

Allusion and T'ang Poetry

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THE device of allusion, which in English we associate with the Augustans and with T. S. Eliot and Mr Pound (or else with marginally aesthetic genres such as the sermon), in fact performs a considerable aesthetic function in many literatures, thus inviting notice from the viewpoints of comparative literature and literary theory. This study demonstrates an exceptionally complex and successful, but otherwise not untypical, set of allusions in an eighth-century Chinese poem, and I shall look into some comparative and theoretical questions along the way.

Allusion once meant, as its etymology suggests, any *playful* reference (cf. the German loan-translation *Anspielung*). In the later sense adopted here, allusion means any *disguised* reference. This sense excludes playful references when overt or self-explanatory — e.g. many puns — but embraces solemn, humorless references, so long as disguised; although it is difficult to expunge all the fun from disguise. Allusion, as I understand it, comprises two sorts of semantic function which can attach to a passage, often at the same time: these are topical allusion (disguised denotation) and textual allusion (disguised quotation). The latter type has the greater literary interest, but neither is exclusively literary, since topical allusion flourishes in the realm of gossip and current anecdote, while textual allusion characterizes a common kind of family joke (the 'text' in these being some remark, often a child's, which with its original and explanatory context is remembered in the family, although the connotations may escape other people). Allusion, like other poetic devices (simile, alliteration, etc.), occurs freely in ordinary speech as well as in literary works (utterances in which the poetic or aesthetic function predominates); it is not by nature, although it may be in practice, snobbish or pedantic. Viewed from outside the group which shares its secret, an allusion can always seem snobbish, although its motive may have been not to exclude the

uninitiate but to strengthen the bond of intimacy among the initiate — the essence of allusion, Freud saw, is the pleasure of recognition, of 'finding something familiar where we expected to find something new instead'.¹ In a learned milieu, textual allusion becomes pedantic through coalescence with another device, the citation of authority (theological, legal, etc.); moreover, as a kind of *reference* to a source, textual allusion may seem decadent or derivative, through its resemblance to *borrowing*, which is nevertheless a different matter — the ultimate borrowing is plagiarism, which must not disguise its source playfully, but conceal it altogether. Nowadays we associate allusion chiefly with pedantry, or with the parody of pedantry, as in Sterne or E. T. A. Hoffmann.² Yet allusions of great ingenuity, including 'textual' allusions, occur not only in speech but in unwritten 'literature', such as the oral poetry of the Yoruba, as Ulli Beier has shown.³ The *sine qua non* of textual allusion is not book-learning as such, but memorization, or at least a near-verbatim recollection of a finite tradition; and here the ancient Chinese, despite their formidable literacy, were closer to the Yoruba than to ourselves. We read too quickly and carelessly to excel at allusion; we read too many books, too seldom the same books. The gentry of the T'ang dynasty (618–906) read less, partly because of their dependence on expensive manuscripts — while printing had been invented, it remained restricted to such cheap, popular items as calendars, handbooks of magic, and Buddhist sutras, plus a few dictionaries; the Confucian classics did not see print before 932. But every candidate for the civil service examinations — including almost every poet — had memorized one or two classics, and knew other Confucian and Taoist works intimately. Since most would-be mandarins sat not for the strictly classical, nor for the

¹ Sigmund Freud, *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious*, in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, ed. A. A. Brill, New York, 1938, p. 714. For an opposite view, see I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, New York, 1925, ch. 28, 'The Allusiveness of Modern Poetry'. Richards plays down the value of the recognition principle, but goes on to predict that the increasing specialization and compartmentalization of knowledge will make poetry more allusive.

² See Herman Meyer, *The Poetics of Quotation in the European Novel*, Princeton, 1968, tr. by Theodore and Yetta Ziolkowski of *Das Zitat in der Erzählkunst*, Stuttgart, 1961, 1967.

³ Beier, 'Poetry of the Yoruba', *Delos: A Journal on and of Translation*, no. 2, National Translation Centre, Austin, Texas, 1968, pp. 5–25.

legal or other examinations, but for the literary examination (*Chin-shih*), which usually required the composition of a poem and a 'rhymeprose' (*fu*), in traditional style and replete with allusion, most had memorized, in addition, the poems and other works in the *Wen-bsuan* anthology, and were acquainted with the biographical sections of the Standard Histories, a storehouse of anecdote and moral example. Students also made use of works somewhat resembling Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*, such as the *Pei-t'ang Shu-ch'ao* by Yu Shih-nan (558-638). All these works provided a fund of common lore, so well known that allusions sufficed as references to it, while the odder, more abbreviated allusions offered in addition a kind of puzzle-interest; undisguised and thus non-allusive citations would have been otiose. Chinese poets of this time were far from the position of Mr Pound, who has had to construct, or reconstruct, his own curriculum of works to which allusions can be made.

The perception of allusion in a passage, allusion (a part of verbal reference) as distinct from borrowing (a part of literary history), is a complex intuitive process, a conclusion drawn from the simultaneous weighing of many minute probabilities, typical of many processes which 'the great averager', as Sir Charles Sherrington called the human brain, can perform much more easily than it can define. A similar problem is that of the latent metaphor. For instance, in the following lines from Robert Frost's poem, 'Bereft':

Leaves got up in a coil and hissed
Blindly struck at my knee and missed¹

— is there or is there not the latent metaphor of a snake? A. A. Hill has devised a rough quantitative method for judging from sets and sequential orders of features (such as *coil*, *hissed*, *struck*, *missed*) the likelihood of latent metaphor being a part of the meaning in such cases.² Textual allusion is a much more complex phenomenon, depending not only upon the relation of message to code (e.g. to the concept 'snake') but upon a relation of message to prior message — a prior message which must be judged

¹ *Collected Poems of Robert Frost*, New York, 1942, p. 317.

² Archibald A. Hill, 'A Program for the Definition of Literature', University of Texas, *Studies in English*, xxxvii, 1958, 46-52.

not only with respect to its congruity but also with respect to its availability and uniqueness as the possible object of allusion. Often we feel surer of allusions if they come in related groups which include at least one highly probable case and thus an escape from *petitio principii*. I shall now discuss a T'ang poem which presents such a group of allusions.

The poem is a work of a talented minor poet, Li Ch'i (*chin-shih* 725), entitled 'Lute Song' ('Ch'in Ko'), the 'lute' (really a zither) being of course the archaic and austerely expressive instrument of sages, scholars, poets, and hermits.¹ The poem mentions the region of the River Huai as a place of official service; Li Ch'i at some time was a comptroller (*wei*), that is, one of the several superintendants of employes and taxes, in the sub-prefectural government of Hsin-hsiang near the Huai in what is now Honan, an area where Li Ch'i's family had lived for some time. We cannot be sure that the poem places him en route to this particular post, nor even that we are meant to take the work as autobiographical. There are, however, vague indications of a journey at the beginning and end of the poem. A set of allusions in the poem greatly clarifies the sense of the poem; in particular, the allusions give to the journey resumed at the end of the poem a significance different from that of the initial journey. Something happens during the brief overnight sojourn which the poem depicts; something which seems to alter the direction of the putative speaker of the poem, turning his voyage, one connected with the mandarin's repeated changes of office, into a voyage of opposite import: a voyage altogether out of public life and into some sort of eremitic retreat — a rejection of society and a return to nature. It does not seem likely that Li Ch'i is disclosing an actual conversion experience, a crucial event of his personal life; as we shall see, a comparable poem by Tu Fu does not merit belief as an account of a conversion experience; more likely, Li Ch'i was dramatizing a mere wistful longing, or complimenting a lutanist on the persuasive powers of his music. But that is beside the point. All that concerns us is the drama depicted. In this, I claim, there is indeed such a conversion experience. But this meaning is

¹ Li Ch'i, 'Ch'in Ko', in *Ch'uan T'ang Shih*, ch. 133, Peking, 1960, II, 1349.

carried for the most part by allusion; it scarcely emerges into the surface meaning of the sentences.

There exists at least one rather slight piece of evidence that Li Ch'i had dabbled in practices associated with eremitism:¹ a poem, frivolous in tone, addressed to him by Wang Wei (701-61), which begins:

I hear, sir, you've been nibbling cinnabar powder;
 You've certainly gotten a fine colour!
 I suppose any day now
 You'll be sprouting wings!

Cinnabar, or crystalline mercuric sulphide, from which elixirs of longevity were concocted, gave its vermilion colour to the eater's face, according to the alchemist Ko Hung.² The aerial flight of the adept-turned-immortal was, of course, the ultimate extension of the hermit's flight from the world. One must recall that, for the Chinese, retiring from the world was a matter of degrees along a scale or several scales. There was always a further degree in the background, an 'India beyond India', just as in Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' the valley of the Wye impresses 'Thoughts of more deep seclusion', the smoke of cottage chimneys suggests 'vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods' or the 'hermit's cave, where by his fire / The hermit sits alone'.³ At the near end of the scale was the comfortably jobless gentleman pursuing some sort of self-cultivation in his garden or villa. Much farther out were the Taoist alchemist — adept and ultimately the 'mountain man' or *hsien* who had transmuted his body, thus achieving longevity and powers of flight. On another scale — Confucian, rather than Taoist — were hermits who took to the wilderness not because of its attractions for them but because of some grievance against society, and who in their extreme form sought not longevity but death: culminating this scale were Po-i and Shu-ch'i, who 'would not eat the grain of Chou' and, protesting the founding of the Chou kingdom (? 1111 B.C.), ate ferns

¹ Wang Wei, 'Tseng Li Ch'i', *Hsu-hsi Hsien-sheng Chiao Pen T'ang Wang Yu-ch'eng Chi*, SPTK, ch. 3, pp. 3a-b.

² Ko Hung (284-363), *Pao-p'u-tzu Nei-wai-p'ien*, SPTK, *Nei-p'ien*, ch. 4, 'Chin Tan' ('Gold and Cinnabar'), p. 13a.

³ William Wordsworth, 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798', *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest de Selincourt, Oxford, 1969, pp. 163-5.

upon the slope of Mt Shou-yang until they starved.¹ In poetry the various scales and degrees of eremitism often get mixed up; but there is a tendency to describe, or to express a wish for, some more extreme kind of eremitism than that which, we feel, the poet or his persona 'really' wants.

Li Ch'i's poem reads:

Our host has wine to cheer the evening,
 He bids the Kuang-ling visitor to pluck and sound the lute.
 Moonlight atop the city wall, crows half-flying.
 Frost grips a myriad trees, wind pierces my coat.
 Bronze braziers, colored candles, brightening each other —
 At first he strums the 'Clear Stream', then the 'Concubine
 of Ch'u'.

The first note in motion, all things fall still.
 On four sides, all speechless till the stars grow few.
 Sent a thousand miles and more to a post on the Ch'ing and
 Huai

I presume to declare: mists, mountains, from this begin!

Notable in this, as in many poems, is a particular sort of departure from the norms of written (or memorized) discourse. Written discourse, with a few exceptions (as in labels), exemplifies what the linguist Leonard Bloomfield called 'displaced speech',² that is, speech exchanged at a remove from the objects of reference, if any. In displaced speech one must ordinarily specify any objects of reference, or of fictional quasi-reference, more carefully than if the objects were physically present, or otherwise known as familiar to particular interlocutors. For example, one must often use a noun or proper name where, in undisplaced speech, a pronoun would serve; and one must explain contexts which would be obvious in undisplaced speech. In 'Lute Song', however, the speaker is made to feign the manner of undisplaced speech, as if addressing not a displaced reader but rather his own friends or himself. The result is a sense of physical immediacy, of intimacy, and, to a degree, of natural speech, despite the use of rhymed verse and of literary language. But in consequence the narration and description appear fragmentary by the usual written-language standards. The place,

¹ Ssu-ma Ch'ien, *Shih-chi*, ch. 61, p. 8a.

² Leonard Bloomfield, *Language*, New York, 1933, p. 141.

time, and *dramatis personae* remain vague. A Chinese storyteller, paraphrasing the poem, would have named the town, the month, the year, and he would have identified the speaker, the host, and the 'Kuang-ling visitor'. The poem exhibits what Jean Cohen describes as *contextual or situational ellipsis*,¹ gaps not of syntax, but in the continuity of representation.

Modern criticism, reacting against Victorian vagueness, has stressed the 'hard' qualities of poetry, its clarity, incisiveness, and structural design; less attention has been paid to these 'soft', mysterious, *sfumato* effects, which can nevertheless play an important part in the economy of poetry. Effects of vagueness doubtless characterize some sorts of poetry more than others. I suspect them to be neither especially primitive nor especially sophisticated, but typical, rather, of poetry, such as Chinese lyric poetry, where the main underlying tradition isn't epic or dramatic or forensic, but instead that of the song or ballad, with its characteristic reduction of action and description to a few high points and suggestive details, leaving out connections and context. In a ballad, the words themselves are usually graphic, not vague; vagueness enters through our sense of what has been left out, what happens between the stanzas. Vagueness in poetry can serve several artistic purposes. The indeterminate areas of a poetic narrative, as of a painting, being interpretable in various ways, make the total effect less mechanical than it would be if derived wholly from prominent compositional elements; free zones, which Gombrich calls 'screens',² are left for the reader's imaginative elaboration, and thus for participation in the aesthetic experience by one's faculty of projection, as when one pictures for oneself the characters and scenes of a story — not quite the same, Gombrich points out, as the kind of knowledgeable inference, although this too is a form of participation, which allows us to make sense of a partly hidden figure in a painting (or, we might add, allusions in poetry).³ A vague feature often encountered in Chinese and other poems is that which Hans H. Frankel has called 'open-endedness', that is, indeterminacy of the beginning and

¹ Jean Cohen, *Structure du Langage Poétique*, Paris, 1966, pp. 155-6.

² E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, 2nd ed., Bollinger Ser., xxxv, 5, Princeton, N.J., 1961, p. 208.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

ending of an action, of which only some intermediate portion is represented.¹ 'Lute Song' is open-ended in this sense.

Contextual vagueness, the absence of localizing background, can also impart a sense of typicality, even universality, to the particulars of a representation. The particulars become what W. K. Wimsatt, Jr, has called 'concrete universals',² thus helping the poem to do what good poems often do, that is, suggest a general truth through particular details. 'Curious power of a device fashioned of mere omissions,' says Jean Cohen; 'it possesses the gift of turning existence to essence and relative to absolute.'³ From its vague ambience the concrete universal obtrudes itself as a symbol, for instance the penetrating wind in Li Ch'i's poem, or as an omen, such as the crows, and it enters readily into symbolic contrasts of the kind which Harold G. Henderson, discussing haiku, has called 'internal comparison';⁴ for example, Li Ch'i's contrast of the cold, black-and-white, inimical outdoors to the warm, colourful, friendly indoors. The symbolic value of these details far outweighs any possible verisimilitude. In poetry, vagueness and symbolism are interdependent. The contrasting contextual vagueness accentuates the represented object, lets it be a symbol. But any symbol reverberates incalculably. It exerts its power of suggestion over the way we project our fantasies on the vague areas, which now serve as 'screens'. Arthur Symons meant something like this when he said that in symbolist writings 'Description is banished that beautiful things may be evoked, magically'.⁵

But it is not only representational elements which poetic vagueness throws into relief. The poet can make vague, that is,

¹ Personal communications. Also Frankel, 'Time and Self in Chinese Poetry' (unpublished paper read at meeting of Assoc. of Asian Studies, Chicago, 28 March 1961). Compare Frankel, 'Fifteen Poems by Ts'ao Chih: An Attempt at a New Approach', *JAOS*, LXXXIV (1964), 3, discussion of 'Men Yu Wan-li K'o' by Ta'ao Chih (192-232), *Ts'ao Tzu-chien Chi*, *SPTK*, ch. 6, pp. 111-12a: 'The warm human encounter lasts only a moment, but this moment is presented as a segment of a continuing process. The brief meeting is seen as a stage in a long journey. Thus the lyric moment is linked to the eternal flow of time. It is, to borrow a line from Robert Browning, "the instant made eternity".'

² W. K. Wimsatt, Jr, *The Verbal Icon*, New York, 1962, 'The Concrete Universal', pp. 69-83.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 161.

⁴ Henderson, *An Introduction to Haiku*, New York, 1958, p. 18.

⁵ Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, revised ed., New York, 1919 [1958], p. 5.

partially suppress, any normal form of order and continuity — grammar, logic, representation — and he can thereby thrust to the fore, or, to use the structuralist term, he can ‘foreground’¹ any form of *poetic* organization which pleases him: rhyme and metre, as well as more complex forms of parallelism and contrast, including parallelism and contrast of allusions.

It is my contention that Li Ch’i, in his ‘Lute Song’, has foregrounded a set of three parallel textual allusions; that this set of allusions is a main structural member of the poem; that the allusions have greater coherence, in more than one sense, than the poem taken simply as a narrative-descriptive representation, that is, the way a reader ignorant of the allusions might take it — thus foredooming any approach to the poem via an ‘innocent eye’ theory of poetry; but that the allusions, if understood, serve somewhat, in linguistic jargon, to ‘disambiguate’ the representation, and also will clarify the point of view of the poem.

In my translation, I have indicated a point of view, and specifically the ‘narrator’ or fictitious speaker of the poem, the poet’s persona, by the pronouns *our* in the first line and *I* in the last. Neither pronoun appears in the Chinese, since the poet gives no modifier of ‘host’ in the first line, while in the last he exercises the Chinese privilege of omitting a grammatical subject. That is, no ‘I’ appears before ‘presume’ and ‘declare’; whether ‘mists’ and ‘mountains’ are subjects of what follows, objects of what precedes, or both, is unclear — a grammatical vagueness typical of T’ang poetry. Vagueness about pronouns occurs widely in

¹ ‘Foregrounding’ is Paul L. Garvin’s translation of the Czech term *aktualisace*: see Garvin, *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style*, Washington, D.C., 1964, p. viii; also Josef Vachek, *The Linguistic School of Prague*, pp. 99–100. The Russian formalist notion of the ‘laying bare of the device’ (*obnaženie priěma*), due originally to Roman Jakobson, represents a more primitive stage in the same formalist-structuralist tradition: Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History – Doctrine*, revised ed., The Hague, 1965, p. 77, note 44, *et passim*. Opposite to ‘foregrounding’ is the ‘automatization’ of language, its use in inconspicuous, habitual ways, so as not to distract from the practical purpose, whether giving instructions, information, exhortation, etc. Conversational and, above all, scholarly language tend to automatization. ‘By foregrounding, on the other hand, we mean the use of the devices of language in such a way that this use itself attracts attention and is perceived as uncommon, as deprived of automatization, as deautomatized, such as a live poetic metaphor (as opposed to a lexicalized one, which is automatized)’: thus Bohuslav Havranek, ‘The Functional Differentiation of the Standard Language’, in Garvin, *op. cit.*, p. 10. And ‘The function of poetic language consists in the maximum foregrounding of the utterance’; thus Jan Mukařovský, ‘Standard Language and Poetic Language’, *ibid.*, p. 19.

poetry; this is the feature which Lewis Carroll parodied in the lines which begin:

They told me you had been to her
And mentioned me to him . . .¹

In particular, the character which *I* denotes in poetry may be kept unclear, that the reader may more readily project himself into the part (so observes Etienne Souriau);² in this it resembles the tiny, nearly featureless surrogate spectator, the fisherman or retired scholar, in Chinese landscape paintings. The Chinese merely go a step further when — as is possible in Chinese — they omit the pronoun altogether. James J. Y. Liu rightly says that 'Such omissions of the subject allows [*sic*] the poet not to intrude his own personality upon the scene, for the missing subject can be readily identified with anyone, whether the reader or some imaginary person'.³ The 'I' which, constrained by the English requirement of grammatical subjects, I have introduced into the last line, represents the speaker according to my interpretation. Another interpretation is grammatically possible. I could have said not 'I' but 'he', referring to the 'Kuang-ling visitor', and making that person, the hypnotic musician of the poem, also its speaker. This is the interpretation embodied in an earlier translation of the poem, the one by Witter Bynner in *The Jade Mountain*.⁴ I believe Bynner's interpretation is wrong, and I think the first allusion in the poem shows it is wrong. Every translation is a kind of experiment performed on poetry. Bynner's book, in print more than forty years and widely used in colleges, represents a particularly interesting, because particularly consistent, experiment. Bynner did not know Chinese. He translated with loving care, aided by an interpreter who, while not in all respects inadequate, nevertheless failed to impress upon his collaborator the significance of allusions. In Bynner's experiment, the allusions are regularly screened out. As his 'Introduction' shows, this was

¹ Verses read by the White Rabbit: Lewis Carroll [Charles Lutwidge Dodgson], *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, ch. xii, *The Annotated Alice*, ed. Martin Gardner, New York, 1960, p. 158.

² Quoted in Jean Cohen, *Structure du Langage Poétique*, p. 158.

³ James J. Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, Chicago, 1962, p. 41.

⁴ *The Jade Mountain: A Chinese Anthology, Being Three Hundred Poems of the T'ang Dynasty, 618-906*, trans. Witter Bynner from the texts of Kiang Kang-hu, New York, 1929, p. 48.

done consciously.¹ What Bynner did not sufficiently appreciate was the importance of those cases where the meaning not only gains from, but turns upon, an allusion; some of his more conspicuous errors involve these cases.

The first allusion, in the group of three which I shall discuss, attaches to the expression which I translate, perhaps disingenuously, as 'Kuang-ling visitor' (line 2). The innocent reader, either of the Chinese text or of my translation, will at first take the expression to mean a guest from Kuang-ling. *Kuang-ling* ('Broad Mound') is an old place-name. Bynner gives us 'guest from Yang-chou', and Yang-chou had indeed been called Kuang-ling after 742, probably late in Li Ch'i's lifetime. We shall miss the basic meaning of the expression, however, unless we realize that there had been an air for the lute called 'Kuang-ling Melody' ('Kuang-ling-san'), a piece with lofty literary associations. Like the 'Clear Stream' and '[Royal] Concubine of Ch'u' named in line 6, the 'Kuang-ling Melody' is mentioned in the greatest of works on the lute, the 'Rhymeprose on the Lute' ('Ch'in-fu') by Hsi-K'ang (223-62), an important poet and a leading spirit among that most celebrated group of aristocratic, Taoist, anti-ritualistic, and generally unconventional free spirits, the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. R. H. van Gulik declares that 'Next to being the author of the *Ch'in-fu*, Hsi K'ang's fame as a lute player rests on his connection with a melody of legendary fame, the *Kuang-ling-san*'.² The official biography of Hsi K'ang (*Chin-shu*, ch. 49), a very late (seventh century) but familiar source, preserves a story about the origin of this piece:

In his early days K'ang once roamed west of Loyang. At dusk he stopped for the night at the Hua-yang Pavilion, and began playing his lute. In the middle of the night there was suddenly present a visitor who addressed himself to K'ang, identifying himself as 'a person of ancient times'. Conversing with K'ang on the rules of music, his words evinced the clearest discernment. Drawing the lute to himself, he played the 'Kuang-ling Melody'. The music was altogether extraordinary. Having taught the piece to K'ang, he exacted an oath that it would pass no further; nor would he tell his name and surname.³

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. xviii-xix.

² R. H. van Gulik, *Hsi K'ang and His Poetical Essay on the Lute*, Monumenta Nipponica monograph, Tokyo, 1941, p. 31.

³ *Chin-shu*, ch. 49, p. 9a.

In the same source (and earlier in *Shih-shuo Hsin-yu*) we find another relevant story:

When Hsi K'ang was soon to be punished (i.e. executed) in the East Market, his spirit remained unperturbed. Drawing the lute close and fingering it, he played the 'Kuang-ling Melody'. When the piece was finished, he said 'Yuan Chun once asked to learn this melody, but I firmly refused to give it to him. Now the "Kuang-ling Melody" has perished'.¹

The latter story has made the 'Kuang-ling Melody' a symbol of vanished glory too fine for our day and for the touch of ordinary mortals. The story shows a poetic delicacy. Not only does Hsi K'ang, as one of his final gestures, draw the lute to himself, exemplifying his intimate and proverbial association with the lute; but in the last sentence we can hardly help observing that it is Hsi K'ang, as well as the melody, whose doom is sealed. Hsi K'ang virtually uses the 'Kuang-ling Melody' as a metaphor for himself. In the finality of the particle *i*, corresponding to modern *-le*, he suggests his own acceptance of the end now all but accomplished. Longevity — the finite-minded Chinese counterpart of immortality — eluded Hsi K'ang's pursuit of it, for he died, the victim of political intrigues, at the age of thirty-nine (A.D. 262).

But it is the former story to which, I think, Li Ch'i more particularly alludes. The key is the word 'visitor' (*ke'o*). The occasion which Li Ch'i's poem represents, in which several people take part and in which (against the strictest provisions for lute-gatherings) wine is drunk, is certainly not the occasion meant in the story from Hsi K'ang's biography, although that too represents a night scene; that is why I suppose that Li Ch'i means us to take his poem as autobiographical, not as being in its entirety an allusion to the earlier event. But should the 'Kuang-ling Melody' ever reappear in the world, it would no doubt come to us once again in the intimacy of the night and from the fingers of a nameless otherworldly visitor, Hsi K'ang's own spirit or that of his teacher. It would be preposterously bad-mannered for Li Ch'i to depict himself as such a spirit; that is why we cannot identify the 'Kuang-ling visitor' with the speaker of the poem. But there is in the depiction some unnamed lutanist to whom poet and host wish to accord this profound flattery.

¹ Loc. cit.; also *Shih-shuo Hsin-yu*, SPTK, ch. Ba, pp. 24a-b.

The 'Clear Stream' and 'Concubine of Ch'u' like the 'Kuang-ling Melody' are mentioned in Hsi K'ang's 'Rhymeprose on the Lute', and it is the first of these — the first piece represented as *played* at Li Ch'i's gathering — which I propose to take as the second instance of allusion in my group, an allusion this time to the great 'Rhymeprose' itself. For Hsi K'ang, in the relevant passage of the 'Rhymeprose', like Li Ch'i speaks of lute-playing on a winter night, and names the 'Clear Stream' as the first melody which ought to be played. I translate the passage as follows: Now suppose a high gallery or soaring tower or a wide, spacious, quiet room, when the winter night is awesomely clear and the bright moon sheds its glitter, when new clothes rustle and tasselled waistbands drift perfume; then the instrument will be cold, its strings attuned, the heart at ease, and the hand clever, the touch will follow the will, responding as your thought determines. Now first you will ford the 'Clear Stream' . . .¹

The third allusion occurs in, and explains, the last line. (Since the line needs explaining in this way, the allusion, unlike the first two in the group, is unassimilated.) The allusion is made in the three small words *ts'ung tz'u shih*, 'from this begin'. It may seem strange that a cluster of words so commonplace in meaning should comprise an allusion, and commentators have ignored them. But the words in their setting do need explaining. The concordances suggest no possible source other than the one which I shall name (the use of *ts'ung* rather than *tz'u* meaning 'from' argues for a post-classical origin). The source-identification, as I shall show, receives strong support from features of meaning and of what phonologists call 'pattern congruity'.

Before naming the source-passage, I should like to point out that another allusion to it, under comparable circumstances, seems to occur in the work of Li Ch'i's contemporary Tu Fu. Tu Fu's poem ('Feng-hsien Liu Shao-fu Hsin-hua Shan-shui Chang Ko')² almost certainly post-dates Li's. Whereas Li's poem concerns music, Tu Fu's concerns painting; it describes a gate-screen at Feng-hsien with landscapes newly executed by a certain Liu of the imperial ateliers (*shao-fu*). The poem, not one of Tu Fu's great works, is a rambling, friendly tribute to Liu and to

¹ *Hsi Ching-san Chi*, SPTK, ch. 2, p. 3a.

² *Tu Shao-ling Chi Hsiang-chu*, ed. Ch'in Chao-ao (1638-1717), ch. 4, Peking, 1955, *ts'e* 3, pp. 12-14.

Liu's sons, also painters. The younger son has painted a mountain-dwelling Buddhist priest attended by a servant lad. The poet is put in mind of a mountain stream and temple in Chekiang which he must have visited in his youthful wanderings. He regrets his worldly life, and concludes 'Plain shoes and cloth stockings from this begin'. He will, as we might say, take up staff and scrip. As in Li Ch'i's poem, the words 'from this begin' terminate the poem. This positional congruence, together with the congruence of theme, encourages me to feel that the recurrences of 'from this begin' are not coincidental; I am curious to know whether the tradition will yield further instances.

Now for the sources. It is, I suggest, a poem universally familiar to T'ang poets from the *Wen-hsuan* anthology: the third of the 82 'Songs of Care' ('Yung Huai') by Juan Chi (210-63), known as a bibulous, eccentric poet-musician, and as the other leading spirit, besides Hsi K'ang, of the Seven Sages:

Beneath good trees, paths come together.
In the east garden are peach and plum.
Autumn winds drive the flying bean-leaves;
Our scattering, our fall, from this begin.

Clustered flowers, even, must burn or languish.
In the high hall grow bramble and thorn.
I'll lash my horse and I'll be gone,
I'll go and climb the Western Mountain.

Since I cannot keep my single body
How can I cherish wife and child?
— A hard frost mantles the grasses of the wild,
The year reaches evening; all is said and done.¹

The eremitic tendency of this poem in its turn is 'disambiguated' by allusion ('Western Mountain') to the archaic verses ascribed in *Shih-chi* to the martyr-hermits whom I have mentioned, Po-i and Shu-ch'i:

Climb that Western Mountain, *hsi!*
Pick its ferns, *i.*
A tyrant traded for a tyrant, *hsi!*
Not knowing the evil of it, *i.*
Shen-nung, Yu [-shun] and Hsia [-yu] are forgotten. If they
are passed away, *hsi,*

¹ *Lu-ch'ien-chu Wen-hsuan*, SPTK, ch. 23, p. 2b.

Where shall we betake ourselves, *i?*
 We are going, alas, we depart, *hsi*,
 Our destiny is decayed, *i*.¹

Let me return to Juan Chi's poem. Not the poem but rather its first quatrain ends, as Li Ch'i's and Tu Fu's poems end, with 'from this begin'. Juan Chi's poem is more sybolic, and even less verisimilar than Li Ch'i's. The time-scale is not that of an evening but of a whole season from the ripening of fruit at harvest-time to (as in Li Ch'i) late autumn or winter. But Juan Chi's first quatrain resembles the Li Ch'i poem in more than one way. In Li Ch'i's poem there is a gathering of guests, the sharing of an experience, followed by implied dispersal, with the speaker's thought turning to journeys in connection with official duty, and also to some apparently alternative journey among mists and mountains. In Juan Chi's quatrain we find a similar dual movement, first gathering, then scattering. In the quatrain there is a coming together of paths, and by inference of people, when the fruit-trees ripen (I shall not trouble the reader with the allusion which may occur here and reinforce this sense); then, as the season turns, there is a scattering of leaves which imparts to the observer a sense of loss, an impulse to be gone. In Juan Chi's poem the second quatrain projects the seasonal scale on to that of the civilization, the dynasty, which also seems to be decaying; a justification to be off, with the flying leaves, to one's own 'Western Mountain'. In Li Ch'i's poem as in Juan Chi's, and in Tu Fu's as well, there occurs an aesthetic experience — for Li Ch'i of music, for Tu Fu of painting, for Juan Chi of nature — which imparts a religious impulse. And in Li Ch'i and Juan Chi there is a sense of a beginning which comes out of an ending, the ending of a night, a season, a kingdom.

We have, then, three allusions, each of which adds something to Li Ch'i's poem not only by itself but in concert with the other allusions. These are *convergent* allusions. They join in calling to mind a particular time, almost five centuries earlier than Li Ch'i, and a particular milieu, that of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, led by Hsi K'ang and Juan Chi. The analogy of the Seven Sages suggests that Li Ch'i's friends, too, commune

¹ *Shih-chi*, ch. 61, p. 8a.

closely with each other and with nature, that they share an unworldly persuasion, that for them music is not just music but a mysteriously enduring and beneficent force which springs from and influences the harmony of heaven and earth. What matters are nature, the individual, relations of individuals based on spontaneous (natural) feelings; not the fixed forms of society.

The poem, read in the light of its allusions, suggests the following interpretation:

The speaker seems to have passed by or through a wintry wood and a city wall. Perhaps he is a wanderer or traveller like the semi-migratory crows which winter at this latitude. All is penetrating cold and clashing black-and-white: frost in the trees, crows in the moonlight, moonlight touching just the *top* of the wall. The crows half-fly (or half of them fly) because it is the transitional hour of dusk and they are desultorily settling to roost, or because the traveller has disturbed them. There is thus a sense of instability and unease. This may extend to a doubt about the crows as omens — usually they are bad omens, but *unexpected* behaviour from crows can augur well, and the reader might remember a story from the *Tso-chuan* in which 'crows atop the city wall' had evidenced the abandonment of a city by the enemy force defending it.¹ Another unsettling effect is the presentation of the scene as a flashback.

¹ In the winter of 554 B.C. the forces of Chin, with those of Lu and other allies, invaded Ch'i and inflicted an initial defeat on that state. The Duke of Ch'i climbed a mountain to view the attacking armies. The latter raised flags in strategic spots for which they could spare no troops, placed dummies in some of their chariots, and dragged branches to raise dust, so as to create the appearance of a greater force than they in fact possessed. Frightened, the Duke of Ch'i struck his standards and fled in the night, abandoning the city of P'ing-yin. It was announced to the Marquis of Chin that 'there are crows on the city wall. The army of Ch'i must have retreated!' See *Tso-chuan Chu-shu, Ssu-pu Pei-yao*, ed., ch. 33, p. 7. Presumably the cautious crows would have avoided the walls when these were defended, but there is more to the omen, since we are told (*loc. cit.*) that the sound of the crows was *joyful*. The motif of the crows which reveal the flight of a superior force in consequence of a ruse — with poetic justice, the crow himself being proverbially *rusé* — may have been current in folklore, since we find it elsewhere too in the *Tso-chuan*, under the year 665 B.C.: ch. 10, p. 8. Other tales of crows as birds of good omen show some thematic continuity with the *Tso-chuan* story cited first above; crows singing *pleasantly* at night, or at dawn, on the roof of a prisoner's house, foretell his imminent pardon — see the poem 'Wu Yeh T'i Yin' by the T'ang poet Chang Chi (c. 765-c. 830), and the preface to it, in *Yueh-fu Shib-chi*, *SPTK*, ch. 60, pp. 1b-2a (it is not generally realized that some crows sing as well as croak; I do not know whether this is true of Chinese crows). The more usual tradition of crows as bad omens, and as emblematic of winter, goes back to *Odes* 41 and 192; see the comments of Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes*, Stockholm, 1950, p. 27, 136.

The next part of the representation (but the first in its unfolding: lines 1-2) introduces a sharply contrasting scene of good cheer, in which the speaker seems to have stopped as a guest at a musical gathering. Whereas the host offers the physical comfort of wine, another guest, likened to Hsi K'ang or Hsi K'ang's mysterious visitor, brings the gift of rare and unearthly music. In lines 5-6 the warmth, brightness, and colour of the interior scene contrast sharply to the cold, half-lit *grisaille* outside. The musician begins to play pieces associated with Hsi K'ang and the Seven Sages; the first-named piece, also played first by Hsi K'ang according to his 'Rhymeprose on the Lute', takes us back to a passage in that work describing lute-playing on a similar night and stressing the perfect establishment of mood necessary to the success of such music.

At this point I shall go back and point out a feature of the poem which repeats and develops. The poem names or suggests many situations of cause and effect. Frost freezes the trees, wind enters the traveller's coat to chill him, he perhaps alarms the crows (and — as omens — they him), wine cheers. We will overinterpret if we insist that the effect of crows and man upon each other is a part of what the poem definitely signifies; yet as part of an aesthetic experience of the poem this might be an allowable free inference. I mention it only because this would be a case of *reciprocal* causation. In line 2 the lutanist does not simply play the lute; he plucks it, the lute sounds, answers, so to speak — again, a hint of reciprocity. Then in line 5 we have a very strong reciprocity of cause and effect. As I understand the line, each *brazier and candle glows in the light of the others*, multiplying the brilliance — clearly symbolizing the warm rapport among host and guests. (The 'Clear Stream' allusion, concerning the establishing of a mood, reinforces this.)

Lines 7 and 8 bring a further development in this direction. We must remember that lute music is chiefly solo music; of those present perhaps only the 'Kuang-ling visitor' performs. On the analogy of line 5, with its image of reciprocity, we might expect that the music would effect an answering music in the listeners' souls. But what happens is something less and perhaps more than this. The response to the music is a *silence* beyond words, beyond music. Measured music produces a *suspension*

of time-sense. The dawn steals upon the listeners unawares; the music, perhaps, reaches a final pianissimo with the fading stars.

In a poem about music it is interesting that the experience of silence should assume such prominence. Moreover the syllable which I translate 'fall still' (*ching*), alone among line-terminating syllables in the poem, stands outside the rhyme-scheme; all the other lines, and the poem is unusual in this respect, are rhyming lines. Thus the word 'still' itself momentarily stills the flow of rhymes — a good example of rhyme (or its lack) abetting the sense. The silence itself involves a reciprocity. The music causes all things to fall still; it charms them to silence or at least it seizes the attention, rendering all else inaudible (line 7). Reciprocal to this (line 8) is a *cessation of speech*, ordinary (or even philosophical) chatter about ordinary things.

What has been produced is a state of abnormally lucid calm and rapport in which repressed insight or self-awareness rises to consciousness. The silence need not be its own end. What matters is the self-discovery permitted when the jangling of the world gives way to something more harmonious, and this self-discovery finds expression, I believe, in the last distich. The speaker of the poem achieves a new consciousness of the journey, literal or figurative, upon which he has embarked. There is an official career, which always for the mandarin involves many changes of post, many journeys; there is or has been a call to a post in the region of the Ch'ing and Huai (or of the 'clear Huai'). But in the final line the speaker has decided, at least momentarily, either to *imagine* that his journey (career) has a different sense, or to turn it in fact in a different direction, not toward a sub-prefectural yamen but toward the mists and mountains, the death-place of martyrs and the dwelling-place of hermits and supernatural beings. This is not, I repeat, to say that Li Ch'i as a person had undergone a conversion experience, any more than Tu Fu had seriously resolved to become a Buddhist. What happened to Li Ch'i we cannot know. But we *can* know that, through allusion to Juan Chi's poem — which, in turn, alludes to Po-i and Shu-ch'i — there enters the last line a definite notion of rejecting a decaying society and taking to the wilderness. It is not simply a matter of continuing one's business journey, as Bynner suggests. Through a strongly linked set of allusions, Li Ch'i evokes the

mocking disdain for convention, the longings for a purer life-style, expressed by the Seven Sages. And behind those aristocratic pseudo-hermits, far off in the direction of substantial sage-hood, we descry the purer types of Hsi K'ang's mysterious visitor, and of Po-i and Shu-ch'i.

The result is not unambiguous; we still feel some of the uncertainty with which the poem opens. On the one hand the speaker declares that for him a life of mists and mountains is to begin. On the other hand he makes his announcement, curiously, in the archaic bit of officialese with which an inferior concludes an announcement to a superior: 'I presume to declare' (*kan kao*). Yet there is, I think, a further significance to this 'declaration'. Line 8 tells us particularly that the group is speechless. Yet just as the flying leaves sweep Juan Chi into thoughts of decline and departure, just as the young painter's picture of a hermit is reflected in a graphic (imagining) by Tu Fu of the poet himself wearing rustic shoes and stockings and resolved to abandon the world, so also the lute music in Li Ch'i's poem at last echoes in a voice breaking the stillness: the speaker's *declaration* of intent. In this connection, it is interesting that, according to van Gulik, a surviving piece of early lute music purporting to be the lost 'Kuang-ling Melody' indicates by the titles of its sections that its motif is the 'magic journey' of the hermit-immortal — the *ultimate, airborne flight from society*.¹ On balance, it would seem that the speaker has resolved to leave the world; a meaning which, however, is carried not by the poem's surface sense, but almost entirely by allusion.

A final note on Li Ch'i's 'Lute Song'. If we want to understand a poem fully, we must of course study 'the poem itself', but also the poem as situated in a larger tradition which in a sense is a larger work of art. And that tradition has not only its 'vertical' dimension through time, linked among other ways by textual allusion; it has also a 'horizontal' dimension, embracing, for example, the author's contrasting works. Several of Li Ch'i's best-known poems concern the barbarous, warlike northern frontier, and the music, so popular in T'ang times, of that frontier: for instance, his poem 'Ku I', which mentions both the

¹ R. A. van Gulik, *Hsi K'ang and His Poetical Essay on the Lute*, 1961, p. 31.

three-holed Tibetan flute, and the p'i-p'a which, unlike the ch'in of 'Lute Song', is a true lute derived from western Asia.¹ 'Lute Song', which concerns the most conservative and characteristically Chinese of instruments, customarily forbidden to barbarian ears, and which depicts a journey, not across the border, but into the heart of the Central Plain, and likewise, through allusion, into the heart of a peaceable, unworldly tradition, must in a larger view be seen as contrasting with these other poems.

Li Ch'i's 'Lute Song' illustrates the great artfulness achieved in China by a kind of poetry nevertheless essentially occasional; 'Lute Song' might well have been improvised and chanted on the occasion which it describes. In such poetry, nearly an oral poetry, allusions might have provided a kind of ready-made filler material functionally similar to Homeric formulae but for their lacking the convenient fixity of such formulae. That allusions nonetheless play the part they do in 'spontaneous' and emotionally vivid lyrics testifies, of course, to the liveliness of the learned tradition which produced them.

If allusions themselves need not be pedantic, their explanations will certainly be, so long as they present a mere scattering of exotic information. I hope therefore that this essay will have done something more; that it will have conveyed, besides an assortment of explanations, some sense of the patterning and power of allusion as an aesthetic device.

Reuben A. Brower has said that 'for Dryden and for Pope allusion . . . is a resource equivalent to symbolic metaphor and elaborate imagery in other poets'.² Evidently allusions, like metaphors, are a kind of parallelism or analogy. The reader of this essay may have been struck not only by the presence of allusion in Chinese literature, but by the absence of metaphor in the usual sense; perhaps the only ordinary metaphor we have seen in these pages is Hsi K'ang's application of the verb 'to ford' to the playing of a piece of music, when he says 'Now first you will ford the "Clear Stream"'. The question thus arises whether, in Chinese poetry (at any rate before the Sung dynasty, 960-1276), the use of allusion does not somehow replace the use of metaphor

¹ *Ch'uan T'ang Shih*, ch. 133, II, p. 1355.

² *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion*, Oxford, 1959, p. viii.

as normally conceived, much as Brower suggests that it does in Dryden and Pope.

T'ang poetry does not lack resources of parallelism or analogy. Such, for example, are rhyme, and the succession of lines equal in length and often, as in the Psalms, alike in syntax, and alike or antithetic in sense; such also is Henderson's 'internal comparison' between elements in a scene or situation, irrespective of line or couplet structure (as the indoor-outdoor comparison in 'Lute Song'). But these and other species of parallelism resemble each other, and differ from allusion and metaphor, in that all, and not only the last-named, are somehow 'internal' bonds linking sequent points, each of which manifests itself in turn within a continuous discourse. Language unfolds in a linear manner. Words, spoken or written, follow each other; they do not occur simultaneously, except abnormally, in puns; the relations of sequent words are *syntagmatic* — this term may be used to cover not only syntactic and other grammatical relations, within the word and sentence, but also the 'internal' stylistic parallelisms named; verse lineation and so on. Allusion, and metaphor, are not syntagmatic. While syntagmatic parallelisms link sequent instants in the discourse, an allusion or metaphor occupies only a single instant in the poem, which it links to something else, something in a sense 'outside' the immediate discourse or narrative or depicted scene. This distinct form of linkage serves a purpose other than the internal organization of a stanza, a story, a tableau; it draws an *external* analogy, and thereby foreshadows a generalization covering the internal and the external case. As the internal forms of parallelism amplify the syntagmatic dimension of language, so allusion and metaphor amplify another dimension, known since the time of the pioneer structural linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, as the associative,¹ and more recently as the paradigmatic (or, to Roman Jakobson, as the metaphoric)² dimension. In the syntagmatic dimension — that is,

¹ *Cours de Linguistique Generale*, 4th ed., Paris, 1949, p. 171: 'Le rapport syntagmatique est *in praesentia*: il repose sur deux ou plusieurs termes également présents dans une série effective. Au contraire le rapport associatif unit des termes *in absentia* dans une série mnémonique virtuelle.'

² 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', in Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, 'S-Gravenhage, 1956, pp. 55-82.

along the 'line' of discourse — words *combine* to form sentences, couplets, poems; in the associative or paradigmatic dimension, they are *selected*, prior to combination, from various sets. A single word may be thought of as selected at once from several sets, large and small — from groups of words with certain grammatic and sonic properties, words of common or related meaning, and sharing certain connotations. A selected word carries with it the associations of the sets to which it belongs — it is a noun or verb, general or specific, technical (musical, nautical, etc.) or not, 'poetic', obscene, pejorative, academic, or not. A metaphor (which Aristotle called 'changed words')¹ is, in literal terms, a 'wrong' selection; an original metaphor draws upon an unexpected set and makes unexpected associations. It thus throws the set-associations of the vehicle-word into juxtaposition with those of the tenor, creating (and nowhere can we see more clearly the *creativity* of the poet) a novel, a more embracing association. In the same way, a textual allusion is a 'wrong' or novel selection, although its novelty lies, paradoxically, in its familiarity, as Freud saw. From discourse we ordinarily expect literalness, and new information; we expect the poet to introduce 'lute-player X'. When, instead, Li Ch'i introduces the 'Kuang-ling visitor', he speaks figuratively, and at the same time withholds new information in favour of a familiar form of words, which we know from the biography of Hsi K'ang; and by this substitute selection, he creates an analogy between the unnamed X, with his milieu, and Hsi K'ang, with his.

Thus allusion so resembles metaphor in its workings that we may identify them, as Weldon Thornton does in his encyclopedic *Allusions in Ulysses*.² But there is a difference. Allusion is more concrete than simple metaphor, as its stuff is not meaning but specific reference. 'Kuang-ling visitor' conveys not a generic meaning, but a reference to an individual, conjuring up all we know of him and his world, that of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. This explains an observation of Thornton, that

Allusion is distinguished from other varieties of metaphor or analogy by the greater complexity and potential its context necessarily brings

¹ *Poetics*, XXI, 7; Loeb, ed., trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe, 1927, p. 81: 'a strange term.'

² Weldon Thornton, *Allusions in Ulysses*, Chapel Hill, 1961, 1968, p. 3.

with it; it is a metaphor with an almost inexhaustible number of points of comparison.¹

Thus despite their neglect of ordinary metaphor, we cannot accuse Chinese poets of having failed to exploit the powers of verse to augment the paradigmatic range of language. Of course, Li Ch'i's 'Lute Song' does more, since it repeats and reinforces the selective device of allusion in a threefold, syntagmatic combination.

¹ *Ibid.*

Oxford Street. Winter

Snappily striding, cutting short capers,
Thousands of girly-longlegs pass below the eye-line,
Trimming time and the pavements away,
Weaving in to occupy the century.

But where do they go to in this winter-time?
To market for beauty preparation, sir;
To bed-squatter rooms, sir; to awkward parents;
To seek new possessions, sit at old desks;
To meet each other at the next station,
Out from home, far from the level crossing,
Every shopping day to the Christmas that never comes.
Only the colours matter, the speed and beat;
The truth and the life are the mini-way.
Everywhere young, they fight with their faces to the show.

And so squares like me, Soho and Golden,
Bless them — often unawares — and are glad
When they visit us in the folded, sidestreet wings,
Spread their lunches over their gleaming knees,
And sit, silent with us in an old romance,
Lovers all, these mothers soon of men.

JULIAN ENNIS