the subject which keeps him from ever being satisfied (*jouissance*). By its very nature it cannot be spoken, although it sets in motion chains of signification along the defiles of the signifier which bears the desire of

the subject. Perhaps the following series of quotations from Lacan's seminar on interpretation will serve as an elaboration of these notions, which cannot be gone into any further in the short space of this paper:

The fact that I have said that the effect of interpretation is to isolate in the subject a kernel, a *kern*, to use Freud's own term, of *non-sense*, does not mean that the interpretation is in itself nonsense.

Interpretation is a signification that is not just any signification. It comes here in the place of *s* and reverses the relation by which the signifier has the effect, in language, of the signified. It has the effect of bringing out an irreducible signifier. . . . (p. 250)

This does not mean that it is not this signification that is essential to the advent of the subject. What is essential is that he should see, beyond this signification, to what signifier-to-what irreducible, traumatic, non-meaning — he is, as a subject, subjected. (pp. 250-51)

He (the subject) is constituted around the *Urverdrängung*, but he cannot substitute anything for it as such — since this would require the representation of one signifier for another, whereas there is only one, the first. In this X we must consider two sides — that constituent moment that sees the collapse of significance . . . but also the return effect. . . . (p. 251)

In so far as the primary signifier is pure non-sense, it becomes the bearer of the infinitization of the value of the subject, not open to all meanings, but abolishing them all, which is different . . . What, in effect, grounds, in the meaning and radical non-meaning of the subject, the function of freedom, is strictly speaking this signifier which kills all meanings. (p. 252)

. . . the fact of being conquered by something that one does not know sometimes has formidable consequences, the first of which is confusion. (p. 253)

As mentioned above, Roland Barthes has reworked these Lacanian notions into a theory and erotics of the text. Basically, he takes Lacan's metonymy as *plaisir* and the other, more radical kind of non-meaning as

jouissance. In Lacan, the word also denotes the surfacing of the death drive. It has various meanings in French, from the enjoyment of property, of that which is properly one's own, to orgasm. In the passage quoted below it is translated as bliss, which has certain religious connotations Barthes would probably want to avoid:

Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading: Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomfords (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language.

Now the subject who keeps the two texts in his field and in his hands the reins of pleasure and bliss is an anachronic subject, for he simultaneously and contradictorily participates in the profound hedonism of all culture (which permeates him quietly under cover of an *art de vivre* shared by the old books) and in the destruction of that culture: he enjoys the consistency of his selfhood (that is his pleasure) and seeks its loss (that is his bliss). He is a subject split twice over, doubly perverse.⁶

We will take up the topic of the anachronic subject a bit further on when we come to discuss *A Lover's Discourse* and the conventions of love poetry, but for the moment we should note that the experience of *plaisir* is a homogeneous, sliding, euphoric, unitary practice which remains within cultural codes and conventions. It is the sliding of the signified under the signifier in a chain of associations mentioned by Lacan. But the subject lacks the unspoken signifier. To discover the site of this loss, which is writing, the unconscious inscription, is to experience a divided self – a non-meaning which is outside of the symbolic realm of culture. Lacan calls it the infinitization of the value of the subject; for Barthes it is *jouissance*. Barthes leaves open the question of how the two categories are to be related historically. Did the text of *jouissance* arise out of the text of *plaisir* or are the two options available in texts of any historical period? Barthes seems to side with the second view, for despite his advocacy of modernist textual practices (Sollers), he says "the subject is never anything but a 'living contradiction:' a split subject who simultaneously enjoys, through the

text, the consistency of his selfhood and its collapse, its fall.”⁷ And elsewhere he allows that the category of text as productivity can be applied to ancient works of literature.⁸

Although one does get a definite impression from reading Barthes that the category of the text is something beyond genre and conventions, he is nevertheless quite explicit about those surpassed conventions. In his *A Lover's Discourse*, for example, he is concerned to debunk certain conventional schemes and imaginary figures of meaning which appear in amorous discourse. The one which interests us here in connection with Li's poem is called by Barthes ravishment (*ravissement*). This figure of meaning comprises the supposedly initial episode (though it may be reconstructed after the fact) during which the amorous subject is “ravished” (captured and enchanted) by the loved object. Of particular interest for our reading of Li's poem is the temporal dimension of this enamoration:

7. There is a deception in amorous time (this deception is called: the love story). I believe (along with everyone else) that the amorous phenomenon is an “episode” endowed with a beginning (love at first sight) and an end (suicide, abandonment, disaffection, withdrawal, monastery, travel, etc.). Yet the initial scene in which I was ravished is merely reconstituted: it is *after the fact*. I reconstruct a traumatic image which I experience in the present but which I conjugate (which I speak) in the past:

*Je le vis, je rougis, je pâlis à sa vue
Un trouble s'éleva dans mon âme éperdue*

I saw him, blushed, turned pale when our eyes met. Confusion seized my bewildered soul.

Love at first sight is always spoken in the past tense: it might be called an *anterior immediacy*. The image is perfectly adapted to this temporal deception: distinct, abrupt, framed, it is already (again, always) a memory . . . I retrospectively create a stroke of luck . . . to meet what matches my desire; or to have taken this huge risk: instantly to submit to an unknown image (and the entire reconstructed scene functions like the sumptuous montage of an ignorance).⁹

It seems to me that Li Shang-yin's poem “The Ornamented Zither”

plays with something very like this notion of amorous time only to "deconstruct" it. Further, the subject of the poem is Barthes's anachronic subject. If we read the poem in a linear fashion, we are taken in by the deception. The poem sets up a medial scene of ravishment (Barthes's sumptuous montage of images) to explain an initial moment of non-sense to which the speaker of the poem is subject. But at the end of speaker says in perfectly clear propositional language devoid of images that he was confused and bewildered *at that time*, so how could the mood of the poem be generated from a amorous memory or scene of ravishment uttered in the present? But I think that the poem goes further than *plaisir* in saying this. It links up with what Barthes calls *jouissance*, with the return of non-sense present (or rather absent) at the beginning of the poem which was never actually overcome in the search for the amorous object which would fulfill desire. In dividing himself and his text in such a fashion, the speaker has his pleasure both ways: staying within the codes of myth (Chuang Tzu and Wang Ti) in the medial section, but returning to non-sense (which is as close to being outside of cultural codes as the speaker can get) at the end.

I shall try to formalize these stages in my analysis, but before coming to that, having rejected the phenomenological view of this poem as inadequate and having advocated a post-structuralist viewpoint, I should say a few words about structuralist work on T'ang dynasty poetry where it approaches my concerns. I refer to the work of Tsu-lin Mei and Yu-kung Kao published in several installments in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. Kao and Mei approach my concerns when they assert that "... the fact that (Chinese) poetry uses two types of language, metaphoric and analytic, means that Chinese poetry is the voice of a *divided self* (my underlining)." ¹⁰ Yet nowhere in their copious and interesting analyses do they draw out the implications of this viewpoint, deferring it for future analysis. For the most part they prefer to remain within the limits of the Jacobsonian definition of the poetic text, which argues that meaning in poetry is based on a principle of equivalence. Although they do adapt Jacobsonian linguistic models to fit the special nature of Chinese poetic language, they nevertheless affirm that the principle of equivalence governs and explains the emergence of new meaning in the Chinese poem. Only briefly are they haunted by the possibility of another principle that might be just as important for Chinese poetry: that of contiguity. When they do give it serious consideration, they always find a way to make it (except

for a few instances which point beyond a structuralist analysis) cooperate with the principle of equivalence. Thus the hegemony of the principle of equivalence over that of contiguity in Jacobsonian poetics is never seriously questioned by the Chinese context. For example, when they discuss *lü-shih* or Regulated Verse, the form in which Li's poem is written, they argue that the middle couplets by and large use imagistic fragmented syntax to display the sensory qualities of individual objects. In contrast, continuous syntax, which occurs most frequently in the final couplets, is supposed to unify the discrete items that appeared earlier in the poem by commenting on them in propositional logic. They further assert that the imagistic thinking of the middle section is similar to mythical thinking in that they both emphasize concentration, isolation and intensity, the appearance of essences. However, propositional language employs the language of the reality principle.

Now, from a post-structuralist point of view the metaphysical stakes involved in such a model of poetic meaning are obvious enough: without metaphor as a basis of knowledge and a principle of meaning, the poet would be denied access into the mystical realm of Oneness, absolute space and time, and would be deceived by any peering into this realm of essences. Yet I think that metonymies are at work in Li Shang-yin's metaphors, and that this activity may not be so happy, innocent and cooperative as Kao and Mei would like. In the analysis which follows I will show that the intermingling of metaphor and metonymy, of essential and contingent connections has implications for the claims made by the metaphors: they are what Lacan would call the Imaginary dimension of the text, that which captures us into believing our desire can be satisfied. But they are seen in the end to depend upon the radical contingency or arbitrariness of non-meaning (the zither, for no reason, has fifty strings).

錦 瑟 無 端 五 十 絃
 ornamented zither no reason fifty strings
 一 絃 一 柱 思 華 年
 one string one bridge think flower year

In this first couplet we are indeed confronted with a series of equivalences. In order to formalize them I have drawn on two formulas of Lacanian structuralism which will demonstrate that, in this poem at least, the figure of metonymy comes first.¹¹ In the first line, a radical non-sense

is displaced along a metonymic chain. In the second, metaphor grafts another chain onto the first chain and we have the emergence of meaning from non-sense. Lacan's algorithm for metonymy describes the activity of the signifier in the first line:

$$f(S \dots S') S \cong S (-) s$$

Basically, the strings come to replace the zither itself; a part is taken for the whole. The first signifier *S* (the zither) has no meaning or a repressed signified (no reason) which is displaced by another signifier *S'* (the fifty strings). But just as the first signifier bears a resistance to revealing a signified, so the second signifier retains the line of resistance, the bar. We still do not know what the strings mean, but metonymy has displaced a term and desire has been set in motion. This equivalence between the two signifiers *S* and *S'*, zither and strings, also installs a lack of being in the signifying chain which the poem will seek to fill with various objects, but to which it will finally return.

The second line is based on a real metaphoric equivalence, and, as Lacan says, metaphor is the precise point at which sense emerges from non-sense. The general formula for metaphor is as follows:

$$f\left(\frac{S'}{S}\right) \cong S (+) s$$

where + represents the crossing of the bar and the emergence of signification. The strings fall to the level of the signified; they now have meaning because of their similarity to another, more conventional chain of signifiers, the "flowery years," or years of youth, which is grafted onto them. However, as a latent signifier, the strings of the equivalence perpetuate there the interval in which another signifying chain may be grafted. The next four lines are in fact grafted onto this interval until the desire of the subject fades at the end of line six. Thus the poem pursues a logic of the signifier before the subject appears on the scene in the second line, in the verb 思 *ssu* or "make think." He is subject to the signifier, is played by the zither, and not the other way around.

It might be objected at this point that the zither does have independent meaning for the subject because it alludes to a famous legend which recounts its origins. According to the legend, the Emperor Fu-hsi made the zither with fifty strings to distract man from the evils attendant upon his condition. He gave the zither to the goddess Su-nü (the White Lady), but she cried

bitterly and could not stop. So Fu-hsi broke the zither. Knowing this, however, still leaves us at a loss, for Li Shang-yin tells us there are in fact fifty strings whereas we would expect twenty-five. And even though we have a reference to the "flowery years," which allows the subject and signification to emerge, this number is still based on some private chronological reference that has never been convincingly explained. The signifiers (the strings) are in excess to the signified, which we do not fully grasp in any case. Even if we assert, using the conventional view of the sign, that the sign "zither" does have a signified (something like "musical instrument with twenty-five strings") this signified can be shown to be inhabited by the traces of other signifiers (the legend surrounding its origin) belonging to other texts, and so on. And so I maintain that the logic of this poem, thus far, is that of the signifier in the unconscious as formalized by Lacan.

莊 生 曉 夢 迷 蝴蝶
 Chuang master morning dream confuse butterfly
 望 帝 春 心 託 杜鵑
 Wang Emperor spring heart entrust cuckoo
 滄 海 月 明 珠 有 淚
 vast sea moon bright pearl have tear
 藍 田 日 暖 玉 生 煙
 Indigo-field sun warm jade produce smoke

From here until the last two lines we have what Barthes terms the image-repertoire of the poem, its montage of sumptuous signifiers (imagistic or metaphoric syntax in Kao and Mei's terminology). Of course it is therefore densely coded, as anyone who has tried to translate the poem without a series of cultural notes will know (in fact, Liu's free translation, quoted at the beginning of this paper, dispenses entirely with these allusions). To save time I will not discuss the numerous possible allusions involved in these lines, but will instead summarize the complex intertextual and associational process involved in reading these lines according to A. C. Graham.¹² I want only to point out that, however we may formalize these lines in the Lacanian algebra as further chains grafted onto the first interval of equivalence, the pleasure to be derived here is that of *plaisir*. The reader must make use of his cultural memory to build up a frame of reference around this section of the poem.

According to Graham, who offers his notes with a warning that this

poem has as many readings as readers, the fifty strings suggest a lady playing sadly like Fu-hsi's White Lady (we may call this Barthes's scene of ravishment); playing them, the poet recalls an experience of this youth. The memory is of an adulterous love like Wang Ti's; and like Chuang Tzu's dream it sometimes seems unreal; like the cuckoo which was once Wang Ti, the poet, changed for the worst by time, sings of a love which he remembers as though it happened to a different person. Graham thinks that the line about Chuang Tzu is free enough and vague enough grammatically to be either active or passive. In erotic terms this means that, not the dreamer, but the woman of whom Chuang Tzu / Li Shang-yin dreams is the lost butterfly. In the next two lines, as he plays, the music evokes the picture of a moonlit sea; the moon suggests a pearl in a sea of tears, pearls growing in the oyster with the waxing of the moon, mermaids from a legend who are said to weep pearls, and a girl who is moon, mermaid and pearl combined. Finally, the music-playing conjures up Mount Lan-t'ien in the mist which is the smoke of its jade (again a metonym) warmed by the sun, and the girl, whose name is "Purple Jade" (Lan-t'ien means "Indigo-field" and is a place where jade is produced or dug out of the ground) who dissolves when the poet tries to fix her in memory. The subject's desire, sustained by these signifying chains in pursuit of its object, begins to fade.

These signifying chains are, as I have said, an effect of *plaisir*. The reader delights in finding equivalences between the objects mentioned, and in filling in the indeterminacies. In the Chinese context some of these associations are erotic, as Wang Ti's "spring heart," but they are as conventional as the cuckoos, symbolizing unhappy, illicit love. So far the poem has led us to believe in what Barthes has called amorous time. As Barthes points out, the image is perfectly adapted to this temporal deception. It is distinct, abrupt, framed, it is already (again, always) a memory. I deceive myself into believing that some image matches my desire. It is this desire that begins to fade at the end of line six, together with the subject of *plaisir*, who now enters on the scene to comment on the nature of the mood 情 *ch'ing* evoked by these images. This emergence of the speaking subject through the mood of the poem is, I suppose, (in the view of Kao and Mei) a continuation of it, but I fail to see how these lines *unify* the poem:

此 情 可 待 成 追 憶
 this feeling may await become memory

只是當時已惘然
only is that time already bewildered (1.7-8)

The subject of these lines has emptied himself out of all images, and the lines are easily translatable because they contain no cultural references whatsoever, only a speaking subject experiencing a crisis in his relationship to language: How could this poem be an amorous memory when I was already confused at the time? The paradox seems to be that linguistically these last two lines are clear logical statements made in propositional language involving predication and therefore the subject (the verb "to be," 是 *shih*), that we assume to be identical to himself is contradicted by the content of what he says. He is lost and bewildered, 惘然 *wang-jan*, now and at that time of the supposed scene of ravishment. Now this is, I submit, *jouissance*. The disruption of the last two lines unties the complex and dense coding of the middle section and returns forcefully to the sense of loss stated at the beginning.

Thus we can affirm in summation that the logic of this poem is not that of a phenomenological subject present to itself, nor yet that of any structuralism based on that of the sign simply understood as embracing an equivalence between a signifier dominated by a signified. The poem engages in a logic of the signifier, which is not that of the sign, but that of the signifying chain in which the desire of the subject is animated. And although "The Ornamented Zither" employs erotic conventions for the reader's *plaisir*, its desire goes beyond these conventions, struggles with meaning, and is at last "deconstructed" in *jouissance*. It is only thus that we can describe the Fate of Li Shang-yin.

Notes

1. James J. Y. Liu, *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin, Ninth-Century Baroque Chinese Poet* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 212.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
4. A. C. Graham, *Poems of the Latter T'ang* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), pp. 141-44.
5. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 248-53. All further references are in the text:

6. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 14.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
8. Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josue V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 74.
9. Roland Barthes, *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang), pp. 438-39.
10. Yu-kung Kao and Tsu-lin Mei "Meaning, Metaphor and Allusion in T'ang Poetry," *HJAS*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (December 1978), 351. . .
11. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 164.
12. Graham, *Poems of the Late T'ang*, pp. 172-73.

