

The Way of the Subject: Jacques Lacan's Use of Chuang Tzu's Butterfly Dream

William F. Touponce

In memoriam
Jacques Lacan (1901–1981)

And when I say you (Confucius) are dreaming, I am dreaming too. Words like these will be labeled the Supreme Swindle. Yet, after ten thousand generations, a great sage may appear who will know their meaning, and it will still be as though he appeared with astonishing speed.

Chuang Tzu

Freud's influence on his time does not necessarily reflect a close reading of his work: his ideas were popularized, his jargon came into common usage (especially in America where the word neurosis is still the ego's badge of social adaptation for Ordinary People). But very often knowledge of his theories was second hand, by way of critics or magazines. It can be an instructive and enlightening experience, then, for the theorist and literary critic interested in psychoanalytic approaches to literature, to enter into the actual world he can be said to have discovered—the unconscious as a field of linguistic and scientific investigation—through his most ingenious and now famous (or infamous, depending on your point of view) exegetical reader on the continent of Europe, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan.

In lectures, essays and seminars for over thirty years now Lacan has been urging a return to the letter of Freud's thought. With all the sagacity of a master of Socratic irony, and the sovereign liberty with language displayed by Humpty Dumpty, he has railed against what he takes to be the stultification of Freud's teachings by post-Freudian analysts. In his own copious theoretical writings, the *Écrits*, he goes directly to the site of the unconscious kept to by Freud: the discourse of the subject reported to the

analyst during the analytic session. Hence his attention to Freud's many notes on the nature of the irruptive language of the unconscious (jokes, slips of the tongue, dreams—all of which can be said to go against the conscious intentions of the ego) and its interference with conscious language. To quote two well-known aphorisms from this book: Lacan insists that the Freudian unconscious field is "structured as a language," and that in this unconscious "man's desire is the desire of the Other" (the Other being defined as the locus from which language, the bearer of social codes, operates). Both phrases are intended to indicate that the dominating structures of the psychoanalytic domain can only be understood through the symbolic function of the word.¹

In his *Écrits*, Lacan has demonstrated also his verve in using literature (Poe, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Borges, deSade, Molière) as a ramifying fable of the analytic process. But in his seminars in particular Lacan's aim has been to effect a kind of analytic listening. By means of a brilliant and often hermetic literary style, which his colleagues call Mallarméan and his detractors meretricious, replete with puns, literary allusions, and syntactic aporias, Lacan exposes his audience and himself to the radical decentering effects of the unconscious field.² While explicating Freud, whose most notable statement was perhaps that the ego is not master in its own house, Lacan tries to liberate the language of the unconscious subject and bring it into contact with the conscious mind. In trying to do so, he thereby puts his audience in the position of a psychoanalyst who must interpret a seemingly delirious kind of speech that he believes reveals more of the experience of the unconscious and desire than any presentation in logical discourse of Freud's metapsychology. That he has been so successful at promulgating Freud's ideas and with directing a return to Freud in French intellectual circles by means of this approach is something of a self-fulfilling prophecy.³

The larger aspect of Freud's influence in France cannot be the subject of this short paper, but we can concern ourselves with Lacan's use, in a seminar devoted to the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis (the unconscious, transference, repetition, and the drive) of a dream from a non-western source, the writings of Chuang Tzu, to illuminate the structure of Freud's dream-theory. By the term use I mean here the borrowing of a text, however fragmentary or misunderstood, from another literary system, where it may or may not have canonical status (Chuang Tzu's texts are

considered by most Chinese literary historians to be deeply subversive of the values implicit in Confucian canonical texts), to support and shore up the status of a text in one's own literary system. It is as if Chuang Tzu's dream of the butterfly, woven together with Freud's own texts by Lacan's dreaming discourse, were the best means for us to seize the elusive way of the Freudian subject, to strengthen Freud's message about the unconscious as the locus of the Other, and to return us to the psychic origins of desire. We will therefore interpret Lacan's use of Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream as a alibi that allows him to take liberties with the texts of both Freud and Chuang Tzu, as he fulfills his goal of having Freud's discovery understood in its full power and amplitude.⁴ Although Freud himself compared the language of the dream to Chinese pictograms, Lacan has no such obvious aim in mind in suggesting that the dreams of the West are not so very far from those of the East. Rather, and as will become more apparent, he seeks to subvert any philosophical position that affirms an autonomous Cartesian subject to whom both meaning and being are unambiguously present.

Judging from the reception of Freud's dream-theory alone, we would have to say that Lacan's approach, if a somewhat circuitous way to the truth at times, has justification. Freud, whose own style was the lucid antithesis of Lacan's, complained in his *New Introductory Lectures* (1932) that despite all his efforts to clarify the theory of dreams, "what is most characteristic and peculiar about the young science, something to which there is no counterpart in the rest of our knowledge, a stretch of new country, which has been reclaimed from popular beliefs and mysticism," scientists, literary men, and the public at large still did not comprehend his discovery.⁵ Ironically, Freud said, he was in a position to claim this because in the thirty years since the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) he had received "innumerable letters" from those who claimed to have read his book, letters asking for information about the nature of dreams and presenting him with dreams for interpretation, letters which betrayed their lack of understanding in every sentence.

Clearly, the crucial issue in the transmission of his royal road to the unconscious, the dream-theory, was that of communication with the unconscious of his readers. The problem was, as Freud wryly put it, that the dream hermeneutics he inaugurated was a curious affair, "not the usual way of dealing with a communication or utterance."⁶ I do not propose to deal in

this paper with the semiotics of the inverted message in this new hermenautics.⁷ Rather, I seek to understand it as much as possible from the inside, from the language of the subject, Lacan, as it speaks (*ça parle*). We will follow Lacan's thinking in the twists and turns it imposes on us. We will then move from this understanding to an examination of two recent interpretations of Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream, one phenomenological (James J. Y. Liu) and the other Jungian archetypal (Toshihiko Izutsu), but both using this dream as central to their arguments. Let us first, however, examine Lacan's use of Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream. For our purposes the passage simply defies summary and so must be quoted in full:

Ça montre — mais là encore, quelque forme de glissement du sujet se démontre. Reportez-vous à un texte de rêve quel qu'il soit — pas seulement à celui dont je me suis servi la dernière fois, où, après tout, ce que je vais dire peut rester énigmatique, mais à tout rêve — remplacez-le dans ses coordonnées, et vous verrez que ce *ça montre* vient en avant. Il vient tellement en avant, avec les caractéristiques en quoi il se coordonne — à savoir l'absence d'horizon, la fermeture, de ce qui est contemplé dans l'état de veille, et, aussi bien, le caractère d'émergence, de contraste, de tache, de ses images, l'intensification de leurs couleurs — que notre position dans le rêve est, en fin de compte, d'être foncièrement celui qui ne voit pas. Le sujet ne voit pas où ça mène, il suit, il peut même à l'occasion se détacher, se dire que c'est un rêve, mais il ne saurait en aucun cas se saisir dans le rêve à la façon dont, dans le *cogito* cartésien, il se saisit comme pensée. Il peut se dire — *Ce n'est qu'un rêve*. Mais il ne se saisit pas comme celui qui se dit — *Malgré tout, je suis conscience de ce rêve*.

Dans un rêve, il est un papillon. Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire? Ça veut dire qu'il voit le papillon dans sa réalité de regard. Qu'est-ce que tant de figures, tant de dessins, tant de couleurs? — sinon ce *donner à voir* gratuit, où se marque pour nous la primitivité de l'essence du regard. C'est, mon Dieu, un papillon qui n'est pas tellement différent de celui qui terrorise l'homme aux loups — et Maurice Merleau-Ponty en connaît bien l'importance, qui nous y réfère dans une note non intégrée à son texte. Quand Tchoang-tseu est réveillé, il peut se demander si ce n'est pas le papillon qui rêve qu'il est Tchoang-tseu. Il a raison d'ailleurs, et doublement, d'abord parce que c'est ce qui prouve qu'il n'est pas fou, il ne se prend pas pour absolument identique à Tchoang-tseu — et, deuxièmement, parce qu'il ne croit pas si bien dire. Effectivement, c'est quand il était le papillon qu'il se saisissait à quelque racine de son identité — qu'il était, et qu'il est dans son essence, ce papillon qui se peint à ses propres couleurs — et c'est par là, en dernière racine, qu'il est Tchoang-tseu.

La preuve, c'est que, quand il est le papillon, il ne lui vient pas à l'idée de se demander si, quand il est Tchoang-tseu éveillé, il n'est pas le papillon qu'il est en train de rêver d'être. C'est que, rêvant d'être le papillon, il aura sans doute à témoigner plus tard qu'il se représentait comme papillon, mais cela ne veut pas dire qu'il est captivé par le papillon — il est papillon capturé, mais capture de rien, car, dans le rêve, il n'est papillon pour personne. C'est quand il est éveillé qu'il est Tchoang-tseu pour les autres, et qu'il est pris dans leur filet à papillons.

C'est pour cela que le papillon peut — si le sujet n'est pas Tchoang-tseu, mais l'homme aux loups — lui inspirer la terreur phobique de reconnaître que le battement des petites ailes n'est pas tellement loin du battement de la causation, de la rayure primitive marquant son être atteint pour la première fois par la grille du désir.⁸

As the reader of this passage may have surmised, interpreting Lacan is a risky business. The notions of the subject presented here are only elliptically and elusively stated, grasped as if something were trying to hide from view, inviting pursuit. To begin with, Lacan says that much of what he is going to say about Freud's dream theory will remain enigmatic. What can we say, then, beyond noting the surface features of Lacan's eliding style in this passage, and particularly the rhetorical figure of chiasmus that links the dreaming and waking states, Chuang Tzu and the Wolf Man, through the word butterfly (*papillon*), which never seems to come to rest on any definite meaning? I will venture an interpretation, a reconstruction of Lacan's irony, based on the assumption indicated by Freud that the dream is a curious and uncommonsensical kind of communication. Addressed, however, to whom? And what is the message? Lacan does not, and we will not, assume to interpret this dream with the help of any "personal associations," however remote, on the part of the patient, Chuang Tzu. This dream must rather be somehow typical of dreaming experience East and West, expressing a general truth about the discourse of the unconscious (the issue of why Lacan makes us of the eastern dream and not a western one will concern us later).

To begin with, in the quoted paragraph previous to the one announcing Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream, Lacan tells us that if we look up the description of any dream, we will find that the most striking thing about it is that the unconscious displays or shows its images (*ça montre*). But nevertheless and paradoxically, our position in the dream is profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject does not see where the unconscious

leads; he follows. Although our mental habit of assuming the existence of an external world with which to contrast our ego is not put to sleep, our field of vision is phenomenologically enclosed, stained. There is no privileged point of view, no ultimate gaze in the dream state. And the only way to test the illusory nature of the dream is empirically to wake up. In short we are unable to formulate a Cartesian *cogito* in which we apprehend ourselves as rational thought.

But if this is so, as it seems to be in Chuang Tzu's dream, then to whom is the dream as desire addressed? Lacan in punning asks his audience the same question. There is in French a pun on *ça veut dire*, to mean, namely, what does the unconscious wish to say. It means, Lacan says, answering his own question, that he, Chuang Tzu, sees the butterfly in his reality as gaze. Now the gaze is, I presume, what he looks like in the eyes of an unconscious Other, his unconscious Other, to whom he represents himself and of whom, of course, he is unaware (Chuang Tzu does not see). This situation requires some brief explanation and grounding in the Freudian theory of the ego.⁹ According to Lacan's parabolic commentary on the "mirror stage," discussed by Freud and his successors, the image in the mirror seen at an early stage of development by the child becomes the prototype for all later images of the self. This represents for the child, usually for the first time, the image of itself as a unified, controllable body that is visible to others. The child greets this image with an expression of jubilation (hence, I hasten to suggest, Chuang Tzu's joy in being a butterfly carelessly flitting about). This mirror phase is, however, no cause for jubilation, for the child fatally takes this specular image to be real, his real self. It is an alienated image that will govern his relations with other children in the dialectics of intersubjectivity and it begins the subject's internal rivalry with himself. It is this notion of a specular ego, rather than that of subjectivity, which perception generates. In the imaginary realm there is only a trap, a lure, which, Lacan says, situates the subject in a fictional direction. In phantasy and in other psychic productions governed by this register, for example dreams, the subject presupposes an unconscious Other to whom they are addressed and to whom they display themselves. His desire is therefore the desire of the Other, for he sees himself as an object, an ego, in the eyes of the Other through the mirror stage.

What is important for us to understand here is not so much the

ambiguities of the Freudian theory of the ego, or that an object is desired because the Other desires it, as the existential fact that when the child sees its reflection in the mirror, that reflection, the objectification of the child, is something other than the subject that sees it. Lacan's epistemological point about the mirror stage is that we misrecognize and take this specular image to be real, and later as a basis from which to philosophize about ourselves, but our knowledge is founded on a fundamental error, a flaw, a gap. Hence the child is said to be captivated and captured by this image, words which Lacan also uses to describe Chuang Tzu's situation. In fact, after the mirror stage a person can only think of his or her self as an alienated object. That is why, Lacan says, the emerging desire of the dream is not assumed by the subject who says "I" in his speech.

Lacan's discourse aims at countering this shadow self and its defenses by assuming the desire of the unconscious subject that expresses itself in puns and dreams. For how can we use the rational discourse of the ego as a defense when we are laughing? Moreover, in the Lacanian way of the subject it is logically impossible to capture in reflection the thing which does the reflecting, or rather, the locus from which reflecting emanates—the Other. The Other is the imperceivable locus of a person's consciousness. Thus reflection, in the sense of the introspection of the Cartesian *cogito*, the ultimate, secure gaze conceived of as rationally exploring a world of essences or of the *moi profond*, its correlate, is reduced by Lacan to the level of a pun: reflection means seeing ourselves in the false depths of a mirror and not knowing that it is so. In the last analysis, and we will examine this in more detail later, Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream is a gratuitous communication because it shows us something we in some sense already know—the philosophical reflection of the conscious ego is founded on illusion. In reality we are subject to the play of language.

Lacan emphasizes this last point by comparing Chuang Tzu's butterfly with the one which terrorized the Wolf Man, saying that it is "not so very different from" that butterfly. Readers will recall how Freud, in this famous case history, discovered the primordial element of the Wolf Man's unconscious through an analysis of one of his patient's childhood symptoms, the butterfly phobia:

He was chasing a beautiful big butterfly with yellow stripes and large wings which ended in pointed projections—a swallow-tail, in fact. Suddenly, when

the butterfly had settled on a flower, he was seized with a dreadful fear of the creature, and ran away screaming.¹⁰

For Freud this phobia provided the key to the weightiest secrets that the patient's neurosis had screened. Behind the symbolic screen-memory of the uncanny butterfly lay the reality of a primal scene and the threat of castration. The yellow-striped butterfly was, it turned out, linked by association with the memory of a most delicious pear known in Russia as gruscha, which has yellow stripes on its skin. Gruscha was also the name of a young maid who looked after that child at a tender age and with whom he lived another decisive scene which unconsciously helped to determine his object-choices both in love (he developed a compulsion to make love to servant girls whom he observed in a certain kneeling position) and in food (as a child, he would eat only sweet things).

Of course the Wolf Man consciously knew nothing about why the butterfly terrorized him or about the primal scene, in which he misrecognized the functioning of parental intercourse, until Freud "discovered" them from the language of their effects. Freud was, however, hesitant about positing the reality of such a primal scene, yet there is in fact no doubt that on two occasions (the scene of parental coitus and the event with Gruscha with the butterfly phobic screen) a sort of linguistic impression, an indelible trace was inscribed in an unalterable way. This trace Lacan calls a *rayure primitive*, a primal stripe. But *rayure* can also mean a scratch, a strike out, an erasure, or a groove, all of these meanings suggesting the letter of unconscious inscription. The Wolf Man was marked in the same way as the butterfly with the grid of desire. The Wolf Man's desire, derived from the primal scene and reinforced in the scene with Gruscha, was the desire to be the desire of the Other, to be the object of desire, the phallus, for the mother, but this way was blocked by the threat of castration (which the Wolf Man took to be real and not symbolic) from the father. Hence, Lacan continues, the butterfly inspires in the Wolf Man the phobic terror of recognizing that the beating of little wings is "not very far from" the beating of causation, the realm of the real, a world which exceeds the subject's imaginary and symbolic constructions. Thus the Wolf Man, just as did Chuang Tzu, represented himself as a butterfly, only in his case we have his personal associations, which, after Freud's interpretation, do not leave us in ignorance as to

what is beyond appearance that the Wolf Man must recognize. Freud traces for us and for all Western philosophical thinking based on the idea of an autonomous subject the central lack expressed in the phenomenon of castration:

Many months later, in quite another connection, the patient remarked that the opening and shutting of the butterfly's wings while it settled on the flower had given him an uncanny feeling. It had looked, so he said, like a woman opening her legs, and the legs then made the shape of a Roman V, which, as we know, was the hour at which, in his boyhood, and even up to the time of treatment, he used to fall into a depressed state of mind.¹¹

So the meaning of both Chuang Tzu's and the Wolf Man's butterfly can be said to lie partly in the imaginary, a prelingual realm in which perceptual features like resemblance operate. As we have indicated though, this imaginary dual relationship is for Lacan that of a lure, a trap, in which we attempt to describe the essence of something we believe to be something else. For the Wolf Man the meaning of his butterfly lies also in the symbolic realm, the register of the letter, a Roman V marking the hour of the primal scene. But the significance of Chuang Tzu's butterfly lies in Lacan's attitude towards the traditional sense of this word "essence." If one of the fundamental techniques of irony is to give a single word opposite and contradictory meanings, one of which is known only to those who are in the know, then Lacan is surely being ironic here. Indeed, he once argued that the social function of psychoanalysis today *is* irony.¹² Lacan is serious when he says that the essence of the gaze, the essence of man's desire, is summed up by Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream. Yet this is because Chuang Tzu, the famous Chinese seer capable of philosophizing on his own dream experience, "does not know how right he is" when he doubts that he is absolutely identical with Chuang Tzu. Chuang Tzu is, when awake, a captive butterfly caught in the butterfly net of others (meaning their language, their symbolic name for him, his position in the social order), but when he is dreaming he is a butterfly for nobody. Since he is a butterfly for nobody, he is free. But, Lacan says, he is still a captive butterfly—captured by nothing, in fact, more than his own image.

Using Chuang Tzu in this manner, Lacan ironizes what he takes to be a phantasy of absolute vision in Western philosophy which extends from the

Platonic notion of essences to modern Husserlian phenomenology. Earlier in the seminar Lacan had explained his way of the Freudian subject (*le chemin du sujet*) as a style of adventure in *frayage*, in pathbreaking (the French translation of the word *Bahnung*, derived from *Bahn*, road; we may well suppose a pun on the Chinese word *tao* here), a term in Freudian metapsychology that designates the origin of memory and of the psyche as memory or trace in general. For in Freud's texts there is no memory without the difference of a trace, a letter inscribed in the unconscious, and Lacan wants us to return to the letter of Freud's pathbreaking thought. In any case Chuang Tzu's metaphor of himself as a butterfly is shown by Lacan to depend also on a inscribed network of language, the symbolic order. If Chuang Tzu dreams of being a butterfly, that is because, Lacan observes, he will no doubt have to bear witness later that he represented himself as such. Thus there is no escape from the Other in Lacan's way of the subject. We are, in the last analysis, captives of language. Simply trying to capture a fixed meaning for the signifier *papillon*, butterfly, however, as its signified changes (now the Wolf Man, now Chuang Tzu) in the twists and turns of Lacan's discourse in this passage, is enough to convince us of the fluidity that remains for it, and how language may snare us.

We are now in a position to examine critically two recent interpretations of Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream. First of all, in his book *Chinese Theories of Literature* James J. Y. Liu writes that it was Chuang Tzu who most influenced the development of the unique metaphysical theory of literature in China. He affirms, however, using the butterfly dream as an example, that Chuang Tzu's thought is metaphysically neutral, and hence his affinity for Western phenomenological theories of aesthetic experience. Is not Chuang Tzu, he asks, in the description of this dream bracketing the world in Husserl's sense, neither affirming nor denying the reality of either himself or the butterfly, but suspending judgement on both? About this suspension of value judgement and predication of existence Liu says:

This suspension of judgement is called by Husserl (*epoché* or *epokhe*, "abstention"), a term that reminds one of Chuang Tzu's "mind's abstinence" (*hsin-chai*), which we have encountered earlier. There is more than a verbal coincidence between these two terms, for both involve the suspension of the "natural standpoint" based on sense perception, and both aim at an intuitive grasp of the essence (*shen* or *eidos*) of things.¹³

Liu had pointed out earlier that in the eastern view of the literary process the *tao* is immanent in nature and the writer's task is to manifest it, whereas in the Western view nature *wants* its meaning to be revealed by art, to be shown by art, and this is an important distinction, tied in with what Lacan has been saying about the narcissistic nature of the visible as a lure, a trap. For if in both cases the ultimate goal of this bracketing of the world is to accomplish a kind of "seeing," as Liu suggests, in which we rediscover the solidarity of subject and object and aim at an intuitive grasp of the nature (essence) of things (which for Chuang Tzu is the *tao* and for Husserl the living relationships of experience), then we may attribute a certain "metaphysical" interest to Chuang Tzu. In Chuang Tzu's dream, as in any other dream, images of nature display themselves, even if they do not provoke the gaze of the subject. This assertion of Lacan's may at first seem to confirm Liu's point about the Western view of nature wanting completion in art, yet things are more complicated than that. Lacan reads Chuang Tzu as a radical critique of the very idea of natural essences. He is especially interested earlier on in the same seminar in examples of disguising display, mimicry, in the animal kingdom. Certain animals are stained with the shapes and inscribed with the pictures of other animals, a fact which indicates again to him the true nature of the self.

As Lacan implies, Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream cannot be used to support an argument for a realm of self-identical essences and a visionary access to them. Indeed, Lacan suggests that on the contrary it radically subverts any ultimate gaze or solidarity between the gazer and the gazed at. This is proved, Lacan says, by the fact that when Chuang Tzu is the butterfly, the idea does not occur to him to wonder whether, when he is Chuang Tzu awake, he is not the butterfly he is dreaming of being. For this would be, I presume, to break the wish-fulfilling pleasure of the dream in seeing himself represented as a happily playing butterfly. We cannot speak of Chuang Tzu as being metaphysically neutral in desiring to see the essence of things, for Chuang Tzu disguises himself as a butterfly. The desire of Chuang Tzu is what we must consider. And where is Chuang Tzu, the speaking subject, if not caught in the nets of communication with an unconscious Other, a fact which Liu implicitly recognizes when, in quoting Merleau-Ponty in support of his thesis, he mentions the function of language in causing essences to exist in a state of separation?

Actually, Liu's references to Merleau-Ponty in support of his thesis are also rather shortsighted, for Merleau-Ponty at the end of his life rejected the Husserlian theory of essences as a derivative of idealism and embarked on a way which brought him much closer to Lacan's way of the Freudian subject than he had previously been. For example, in the posthumous *Le Visible et l'invisible*, he argued for an ontology of the visible which was intertwined with the experiences of the darkness of the body. It was the publication of this book in fact which prompted Lacan to make his own pathbreaking movement into the essence of the visible in the Freudian scopic field (ultimately positing the existence of a scopic drive) and to make use of Chuang Tzu's "phenomenological" butterfly as a response to Merleau-Ponty, as readers of the passage taken from his seminar and quoted above will recall. One can only wonder whether, on closer inspection, Chuang Tzu's aesthetic and literary affinities may be said to lie not with Husserlian phenomenology or any aesthetic theory derived from it (Liu uses Dufrenne as a point of comparison) but with the Lacanian theory of the subject dependent on the vagaries of language, the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real.

And as for his philosophical affinities, in contrast to Liu, our second critic, Toshihiko Izutsu, is much more willing to recognize unconscious, if not Freudian, factors in Chuang Tzu's writings. He too takes the butterfly dream as exemplary, but more as an instance of what he terms mythopoetic discourse, "a peculiar use of language by which myths are central on the one hand, but by which, on the other, and exactly the same time, philosophical thinking is evolved," than of phenomenological description.¹⁴ Izutsu's analysis of the butterfly dream recognizes that behind the spontaneous archetypal (Lacan would say typical) imagery of this dream Chuang Tzu is developing one of his favorite metaphysical theses, which Izutsu translates as the "chaotification" of all things. To Izutsu, Chuang Tzu is a peculiar type of shamanistic philosopher, one who can actually see himself in a dream transformed into a butterfly and then reflect upon it in search of the philosophical meaning of his own dream experience. In his view Chuang Tzu has both a visionary nature and a talent for logic, both aspects being inextricably interwoven in his discourse. Thus when Chuang Tzu reflects that his imaginary situation in the dream is what he calls in language (the Lacanian symbolic order) "the Transmutation of Things" (*wu hua* 物化), he is arguing in philosophical terms that there is another ontological dimension (corres-

ponding, Izutsu says, to a transcendental, non-empirical level of consciousness which is actualized in ecstatic experiences) in which everything loses its essential self-identity and in which, consequently, all things become "chaotified" in the oneness of the absolute *tao*. In this "chaotified" state of mind the ego has also lost its self-identity, and Chuang Tzu as shamanistic seer can therefore observe the cosmic Transformation of Things:

A butterfly freely changes into Chuang Chou; Chuang Chou freely becomes a butterfly, or indeed anything else. Everything has become everything else. The situation is comparable to an imaginary case in which an infinite number of mirrors standing face to face go on reflecting one another indefinitely, without any obstruction.¹⁵

Izutsu enjoins the reader to adopt a peculiar way of understanding Chuang Tzu in order to approach him on the mythopoetic level of discourse where he believes we should properly locate his words. The reader must also relive phenomenologically these visionary images in order to understand the words with which they are associated intimately. How close Izutsu comes to the symbolic and imaginary realms of Lacan, yet he remains in a facile dualism because of the lack of the problematic dimension of the real (which here we can identify with history, Chuang Tzu's fate as a "man of Sung")! For if in the last analysis everything is a mirror image of everything else in this ontological state of chaos, we may well ask how Chuang Tzu manages to position himself as a "reflective" philosopher able to give an anagogic meaning to his images. Is not this positional ego an illusion as well, as Chuang Tzu freely admits? We may seek some clarification on this point about mythopoetic discourse from the writings of Freud and Lacan. First of all, and as is well known, Freud in his analysis and reconstruction of the unconscious history of the Wolf Man for the most part rejected all anagogic (i.e. Jungian) interpretations of imagery that would tend to create new, more and more universal symbols representing the great spiritual problems of the human mind. Thus, according to Freud's hermeneutic, the Wolf Man's phantasy of re-birth was a euphemistic derivative of the primal scene rather than that the primal scene was, on the contrary, a reflection of the phantasy of re-birth.¹⁶

For his part Lacan says as much, although it is certainly a more problematic presentation, in defining the narcissistic ego and the realm of the

imaginary as an effect of the mirror stage, and in saying that Chuang Tzu's butterfly is not so very different from the one which terrorized the Wolf Man. All images of the self as an objectified ego are displacements of an original scene of misrecognition. As we have tried to demonstrate, to Lacan's way of thinking, in the analytic session the analyst must engage in a continual process of putting himself in question, or ironizing, and must never let *his* sense of reality become the measure of all things for the patient in reconstructing his unconscious history (when Freud presented to the Wolf Man his own theories of why the butterfly terrorized him, he rejected them as absurd and presented his own version, part of which is quoted above). And if, as Burton Watson claims, Chuang Tzu employs every resource of rhetoric, but most of all irony, in his efforts to awaken the reader to the essential meaninglessness of conventional values and to free him from their bondage, should we not hesitate in identifying too strongly with the mythopoetic realm of Chuang Tzu's discourse?¹⁷ For this level of Chuang Tzu, the level of the solidarity of subject and object, of the gazer and the gazed at, is the one most apt to lend an alibi to grandiose inflation of the ego:

. . . le plan de la réciprocité du regard et du regardé est, plus que tout autre, propice, pour le sujet, à l'alibi. Il conviendrait donc de ne pas, par nos interventions dans la séance, le faire s'établir sur ce plan. Il faudrait, au contraire, le tronquer de ce point de regard dernier, qui est illusoire.¹⁸

We should follow Chuang Tzu himself in an iconoclastic reading of his own philosophical pretensions. And when he says that his is a dreaming discourse, we should take him at his word. But as for Lacan, he also is not without an alibi. In conclusion we may say that the foreign writer, Chuang Tzu, is to all extents and purposes used as an alibi by Lacan, as an excuse to strengthen the influence of Freud's discoveries within our western literary system. As theorists of polysystems such as Lefevre point out, the writer who wants to use a foreign literature, or a figure from it, must preserve an ambiguous status for the foreign work.¹⁹ This is so because in any literary system, argues Lefevre, there are canonical texts and texts struggling for canonical status. In order therefore to strengthen his position the writer ironizes the foreign literature to show that it is not to be taken seriously and is not a threat to any of the competing systems. But the writer also and

at the same time reinforces those features in it which are well-known to the native audience (here, Chuang Tzu's status as an iconoclast and seer). We can argue that Lacan's use of Chuang Tzu is a clear instance of this paradigm of influence, for he makes use of the over-all cliché of Chuang Tzu's status as a seer, his "oriental wisdom," only to ironize it. The ambiguous position which Lacan adopts towards Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream allows him to obey the laws of the unconscious (the dream-work of using texts already composed and lying ready-to-hand) while revealing them to his audience. He also fulfills the function of psychoanalysis according to his view, namely, the ironizing of all philosophical positions based on a view of the autonomous subject. Furthermore, in using the native view of Chuang Tzu as an iconoclast, he has gained much more "permission" for his word-play than he would have had in any rational presentation of Freud's metapsychology. And still more, the idea belonging to the native tradition that Chuang Tzu is a seer who completely and nonchalantly enjoys himself in a transcendental realm of essential Being, however ironized, allows him to give an oracular ring to Freud's dream theory, for Freud's theory is capable of explaining even what the famous seer himself did not see. How much more powerful, Lacan implies, must Freud's theories be then, for the interpretation of literature, than the host of his critics, East and West, subsisting on banalized formulas gotten second hand, have led us to believe.

Freud's message has, I think, become clearer and stronger in its encounter with Chuang Tzu at the instigation of Lacan. Freud had pointed out as early as his preface to the second edition of his masterwork, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1908), that his psychiatric colleagues seemed to have taken no trouble to overcome the initial bewilderment created by his new approach to dreams. Nor were the philosophers more comprehending:

The professional philosophers have become accustomed to polishing off the problems of dream-life (which they treat as a mere appendix to conscious states) in a few sentences — and usually in the same ones; and they have evidently failed to notice that we have something here from which a number of inferences can be drawn that are bound to transform our psychological theories.²⁰

In hindsight we can perhaps say that Freud was too modest in his

claims. He should have said our philosophical theories, for the investigation of the unconscious field which he began has provided the most powerful instrument, in the hands of Lacan and others, for the decentering of the western way of philosophizing that we can be said to possess. And if what Freud says of the unconscious is right and if psychoanalysis is necessary, then this is in a large part true because the dream is made for the recognition of desire. And desire can only be grasped in the hermeneutics he made possible. In hindsight we can now also understand Freud's irony when he mentioned receiving those misunderstanding letters for thirty years and, one supposes, until the time of his death. As Lacan has argued, it is from the Other that the subject receives even the message he emits. The way of the subject is not so very different from the way of Chuang Tzu, for the essence of man is to be that butterfly who paints himself with his own colors.

Notes

1. Lacan has compared the process of communication in psychoanalysis to a kind of Buddhistic enlightenment, and especially to the techniques of Zen. See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits I* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 200.
2. For Lacan as meretricious, see Jane Gallop, "The Ladies' Man," *Diacritics*, 6, No. 4 (Winter 76), 28-34.
3. For an account of Freud's influence in France, consult Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics, Freud's French Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).
4. The notion of alibi can be found in André Lefevere, "Slauerhoff and Po Tsju I: Three Paradigms for the Study of Influence," *Tamkang Review*, 10, Nos. 1 & 2 (Fall, Winter 79), 66-77.
5. Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey, ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 36-37.
6. Ibid.
7. Concerning a semiotic account of this process, see Eugen Bar, "The Language of the Unconscious According to Jacques Lacan," *Semiotica*, 3 (1971), 241-68.
8. Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre XI, les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), pp. 72-73.
9. Lacan, *Écrits I*, pp. 89-97.
10. Sigmund Freud, *Three Case Histories*, trans. James Strachey, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 281.
11. Freud, *Three Case Histories*, p. 283.

12. See Fugen Bar, "Understanding Lacan," in *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Science*, ed. Goldberger and Rosen, 3 (1974), 473-545.
13. James J. Y. Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1975), p. 61.
14. Toshihiko Izutsu, "The Archetypal Image of Chaos in Chuang Tzu: The Problem of the Mythopoetic Level of Discourse," in *Anagogic Qualities of Literature*, ed. Joseph P. Strelka (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), p. 276.
15. Izutsu, p. 285.
16. Freud, *Three Case Histories*, pp. 295-296.
17. Chuang Tzu, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 7-28. His translation of the butterfly dream, which is to be found on p. 49, runs as follows: "Once Chuang Chou dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Chuang Chou. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Chuang Chou. But he didn't know if he was Chuang Chou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Chou. Between Chuang Chou and a butterfly there must be *some* distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things."
18. Lacan, *Le séminaire*, p. 74.
19. Lefevere, "Slauerhoff and Po Tsju I," pp. 72-75.
20. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965), p. xxv.

