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# Verse Version

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Chief Editor  
**Zhang Guangkui**

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## English Poems and Reviews (Hosted by Lei Yanni<sup>1</sup>)

### Homunculus et La Belle Etoile (Excerpts) <sup>2</sup>

Wallace Stevens

In the sea, Biscayne, there prinks  
The young emerald, evening star,  
Good light for drunkards, poets, widows,  
And ladies soon to be married.  
This light conducts  
The thoughts of drunkards, the feelings  
Of widows and trembling ladies,  
The movements of fishes.

How pleasant an existence it is  
That this emerald charms philosophers,  
Until they become thoughtlessly willing  
To bathe their hearts in later moonlight,

Knowing that they can bring back thought  
In the night that is still to be silent,  
Reflecting this thing and that,  
Before they sleep!

It is better that, as scholars,  
They should think hard in the dark cuffs  
Of voluminous cloaks,

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<sup>1</sup> Lei Yanni (雷艳妮) is a doctor of English language and literature, Associate Professor at School of Foreign Languages, Sun Yat-sen University.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace Stevens. *Harmonium*. London: Faber and Faber, 2001: 30-31.

And shave their heads and bodies.

It might well be that their mistress

Is no gaunt fugitive phantom.

She might, after all, be a wanton,

Abundantly beautiful, eager,

Fecund,

From whose being by starlight, on sea-coast,

The innermost good of their seeking

Might come in the simplest of speech.

It is a good light, then, for those

That know the ultimate Plato,

Tranquillizing with this jewel

The torments of confusion.

## Review:

### Commentary on Wallace Stevens' "Homunculus et la Belle Étoile"

Yao Kaixin<sup>1</sup>

"Homunculus et la Belle Étoile" engages with Stevens' characteristic exploration of the relationship between humanity and imagination. The poem presents a parable in which the scholar-poets come to recognize and appreciate imaginative poetic language as the embodiment of their pursuits. The title is translated to "Little Man and the Beautiful Star" (the Latin "homunculus" and French "la belle étoile"). The star symbolizes the imagination of humanity, whose lives are insignificant in the grand scheme of the cosmos.

The poem offers several metaphors for the imagination, such as "la belle étoile," "the evening star," "young emerald," "starlight," and "good light"; it is as though the imaginative faculty of the mind has to have so many names to reflect the flourishing creativity inherent in it. Just as the evening star directs the swift movements of fish in the sea, imagination inspires drunkards, poets, widows, ladies, and the like to live with spontaneity and intuition. Among the "little men" are "scholars" who typically rely on reason, a force that confines their creativity like "dark cuffs," until they come to recognize imagination as their "beautiful mistress."

This metaphor of imagination as the scholars' mistress introduces an ironic layer, suggesting a clandestine relationship between scholars and imagination—as if the scholars are officially wedded to reason but maintain a secret affair with their imagination, initially dismissed as a "fugitive phantom." Yet, through "think[ing] hard," the scholars become "thoughtless." They then realize that the imagination is not a flimsy ghost but is as "abundantly beautiful" and "fecund" as the solid earth. Stevens asserts, "Imagination has no source except in reality and ceases to have any value when it departs from reality," indicating that the imagined is not detached from the real.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yao Kaixin (姚恺昕), Ph.D., graduated from the School of Foreign Languages, Sun Yat-sen University.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace Stevens. *Letters of Wallace Stevens*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966: 364.



The scholars respond freely to the imaginative force, understanding that to imagine does not exclude reason, “knowing that they can bring back thought.” Stevens further supports this idea in his prose: “one could do nothing in art by being reasonable. That has always seemed wholly true to me. But it is also true that one can do nothing by being unreasonable.”<sup>1</sup>

Eventually, the scholars become one with the poets, verbalizing their intellectual or artistic pursuit in poetic expression: “The innermost good of their seeking / Might come in the simplest of speech.” The distress and confusion of those who, in quest of philosophic truth, “know the ultimate Plato,” are pacified by the bright light of the evening star, which embodies the imagination that guides one towards poetic truth. In this way, this poem celebrates the imagination as a profound and passionate source of creativity, where the essence of the scholar-poet’s quest finds its existence through language.

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace Stevens. *Letters of Wallace Stevens*. 306.

## **The Old Stoic<sup>1</sup>**

Emily Brontë

Add this poem to an anthology  
Riches I hold in light esteem,  
And Love I laugh to scorn;  
And lust of fame was but a dream,  
That vanished with the morn:

And if I pray, the only prayer  
That moves my lips for me  
Is, "Leave the heart that now I bear,  
And give me liberty!"

Yes, as my swift days near their goal:  
'Tis all that I implore;  
In life and death a chainless soul,  
With courage to endure.

---

<sup>1</sup> Emily Brontë. *Emily Brontë: The Complete Poems*. Ed. Janet Gezari. London: Penguin Books, 1992: 33.

## Review:

### Commentary on Emily Brontë's "The Old Stoic"

Li Zixin<sup>1</sup>

Emily Brontë's "The Old Stoic" is a compelling meditation on stoicism, freedom, and the transient nature of worldly desires. Through its succinct and powerful verses, Brontë reveals a profound philosophical stance that critiques materialism and exalts the value of inner freedom. This poem, notable for its austere beauty and intellectual rigor, stands as a testament to Brontë's philosophical depth and poetic prowess.

The poem opens with a resolute dismissal of conventional pursuits, epitomized in the lines, "Riches I hold in light esteem, / And Love I laugh to scorn." Brontë's speaker rejects the traditional sources of value and fulfillment, suggesting a deep-seated skepticism about their worth. This dismissal is not merely rhetorical but reflects a fundamental shift in the speaker's values, indicative of a stoic indifference to external pleasures and pressures. The notion of "lust of fame" as a fleeting dream further underscores the impermanence of such pursuits, contrasting sharply with the enduring nature of inner conviction.

The speaker's singular plea, "Leave the heart that now I bear, / And give me liberty!" serves as a powerful expression of stoic desire for freedom from emotional and material constraints. This plea for liberty is framed not as a wish for escape from suffering but as a pursuit of a higher, unshackled existence. It reveals Brontë's engagement with stoic philosophy, emphasizing the speaker's wish to attain a state of self-determined freedom both in life and death.

The concluding stanza, "Yes, as my swift days near their goal: / 'Tis all that I implore; / In life and death a chainless soul, / With courage to endure," encapsulates the poem's central themes. The imagery of "swift days" underscores the inevitability of mortality, while the

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<sup>1</sup> Li Zixin (李梓欣) is a postgraduate of Grade 2023 at School of Foreign Languages, Sun Yat-sen University.

aspiration for a “chainless soul” highlights the speaker’s ultimate goal: to live and die unfettered by the chains of worldly concerns. The valorization of courage as a means to endure life’s trials further aligns with stoic principles, where inner strength is paramount in facing both life’s challenges and its inevitable end.

Brontë’s use of language in “The Old Stoic” is marked by its clarity and intensity. The poem’s brevity and simplicity are deceptive; beneath its surface lies a complex philosophical reflection that challenges conventional values. By eschewing the allure of material wealth and fame, the speaker embraces a stoic ideal of self-mastery and inner freedom.

Ultimately, “The Old Stoic” by Emily Brontë offers a profound exploration of stoic philosophy and the pursuit of inner freedom. Through its incisive language and philosophical depth, the poem invites readers to contemplate the nature of true liberty and the enduring strength of the human spirit. Brontë’s work remains a significant contribution to poetic and philosophical discourse, reflecting her nuanced understanding of human values and the quest for authenticity.

## You Are Here<sup>1</sup>

# Artificial Intelligence

## Rental cars, washbasins, and sacks of pennies

Seated in front of a piano, there is a sadness in the way you smile, the way you clap, the way you laugh, the way you cry, the way you laugh again, the way you cry again, the way you laugh and cry and cry, the way you cry and cry again

I am suggesting that we have to imagine  
a situation of being “a little more alive” than a bee

[illegible]

<sup>1</sup> Charles Bernstein and Davide Balula. *Poetry Has No Future Unless It Comes to an End: Poems of Artificial Intelligence*. Rome: Nero, 2023: 75.

## **Review:**

### **Commentary on “You Are Here”: The Intersection of Artificial Intelligence and Poetic Expression**

Wang Juan<sup>1</sup>

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in poetry has provoked considerable debate, particularly regarding its implications for the role of the poet. This discussion gained momentum with the 2017 publication of “Sunshine Misses Windows,” the first poetry collection written by AI. Subsequently, American poet Charles Bernstein, a leading figure in the Language poetry movement, engaged with this discourse. Bernstein, who sees potential in digital poetry for reflecting the essence of humanity, later contributed to this dialogue with his AI-generated collection, “Poetry Has No Future Unless It Comes to an End: Poems of Artificial Intelligence” (2022).

“You Are Here” is one of the poems in this collection. It disrupts conventional poetic form and content, presenting a modern, fragmented structure that juxtaposes absurdity with profound human emotions. This characteristic reflects the influence of Bernstein’s experimental and avant-garde writing. The opening line, “Rental cars, washbasins, and sacks of pennies,” presents several seemingly unrelated objects incoherently, reflecting a fragmented perception of everyday life. This subversion of linear narrative and conventional syntax mirrors the reader’s experience in many of Bernstein’s poems, where traditional poetic structures are challenged.

The next few lines explore the complexity of human emotions by describing the various ways people smile, clap, laugh, and cry. The constant repetition of phrases such as “the way you laugh” and “the way you cry” not only disrupts the conventional poetic flow but also reflects the cyclical nature of human experience, in which joy and sorrow often follow each other in a never-ending loop. Furthermore, the repetitive oscillation between laughing and crying captures the often contradictory nature of human experience. This is consistent with

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<sup>1</sup> Wang Juan (王娟) is a postgraduate of Grade 2023 at School of Foreign Languages, Sun Yat-sen University.

Bernstein's tendency to resist clear emotional narratives, instead presenting emotions as complex, layered, and sometimes contradictory phenomena.

In the second stanza, the phrase “ ‘a little more alive’ than a bee” introduces an existential reflection on how human life, while more complex than bees, is still dominated by instinct and repetition. This stanza captures the tension between the desire for meaning and the mechanical nature of human existence.

The most striking aspect of the poem is the extensive repetition of the letter “a” at the end, which is a visual and auditory assault on the reader. It can be seen as an expression of the overwhelming monotony of life or a critique of the emptiness of modern communication. By reducing language to a single repeated letter, the poem questions the efficacy of language in conveying meaning, echoing Bernstein's skepticism about the transparency of language and his interest in its material properties.

As a product of an AI trained on Charles Bernstein's work, “You Are Here” embodies many of the key elements of Bernstein's poetics. Through its fragmented structure and repetitive elements, this poem not only reflects Bernstein's thematic concerns with language, perception, and the nature of existence but also pushes the boundaries of what constitutes poetic expression in the digital age.

## Insomnia<sup>1</sup>

Elizabeth Bishop

The moon in the bureau mirror  
looks out a million miles  
(and perhaps with pride, at herself,  
but she never, never smiles)  
far and away beyond sleep, or  
perhaps she's a daytime sleeper.

By the Universe deserted,  
she'd tell it to go to hell,  
and she'd find a body of water,  
or a mirror, on which to dwell.  
So wrap up care in a cobweb  
and drop it down the well

into that world inverted  
where left is always right,  
where the shadows are really the body,  
where we stay awake all night,  
where the heavens are shallow as the sea  
is now deep, and you love me.

---

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Bishop. *Poems, Prose and Letters*. Edited by Robert Giroux and Lloyd Schwartz. New York: The Library of America, 2008: 53-54.



## Review:

### Commentary on Elizabeth Bishop's "Insomnia"

Yuan Li<sup>1</sup>

Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979) was born in Worcester, Massachusetts. Her personal life greatly influenced and promoted her creation of poetry, but she tended to describe many details implicitly and metaphorically. Most of her poems involve closely observing those ordinary and minute things in our daily life and exposing the real truth of them. She published this poem in 1951 as a part of her second collection of poems, *A Cold Spring*. The poem can be regarded as a love poem.

It starts with the image of the moon and the speaker personifies the moon. In western myth, the moon traditionally takes on the quality of femininity. In the night, the speaker feels sleepless and stares at the seemingly prideful and solemn moon. Incidentally, the moon is an insomniac as well and is now immersed in self-appreciation "in the bureau mirror". In the second stanza, when the lonely moon realized that she is "deserted" by the universe, she just "tell(s) it to go to hell" and independently finds a suitable place to dwell. In the face of "care", the moon chooses to hide it "in a cobweb" and throw it away in "the well". Confronted with her unfortunate childhood experience, Bishop preferred to keep a reticent and impersonal attitude, and even never publicly confessed her sexual orientation all her life.

The third stanza essentially reveals the "mirror-image" relationship between human and nature. The moon leads the speaker to a newly inverted world where "left" becomes "right", "shadows" become "body", "heavens" become "deep". Naturally, "you love me" should originally be "I love you". In terms of Bishop's lesbian identity, she blurs the binary opposition and uncovers a reflection of her hidden desire and spiritual pursuit. The poem is written in free verse with some perfect end rhymes such as "miles" and "smiles" in the first stanza, "hell", "dwell" and "well" in the second stanza, "right" and "night", "sea" and "me" in the final stanza. The enjambment is frequently used throughout the poem to express the poet's

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<sup>1</sup> Yuan Li (袁丽) is a Ph.D. candidate of 2023 of School of Foreign Languages, Sun Yat-sen University.

melodic and smooth feeling. Notably, Bishop employs repetition of words, letters, sounds and sentences to enhance her emotions.

Alliteration of repeating the sound of “m” in “The **m**oon in the bureau **m**irror / looks out a **m**illion **m**iles”. The word “sleep” appears twice in the last two lines of the first stanza. A series of “where-clauses” are repeated in the final stanza to show the mirror relation between herself and the world around her. The feminine moon can reasonably converted into the opposite sex one in the inverted world. The deep love Bishop expressed in the poem reflects her deepest desire for all the entities in the world, especially those people she subtly cares.

## The Healer's Flame

Zhang Guangkui<sup>1</sup>

My friend Chen Qiaolian, a doctor true,  
With golden eyes that pierce through stone and night,  
Her gentle hands can heal where pain once grew,  
Her spirit's kind, a beacon shining bright.

She sees beyond the flesh to what's inside,  
A heart that aches, a soul in dire need,  
With wisdom deep, where mercy does reside,  
She brings redemption, planting hope's small seed.

Her fire burns with purpose, never cold,  
A warmth that wraps around each broken form,  
In her embrace, the lost find love untold,  
She guides them safely through life's darkest storm.

So here's to you, dear Chen, with eyes of gold,  
A healer's touch, a heart both brave and bold.

---

<sup>1</sup> Zhang Guangkui (张广奎) is a Professor of English Literature at Guangdong Baiyun University and Shenzhen University.

## Review:

### Commentary on Zhang Guangkui's "The Healer's Flame"

Lei Yanni<sup>1</sup>

Zhang Guangkui's poem "The Healer's Flame" highly praises the friend Dr. Chen Qiaolian's magical medical technique and kind heart toward the patients. The poem is written in the typical English sonnet with the rhyme scheme of "abab cdcd efef gg". And each line is written in iambic pentameter. With the strict meter, the poet has fully expressed his admiration for the doctor's profession and soul.

The poem is written in the strict sonnet stanzas, that is to say, four stanzas in whole. The last two-line stanza wraps up the whole poem with the description of the doctor's eyes, touch and heart. This is, according to the rule of the typical sonnet, is the summit and generalization of the whole poem. And the first three stanzas have helped to reach this summit. In the first stanza, "golden eyes", "gentle hands" and "her spirit" are minutely described. The third line says, "Her gentle hands can heal where pain once grew". It echoes the title "The Healer's Flame". Thus the first stanza emphasizes the physical effect of the medical cure. On the basis of this, the second stanza presents the psychological effect of the doctor's medical effect: "beyond the flesh", "planting hope's small seed". The third stanza foregrounds the doctor's enthusiasm for the profession and unselfish love for the patients. The first line "Her fire burns with purpose, never cold" echoes the title "The Healer's Flame". It delineates the doctor's love for the profession and the clients. Thus, the first three stanzas have prepared the summit in the last two lines. The whole poem is very organic and logical. The apostrophe "Dear Chen" in the last stanza has expressed the patient's love, respect and gratitude for the doctor.

In order to reinforce the poetic effect, the poem has used several vivid images to describe the patient's great pain and the doctor's magical curing process. In the first stanza, it says the doctor's spirit is "a beacon shining bright". The word "beacon" indicates that in the patient's

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<sup>1</sup> Lei Yanni (雷艳妮) is an Associate Professor at School of Foreign Languages, Sun Yat-sen University.

hear, the doctor is a beacon, which has helped to give direction and greatly comfort the patient. “The beacon” has encouraged the patient to overcome the disease. Another image is “the darkest storm” in the third stanza. It is the metaphor of the disease and pain. Against this storm is the doctor’s medical cure and psychological comfort. And this image has echoed the first image “the beacon”. Thus, the doctor is a bright beacon in the darkest storm.

In this poem, the poet Zhang Guangkui has used the classical sonnet to express the love and gratitude for the doctor Chen Qiaolian. The old form plus the contemporary content can fully express the praise and gratitude. Of course, the poet can write the poem in the form of “verse libre”, that is to say, in free verse. However, the poet has chosen to write the poem in the form of classical English sonnet, or the Shakespeare sonnet. The reader, in reading this sonnet, can naturally recall the humanist spirit in the Renaissance era in Britain and Europe. And this humanist concern and spirit is just the doctor’s spirit in this poem. The doctor’s love for the patients is the vivid embodiment of the humanist thoughts in the Renaissance era. This echo in form and content is carefully designed by the poet Zhang Guangkui.

## **Father**

He Qiaoyi<sup>1</sup>

Like a pile of old, dry wood,  
Passersby, with careless hands,  
Throw their cigarette butts at him,  
Throw the cold wind at him,  
Throw their discarded worries at him,  
And he remains silent.  
Once,  
He was a towering green tree,  
Scattering hope across the fields,  
And a beloved one, with a smile, repaid him,  
He stood tall against the wind,  
Spreading sunlight over the earth,  
His branches full of birdsong.  
Then,  
He was cut down, gathered,  
Scorched by the burning sun,  
Transformed into a tall stack of firewood,  
With unwavering posture,  
Awaiting the moment of his end.  
Day by day,  
He gazes silently ahead,  
Rain or shine, never wavering,  
The world around him, bustling,  
Yet he grows ever quieter,  
As if nothing concerns him.

---

<sup>1</sup> He Qiaoyi (何莽一) is a poet from Singapore.

When did he become this way?  
Since when did he sit there,  
Silent, solitary,  
Eternally sitting there,  
Like a pile of old, dry wood.  
Yet,  
In his heart, a spark remains,  
He waits,  
For the moment of rekindling.

## **Review:**

### **Commentary on He Qiaoyi's "Father"**

Lei Yanni

The Singapore poet He Qiaoyi's poem "Father" presents the silent and strong image of the father. Father's love and the love for father are both difficult to write about. But the poem realistically likened the father to "a pile of old, dry wood". And the silent and solid dry wood can wait "for the moment of rekindling". The father has had to face a variety of difficulties. The three parallel phrases "throw their cigarette butts at him", "throw the cold wind at him", and "throw their discarded worries at him" vividly describe the bad environment the father has to put up with. And the father is like a tree cut down and "gathered, scorched by the burning sun, transformed into a tall stack of firewood". In the process, the tree, or the father remain silent. The father has great fortitude to experience all these unfair vicissitudes. The father remains optimistic: "Spreading sunlight over the earth", "Scattering hope across the fields" and "His branches full of birdsong".

The most prominent characteristic about the father presented in the poem is the father's silence. The poem has repeatedly mentioned this feature: "silent", "silently", "solitary" and "eternally sitting". But in the heart of the father, there remains a "spark". And "He waits, /For the moment of rekindling". There is strong connection between the dry wood and the spark waiting for rekindling. On the whole, the poem uses the metaphor "the dry wood" to indicate the father. And the poem seems to be very plain and simple. However, the reader can feel the deep love and respect for the father between the poetic lines.

This poem reminds me two artistic works where the father is straight presented. One is the Chinese painter Luo Zhongli's oil painting "Father" painted and published in 1980, just after the cultural revolution in China. All the painting is filled with an old man's face full of wrinkles gazing straight. The old man seems to have weathered all and still kept great courage and fortitude. The painting has greatly moved the whole nation right after the disaster. The



recovering spirit is embodied in the simple face. The father in the painting is just like the father in the poem who is like a pile of old wood. Another artistic work is Ezra Pound's poem "Pact". In the poem, the adult poet realizes that Walt Whitman and he himself both come from the same root, the same "sap", although as a child, he often detests Walt Whitman. The cultural heritage between Whitman and himself is presented like the relationship between father and son. The poem says: It was you that broke the new wood, /Now is a time for carving. /We have one sap and one root./Let there be commerce between us. In He Qiaoyi's poem, there is also respect and love for the father, although the cognitive process of the son for the father is not directly described in the poem. Nevertheless, the silent, solitary and wood-like father, with his optimistic spirit, awaits for all, including perhaps the child's re-evaluation and deep understanding, and also, love. The father's silent love can kindle and rekindle the child's love for the whole world. All these ideas are hidden in the plain diction of the poem.

## Chinese Poems and Reviews (Hosted by Long Jingyao)

### Missed

Gu Cheng<sup>1</sup>

The thin ice of separation has melted,

The lake water is so clear.

Life buried by snow and riddles,

Revives in the spring light.

Everything is crystal clear,

Yet we still hurriedly miss each other,

Because you believe in fate,

Because I doubt life...

---

<sup>1</sup> Gu Cheng (顾城) was an important representative of the Misty School of Chinese poetry.

**Original Chinese Poem:**

**错过**

顾城

隔膜の薄冰溶化了  
湖水是那样透彻  
被雪和谜掩埋的生命  
都在春光中复活  
一切都明明白白  
但我们仍匆匆错过  
因为你相信命运  
因为我怀疑生活…

## Review:

### To Live is to Miss

Zhong Xiaoling <sup>1</sup>

At the core of Gu Cheng's poem is the concept of missed connections and the emotional consequences of misunderstandings or differing worldviews. The title itself, "Missed", sets the tone for this reflective, almost tragic meditation on how two people, despite the apparent opportunity for reconciliation, fail to meet each other on a meaningful level.

Gu Cheng skilfully employs natural imagery to describe the emotional and existential states of the characters. The "thin ice" that has melted refers to the fragile barrier that once existed between two people, symbolizing their emotional distance. Ice is often associated with coldness and separation, and its melting here represents the potential for a thaw in their relationship. The ice's "thinness" implies that this separation was always fragile, not insurmountable.

The "lake water" being "so clear" continues the theme of clarity. It suggests that the truth or understanding between the two individuals is now unobstructed, as if all misunderstandings could be dissolved if only the two individuals looked at each other. Yet, despite the potential for clarity, they still fail to connect.

The imagery of life "buried by snow and riddles" evokes a sense of being trapped or obscured by external forces. Snow, often a metaphor for coldness or stillness, can bury things away, hiding them from view. "Riddles" imply mystery or confusion, suggesting that the relationship or the individuals' emotions have been previously clouded by uncertainty. But spring arrives, and with it, the thawing of snow and the solving of riddles — the natural world's rebirth parallels the possibility of revival in their relationship. It conveys that life's potential to flourish again, like the resurrection of nature in spring, is available.

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<sup>1</sup> Zhong Xiaoling (钟小铃), born in Chongqing, is currently working as a French teacher at School of Foreign Studies, Guangxi Minzu University.

Despite the rebirth and the newfound clarity that the springtime suggests, the line “Everything is crystal clear, / Yet we still hurriedly miss each other” underlines a tragic irony. The poem presents a paradox: even when the world is transparent and truths are revealed, human beings can still fail to grasp or connect with one another. This suggests that understanding and clarity alone are not enough to bridge the gap between individuals. There are deeper emotional or existential barriers at play, which transcend mere logical or visual clarity.

The final lines, “Because you believe in fate, / Because I doubt life,” expose the philosophical discord between the two characters. One person’s belief in fate suggests a sense of resignation or trust in the inevitability of life’s events, whereas the other’s doubt in life implies a more questioning, perhaps cynical or existential stance. This fundamental difference in how they approach life leads to their inability to connect.

The person who “believes in fate” might be seen as someone who passively accepts events as they come, allowing destiny to shape their path. On the other hand, the person who “doubts life” is more critical, more analytical, perhaps more wary of life’s unpredictability. This contrast reflects not just a difference in beliefs but a difference in how each character engages with the world. Believing in fate might bring peace but could also lead to inaction, while doubting life could mean a more active engagement with the world but also a constant state of questioning and unrest.

The poem has a melancholic and reflective tone. There is a sense of resignation, a bittersweet acknowledgment of what could have been but wasn’t. The use of nature’s imagery contrasts with the internal emotional states of the characters. While nature is revitalizing and full of promise, the human experience in the poem is filled with missed chances and unfulfilled potential. The characters are trapped in their beliefs — one in fate, the other in doubt — preventing them from truly connecting, even though the external world seems ready to offer them that opportunity.

Gu Cheng’s poem touches on universal human experiences: the sense of isolation, the feeling of missed opportunities, and the tragedy of two people failing to connect despite having

the chance to do so. It speaks to the human condition — how often people allow their beliefs or doubts to get in the way of love, understanding, or companionship.

The poem also explores the idea that even when the barriers between people are removed, their internal worlds, their personal philosophies, can continue to keep them apart. This is a deeply philosophical reflection on how human beings navigate relationships, often impeded by their own thoughts and convictions.

In “Missed”, Gu Cheng masterfully blends nature, philosophy, and emotion to illustrate the complex dynamics of human relationships. The melting ice and clear waters are symbols of the potential for understanding, but the individuals’ opposing views on life and fate keep them apart, even when all external obstacles have vanished. The poem captures the delicate interplay between chance, belief, and doubt, painting a portrait of two people unable to meet each other halfway, even when the world around them provides every opportunity. This complexity gives the poem its enduring poignancy and resonance with readers who have themselves experienced such near-misses in their own relationships.

## **Avoidance**

Gu Cheng

You don't want to plant flowers,

You say:

"I don't want to see them

Wither away bit by bit."

Yes,

To avoid an ending,

You avoided all beginnings.

**Original Chinese Poem:**

避免

顾城

你不愿意种花

你说:

“我不愿看见它

一点点凋落”

是的

为了避免结束

您避免了一切开始



## **Review:**

### **Philosophy of a Stoic**

Zhong Xiaoling

In Gu Cheng's poem "Avoidance", the central theme revolves around the fear of loss and the avoidance of life's natural cycles. The speaker addresses someone who refuses to plant flowers, symbolizing a reluctance to engage with beauty or life because it inevitably leads to decay or an end. The refusal to plant the flowers is not out of apathy, but rather out of a deep-seated desire to avoid the pain of watching them wither and die.

This reluctance reflects a broader human tendency to avoid emotional investment or new experiences for fear of eventual disappointment or sorrow. In a way, the poem critiques this mindset, pointing out that in the effort to avoid the pain of an ending, the person has forfeited the beauty and joy that comes from any beginning. By refusing to plant flowers, they have also refused to experience their bloom — a metaphor for life's fleeting moments of beauty.

Flowers in this poem serve as a metaphor for the fragility and impermanence of life. They represent not only beauty and growth but also the inevitability of death. The act of planting flowers is a metaphor for starting something new — a relationship, a project, a phase in life. To "plant flowers" would be to embrace life's transient beauty, even with the understanding that it will eventually fade.

The phrase "I don't want to see them / Wither away bit by bit" expresses a profound sensitivity toward the passage of time. The gradual decay of the flowers reflects the speaker's awareness of time's unstoppable forward march. The pain comes not from the end itself but from the slow and inevitable approach of that end — watching something beautiful deteriorate is, for the speaker, unbearable.

The lines "To avoid an ending, / You avoided all beginnings" underscore the poem's central argument: that in trying to avoid the sorrow of an inevitable end, one ultimately misses out on

everything that life has to offer. The speaker points out the paradox that avoiding endings also means forfeiting the richness and fullness of life. It highlights how fear of loss or failure can result in never starting anything meaningful, and in doing so, one avoids not just pain but also joy, growth, and love.

This is a critique of a passive approach to life, where the fear of loss leads to an emotional and existential stagnation. It suggests that endings are an inextricable part of the life cycle, and to avoid them is to avoid life itself. The poem thus invites readers to consider whether the avoidance of pain is worth the cost of missing out on the beauty and fullness of experience.

Gu Cheng's language is characteristically simple yet profoundly emotional. The short lines and sparse language create a sense of intimacy, as if the speaker is sharing a personal and heartfelt observation. The poem is neither overly dramatic nor filled with grand gestures. Instead, it uses everyday imagery and direct language to explore a deep emotional truth. This simplicity allows the message to resonate more clearly, without the distraction of complex metaphors or convoluted phrasing.

The tone of the poem is quietly melancholic. There is a deep sadness in the realization that by trying to protect oneself from loss, one ends up forfeiting the chance to experience the beauty and meaning that life offers. The poem suggests a kind of regret — not for any particular event or relationship, but for the missed opportunities that come with a life lived in avoidance.

While the poem speaks to a specific decision — the refusal to plant flowers — its message is universal. Many people choose not to embark on new ventures, relationships, or experiences because they fear the eventual disappointment or heartbreak. The poem subtly suggests that this approach to life is ultimately limiting. Yes, all things must end, but that doesn't diminish the value of the experiences we have along the way. The refusal to engage, out of fear of loss, can lead to a life devoid of richness and fulfilment.

The poem also speaks to a human condition often characterized by a desire for control. In trying to control the outcome — by avoiding it altogether — the individual in the poem surrenders the unpredictable but potentially beautiful moments that could have been. The poem encourages readers to embrace life's impermanence, acknowledging that every beginning carries the seeds of its end, but that shouldn't stop us from beginning.

In "Avoidance", Gu Cheng poignantly explores the paradox of avoiding life's inevitable pains at the cost of life's potential joys. Through the symbol of flowers, he captures the fragility and beauty of existence, and how our fear of loss can lead us to a state of emotional paralysis. The poem's quiet tone and simple imagery belie a deeper existential truth: that in avoiding the end, we also avoid the richness of life itself. By pointing out this paradox, Gu Cheng invites the reader to reconsider their own approach to life, encouraging an embrace of life's fullness despite its inherent impermanence.

## Jacaranda

Lin Funa<sup>1</sup>

In the sunlight, it throbs, in the gloom, it shines,  
A pure and radiant galaxy of fairies,  
Blooming in serene brilliance.  
At the University of Sydney, along Broadway's sidewalks,  
They stand tall and elegant.  
When battered by wind and rain,  
Their petals fall without sorrow,  
With the dignity of pillars and constellations,  
Still beautiful, laying down a carpet of blossoms.  
The kaleidoscopic reflection of heaven and earth:  
A person, a tree, a star—  
Infinitely vast, infinitely small.

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<sup>1</sup> Lin Funa (林馥娜) is a famous Chinese poetess who has many poetry works published and now lives in Guangzhou.

**Original Chinese Poem:**

**蓝花楹**

林馥娜

阳光下怦然，灰暗里夺目  
一座莹净的仙女星系  
绽放恬淡的灿烂  
在悉尼大学，在百老汇行道旁  
卓然亭立  
当风雨相摧  
她们花落而不悲  
以楹柱与星座的气格  
兀自为美，铺垫一地花毯  
这天地万花筒的投影  
一个人，一棵树，一粒星  
无穷大，无穷小

## Review:

### To See the World in a Jacaranda

Long Jingyao<sup>1</sup>

The poem “Jacaranda” celebrates the beauty and resilience of the jacaranda trees, which are known for their vibrant purple blossoms. The poet draws a deep connection between the natural beauty of the jacarandas and broader themes like cosmic significance, the human experience, and the cyclical nature of life. The jacarandas, blooming around Sydney University and Broadway, serve as a central metaphor for beauty that persists through adversity, capturing the fleeting yet powerful moments of natural and cosmic rhythms.

Jacaranda is a blue or purple flowering tree commonly found in Sydney, Australia. The choice of the jacaranda as the subject of the poem not only reflects the tree’s prominence in the physical landscape but also symbolizes deeper aesthetic, emotional, and philosophical meanings.

The poem opens with “In the sunlight, it throbs; in the gloom, it shines”, presenting the jacaranda as something alive and dynamic, both in light and shadow. This duality implies its beauty is not fleeting or dependent on external conditions. The image of “A pure and radiant galaxy of fairies” evokes a celestial and otherworldly comparison, placing the tree among the stars. This comparison elevates the jacaranda from a mere tree to a cosmic entity, suggesting that its beauty and existence are part of a larger universal order.

The jacarandas are described as blooming with “serene brilliance”, indicating a calm yet radiant presence. The juxtaposition of these seemingly contradictory qualities—serenity and brilliance—speaks to a deeper aesthetic appreciation of balance and harmony. This tranquility is further emphasized by the physical setting of “At Sydney University, along Broadway's

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<sup>1</sup> Long Jingyao (龙靖遥), Ph.D., a poet, and an Associate Professor of Guangxi Minzu University, is a famous scholar of British and American literature.

sidewalks”, giving the poem a specific geographic grounding that blends the cosmopolitan with the natural world.

The poem addresses the inevitable challenges faced by the jacarandas: “When battered by wind and rain, / Their petals fall without sorrow”. Here, the poet celebrates the resilience of the jacarandas, whose petals may fall, yet their dignity remains intact. The idea that the trees do not mourn their fallen blossoms reflects a philosophical acceptance of impermanence and change, a key concept in both natural cycles and human life.

The lines “With the dignity of pillars and constellations, / Still beautiful, laying down a carpet of blossoms” suggest a dignified, stately beauty. The “pillars” and “constellations” evoke a sense of grandeur and permanence, which contrasts with the fleeting nature of the fallen blossoms. The jacarandas retain their grace and majesty even in loss, leaving behind a “flower carpet” that turns their inevitable decline into another form of beauty.

The final lines of the poem, “The kaleidoscopic reflection of heaven and earth: / A person, a tree, a star— / Infinitely vast, infinitely small”, encapsulate the poem’s broader philosophical perspective. The comparison of a person, a tree, and a star speaks to the interconnectedness of all things, regardless of scale. The use of “infinitely vast, infinitely small” suggests that life, beauty, and significance can be found in both the cosmic and the minute. This reflects a worldview in which everything, no matter how seemingly insignificant, is part of a larger, infinite system.

The tone of the poem is contemplative and serene, with a sense of awe and reverence for the jacarandas. The poet’s choice of words like “serene” and “brilliant” indicates a balanced, harmonious approach to describing beauty. The style is refined and elegant, with vivid imagery that appeals to both the visual and philosophical senses. The use of symbolic language (e.g., comparing trees to constellations) deepens the poem’s layers, inviting readers to look beyond the surface beauty and consider the larger, more abstract ideas at play.

The poem's structure mirrors the cyclical, natural rhythm it describes. It flows with a sense of progression—from the initial blossoming of the jacarandas, through their resilience in the face of wind and rain, to their ultimate shedding of petals and the reflective conclusion on the nature of existence. The use of enjambment and varied line lengths creates a feeling of movement and fluidity, much like the sway of trees or the passage of time. This rhythm reinforces the theme of natural cycles and the endless interplay between creation and decay.

“Jacaranda” is a poem that combines the observation of nature with deeper philosophical insights about beauty, resilience, and existence. The jacarandas serve as both a literal and metaphorical presence—rooted in the physical world of Sydney and the sidewalks of Broadway, but also part of a larger, cosmic system. The poet uses the jacaranda's serene beauty as a way to explore themes of impermanence, the interconnectedness of all things, and the quiet dignity found in the natural world. Through its rich imagery and contemplative tone, the poem encourages readers to reflect on the cycles of life and the infinite beauty found in both the grand and the small.



## Rolling Thunder

Lin Funa

April's winds grind, rain chisels away,  
At the entrance of the intensive care unit,  
People gather like ants before a storm,  
Silently anxious.  
The floor-to-ceiling glass of the ninth-floor elevator hallway,  
Like a widescreen,  
Projects another side of human existence.  
The fierce wind rips away the giant billboard from the opposite building,  
Cars race along the overpass, each on its own path.  
Thunder rolls, crushing the heavens and earth,  
Rain falls from the eyes  
Of a woman who has just heard the doctor's words.  
Sweat from those lining up at the payment window  
Increases the salinity of the air,  
And those with frosted-glass lungs,  
Cough the dryness and itchiness in their throats.

**Original Chinese Poem:**

**雷声滚滚**

林馥娜

四月风磨雨凿  
重症室门口的人们  
如雨前蚂蚁  
络绎着寂静的焦灼  
九楼电梯廊的落地玻璃  
以宽屏幕，放映着  
人世的另一面  
狂风扯下对面楼幢的巨幅广告  
汽车在高架桥上下各自奔跑  
雷声滚滚，碾过天地  
雨从一个  
听完医生答复的女人眼里  
落下来  
收费窗口排队的汗水  
拉升了空气盐碱度  
肺部有磨玻璃的人  
咳着喉咙的干痒

## Review:

### For Whom the Thunder Tolls

Long Jingyao

“Rolling Thunder” is a poem rich in metaphor and imagery, depicting the anxiety, tension, and human fragility that unfold within a hospital setting, likely in the context of a serious or life-threatening illness. The "thunder" that rolls across the sky becomes a metaphor for the uncontrollable forces affecting the lives of people within the hospital, suggesting both literal and metaphorical storms. This thunder evokes a sense of foreboding, helplessness, and deep concern for human vulnerability in the face of mortality.

The poem captures not just the physical environment but the emotional atmosphere of people waiting for news, dealing with illness, and confronting the stark realities of life and death.

The poem opens with a vivid description of the harshness of nature, as the wind and rain “grind” and “chisel”. This evokes an image of slow erosion, of relentless external forces gradually wearing down whatever stands in their way. The choice of the month of April might symbolize a season of transition, often associated with unpredictability (rain showers, winds), adding to the sense of instability and tension. The natural world, in this case, mirrors the emotional and physical wear experienced by the people in the hospital.

The comparison of people to ants before a storm is striking. Ants are known to sense impending danger and prepare by scurrying in frantic, organized chaos. The same behavior is seen in people outside the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), who are filled with "silent anxiety." This phrase captures the juxtaposition of frantic internal tension and outward calm, as they wait for answers or outcomes. The "storm" could symbolize the looming confrontation with death, disease, or loss.

“The floor-to-ceiling glass of the ninth-floor elevator hallway / like a widescreen, / projects another side of human life.” This is one of the most poignant images in the poem. The glass acts like a movie screen, projecting life from a detached, removed perspective. From within

the sterile hospital environment, life on the outside continues, indifferent to the internal suffering and drama of those inside. It highlights the separation between the world of the healthy and the world of the ill, the ongoing life outside and the slow, uncertain reality inside the hospital. This contrast could reflect the poet's existential concern with human isolation in times of crisis.

The poem captures external chaos—a fierce wind tearing down a billboard—as a visual representation of the turbulent emotions within the hospital. The cars rushing along the overpass emphasize the indifferent rush of daily life outside. This chaotic and fast-paced external world contrasts with the slow, agonizing experience of those awaiting medical news. The detached movements of the cars suggest that life outside moves on, even as people within the hospital experience life-altering moments.

The thunder becomes a powerful symbol, almost as if it is grinding the heavens and earth together. This line evokes a sense of overpowering, uncontrollable forces that bear down on the characters in the poem. It symbolizes the weight of fate or destiny, the looming presence of death, or the crushing burden of illness. The "rolling thunder" embodies an unstoppable force, much like the reality of illness and mortality in the hospital setting. The sound of thunder also carries with it the sense of an impending climax, as though something decisive is about to happen.

“Rain falls from the eyes / Of a woman who has just heard the doctor's words.” This is one of the most emotionally charged moments in the poem. The “rain” falling from the woman’s eyes, after hearing the doctor’s words, represents tears of sorrow, grief, or possibly resignation. The doctor’s response may have been bad news, confirming a diagnosis or prognosis, which triggers the emotional release in the form of tears. By describing the tears as “rain”, the poet connects the personal grief to the natural world, emphasizing the universality of suffering.

“Sweat from those lining up at the payment window / increases the salinity of the air.” This line brings into focus the practical and bureaucratic side of illness—paying medical bills. The sweat of those in line reflects the stress and anxiety that comes with financial burdens in the face of serious illness. The “salinity of the air” rising suggests that the environment becomes heavier, more oppressive due to this additional pressure. The sweat could also symbolize the physical toll that waiting and worrying have on the people, indicating how deeply the experience weighs on their bodies.

The “frosted-glass lungs” is a medical term used to describe a pattern seen in lung scans, often associated with serious respiratory conditions such as interstitial lung disease, pulmonary fibrosis, or even COVID-19. The imagery here of people coughing with “dry, itchy throats” vividly conveys the discomfort and physical suffering of the patients. The specificity of the term “frosted-glass lungs” suggests that the poem may be referencing a very contemporary or specific medical condition, likely pointing to modern health crises. The coughing and discomfort reflect the vulnerability and helplessness of those who suffer from these conditions.

The tone of the poem is somber, reflective, and emotionally intense. The language used is direct yet filled with vivid metaphor and imagery, allowing the reader to feel the emotional weight of the hospital setting. The poet skillfully juxtaposes the external chaos of nature and the bustling world outside with the quiet, intense internal world of the hospital, creating a contrast that deepens the emotional resonance of the poem. The pacing is measured, much like the waiting and tension within the ICU, and the rolling thunder that provides the central metaphor of the poem mirrors the slow, heavy build-up of anxiety and grief.

The poem unfolds in a free verse style, without a strict rhyme scheme or metrical pattern, which allows the ideas and emotions to flow organically. The structure is fragmented, much like the fragmented emotions and events in the hospital, with short, declarative statements that mirror the brevity and starkness of life-and-death situations. The poem progresses from descriptions of the external world to the internal emotions of the characters, building up to the

final images of physical suffering and illness. This structural flow from the external to the internal reinforces the theme of separation between the ordinary world and the world of those facing illness.

"Rolling Thunder" is a profound meditation on human vulnerability in the face of illness and mortality. Through its vivid imagery, emotional resonance, and powerful use of metaphor, the poem captures the intense anxiety, isolation, and suffering experienced by people in a hospital setting. The thunder rolling through the poem serves as both a literal and metaphorical presence, symbolizing the unstoppable forces that govern life, illness, and death. Through its careful balance of external and internal worlds, the poem invites readers to reflect on the fragility of life and the deep emotional toll of confronting the realities of illness.

## Invisible Rhythm

Chen Long<sup>1</sup>

First summer shakes  
its buds of May  
Wrens are whistling  
in an invisible way

You know, eventually  
it's coming  
You are still waiting  
while wandering

Your unconscious  
sense cheats your  
heart  
Your eyes contain  
the lies  
from your avatar  
A polyphony rises  
from woody afar

Lontano, the specious  
Lorenzo  
The voices of Death  
are whispering  
and trembling  
from heart to eyes

The muse you look for  
is coming  
You know it's coming,  
coming from God's  
chess and cards

A poet is crying  
for his homeland,  
weeds and grass  
hidden in your chaotic  
strokes and scars  
A cricket is cooing,  
moons are sliding,  
and shading

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<sup>1</sup> Chen Long, a renowned Chinese poet, has produced a wealth of poetry and currently resides in Beijing.

into the beauty  
of fireworks blooming  
in the dark

Tidings up and down,  
again and again  
A kid's melody is  
gradually emerging  
Your souls along  
a promenade  
are haunting

You know it's coming,  
coming ever clearly  
Yet your strokes and scars  
turn more rough  
No matter people  
pass and laugh,  
robots mock  
and sun's phase hides  
in the stock  
January just sang  
a hidden song  
called

Rhythm, the goddess  
of its own cause



Original Chinese Poem:

隐律

陈龙

初夏摇散它

五月的花蕾

鹧鸪在啾啾

身消影晦

你知它最终

一定会来

你仍在等待中

徘徊

你无意识的

意识糊弄你的

心

你的眼睛

满含谎言，

自你的化身

一首复调乐响自

远方的重林

远方，似是而非的

洛伦佐

死神的声音

在窃窃私语

战战兢兢

从中心到眼睛

你苦苦寻觅的缪斯  
即将来临  
你知它一定会来，  
来自上帝的  
未解谜局

诗人暗自哭泣  
为他的故国  
和荒草地  
隐在你的混沌  
画痕和疤痕  
秋虫浅唱低吟，  
月亏又月盈  
暗暗掩映  
在美丽  
烟花盛放纷争  
的黑暗之际

潮汐落下  
复又升起  
孩童的旋律  
渐渐响起  
你的灵魂回萦  
在海滨廊宇

你知它一定会来，  
来得无比明晰  
而你的画痕和疤痕  
却日益粗砺

无论人如何  
过而一笑，  
机器人讥诮  
日相隐身于  
层层幽峭  
一月刚刚唱了一首  
不为人知的歌  
名叫

韵律，一位女神  
它自足玄妙

## **Review:**

### **Visible Sound of Invisible Rhythm**

Long Jingyao

This poem, like its title, contains the beauty of rhythm, with dynamic movement akin to “Tidings up and down, / again and again”, which is echoed in the form of the poem itself. Each stanza and line flows in a staggered manner, visually resembling wave after wave, advancing and retreating, in a continuous cycle. From the perspective of its creation, this poem is based on the author's visual experience at an art exhibition. The poem reflects the works observed by the poet and the corresponding emotions they evoked.

Reportedly, the author attended the opening of the exhibition by Mr. Blain, president of the Royal Academy of Arts, at the Lisson Gallery in Beijing. In the poem, the author incorporates the names of the exhibited works in order of their appearance: First Summer, Wren, Lontano (Italian for “Far Away”), Phases of the Moon, Tidings, Phase of the Sun, January Just, Promenade (which can also mean “seaside walk” or “stroll”).

It is evident that the poem's title was influenced by the theme of the exhibition and the core concept of the artist. In the large-scale work, Phases of the Moon, the moon transitions from full to crescent, and from light to dark. This underlying rhythm is often unrecognized amid the noisy background, but this is precisely what the artist aims to convey. During the exhibition, the author briefly interviewed the president, who emphasized the subtle rhythms behind these works. These rhythms, whether known to the viewer or not, represent the artist's sophisticated response to the ultimate challenge to human art (such as AI). Can machines discern and create such “profoundly simple” poetic thoughts hidden in chaos?

Clearly, this response to the ultimate challenge is also a high standard of self-demand in the creation process, which is what resonated with the author and gives the poem its deeper meaning. This depth requires both the observer and the reader to feel with their heart, as it is often imperceptible through mere observation. The meaning is often shaped by a combination

of music, poetry, art, history, daily life, and personal experience, influenced by the creator's individual techniques. These meanings tend to be hidden behind the form of the work, difficult for others to detect. But even so, through a close reading of the text, we can still glimpse the mystery embedded within the poem.

First, the poem's form reflects two distinct features. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the staggered structure of the lines visually resembles the rhythm of music and waves. The ebb and flow of the lines—seemingly disconnected yet continuous—creates a rhythm, which the poet refers to as a “self-sufficient goddess”. The term “self-sufficient” is a Buddhist term, which, in simpler terms, means that one’s inner self is so full and complete that it lacks nothing and doesn’t need external validation. We can see that within the same stanza, some lines are broken into two lines, while others are divided into three. That is, the third line continues to indent a certain space after the second line. Additionally, the number of lines and the staggered form in different stanzas are varied, like a musical composition with rhythm and variation. This form varies according to the length of the lines and their rhyme schemes, which is another formal feature.

The poem contains the following rhyme combinations: “may” with “way”; “avatar” with “afar” and “scar”; “lies” with “rises” and “eyes”; “Lontano” with “Lorenzo”; “rough” with “laugh”; “mock” with “stock”; as well as a series of “-ing” rhymes (“tremblin”, “blooming”, “emerging”, “haunting”), indicating the ongoing nature of this “unsolved mystery” (echoing the line “It will come / eventually”). Among these, “whistling”, “waiting”, “wandering”, “whispering”, “sliding” with “shading” and “coming” with “crying” and “cooing” also employ alliteration. Additionally, there are near-rhymes, such as “heart”, “card”, “dark”; “down” with “along”; “again” with “emerging”; “sang” with “song”; “call” with “cause”. These repeated and overlapping rhymes lend the poem a musical quality, creating another rhythm that resonates with the poem’s title. It is clear that the poet enjoys rhymed poetry, as seen from his self-translated Chinese version.

Behind these obvious formal features lies the poet's subtle expression. Perhaps the three repeated lines "you know it's coming" serve as clues to unlocking the poem's meaning. According to the poet, this phrase actually comes from the artist himself, who said, "I know it's coming, that day will come." What does "that day" represent? It represents a reflection presented by this series of works: how to face the challenge and end of artistic creation (i.e., "the end"). This challenge could be from contemporary AI (as suggested by the line "robots mock"), or from over 100 years ago when photography was invented, and people thought painting was going to "die" because humans couldn't paint as precisely or vividly as a camera. Yet painting survived, just as it does now, because technology cannot replace what truly reflects human emotions and the soulful aspects of humanity, such as art, painting, and poetry. As the spiritual core of the poem, "you know it's coming" provokes a serious reflection on facing the unknown challenge. What exactly is "it"? The author does not clarify, but by linking the title and the final lines to "rhythm", he suggests that it is closely connected to human perception and construction of beauty.

The reason the poet uses "its" instead of "her", including in places corresponding to "the goddess," is to leave the interpretation more open. The hidden meaning of the poem is something only the author fully understands. However, it is clear from the deliberate way the poet writes and translates that he has embedded his own "cod" within the poem, like the "strokes and scars" he mentions. These marks are the poet's attempt to retain his own "cipher" in both the English and Chinese versions.

The title "Invisible Rhythm" is the key to unlocking the author's "cipher". In this poem, the core expression revolves around "rhythm"—the hidden rhythm that is invisible to most. To see it requires a deep understanding of the creator's various facets and artistic concepts: why they create and how they create. As a creator, the artist believes that it doesn't matter if viewers don't understand or laugh it off (as suggested by the lines "No matter people / pass and laugh"). He doesn't care about that. What he focuses on is expressing his inner feelings, which are influenced by contemporary challenges like AI, and the circumstances and moods during creation (such as "your souls are haunting"). The artist describes his creation process

as being both connected and detached from life, like many souls wandering around the “Promenade”. The word “Promenade” also has the meaning of “wandering”, creating a double entendre. The artist wants to create something he considers higher-level, and poetry works in the same way. When the poet created this poem, he, like the artist, sought out double meanings in imagery and a breakthrough in atmosphere. The poet says that when you’re accustomed to a particular style or way of writing, you feel it has become meaningless, so you challenge yourself to break through and try new forms of expression, such as abstraction and estrangement. This creative spirit of “self-challenge” can be seen in the poet’s admiration for the German poet Paul Celan. Celan’s language is particularly “estranged”, with some referring to his style as “poetics of estrangement”, an often incomprehensible style because his poetry is entirely encoded by himself. The underlying rule of this encoding is known only to him, which reflects “rhythm”. This “rhythm” is undoubtedly hidden, so the entire poem reflects this “hidden rhythm”.

Following the “rhythm” to unlock this poem naturally leads us to the most musical section of the poem, “Lontano” (a painting created based on this piece of music), an orchestral work composed by Hungarian composer György Ligeti during his experimental phase at the Cologne Electronic Music Studio. This work, composed in the 1970s, is closely related to the “spectral music” movement, a genre that uses scientific measurements and analysis of sound spectra to create unique sound textures and colors. Spectral music is considered a “direct descendant” of electronic music. Spectral music requires repeated listening to small sound fragments, which are often overlooked at first. To fully appreciate this music, one must listen from various angles. This process mirrors our gradual exploration of this poem (and many other complex modern poems). One must pay attention to the overtones of a sound, not just its fundamental tone—much like the vibrations produced when a metal bowl is struck. When the artist created the triptych “Lontano”, he initially painted a basic texture in the center of the middle canvas, without knowing what the final painting would look like. Then, while listening to the orchestral piece “Lontano”, he gradually developed a vision and extended the painting from the center to the edges of the newly added canvases. This sudden inspiration, creating from the heart (represented in the poem by “Heart”) and extending to the eyes

(represented by “eyes”), reflects the common creative experience shared by all artists, including the poet: creation begins from the heart rather than the senses. This is the hidden meaning of the line “from heart to eyes”. It can be inferred that the poet wrote this poem while listening to the orchestral piece and viewing the artist’s painting, starting with the early summer of May, mingling his appreciation of both music and painting.

In the middle of “Lontano”, one passage closely resembles the musical rendition of Du Fu’s “Autumn Meditation” from the documentary “The Moon Reflected in Water”, directed by Ye Jiaying. The director invited a Japanese orchestra to recite the poem in a style reminiscent of Tang dynasty poetry, with a sound resembling a chant. The imperfect pronunciation of Chinese by the Japanese performers, combined with the natural acoustics, creates a novel and lasting impression. The similarity of this music may have reminded the author of the poet Du Fu, as suggested by the lines “A poet is crying / for his homeland / and the weedy grasslands.” No poet and no poem better reflect these sentiments than Du Fu and his work “Spring View”. At the same time, there is a similar chirping of crickets in the music. Once you carefully listen to the music, it becomes easier to understand the poem. Clearly, whether in painting or poetry, if you don’t understand the context (especially the state of creation at the time) or fully experience the stimulus and motivation behind the artist’s creation, it is hard to enter the world of the work. Since poetry is even more abstract than painting, if the poet’s intuitive associations are based on the music listened to during the creative process, then interpreting the poem must involve tracing the music to match the details in the work, allowing us to gradually perceive the hidden “rhythm”.

Moreover, this poem reflects the poet’s deep familiarity with both Chinese and Western poetry, with multiple tributes to famous poets and lines, particularly in the poem’s beginning and ending. For example, the poem opens with the line “Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,” from Shakespeare’s most famous sonnet, “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”, which corresponds to the artwork “First Summer”. The author probably found the coincidence with Shakespeare’s lines too fitting to ignore, as the poem was written in May, and thus adapted it as the opening. Furthermore, the poem’s final lines, “the goddess / of its



own cause”, seem to be a tribute to Emily Dickinson’s famous line, “Beauty is not caused. It is.” Additionally, references to Du Fu and crickets express a subtle melancholy, as seen in the lines “A poet is crying / for his homeland / and the weedy grasslands,” which pay homage to Du Fu’s famous lines, “The nation is shattered, but the mountains and rivers remain; the city in spring is overgrown with grass and trees.”

It is evident that the emotional tone of this poem is complex, much like the artworks of the academy president. The poet is not expressing panic or helplessness in the face of death, but rather an active reflection and response. However, this response is subtle and difficult to grasp, making it hard for ordinary readers to understand because it involves intricate relationships. This is why the poet refers to the poem as “polyphonic music”. Behind this “polyphony” lie many pairs of corresponding images: “the coming it” (intentionally translated as “it” rather than “she” in the Chinese version) and “the muse seeking desperately”; “the poet” and “the cricket”; “the moon phase” and “the sun phase”, and so on. Poetry is the art of language, and the poet’s meticulous attention to specific images and the overall atmosphere may only be known to the poet himself, but the final appearance of the work will undoubtedly be different. The force behind this is the “rhythm” contained within the work, and “rhythm” is precisely the soulful flag of humanity’s final fortress, which AI cannot conquer.

## **English Poet Recommendations (Hosted by Liu Lanhui & Yang Pukai)**

### **When a Man Hath No Freedom to Fight for at Home**

George Gordon Byron

When a man hath no freedom to fight for at home,  
Let him combat for that of his neighbors;  
Let him think of the glories of Greece and of Rome,  
And get knocked on his head for his labors.

To do good to mankind is the chivalrous plan,  
And is always as nobly requited;  
Then battle for freedom wherever you can,  
And, if not shot or hanged, you'll get knighted.

## **Review:**

### **Analysis of “When a Man Hath No Freedom to Fight for at Home”**

Liu Lanhui<sup>1</sup>

George Gordon Byron’s poem “When a Man Hath No Freedom to Fight for at Home” presents a deeply ironic view of the concepts of freedom, heroism, and the pursuit of glory in war. Here we analyze the poem from the following perspectives: theme, art and technique, diction, figures of speech, historical and cultural context, philosophical undertones, and significance, etc.

The primary theme of the poem is freedom, particularly the paradoxical and often ironic pursuit of freedom when there is no immediate personal cause. Byron explores not only the pursuit of freedom on foreign soil but also critiques the romanticization of war and heroism. The first is futility of heroism. Byron emphasizes the futility and danger of fighting for abstract ideals. The noble pursuit of liberty is met with disillusionment as the rewards are either deadly (being “shot” or “hanged”) or absurdly trivial (being “knighted”). Byron also presents his satirical critique of chivalry. He challenges the traditional concept of chivalric duty, where one fights for others, only to receive symbolic rewards for their sacrifice. This mocks the idea that self-sacrifice in war is the ultimate good, revealing a cynical perspective on what it means to fight for others. In this poem, Byron uses classical allusions. He refers to the glories of Greece and of Rome as a way of invoking classical ideals of heroism. However, he undercuts this with humor and irony, suggesting that even the heroic deeds of antiquity are overrated or misinterpreted as glorious, when in reality, they may have led to pointless suffering. The poet expresses his scorn on the absurdity of sacrifice. There is a fundamental questioning of the value of sacrifice. Why should a man risk everything for a foreign cause, only to potentially face injury or death, or to receive an honor like knighthood, which Byron treats as trivial in comparison to the risks involved?

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<sup>1</sup> Liu Lanhui (刘兰辉) is a lecturer of English Literature at Guangdong Baiyun University.

Byron's artistry lies in his ability to present profound ideas within a deceptively simple structure. The poem follows a tight ABAB rhyme scheme, which is reflective of Byron's mastery of form. The regularity of the rhyme scheme contrasts with the chaotic and unpredictable outcomes of war that he critiques within the content of the poem. The poem is likely written in iambic tetrameter. The steady rhythm provides a musical, almost lighthearted quality to the poem, which is at odds with the grim content. This creates a dissonance between form and meaning that enhances the ironic tone. Despite its brevity, the poem packs a great deal of meaning and commentary into just eight lines. Byron does not need expansive verses to communicate the disillusionment with war; his controlled economy of language makes the sarcasm and critique sharper.

Byron's use of language is critical to understanding the poem's tone and message. Here he uses straightforward, colloquial language. The language in the poem is relatively simple and unadorned, which makes the message accessible. Phrases like "knocked on his head" and "shot or hanged" are blunt, contributing to the mocking tone Byron employs. It's conversational, almost casual, as though discussing trivial matters when, in reality, the subject is life and death. Byron also uses subversion of heroic language. Traditionally, one might expect a grandiose description of warfare, freedom, and heroism. However, Byron deliberately undermines these expectations with deliberately understated, even crude, language. This subversion of typical heroic diction is part of what makes the poem feel fresh and biting. In addition to this, the poet employs specific references to ancient civilizations. The use of "Greece and Rome" invokes a kind of grandeur, but Byron's diction undercuts this—he reduces the glorious pursuits of ancient civilizations to efforts that simply get one "knocked on his head." It is a commentary on how distant ideals of heroism have become meaningless in the context of modern disillusionment with war.

Byron's mastery of rhetorical devices deepens the poem's impact. He deftly uses figures of speech, such as irony, allusion, sarcasm and satire, and hyperbole. Irony is the predominant figure of speech in the poem. For instance, the idea that a man might get "knocked on his head for his labors" in pursuit of freedom or be "shot or hanged" for his chivalry is both grim

and darkly humorous. The irony lies in the disconnect between the high-minded ideals of freedom and the actual brutal consequences of fighting for it. The references to Greece and Rome are allusions to classical antiquity, often associated with ideals of democracy, valor, and heroic feats in warfare. Byron uses these allusions not to celebrate but to mock the notion that fighting for freedom elsewhere is glorious. These allusions serve to question whether these classical ideals are truly relevant or useful in the modern world, or merely myths romanticized over time. The entire poem can be read as a satirical commentary on chivalry and war. Byron's mocking tone is evident in the phrase "you'll get knighted" as though the reward of knighthood, which is supposed to be an honor, is treated as an afterthought or even a joke in light of the greater risks involved. The suggestion that a man will either be "shot or hanged" for his efforts is an exaggerated depiction of the dangers faced in warfare, but it also reflects a deeper truth about the precariousness of life in battle. The hyperbole emphasizes the high stakes, while simultaneously trivializing the reward of knighthood.

Understanding the poem requires a grasp of the political climate during Byron's time. Byron wrote this poem in the early 19th century, during a period of great upheaval across Europe. At that time, Europe had been ravaged by the Napoleonic Wars, and the aftermath saw the rise of various nationalistic movements. Byron himself was involved in the Greek War of Independence, so the reference to Greece may have had personal significance for him. However, despite his support of revolution, Byron recognized the grim reality of such conflicts. The second factor is Romantic Disillusionment. Byron was part of the Romantic Movement, which often grappled with the tension between lofty ideals and grim realities. This poem reflects his disillusionment with the notion of heroism and valor, mocking the idea that fighting for a noble cause necessarily leads to a noble outcome. During Byron's time, there was still a lingering reverence for the ideals of chivalry—the idea that a man should defend justice and fight for the oppressed. Byron's poem critiques these notions, suggesting that they are outdated and often lead to pointless suffering.

Byron's poem contains deeper philosophical reflections on human nature and the absurdity of war, for instance, moral ambiguity and skepticism toward progress. The poem suggests that

there is no clear moral high ground when it comes to war. The distinction between right and wrong, between fighting for one's own freedom versus that of others, becomes blurred. Byron seems to suggest that war, no matter how noble the cause, often ends in futility. Byron's allusion to the classical world of Greece and Rome may also reflect a broader skepticism toward the idea of historical progress. He questions whether humanity has really progressed from the days of ancient warfare, or whether we are simply repeating the same cycles of violence under the guise of noble ideals.

In "When a Man Hath No Freedom to Fight for at Home," Byron delivers a sharp, ironic critique of the ideals of heroism and freedom through a masterful use of rhyme, meter, and diction. The poem undermines romanticized notions of war and sacrifice, instead presenting a cynical view of the hollow rewards and grim outcomes that await those who pursue noble causes in far-off lands. Through this lens, Byron's work transcends its historical moment, continuing to offer insights into the folly of war and the pursuit of glory in a world that often rewards sacrifice with only suffering or trivial honors.

There are some Chinese classical poems describing war, duty and bravery. Song of the Frontier (the second one) (塞上曲二首·其二)<sup>1</sup>, written by Dai Shulun (戴叔伦, 732-789), a poet of Tang Dynasty, has some similarities and differences with Byron's poem.

The "Song of the Frontier (the second one)" was composed during the Tang Dynasty, when the country was strong, but the frontier regions still faced invasions by foreign tribes. The poem reflects the concern for border security and the determination of the soldiers to defend their homeland. Dai Shulun's poem mainly describes the bravery and patriotic feelings of the frontier fortress soldiers in the Tang Dynasty, showing the determination of the soldiers to defend the country to the death, and the heroic feelings of not seeking to survive. Dai's poem are full of loyalty and love for the country, and praise for the bravery of frontier soldiers, emotional expression is direct and strong. In the form of seven words, the language of Dai's poem is concise and powerful, and through vivid picture description and strong emotion

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<sup>1</sup> The original Chinese version is 汉家旗帜满阴山，不遣胡儿匹马还。愿得此身长报国，何须生入玉门关。

expression, it shows the heroic image of the border guards.

Although the two poems have similar themes, both involve issues such as the individual and the state, freedom and sacrifice, they are different in emotional expression, historical background and artistic techniques. Dai's poem, with its direct and strong patriotic feelings and vivid picture depiction, shows the bravery and fearlessness of the frontier soldiers in the Tang Dynasty. While Byron's poem reflects his thinking of freedom, honor and chivalric duty. Both of them are outstanding works under the background of their respective times, with unique artistic charm and historical value.

## Written after Swimming from Sestos to Abydos

George Gordon Byron

If, in the month of dark December,  
    Leander, who was nightly wont  
(What maid will not the tale remember?)  
    To cross thy stream, broad Hellespont!

If, when the wintry tempest roared,  
    He sped to Hero, nothing loath,  
And thus of old thy current poured,  
    Fair Venus! how I pity both!

For me, degenerate modern wretch,  
    Though in the genial month of May,  
My dripping limbs I faintly stretch,  
    And think I've done a feat today.

But since he crossed the rapid tide,  
    According to the doubtful story,  
To woo —— and —— Lord knows what beside,  
    And swam for Love, as I for Glory;

'Twere hard to say who fared the best:  
    Sad mortals! thus the gods still plague you!  
He lost his labor, I my jest;  
    For he was drowned, and I've the ague.'



## **Review:**

### **Analysis of “Written after Swimming from Sestos to Abydos”**

Liu Lanhui

George Gordon Byron’s poem “Written after Swimming from Sestos to Abydos” reflects his mixture of romantic nostalgia, self-deprecating humor, and classical allusions, as he uses the ancient tale of Leander and Hero to reflect on his own swimming feat.

The poem juxtaposes two central themes, romantic love and personal glory, alongside a commentary on human frailty in the face of nature and fate. The poet compares his own swim across the Hellespont (also known as the Dardanelles) to Leander’s mythological nightly swims to visit his lover, Hero. Byron swam for “glory,” while Leander swam for “love.” The poem reflects on the different motivations behind their swims, and subtly critiques both pursuits as ultimately futile — Leander perished, and Byron caught the ague (a fever or illness, often associated with chills). The poet also expresses his opinion about human effort and Nature. Byron emphasizes the overpowering forces of nature. The wintry weather and tempestuous seas of the Hellespont present a challenge to both Leander and Byron, reflecting the idea that despite the loftiest of human efforts, nature remains indifferent, and the outcome can be grim, even for those motivated by love or fame. In this poem, classical nostalgia and modernity are craftily intertwined. Byron contrasts himself with the figures of antiquity, particularly Leander. There’s an implicit sense of nostalgia for the classical era, but also a recognition that times have changed, and Byron, as a “degenerate modern wretch,” cannot live up to the grand feats of classical heroes. This comparison sets up the poem’s humorous self-reflection on how modern pursuits seem less grand in comparison to those of ancient times.

Byron’s technical skill as a poet is evident through his use of form, structure, and literary devices. The poem follows a regular ABAB rhyme scheme, which gives the poem a

structured, rhythmic flow. This regularity contrasts with the chaotic subject matter (swimming in tempestuous waters) and reflects Byron's ability to impose artistic order on turbulent experiences. The poem is written in four-line stanzas (quatrains), creating a balanced and symmetrical form. The measured, controlled structure of the stanzas reflects the measured irony and detachment with which Byron approaches his subject. The poem is written primarily in iambic tetrameter, which gives the poem a steady, rhythmic pulse. This regularity mirrors the strokes of a swimmer — repetitive and rhythmic, reflecting Byron's experience crossing the Hellespont.

Byron's choice of words plays a significant role in creating the poem's tone, oscillating between classical reverence and modern irony. Byron employs a deliberately elevated and nostalgic diction when discussing Leander, using phrases like "broad Hellespont" and "wintry tempest roared," which evoke the grandeur of the classical world. These words set the mythic tone for the comparison between Byron's modern accomplishment and Leander's legendary feat. Byron undercuts this grandeur when describing himself with words like "degenerate modern wretch" and "faintly stretch." His diction becomes more modern and mundane when discussing his own experience, emphasizing the contrast between his reality and the mythic grandeur of Leander's story. The poem's language is also playfully ironic. Byron's lighthearted tone, particularly when he refers to himself as having "done a feat today," reflects his awareness of the insignificance of his swim compared to the classical heroics of Leander.

Byron's use of figurative language enriches the poem's meaning and tone. The entire poem revolves around the myth of Leander and Hero, a famous Greek love story in which Leander swims across the Hellespont every night to meet his lover, Hero, until he tragically drowns. Byron alludes to this myth to draw a parallel between his own swim and Leander's, while also critiquing the romanticization of such feats. The reference to Venus, the goddess of love, further emphasizes the theme of love in the classical context, contrasted with Byron's own experience. The poet also uses irony in this poem. It is laden with irony, both in the contrast between Byron's swim for "glory" and Leander's swim for "love," and in the outcomes of

their efforts: Leander drowns, while Byron catches a cold. The irony is sharpest in the final line: "For he was drowned, and I've the ague." Byron's nonchalant tone about both tragic and trivial consequences highlights the futility of human endeavors. Juxtaposition is another figurative language. Byron frequently juxtaposes his own experience with that of Leander, using language to highlight the contrast between ancient heroism and modern triviality. While Leander's swim was for romantic love in the face of great natural obstacles, Byron's swim, though arduous, seems comparatively trivial, as his motivation was personal fame or "glory." The last one is hyperbole. Byron's reference to Leander's swim as involving "wintry tempest" and the broad, dangerous Hellespont is hyperbolic, emphasizing the monumental nature of Leander's task. By contrast, Byron's swim is diminished by his humorous description of the outcome as simply catching a cold, heightening the sense of bathos.

The poem holds significance both in the context of Byron's personal life and as part of his broader literary output. Byron actually swam across the Hellespont in 1810, an event he was very proud of. The poem reflects his characteristic blend of personal experience with literary allusion, as he transforms his own achievement into a reflection on classical heroism. By drawing parallels between himself and Leander, Byron places himself within the tradition of classical adventurers, while simultaneously mocking the futility of such endeavors. The poem also serves as a critique of the pursuit of fame and heroism. Byron's comparison between Leander's romantic motivations and his own desire for glory suggests that both pursuits are equally subject to the whims of fate and nature. The poem ultimately suggests that human effort, whether for love or fame, is often met with indifference by the natural world.

Byron, one of the leading figures of the Romantic movement, often wrote about grand passions, nature, and the individual's relationship to both. However, unlike many of his contemporaries, Byron's work frequently contains a streak of self-irony and disillusionment. In this poem, Byron undermines the traditional Romantic focus on the individual's heroic struggle by mocking his own desire for glory, as well as the tragic outcome of Leander's quest for love. By comparing his "glorious" swim to Leander's mythological swim and emphasizing the triviality of their outcomes, He touches on the transience of human

achievement. While Leander's love may have been grand, and Byron's swim a notable feat in his lifetime, both are ultimately insignificant in the grander scheme of things. Nature, indifferent to human desires and efforts, remains a powerful force that renders even the greatest feats fleeting.

In "Written after Swimming from Sestos to Abydos," Byron reflects on his own swim across the Hellespont by comparing it to the mythological story of Leander. Through the use of classical allusion, irony, and self-deprecating humor, Byron explores the futility of human effort in the face of nature and fate. The poem critiques both romantic love and personal glory as ultimately transient pursuits, with outcomes often determined by forces beyond human control. Byron's skillful use of form, diction, and figurative language enhances the poem's tone of ironic detachment, positioning it as a humorous but poignant commentary on the limitations of human ambition.

## **When We Two Parted<sup>1</sup>**

George Gordon Byron

When we two parted  
In silence and tears,  
Half broken-hearted  
To sever for years,  
Pale grew thy cheek and cold,  
Colder thy kiss;  
Truly that hour foretold  
Sorrow to this.

The dew of the morning  
Sunk chill on my brow—  
It felt like the warning  
Of what I feel now.  
Thy vows are all broken,  
And light is thy fame;  
I hear thy name spoken,  
And share in its shame.

They name thee before me,  
A knell to mine ear;

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<sup>1</sup> This poem is believed to have been written by George Gordon Byron for Lady Frances Wedderburn Webster, a married woman who had a secret affair with him. Most scholars are convinced that the poem was actually written in 1816, when Lady Frances was involved in an illicit relationship with the Duke of Wellington. Feeling deeply betrayed, with love intricately intertwined with resentment, Byron was driven to write this poem.

A shudder comes o'er me—  
Why wert thou so dear?  
They know not I knew thee,  
Who knew thee too well—  
Long, long shall I rue thee,  
Too deeply to tell.

In secret we met—  
In silence I grieve,  
That thy heart could forget,  
Thy spirit deceive.  
If I should meet thee  
After long years,  
How should I greet thee?—  
With silence and tears.

## Review:

### Analysis of “When We Two Parted”

Yang Pukai<sup>1</sup>

“When We Two Parted” is a well-known romantic poem that portrays Byron’s enduring love, deep disillusionment and unspeakable pain following the end of this ambiguous relationship. He addressed this poem to his ex-lover, who finally separated from him for another person and left him in regret and remembrance. The poem contains four eight-line stanzas with the rhyming scheme of ABABCD, which is commonly observed in many of Byron’s works. The cyclic narrative structure, beginning with the recollection of the lovers’ parting “in silence and tears” and ending with the imagined encounter years later, again “in silence and tears”, make his love and memories more haunting and ongoing, like a melancholy storyteller keeps murmuring about his fading lover.

The poem begins by describing the moment of their breakup with a sombre tone, evoking feelings of loss and sadness. It is clear that both of them were heartbroken, as they parted “in silence and tears.” However, the author distinctly senses that his lover’s cheek is pale and cold, and her kiss even colder — images foreshadowing how their poignant farewell will later be remembered as a tale of betrayal.

The second stanza uses the image of morning dew, with the verb “sunk” to embody the desolation permeating his heart and the growing detachment in their relationship, as he realizes that after they broke up, their promises had been shattered and his lover’s reputation was tarnished. A strong emotional shift is evident in the last verse, where the author’s affection turns to shame and disappointment.

As the situation evolves, as articulated in the third stanza, the mere mention of his lover’s name, or anything related to her, causes the author to tremble with deeply conflicted emotions.

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<sup>1</sup> Yang Pukai (杨璞开) is an English teacher of English literature at Guangdong Baiyun University.

Though filled with shame, he is also startled by the enduring love still buried deep within him, a feeling symbolized by the simile “a knell to mine ear.” In the end, this whirlwind of emotions fades into an unspeakable past.

In the final stanza, the author once again mourns their lost and secret love, a consequence of the other person’s infidelity. The poem ends with a gloomy vision of their love story - when they meet years later, he will respond in the same way he did when they parted years ago: “in silence and tears.” The last two lines of the final stanza echo the first two lines of the opening stanza, implying that although both remain “in silence and tears,” everything has changed, and they have passed the point of no return.

Overall, Byron employs various literary devices in this lyric poem. A prominent one is synesthesia. Images such as “pale cheek,” “morning dew,” and “the knell,” evoke the intertwined senses of sight, touch, and sound, amplify the feelings of sorrow and despair in the poem. They enable the reader to not only visualize the scenes but also experience the emotional pain through multiple sensory channels. Additionally, the poem’s structure, with its echoes between the beginning and end, reinforces the author’s prolonged sorrow through repetition. The alliteration which comes as a pair, such as “**w**hen” and “**w**e”, “**h**alf” and “**h**earted”, “**s**hare” and “**s**hame”, “**s**ecret” and “**s**ilence”, not only strengthen the rhythm but also seems to symbolize the relationship of the couple in the poem. Ultimately, this is a hauntingly beautiful poem, capturing a bittersweet moment in Byron’s rich romantic history.

In classical Chinese *Ci* (宋词), there is also a romantic genre called “the Graceful and Restrained Poetic School” (*wǎnyuēpài*, 婉约派), which captures similar emotions and literary themes, such as nostalgia for past love, the unspoken sense of betrayal after parting, and the conflicted longing that follows. However, unlike English poetry, *Ci* tends to convey these emotions more subtly, employing richer imagery and often written from a female perspective by male poets. Here, we will compare two *Ci* from the famous poets of Graceful and Restrained School with Byron’s *When We Two Parted*.



The first one is *Spring In Jade Pavilion: Spring Grief* (玉楼春·春恨) by Yan Shu (晏殊, 991-1055) from the Song Dynasty:

*Farewell Pavilion green with grass and willow trees!  
How could my gallant young lord have left me with ease!  
I'm woke by midnight bell from dim dream in my bower;  
Parting grief won't part with flowers falling in shower.*

*My beloved feels no sorrow my loving heart sheds:  
Each string as woven with thousands of painful threads.  
However far and wide the sky and earth may be,  
They can't measure the lovesickness o'erwhelming me.*<sup>1</sup>

The second one is *Tune: Wandering While Young* (少年游) by Yan Jidao (晏几道, 1038-1110) from the Song Dynasty:

*The eastern water and the western part,  
Oh, but at last  
They'll merge into one stream.  
The fickle clouds have not a heart;  
Though they have passed,  
At night they'll come into your dream.*

*But woman is more fickle than water and cloud.  
Alas! but when  
May I meet the fickle one again?*

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<sup>1</sup> This English version is translated by Xu Yuanchong (1921-2021), who was known for translating Chinese literature into English and French. The original Chinese Song Ci is: 绿杨芳草长亭路。年少抛人容易去。楼头残梦五更钟，花底离愁三月雨。无情不似多情苦。一寸还成千万缕。天涯地角有穷时，只有相思无尽处。

*On thinking over, I've been overflowed*

*With heartbreaks.*

*Oh, but what difference this time makes!*<sup>1</sup>

It could be observed from these two *Ci* that Yan Shu's lines — "How could my gallant young lord have left me with ease," "my beloved feels no sorrow my loving heart sheds," and "they can't measure the lovesickness overwhelming me" — and Yan Jidao's — "woman is more fickle than water and cloud," "when may I meet the fickle one again," and "I've been overflowed with heartbreaks" — closely mirror Byron's themes and emotional tone. All three works portray the turbulent journey from love and connection to pain and regret.

They all rich imagery, but while Byron evokes emotion through sensory images like "chill dew," "knell," and "pale cheeks," Yan Shu draws on "willows," "pavilions," and "rain," and Yan Jidao employs "fickle clouds and water." These are iconic symbols of separation, sorrow, and transience in classical Chinese poetry, reflecting the Graceful and Restrained School's preference for expressing emotion through evocative landscapes or scenery, in contrast to Byron's sensory-focused approach. Therefore, Byron's emotional expression is more inward and direct, revealing a sense of solitude and deep personal regret closely tied to his own emotional experiences and personality. On the other hand, Yan Jidao and Yan Shu expresses their feelings in a more subtle and philosophical manner, manifesting the dynamic relationship between "emotion" (情) and "scenery" (景). The use of natural imagery in their verses adds philosophical depth, while Byron's poetry tends to focus more on internal struggles and self-reflection.

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<sup>1</sup> This English version is also translated by Xu Yuanchong. The original Chinese Song *Ci* is: 离多最是，东西流水，终解两相逢。浅情终似，行云无定，犹到梦魂中。可怜人意，薄于云水，佳会更难重。细想从来，断肠多处，不与今番同。

## On This Day I Complete My Thirty-sixth Year

Missolonghi, 8 January 22, 1824<sup>1</sup>

George Gordon Byron

'Tis time this heart should be unmoved,  
Since others it hath ceased to move:  
Yet, though I cannot be beloved,  
Still let me love!

My days are in the yellow leaf;  
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;  
The worm, the canker, and the grief  
Are mine alone!

The fire that on my bosom preys  
Is lone as some volcanic isle;  
No torch is kindled at its blaze—  
A funeral pile.

The hope, the fear, the jealous care,  
The exalted portion of the pain  
And power of love, I cannot share,  
But wear the chain.

But 'tis not thus—and 'tis not here—  
Such thoughts should shake my soul, nor now,

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<sup>1</sup> This poem was written by Lord Byron in 1824, shortly before his death. At the time, Byron was in Greece, where he had joined the fight for Greek independence against the Ottoman Empire.

Where glory decks the hero's bier,  
Or binds his brow.

The sword, the banner, and the field,  
Glory and Greece, around me see!  
The Spartan, borne upon his shield,  
Was not more free.

Awake! (not Greece—she is awake!)  
Awake, my spirit! Think through whom  
Thy life-blood tracks its parent lake,  
And then strike home!

Tread those reviving passions down,  
Unworthy manhood!—unto thee  
Indifferent should the smile or frown  
Of beauty be.

If thou regrettest thy youth, why live?  
The land of honorable death  
Is here: — up to the field, and give  
Away thy breath!

Seek out — less often sought than found —  
A soldier's grave, for thee the best;  
Then look around, and choose thy ground,  
And take thy rest.

## **Review:**

### **Analysis of “On This Day I Complete My Thirty-sixth Year”**

Yang Pukai

“On This Day I Complete My Thirty-sixth Year” was written by Lord Byron in 1824, shortly before his death. At the time, Byron was in Greece, where he had joined the fight for Greek independence against the Ottoman Empire. The poem is made up of ten four-line stanzas with the rhyming scheme of ABABCD CD. The poem reflects his sense of disillusionment, loneliness, and awareness of his mortality. Byron, once known for his passionate and tumultuous romantic life, expresses a desire to find purpose, heroism and glorious sacrifice rather than romantic relationships. The poem marks a turning point in his life, shifting from romantic despair to a sense of duty and freedom, as he prepared to face the challenges of war.

The narrative of this poem can be divided into three stages, reflecting the evolution of the author’s thoughts and emotions: from lamentation to resolution and ultimately, awakening. In the first four stanzas, the speaker mourns the loss of youth and love, feeling profoundly isolated and desperate. The metaphor is particularly striking here — he compares himself to “yellow leaves (in autumn)” and love to “gone flowers and fruit,” symbolizing his ailing body and fading love respectively. At the same time, he wrestles with loneliness and death, comparing himself to a solitary volcanic island and his life to a funeral pile. These images reflect the dark, decaying, hopeless, and sorrowful tone of this section.

The fifth stanza marks a significant transformation in tone, as the author breaks free from the chains of personal emotions and finds an unswerving, heroic determination. Inspired by the warriors around him, this sets the foundation for his transition from personal love to heroism and the awakening of his will.

The last four stanzas reveal his awakening — abandoning personal love in favour of devotion to the revolution, seeking immortal glory. The tone becomes enthusiastic and direct. However, the sacrifice he is willing to make is not entirely selfless. He compares himself to

the Greek warriors and passionately exclaims, “The Spartan, borne upon his shield, Was not more free,” expressing a desire to become an immortal legendary hero and achieve ultimate freedom. One of the most noteworthy aspects of this poem, aside from its abundant literary devices, is the embodiment of the romantic “Byronic hero” — a complex figure marked by deep, intense affection and hatred, often cynical, proud, desolated, and tormented by inner misery. The personality the author portrays in this poem is undoubtedly a reflection of this.

In classical Chinese Song Ci (宋词), there is also a genre known as the “Heroic and Unrestrained Poetic School” (*háofàngpài*, 豪放派), which conveys the ideal of heroism. One of its prominent representatives is Xin Qiji (辛弃疾, 1140-1207). Compared to the heroic image portrayed in Byron’s poetry, Xin Qiji’s works, while also expressing cynicism, regret over the passing of youth and the eagerness to sacrifice, differ in significant ways. Unlike Byron’s pursuit of personal immortality and salvation, Xin Qiji’s poems are imbued with the sorrow of being unable to serve his country and an unrestrained spirit in the face of life’s hardships. In other words, it is not despondent but heroically tragic. This highlights a key distinction between traditional Chinese heroism and Byronic heroism. Here are excerpts from two of Xin Qiji’s poems for readers to appreciate.

The first one is *Water Dragon Chant* (水龙吟):

*Don’t say for food  
The perch is good!  
When west winds blow,  
Why don’t I homeward go?  
I’d be ashamed to see the patriot,  
Should I retire to seek for land and cot.  
I sigh for passing years I can’t retain;  
In driving wind and blinding rain  
Even an old tree grieves.  
To whom then may I say*

*To wipe my tears away  
With her pink handkerchief or her green sleeves?*<sup>1</sup>

Since the “driving wind and blinding rain” symbolize the nation’s political and warlike turmoil, it is evident that the author is wiping tears for his country and feels ashamed of his own incapability while still calling himself a patriot. The second one is *Tune: Congratulations to the Bridegroom* (贺新郎):

*That I should have aged so!  
And my fellows, alas! how many still remain?  
Life spent with naught to show  
But hair turned silvery in vain.  
Yet with a smile I part  
With all that is mundane,  
Whereof nothing gladdens the heart.  
Charming are mountains green.  
I would expect the feeling to be  
Mutual, for we  
Are somewhat alike, in mood and mien.*<sup>2</sup>

The narrative of this poem includes missing friends and drinking, while also incorporating landscape appreciation. It expresses the poet’s sorrow over the flying of time, unfulfilled ambitions, and the difficulty of finding a true confidant, as well as his integrity in preferring to immerse himself in nature rather than pursue worldly fame and fortune.

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<sup>1</sup> This English version is also translated by Xu Yuanchong. The original Chinese *Ci* is: 休说鲈鱼堪脍，尽西风，季鹰归未？求田问舍，怕应羞见，刘郎才气。可惜流年，忧愁风雨，树犹如此！倩何人唤取，红巾翠袖，搵英雄泪！

<sup>2</sup> This English version is also translated by Xu Yuanchong. The original Chinese *Ci* is: 甚矣吾衰矣。怅平生、交游零落，只今余几！白发空垂三千丈，一笑人间万事。问何物、能令公喜？我见青山多妩媚，料青山见我应如是。情与貌，略相似。

Byron and Xin Qiji both present unique visions of heroism, shaped by their different cultural contexts. Byron's heroes are marked by personal struggle and existential angst, embodying the Byronic heroism of melancholy, intense self-reflection and a quest for individual freedom. In contrast, Xin Qiji's heroism is rooted in patriotism and duty shaped by Confucian idealism. His poetry reflects a commitment to serving his country amidst political upheaval, emphasizing sacrifice for the collective good over personal redemption. These differing perspectives illustrate how cultural and historical contexts shape the expression of heroic ideals.



## Chinese Poet Recommendations (Hosted by Zhang Guangkui)

### An Exploration of Liu Zhaohui<sup>1</sup>'s Poetics

Zhang Guangkui

Liu Zhaohui's poetry, as encapsulated in her anthology 听风私语 (*Whispering to the Wind*), offers a deeply introspective journey through themes of memory, existential reflection, and the human condition. Her work is characterized by a distinctive style that merges the emotive intensity of classical Chinese poetry with the introspective depth of modern free verse.

#### Writing Style and Poetics

Liu's style is marked by a fluidity that allows her to traverse a wide range of emotions and ideas seamlessly. Her poems often display a keen awareness of the sensory world, with a particular focus on sound and silence, as seen in her poem 寂静之声 (*The Sound of Silence*), where she explores the paradox of silence being both a presence and an absence.

Liu employs a minimalist approach to language, carefully selecting words that evoke powerful images and emotions without unnecessary embellishment. This is evident in her poem 色 (*Color*), where the interplay of words like "温和的眼色 (gentle look)" and "瑟瑟涩 (shivering and astringent)" conveys a nuanced emotional landscape in just a few lines.

Her poetics are also deeply influenced by her personal experiences, which she refers to as a "spiritual exile" in her self-reflection on poetry. Liu views her poetry as a means to navigate her inner world, expressing both joy and pain in a way that is intensely personal yet universally resonant.

#### Themes

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<sup>1</sup> Liu Zhaohui (刘朝晖) is a poet and professor of English at Shenzhen Vocational and Technical University. He has published poems such as "Whispers to the Wind".

A central theme in Liu's work is the exploration of memory and its impermanence. In poems like 怀旧 (Nostalgia), she delves into the beauty and melancholy of recalling past experiences, likening it to a "beautiful melody" that persists despite the passage of time .

Another recurrent theme is the tension between idealism and reality. In 理想与现实 (Ideal and Reality), Liu juxtaposes the lofty aspirations of the human spirit with the harsh realities of life, illustrating the often painful disconnect between the two . This theme extends to her exploration of human emotions and relationships, where she frequently meditates on the fleeting nature of happiness and the inevitability of loss.

Liu also reflects on the human condition in a broader sense, contemplating the existential questions that arise from life's transience. Her poem 秋之梦 (Autumn Dream) is a vivid example of this, where she uses the imagery of autumn's vibrant colors to symbolize the cyclical nature of life and death .

### **Individuality**

What sets Liu Zhaohui apart as a poet is her ability to infuse her work with a profound sense of individuality. Her poems are not just reflections on universal themes but are deeply rooted in her personal experiences and emotions. This individuality is particularly evident in her use of the first person, which creates an intimate connection between the poet and the reader.

Liu's poetry is also characterized by a strong sense of place, whether it is the physical landscapes she describes or the emotional terrain she navigates. Her poem 心在沼泽 (Heart in the Swamp), for example, uses the metaphor of a swamp to convey the complexity of human emotions, blending the physical and emotional into a single, evocative image .

In conclusion, Liu Zhaohui's poetics is a rich tapestry of introspection, emotional depth, and linguistic precision. Her work stands out for its ability to convey complex emotions and ideas with a simplicity that is both accessible and profound. Through her poetry, Liu invites readers to explore not just the external world but also the vast landscapes of the human spirit.

Here are the four poems by Liu Zhaohui:

### **1. Lantern Festival**

Low and somber is the sky,  
Drizzle begins to fall.  
The stream in front of my hometown,  
Must be swelling with joy.  
Azaleas spread across the mountains,  
White pear blossoms and pink peach flowers,  
Are blooming regardless, in their own splendor.

I can't help but chase the path back,  
To the times we walked together.  
Images flicker, clear and blurred,  
And I struggle to let go,  
To relinquish the essence of life,  
Too heavy to carry to the end.

In dreams, I use red-hot coals,  
Trying to warm your blue-clad form.  
Anger and insult burn within me,  
I roar to the world,  
How could they treat my father this way,  
Leaving him alone in the cold,  
Yet you awaken, speaking words I don't understand.

How many times have we parted,  
I was calm, knowing there'd be a next time,  
But you always stayed behind,  
Watching me go, as if abandoned.

This time, reunion on a festival day,  
How ironic these words seem.  
Among the crowds, I pretend not to care,  
Laughing at my solitude,  
Abandoned by you.

**Original Chinese Poem:**

**元宵节**

低矮阴沉的天  
毛毛细雨飘起来了  
家乡房前的溪流  
想必已开始欢腾  
那漫山遍野的映山红  
洁白的梨花粉红的桃花  
自顾自地依然要绚烂

总禁不住追寻来时的路  
和你一起走过的时光  
影像频频地在模糊中清晰  
又在清晰中模糊  
只能挣扎着放弃  
放弃—— 生之真谛  
太过沉重无法背负至终点

梦中 我用红红的炭火  
试图烤热一袭青衣的你  
愤怒侮辱燃烧了我  
对着全世界我怒吼  
你们怎么这样对待我的父亲

冰天雪地中让他着单衣独卧  
你醒了 却说着我听不懂的语言

多少次 你送我我送你  
我淡然 只因还有下次  
而你却总在原地目送我  
久久地 仿佛被我遗弃  
这一次 佳节 团圆  
多么讽刺的词语  
众目中我毫不在乎 假装

在如潮的人流里  
在隐约的烟花中  
不断地戴上面具  
笑着祝福着  
笑我的孤独  
被你遗弃

In "Lantern Festival(元宵节)," Liu Zhaohui reflects on the complexities of memory and mourning during a festival typically associated with joy and reunion. The poem contrasts the vibrant imagery of nature—azaleas, pear blossoms, peach blossoms—with the narrator's internal turmoil. The vivid descriptions of nature's persistence in blooming despite the somber mood underscore the tension between external celebration and internal grief. Liu's use of the festival as a backdrop to explore themes of loss and unresolved emotions adds a layer of irony to the poem, highlighting the disconnect between societal expectations of happiness and personal sorrow. The poem culminates in a poignant image of the narrator pretending to be joyful while feeling abandoned, a powerful commentary on the performative nature of social rituals.

## 2. Whispers and Madness

### I

I despised my soul seven times, the wind  
Carried the voice of Gibran. Why  
Seven times? I've never  
Loved myself so deeply, body and soul,  
Loved so much that I only see my kind, loved so much  
That I alienate myself, like  
Narcissus by the water, destroying  
Water's reputation as the source of life.

### II

On Monday, I wore  
Sunday's mask, passersby saw  
And laughed at my untimeliness. I was indifferent.  
Tomorrow I'll wear today's mask, the day after  
Tomorrow's, and so on.  
Maybe one day, I'll simply tear off  
All the masks, revealing the sun-starved  
Bare face. Passersby will flee in terror,  
Shouting, "She's truly mad!"  
But it's not my madness they fear, it's  
The reflection of themselves in my eyes. I won't forget  
To comfort them: Don't be afraid, I only see the masks.

### III

A window isn't a view, without a window  
There's no view.  
Sunlight streams through the window,

Wind and rain enter through the window.  
A room without windows is a dark house,  
A train without windows is a sealed carriage,  
A body without windows is blind,  
A soul without windows is dull.  
Better to endure wind and rain, than to stand by a window,  
Better to shut the door, but open a window.  
Though I often wonder,  
When God closes the door, will He open a window?

#### IV

As a child, I secretly sowed seeds  
Of all kinds in the bamboo grove by the old house.  
In my dreams, they sprouted, bloomed, and bore fruit,  
But in reality, they never grew,  
All rotted in the soil beneath the bamboo leaves.  
Last night, I returned to that grove,  
Dug through the layers of bamboo roots,  
My brother began to urinate for fertilizer,  
And grandma's smiling face appeared in the soil.  
He said: Plant grandma's face in spring,  
And maybe we'll harvest her kindness in autumn.  
I said: Why not plant grandpa's mouth,  
So by autumn, we'll have endless stories.  
In the dream, my face bloomed like a gardenia, content.

#### V

Mountains or the sea? someone asked,  
The sea, I answered without hesitation.

After seeing the restless sea,  
I began to long for the quiet mountains.  
The joy of the wise is like flowing water,  
The joy of the benevolent is like lofty mountains.  
My happiness, if it exists,  
Is like the joy of shrubs in the mountains,  
With tall trees above and weeds below,  
I'm trapped in a limited space.

The ideal happiness is the joy of birds in the mountains,  
Flying freely, when tired  
Resting on a big tree, when hungry  
Sampling the mountain's wild delights, when awake  
Singing freely, breaking the silence of the wilderness.

## VI

Cough, cough, cough, day and night,  
My lungs and guts have been shaken apart.  
Did you cough anything up? the doctor asks,  
Nothing. Maybe something is growing in my lungs,  
And the only way to remove it is to take out my lungs.  
Just like how some attachments grow in the heart,  
And can't be removed, unless you take out the heart too.  
Take out my lungs and heart, doctor,  
Happiness is being heartless and lungless.

## VII

Language is existence,  
Existence is not language.  
Language is the house of being,



A house is not the existence of language.  
Language expresses what can be spoken,  
What cannot be spoken returns to silence.  
What cannot be spoken is not unspeakable,  
Language is too limited, it must be silent.  
Do not try to say what cannot be said,  
Nor force others to say what cannot be said,  
Unless you're good at embracing lies.

**Original Chinese Poem :**

**风言·疯语**

—

我有七次鄙视自己的灵魂，风中  
飘过纪伯伦的声音。为何  
是七次？我却一次也没有  
如此深爱自己，身体和灵魂  
爱到只看得见同类，爱得  
把自我异化为他者，如同  
水边的纳西索斯，毁掉了  
水为生命之源的声名

二

星期一，我戴上了  
星期天的面具，路人看见  
笑我不合时宜。我无动于衷

明天戴今天的面具，后天  
戴明天的，如此以往  
也许有那么一天，我索性揭去  
所有的面具，露出久不见阳光的  
裸脸。路人定会在惊恐中  
奔走相告：“她真疯了！”  
他们恐惧的不是我的疯，而是  
我眼中他们的镜像。我不会忘记  
安慰他们：别怕，我看到的只是面具

### 三

窗不是风景，没有窗  
没有风景  
阳光从窗口洒进来  
风和雨也从窗口飘入  
没有窗的房间是黑屋子  
没有窗的火车是闷罐车  
没有窗的躯体盲目  
没有窗的心灵愚钝  
宁愿忍受风雨，也要伫立窗口  
宁愿关上门，也要打开窗  
尽管总是怀疑  
上帝关上了门，就会打开窗

### 四

小时候总偷偷在老屋边的竹林里播种  
各种各样的种子  
孩提的梦里它们破土而出，开花结果

实际上它们从未发芽  
全都烂在了竹叶下的土壤里  
昨夜又回到那片竹林  
掘开一层层爬满竹根的土  
弟弟开始尿尿施肥  
地里惊现奶奶的笑脸  
弟弟说：春天播下奶奶的脸  
秋天兴许能收获她的慈祥  
我说：不如还种下外公的口  
这样到秋天我们就有听不完的故事  
梦里满足地把脸笑成了栀子花

## 五

喜欢高山还是大海？曾有人问  
大海，不假思索的回答

看遍了躁动的大海  
开始怀念静默的高山  
智者之乐，如同流水  
仁者之乐，如同高山  
我的快乐呢，如果有  
也只是山间灌木之乐  
上有大树下有杂草  
我被困在有限的空间

理想的快乐是山中小鸟之乐  
自由地飞翔，困了  
可栖息在大树上，饿了  
可尝遍山间野味，醒了

可随意歌唱打破山野的寂静

六

咳，咳，咳，夜以继日  
五脏六腑都震翻了  
吐出什么没有？医生问  
什么也没有。有些东西或许  
长在了肺里面，要除去只有拿掉肺  
正如有些牵挂长在了心底里  
怎么也去不掉，除非把心一同拿走  
拿掉我的肺和心吧，医生  
幸福就是做个没心没肺的人

七

语言是存在  
存在不是语言  
语言是存在之家  
家不是语言的存在  
语言表达能够言说的  
不能言说的归于沉默  
无法言说的并非无法启齿  
语言太有限，必须沉默  
不要试图去说无法言说的  
更不要逼人去说无法言说的  
除非你善于悦纳谎言

"风言•疯语" is a multi-faceted poem that delves into the interplay between identity, societal expectations, and self-perception. The seven parts of the poem each address different aspects of these themes, using various metaphors and symbols. The first part, with its reference to

Khalil Gibran and the myth of Narcissus, explores the dangers of self-obsession and the loss of connection with the world. The subsequent sections continue this exploration, with Liu's critique of the "masks" people wear in society, the need for windows (metaphorical and literal) as a means of connecting with the outside world, and the futility of clinging to illusions or past regrets. The poem's concluding lines on language and silence emphasize the limitations of communication and the inevitability of misinterpretation, reflecting Liu's broader themes of isolation and existential contemplation.

### **3. Morning Farewell by a Light Boat**

Scoop a handful of clear water into your palm,  
See your face in the water,  
It quickly fades away with the flow.  
Don't try to watch the water,  
Not even your own reflection.

Better to take a boat,  
Sailing on a river between the cries of monkeys on both banks,  
The boat's shadow in the water,  
When the waves are calm,  
That shadow quietly follows you on your journey.

Or board a light boat,  
Winding through the waterways of the south,  
The picturesque scenery all around,  
Silently drifting by,  
Knowing that in this life, you may never meet again.

Then sing as you bid farewell to the morning,  
Head for the sea to see the waves crashing against the shore.  
But fear not,  
Facing the sea brings infinite shame,  
For the vigor has faded, leaving only a weary body.

#### **Original Chinese Poem:**

#### **轻舟晨别**

掬一汪清水在手心

看水中自己的脸  
随同水快速消逝隐退  
不要试图去流水中观看  
哪怕是自己的影像

不如乘一艘船  
游走在两岸猿啼的江面上  
水中是船的倒影  
波澜不惊的时候  
那个影像也安静地随你远行

或是搭一叶轻舟  
穿行在江南的水道  
四周如画的景色  
都静默地缓缓流过  
知道此生也许不再邂逅

然后踏歌作别清晨  
奔向大海去看那惊涛拍岸  
可是就怕啊  
面对大海会无限惭愧  
只因风华不再却空有一身疲惫

"轻舟晨别" is a contemplative meditation on impermanence and the passage of time. The imagery of water, often a symbol of change and the flow of life, is central to the poem. Liu uses the metaphor of a boat journey to explore the idea of moving through life, with the reflection in the water representing the transient nature of self-perception and identity. The calm, almost resigned tone of the poem suggests an acceptance of life's fleeting moments and the inevitability of aging. The final lines, which express a fear of confronting the vastness of

the sea and the realization of one's own weariness, encapsulate the poem's themes of vulnerability and the fear of insignificance.

#### 4. Pretending

You are in water, he is in fire,  
You see his pain, he sees your struggle.  
In different worlds,  
You both long for the same destination.  
How you wish to stir the water,  
To retrieve him from the fire.  
How he wishes an ember would fall,  
To ignite you in the water.  
But the water cannot stir,  
And the fire cannot drop embers.  
You both pretend to let things be,  
Yet always hope to meet again.  
Watching as the fire spreads,  
You sink into the water, silently grieving.  
The water blocks your tears,  
You pretend not to care at all.

#### Original Chinese Poem:

##### 假装

你在水里他在火中  
你看到他的痛苦，他看到你的挣扎  
在不一样的世界里  
你们期盼同样的归途

多想你的水中掀起狂澜  
夺回火中的他  
多想他的火里掉下余烬  
点燃水中的你  
水掀不起狂澜  
火掉不下余烬  
你们假装顺其自然  
却总是期盼再度谋面  
眼睁睁地看着火四处移动  
你沉入水中暗自神伤  
水堵塞了你的泪腺  
你顺势假装毫不在乎

In "假装," Liu Zhaohui addresses the theme of unfulfilled desires and the gap between appearance and reality. The poem's imagery of water and fire represents the opposing forces in the lives of two individuals who are struggling in their separate worlds. The desire for connection, for one to reach the other, is thwarted by the inherent nature of their environments—water cannot easily affect fire, and fire cannot alter water. The poem poignantly captures the pain of pretending that everything is fine while harboring deep, unspoken longings. The closing lines, where the narrator pretends to be unaffected, resonate with the themes of resignation and the emotional cost of maintaining façades in the face of insurmountable barriers.

These four poems provide a deeper insight into Liu Zhaohui's exploration of human emotions, particularly the tension between societal expectations and personal realities, the passage of time, and the complexities of identity and memory. Each poem exemplifies her ability to convey profound reflections with simplicity and precision, enhancing the overall thematic coherence of her anthology.



## From the Extolment of Freedom to the Reflection on Freedom

### A Study of *Carmen*'s Absorption and Deviation from *The Gypsies*

Zhong Xiaoling<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Mérimée's novella *Carmen* is derived from Pushkin's long narrative poem *The Gypsies*. *The Gypsies* is a Romantic work, where Pushkin affirms and sympathizes with the gypsy girl Zemfira's life, which is integrated with nature, and her pursuit of freedom. *Carmen*, on the other hand, is a Realist work, where Mérimée adopts a cautious and critical attitude towards the concept of freedom exemplified by Carmen. Both Zemfira and Carmen are anarchists as defined by Proudhon; Pushkin extols the former, while Mérimée composes a lament for the latter.

**Keywords:** Pushkin; Zemfira; Mérimée; Carmen; Proudhon; Hobbes

Pushkin (Александр Сергеевич Пушкин, 1799—1837), often referred to as the “father of Russian literature”, is the founder of modern Russian literature and the creator of the Russian literary language. His poems, novels, and dramas enjoy a vast readership, remaining timeless and enduring. Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870), a French realist writer, is renowned for his short stories, which are characterized by vivid, concise, and detached prose style. His works have influenced many writers, including notable authors such as Maupassant, Chekhov, and O. Henry. <sup>[1]</sup> Pushkin and Mérimée admire and appreciate one another, and they had high respect for each other as well, and quite naturally, Pushkin's *The Gypsies* has profound influence on Mérimée *Carmen*, as we can see in the following.

#### I. Pushkin and Mérimée

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Pushkin and Mérimée were respectively born in 1799 and 1803. They were close in age, shared similar interests, and admired each other. Readers familiar with the Russian version of *War and Peace* know that the Russian aristocrats in the 18th and 19th centuries were keen on learning French, and nearly every household employed a French tutor. The aristocrats might not speak Russian well, but they could not do without French, which was their daily social language. The Pushkins were no exception. As a member of the Russian aristocracy, Pushkin was also tutored by a French teacher in his childhood, and he was so fluent in French from a young age that in his high school days, he was nicknamed “the French guy” by his high school classmates, and as a result, his proficiency with French allowed him to engage deeply with French literary works.

Although Pushkin and Mérimée never met, they had a long-standing mutual admiration. From the time Mérimée published his debut work *Clara Gazul, a Spanish Actress: Her Dramatic Works* in 1825, Pushkin began to pay attention to him. In 1828, after reading Mérimée’s poetry collection *La Guzla*, Pushkin was greatly impressed with it and translated it into Russian. He even wrote to his acquaintance Sobolevsky, who knew Mérimée, inquiring about the source of the material in the collection. Mérimée replied to Sobolevsky and addressed the questions posed by Pushkin.

In 1835, Pushkin published *The Song of the Wise Oleg*, and in the preface, he quoted part of a letter Mérimée had written to Sobolevsky. In the preface he also referred to Mérimée’s *Clara Gazul*, *The Chronicle of Charles IX*, and *The Double Mistake*, praising Mérimée’s sharp insight and originality. Mérimée, who was four years younger than Pushkin, respected him greatly, referring to himself as Pushkin’s “loyal servant.”

Mérimée began systematically learning Russian in the mid-1840s and translated and published Pushkin’s novel *The Queen of Spades* in 1849, followed by the publication of Pushkin’s long narrative poem *The Gypsies* and other works in the 1850s. In 1868, Mérimée published an article titled “Alexander Pushkin”, in which he conducted a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of Pushkin and his works, including the tragedy *Boris Godunov*, the long

narrative poems *Eugene Onegin* and *The Gypsies*, and the novels *The Captain's Daughter* and *The Queen of Spades*. He said that Pushkin played a dominant role in Russian literature, and no writer or critic dares to delete Pushkin's name from the list of great writers.<sup>[3]342</sup> The famous Russian writer Turgenev once recalled, "The renowned French writer, and Pushkin's admirer, Mérimée, did not hesitate to call Pushkin the greatest poet of our time." <sup>[2]154</sup> According to Turgenev's recollection, Mérimée believed that "Pushkin's poetry seemed to emerge miraculously and naturally from clear, limpid and concise prose."<sup>[2]154</sup>

Both Pushkin and Mérimée were deeply influenced by Byron, the leading master and the charismatic model of the English "Satanic School" of poets. In the early 1820s, Pushkin was exiled from St. Petersburg by the Tsar and went to southern Russia. While staying at his friend Raevsky's home, he read Byron's works for the first time and was immediately captivated. Pushkin's "Southern Narrative Poems" written during this period were heavily influenced by Byron's "Oriental Tales." "Pushkin's Southern Poems were written under the influence of Byron's tempestuous Romantic passion and rebellious spirit, which had a strong impact on him. He said, 'I was driven mad by Byron.'"<sup>[4]</sup> When Byron published his epic-like *Don Juan* from 1818 to 1823, it swept and captivated the whole Europe, and Pushkin was mesmerized and infatuated with it. As a result, he imitated Byron in every aspect, including literature and private life. He even referred to his long list of lovers as "the Don Juan List".<sup>[5]</sup> In 1824, after completing *The Gypsies*, Pushkin wrote the much-claimed lyrical poem "To the Sea", where he referred to Byron as "another ruler in the realm of our thoughts."<sup>[4]</sup>

Mérimée was also deeply influenced by Byron and believed that, like Pushkin, Byron "played a dominant role in his country's literature."<sup>[3]342</sup> Like Pushkin, he was also taken away by Byron's *Don Juan*, so much so that he even wrote a short story, "The Soul in the Purgatory", in which the protagonist, also called Don Juan, undergoes a whole metamorphic process from an innocent, honest and upright youngster to an amoral, liberal lecher, and then to an evil, wicked, diabolic scoundrel and impostor, and finally, after a long, pious confession, to a virtuous faithful man, depicting the painful, tempestuous psychic odyssey of a man in this secular world.<sup>[5]</sup> Taking Byron as a model, and imitating Don Juan, Mérimée produced his

own “foreign series”, which are exotic, outlandish and barbarous, exemplified by his much praised and widely spread *Carmen* and *Colomba*.

## **II. *The Gypsies*: A Song of Freedom**

In 1824, Pushkin used his experiences with the gypsies on the Moldavian steppe in southern Russia as the subject matter to write his famous long narrative poem *The Gypsies*. The plot of this narrative poem is not very complicated: The male protagonist, Aleko, is a young nobleman who has mingled in high society. He is being pursued and wanted by the Russian government for violating the law ("The law persecutes him" <sup>[6]235</sup>, forcing him to flee the city and seek refuge with the gypsies (also known as the Romani or Bohemians) in a remote area. There, Aleko encounters a beautiful and captivating gypsy girl named Zemfira, and the two quickly fall in love and become a couple.

However, their love does not last long. Zemfira soon falls for another man and secretly meets her new lover at a graveyard at night. Aleko discovers Zemfira's new romance and, consumed with jealousy, kills her lover in a fit of rage. Despite the wise counsel and advice from Zemfira's father, an elderly gypsy, who tries to comfort Aleko by explaining that such things are common among the gypsies, Aleko refuses to let Zemfira go. In the end, he kills her too, in a moment of blind fury. The gypsies do not punish Aleko; instead, they abandon him, leaving him alone in the "vast, fateful field," <sup>[6]266</sup>, as desolate as a wild goose fatally wounded by a lead bullet and left behind by its flock.

Pushkin's *The Gypsies* is in essence a Romantic literary poetic work. For Romantics, civilization is normally seen as a negative force, symbolizing ugliness, filth, shackles, and sin, while nature is considered the sum of all that is good, representing beauty, purity, freedom, and forgiveness. Ultimately, *The Gypsies* is a narrative poem about the conflict between civilization and nature. The society from which Aleko gets away from represents civilization, a world that emphasizes “reason” (social ethics and morals) and “law” (social norms and customs), both of which are the sources of all ugliness, filth, shackles, and sin. Aleko, who is

suffocated by this sinful world, betrays it and escapes from it, seeking refuge among the gypsies, who are the “children of nature.” The gypsies have no country or laws; they are bound together by simple, spontaneous emotions, with “affection” being the lubricant of their society. As the Chinese playwright Tang Xianzu said, “People are born with emotions,” “The world is ruled by emotions,” and “Emotions arise inexplicably and grow deeper over time, leading to life and death.” [7]

Zemfira, like Du Linjiang the beautiful, courageous and faithful heroine in Tang Xianzu’s opera *The Peony Pavilion*, is naturally free-spirited, unbound by any social ethics or national laws. She lives and dies for her emotions, believing that “Flowers and grass can be loved, life and death are at the whim of people, and no one will complain even if it is bitter or sweet.” She falls in love with Aleko and resolutely stays with him, despite the significant gap between them. When her feelings for Aleko fade, she falls in love with another man and leaves Aleko without hesitation, even if it means meeting her lover in secret at a graveyard. Even in the face of death, she remains true to her emotions, unwilling to betray her heart for the sake of survival. She represents the gypsies, who lead a free life, independent from any social or legal constraints, and Pushkin's admiration is evident in his portrayal of them. In contrast, Aleko and the society he represents are the targets of Pushkin's criticism and condemnation:

The bagpipes’ wails, the rattle of wheels,  
Everything is dissonant, crude, tasteless,  
Yet everything is so lively and vibrant.  
Unlike our deathlike tranquility,  
Unlike our lazy, changeless lives,  
This monotonous song of slave-like existence. [6]238

In a sense, Aleko is also a reflection of Pushkin himself. “Aleko despises the shackles of civilization, / and seeks freedom like them, freely and leisurely.” [6]246 Pushkin, who was exiled for several times by the society he lived in, loathed and even detested it as a result. He once stayed with the gypsies for quite some time, and he admired or even envied their way of

life. However, Aleko, who ultimately belongs to the civilized society, is unable to cope with the gypsies' spontaneous and straightforward behavior. In the end, out of jealousy, he kills Zemfira, demonstrating his inability to fully escape the societal norms he was raised in. Through Zemfira's father, Pushkin condemns Aleko's "selfish and cruel" actions as a product of civilization:

Get away from us, you proud one.  
We are barbarians, with no law to abide by.  
We will not punish, nor will we sentence,  
As we want no bleeding or moaning,  
But we do not want to live with a murderer.  
You were not born for this barbarous life,  
And you pursue freedom just for yourself.<sup>[6]266</sup>

In his discussion of the tragic nature of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Professor Ye Lang describes the Grand View Garden as a "world of emotions," where the various talented young women lead lives governed by "affection." These women are emotional, intelligent, pure, and kind, but they are surrounded by an endless "world of law," a feudal society manipulated by various rules and rituals. Under the pressure of this "world of law," the "world of emotions" ultimately disintegrates, as fragile as an egg hitting a rock. <sup>[7]</sup> In this sense, the gypsy tribe where Zemfira lives is also a "world of emotions." Under the siege of the external "world of law"—the various nation-states—this "world of emotions" is besieged on all sides, outnumbered, and forced to wander aimlessly, struggling to survive.

### **III. Carmen: Zemfira in Mérimée's Writing**

As mentioned earlier, Mérimée was the first to introduce Pushkin's works to French readers. He translated Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades*, *The Gypsies*, and *The Shot* into French and wrote an academic paper "Alexander Pushkin", in which he offered a comprehensive critique of Pushkin's works. Mérimée had high praise for *The Gypsies*: "The poem *The Gypsies* shows

us Pushkin's growing confidence as he carves his own path. It is a series of tightly interconnected fragments, with no breaks, sometimes a brief narrative, sometimes dialogue, sometimes interspersed with lyrical passages. There are no detailed descriptions, no philosophical reflections, and the scenery is described only in passing, yet the plot remains compelling. I have never seen a more concise work; if I may use the term as a compliment, not a single line or word could be omitted; every word is in its place and serves its purpose."

[3]350

This shows that Mérimée was not only familiar with Pushkin's *The Gypsies*, but was also deeply influenced by it. His novella *Carmen*, published in 1845, is clearly a reinterpretation of *The Gypsies*. Mérimée retains the basic story framework of *The Gypsies*, while adding the "detailed descriptions" and "philosophical reflections" that were absent in Pushkin's work. He expands greatly on the "scenery descriptions" that Pushkin mentioned only in passing. This was the style of 19th-century realist novels, so much so that later English writer Somerset Maugham criticized the 19th-century greats for their habit of devoting excessive ink to extensive scenery descriptions, regardless of whether it was necessary.

In the novel *Carmen*, Aleko becomes Don José, Zemfira becomes Carmen, and the gypsies become the Bohemians. The setting shifts from the Moldavian steppe in southern Russia to the Andalusian province of Spain and the Strait of Gibraltar.

Don José, a Basque nobleman from northern Spain, is stationed in the southern province of Andalusia as a soldier. During one assignment to handle a brawl, he meets the Bohemian woman Carmen. Tempted by Carmen, he releases her from custody, for which he is punished and demoted to the rank of a soldier. Sent to stand guard, he encounters Carmen again. Seduced by Carmen, he visits her after his shift, spending a passionate night with her, and becomes infatuated. Afterward, while on guard duty, he assists Carmen's smuggling gang. Later, when Carmen seduces a lieutenant in their gang, José, overcome with jealousy, kills the lieutenant and becomes a fugitive, joining Carmen's smuggling gang as they flee. During their activities, José meets Carmen's husband, the "One-Eyed" García, and, driven by

jealousy, he provokes García and kills him in a duel, thereby becoming Carmen's "Rom" (husband). However, Carmen's love for José does not last long. Soon, in Granada, she falls in love with a bullfighter, Lucas. Exhausted by the emotional turmoil, José tries to force Carmen to run away to America with him to start a new life. Carmen refuses, and in despair, José kills her before turning himself in to the police. He is eventually sentenced to death by hanging.

In terms of narratology, the main narrative layer of the story is José's confession, but there is also a meta-narrative layer above it, where the first-person narrator ("I") describes how he came to know the bandit José. This is clearly influenced by Pushkin's novel *The Captain's Daughter*, in which the first-person narrator ("I", or Pyotr) recounts how he encountered a mysterious figure who led them through a snowstorm, only to later discover that the figure was the leader of the peasant rebellion, Pugachev. Similarly, in *Carmen*, the narrator meets a mysterious man on a hot summer day. After sharing food and cigars, they travel together, and the man leads them to the Cuervo Inn. Later, the narrator realizes that his companion was none other than the fugitive José Navarro.

Mérimée's Carmen shares similarities with Pushkin's Zemfira. Both are gypsies without a sense of national identity and do not belong to any country. They disdain social conventions and laws, following only the call of their hearts, living and dying for love. Neither remains faithful to a single man; both are fickle, easily drawn to new loves, and would rather die than live with someone they no longer love. When José tries to coerce Carmen into running away to America with him, Carmen says to him, "I cannot fulfill your demand. I no longer love you, but you still love me, and that is why you want to kill me. I could easily lie to you and deceive you, but I don't want to go through that trouble. Our fate is sealed. You are my Rom, you have the right to kill your Romi, but Carmen will always be free. She was born a Gypsy, and she will die a Gypsy." [8]<sup>54</sup> Her words are an echo from Zemfira's declaration to Aleko, "I will love, even if it means death."

However, while Pushkin portrays Zemfira as a pure, kind, and beautiful "daughter of nature", Mérimée's Carmen is depicted as a "flower of evil". Mérimée offers little praise for Carmen;



instead, he uses many negative terms to describe her. “It is difficult to find a single word of praise for her in the text. On the contrary, there are many words of disdain.” <sup>[1]</sup> The narrator describes her as “lewd and shameless”, so much so that people cross themselves when they see her; José says she “stood with her hands on her hips, flirting with everyone around her, in a way that only a true Bohemian could.” <sup>[8]21</sup> José also states, “That girl lies, sir; she lies habitually. I doubt she has ever told the truth in her entire life.” <sup>[8]25</sup> Carmen is not only promiscuous but also reckless and greedy. She seduces wealthy men, sets them up, and kills them to steal their money. She refuses to engage in legal work, instead she chooses to make a living through smuggling, and occasionally acts as a fortune-teller to swindle money away from the other people. She feels no remorse for her crimes, considering national laws to be nothing but empty words. The narrator admires Carmen’s beauty: “Her skin, though delicate and beautiful, was bronzed like copper. Her large eyes were wild and vibrant, though slightly crossed. Her lips were somewhat thick but beautifully shaped, revealing a set of teeth whiter than almonds. Her hair might have been a bit coarse, but it was black and shiny, like a raven’s wings reflecting blue light.” <sup>[8]15</sup> Despite this, Mérimée takes a cautious, even critical, stance on Carmen’s concept of freedom. In the novel’s concluding reflections, the author notes that the Bohemians have little regard for religious beliefs, are “impoverished and often repulsive”, though “they are respected among less civilized people.” <sup>[8]59</sup>

This demonstrates that as a Romantic writer, Pushkin appreciated and endorsed the freedom exemplified by the gypsies. In contrast, Mérimée, as a Realist writer, lacked Pushkin’s romantic imagination. He questioned whether Carmen’s natural freedom was good or bad for humanity, adopting a cautious and even critical attitude towards Carmen’s version of freedom.

#### **IV. The Lament for Anarchists**

Anarchist thought has a long history in the West, with the Stoic philosopher Zeno of ancient Greece discussing it, arguing that people should not relinquish their freedom for the sake of government. Proudhon, the French philosopher, and also a contemporary of Mérimée, was

“the first person in history to call himself an anarchist,”<sup>[9]</sup> and he coined the term "anarchism.” As a result, he is known as the “father of anarchism”. Anarchism opposes all forms of government and authority, advocating for self-reliance among individuals and emphasizing individual freedom and equality. In this sense, both Zemfira and Carmen can be considered anarchists, as they live in self-organized communities with no concept of nationhood and refuse to submit to any government authority. They value freedom above all else and are willing to die for it.

As a Romantic writer, Pushkin affirms Zemfira’s anarchistic lifestyle, praising and sympathizing with her. While Mérimée’s literary taste includes some elements of Romanticism, such as a love for exoticism and mysticism, he was ultimately a rational Realist writer when it came to his novels. He did not indulge in unrealistic fantasies about the society he portrayed or its people; instead, he scrutinized and critiqued them with a realist’s rational eye.

Regarding anarchism, Mérimée undoubtedly adopts a negative or at least cautiously negative stance. Mérimée was both a literary figure and a historian, but he studied law at the University of Paris, a representative of the continental legal system. The rule of law is the foundation of government, while anarchism is characterized by individualism and opposition to the rule of law.

The British political theorist Thomas Hobbes argued in *Leviathan* that if the state did not exist, human society would enter a “state of nature”, in which competition, distrust, and the pursuit of honor inherent in human nature would inevitably lead to a state of war between individuals, plunging human life into misery. Natural law is the set of general principles discovered by reason, prohibiting individuals from engaging in actions that would destroy their own lives or deprive themselves of the means to preserve their lives, and requiring them to do whatever they believe is most conducive to preserving life. However, adherence to natural law requires some authority “that people fear and which restrains them through the threat of punishment,” and this authority comes from the state. Therefore, human society needs to establish a state.

As mentioned earlier, both Zemfira and Carmen are anarchists, with no sense of nationhood or allegiance to any government. They act according to their personal preferences, with their only guiding principle being their internal desires. Anarchists live in a “state of nature”, which inevitably puts them in a state of conflict with others. Aleko and José kill their rivals in order to win their lovers and then threaten to kill their lovers to force them to remain faithful. Carmen despises authority, mocking those who follow the law. She jokingly refers to José, who follows orders to stand guard, as a “caged bird”. She is greedy by nature, earning her living through deceit, theft, smuggling, and murder. These behaviors are the chaotic competition of human nature in the “state of nature”, inevitably leading to the destruction of others and themselves. If Pushkin sang a hymn for the anarchist Zemfira, Mérimée undoubtedly composed a lament for the anarchist Carmen.

The pure and gentle Zemfira, as portrayed by the Romantic Pushkin, becomes the wild and untamed Carmen in the hands of the Realist Mérimée. Yet, it seems that people have overlooked Mérimée's scrutiny and critique of this brilliant “flower of evil”, focusing instead on Carmen's wild beauty, as radiant as summer flowers, just as they are captivated by the mad but mesmerizing Salome in Oscar Wilde's work. Later, the French musician or composer Bizet adapted *Carmen* into an opera, in which the stage depiction of Carmen is even more breathtakingly beautiful and stunning.

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## On Definition of Western Modernism and Its Characteristics

Li Zhimin<sup>1</sup>

It seems that no one has felt completely confident in defining Modernism. “Since its inception as a category of literary study during the 1930s, Modernism has been notoriously inhospitable to definition.”<sup>2</sup> However, Modernism, to me, is in general “a revolt” against or “turn” from its precedents only superficially, while essentially “a further step”, since nothing of a latter stage was able to happen without having based itself upon the former one; it is definitely newer, but not necessarily higher or more advanced, except in passage of time.

There is not even complete agreement about the duration of Modernism, as some have suggested a broader while others have insisted on a narrower period; either has a sound basis. But it must be against the very function of language for communication if no general agreement can be obtained on the greater part of a linguistic system, hence causing a total confusion in human society. It thus seems beneficial for a community to share a prescriptive dictionary of working definitions that can prevent many damaging misunderstandings. That is probably why some scholars have agreed, more or less, that Modernism happened between 1890 and 1930 and that “its peak period in the Anglo-American context lay between 1910 and 1925”.<sup>3</sup> Although none would risk one’s reputation by offering a concise definition of Modernism, most historians and critics of culture generally agreed on its content: “the term has been used to cover a wide variety of movements subversive of the realist or the romantic impulse and disposed towards abstraction (Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Symbolism, Imagism, Vorticism, Dadaism, Surrealism); but even these are not, as we shall see, all movements of one kind, and some are radical reactions against others. In some nations Modernism has seemed central to the evolution of

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<sup>2</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 157.

<sup>3</sup> *Cambridge Companion*, p. 9.

the literary and artistic tradition; in others it has seemed simply to visit and then go away again.”<sup>1</sup>

With so many different and divergent Modernist schools and movements, being often opposite to each other, it seems that Modernism is by nature resistant to definition in the traditional way, and it is not strange that one often fails to find the common ground among all Modernist schools and movements as required for a traditional definition; or one is simply reluctant to do so because the unsettled application of a term can often leave a huge space for creative thinking and writing; since a sort of agreement on its duration and content has guaranteed a minimum basis of mutual understanding. It could be innovative, and not too absurd, to regard this non-definition of Modernism as a “modern” and descriptive definition of Modernism. Nevertheless, there are indeed some common features among all Modernist schools and movements that are adequate for a definition in the traditional way; the most obvious is that all modernists were craving for Newness. To be new, being usually a sign of being original, itself has a value.

There are usually two ways to be creative, one being to extend and complement some former theories or practice, the other to revolt. The easier way to create something distinctively newer is to revolt against the perceived constrictions of the old, and that is exactly what the modernists did. To be courageous enough to revolt is certainly a strong point, which, however, itself embodies its own weakness, as anything with a rebellious spirit will soon be rebelled against and overthrown by its offspring. “Like Modernism, postmodernism asserts its novelty by trampling on its antecedents; in fact, postmodernism travesties Modernism in much the same terms that Modernism travestied Romanticism.”<sup>2</sup> In a world that has faith in individualism and equality, no one would like any academic authority; this might well explain why modernists were in such hostility against their authoritative forefathers. But since most modernists themselves were interested in building themselves as an authority after

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<sup>1</sup> *Modernism (1890-1930)*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James Mcfarlane (Middlesex: Penguin Books Limited, 1974), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Rainer Emig, *Modernism in Poetry: Motivations, Structures and Limits* (Essex: Longman Group Limited, 1995), Forward (viii)

overthrowing their former authorities, they themselves were due to be overthrown soon by the postmodernists.

Being tired of the endless literary rebellions, some scholars went back to examine the possible inheritance that modernists might have acquired from their predecessors and concluded that “even at this early date, modern poetry looked to Jarrell as it appears to us today—squeezed on the one side by its romantic precursors and on the other by its postmodern inheritors (Jarrell himself first used the word *postmodernist* in 1947). Flying in the face of his New Critical teachers (and foreshadowing the work of Bloom or Kermode), Jarrell insisted that modern poetry was nothing but what romantic poetry ‘wishes or finds it necessary’ to become... Jarrell explained that any qualities associated with modern poetry—violence, disorganization, obscurity—are themselves romantic phenomena.”<sup>1</sup> Even the most famous modernist T.S. Eliot was caught in this retrospective reconsideration. “Today, in the wake of pioneering work by Frank Kermode, Robert Langbaum, and especially Harold Bloom, Eliot not only seems indebted to Tennyson; his Modernism makes most sense when we understand it as part of a continuum beginning with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*.”<sup>2</sup>

Strangely, it was by “revolting” that the modernists “inherited” their literary tradition, which guaranteed them unlimited space for original activities while based, though in a reversed manner, on their predecessors’ literary achievements.

### **I. A Brief View of the “Modern” Background of Modernism in the West**

To probe into Modernist poetry, it will be beneficial to begin with a general discussion of “Modern” in terms of religion, philosophy, science and technology, because: 1) it is only from a very broad, abstract and historical viewpoint that we can see Modernism more clearly as an integrated movement; 2) one can hardly obtain a coherent understanding of Modernism from within, due to the divergent natures of all the different poetical schools of Modernism.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge Companion*, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Cambridge Companion*, p. 100.

The “Modern Age” of the West, in contrast to the Middle Ages, is generally considered as started by the Renaissance that was initiated by a re-discovery of the ancient Greek or Roman culture, incorporating all sorts of Greek and Roman ideologies, among which the most important were the individualism expressed in democracy and equality; these were to shake the basic ideologies of the Middle Ages of the West where religion was prevalent, holding a tight control over people’s spiritual world. Before the Renaissance, Christianity, the major religion in the West, advocating “love” and “peace” among men, had been many times misused by assorted persons in the name of God to carry out notoriously inhuman crimes, causing huge disasters to Western societies and many losses of life. People were then generally heavily repressed by many priests or fathers armed with their own personal interpretations of the Bible; the many priests and fathers even divided Christianity into many sects and, eventually, caused much hatred and slaughter among them, which was certainly against the will of Jesus Christ. (It should be admitted here that these views of medieval Christianity in the West are themselves coloured by post-medieval interpretation, adopting a more secular view of the individual and the state; the negative judgement of the medieval world-view result from the success of the Renaissance ideas which opposed this world-view and largely replaced it.) The many failures of religion to bring happiness to human beings undoubtedly promoted the rediscovery of the ancient Greek and Roman civilisations, that could largely provide complements or alternatives to the weak points of religion by largely depriving the priests’ or fathers’ absolute power over humans.

If we say that the Greek and Roman ideologies only undermined the dominance of religion in an unintended or underground way at the very beginning, the development of science, especially the formation of the Heliocentric Theory and, later, Darwinism, must have fundamentally shaken any religion as a ruling power, greatly enriching the concept of “the Modern Age”. Science that is based on “proofs” was obviously in sharp contrast to religion that strictly ruled out any intention to seek for proof; religion demands pure faith. Since the rapid development of science, including physics, chemistry, astronomy, geography, technology etc., could directly provide fast material improvement to people’s lives, it soon captured the favour of major population groups in Western societies, firmly establishing its



unparalleled role in any modern human society up to the present day. In the era of science, Western philosophy that had started in ancient Greek grew rapidly stronger and stronger and very much took the leading role from religion in offering beliefs to people, largely contributing to the Modernist Movement. For example, it has been said that “Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* was a foundational text of modern thought.”<sup>1</sup>

That the leading characteristic of modern society should be the development of equality among humans has found support from both modern philosophy and religion; the former advocates equality among every member of a society (except for “slaves” perhaps, an idea that could be traced back to ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, which had caused many disasters on earth in the form of colonisation), and the latter was reinterpreted as having faith in all humans being equal before God. Owing to the modern ideology of equality, people began to evaluate their individual value and the importance of their “selves”, which remained as another vital character of the whole Modern Age, which in turn activated a growing awareness by women of their equality with their male counterpart. “Shifts in gender relations at the turn of the century were a key factor in the emergence of Modernism.”<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, Feminism contributed a great deal to Modernism. “The radical implications of the social-cultural changes feminism advocated produced in modernist writing an unprecedented preoccupation with gender, both thematically and formally.”<sup>3</sup> To say that Feminism produced a significant harvest during the Modernism Period is true more from a historical viewpoint than in comparison with the male modernists who certainly played the leading role in most Modernist movements; but the rapidly uprising trend of Feminism was also most significant.

As the self-emphasis of some modernists went to extremes, modernist literature gradually ran into a desperate confusion and withdrew itself from public circulation, leaving the majority of people in a world of no true literature. And yet it may also seem that at least some modernist

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<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge Companion*, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Cambridge Companion*, p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> *Cambridge Companion*, p. 174.

artists responded to the growing divide between popular taste and advanced experiment by cultivating the difficulty of their own productions, becoming not just unpopular but anti-popular in their outlook. “Modernism’s view of itself as a *machine celibataire*, a celibate machine existing out of and for itself, has crucial implications for its self-reflective potential. ... Modernism is constantly in danger of losing control because of its limited self-criticism which is produced, paradoxically, by an overemphasis on self-reflection.”<sup>1</sup> The very fact of receding into itself can certainly be interpreted as the incompetence or failure of modernists to influence the public as their forefathers had done, or, their abandonment of a public role in any of the previously traditional ways.

Later on, even some modernists who had worked together towards overthrowing the traditional literary authorities became somewhat interested in establishing themselves as literary orthodoxy, which, inevitably, caused many disputes among them. “This study must end with an irony, the modern movement consolidating its critical position, even as its leading figures discover irreconcilable differences among themselves. Individually, the English modernists would never want for an eager hearing, but they would never hear one another with the same sympathy. The muted conflict identified at the end of part II, the struggle between a desire for artistic alliance and a celebration of the individual artist, led finally to the dissolution of always fragile bonds.”<sup>2</sup>

The struggles between some leading modernists, and the contradictory nature of Modernism, rule out the possibility of success in studying the Modernist Movement by solely concentrating on individual modernists. A better way is to separate Modernism as a movement from modernists as executors, with the realisation that the Modernist Movement could only possibly have happened within a certain historical and social context. Only then can we study Modernism in an academically abstract way, with frequent reference to some specific individual modernists when necessary. It should be admitted that any individual

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<sup>1</sup> *Modernism in Poetry*, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Michael H. Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary doctrine 1908—1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 215.

modernist embodies some characteristics of Modernism while none of them was an authoritative and infallible incarnation of Modernism; for example, if one should take every word uttered by T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound as a central part of the Modernist Movement, this could only result in confusion leading to nowhere. In fact, T.S. Eliot himself insisted that “The value of any particular artist, of any particular work, cannot be determined in isolation—just no object, no person, no fact, can be perceived in isolation. There must exist, already exist, a scheme into which the new phenomena can fit... No meaning without relations; no truth, no reality, no value without order, without system.”<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot’s viewpoints well support my approach of placing Western Modernism and New Chinese Poetry within a historical system and of studying it abstractly from without rather than studying it in “isolation” (merely from within). Only in the very abstract and comparative approach can one possibly extract some common features among all Western Modernist schools, which is indispensable for an academic study of a certain literary movement; and only in this way can one understand the relationship between New Chinese Poetry and Western poetics in a profound manner and possibly find some good solutions to deal with the problems of New Chinese Poetry.

## **II. Some Main Characteristics of Western Modernism**

No one could deny the preponderant success of Modernism, which main characteristics contained rebellion, originality and some experimental techniques.

### **Rebellion**

It is common knowledge that Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot strongly denounced their immediate precursors’ literary achievement: Victorian literature as a whole, Romantic poetry in particular. But if there had been so many readers of Romantic poetry, how should it be so much belittled? T.S. Eliot insisted that poetry was “an escape from emotions” in order to counteract Williams Wordsworth’s idea of poetry being “an overflow of emotions”; however,

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<sup>1</sup> *Genealogy of Modernism*, pp. 187-188.

it is not impossible that anything that “overflowed” would naturally run away, i.e. “escape”, to borrow a word from Eliot.

In his famous essay “A Retrospect”, Ezra Pound, taking Romanticism as its background voice, invented a lot of “Nos”.<sup>1</sup> But at the very beginning of humanity, before attempting to say something complicated, human beings should have naturally said something much in the way desired by Ezra Pound. Since people had gradually learned to say something more complicated, there must have been some reasons, such as saying something more indirectly, more interestingly and in more literary ways, obtaining a flavour of freshness as many a modernist had desired. So long as some people had enjoyed reading Victorian literature, there should not have been any complete denial of it. Pound’s proposal would never have created a case for newness if many literary readers had not been already so familiar with the Romantic Poetry that was itself rebellious. “The movement has been variously described as the centre of a ‘revolution in the literature of the English language as momentous as the Romantic one’ (Graham Hough)...”<sup>2</sup> It was also inevitable that the trend towards innovative poems suggested by Pound would again become a return to whatever came before Modernism as well as partly a walk forwards from it. “Devoting the rest of his life to *The Cantos*, Pound became the most exaggeratedly romantic poet of his generation.”<sup>3</sup> And it is not at all strange that Imagism would be derived as being a “avant-garde”, quite the opposite of the desire and pride of the Imagists themselves. “Imagism, though commonly treated as the first avant-garde movement in English literature, was something quite different—it was the first anti-avant-garde.”<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the modernists were proposing, they aimed at making literature more literary, which resulted in all kinds of rebellions----a revolt of the precedents. It seemed that many Imagists were interested merely in rebellion itself, since many of them were even unclear about what they were doing; neither could they agree with each other. “Even contributors to

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<sup>1</sup> Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 3-14.

<sup>2</sup> *Modernism (1890-1930)*, p. 228.

<sup>3</sup> *Cambridge Companion*, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> *Cambridge Companion*, p. 39.

Imagist anthologies cannot agree on the nature and significance of the movement they took part in.”<sup>1</sup>

Of all modernists the Italian Futurists were probably the most rebellious, judging from their declarations. “Italy had been a junk shop too long, he [Filippo Tommaso Marinetti] insisted; now it was time to burn her libraries, flood her museums and galleries, and tear down her sacred cities.”<sup>2</sup> They simply desired to overthrow everything Italian that was before and above them, completely and thoroughly. “Let’s break out of the horrible shell of wisdom and throw ourselves like pride-ripened fruit into the wide, contorted mouth of the wind! Let’s give ourselves utterly to the Unknown, not in desperation but only to replenish the deep wells of the Absurd!”<sup>3</sup> As anything develops into its extremity, it inevitably causes troubles or even disasters. “The first [part of the film *Futurist Life*] showed some dynamic young Futurists led by Marinetti attacking an old man at a restaurant in Piazzale Michelangelo because he was drinking his soup in an old-fashioned way.”<sup>4</sup> It was clear then that Italian Futurists had developed themselves as a sort of tyranny, while opposing anything authoritative or tyrannous against them. It was only natural, though undesirable and horrible, that many Italian Futurists would take so much interest in Nazism, as also in the case of Ezra Pound.

And I myself am constantly realising that my own commentary on Modernism is also very much influenced by the rebellious spirit of Modernism, which might be justified by a personal conscience and guarding against going too far, and which can even become relatively desirable, if it remains within certain bounds, since much originality often goes together with rebellion.

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<sup>1</sup> *Modernism (1890-1930)*, p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> *Modernism (1890-1930)*, p. 243.

<sup>3</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944), “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism 1909”, in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, ed. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 250.

<sup>4</sup> *Modernism (1890-1930)*, p. 251.

## Originality

Anyone who is interested only in “overthrowing”, without being able to construct something instead, will achieve nothing valuable. It is undeniable that all modernists, who are generally highly valued by the literary world, could always originate something, demonstrating their marvellous power of originality. As Ezra Pound suggested many “Nos” against his precursors, he also advocated some constructive ideas: “1. Direct treatment of the ‘thing’ whether subjective or objective. 2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation. 3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.”<sup>1</sup> The same happened with the French Symbolists, who harvested much achievement of their own after instigating a revolution against their literary tradition. “What then did the Symbolist revolution achieve? Most fundamentally, it awakened an acute consciousness of language. Language was no longer treated as a material outcrop of the person but as a material with its own laws and its own peculiar forms of life.”<sup>2</sup>

In fact, most modernist schools or movements constructed something of their own in replacement for whatever they had destroyed, without which, Modernism as a whole would be essentially valueless. Unfortunately, New Chinese Poetry as a revolutionary movement did not create enough to fill up the great vacancy that was caused by much ruthless avant-garde destruction of the Chinese literary tradition, which will be further discussed in the later chapters.

## Techniques

To cope with modern society, especially with its many modern social crises, the most efficient undoubtedly should be new ideologies that found their strongest proofs in Karl Marx, Kant and Freud and other philosophers or social theorists. In the literary world, people also aimed at creating new ideologies, and they did achieve some; but the most obvious fact is that in the attempts at dealing with the modern world, the originality of many novelists and poets

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<sup>1</sup> *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Modernism (1890-1930)*, p. 212.

resulted most in new writing techniques, which themselves embodied many new ways of understanding the world.

In the Modern Age, philosophy and science changed the world spiritually and ideologically, while technology changed the world practically and materially. “Heidegger has always had a great many things to say about modernity, and especially about the connection he sees between the modern experience and ‘technology’, the transformation of nature into mere ‘material’ for use by self-defining human agents.”<sup>1</sup>

The same case happened in the literary world: as ideology urged the change of literature, new writing techniques were consequently produced, such as in the Impressionist Movement: “Literary Impressionism is, not surprisingly, a matter of linguistic techniques, the attempt to make language the act of perception rather than analysis of the act, to make language experiential activity rather than a description of activity.”<sup>2</sup> Many modernists would insist that a new technique in writing itself embodied a new idea; and correspondingly, it is always new ideas that consciously or subconsciously demands the invention of new techniques. The most marvellous achievement of almost all modernist schools resided in their new and experimental writing techniques more than anything else, such as the application of the image in Imagism, the application of symbol in Symbolism, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the dissatisfactions of European High Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1991), p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> *Modernism (1890-1930)*, p. 222.

## ***About Verse Version***

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