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Abstract: English Romantic poetry plays an important role in shaping Chinese modern poetry. This role is typically manifested in Xiang Zhu, a representative of Chinese modern poets. His reception and transformation of English Romantic poetry demonstrates how Chinese modern poets learned from the West to enrich and extend their poetic scope. This paper will read Xiang Zhu’s poetic writing as exemplary, showing why he was drawn to Romantic poetry and illustrating his reception of Romantic poetic concepts. The paper argues that Romantic influence did not lead him to abandon Chinese poetical tradition, so that the poems he wrote turned out to be very distinctive. In reconciling Romantic poetry and Chinese classical poetry, Xing Zhu creates Chinese Romantic poems. The paper claims that in receiving foreign culture and literature, poets’ consciousness of native tradition inevitably plays a role.

Keywords: Xiang Zhu, Chinese Modern Poetry, Romantic Poetry, Consciousness of Nativeness

Introduction
Since English Romantic poetry was introduced into China during the first decade of twentieth century through concentrated translation, it has exerted a great influence upon Chinese poets. In particular Chinese poets have been drawn to poetry marked by revolutionary spirit, response to the natural world, subjective feelings and

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the creative power of imagination. Among those poets influenced by English Romantic poetry, Xiang Zhu (1904-1933) is representative. His reception and transformation of English Romantic poetry demonstrates how Chinese modern poets learned from the West to enrich and extend their poetic scope. This paper will read Xiang Zhu’s poetic writing as exemplary, showing why he was drawn to Romantic poetry and illustrating his reception of Romantic poetic concepts. The paper argues that Romantic influence did not lead him to abandon Chinese poetical tradition, so that the poems he wrote turned out to be very distinctive: in reconciling Romantic poetry and Chinese classical poetry, Xing Zhu creates Chinese Romantic poems. The paper claims that in receiving foreign culture and literature, poets’ consciousness of native tradition inevitably plays a role.

Xiang Zhu plays a central role in the development of Chinese new poetry; as Niansheng Luo remarks, “Xiang Zhu should account for the early flourishing of the new culture.”¹ (Luo 14) Nanrong Li praises Xiang Zhu’s poetic creativity in “On Xiang Zhu from the New Crescent School” by suggesting that “New Poetry Anthology with his (Xiang Zhu’s) ten poems and two essays ….can reveal the poet’s talent and persistent pursuit of the new poetry. Xiang Zhu should occupy an assured

¹ Xiang Zhu (1904-1933) was an early 20th century Chinese poet. As one of most celebrated romantic poets of 20th century Chinese literature, he is well-known for promoting modern Chinese literature-new poetry and made a significant contribution to Chinese new poetry. Born in Taihu, Anhui Province, he attended the primary school attached to the Jiangsu 4th normal university in 1914. In 1919, he was enrolled into Qinghua University and joined the “Literature Research Association” in 1924, when he translated Romanian folk songs and composed his first anthology Summer. He married Nijun Liu in 1925 and left for America to study in Lawrence College in 1927. Due to his unsatisfactory experience, shortly afterwards he transferred to Chicago University for further study. In September 1929, he went back to China and taught as the Dean of the Foreign Language School at Anhui University for a period. Later he did not gain renewal and descended into poverty. On December 4th 1933, a desperate Xiang Zhu committed suicide in Cai Shiji.

Zhu Xiang’s major contribution to Chinese new culture and poetry mainly lies in his composition of over 200 poems which are collected in his four anthologies, Summer (1925), Wilderness (1927), Stone Gate (1934) and Forever Words. In the Preface to Summer, he explains that this collection of 26 poems was composed during the period of two and a half years before 1924, and its title embodies his adieu to youth and welcome to maturity. Wilderness was published before his trip to America; however, Zhao Jingshen confirms that Zhu Xiang edited Wilderness while he was in America. Stone Gate comes third according to published date, however his Forever Words can be considered the second if based on the composition date which was around 1925 and 1927.

He translated foreign poems included in Survey of Romanian Ballads and Guava Anthology. He also wrote essays in the Zhong Shu Collection and letters to his wife Liu Nijun and his soul mates like Luo Ailan, Liu Wuji, Luo Niansheng, Zhao Jishen, etc. In those essays and letters, he expatiated on his poetic ideologies and expressed his ambitions for the new poetry, as well as his love for wife and concern for his family and friends.
position in the history of Chinese modern poetry.” (Luo 7) Therefore a case study of Xiang Zhu can provide scholars with a rare opportunity to examine how English Romantic poetry shaped Chinese new poetry alongside the poet’s profound knowledge of Chinese poetic tradition.

As a poet, essayist and translator, Xiang Zhu (1904-1933) was deeply fascinated by Keats’ poems. Since his poetic style shows similarities with that of Keats, he is esteemed as “Chinese Keats” by Xun Lu; hence in modern Chinese literary scholarship Xiang Zhu has always been linked with Keats. Most research tends to link English Romanticism and the New Crescent School, of which Xiang Zhu is generally considered a member, focusing on Xiang Zhu’s affinity with Keats.\(^1\) Though these investigations have enriched the study of Keats and Xiang Zhu, there remain limitations and the space for further critical discussion.

When most studies mainly focus on superficial similarities between Keats and Xiang Zhu, analysis of Xiang Zhu’s poetic theory has been neglected. A narrow lens has limited understanding of Xiang Zhu’s extensive and complex relationship with English Romanticism, especially Coleridge. There has been a failure to trace affinities through detailed textual and contextual analysis. Few studies have considered literary historical factors such as Xiang Zhu’s early study abroad, his translations of Romantic poetry, and his consistent ambition to reconcile Chinese poetic tradition with English Romanticism as a path to the renewal of Chinese poetry. These factors provide a necessary framework for study of Xiang Zhu’s writing. How Chinese new poetry represented by Xiang Zhu assimilates English Romanticism is the central focus of this paper.

Xiang Zhu’s development can be divided into three stages corresponding to his encounter with Romanticism: initial encounter with Romanticism, subsequent reception and identification with Romanticism, and integration of Chinese traditional poetry and Romantic poetry.

I. Xiang Zhu’s Encounter with English Romanticism

In reviewing Xiang Zhu’s first encounter English Romanticism, there are three major considerations: the cultural atmosphere in contemporary China, Xiang Zhu’s overseas study experience and his work in translation.

Enthused by the slogan “seeking inspiration from alien lands”, Chinese intellectuals sought nourishment from the West to construct a new Chinese culture, resulting in the well-known New Culture Movement (1915-1923 in the broad sense and 1917-1921 in the narrow). At this time ambitious Chinese poets were committed to developing a new poetry, assimilating “inspiration” (Qichao Liang’s words) from the “Satanic School” (Xun Lu’s words) (Zhao 4) of Romanticism. In this cultural atmosphere, Xiang Zhu was one remarkable figure who eagerly sought acquaintance with Romanticism.

From his letters, critical essays and some poems, it is clear that before he travelled to America for study, Xiang Zhu had already been familiar with some Romantic poetry. For example, some poems collected in his first Poetry Anthology Summer published in 1924 indicate that he had been reading Romantic poets, especially Keats. His explicit mention of “meeting Keats’ nightingale” (Zhu 30) in “Homeward” demonstrates this. Another poem “To Qian Si” cites Keats’ early death and expresses admiration for his poetic achievement. In “Writing to Siqian Gao” dedicated to a friend dying of tuberculosis, Xiang Zhu refers to Keats as an example to encourage his fight against the same disease: “there was a poet in the old West/Keats, a doctor who diagnosed his own tuberculosis!” (26) In the same poem he eulogizes Keats’ dedicated spirit, “He grinds his pious heart into incense,/ burning in the urn to worship the nine Muses”(26). At the same time he acknowledges Keats’ “miseries and sufferings” (26). These examples directly show Xiang Zhu’s familiarity with Keats, and this familiarity was further strengthened when he studied in America.

Xiang Zhu’s experience in America (1927-1929) provided him with a precious and a close contact with Western literature as a whole and British poetry in particular. He acquired several foreign languages, including Latin, French, German and old English. He was able to exploit these linguistic skills in exploring and translating ancient Greek and Roman literature as well as translating from other languages. At that time, his ambition of “embracing the whole Western literature” (Luo 70) was reflected in a wide range of reading extending from Percy’s Ballads and Walter Scott to Thackeray and Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories. Although he was not in
good financial circumstance, he saved as much as he could to buy volumes from *Everyman’s Library* and the *Modern Library*, as well as *The Oxford Book of English Verse*. Drawn to English literature, he attended a course in “British Ancient Literature” (46) and was fascinated by Shakespeare’s plays and by English ballads and poems more generally. While attending lectures, he also took part in a “poetry reciting competition” with his peers (48) and “composed Chinese poetry in imitation of the English sonnet” (56), and in a letter to his wife, Nijun Liu, articulated a wish to “appreciate poems all over the world” (*Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume II* 5). He regarded English poetry an important model for Chinese new poetry, noting that writing “with a concern for nature (including human nature), the study of British poetry and study of folk ballads are three models for Chinese new poetry.” (*Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume I* 104) English Romantic poets were always his favorite and Keats was particularly important to him. Keats’ statement that “each word in every verse contributes to the whole effect” (Luo 55) was a lesson that he never forgot.

Xiang Zhu’s contact with English Romanticism led to his devotion to translating English Romantic poems. Immersed in reading poetry, he spared no efforts in translating many poems from several languages between 1922 and 1930, to be published eventually in an anthology titled *Guava Anthology*, where English Romantic poems account for a major proportion. They include “My Heart’s in the Highlands”, Blake’s “The Tyger”, Wordsworth’s “Michael” and “Evening on Calais Beach”, Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and Keats’ “Ode on Grecian Urn”, “La Belle dame sans Merci”, “To Autumn”, and “The Eve of St. Agnes”, to name but a few. With these translations Xiang Zhu aimed to enrich Chinese new culture. His ambition was shown in the following remarks: “as Zang Xuan’s [a Chinese ancient monk] translation contributes to the prosperity of Buddhism in Tang dynasty, current poetry translation is of high value for the boom in Chinese new culture”. (*Essay of Xiang Zhu I* 242) It is true that the consummate craftsmanship of his translation of the Romantics provides an indispensable opportunity to scrutinize the effect of English Romanticism on his poetic thought and composition.

**II. Xiang Zhu’s Identification with and Reception of Romanticism**

The poems and essays Xiang Zhu wrote after he returned from America show him probing further into English-language Romanticism. He reads extensively in Robert Burns’s ballads and William Wordsworth’s “nature poetry”; he is compelled by Coleridge’s fantastic subject matter, far-reaching imagination, grotesque images,
and prosodic precision; he is delighted by Keats’ exquisite effects derived from sensual description and underlying melancholy; and he is enthusiastic about Shelley’s unprecedented beauty and intricate rhyme structures.

Xiang Zhu’s engagement with Romanticism started with his interest in ballads from reading Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* and Walter Scott’s *Proud Maisie*, and above all, Burns’s ballads. An early Romantic Scottish poet honored as the “plowman poet” and “Scottish soul”, through his ballads Robert Burns contributed much to the development of Romanticism, stimulating Xiang Zhu’s strong attachment to this poetic form. Xiang Zhu praises the “musical effect in Burns’s ballads in comparison with those of William Blake” (*Essay of Xiang Zhu I* 249) and ascribes its success to the handling of refrain. He points to Burns’s “My Heart’s in the Highlands” as exemplifying it in the repeated line “My heart’s in the Highlands, my heart is not here”. Later he applied the technique to many of his own ballads, though with some alterations. In Burn’s case, the refrain occurs in the first line and last lines in a stanza, while Xiang Zhu uses it in the last but one lines, such as “Sound sleep, baby” (Zhu 57) in “Lullaby”.

The natural world occupies a supreme position in Romantic theories and poetic practice. Xiang Zhu did not escape from the influence. A number of his poems were inspired by nature. Huatang Pu suggests that “Xiang Zhu can discover the genuine beauty in worldly surroundings and tries to attain the sparkling stimulus from nature.” (*Essays of Xiang Zhu I* 7) It is evident he was considerably influenced by Wordsworth’s example in, for instance, “She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways”. Xiang Zhu claimed that “he was deeply impressed by Wordsworth’s love for natural beauty reflected in his descriptions of violet and star.”(*Essays of Xiang Zhu II* 316) Gradually he developed an intimate relationship with natural beauty in his poems. For example, he is profoundly affected by “silent poplar” in “Deserted Garden”, “flowing river” in “Brook”, and “green willows” in “Late Coming Spring”; he presents “white cloud”, “sister grass”, “sister wind” and “brother swallow” in “Small Stream”. Birds herald the early spring in his “Spring Bird” and birds chirp in the “Tranquil Summer Night”; “White pear flower”, “olivine grass”, “silver waves”; and “rime fog” are exquisitely described in “Spring”. Such a concern with nature marks his first important step in the reception of Romanticism. In classic Chinese poems, nature has always been the focus for poets’ composition with the idea that man is an integral part of nature. They strive to express their subjective feelings, enthusiastic and passionate, through the natural images or symbols. However, nature, depicted by Xiang Zhu, distinguishes itself through a sentiment derived from
Wordsworth’s poetic tone. Both in “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” and “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey”, Wordsworth expresses his feeling for tranquility, loneliness and solitude. Xiang Zhu also voiced his similar emotions in his works like “Small Stream”, “Tranquil Summer Evening”, and “Long Waiting for Spring”.

Xiang Zhu’s identification with Romanticism is even more apparent in relation to Coleridge. He admires Coleridge’s extraordinary imagination and exquisite choice of words, but what most moves Xiang Zhu is Coleridge’s “pioneering boldness. He quotes from “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” to characterize such a spirit “We were the first that ever burst/ Upon that silent sea!” (Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume I 252) Xiang Zhu claims that “Coleridge is the guide of British Romantic Movement in the nineteenth century” (252) for he embodies the essential and ultimate quality of Romanticism—that is, “pioneering boldness”, evident in Coleridge’s ground-breaking subject matter in “Youth and Age”, “Kubla Khan”, “The Rime of Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel”.(188).

For Xiang Zhu, Coleridge’s response to modern life sets a good example for the subsequent poets. He cites the “skiffs” in Coleridge’s poem “Youth and Age” as a typical subject from modern life. He observes the similarity between Moruo Guo’s subject matter and Coleridge’s, reminding him of the latter’s verses, “Like those trim skiffs, unknown of yore, /On winding lakes and rivers wide,/That ask no aid of sail or oar,/That fear no spike of wind or tide”. (Essays of Xiang Zhu I ,189) Xiang Zhu appreciates Muoruo Guo’s “skiff” in his poem “Bird’s View on Bili Mountain”:“In the dark sea gulf are halting skiffs, sailing skiffs and countless skiffs, / out of each chimney a black peony blooms.” (Essays of Xiang Zhu I , 189) Coleridge’s transcendental physical experiences also attract Xiang Zhu’s attention. He describes the experience in this way: “Coleridge experiences a strange feeling coming from the breaking up of soul and body, expressed as ‘This breathing house not built with hands, /This body that does me grievous wrong’ in “Youth and Age”. " (190) Also important is the feeling of dejection suffusing the “Ode to Dejection”. Excited by Coleridge’s supernaturalism, Xiang Zhu marvels at Coleridge’s creation of Kubla Khan’s splendid and grotesque palace, the Ancient Mariner and the female ghost in “Christabel”.

Following Coleridge, Xiang Zhu weaves modern and everyday objects into his poetry. As Coleridge makes use of “skiff”, Xiang Zhu uses “tram”, “train” and “ship” in his “Italian Sonnet 38” (271) as well as “yacht” in “Sonnet 49”. Niansheng Luo comments that “Xiang Zhu’s introduction of ordinary items in daily life into his
poetry deserves the attention of new poets.” (Luo 87) Influenced by Coleridge, Xiang Zhu depicts body and soul separating in a dream atmosphere in his “Italian Sonnet 16”, “In an eccentric, weird dream, I caught sight of /my double self stemming from body.” (Zhu 257) Again in his narrative poetic drama, “Accidental Mistake”, he creates a supernatural portrayal of a female soul reincarnated in a dead male.

The power of imagination was the weapon wielded by Romantic poets against classicism and rationalism. Instead of mechanically reflecting the physical world, Romantic poets immersed themselves into the fantastic world to obtain poetic truth. It is Coleridge who captures the force of imagination in contrast with fancy in his *Biographia Literaria*, leaving a deep impression on Xiang Zhu, for he frequently expresses a passion for Coleridge’s exotic imagination and the illusions produced by opium. By citing “Kubla Khan” as exemplifying Coleridge’s poetic “imagination” by contrast with “fancy”, Xiang Zhu acknowledges its genuinely exotic feelings. He believes that “Coleridge could not find anything special in the western world but resorted to the enlightening Eastern world to grasp ‘Kubla Khan’” (Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume I 190) Xiang Zhu relishes “Kubla Khan” in particular and once declares “‘But O, that deep Romantic chasm which slanted/ Down the green hill athwart a cedar’s cover!...A river steep and wide’ is a unique and genuine imagination rarely achieved”.(174) “As a ‘fragment’ of a longer poem he had composed in drug-induced sleep after reading about ‘Kubla Khan’ s garden”,(Carl Woodring 345) “Kubla Khan” presents the majestic palace set in “a savage place” with “sacred river” running and “there were gardens bright with sinuous rills” (*The Norton Anthology English Literature: The Major Authors* 1505). A mysterious and grotesque atmosphere is evoked by a “woman wailing for her demon-lover” under the “waning moon”. Prompted by this, Xiang Zhu wrote a similar poem “Palace of Beauty” whose awesome and gothic effect is achieved by “stately columns pointing to heaven”, a “royally grand crimson wall” and a “gruesome forest with the ape’s crying nightly”. (Zhu 332)

Xiang Zhu’s infatuation with Coleridge is shown then in his love for the latter’s “ugly” and “grotesque” images. He insists that those images are an indispensible part of Coleridge’s aesthetic, a case in point being Coleridge’s “Life-in-Death” woman in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”: “Her lips were red, /her looks were free, /Her locks were yellow as gold: /Her skin was as white as leprosy, /The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she, /Who thickens man's blood with cold”. (Wang 680-681) Likewise, a number of dreadful and deformed images can be recognised in
Xiang Zhu’s poetic practice. He characterizes a bizarre siren in “Prayer for Sun” in the words “…a siren clad in the red/ a fox, praying in the moon, sucks marrows / White rotten skulls and decayed bones, on which/ carved rare flowers in crimson and dark, bloomed” (Zhu 184). Xiang Zhu’s “History” compels through the “grotesque” image of the freezing wild wind: “people in winter, awaiting for the wind to settle,/ and cease mincing meat from the bone –shaped branch.”(Zhu 343)

As Xiang Zhu indicates, Coleridge’s “pioneering boldness” is also revealed in his use of syllables. Xiang Zhu not only espouses Coleridge’s emphasis on “words and forms” but also approves of the latter’s proposition in *Biographia Literaria* that “the syllable is the standard for the genuine new poet” (*Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume II* 193). Syllable in Xiang Zhu’s mind mainly refers to “rhythm” and “rhyme” as summarized by Niansheng Luo. (Luo 140) One typical example is found in Xiang Zhu’s poem “Ode to Marriage”, where the use of rhyme “ang” at the beginning of the poem and “ao” at the end of the poem conveys conflicting emotions: one is the excitement of the wedding ceremony, and the other the sentimental feelings of the bride and groom. The vowel rhyme here emphasizes the rhythm. Meanwhile, Coleridge’s attention to word order serves for example too. Coleridge highlights the exact location of a word by stating that “…it would be scarcely more difficult to push a stone out from the pyramids with the bare hand than to alter a word, or the position of a word in Milton or Shakespeare…without making the author say something else, or something worse, than he does say.” (*The Norton Anthology English Literature: The Major Authors* 1539) Xiang Zhu responds actively to this idea and advocates reordering the Chinese archaic words Zhi, Hu, Zhe and Ye into the sequence of Zhi, Hu, Ye and Zhe in the form of couplets. He considers the creative utility of old poetic techniques, for example, rearrangement of word sequence mentioned above, as the “uttermost distinction between the new poetry and the ancient one”. (*Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume I* 308)

Alongside Coleridge, Keats is Xiang Zhu’s favorite Romantic poet. Xiang Zhu’s identification with Keats is multifaceted. Firstly, he acclaims Keats’ conception of beauty and truth. He states that “if we are incapable of discovering vivid beauty in a particular context, then we are away from truth of poetry. While reading poetry or other literary works, we are supposed to detect vivid beauty and the quest for poetic truth rather than hesitate over whether such beauty conforms to reality or not.” (*Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume II* 314) Xiang Zhu proposes that “if we look at the poem in terms of pure poetry or poetic truth, we will find ourselves pleased and satisfied in reading Keatsian “The Eve of St. Agnes””. (314)
Secondly, his verse is deeply imbued with a Keatsian presentation of sensual experiences. According to him, Keats’ “I Stood Tiptoe upon a Little Hill” and “The Eve of St. Agnes” “remarkably exemplify Keats’ delicate depiction of fresh sensations”. (Essays of Xiang Zhu I 113) Description of sensation, motivated by “negative capability” is sophisticatedly manipulated by Keats to counter Locke’s empiricism, his dismissal of unreliable subjective imagination.

Thirdly, Xiang Zhu is struck by Keats’ creation of images appealing to various senses – “tactile, gustatory, kinetic, visceral as well as visual and auditory” (The Norton Anthology English Literature The Major Authors 1769). These sensual images, he thinks, give rise to the sensual beauty with the help of which Keats builds an imaginative world based on as well as transcending the given world. Zhu not only theorizes this sensory vividness but also practices it in his poems. “Rain” is a typical example illustrating the presentation of sensual images he learnt from Keats. In it, he deals with the senses of seeing, hearing, touching and feeling all together. His sophisticated use of visual color is represented in the “grey and crystal cloudy sky with boundless expectation for rain” and the visual impression of “dazzling lightning”. (Zhu 77) In the describing sound, he compares the “big raindrops beating on the pane” to those “falling on the banana leaves”. (77) For the tactile sense of raindrops falling on the face, he evokes “fog”.

Fourthly, Xiang Zhu is interested in the Keatsian development of the contradictory state of the real and dream as manifested in “Ode to a Nightingale”: “Was it a vision, or a waking dream?/ Fled is that music:-Do I wake or sleep?” (The Norton Anthology English Literature: The Major Authors 1793. Abrams writes that “under the richly sensuous surface, we find Keats’ characteristic presentation of all experience as a tangle of inseparable but irreconcilable opposites. He finds melancholy in delight and pleasure in pain; he feels the highest intensity of love as an approximation to death…. he is aware both of the attraction of an imaginative dream world without ‘disagreeables’ and the remorseless pressure of the actual”. (1769) This achievement is echoed by Xiang Zhu, for readers can unearth similar contradictions below the surface of his poems. In “Moon Travel”, Xiang Zhu confuses “dream” and “reality” through exquisite sensual description, but the narrator is unexpectedly drawn out of his fantastic realm in the lines “Suddenly I woke,/ found moonlight cast ahead of bed.”(Zhu 97)

Fifthly, Xiang Zhu marvels at Keats’ imagination. While some scholars mock Keats’ introduction of “carpet” in a poem about the Medieval Age and condemn it as an anachronism, he shows a tolerant attitude towards this “anachronism” in “The
Eve of St. Agnes” and highlights the archaic aesthetic embodiment performed by “carpet”. He elaborates in his article “Table Talk” that “the existence of the carpet establishes the connection between the chilling air in the castle and freezing coldness outdoors.” (314) In the speculative poem “Pleading”, Xiang Zhu discards the notion that a poem should mechanically mirror reality and resituates the autumn night in summer by introducing the unseasonal May blossom in imitation of Keats. He explains that only the “smell of May blossom blooming in the hot summer can convey ardent love.” (Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume I 295)

Furthermore, Shelley’s sublime landscapes are also Zhu’s delight. He compliments Shelley on his description of nature, especially the grand mountains and perilous peaks, as well as the impressive rivers in Shelley’s “Alastor: or The Spirit of Solitude”. Compelled by such sublime beauty, Xiang Zhu subsequently composes certain poems to pay tribute to Shelley. In the “Ocean”, Xiang Zhu contemplates the grandness of the ocean by claiming “Only the Ocean! e’more gazing on blue sky!/ taking along icy water from the mountain range in the Antarctic”. (Zhu 179)

Form is an important literary property that no writer can dodge. Chinese new poets were attentive to form in renovating traditional poetry and creating a new one. As a new Chinese poet, Xiang Zhu thought deeply about formal innovation. His understanding of poetic form accords with Abrams’ definition: “verse form and stanza form constituted by certain fixed patterns of meter, lines and rhymes.” (A Glossary of Literary Terms 101) He notices the Romantics’ endeavors to revolutionize form and is particularly attracted to “Shelley’s valuable model in “To Night” because this poem, he thinks, adopts a stanza with a fixed “rhythmic schemata”, which he terms the “repetitive stanza” (Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume I 290). This “repetitive stanza” is similar to Que (stanza) in Chinese Ci in that once the first Que is determined, the second Que must repeat it. In “To Night”, each of the five stanzas contains seven lines, and each line consists of eight (exceptionally of nine) stressed or unstressed syllables, except for the second and eighth which consist of three or four syllables. And the rhyme scheme (ab ab ccb) repeats in every stanza. In Xiang Zhu’s view, this “rhythmic schemata” contributes to the poem’s formal beauty. Later he follows Shelley’s example to compose “Pleading”, though with a different number of lines:

Ken Qiu
恳求  
Pleading  

天河明亮在杨柳梢头，  
Milky way hangs over willow bright,  

隔断了相思的织女，牵牛；  
breaking weaving girl from cowboy,  

不料 我们 聚首，  
But we meet, Alas!  

女郎呀，你还要含羞……  
Young lady, still you are so shy.  

好，你且含羞；  
Alas, still you are so shy.  

一旦间我们也阻隔河流,  
Once separated by waters then,  

那时候  
At that time  

要重逢你也无由!  
hardly will we meet again!  

----------- Stanza I  

The poem consists of three stanzas each containing eight lines of different length deriving from the variable number of Chinese characters. Rhythm is understood by Xiang Zhu, according to Niansheng Luo, “as the ‘meter’ that can be achieved through the fixed numbers of Chinese characters.” (Luo 89) Hence, the first line contains nine characters, followed by ten in the next, and six, eight, five, ten, three and seven in sequence. This pattern is repeated in the remaining two stanzas of the poem. Evidently Xiang Zhu uses Chinese characters in place of English syllables. Besides, the end rhymes of “ou”, “en” and “ang” convey a particular emotion. He explains that “in every stanza, the third line ends with the third tone of the same rhyme to create a variety, and the last but second line ends with the fourth tone of the same rhyme to create an emotional tension.” (Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume I 294)  

In his reception, Xiang Zhu discovers a respect and yearning for the past as a source of inspiration in Romanticism. He finds that English Romantics often return to ancient Greece and Rome and to the English Renaissance for certain themes and poetic forms. Therefore he asserts that “without the revival of ancient literature, British Romantic poets would never have been born”. (Essays of Xiahu Volume II 299) It is true that English Romanticism was born in rebellion against the
philosophers of the eighteenth century, “who represented the ultimate reality as a mechanical world consisting of physical particles in motion.” (English Literature The Major Authors 1267) Romantic poets, in Professor Ker’s words, “implied reminiscence” (Lovejoy 231). Xiang Zhu recognizes the influence on Wordsworth of Shakespeare: “We speak the tongue that Shakespeare spoke, which also echoes the conclusion summarized by Carlyle’s Shakespeare in Heroes and Hero Worship.” (Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume I 284) He points out that Coleridge composes “On Donne’s Poetry” to show his respect for the past, and proposes that Keats esteems Homer, writing the sonnet “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer” to show his respect, and that Keats always takes Shakespeare as his model.

Romantic inclination towards the past, as Zhu recognises, can be shown in choice of subject matter and poetic form. Wordsworth discovered profound melody in the ancient “Arabian sands” and “Among the farthest Hebrides” (English Literature The Major Authors 1390); Coleridge constructs his splendid palace in imitation of the emperor Kubla Khan in China; Keats retells an old romantic story in “The Eve of St. Agnes”, reminiscent of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet; he borrows subject matter from ancient Indian demonology in composing Lamia. As for poetic form, Zhu points out that Romantic poets revive the Spenserian stanza, ode, ballad and sonnet. As Carl Woodring notes, a number of repeatedly cited ballads in Thomas Percy’s Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765) “alerted Burns, Scott, Wordsworth, and Coleridge to the beguiling force of ‘folk’ balladry.”(Woodring 110) Burns recorded Scottish ballads and composed “My heart’s in the Highlands” on their model; similarly, Coleridge used the ballad form in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, and Keats composed several narrative poems in Spenserian stanza, “The Eve of St. Agnes” in particular. Romantic’s return to the past as a literary source, though not the dominant practice among them, did awaken Xiang Zhu’s “complex of the “past” and encourage him to go back to Chinese traditional poetry for a source of his poetic writing. Here his nativist consciousness becomes apparent. Professor Ou Hong, a Chinese scholar of English poetry, suggests that in accepting foreign literature and culture, a native writer’s sense of nativeness plays an important role, determining what he or she receives and refuses. In the case of Xiang Zhu, although this paper focuses on his relationship with foreign literature, his strong national consciousness cannot pass unnoticced. What constitutes Zhu’s nativism in terms of literature is his education in traditional Chinese culture and passionate love of Chinese traditional poetry. Even in responding to Romanticism he avoids wholly embracing it, for he feels so worried about the disappearance of traditional Chinese
culture: “in the future, the overwhelming culture crisis for China probably lies in the domination of Western spirit over the Chinese literary form.” (Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume II 256) With such apprehensions in mind, Xiang Zhu constantly guards against being totally captured by the Romantic. In his poem “Homeward”, he resists being canonized as “Keats’ Nightingale”, preferring to be an “Oriental bird”, a “mandarin duck”, a “white crane”, or a “Chinese Phoenix” (Zhu 29). He never neglects the aim of establishing a genuine Chinese culture named as “culture-nationalism” in his letter to Yiduo Wen, another new poetry contributor.

Xiang Zhu’s deep knowledge of previous Chinese classical literature makes it natural for him to refer to it. His ardent desire for learning and his formal traditional education lead him to a wide range of reading, that is, “storage of materials” in Xiang Zhu’s words, including classical books, ancient popular ballads and Chinese Romantic poems as well as Chinese legendary stories like Long Bian Ying, The Book of Odes, The Four Books, Tso Chuan, Yue Fu Anthology, Odes of CH’u, and Anthology of Tang Dynasty, the poems of Qu Yuan, Li Bo and Wei Wang and Ci Poetry in Song Dynasty, and Niú Láng (Cowboy) and ZhīNǚ (Weaver Girl), Cháng é (Chinese Moon Queen) and Wú Gāng (Woodcutter, Servant of Moon Queen), Xi Hé (Chinese Sun Goddess ) and Hòu Yì as well as to fox ghosts and other folk

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1 As one of the popular poetic forms, Yue Fu is composed in the folk song style. The lines of the Yue Fu are of uneven length, though most are in five-character lines. Most of Yue Fu poems in narrative mode mirror the themes of ordinary people. Some reflect the poverty-stricken life of laboring people; some expose the misery caused by wars; some express opposition to feudal marriage and customs and celebrate the pursuit of true love; and some reveal the decadent life of aristocrats and the darkness of society. Xiang Zhu absorbs much from Yue Fu in terms of uneven length stanza.

2 Qu Yuan, a great patriotic poet living in the latter part of the Warring States Period (476 BC - 221 BC), drowned himself in Miluo River after failing in his struggle to reform the government. He is famed in literature for many immortal poems including Lì Sāo (The Lament), Tian Wen (Asking Questions of Heaven), Jiù Ge (Nine Songs), and Huái Sha (Embracing the Sand). Xiang Zhu was fundamentally influenced by him, and usually alludes to him or his poems in the creation of new poetry.

3 Li Po (A.D. 701-762), a poet of Tang Dynasty who is supposed to embody the Chinese Romantic spirit, exerted a great influence on Xiang Zhu.

4 Wang Wei (A.D. 701-761 or A.D. 699-761), a poet in Tang Dynasty. His influence upon Xiang Zhu is shown in two ways. First, Wang’s way of dealing with foreign culture (Buddhism) inspires Xiang Zhu. Second, his poetic images have a deep impact upon the latter’s poems. Xiang Zhu comments on Wei Wang’s aesthetic principles in the essays Poems of Wei Wang.

5 Ci Poetry in Song Dynasty is also known as Changduanju ("lines of irregular lengths"). Typically the number of characters in each line and the rhythm are determined by certain sets of patterns, or tunes.

6 Niú Láng (the Cowboy) and ZhīNǚ (the Weaver Girl), Cháng é (Chinese Moon Queen) and Wú
figures. From these Chinese classical precursors Xiang Zhu draws subject matter and formal structures. And it is this consciousness of nativeness that fosters Zhu’s sympathy with the Romantic tendency to return to the past.

Xiang Zhu is happy to find an affinity between the ballad form, which he loves in traditional Chinese poetry (Yue Fu Poetry) and the Romantic adoption of ballad form. His belief that this affinity can join Chinese and English Romantic poetry is realised in his later integration of Chinese and Romantic poetry in his own work.

To sum up, Xiang Zhu’s reception of English Romanticism is among the most comprehensive of his contemporaries, and is based on his openness to Western culture as well as his nativist consciousness. This establishes the basis for his contribution to new poetry—Chinese-style Romantic poetry.

III. Xiang Zhu’s Integration of Chinese Classical Poetry and Romanticism

In terms of his cultural stand, Xiang Zhu is neither a conservative nor a radical. He aims to integrate harmoniously Western culture and Chinese culture, Western poetry and Chinese poetry. In his acceptance of Western culture, he is aware of the danger of thorough Europeanization—total immersion in the West. In his letter to Congwei Shen, Xiang Zhu wrote that “it is an undeniable truth that Western thoughts can be utilized by [Chinese] natives, and even should be integrated into the native culture deeply. Nevertheless, they should never entirely replace the native culture. In

Gāng (Woodcutter, Servant of the Moon Queen), Xī Hé (Chinese Goddess of the Sun) and Hòu Yì. These are mythological figures in Chinese ancient culture and literature, which Xiang Zhu highly admires and alludes to in his writing. Niú Láng and Zhī Nǚ are exemplary in pursuing a pure love. As the daughter of Heaven Queen, immortal Zhī Nǚ’s secret love with mortal NiúLáng is strongly denied and forbidden by the former’s stony-hearted mother. Even though Zhī Nǚ manages to flee with NiúLáng and both of them get married and bear two children, she is eventually captured, delivered to heaven, and the two lovers are separated forcibly forever. Moved by NiúLáng’s ardent and persistent pursuit for love, Heaven Queen allows them to meet yearly on July 7th in the lunar calendar on the bridge established by flying pigeons. Therefore, both figures represent genuine love.

Cháng’ė secretly swallows a magic pill and becomes immortal, flying to the moon by herself to become a goddess but leaving her husband alone at home. She never forgets her husband and misses him so much. Cháng’ė is often depicted as beautiful and everlastingly young. Wú Gang as woodcutter is the servant of Moon Queen.

Hòu Yì is portrayed as a hero to save mortal human beings from the heat of the sun. In the ancient Chinese myth, there are nine dangerous suns appearing all together in the sky, causing bitter heat and severe draught to human beings. Hòu Yì kills eight suns and leaves only the one to operate regularly, relieving people’s sufferings, and he is therefore honored as a hero.

Xī Hé, the wife of King Dijun in the legend, is commemorated by Chinese people as the Goddess of Sun, and gives birth to ten sons.
this case Wei Wang serves as a good example for he acquired the inheritance of Buddhism but he did not merge himself completely into it.” (Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume II 211). However, Xiang Zhu maintains a critical stance when engaging with Chinese culture and he reminds Chinese new poets that not all Chinese classical literature is of the highest merit, suggesting that before a new poet throws himself into Chinese classical literature he should examine it closely and then decide “what should be passed down, preserved and inherited, what should be discarded.” (Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume I 212) This cultural position determines his poetic stand, and especially his approach to writing new poems: a harmonious integration of both the native and the foreign, in choice of subject matter, impressionistic and sensual imagery, expression of contradictory and confused feelings, and above all, experiment with poetic forms.

Firstly, Xiang Zhu introduces both Chinese and English Romantic subject matter into his poems, for instance in “Spring”. In keeping with Chinese classical themes, he alludes to “the greybeard joyfully watching two children playing in the river” in Wei Wang’s “Farm Houses by Wei River”, “Prints his kiss on her silent blushing lips” in Hu Cui’s “Lines on South Village”, and Shi Su’s “Spring breeze blows over the fence” in his poem “Butterfly in Spring Loves Flowers ”. (Zhu 10) Still in this poem, the Chinese legendary figure Cháng’è is resurrected in the line “Moon Queen resides alone in Crystal Palace” (11). In a more Romantic idiom, he presents a deserted wife in the same poem: “The spring for a deserted wife/ spring is coming, /however he is not”, (10) which reminds us of Wordsworth’s solitary Margaret anxiously waiting for her departed husband to return but in vain in “The Ruined Cottage”, “And when a stranger horseman came, the latch/… Of tender feeling she might dare repeat/The same sad question”. (Abrams, 1366) He introduces Keats’ ceaseless singing of the nightingale to reach poetic heights in “The spring for a poet/ in solitude cocoons Change in Crystal Palace/ Thick willows can never hide a nightingale’s singing”. (Zhu 11) He is entranced by Byron’s expression of love in “She Walks in Beauty” and thus the lines emerge, “The spring for a lover/ your eyes are my azure sea/ your cheeks are my roses/ your laughter is my bird’s songs”(10) Thus Xiang Zhu’s new poetry features a delicate integration of romantic idiom which introduces a new and different tone to Chinese verse. Xiang Zhu criticizes a trend among both modern and ancient poets “who always examine if their subject matter is used by their precursors, and if the subject matter is not used, they will not dare to transgress”. (Essays of Xiang Zhu I 104) So he is bold enough to overcome such anxiety and address unprecedented subjects, as a result injecting fresh vigor
into Chinese modern poetry.

Secondly, Xiang Zhu integrates Chinese images with Romantic ones. His poem “The Sun” provides a good example. He borrows Chinese traditional picturesque description from Wei Wang and produces the line “the sunset in the desert,/ and straight smoke is high to clouds”, reminiscent of Wei Wang’s original “In the desert rises only one wisp of smoke, /Over the vast long river sinks the round sun” in “To the Frontier as the Envoy”. In describing sunrise and sunset, he uses the “fan” and “wheel” to reproduce the radial structure of the sun, “fan formed in the cloudy sky,/ which is XiHé’s Wheel,/ Slowly setting,/Down to the West.” (Zhu 79)

And according to his own account, the images draw on Spenser’s metaphorical portrait of “hair”, Shelley’s “Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day” in “Night”, and Keats’ “While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day”. (Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume I 45) The legendary image of “XiHé” (the Chinese goddess of the sun) not only depicts the image of the sun vividly but also casts a mysterious atmosphere over the whole poem. Xiang Zhu more than once draws attention to the Chinese traditional images and metaphors, “even certain old metaphors like ‘gold crow’ (referring to the sun) and ‘jade rabbit’ (referring to the moon) deserve new poets’ attention”. (Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume I 310)

What is regarded as his most successful and comprehensive work of integration can be found in his famous narrative poem, Wang Jiao. This poem consists of seven parts, which are divided into thirty-seven stanzas (Part One), thirty-nine stanzas (Part Two), twenty-three stanzas (Part Three), twenty-nine stanzas (Part Four), twenty-seven stanzas (Part Five) and nine stanzas (Part Seven) respectively, except for Part Six. First, in selecting his theme, Xiang Zhu goes back to the Chinese ancient literary work One Hundred-Year Hatred of Wang Jiao Luan. In the original poem, the female protagonist Wang Jiao eventually punishes her betraying lover. But Xiang Zhu alters the story to suit the taste of modern readers by making Wang Jiao commit suicide to highlight the tragic effect and an anti-feudalist message.

Second, Xiang Zhu weaves Keats’ sensual images and ambivalent feelings into the poem. He admits to conscious imitation of Keats’ “The Eve of St. Agnes” in replying to Niansheng Luo that “Wang Jiao seems full of much sensual description rather than narration, which echoes Keats’ “The Eve of St. Agnes”.” (Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume II 292) It is beyond doubt that Xiang Zhu’s “gauze stockings and gold hairpin” (Zhu 123) can be traced back to Keats’ “Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees”. In the poem Xiang Zhu utilizes images appealing to the senses of sight, hearing, smell and touch, such as “The stars spread over the sky/Twinkling,
just like many lanterns’ light”, “The crowded people hang out talking and laughing”, “The darkness is sweet with aroma/ that melts into the cozy gown”. (103) These sensual images embody his diligent pursuit of “exquisite feelings” (Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume I 113). Xiang Zhu also does well in juxtaposing opposites in imitation of Keats, with “the more noisy in countryside field, more tranquil in the courtyard”, (119) and his confused feelings can be detected in the protagonist Wang Jiao’s wondering while speaking to Chun Xiang, “Do I wake or dream?” (Zhu 125) Such an uncertain state demonstrates that like Keats, Xiang Zhu, though he seeks to create an ideal and dreamy world, never ignores reality or ceases to pursue beauty in reality.

Third, as for the poetic form which is his central concern and which constitutes his major contribution to the new poetry, Xiang Zhu mingles the ballad, Chinese Ci and Shelley’s “repetitive stanza” in this narrative poem. This, according to the scholar Niansheng Luo, “represents a new direction for Chinese modern poetry”. (Luo 139) Xiang Zhu loves Chinese Yue Fu ballads and this love leads him to love English ballads. (This might illustrate his strong nativist consciousness and his attempt to transcend nativism through engaging with foreign culture.) Ballad provides him with a perfect meeting point that can combine Western and Chinese poetry. The distinctive elements of English ballads like “narrative folk songs”, story telling “through action and dialogue”, “a quatrain in alternate four and three-stress lines; usually only the second and fourth lines rhyme…” (A Glossary of Literary Terms 18) Many ballads employ set formulas…a refrain in each stanza and reincremental repetition, in which a line or stanza is repeated. These features are consistent with those in Chinese Yue Fu. Composed in such a manner, Wang Jiao sets up a model for the fusion of Chinese and Romantic ballads. The overall tragic story of Wang Jiao is narrated from the third person point of view interwoven with action and dialogue. In terms of action, the initial unexpected meeting in the street and subsequent unconventional secret dating are splendidly presented. The dialogue, a necessary feature of ballad, is admirably managed. The amorous meditations of Wang Jiao and the exchanges between Wang Jiao and He Wenmai are depicted vividly. Aunt Cao Yi’s hearty persuasion and Father’s grief-stricken wailing are depicted strongly. Xiang Zhu also introduces the refrain into this poem. For instance, when the grief-stricken father mourns over the death of his daughter, he exclaims “Jiao(er)!” (Zhu 146), which is used four times at the beginning of each successive stanza. The use of refrain intensifies the emotional effect and advances the whole poem.
Among other things, Xiang Zhu is interested in the stanza form. A stanza determines the number of lines, the length of lines, the meter, the rhyme scheme, and even the refrain if the ballad is adopted. The Chinese ballad form, Yue Fu, with “varied lines doted with a certain number of characters ranging from three to seven” (Essays of Xiang Zhu I 104) and the Chinese Ci with short and long sentences impressed Xiang Zhu very much, so when he composed this poem he imitated the style by forming the “varied lines” from seven, eight, nine or ten Chinese characters. For example, each stanza in Part One consists of four lines with seven characters in the first and third lines, and nine characters in the second and fourth lines. In Part Two, each stanza contains four lines of ten characters. And in Part Three, each stanza contains five lines with eight characters in the first four, and ten in the fifth line. In this way, a well-proportioned pattern emerges, contributing to formal beauty and the rhythmic effect.

To tackle the problem of meter and rhyme scheme, Xiang Zhu gains inspiration from Shelley’s “repetitive stanza” and Chinese Ci, for both are characterized by “fixed rhythm and rhyming scheme.” (Essays of Xiang Zhu I 292) With regard to meter, he employs Chinese ping ze (level tone and oblique tone) to correspond to English stressed and unstressed syllables; and with regard to rhyme, he learns more from Shelley’s “repetitive pattern”. All parts of the poem develop with fixed rhyme schemes in each stanza except for the sixth part, which is not divided into any stanza but uses blank verse. More specifically, while the first, second and fourth stanzas in the first five parts follow the rhyme of “aaba”, the third one follows “ababb” and the fifth follows “abba”. In choosing the rhyme, Xiang Zhu also considers how it matches sense and emotion. He writes, “the rhyme of every stanza in Wang Jiao is determined in accordance with the emotions conveyed in particular circumstances” (Essays of Xiang Zhu II 208) For example, in the first part, the rhyme of “ài” in the 11th stanza intensifies the atmosphere when Wang Jiao notices the wicked youth and the rhyme of “ào” in the 13th stanza depicts the wanton behaviors of those spoilt and voluptuous youths. The following two stanzas are shown as typical cases.

Xīng Dǒu Bù Mǎn Le Tiān Kōng
星 斗 布 满 了 天 空,
The stars spread all over the sky
Shǎn Zhe Guāng Yē Xǐng Xī Duō Dēng Lóng
闪 着 光，也 像 许 多 灯 笼。
Twinkling, just like lots of lanterns’ light
Dēng Zhú Guāng Zhòng De Yáng Liǔ
灯 烛 光 中 的 杨 柳
illows are cast with lighted candles,
Such is the way of Xiang Zhu’s integration: assimilating the foreign with a strong consciousness of the native. His learning from Yue Fu in respect of uneven sentences liberates him from Chinese traditional poetic form and also from certain immature new fabrications such as the “square-shaped poem” or “bean curd poem”. (Luo, 56) Simultaneously, his integration of Romantic and Ci poetry liberates him from clichéd rhyme patterns. His achievements are consistent with Bannong Liu’s view, “the reformation of traditional poetry should principally be conducted by abandoning the old fashioned rhymes and establishing new ones.”(Li, 3) And this reflects Xiang Zhu’s innovative thinking in exploring a new style for Chinese poetry.

**Conclusion**

In modernizing Chinese poetry in the early twentieth century, many Chinese poets turned to Western poetry for inspiration. The available alternatives were English Romantic poetry, Modernist poetry, Whitman’s poetry, Russian poetry, and French poetry. Xiang Zhu was not the only poet who learned, identified with and adapted English Romanticism, but he was definitely the poet who did so most successfully, even if he was far from systematic. We credit him not because of his reputation as the “Chinese Keats”, but because of his exploration of a way ahead for Chinese poetry at a historical and cultural crossroads. Unlike those who totally abandoned Chinese tradition (Moruo Guo) and those who committed themselves to modernist experiment (Baiqing Kang), he worked hard to bring together two cultures in his poems, smoothly and harmoniously. When reviewing his achievement, we may conclude that his efforts were rational and realistic. He might not be the
greatest Chinese modern poet (because his subjects are narrow and his themes are not especially profound and complex – if he lived longer, he would certainly have produced greater poems), but he surely made a distinctive contribution to Chinese modern poetry and did much to set its course. The critic Huatang Pu positively appraises Xiang Zhu’s role as an intellectual in Chinese modern literature in that, “in this way, though Xiang Zhu cannot be considered as a man of great learning, it is of particular significance to bring him into any investigation of Chinese intellectuals in 1920s and 1930s, especially their passionate pursuit and shaping of their self-identities during the process of ‘West Learning into East.’” (Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume I 9) That is why he enjoys an enduring reputation among readers and scholars. Xiang Zhu continues to be influential owing to his consistent work of reforming old poetry and developing a new poetry. While other new poets endeavor to discard Chinese ancient poetic techniques, Xiang Zhu successfully draws inspiration from Chinese Yue Fu and Song Ci. At the same time, Romantic poetry breathes fresh air into his poems, thus heralding the integration of “Romantic inspiration and classical art.” (Luo 70) Xiang Zhu’s contribution to the new poetic form is universally recognized, with the scholar and critic Wuji Liu acclaiming “Xiang Zhu as a pioneer in construction and promotion of the new poetic form”. (56) Huatang Pu identifies Xiang Zhu’s poetic style: “Xiang Zhu in his poems creates a “world full of harmony in terms of syllables, colors, and emotions…close to nature, conveys the joyful and tranquil feelings occasionally combined with melancholy.”(Essays of Xiang Zhu Volume I 4) These assessments are accurate. His poetry “represents an important trend of Chinese new poetry for ten years.”(4)

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Edited by John Wilkinson
“Undo Thin Hearte”: The Treatment of the *Ubi Sunt* Theme in Medieval Penitential Lyrics

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**Abstract:** The *ubi sunt* theme is one present in various literatures and throughout ages. This essay examines the representation of this theme in Medieval penitential lyrics. Unlike pagan poetry that employs this theme to work up the mood of helpless nostalgia, penitential lyrics focuses on the introspective contrition and prospective of salvation. The article also discusses penitential lyrics in light of Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council, to demonstrate how the personae of these lyrics try to achieve salvation through absolute devotion.

**Keywords:** penitential lyrics, *ubi sunt* theme, *do ut des*, confession

The *ubi sunt* is a phrase taken from the Latin sentence *Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerent* which begins several Medieval Latin poems. It denotes a nostalgic emotion towards past glories, “the good old days”, and has come to mean, as a motif, the meditation and lament of the transience of human life. Yet the *ubi sunt* theme, one that comes up repeatedly through the ages and in various cultures, is rendered very differently in medieval penitential lyrics. Compared with pre- and post-medieval *ubi sunt* poems, the lamentation and nostalgic sensation are constantly overwhelmed by the preeminence of self-examination, the anxious efforts for contrition and penance. How and why is the *ubi sunt* theme treated in this way in medieval penitential lyrics? The present essay would try to give a tentative analysis through some comparative studies.

The *ubi sunt* theme in medieval lyrics took two different turns, one as connected with the *carpe diem* spirit in the seduction poems, and the other in penitential lyrics, which would be the focus of our discussion. The term “penitential lyric” is used, not to draw a strict borderline in defining a subgenre—since the rather recent term “lyric” was not even known to the authors of the poems under discussion, but as a convenient way to roughly refer to those poems which express repentance
and sorrow in the religious context.①

The best way possible to see the peculiarities in the rendering of the ubi sunt theme would be through comparison. How is it treated before and after the Medieval times, and how in other cultures? Take the Anglo-Saxon poem, “the Wanderer”, as an example. It well exemplifies the ubi sunt lamentation in the following rhetorical questions:

Where is that horse now? Where are those men? Where is the hoard-sharer?
Where is the house of the feast? Where is the hall's uproar?
Alas, bright cup! Alas, burnished fighter!
Alas, proud prince! How that time has passed,
Dark under night’s helm, as though it never had been!
(“The Wanderer” ll. 92-6, trans. Michael Alexander)

The enumeration of various features of the good old days directs readers’ focus to the transience of things, and the nostalgia that naturally follows up. And though in the end of the poem mercy and consolation are sought for “from the father”, it is only a gesture to counteract against the fluidity of the world; heaven is regarded as where “all permanence rests”, as “a place beyond the laws of change” (Woolf 62).

In the pagan tradition, an eighth century Chinese poet, Liu Xiyi, would write the following verses:

年年岁岁花相似, 岁岁年年人不同。
Every year, year after year, the flowers are always alike;
Year after year, every year, the people are not the same.

And the poem ends with a lament for the fluidity of the world:

但看古来歌舞地, 唯有黄昏鸟雀悲。
Look now to where from ancient days were lands of song and dancing.
Now nothing more than the brown of dusk and the lament of sparrows.②

① For a stricter classification, see Frank Allen Patterson, The Middle English Penitential Lyric, on the definition of terms (pp 1-3) and on the classification of penitential lyrics (pp 13-15).
② Liu Xiyi (刘希夷), “Dai Bei Bai Tou Weng” (《代悲白头翁》). The translation is rendered by Stephen Owen.
Natural images in the poem are used to evoke readers’ emotions; for the cycle of nature contrasts the linear and irretrievable process of individual life. Things come and go; people rise and fall. Past glory and prosperity are referred to and juxtaposed with the present decadence and loss; a tension is built up; and a mood is aroused.

However, in medieval penitential lyrics, images connected with pleasure might be referred to, yet there is no lavish delineation of them. In “Miri it is while summer i-last” (Duncan No. 36), the limp pleasantry that might be evoked by the image of “sumer” and “foules song” in the first two lines is immediately upset by the gloominess of “windes blast” and “weder strong”. As if this swift change of mood within the four lines is not enough, line five explicitly laments “what this night is long”, contrasting the long-lasting pain and sorrow with the glimpse of pleasure. As Jeffrey comments, “the quickness with which the poet speeds our sense of the passage from life to death is one of his remarkable achievements” (13).

Like the pleasing natural images, delightful human affairs are also flimsy, and the brief mentioning of them is swiftly followed up by the sorrowful scenes after the loss of them. In “Where ben they before us were” (Duncan No. 47), those who had enjoyed worldly delights are described to have taken paradise when alive, and have to suffer the agonies of hell when they die. The abrupt shift from the worldly pleasures to the hellish pains seems to suggest that any enjoyment in the present life is wrong and is to be paid off later. Also in “the Bird with Four Feathers”, such qualities as beauty, youth, strength and riches which people normally would value and take pride in, and the loss of which would evoke a nostalgic mood in non-Christian ubi sunt lyrics, are suggestive of, or connected with pride which would lead to the downfall of one’s soul. The past glory and delights in life are not, like in pagan poetry, viewed with reminiscence and a somewhat admiring eye. The fact that penitential poems seldom dwell upon the depiction of past glory seems to suggest that their poetic personae hardly regret that the enjoyments are gone; they only regret that men have been blinded and led astray by these worldly pleasures.

Thus the contrite readers of these poems are encouraged to “flesh lust forgon” so as to “undo thin herte” (Brown No. 63, l. 7) to the lord. Nothing is stable: “Worldes blis ne last no throwe./ It wet and wit awey anon” (Duncan No. 38, ll.1-2); youthful strength is only temporal: “Al shal falewi thy grene”; and death is lurking at the door: “nis king ne queen/ That ne shal drinke of Dethes drench” (Duncan No. 39, ll. 6, 7-8). The sense of helplessness in face of the impermanence of things thus gives way to an inward process of self examination and repentance. This might
come as an epiphany, a sudden revelation. Take, as an example, “Nou shrinketh rose and lylie-flour” (Duncan No. 53). The poem begins with a general comment on the impermanence of the world, both of natural images and of human affairs. As every rose and lily which “bar that swete savour/ In somer” (ll. 2-3) would wither, so every human being, no matter how “stark” or “stour” (l. 4), would be taken by death. Yet the persona does not allow himself to linger on this topic; it is followed up by a direction of the right thing to do: since bodily delights are constantly fleeing, one should “on Iesu be his thought anon” (l. 9). It is only in the second stanza that readers find a specific occasion for the above general comment, which arises from observations of the persona on his way out from Peterborough. The persona’s train of thought is thus clear: on a trip originally “o my playing” (l. 12), the persona, touched by the transience of natural beauty, is reminded of the threat of death on human lives, and thus “gan my mourning” (l. 14). The contrast between the excess of beauty and power, and the short span of their duration, creates a tension and weight in the tone. In order to “Hevene blis abyde” (l. 8), the persona consequently turned to Mary for mercy.

In post-medieval times, with the growing self-awareness and individuality, the constant anxiety between the impermanence of the world and human mortality is at last solved by the connection between the poet’s art and eternity. “So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this and this gives life to thee.” In Shakespeare’s confident proclamation, word is said to be able to survive individual lives. Art brings the “eternal summer”; while the human world is constantly changing, art remains the steadfast anchor in a sea of fluidity, to which ties men’s hope for immortality.

Two traits of penitential lyrics are worth noticing from the above comparison: first, while pagan ubi sunt poetry aims at a mood of regret, of helpless melancholy, the mood evoked in penitential poems is contrition; second, while salvation hinges upon the persona’s self-examination, this introspection does not yield any confidence in the power of the self, but results in the giving up of the self to the lord.

Why is the rendering of the ubi sunt theme constantly associated with penance and confession? And why does the reflection of the self end in an effacing of the self? Woolf has made a very illuminating distinction between “the homiletic and the poetic” (71). Indeed, it is important to note that medieval penitential lyrics are largely not to express individual anxieties and uncertainties, but to teach, because many religious lyrics were rooted in, or at least began with, Christian teaching (Hirsh14). Duncan points out that, unlike love lyrics, Middle English penitential and
moral lyrics stand in the tradition of Old English poetry and homiletic prose (xxv). And in these poems the attitude towards transience and death form a sharp contrast with that of carpe diem poems, since

. . . whilst sermons logically reiterate that to the Christian the transience of an object is a sign of its worthlessness, human feeling, and in particular the poetic imagination, finds that, on the contrary, transience confers on things a poignant beauty and vitality. (Woolf 71)

The above comment sheds light on the disparity between medieval penitential lyrics, which aim to stir up the audience’s contrition, and the poems of non-Christian tradition which aim at building up a mood. While the latter ones lay emphasis on the aesthetic values, the cruel beauty at the moment of realization of helpless loss, for the former ones, an important function of poetry is to “stimulate moral reflection and penitential contrition” (Duncan xxv). It is for this reason that Middle English penitential lyrics would not dwell upon the mood which a pagan ubi sunt poem might spare no efforts to create; on the contrary, the melancholy mood, which is poetically delightful but morally useless, is usually under firm control.

In addition to the stimulating repentance, the didactic function of these lyrics also lies in the fact that they set formulae for the penitents, as to when and why and how to repent. In “In noontide of a somers day” (Gray No. 80), the poem starts with an outing trip, with familiar images associated with merry-making, with hawk, hound and the sun shining “full meryly” (l. 2). However, soon after the persona started hunting, his leg was “hent all with a breer” (l. 12), and this incident pricked his train of thought which ended in his resolution to revertere. As “Nou shrinketh rose and lylie-flour” (Duncan 53), this poem also shows the process from heartless merry making to the realization of sin and the looming downfall. It is symbol-laden: the hawk stands for “yowth… high of porte” (l. 29), the outing is remindful of the journey of human life, and the time, the “noontide of a somers day” suggests the age of the persona. The message is thus clear: life abounds in thought-provoking details, and needs only a repentant, introspective heart to see that “any form of prosperity is precarious and passing, and will not survive the grave” (Hirsh 27). It is not yet too late to revertere in the middle of one’s life; the important thing is to be perceptive of every minute revelation around. The rejection of the familiar, cliche ubi sunt images, and the turning away from quotidian activities to harsh self-examination, are thus the standard patterns in these poems; they are set as models for the readers so as to
teach them “how to know their own weakness and frailty, and, in recognizing their own impotence, how to seek mercy and forgiveness from the Almighty” (Gillespie 71).

The homiletic role of penitential lyrics also offers a perspective to understand the self-effacing tendency in medieval penitential lyrics. Although critics have been arguing that, the implementation of the confessional practice promotes, in effect, the growth of subjectivity, the reform of the Fourth Lateran Council was intended to exert control, to revive the authority of the church and to restrain any sparkle of individualism. That we read in Chaucer and Boccaccio realistic, lively characters may result partly from the fact that these distinctive authors were using confession as a means of characterization. They have no intention to teach their readers how to confess and how to repent. However, the penitential lyrics aim to persuade, to teach, and to suppress the audience’s individualism. It is thus not surprising that these poems are mostly “genuinely anonymous” (Woolf 13), with no distinctive voice, and conforming to an organized way of thinking.

Having examined the impact of the homiletic function on the writing of penitential lyrics, it might be helpful to look into the religious background and trace the confessional tradition that has been nurtured for centuries and then propagated and regularized by the Fourth Lateran Council. Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council shows that confession was first conducted as a requirement, a must for good Christians, and the failure to confess properly would result in excommunication and the deprivation of Christian burial:

All the faithful of both sexes shall after they have reached the age of discretion faithfully confess all their sins at least once a year to their own (parish) priest and perform to the best of their ability the penance imposed, . . . otherwise they shall be cut off from the Church (excommunicated) during life and deprived of Christian burial in death. (Canon 21)

The canon came in form of a warning, that the failure to perform one thing would trigger its due punishment. Yet if we reverse the cause and effect, we might discover, beneath the surface of a warning, that there seems to be a promise, connecting the good behaviors of present life with some prospect of reward in afterlife. And this promise, the reverse of the warning, is very much reminiscent of the form of prayer in the sacrifice rituals of classical Greco-Roman cult: “If I ever…
will you now...". Although this format of "if ever" prayer is attested only in works of high literature (Price 37), critics agree that non-literary classical texts offer good proof for the "underlying mentality" (Parker 107) which they share with literary ones: the belief that past offerings to gods give men claims for their future favors.

Do the penitent personae in penitential lyrics confess, as if in classical rituals, on the ground of reciprocity—the merely do ut des pattern? We would hesitate to reach any conclusion before we examine the issue more, for a simple analogy between the classical rituals and the Catholic conduct would be abrupt. For even in classical rituals, to dismiss their pattern of sacrifice as mere commercial reciprocity would be an over-simplification. Although gods are depicted as actually benefiting from human offerings in some literary works, philosophers have long since questioning the possibility that gods would need anything from human and thus benefit from them, as Plato's Socrates forced Euthyphro to admit (Euthyphro 12e-15b). On the other hand, as Parker points out, the core of the idea of reciprocity and repayment in classical rituals lies in the word "kharis", a Greek word meaning "delight, charm".\(^1\) Actually Euthyphro's definition of piety is "knowing how to say and do what pleases the gods (kekharismena) when praying and sacrificing" (14b).

The concern for the propriety in getting things done reflects the anxiety of the one who offers the sacrifice, the anxiety about not being able to please the gods, which would directly lead to the failure of the whole sacrifice. The word kharis might not appear on all occasions. The following is the inscription on the thighs of a bronze statuette:

Mantiklos dedicated me to the silver-bowed far-shooter [i.e. Apollo]
from his tithe. Phoibos [Apollo], grant him grateful recompense. (qtd. Price 38)

Although kharis does not appear, the meaning of pleasure and goodwill is well expressed by the word "grateful" here; the god, pleased by the gift, will favor the dedicatore out of good humor. It would follow that the apparent do ut des pattern is in essence not a buying-off process or a commercial exchange, but an exchange of goodwill, "an unceasing interchange of delightful gifts and services, a kind of charm war" (Parker 109).

\(^1\) Some other words from the "khar-" root which appear in classical texts: khairein—to rejoice, to take delight in; kharienta or kekharismena—pleasing, causing delight; etc.
Taking *kharis* as the core element, this ritual system thus assumes the choice on both sides. This might explain the frequent accusation of the arbitrariness of gods’ favors. Within the “system of sacrifice and offering and prayer” (Parker 117), gods might reject an offering either because he is not pleased or due to the inexpiableness of the dedicator’s sins. The outcome of the ritualistic prayers does not depend very much on the sorrow or contrition of the ritual performers, or at least not on that alone.

Moreover, the concerns of these *kharis*-based classical rituals are mostly on this present life, the realities. Dedicators render offerings as thanks and wishes for their good luck, their health or wealth. Athletes pray to excel in contests. Generals make sacrifices in hope of victories. Just as the ghost of Achilles would rather choose to live as a servant than to rule among the dead (*Odyssey* 11. 489-491), the Greeks view death as the end of everything, and the focus of attention is always this present life.

The confessional practice in medieval penitential lyrics, however, took a quite different stand. The prayers, rising from inward self-examination, are not based on mutual delight, but on the ultimate fidelity of one side and the extreme mercy of the other. Tentler points out that during the 9th to the 13th centuries sorrow and contrition began to play the principle part of the forgiveness of sins (18). The contrition that dominates many of the penitential lyrics is just the result of the painful process of opening one’s heart fully and completely to the lord in hope of his forgiveness; and if the penitent is trying to please God, to “Undo thin hearte” would be the only way. The strictness of the definition of sorrow as “intellectual, not sensible sorrow” (Tentler 237), i.e. a moral instead of an emotional one, and the rigorous division between attrition and contrition (250) all suggest the necessity and importance of the penitent’s attitudes in confession.

Furthermore this penance and confession are directed to the afterlife. Everything conducted and confessed in this present life are supposed to be responsible for the other life; death is not an end but the beginning of some everlasting state, either blessed or condemned. In medieval times, “an age of faith when life expectancy was often short” (Duncan xxv), the present life is uncertain:

The joye of this rechid world is a short feste—
It is likenyd to a shadowe that ma not longe leste.

(Gray No. 85, ll. 25-26)
However, while “this worlde fareth as a fantasy” (Gray No. 83, l. 12), death casts a permanent and poignant threat, and every prosperity only “shullen wormes to note” (Duncan No. 45, l. 4). That the inevitable death might bring eternal sufferings is a fact which worried many a medieval mind.

It would be arguable to say that the confessants intentions in the medieval penitential lyrics should be different from those in classical rituals, in that, even if there is a *do ut des* quality involved, it hinges not on mutual delight, but on unquestionable devotion; and it is not for this present life, but for eternity. Unlike the classical offering rituals, the medieval confessional practice, with the emphasis on reflections going inward instead of the rituals which stayed as outward performances, offers a promise for eternity and ultimate salvation. Confession is to provide consolation for men, allowing the penitents to be reconciled to themselves, to the church and to God. It is for this reason that medieval confessions achieve something that the classical rituals did not: that they unburden people’s mind and offer them a sense of safety, while in the classical tradition men seek eternity in the more outward display of valor.

It then follows that people confess and pray out of this consoling role of medieval confession, and such literary works as *The Gast of Gy* and the *Purgatory* assure men of the effectiveness of their prayers. Piety in this world would lead to the ultimate salvation in the other.

Yet before we draw the conclusion, there is yet another point worth considering. Things might become a little more complicated when we turn to such literatures as *Decameron* and *Canterbury Tales*, where confessions are heavily manipulated and misused. Other than a few, most of the confessants in *Decameron* show little concern for the spiritual aspect of confession. Regardless of the consequences of their souls after death, they changed confession into a tool for worldly gain and excessive secular pleasures. In Day one, Story One, Ciappelletto demonstrates his great familiarity with the proper language and proper practices of confession, yet this familiarization and his manipulation on top of it combined show that he either disbelieves punishment after death, or chooses to care nothing of “the undiscover’d country from whose bourn/ No traveler returns” (*Hamlet* III. 1. 87-88).

Of course, the danger of confession being misused seems to have always existed. The confessional practice laid down by the Fourth Lateran Council is a verbalized process, and the inward penance and contrition is never intended to be implicitly understood, but to be formulated in to language and spoken out. Moreover, confessions should always be directed to a listener, a sober, attentive one who has
power over the one who confesses. While they are supposed to be impartial and to keep the contents of the confession confidential, the confessors themselves are human beings who have their own frailties—the detailed regulations for confessors are themselves evident of how much they might err. The individual relationships between the confessor and the confessant could be varied and subtle. On the one hand, manuals prohibit the confessants to split their confessions between different priests, or to confess to a less familiar priest other than the one of his own parish. Thus there is the possibility that a confessant feels ill at ease before a certain confessor. The confessants could also be very conscious of their audience, and with this awareness there might be certain extent of performance in their confessions. On the other hand, confessors might themselves be affected by the confessant’s stories, with the power of control shifting from the listener to the one who tailors and shapes the story, as in the case of Ciappelletto.

However, this note of disaccord does not sound too loudly against the larger picture of the tradition of confession. Just as the Greek gods’ occasional rejection of human offerings would not damage the commonly accepted ground of mutual delight in the sacrificial system, this occasional unconcern for the afterlife would not seriously undermine the role of confession as offering consolation for the penitents. For human beings are constantly confronted with the fluidity of things. The impermanence of the worldly affairs casts a threat on the short span of human lives, who out of instinct try to grasp something solid and tangible to achieve some sort of eternity. The classical ritual system does not solve the problem of eternity, and the pity for the transience of mortal lives turns towards heroic deeds for the hope of eternity. In the Middle Ages the lament on mortal lives is ever more strong:

Men se the world on every side
In sundry wyse so diversed,
That it wel nyh stant al reversed,
As for to speke of tyme ago”

(Gower, Prologue ll. 28-31).

As Gillespie says, “three Sorrowful Things haunted human consciousness: the inevitability of death, the uncertainty of its time, and the unknowability of the soul’s fate after death” (69). There is no way out except for a complete disregard of the self to the grace of God, through which men were able to endure and combat the impermanence of the hostile world.
In this I see a deeper confidence in the ultimate salvation: if you open your heart and confess sins great or small, your confession and prayers will be heard. A relationship has been established between one’s deeds and the ultimate salvation of one’s soul. The helpless mood in pagan poetry is exterminated; the eternity of the individual soul is secured, not by prowess or heroic deeds, not by art or words, but by one’s actions and repentance. In this is a sense of safety and assurance not seen in pagan poems on the *ubi sunt* theme.

Perhaps this is why the *ubi sunt* theme is rendered thus in medieval penitential lyrics, that in a post-heroic age people turned from outside actions to introspection for strength and solution in face of their frailty and limitations, and it is not yet an age when men’s confidence and hope for eternity are very much shifted to words, that is, the poetic art. The distinct individuality has just peeped through the dark ages where faith alone offers light and hope for men.

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*Edited by Luo Bin*
Literary Work vs. Cultural Assumption: Illustrating Some Caribbean and English Writers and Texts

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Abstract: By looking at the works of a couple of Caribbean and English literary writers, the author of the essay wants to demonstrate that literary writings are intimately related to the cultural and historical assumptions of literary writers. And these cultural assumptions are often unconscious ones. They tend to belie the work of authors. As a matter of fact, no writer can discuss a subject either alien or familiar to them without a sense of identity, which proves what E. Said said is quite right. Identity comes from what he or she is not rather than what he or she is. This sense of self and of other is essential to writing an individual’s truth, for it is this that defines what is individually true instead of what is factually true. A literary text, be it a poem or a novel, always relies on certain cultural assumptions, either by accepting them or by questioning them. It is the basic framework of beliefs which supports writers composing their works.

Keywords: poem, novel, narrative, cultural assumption, Caribbean, English

In this essay a postcolonial approach is employed to discuss the works of a couple of respective Caribbean and English literary writers. The works of three Caribbean poets will come under study. These poets have a unique shared history, that of the Caribbean. The Caribbean history is one of upheaval, passing between French and English hands for many years before the English won political power. Then Caribbean writers have the option of either selecting the appropriate pre-Caribbean history (most were immigrant slaves of African or Indian origins) or to try to accept the whole history. This often proves to be too much of a task and so many Caribbean writers feel they are “de-racialized”. Therefore, some powerful images of a future, and a literature, which are uniquely West Indian, have their roots

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in slavery. In comparison, the author will look at the works of a couple of English poets. They all have different views on what renders them English. No one poet is factually incorrect; they all look at different eras to demonstrate their nationhood. All are part of a large expanse of history, which is incomplete by nature.

Further to this two novels are to be studied in the light of cultural identity. The first novel is E. M. Forster’s A Passage to India. This will give the view of a British person who feels they are liberal and progressive and show how non-liberal and unprogressive they are with their beliefs about the culture they have usurped. To counteract this V. S. Naipaul’s In a Free State will be studied. Both novels look at the aftermath of the withdrawal of the British from the former colonies. Naipaul’s work shows that it is not easy to regain an identity of one’s own when one has been “liberated” by a colonizing nation. Having gone through this process himself, Naipaul is well-qualified to judge from a “native” point of view, although the views he extols do not win him many friends from amongst his contemporaries.

Contrast between Caribbean and English Poetry

According to Ian Ousby (1989), Derek Walcott has always written courageously for a Caribbean tradition subsuming African, Indian and European cultures in the region he describes as “Our hammock swung between Americas” (Elegy). He has tried his best to “alchemize ‘where nothing was/the language of a race’ (Crusoe’s Journal) out of various despised patois and metropolitan English, with which to confront Caribbean individual, historical and racial contradictions” (Ousby 1039).

Although he sometimes writes in a less Creole form, Walcott seems to be somewhat unapproachable. In Another Life he speaks of the past and of his childhood. It speaks of his discovery of those less fortunate than himself.

…Afternoon light ripened the valley,
Rifling smoke climbed from the small labourers’ houses,
And I dissolved into a trance.

I was seized by a pity more profound
Than my young body could bear, I climbed
With the labouring smoke…
He later goes on to discuss the British education he received:

Cramming half-heartedly for the scholarship,
I looked up from my red-jacketed Williamson’s
*History of the British Empire*, towards
The Barracks plumed, imperial hillsides
Where cannon-bursts of bamboo sprayed the ridge,
Riding to Khartoum, Rorke’s Drift,
Through dervishes of dust…

(Lehman 277-278)

These lines show that he had a relatively Westernized education, involving little
education about his own past and heritage. The assumption therefore, is that he
has no culture of his own, that it must always be borrowed. He has been raised as
a European and so it is a surprise for him to see poverty, as in the labourers.

Poetry detached but simultaneously skeptical, has followed through in his *Sea
Grapes* (1976) and other poem collections. In *Sea Grapes* he uses even less Creole
language and references.

That sail which leans on light,
tired of islands,
a schooner beating up the Caribbean

for home, could be Odysseus,
home-bound on the Aegean;
that father and husband’s

longing, under gnarled sour grapes, is
like the adulterer hearing Nausicaa’s name
in every gull’s outcry.

This brings nobody peace. The ancient war
Between obsession and responsibility
Will never finish and has been the same

For the sea-wanderer or the one on shore
Now wriggling on his sandals to walk home,
Since Troy sighed its last flame,

And the blind giant’s boulder heaved the trough
From whose ground-swell the great hexameters come
To the conclusions of exhausted surf.

The classics can console. But not enough.

(Huang 424-425)

Nostalgia can be strongly felt here. The poem is narrated in the third person. This suggests that he is speaking this from an objective point of view. There are realities and mythologies. European cultural references are abundant, such as “Odysseus”, “Nausicaa”, “obsession and responsibility”, “the blind giant”, and “exhausted surf”. Interestingly, the poet pretends to be an observer, but that is hard. In fact, he is both “in” and “out” of the nostalgic story.

Grace Nichols was far more accessible. She is Caribbean by birth and raising, but chose to come to England in the 1970s. And many of her subjects are the differences between the two. Concern with race and gender are key topics in Grace Nichols’s poems, but she treats both with a measure of comedy, which is particularly apparent in her second verse collection The Fat Black Woman’s Poems (1984).

Nichols injects self-criticism and humor into some of her works and also a little nostalgia for home. In “Tropical Death” she writes:

The fat black woman want
A brilliant tropical death
Not a cold sojourn
In some North Europe far / forlorn.

The fat black woman want
Some heat / hibiscus at her feet
Blue sea dress
To wrap her neat.
However, some of her early poems show a strong sense of the colonial injustices perpetrated against black people and against women. In them she has cast her mind back to the miserable sugar gathering days of her ancestors. Such West Indian poets have spoken of the dead and of their heritage of slavery. But they have also written with a faith that life will continue. They have written in the language that can make hope, humor and healing possible (See Chamberlin 20-22). In fact, the cultural identity of West Indian poets often involves historical contradictions and caricatures, which is vividly represented in their language.

The proper comparison is with some of the well-known English poets. Specifically these are Ted Hughes, Phillip Larkin and Geoffrey Hill. They use references of their national history or some aspect of it as a muse, and translate it so that it speaks to their readers. They represent movements within English poetry shared by others but led by the above ones. Ted Hughes is the case in point. Much is made of Hughes’s love of the dark and monolithic. Hughes utilizes many sorts of cultural deposits and capital, including the pagan Anglo Saxon and Norse elements, and he draws energy also from a related constellation of primitive myths and world views. He seems to look almost to prehistory for his truths and package them in a way that they seem romantically bleak to the reader. His subjects are often plants or animals. Modernity in his many poems is sometimes defined in terms of antiquity (Zhang 28-29).

Phillip Larkin’s work has characterized the dominant trend of English poetry of his times. The poet was acknowledged as “the effective unofficial laureate of the post-1945 England” (Easthope 184). He has great admiration for Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover, which may partly explain the linguistic simplicity of some of his poems published in High Windows.

When I see a couple of kids
And guess he’s fucking her and she’s
Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm,
I know this is paradise
Everyone old has dreamed of all their lives

(Sanders 605)

Larkin’s line (“They fuck you up, your mum and dad”) serves as the beginning of the poem entitled “This Be The Verse”. The poetic expressions appear to be greatly
concerned with Freudian theory, but they may move into intensely private realization of human production of the people concerned (See Bennett and Royle 3):

Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can,
And don’t have any kids yourself.

(Sanders 606)

On the subject of Phillip Larkin generally, Heaney writes, “…his proper hinterland is the English language Frenchified and turned humanist by the Norman conquest and the renaissance, made nimble, melodious and plangent by Chaucer and Spenser…” (Walder 19) His is a more modern England than Hughes’s but still deeply rooted in tradition. The subjects about which he writes are more varied than Hughes’s.

The final poet to be considered here is Geoffrey Hill. Such customary themes of his as history, war, English landscape, music, poetry, and faith are also concerned with dense references to the literature and the echoing voices of old histories.

It is believed that his work and his ambivalent attitude to Christianity account for his poetic reputation. His poetic writings are featured with rigor and discipline in literary comments. The first poem in Hill’s King Log (1968) recalls the dying command of John Tiptoft that he should be decapitated in three strokes “in honor of the Trinity”:

Processionals in the exemplary cave,
The voice fragrant with mannered humility,
With an equable contempt for this world,
“In honorem of Trinitatis”. Crash. The head
Struck down into a meaty conduit of blood.
So these dispose themselves to receive each
Pentecostal blow from axe or seraph,
Spattering block-straw with mortal residue.
Psalteries whine through the empyrean…

(Sanders 636)
It seems that these violent and horrified scenes and events can be typically found in the history drama of Shakespeare. One may detect the fierce imagery that Hill evolves from the eventful things of the distant past is doubtlessly of his creation.

Geoffrey Hill shares the common “Anglo-Saxon base”, however his language is more Europeanized and Latinate. He writes about history as if it were contemporary, mixing in the modern regularly, with references in his Mercian Hymns to “the citadel of Tamworth”, “the overlord of the M5”. “Merovingian car-dealers” and “the mythical Camelot”. His attitude seems to be summed up in the title of one of his poems, “Requiem for the Plantagenet Kings”. He looks back in history, although this is not entirely nostalgic. Essentially, Mercian Hymns is a series of prose-poems “using the historical figure Offa to connect the idea of kingship with the private responsibilities of the individual and those of the poet to his people and his time” (Ousby 461).

Unlike their Caribbean counterparts, these poets have history. It is believed that together they give a fairly accurate picture of it. It is definitely something that roots them. That is not to say that the Caribbean poets are any less valid by their fragmented history, merely that what they have to say is different. The cultural assumptions in question here are historical in nature. One culture is steeped in history and the other is very limited in it. It is this basic assumption of antiquity that underlies the poetry of all of these poem writers.

Naipaul’s In a Free State and Forster’s A Passage to India

It is proper to first look at V. S. Naipaul’s In a Free State. This is not a traditionally arranged novel. Chapters have been replaced with individual narratives of usually unrelated stories. This “unrelatedness” is not the case through the whole book, since the first and fifth narratives are in fact journal entries from what is indicated to be the same person, relating in the first person violent incidents which take place on two trips to Egypt. The first happens to an English “tramp”. His status as tramp is in question because although he is described as somewhat scruffy his actions are those of someone who is merely eccentric. “…when he came closer we saw that his clothes were all in ruin, that the knot on his scarf was tight and grimy; that he was a tramp.” Furthermore he obviously is sufficiently solvent to pay for fairly regular trips abroad. “…I’ve been to Egypt six or seven times. Gone around the world about a dozen times…Geologist, or used to be. . . I’ve been traveling for thirty eight years…I
think of myself as a citizen of the world.” This issue is significant because it highlights the cultural prejudices of the other passengers. He is the only British passenger (although the narrator is somewhat unsure about his own identity) and he is distinctly odd as an individual. His status as Other threatens his fellow passengers. The epilogue (the previous narrative is a prologue) marks the return of the narrator to Egypt. A further violent incident occurs. Beggar children are thrashed for seeking food from Europeans. The narrator sees this as grossly unfair and reacts to the man whipping them. He did not react in the prologue. Has he changed his views of the victim? Is he more inclined to help because they are children or natives? Is it just that there is safety in numbers? He sees natives as less able to defend themselves than the Englishman who is so well established that he should be able to look after himself. Perhaps he feels pity for the native children as dispossessed and feels no pity whatsoever for the “tramp”.

It is an important point that in all of Naipaul’s narratives in this novel some kind of revolution has taken place. In Egypt it is a political one, hence plenty of poverty and numerous beggars.

In his first narrative within the framework of the Egyptian journals, “One Out of Many”, an Indian Hindu servant is transplanted from his home, where he is respected for the status of his employer, to Washington, USA. This is a personal revolution for him. He sees society as completely restructured. “Outside the supermarket there was always a policeman with a gun. Inside there were a couple of Hubshi guards with truncheons, and, behind the cashiers, some old Hubshi beggar men in rags.” Hippies and black people (Hubshis) are equal to everyone else and there is no caste system. He faces the dilemma of whether he is superior to the black people around him as he would be at home, or whether he is inferior because they are at home there and he is not. As he spends more time there he is involved increasingly in the outside world. He has a relationship with a black woman, which would be unforgivable in his native land, he gets a job for his own sake rather than his master’s and ultimately is legally naturalized. As a character, and as a Hindu, Santosh is painted as somewhat submissive. He is surprised at the aggressive attitudes of the Americans and he expects little. He is used to sleeping in a cupboard whereas his American counterparts have entire apartments. When he arrives into America he is childlike. He is an innocent who is corrupted by this new world in which he is the Other. The main corruptor is the black woman, and he despises her for this, but yet marries her. He chooses to be part of this new life, even though he prefers the old. So what cultural
assumptions are there in this story and how are they treated? The narrator assumes a lot about the character of the Hindu. They are childlike and submissive, easily led astray. This may have come from the experience of the Indian Trinidadian Naipaul, a lapsed Hindu. The narrator also assumes that black people are sexually demanding and smoke cannabis. It is impossible to quantify this and it could be argued that the incidents represent individual characters rather than a race of people, but nameless and faceless people who can only be represented by individual characters populate the city. The narrator seems to accept these assumptions and work with them, but this may be a clever device on Naipaul’s part to make the reader question them. It may also be another example of the racism of which he has been accused.

In the second narrative, “Tell Me Who to Kill”, the revolution is once again personal. Perhaps this is the device of using the first person. The narrator, whose name we are never given, is a protector. Education is a feature of the ever present Other. It is entirely alien to the environment in which the narrator and his family have grown up, but it is shown as a guiding light by a Christian relative. The youngest son, Dayo, is the most cherished member of the family and so it is he who is given the gift of education, the agent of revolution. This leads him to England home of civilization supposedly. Once he has arrived there his brother, the narrator, feels he needs protecting and goes over to do that. Theirs is a relationship that is not easy. They need one another and somehow resent one another too. The narrator works hard and earns a lot of money but this disappears quickly. It is ultimately Dayo who breaks away from this, marrying an English girl. The narrator then realizes how much Dayo and his needs have shaped his identity.

It is indicated, although never specified that these men are Caribbean. They have a fragmented history and feel baseless. This may make it easier to start again elsewhere, but it leaves them without an identity. This is indicated by the narrator’s lack of name. It is this lack of naming that indicates that Naipaul is most closely linked to these protagonists. This, as also indicated by the title of the section, renders the narrator unstable and therefore dangerous. We meet his friend Frank, a constant companion with whom the narrator shares everything and is often annoyed. Is Frank a friend, as the words state? Is he as close as a lover? It is doubtful that Frank is another side to the personality of the narrator. He seems to put across sense when the narrator is at his least stable, and comfort
him when he is worried. He is all that the narrator will have left after Dayo’s marriage.

What assumptions are made, then, of where they have come from? The text states that the lifestyle is slower at home. “…but it (the village at home) is home, and on a sunny Sunday morning, nobody working…I can see my father’s younger brother coming up the pitch road on his bicycle”. The narrator must work two jobs to support himself and Dayo in England. Is this suggesting that Naipaul thinks that the Trinidadian way of life is somehow lazy or that the English way of life is all hard work for little reward? The main characters’ way of life is without doubt somewhat squalid. Perhaps poverty in England is less friendly than poverty in a hot climate. What assumptions do readers make? The reader is given a number of characters’ names, their religions and clues to their whereabouts, but at no point does it state that they are black. But it is strongly indicated that they were.

The third narrative, “In a Free State”, features a political revolution, and hints at a sexual one. It is made clear from the beginning that one of the main protagonists is promiscuous and the other is gay, although it is still a shock when he refers to himself later as “queer”. This revolution, which involves everyone and so is much less personal, is represented in the third person. The other potential meaning of this change of voice is that Naipaul as the author could sympathize with the other situations and he cannot do so with this one. A journey takes place during which political activities come and go, including a beating for Bobby from soldiers and the defeat of the King by the President. Almost more important than the revolution going on around them are the discussions that take place between Bobby and Linda. They both respect and dislike the other at times, but they share a racial unity, which they protect by sticking together. Their attitudes are different but equally useless. Linda is a pragmatist who sees the chance to make the most of what is left. She is an opportunist, as her planned infidelity with a fellow traveler, Carter, proves. She seems to flirt with Bobby too, knowing that she has no chance. Bobby is a liberal. He sees himself as a friend of the African. The English are no longer in charge, yet he takes a very superior view of the African who accidentally scratches his car windscreen. This view is not limited to black people, though. It is also shown in his and Linda’s joking about Doris Marshall, the South African wife of a colleague. It is not a prejudice against Africans; it is a fear of the Other. Many black people have taken to combing their hair in the “English” style. This is taken to mean
that they have their independence but they do not know what to do with it, so they imitate their colonizers. This is given an ironic twist later, as the true attitude to the Colonizers is shown to be unwelcoming. This mimicry is shown to be either ironic at the English. Bobby and Linda see it only as the sincerest form of flattery though. They assume that the natives want to speak English and that they require English help to establish themselves. It is this that creates the untaken opportunity for Bobby to seduce a waiter at the Hunting Lodge. This is untaken because his basic revulsion comes into play. This is another attitude he and Linda share. They see that the Africans are dirty and their scent is regularly mentioned. Whilst Bobby thinks of himself as liberal and a man who would “bend over backwards”, he is as repulsed and threatened by the Africans. Interestingly Bobby also thinks of Linda in terms of her smell. He notices her vaginal deodorant and sees this as a mask for her unhygienic undercarriage.

It is also interesting to compare Naipaul’s Bobby with E. M. Forster’s Fielding. In *A Passage to India* Forster writes about an imagined Indian response to the end of British rule in India. The Indians, like Naipaul’s Santosh, are submissive and childlike. The English (or Americans) are kindly benefactors, the adults of the situation, although this attitude could almost be tolerated when the protagonist has gone into that situation, as with Santosh, it is hugely patronizing when the adult civilizing benefactors have invaded one’s home, as in Forster’s novel. In this all Indians are savages, awaiting the calming influence of the superior, British race. This is not irony by Forster but assumed of his reader. He does suggest that, as a result of the English influence, Indian natives are no longer necessarily savages. This view is merely perpetuated by the British to enhance their own sense of being depended on. The reader is asked to assess his or her own assumptions by the deliberate non-specification of Adela’s attack. Do we assume that she is a weak woman who cried rape? Is this her discovery of the “real India”? Was she attacked and blamed by the nearest person? Probable is that she was attacked, however not by Aziz. The conveniently absent guide seems a much more likely culprit, although there is the absence of detail in this regard. Forster seems to be quite pro-Indian. Hence many of the Indian characters are portrayed as rather one dimensional in comparison to the English.

There are characters who have much in common in Naipaul’s *In a Free State* and Forster’s *A Passage to India*. The main two are Forster’s Fielding and Naipaul’s Bobby. They share liberal sentiments towards natives but
favour their own kind in reality. Bobby’s attitude is conscious. He will side with white people over black people innately, but he makes conscious decisions to side politically with the new native government. Fielding is less conscious of his bias. He lives in India and feels awkward in English company, but he cannot fit into Indian society either. He is the Indian’s white friend. He will represent the Indian as a white man to white men. His true bias is noted on his return to England, as he feels safer and safer through Europe. “The buildings of Venice, like the mountains of Crete and the fields of Egypt, stood in the right place, whereas in poor India everything was placed wrong.” One could also compare Adela and Linda. They seem quite different on the surface but they share a degree of naivety towards the natives. Adela asks Aziz if he has more than one wife and he is offended. Linda sees the politics that have brought about the demise of the British rule as rather simplified and does not think to question her place in the changing society.

Some critics believe that A Passage to India marked a turning point for colonial literature, having had an “even greater influence on British imperial politics than on English literature” (Chaudhuri 19). Others think of the work about India becoming a book about the representation of India. This representation can be somewhat negative. It ultimately represents what the Western mind does not know about itself. Forster’s image of India is of a cave. His is a seductive India, which leads to the alleged rape of Adela. There is a probability that this attack did not take place, but that Adela is hysterical and imagines it, half in hope. This casts India as erotic and desirable, yet somehow unattainable to outsiders (Forster loved the country but was always an outsider). In this situation one can consider that the narrator is Forster, since it is his assumptions of the erotic and exotic land taking over his characters.

The unique voice to be heard in passing is that of Edward Said. He wrote what is one of the most famous criticisms of Otherness, Orientalism (1978). He feels that Western scholars wholly bring about the study of the Orient. There are a number of implications for this as numerous “questions raised by Orientalism” (Said 15). The first is economic. What the West lacks is made up for from the east. This could be in terms of gross product, or in terms of labor—it was mostly African and Indian slaves that were dispatched to the Caribbean. It serves the Western economic purpose to subjugate and make Others submissive Orientals. If the West feels superior to them they are able to control them. There are also social implications involved. The West defines itself and its inhabitants not in
terms of what it is but in terms of what it is not. Where Europe is strong, steady reliable, adult and masculine, the Orient is weak, unstable, savage, childlike and feminine. There is European and there is Other. Of course this is oversimplified, but it explains the concept of Imperialism well. The English poets seem to have little sense of Otherness because they seem largely to concentrate on their own culture. The concept of the other is now a cultural assumption, which does not have to be spoken about to be acknowledged.

In conclusion, it is clear that literary production is related to cultural assumptions, often unconscious ones. They tend to belie the work of authors. No writer can discuss a subject either alien or familiar to them without a sense of identity, and Said points out that this identity comes from what they are not rather than what they are. This sense of self and of other is essential to writing an individual’s truth, for it is this that defines what is individually true instead of what is factually true. It is the basic framework of beliefs and histories which supports writers composing poetry and fiction.

**Works Cited:**


*Edited by Lei Yanni*
John Keats, ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’: Study Notes*

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Abstract: These study notes on John Keats' notoriously puzzling poem, ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, examine the text in extremely close detail, to pay attention to the presentation of the poem's narrative development within the form of the ode and to explore the internal self-contradictions of the argument; with very specific discussion of the poem's challenging conclusion.

Keywords: John Keats; ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’; poetic irony; ambiguity; pastoral; life and death; beauty and truth.

Ode on a Grecian Urn

I

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fring’d legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

II

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard

* It is agreed to let this article follow its own style.
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear’d,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal--yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

III

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!

For ever warm and still to be enjoy’d,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy’d,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

IV

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, o mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for ever more
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e’er return.  

V

O attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!

When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say’st,
‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’--that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

John Keats (1795-1821) ①

Ode (title): the reader should have in mind the classical origin of this verse-form. In its development by the Greek poet Pindar and others it was a lyrical poem often performed in musical ceremonial, celebrating some notable person or occasion; therefore elevated in style and framed as a mode of address or invocation: thus, Thou (1). The composing poet takes on the rôle of a speaker or singer in public of the poem, to an audience of his readers who are also part of the ceremonial

① The date of composition of this poem is not exactly known, and no manuscript version in Keats’s own hand survives; but several contemporary manuscript transcripts exist with the date “1819”. The subject-matter has not been linked to any particular Greek vase, although Keats was familiar with the world of Hellenic sculptural decoration and vase-painting. This text here is from Jack Stillinger (ed.), The Poems of John Keats (London, 1978), pp. 372-3, based on the version first published in Annals of the Fine Arts, 4 (January, 1820), pp. 638-9, which ‘most likely was printed from a Keats copy transmitted by Haydon’ (Stillinger, p. 653). A good modern edition of Keats, affordable and with a selection of his prose and letters, is The Penguin Classics John Keats: The Complete Poems, ed. John Barnard (3rd revised and updated ed., Penguin Books, London, 1988; reprinted with updated further reading and minor corrections, London, 2006). There is a brief introduction and very full, useful notes to the poems.
occasion; in this way, we the modern readers are included as participants in the poem’s activity and meaning, with our part to play. But in this case we may turn out to be a disunited audience, with individually different views of how this poem works, and of its concluding ‘message’ (49-50), because the composing and uttering poet’s voice may itself present or express conflicting or unstable points of view. The pindaric ode was traditionally deployed into three divisions or stages of development: the strophe, the anti-strophe, and the epode; this disposition was rendered by the English poet Ben Jonson as the turn, the counter-turn, and the stand.

Thus, poems in this form typically took the shape of an argument or framing narrative, whereby the theme was first presented, then altered in counter-argument, then in conclusion resolved and brought back into unity. There could in this way be a tension within the form itself: the ceremonial aspect suggested a generalised agreement in theme and mode, but the internal counter-movement could suggest an element of disputed perspective or contradiction. This ode by Keats adopts a ceremonial subject-matter, composed into an harmonic formal unity in the figure of the urn; but the deliberating narrator who is the poem’s voice is in continued tension with this ceremonial mood, questioning it and progressively encountering many self-contradicting aspects.

_on (title):_ slightly surprising, when to might have been more usual. Maybe the urn is theme, rather than object consistently addressed; and maybe this ode is inscribed or depicted on the surface of this imagined object, overwrought upon it as the pastoral scene is also on the urn’s surface. But of course this is a literary device, not fully realised as an actual existing object, so that the pictorial aspects can remain uncommitted to specific material embodiments, or hovering between alternative possibilities.

_Grecian (title):_ another aspect to be recognised here, from the outset, is the double theme of an ancient view of the world, of art and ceremonial function and the wondrous achievements of that classical culture still surviving as visible today in its exemplary artefacts; in contrast with a much later modern world in which the current poet works with and from far-different literary traditions, in a much-changed world view not to mention a different climate; so that there is a cultural divide. Can the surpassing excellence of the older culture be still recognised as intelligible, as of highest value in the modern era; can such ideals able to be discovered in the ancient art, like beauty and truth (49), still have a message or a lesson for our own present age? Can the cultural gap, between ancient Greece and modern England, be bridged, or are the discrepancies in any important way disabling? It’s clear that
Keats wants this revisitation of the classical art-view to inspire his poem, very ardently, so that even though the approach in format of composition seems relaxed and unhurried, there are pressures of desire for success and for a workable coherence in the methods of narrative and description.

_Urn_ (title): urns in ancient Greece were no doubt originally domestic containers which became developed into festive or ritual objects, for display or for ceremonial purposes. Vases were often formed of clay and then fired, to make them durable like earthenware, and then painted, with borders and decorative designs including figures within a scene or scenes; such figures often derived from Greek mythology or legend, as imagined here, where the young lovers, the music-players and the scene of sacrifice suggest a traditional origin. Some of these vessels with wider mouths were glazed inside, for use in wine-mixing at feasts or banquets. But here the urn which Keats imagines and describes can be seen adorned with a _brede_ / _Of marble men and maidens_ (41-2); and if the human figures portrayed on the surface are formed of _marble_ then the entire urn must be carved out of the same substance, a high-quality crystalline stone much used also for statues and architectural features; it can take a high polish revealing subtle colourations. Keats had himself certainly seen and studied such objects and had read published accounts of them. The _brede_ here is probably a low-relief decoration, raised up in shallow profile from the urn’s surface. Clearly this is not a domestic utensil but a sophisticated art object; possibly it could be a _funerary_ urn, for the containment of the ashes of a cremated person thus preserved in respectful memory.

_Thou_ (1): according to tradition this ode is composed as a formal spoken utterance, here addressed towards an imaginary free-standing solid object imagined to be positioned directly within the contemplative view of the poem’s internal speaker; also imagined thus by the poem’s overall author, the poet John Keats. This urn is invented, as an idea of a work of artistic production within a recognised class of such objects, from the hands of a master-craftsman of ancient classical times. _Thou_ formally thus affirms the urn’s specific object-reality (compare line 47), even as we the readers of the poem know full well that there exists no such specific urn in our real world, nor in the real world of the poet. We readers also well understand that, even if figuratively the urn is described as a _bride_ (1), the urn itself must be in its own imagined reality an inanimate, manufactured object, thus unable to comprehend or even to hear speech directed towards it: the words addressed ostensibly to the urn are in effect composed for the benefit of the poem’s readers, here devised to be listeners to the address-form of the ode. And yet by a
personifying figure the urn is later presented as having and using its own power of speech (*thou say'st*, line 48), as if audible utterance issued from the urn’s mouth.

*still un ravished bride* (1): a complex expression. A *bride* is a woman who has been legally married to a man, recently or by anticipation, so that sexual relations between them are natural and correct, for the purpose of producing children and enhancing happiness, *bliss* (19). As this word *bride* is applied to the urn, the sense must be metaphorical; marriage must here signify a close, intimate link between the urn and *quietness*, but not sexually. This bride is *unravished*, thus untouched in fulfillment of desire; but *ravish* signifies forcible sexual interference by a man with an unconsenting woman, thus not between affectionate husband and wife.

*still* (1): either (a) motionless, undisturbed, or (b) not yet, previous to (compare line 26). The word might here express expectancy, ardently waiting, and yet *ravish* (1) is a word of violation rather than of satisfied enjoyment, so that the whole phrase is contradictory in its emotional tendency. If there is any pause after *still* then the word's function is adjectival: motionless. If there is no pause then the function of *still* is probably adverbial: not yet (qualifying the following past participle used as an adjective). The sense probably hovers between these two alternatives.

*foster-child* (2): because not born of any direct sexual relation between silence and slow time, even in imagination; the child has been adopted, and so we do not know the identities of the ‘actual’ parents; presumably the parentage belongs with the original artist or artists in antiquity who produced and decorated the urn, now entrusted to the care of succeeding eras and cultures. Even so, the term *child* must be metaphorical and imaginary, since no actual birth-process can have been involved. *child* might suggest a youthful object, but the urn is already ancient, deriving from a remote antiquity, so that in organic life-terms it is ageless.

*slow time* (2) is a phrase of two stresses set together (spondee), to slow down the movement of the line, so that it performs its own meaning. Further examples of this stress-pattern are: *what wild* (10), *play on* (12), *no tone* (14), *fair youth* (15), *sea shore* (35), *old age* (46). The rapid onrush of human history is not part of the idea, here, because the ancient urn is immune to history and unaltered by it, as the ages continue onward from one to the next.

*Sylvan historian* (3): the urn shows a scene set in woodlands (*sylvan*, from Latin *silva* = a wood), that tells a story of ancient times (*historian*). The phrase is both respectful and, maybe also, a little playful.

*thus express* (3): produce in this written form so as to be able to be known as
the *tale* (4) about to be told (*thus*), recognisable from the decoration pressed outwardly (*expressed*) on the urn’s surface. And yet the decoration on the urn displays a *tale* altogether implicit, so that the verse recital to follow here of this tale must be conjectured and indeterminate (‘imaginary’) in relation to the surmised pictorial scene.

*flowery* (4): in senses (a) decorated with flowers, and also (b) in over-decorated style; the suppressed irony of this self-critical play on words will become progressively more apparent. In each such case the surface-meaning is qualified or even to a degree subverted by what the alternative sense adds into the argument.

*haunts about* (5): a similar irony, (a) plays and lurks about the urn’s surface, and (b) takes on the disembodied forms of ghosts or unreal figures.

*deities or mortals* (6): in ancient Greece the gods were believed to move about freely in the natural world and the world of human affairs, sometimes with close physical contact. The principal contrast between these two classes of being was that the gods, who were imagined to live on Mount Olympus, were immortal and could not die; whereas mortal humans were born, lived and died. It’s possible that for Keats and his contemporaries it was not always easy to distinguish visually between these two classes as they figured in decoration of vases or urns.

*Tempe* (7): a valley in central eastern Greece, close to Mount Olympus, and *Arcady* (7), further to the south of the country, were both locations much celebrated by the classical poets for their pastoral beauty, Arcady being chiefly inhabited by shepherds; *attic* (41) described the region of Attica, also in southern Greece, famous for its beauty and elegance of language. Keats makes a little display of his classical learning, here.

*men or gods* (8): this pairing of two different types of living creature, mortal and immortal, seems to suggest that this is the prime opposition or difference that will motivate this poem: the ideal, sacred world of the gods, where all its forms are proof against decay, and the changeable human world, where passion is temporary and thus all the more urgent for being so. But then, with the appearance of *maidens loth* (8) we recognise that the focus of experienced passion is sexual: that in classical mythology the male gods sexually pursued mortal, human females, so that the thematic contrast is not exclusively immortal/mortal but also, across this dividing line of gender difference, is a contrast between male and female sexual desire. At this point the reader will recognise that the speaking voice of and within the poem is distinctively male, whereas the urn seems to be latently female: *bride*
This theme is itself then more complicated, because the young mortal men who are in erotic pursuit of young mortal girls within the poem’s scenic presentation are no more than figures upon the urn’s decorated surface; all of them are frozen into static, immobile and unchanging forms, as if they have been transported into an unwilling divine permanence; in fact, both the men and the girls have become like Greek statuary, representing attitudes of desire but unable to accomplish any consummation. By contrast, the figure of the poem’s speaking voice is half inside and half outside this frozen composition, looking in through the window of the urn’s pictorial frame, seeming to be part of this interior world, but also external to it, as the urn itself is external to the scenes inscribed on its surface.

As an example of such material/immaterial contradiction, whatever can be ditties of no tone (14); if there is no tone, no actual acoustic sound, how can there be the experience, in hearing of any kind, of a sounded ditty? Ah, may be the reply, the imagination can do this; or can seem to do so. It’s quite probable that the scenes on the urn’s surface include human figures playing upon pipes as part of the collective ceremonial; we from the outside can construct inferred images of them in postures of performance but of course all is silent (44) and we can only imagine the sounds that they produce, and can only intuit the effect of these sounds upon the other excited hearers within the urn’s world. The poem’s speaking voice-figure is depicted as able to see the urn and to see (but not hear) the pipe-players represented upon its surface, but we the readers can neither actually see nor actually hear anything, since nothing at all is directly accessible to our actual sight or our actual hearing. All is for us conjectured and imagined. The nearest access to actual perceived reality provided to the reader is the implied sound-presence of the ode’s words and rhythms, which too are silent upon the page but which take on life in the reader’s auditory recreation of how these words would sound, if they were spoken aloud.

This poem, then, is already revealing a dialectic of multiple contradiction, in several conflicting dimensions simultaneously; its development allows the poet a teasing erotic play with these images, but it also enables him to be discreetly unspecific about the actual performance of desire. We may even read this aspect as a kind of coy self-censorship, in the likely face of prevailing public morals at that time: thus, not to the sensual ear (13).

maidens loth (8): these young girls are probably still virgins, as the term maiden implies, and they have their own desirable beauty (fair, line 20). They are
reluctant to be pursued; recall the word *ravish* (1), describing the action of a man who presses his unwanted sexual attention upon a woman or girl. And yet the *struggle to escape* (9) is part of the spectacle of this poem, watched without any apparent evidence of moral disquiet or protest or instinct to intervene, as if it were some sacred frenzy beyond reach of human judgement. This is not only the resistance of these alluring young girls to the sexual aggression of their male pursuers; by a larger irony it is also the unavailing exertion of all these figures, mortal and immortal, male and female, to escape from the frigid reduction of warm life into cold art. The maidens are fearful of desire in this aspect, but without fulfillment they will be doomed to unreality, as the urn herself is also unfulfilled. For the young men to be ardent in pursuit and the maidens to be self-withholding and reluctant is a traditional gender stereotype that Keats plays with here without challenge or demur; except that his young men enjoy no advantage because all the figures, male and female, are prompted by desires that cannot lead to expressive action. The prospect of consensual domestic sexual partnership is not any part of these scenes; the experience of *love* (20, 25) is presented in the form of frustrated appetite, prolonged *for ever* (20, 24, 26) in frigid deferral. The word *bride* (1) suggests an alternative, but does not lead anywhere, on this urn or in this poem.

*timbrels* (10): old word for an ancient musical instrument, like a rattle, associated with the rhythms of dancing and excitement. The choice of this word invokes a mood and is also a distancing device, projecting the power of music to incite and depict states of arousal back into a remoter classical past.

*Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter* (11-12): the “pipes and timbrels” of the opening stanza are of course silent, written words within the composed text of the poem; but within the envisaged (imagined) narrative of the events and experiences that is the poem’s fiction, the words are spoken (or uttered in mind) by the auditor within the poem, and the recording presence of the poem’s speaker supplies the speech-origin of this pair of words. Each performable instrument can produce note-values of different timbres that can be distinguished and recognised, as of course if the depicted instrumentalists are viewed as part of the urn’s decoration, then the viewer can also recognise them visually. But the rhetorical question (10) posed by the narrating voice is not designed to raise the query, what kind of instrument is each kind, but to exclaim at the dramatic spectacle and its wild, even corybantic performance of these pungently expressive sounds. The mood is excited! But there is also no call to conceive that these words, *pipe*, and *timbrel*, are spoken aloud, even within any layer of the poem’s fiction, because
they are fictional-observer’s thought-words, not uttered at all and thus silent. The sounds imagined as actually heard are implicitly regarded as justification for the five rhetorical question-marks in close succession that conclude the first stanza; but without completed sentence-structure these too are part of the observer’s commentary to himself, within his own thoughts, because even within his own fiction he cannot have heard these sounds as actual auditory events. All is imagined, by him and by us! In the separate space of his own consciousness, which is where the reader is also stationed, we have short-term memory of these inferred occurrences; but within memory too they are completely without sound, are silent (39, 44). Even if we imagine hearing, it’s not entailed that we imagine specifically what it is that we hear.

Thus the opening of the second stanza reflects upon this first-order fictional experience, to add a second layer of comment and characterisation, in sweepingly general terms, since there is no constraint from actuality to compel any closer qualification. What is imagined or fancied to have been heard are melodies (10), ordered musical sounds expressive of rhytmical pattern and feeling, which distinguish them from noise or din. Such sound-production may in conjectured actuality be sweet (11), delightful to sense and mind as gratifying an appetite, as affording distinctive musical pleasure; but the word sweet itself is perilously vague and undefined, unconcerned with the specific origin of this response or the particular evidence which supports it (compare the indefinite more sweetly of line 4). The word sweet and the idea of it are to Keats a well-known danger, an invitation to internally self-induced pleasure with its implication of escape into a less troubled or less painful world than encounter with accurate knowledge. The term is impressionistic, self-conceding as a preference of mental appetite or even taste, though attached no doubt to the widely conventionalised employ of an idiomatic vocabulary of approval and enjoyment.

It could indeed be defensively alleged that the word sweet has a long history of poetical usage; and yet it is often ill-supported and merely vague in this way; and yet too that this recourse to only apparently specific description is usual and thus maybe not over-actively to be censured. But in so many ways Keats stakes his reputation and his self-esteem on not being a weak poet in this or any way; he does inherit a vocabulary, to make what of it he can; but he is also a poet not at all easily satisfied with easy options, which is why and how he is a poet of severe argument and self-challenge as much as one with developed gifts of exceptionally mellifluous expression. In addition, it should be said that sweetness has a real value and
meaning for him, as something that in an ideal order a poet can attain to and donate to others, that the encounter with beauty need not inevitably be untrue or merely fanciful, that it can at best suffuse the sensitive imagination with transformatively ardent fulfillment. Here the comparison between heard and unheard experience is pronounced in an aspirational way and as a quasi-authoritative verdict, as generally self-evident, in which the fictional auditor's preference is authorised by an appeal to widespread agreement. This claim to authorised and conclusive judgement will be met with again later, in the words uttered about beauty and truth (49-50).

Furthermore, the reader of this poem needs to take into account what would then be expected concerning the character of such a composition, set up with the word ode in its title. Here for example is a dictionary definition, from the early 18th century, summarising the principal features of the ode as a recognised poetic form:

The distinguishing character of this sort of poetry [the classical ode] is sweetness, the poet endeavouring to sooth his auditors or readers by the variety of the verse, and the delicacy of the words, the beauty of the numbers, and a choice of such things as are most beautiful in themselves, for the subject of his description.¹

This account demonstrates how sweetness and also beauty are definitive requirements for this kind of writing, that melody (10) is sweet music calming the mind and closely linked to poetry; Keats appoints to himself the fitting task of imagining a sweetness beyond even what can actually be heard in the real world of sense. Melody derives ultimately from Greek melodia, ‘singing, chanting, a tune to which lyric poetry is set’, from melos, song plus oide, song, ode. Thus melody contains and performs ode, as a kind of word-play that is not merely fanciful but is rooted in the word’s ancient origins. Also we may notice here that in his sequence of odes Keats has strenuous ambitions for the ode-form, not breaking this earlier somewhat decorative scheme but at the same time making strong argument with the form itself, intensifying it and extending its range.

And yet as readers of this poem we are left with many unanswered and maybe also unadmitted questions: are all heard melodies sweet and to be put into an undiscriminated inclusive category of sweetness? If sweetness in musical sound is

not only a mental idea but also a description of auditory character and quality, proved within the sensory ear-space even though also then verified by comparisons in memory, then how can such character be attributed (in a fully superior degree) to sounds not even remembered, but invented in interior consciousness? For it’s probable that unheard (11) describes not sounds merely not now at this moment being heard, but those in a more expanded category, outside the physical hearing experience, not even able, ever, to be actually heard. For also to be recognised is that in the modern age we no longer know how these ancient classical flute-melodies were constructed and performed; even the principles of Greek musical harmony have become obscure, and thus all too literally that music is now unable to be heard. We readers understand well enough, too, that no actual pipes could ever play ditties of no tone; only the imagination (spirit, line 14) could play at such fanciful hearings; which might be beautiful but it’s hard to grasp how they could also be truthful, or true? Or perhaps this is to be a truth of the higher spirit (14), and thus far above (28) ordinary human experience? Is that, perhaps, the only level at which such truth could ever be encountered?

This group of lines (11-14) is presented to the reader as attempting judgement, not (or not principally) of the understanding sought for by the fictional observer, but of the intelligence probably to be accredited to the overall poet himself. In resistance a reader may counter-argue that such a dogmatically affirmed preference is not sweet, a weakly conjured word, a sentimental preference for immediate emotional satisfaction: easy pleasure that comforts the mind and eases its tasks. Does the weakness of this word weaken the progress of this poem as a passage of strenuous thought, and thus introduce an element of facile surrender that must infect the whole poem and our reckoning of it? But the reader also has to acknowledge an awareness of this poet’s measured and complex approach to this theme, which might serve to at least half-persuade us that a most clumsy error of mental alertness is at very least improbable.

But if so, what then? Could the ‘weakness’ be in some sense part of the overall-controlling poet’s deliberateness and self-contest, to expose this potential lapse of vocabulary as a reckonable weakness of argument? And could this flaw in argument be a central aspect of this poem’s task, to recognise ‘mere’ sentiment and to search out its contradictions, not in theory or in general but as issues in personal experience and in the life of feeling? Suppose that imagination is to be the bridging link between the real and the ideal, ready-positioned to serve as a relief or escape from one to the other; and that to yield to this soft (12) pleasure is the
indulgence that tempts the observer who seems to have no duties other that to entertain his own fancy. Does the overall poet have in fact other and maybe stern self-imposed tasks; and if so is there tacit irony in the observer-narrator’s vacillations and blurring of difficulties which perhaps does insert a central critique into this poem, not secure or consistent because the critique itself runs into its own contradictions? Is there, in other words, an outside framing dialectical enquiry holding this self-lapsing poem in place but itself subject to wavering uncertainty, as the tendency for the fictional observer to be entranced into and by ‘the world’ of this poem, located in a between-world hovering between ancient and modern, extends to compromise the secure tenure of the overall poet himself as the ultimately responsible agent? If this poem goes wrong or is (fatally) weakened by some aspect or defect within its coherence, we as readers shall blame this overall-poet for the confusion, and not the fictional observer-figure or any of the other agencies implicated in the poem’s development.

So is then sweet a point of irony or self-irony within the text? Could it be unselfconscious or unadmitted irony, but irony nonetheless? Could this connect to an intermittent but continuing and purposeful tendency to uncover weakness of judgement and understanding within the very fruitfulness of imaginative envisagement and story-telling that the poem performs? Is the play of easy fancy a perceived challenge to a stronger imagination, a fancy to play with scenes and ideas as if there is no requirement to be answerable about them and their implications? And could this texture of half-lapsing judgements be not merely one (possible) attribute of this poem, but its central core, its deliberately self-contested theme? If the imagination in its rôle as sweet fancy plays such kinds of games under the authority of its supreme creative status, does not the precious imagination itself stand to be exposed as weakened, not only in the reckoning of the seriously attentive reader but also in the self-reckoning of the poet’s own seriousness? If the ditties of no tone (14) are forever soundless, are they not empty affordable options for easy listening, with never a jarring or a challenging note? Does not the overall poet within his poem tacitly, by subsequent manoeuvres, obliquely concede this by creating his own poem (ditty) which can also claim no heard experience of the word-forms implying sound (as for example the complex and extremely deliberate rhyme-scheme, based on sound values that lie silent upon the page)? Is there not a constant half-slide towards ‘endearing’ (13) sensation which would inevitably compromise the responsibilities of coherent thought and argument? And to rescue this otherwise grand and lofty poem from facile sweetness, may the reader be
perhaps too ready to find condoning excuses to retrieve the poem’s integrity, by redefining lapses into weakness as sophisticated and well-controlled irony? Are we as readers drawn into complicity with these defences, because we don’t wish to see imagination weakened as a faculty, evading its hardest challenges which ought in seriousness to be its most rightly-demanding tasks?

For Keats and the poets of his generation (after Wordsworth and Coleridge) this was undeniably a central and crucial dilemma for the Romantic imagination; and if this ode is a major landmark for encounter with this dilemma, what kind of a landmark is it, in our individual and collective recognition: an exemplary success, or a marker of warning? If the poem is (half-)avowedly self-testing, can it or does it survive these tests, without fatal damage? Could the tests, indeed, be vehicles for a poetic self-pride; a kind of lyrical arrogance, presented as meek confusion, that hovering irony protects the poet’s mind from wishful self-deception, that imagination can claim a freedom to make up its own rules (or at least procedures) without ever being justly called to account? May indeed the lyrical motive itself be a kind of high-level laziness of understanding, promoted as authentic felt experience, which would if so amount to deception practiced upon the reader brought into trust by the enticingly beautiful (unheard) melodies of this ode? Or alternatively, could this internal struggle strengthen the poem in our reader-judgement of it, and give us deeper respect for its author, working at maximum effort of mind and feeling to bring a disturbed poem like this into some kind of difficult balance?

It may be seen, then, that quite early in this poem there are questions dimly half-visible, which it might be over-earnest to pursue into fine detail, but which lodge uneasily in the mind as unsettled issues, giving forward-looking point to our running thoughts but also clouding them with potential distractions, which enhance reader conscience while making the precise moment of scruple harder and more expensive to recognise. It would be facile to manage these profoundly problematic issues by claiming that these rivalrous and mutually self-contradicting interpretations are all part of poetical ambiguity of method, a manoeuvre to enhance richness of the experience of the poem for the responsive reader, because that approach would be the worst kind of defensive trifling, cleverly to disarm the reader’s own scruple. But even so, such an overall estimation may in retrospect turn out to be at least partly just and true, in which case the poet maybe ought to be ashamed of it, as a costly price to pay out for a poem of otherwise notable beauty and power? And if partly or at certain moments he perhaps is ashamed of it, what about the other parts where apparently he is not? For it can hardly be disbelieved
that the contrivance of internal colloquy or dialogue is a ventriloquism of the overall-poet, his artful projective device.

_Thou canst not leave_ (15): a fine example of ardent punning or play on words (compare also line 29): the fair youth cannot come into new leaf in fresh vernal growth, and yet also they cannot leave aside or give up or depart from their desire for it, the expression of life growing within them. Thus, their fresh-growing love must wilt (20), decline and lose its vigour as leaves do when deprived of opportune conditions for growth. Puns such as these are intrinsically contradictory, not so much in enrichment of meaning as setting one level of interpretation against another; nor is the contradiction a local accident of meaning, since this incident plays on a continuing theme in the poem’s argument with itself. For example, if this sweet springtime leafage should bear on its surfaces the delicate moisture of dew, in the essential transience of the climate of the day, then adieu (22) will mark how nothing transient ever will survive the condition of perpetuity: all is in farewell, is indefinitely postponed. Everywhere these latent puns carry on a critical or even adverse counter-meaning, just below the surface of overt narrative performance.

_Nor ever can those trees be bare_ (16): because on the surface of the urn and thus in the imagination (of poet and reader) time stands still, nothing moves and the season never changes (not in decline from summer to winter, but also, not in renewal from winter to spring and summer). Nor ever, also, can these trees bear, come into fruitfulness (another latent pun), so that no life-form in this world can generate its own organic new life, all is barren and the sexual instinct can have no natural consummation (compare the sexual pun on brede, line 41). _Never_ (17 twice) and _ever_ (40, contracted) and _for ever_ (20, 24 twice, 26, 27), _for ever more_ (38) combine in the denying forms of _nor ever_ (16, 22), to flaunt hope for the future as no more than repeated glimpses of impossibility and frustration.

_Never, never canst thou kiss_ (17): a further note on arrested motion. The controlling idea of this poem is that the scenes depicted on the surface of the urn represent postures of lively human activity, but that all is frozen and perpetually immobile. This idea brings many large problems, but also numerous much smaller ones, of consistency and consequence. Right from the start the picture of a mad pursuit (9) is treated as if it really is the ardent and excited straining of these youths, as if the tumult is real motion (the word ‘real’ is nowhere used in this poem), even within the world not of reality but of the imagination. The pipers in stanza II are described as playing so as to produce actual melodies (11), even if not so sweet as
those unheard (11); but if they produce notes in sequence they must of course be
moving their fingers up and down their pipes; otherwise, they will be restricted to
producing only one single note. Also of course if they cannot blow into their pipes,
by the movement of their lips and lungs, then they cannot produce any sound at all;
indeed, if they cannot breathe, then they must be not living but dead. But then
equally of course they are dead, mere lifeless marble figures, so that we readers and
viewers are to imagine life into them, as the internal observer-poet also does. Thus
these ardent youths, in the posture of *For ever piping* (24) or *For ever panting* (27),
cannot actually at any moment pipe or pant because they cannot move at all, there is
no life in them but only the postures of it. These are acute dilemmas of close,
literal-minded interpretation.

The paradox of being dead is also worth noting; that which is lifeless cannot
ever be dead, if it was never once alive. Leaves fallen from a living tree may be
dead leaves, but stones lying on the ground or in a quarry cannot be dead stones, or
only figuratively so. Thus if these passionate-seeming human figures were never
more than inert, carved marble, they can and must in actuality be lifeless: they
cannot die and cannot ever be dead; nor can they possess eternal life, that is, be im-
mortal, even though they may endure forever. But by contrast, figures perceived as
alive in imagination are not immune to imaginary death and dying, or to losing their
imagined life-being, because this is a world-condition different from ‘actual’ reality;
even if this reality is also imagined. And the god-like figures included in these
scenes are to be apprehended as fully immortal by their status and will live for ever,
they exist within a separate life-world in which death amongst their number can play
no part. The implied contradictions in this region of thought are deep and intense,
as imagination both liberates and also concurrently implies a powerful captivity of
restriction.

The logical puzzles extend fully into the scene of the *sacrifice* (31) in stanza IV;
to be *coming* (31) is never to come, to be leading a *heifer* (33) is never to arrive,
ever to perform the deed for which all has been prepared: nothing can ever change,
even to the smallest degree, as if we readers are continually teased by these
semblances of life and incipient motion. We outsiders to these scenes, participant
only as readers, may be trapped in the passage of wasting time (*waste*, line 46), as
mortal beings growing old in our own lives and going on well past these excitements
of fresh, expectant youthfulness; but everything within the scenes before us is
locked into unchanging fixity; the appearance of living, breathing humanity is a
mere delusion of art--beauty without life. We slide at every turn into believing
acceptance of these represented appearances, the power of the imagination to bestow warmth and human agency upon these figures; but in cold logic we know, and we know that we know, that they are all unreal inventions, with actual life reserved only for the internal poet-speaker and for the outside human community of poem-readers to which he belongs, who struggle to grasp and make sense of these contradictions. Maybe, indeed, this is a general condition of poetry, that by definition it cannot make truthful statements in a strict sense? The overall author-poet John Keats is himself right in the thick of these contradictions, operating by proxy and maybe even partially trapped within their beautiful but impossible logic, as he tries persistently to bring this poem to a noble conclusion.

\textit{winning near the goal} (18): the phrase is suggestive of competing for success in running a race, as a test of athletic prowess and stamina such as was a familiar feature of public sports and games in ancient Greece. To reach the finish-line ahead of all other runners would gain the match prize and also win admiration, in what would be an exciting spectacle for the spectators, who possibly had taken sides in giving their support and encouragement. No doubt the scene upon the urn is briefly described here as representing a moment in such a spectacle, very close to its finish. This is not personal, private courtship but the display of passionate desire as a contest, to be the first and to be awarded a kiss as the prize for blissful victory. It's an entirely masculine theme since the maidens play no active part: they are trophies, even unwillingly so; yet the arrested moment seen here imposes a kind of frozen parity on both sides, the pursuers and the pursued: all is poised and preserved in a balance of equal frustration. A somewhat similar stereotype of masculine dominance is presented in the following scene, of public sacrifice (31-4), where the male priests control the event-spectacle and the female animal is the passive victim; and yet, again, the priests do not succeed in their purpose, since they too are under restriction of a general arrest or stasis which they are powerless to overcome, decreed by a \textit{deus ex machina} located outside the urn's depicted scenery, perhaps by the urn itself. The public running-match and the public sacrifice share a correspondent, imposed frustration.

\textit{Ah, happy, happy boughs!} (21): human emotion is assigned to natural forms by a traditional projection: boughs cannot of course really be happy, except by the device of pathetic fallacy, as John Ruskin called it. This happiness must in any case be heavily ironic, because arrested growth is no growth at all, organic life is the process of change through its cycle and through the succession of the seasons: this is also the active condition for the cycle of flower and fruit, for sexual encounter and
reproduction as also in gods and humans, when spring prompts the urges of desire and release. All these cases of reduplicated words, happy, happy (21, 23, 25) and for ever (24, 26-27) demonstrate that these word-repeats cannot discharge their meaning, the over-assertion is vain and unproductive. We might recall here that even Christian marriage was and is not for ever, but was to endure only until the death of either partner.

Readers may well experience a sense, here in the third stanza, that the note of irony is laboured and not without its facile aspects; that the active intelligence of the poem has become immobilised in these repetitions, to result in weakness of argument and a tone of frustrated self-defeat. The movement of the poem appears to be in struggle with its own circumstance, the premise of inertia and vacancy in arrested happiness that feels increasingly like no happiness at all, as if caught and trapped in the stasis of its own conception. What’s to be made of this apparent loss of direction, this seeming inability to break free of, or overtly to critique or question, the framing conditions imposed on the scene by the urn’s arrested reality? One possibility here is that the struggle to grasp the underlying issue is a contest within the process of the poem itself, here encountered and revealed symptomatically and by inference, to indicate these features of potential damage to high poetic ambition as the task that this poem will avoid only at its own peril, but which admits of no easy solution. This sense of intense frustration may thus be experienced by the reader as pivotally dialectical, a challenge to account for confusion of central purpose so early in the poem’s narrative development. The evasiveness can scarcely be overlooked, but it is not clear what significance to assign to it.

for ever new (24): the same continuing irony about permanence: that which is for ever cannot be new, and vice versa: the contradiction is inescapable, in logic and in experience; likewise for ever young, since new and young only make sense by contrast with their opposites in future outcome. Endless unvarying repetition will wear out these songs, both played and sung, and these fancies concerning them, into a perpetual monotony.

still to be enjoyed (26): still has the sense, ‘yet, by anticipation in the future’; but also at the same time, ‘motionless, unmoving’. enjoyed has the sense, ‘giving the prospect of pleasure’ (even in thought or imagination); but also, ‘serving as the occasion and subject of immediate sexual bliss (19)’; for the double sense of still compare also line 1. If enjoyment is a form of action, then stillness is its enemy. The rhyme of kiss (17) with bliss (19) has suggested strongly enough how much will
be lost by what is always near (18) but for ever (20) tantalisingly out of reach.

   high-sorrowful (29): an intensely question-begging description. If the serene world of ideal happy love is stationed, in this account, far above (28) the mortal world of lost passionate satisfaction, then the consequent sorrow of the heart (29) is not lofty, not high, but is depressed downwards into non-ideal and mortifying unhappiness, burning and parching (30). Of course, as we by now fully recognise, the urn will not burn, because it is forever cold. If high means “exceedingly, very much” then the description does fit; but if it means “noble and elevated” then it must be trying, surely without success, to bridge the gap between the ancient ideal (idealised) world and its unmatching modern counterpart: high and low. Cloy’d (29) is no state of feeling that ever could be desired or valued positively; if natural human instinct is sated and repressed like this, emotional damage must inevitably follow; but not in the world depicted here because there is no following, of any kind. These equivocations, so close-packed as to inhibit lucid investigation, must for sure constrain the reader to make his or her own reckoning.

   A burning forehead and a parching tongue (30): these are the feverish symptoms of unsatisfied desire, brought about because love has been elevated into a condition ironically perfect and outside the reach of physical expression, always about-to-be but never actually accomplished. The imagination may rise to heights of perfection, but the heart (29) is stifled: a happiness desperately unhappy. But if the tongue (30) is the site of intense erotic sensation, as well as the instrument of speech, does some kind of puritanical idealism infer the conviction that there can be no lasting truth in the experience of ardent desire? That the parching (30) is a fair and necessary price to pay for higher beauty? This does seem a very unkeatsian thought! In response to these recurrent questions about speech and song and human language, all within the urn’s motionless world is completely silent (39, 44), like a mausoleum. The urn does not have a tongue in its mouth, and yet the urn does possess a voice (say’st, line 48), even if this may or must be another imagined audition, not real actual sound?

   green altar (32): another pungent, suggestive contradiction. An altar would normally be expected to be part of a ritual structure that is permanent, as in a shrine or formal place of worship; but here it is green, as if improvised and in the open air, like the boughs of the verdant trees and natural plant growth, temporary like the season. Of course the altar here could indeed be permanent but decorated with greenery, but the scene seems to be out-doors, within and part of the natural world
of springtime. By a concentrated word-pun, this *altar alters*. And yet of course, within this poem’s fiction, all this green natural world is itself artificially permanent, as if natural life has been *sacrificed* (31) as an offering to some higher purpose. The *garlands* (34) that decorate the animal about to be made a blood-offering to the gods were once plants full of natural fresh life; but now they are plucked and reduced to ritual function, and of course they will soon *wilt* (20).

*or mountain-built* (36): if this little town is envisaged as located by a *sea shore* (35) then it can hardly at the same time be built within *mountains*: these are impossible contradictions in the urn’s claim to represent imagined actuality, a plausible location. Thus, now it’s even more clear that this *little town* (38) is a product of fancy, so that it can be anywhere and nowhere. The town is *little* because in diminished perspective within the urn’s pictorial *brede* (41); and also it’s an affectionate (even sentimental) diminutive, to arouse sympathetic identification in the viewer and proxy-viewer; which in the event provides no escape at all from *desolation*. The ‘world’ represented by and on the urn is characterised as *peaceful* (36), its folk *pious* (37); but this apparent imaginative coherence of community is disintegrated by such open contradiction, none of this occurring by accident.

*fair attitude!* (41): the irony and self-irony in this exclamation are again very explicit here. The continuous activity of life and emotion and social purpose has been replaced by arrested imitation and posture (*attitude*); and this is *fair* not because it is just and balanced in equitable expression but because it looks pretty, as a display of poses attractive to the regarding eye; the exclamation mark underlines the overt irony of this, inviting the reader to consider this cognitive gap between the innocent viewer and more potentially sceptical or disturbed interpretations. Is all this to be the way that art enriches and fulfills the experience of life; or may art rather be predatory and parasitic, sucking out vital life processes in order to substitute monuments and ornaments without practical purpose, except to remind us that the glory of art is precisely that it has no purpose, is lifted out of the busy world of men so that we can reflect on its immunity to daily life? Can the silent claims of art be justified, in face of such persistent and delicate irony at its expense? This grecian urn has no place in a working kitchen or store-room, although it imitates the form of a domestic object with a practical use. By a process of alterative parody it has been made precious, truly so, too valuable to use except as an object for contemplation and admiration. The paradoxes and contradictions of its status, as an object resembling other objects, also mean that we can hardly just gaze contentedly upon its refinement and grace of station; the story it has to tell does look
recognisably human, but by being wrapped around a (modified) cylindrical form it
has no beginning and no end. Its steadfast balance and repose contrast
near-vioently with its teeming, unresolved contradictions, as well as with the
imminence of performed violence and bloodshed. To a modern consciousness a
live-animal sacrifice in ceremonious ritual slaughter must inevitably seem barbaric,
however framed in implied knowledge or guesswork concerning its ancient
historical rationale? Or does the cultural remoteness of this practice defend it from
intrusive modern judgement?

And yet this poem’s multiple ironies and paradoxes make no secret of its
implicit incoherence, beneath its serene surface appearance; perhaps, indeed, a more
subtle and complex purpose is to explore step by step these rival layers of purpose
and value that specifically cannot be reconciled. We the readers never view this
thematic object, but only this representation of its image-forms which are thus
beyond the reach of our own verification; and at the conclusion it is left to us to
draw what conclusions we may. Indeed, the envisaged solid-form of the urn also
means that the scenes recorded on its surface could not possibly all be viewed from
the same perspective; the viewer must circulate around it, to reconstruct in visual
memory its connected schedule, just as the reader can scarcely locate a single
point-of-view from which to assimilate this poem. The message (49–50) delivered
apparently by the urn as its ultimate self-justification, perhaps or perhaps not
endorsed by the poem, only makes the dilemma for the reader even more
challenging and, it may be, uncomfortable. What was the poet’s ultimate intention
in devising this classically beautiful poem is, it would seem, nowhere in sight;
maybe even to himself its final sense was obscure or unresolved.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice? (31): this question now in retrospect
deserves a fuller note. In the opening stanza the seven question-marks are in part
exclamatory and rhetorical, not seeking for answers; but they do also indicate that
the internal poet/narrator is presented (self-presented) as not possessing a complete
explanation of this exotic classical scene, as if he is gazing at and into a portrayed
landscape containing elements of unresolved mystery, as contrived by the ancient
carver of the urn’s surface and by now, across large cultural and historical distance,
unable quite to be distinctly interpreted. The scene-within-scene components
contain at least these distinct frames: we the readers (a) contemplate the scene
imagined by the overall poet (b) which contains a viewing narrator (c) whose tale
this supposedly is, and who looks into the images carved on the urn (d) to observe
there a further interior scene or series of scenes (e) containing personages who are
lifelike figures (f) reaching out for activity which is arrested by the fixity of pictorial art. We the outside readers know, of course, that the overall poet has entirely invented all these scenes, together with any ‘mysteries’ (32) that may be included, and so he cannot be strictly candid in claiming (by a kind of tease) not to know the answers to these questions, in preferring not to invent answers to them. This element of invented, fabricated mystery is yet more prominent in line 31 (Who are these coming to the sacrifice?), where it takes on a more central and, it may be, more disturbing rôle. For now the reader is conducted past incidental scenic aspects (e.g. leaf-fring’d, line 5) to what is implicitly claimed to be a central authorising focus of this little community, its way of life spiritually and its moment of collaborative ritual sacrifice. Not merely some members of this community are involved, but all of them: this folk (37); it is a totalising sacrificial event.

The implied knowledge-base here seems quite inconsistent; the voice that describes this scene does not know who they are who come to this place of sacrifice, but he seems to know that the entire community has left their town in order to be present, as if the poet/narrator is not just studying a landscape image but is somehow internal to the scene, to at least some degree. After all, an outside viewer could not possibly know that the entire population of this little town had left their homes in order to be present at the place of sacrifice; this could not be detected from the available viewpoint; so the narrating figure does have, is supplied with, inside information. The poet/narrator refers to it not as ‘a sacrifice’ or ‘some sacrifice’ but as the sacrifice (31): this form of reference reveals a definitive confidence that the event is clearly or inferentially known for what it is. What is apparently not known to outside observers (poet/narrator and readers) is, what unity of purpose brings together this assembly of participants; the morning of the occurrence is pious (38), by transfer from the pious aspects and motives of the coming-together, but the underlying rationale for devoutness is not explained, apparently not known. And yet there is an altar unexpectedly green (32) and a priest explicitly mysterious (32), converging on the carrying-out of a ritual that must assuredly lie close to the innermost centre of this community’s collective purpose and identity. This ritual must be assumed to be on the general model of a classical, pagan scheme of observance, in which the relation between deities and mortals (6) requires supplicant, regulatory ministration. Yet the poet/narrator claims by inference not to have insight into the cultic rationale of this procedure, into the propitiatory significance of the sacrifice; it is a kind of pastoral anecdote for him, about which it seems that he is scarcely more than slightly curious.
The incident is presented pictorially, not as an occasion for ethnographic or philological reconstruction, even though we may surmise that Keats knows a fair amount more than he allows into the picture. It is a major shift of scene after the painful urgencies of the preceding stanza; cooler, less afflicted by physical distress and the crisis of blocked human passion (28). And yet all the life-forms hitherto represented on the surface of the urn will live for ever in this suspended animation: but also, this new event is in apparently active progress, there is coming (31) and leading (33); this one especially prepared animal, already letting out cries in distressed anticipation (lowing, line 33), will not live forever, but will be laid low, will be ceremoniously slaughtered. But yet again, if the whole sacrifice is suspended in time and frozen into stillness, this animal will not die but will almost-die, in perpetuity. So by the implication of his descriptive account the poet/narrator professes not to know what is the meaning of, the religious sanction for, this extreme but perhaps also regularly performed act, of worship or appeasement or both; and so we the acquiescent readers also do not know. We remain in a kind of aesthetic trance, our concern with the understanding of purpose drained out of us; and yet we pay close attention to the detail of what we see.

We must as readers infer that none of those taking part in or witnessing the sacrifice can be immortal, all are in the province of those who, imagined as living creatures, are within the domain of eventual dying. And yet they too also share an invented, imaginary life-like condition, by the same figurative projection that gives a kind of life to the men and maidens of the first three stanzas. Here, the priests perform service to the immortal gods who are felt as controlling presences, but in this scene we observers and those attending the ritual moment catch no direct glimpse of these hidden gods. If there are many gods, we do not know which ones are specifically invoked, on this spring morning. Yet the intended sacrificial killing of the heifer will confirm a cultic link between mortal and immortal worlds, in which the spiritual province beyond reach of death seemingly demands a tribute-death from within the human and animal life-world, to pay homage to the acknowledged ascendancy of the gods within this community. The method to implore the protection of spirit-life is thus death by proxy, which pervades this whole section of the poem and maybe prevails more extensively thereafter: Cold Pastoral! (45), as a kind of grave-yard, with marble monuments.

And whatever of these constructions may be credited, the concept of sacrifice itself adds deep shadows to this sylvan scene, a kind of primordial superstitious belief in literal blood-requital not at all Christian in a progressive modern sense,
which interposes into the narrative at least two new major themes. The first is that the previously implied prevalence of a natural innocence in this scene and this account of it, what might even be called its ‘charm’, has been compromised, perhaps irrecoverably; even though this poem does not further take up this point in any open manner, it remains a latent issue to provoke disturbance of thought and to question the serene surface mannerism of the poem’s execution. The second new major theme is that life itself is not inviolable, it can be terminated: and not by accident or by the span of a naturally completed lifetime, but by ritual killing, here of a no doubt economically significant animal of female gender (heifer, line 33), performed by male functional intermediaries (priests, line 32) whose status and authorisation the poet/narrator professes not to understand (mysterious, line 32), but also not seriously to question. And yet, now we have violence in this poem, deliberate and destructive.

Perhaps the reader may be not so easily satisfied with or by such ignorance and mystification. Placed on alert by such lack of knowledge we might wish to introduce some newly-conceived questions of our own. How much of these legendary (5) aspects and episodes are in fact expressions of implied ritual purpose, controlled by its functioning ceremonial? This mad pursuit (9), this wild ecstasy (9), this piping of songs (12, 24): are these elements of an undisclosed communal rite expressing some pervasive principle of sacrifice (31), relinquishing free experience under duress from a social control mediated by an imposed hierarchical collective (priesthood) and its prescriptive coercions? Is amorous desire itself the threatening danger, to be placed under the barrier of indefinitely extended deferral, sacrificed to some jealous watchfulness by here-unknown gods or their agents? Ritual death according to a hidden formula, devised by this modern poet as an homage to antiquity while also part-concealing the prospect of surrender and mourning under the charm of morn (37), while he repeatedly professes to pine at the loss of spontaneous freedom which he has himself imposed? This Pastoral is Cold (45), or has become recognised thus, because he has conducted it to this diminishing outcome, cherishing the sweet (11-12) and happy (21, 25) pastoral world which is already artificially removed from the simplicity of ‘actual’ life; and then at the same time he concedes an increasing dismay at its chill, its loss and denial of life-warmth (28-30). The heifer (33) has presumably already been removed from her natural herd, soon to surrender her breathing natural life and to be lying dead and cold upon the altar (32) which has presumably been claimed to provide overriding meaning and justification for a self-deluded butchery; from outside, this is how a present-day
contrarian viewpoint may choose to see it. Can the pursuit of beauty give sanction to such primitive violence, does not the reader at least somewhat blench at this wounding scenario?

The urn itself, of course, another ritual object and likely from within the same overall ethos, has nothing to lose in this chill, having been cold ever since the marble from which it was carved was hewn from the quarry and worked into potentially everlasting fixity, no doubt carefully protected now from the fate of common objects in some display-cabinet or museum of classical antiquity. And yet this marble object cannot of course be immortal, since it cannot possess everlasting life: it cannot possess, or have possessed, any life at all. The poet/narrator is the readers’ proxy within these scenes, but he seemingly lacks the power or the will to avert the consequences of his opening description, already with a slight sinister shadow because of ravish’d (1) which suggests what can happen if panting love (27) is not inhibited; and so in the end a codified, rationalising formula (49-50) is imposed, to damp down excess of ardour and further question, as by a kind of poetic appeasement.

And yet again as concerned active readers we do need and wish to know, here on this earth (50) or in fact anywhere, what is the claimed justification for this all-inclusive sacrifice (31); how much else shall we be induced to relinquish in the name of some lofty purpose, concealed from mere mortals (6) and to which we have not subscribed? What we may quite urgently need to know is that we are free to decide for ourselves what we deem necessary to be known (59), and not to have some cryptic oracle induce us to sacrifice this freedom, to be endlessly curious beyond what we are prescriptively told what is good for us, and sufficient. It may be, indeed, that the very idea of sacrifice has tacitly invaded this poem, which proves powerless to resist its insidious control-narrative: that art shall and must finally control and even extinguish nature, even though there is continuing struggle (9) to resist this outcome. Christianity promised mankind eternal life, though of a special and conditional kind; but eternity (45) here is surely not a natural or even unnatural home for life on earth (50), but rather a condition close akin to death, permanent and unchanging: like the urn. (For Christian eternity, compare Milton, Paradise Lost, Book Three, lines 1-55.)

However the struggle within the poem is expressed in its argument and experienced by the reader, the word desolate (40) rings out like a solemn bell, with its implication of abandonment and irremediable sorrow. This is locally contained
in effect as part of the conjectural story of this little town (38), but it strikes more deeply into the poem’s darkening mood: maybe this fair picturing of a community poised in secure happiness and beauty can only lead into desolation, into a loss of feeling-life which this poem tacitly recognises but cannot quite openly admit? For sure we cannot feel endear’d (13) by this aspect? The same effect may also arise from emptied (37), the sense of which overflows its immediate context to further emphasise negative thoughts and feelings, of vacancy and loss, in contrast to the ‘peaceful citadel’ (35); the reader is reminded once again that the urn is on the outside fully decorated but, presumably, also hollow and empty within, an enclosed void. In all this, after all, the risk-stakes are high; if this poem is allowed to falter or collapse under the strain of internal self-contradiction, the entire link between a modern spirit and the beauty and truth of a classical ideal may be ruptured beyond repair. Keats needs this landmark poem to succeed, to keep control of its inherent instability; for example, the complex rhyme-scheme of the division into strophic format is never allowed to falter or stray from its pre-planned arrangement. These disruptive figurations are in the event assigned to the reader, as central to the problematics of how to read this poem fully and accurately; recognising that none of the possible resolutions can claim self-evident authority over the alternatives. This, indeed, is the challenge of dialectical reading.

With brede / Of marble men and maidens (41-2): brede is an older word for a kind of decorative textile, woven or embroidered; and what marble men will never do is breed, because, locked as within inert marble, they are not married (compare bride, line 1) but marred; the puns and half-puns are exquisitely painful. Thus also punning, overwrought (42) signifies both ‘decorated with a design over its surface’ and also, ‘too much overcome with passion and (vain) excitement’. marble is the fine precious stone from which the celebrated Greek statues of human figures were carved; but here too, these figures of art cannot be living because they are petrified, reduced to lifeless stone, on the decorated surface (brede) of the urn; as in a frieze or band of human forms reduced to ornament. Keats could have written of marble men only, as a generic description (compare a friend to man, line 48); but he adds and maidens, because the gender difference is intensely central to his theme. Once again these ironic contradictions of sense begin to take on a latent thematic coherence, as a half-submerged argument of the poem with and/or against itself.

dost tease us out of thought (44): us is the first explicit mention of the general collective of humanity that includes the speculative internal poet and the whole of his readerly audience, part-matched by our (4) which must also include the overall
poet/author John Keats. To *tease* is, chiefly, to speak or act playfully, as to a child, to make light of a matter by making a small joke or puzzle that will surprise or annoy with a mock-torment and also please or amuse the one who is teased, in friendly and perhaps quite unserious exchange. Thus to be teased *out of thought* is to be brought to be less grandly in earnest with the problems of rational understanding, to relax and accept a paradox as probably beyond solution. To *tease* can also have the sense of to loosen the strands of a dense material or the knots of an entanglement: to *tease out*.

What are the implications of these usages? Are we to allow ourselves to be persuaded, after the complex and strenuous issues of all in this poem that has gone before, that actually the whole obscure linkage of problems doesn’t really matter so much, that we can run along with our lives without the bother of thinking out a resolution? Something of this kind is a possible implication of the exclamation marks at the end of lines 20 and 25, as well as of those within line 41; what is reported and described is surprising in a perhaps not altogether serious way, as unexpected and puzzling but also light-hearted, as strangely contrary to natural likelihood; this is the apparent teasing aspect of the poem’s mood. For sure this attempted deflection of our serious thought in line 44 is scarcely plausible to us as readers, it’s a little decoy or evasion, we cannot give up so easily, and for sure *eternity* (44) is not a playful idea. We are in a deep contradiction, here, with many ironies hovering about the motives and attitudes expressed in these words and text-markings.

*Cold Pastoral!* (45): this exclamatory phrase amounts to a retrospective summary comment, on the description of the whole scene so far; an explicit awareness acknowledging this subversive underlay to the ideal landscape and its inhabitants as now itself an emerging central aspect to the poem’s narrative development. *Pastoral* is the idealised surface-level, without weariness (23), and *Cold* is the implicit counterpart, ever more *silent* (39) and more *desolate* (40). The scene purports to display all the natural warmth and activity of this idealised country life in benevolent springtime; and yet, by what is now explicit and recognised contradiction (admitted to be such by the presence of the exclamation mark), all is cold as if in dead of winter and without ‘real’ animation. But, inside a poem and in imagination now feeling the pinch of contradiction, what could ever be ‘real’? If the urn is removed from reality through derivative imitation, then the scenes upon it are twice-removed. This double-removal has implications for the internal poet-narrator’s point of view, since he is at some moments self-projected as fixing
his living gaze upon this urn, as an imaginary object artfully endowed with object-status, poised within his range of vision as he causes this object to come into existence for us readers by his unfolding description of it; and yet, by alternation and also simultaneously, his point of view is inside the scenes displayed on the urn’s surface, which are imagined to have internal dimensions and locations, near and far, as if in a kind of peep-show or magic-lantern imagery, perhaps even back-projected as in Plato’s Allegory of the Cave. In parallel with these alternations of viewpoint the reader also is positioned so as to gaze at the urn, and to gaze into the urn’s apparently interior world; we are enclosed within this illusion of an inhabited world and, by a similarity of aspect, we too cannot move or shift, because we too are immobilised, within our enclosed mental space, anticipating and questioning (31-34) what might lie in the future following on from this snap-shot or single moment of view but knowing at the same time that there can be no future, just as there can have been no past.

Indeed, if this virtual object may be a funerary urn, constituting or resembling a sacred utensil prepared so as to contain the cremated ashes of a dead person, then perhaps the illusion of life displayed on its surface memorialises a death-like permanence or after-life, for poet-narrator and reader alike. Even if it only mimics this function of a ritual funerary container, then its identity, its raison-d’être, is that of a memorial death-object; in which case all the varied scenes of natural life inscribed upon its surface are to be understood as a kind of necrotic, macabre irony; this bright activity on the surface must be all hollow, enclosing a space of shadowy inward oblivion that is reached through an aperture which the poem never visits or overtly mentions, even though it may function as an oracular mouth emitting utterance from this presumed interior personhood, to declare its finally decreed non-negotiable terms for sufficient human life-values. More obliquely acknowledged is this dark funnel-passage as a female sexual opening with its hymen intact: unravish’d (1). This obscure interior of course expresses the purpose of the object, with the decorated enclosing boundary-wall as no more than incidental, a pretext for artistic display. If these formalised contrasting notions of light and dark, visible and invisible, inside and outside, are placed in reciprocal equivalence, cancelling out the separateness of each other’s differing scope of directive application, then the overall formula will prescribe a stasis of knowledge, far above (28) mortal human-kind and inimical to the multiple agencies that compose the varieties of action and passion essential to human life. Classical and modern are severed here by a vertical separation.
this generation (46): the group of living humans of this current age, including at time of writing the poet and his readers; also by generation we have been brought into the presence of our own ‘real’ birth and thus shall meet with ‘real’ death. By contrast, within the world of the urn there will be no sexual fulfillment and thus no birth, no generation at all; because the urn's figures are lifeless and will escape death, thus to remind us and our successors that some values are permanent (though at a price) and beyond the reach of change (for ever, several times).

‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’ (49): this final statement is enclosed in quotation marks and thus is attributed to the everlastingly permanent urn, as the lesson which it (she) imparts or decrees to men, in their successive generations of mortality. There has been much textual controversy over the use of these quotation-marks, and over which portions of these lines are identified as direct utterance, and as spoken by which possible voice within the poem; here the supposition is accepted that it is the urn who/that ‘speaks’ these words, by comprising their source as an oracular issuing authority, presenting or implying these prescriptions of advice to the reader and to all readers, indeed to all mankind. It is notable that, in a poem suffused with questions of sexual paradox, the urn is given a voice apparently without gender, even though earlier she/it has been a bride (1). The form and style of this terminal statement seem to announce an unquestioned general certainty, valid in some metaphysical and absolute way, self-evident by its own confidence and authority. After all, the concept of truth, apparently with higher authority than the vivid imagination in play throughout the earlier parts of this poem, arrives abruptly and with potentially corrective application to a flowery tale (4) or a leaf-fring’d legend (5). By this token the first part of the final statement could be taken to affirm that the only real beauty is that which is truthful, embodies truth; all other apparent beauty is a deception; this could be a severe restriction, in face of the beautiful fancies of the urn’s tale and the viewer’s correspondent imaginings.

By now in this poem the reader should be deeply wary about accepting at face value this lofty claim to authority. The first statement is then followed by another, equally peremptory, directing how the first statement shall be incorporated into our deep knowledge about the world and ourselves, as fully sufficient to our human needs. Some readers and critics of this poem have argued that the whole of the last two lines is ‘spoken’ by the urn, and even that, maybe, the beauty-truth comment is itself an allusion to the position held by Sir Joshua Reynolds, an authoritative classical-minded art critic of the period. And yet we should know that for Keats the idea acknowledged a noble, ideal sentiment: in his wide-ranging letter to his
brother and sister running over December 1818 into January 1819 he wrote, ‘I can never feel certain of any truth but from a clear perception of its Beauty.’ And yet again as we sufficiently know, the plain truth of a circumstance, or knowledge of it, without ornament or embroidery, may redress apparent beauty of appearance, may be unpleasingly hard to accept, even ugly in the undeniable displacement of delusive wish-fulfillment and stubborn cherishment of an ideal. And then yet again, the reader is also perhaps invited to be aware that, in antiquity, oracles spoke in brief, enigmatic riddles, capable of being interpreted in several distinct and even conflicting ways; this enigmatic aspect, here too, may be quite self-conscious and deliberate, as intrinsic unresolved challenge to the appearance of confident certainty.

The main problem, outside the multiple ironies of its presentation, is that the message apparently given by the design on the urn’s surface, the scenes which it shews and the story which it tells, does not provide very encouraging or even coherent advice to real-life human beings. The urn may indeed display great beauty, but at the expense of life itself, of feeling and passion and action, the qualities of reality for social and personal experience. These instructional mandates are entirely fixed and static: beauty does not develop into truth, nor truth flower into beauty: it is a rigid equivalence or lock-down, as a category relation, as if each is the fixed prize awarded for the counterpart other. By continuously ironic contrast the urn’s world is intact but inert, cold and unreal: it represents the appearance of life but only in severely limited aspects, because its world is in actuality dead, not only buried in a far-off dream of classical antiquity but suffocated there, too. It toys with ideas of sexual passion but trivialises it, by never letting them achieve any depth or power. In this it is beautiful but childish, as the ironies constantly admit, and indeed obliquely emphasise.

These paradoxes point to a further controversy of interpretation which has a long and ancient history. Truth is supposed to be permanent and unchanging, not affected by the temporary human passions and actions within the ebb and flow of life. The term may carry amongst other meanings, ‘not false or deceptive’ and also ‘loyal and sincere’ (as when a man is true to his word). Beauty in contrast is not everlasting, it comes and goes, like the rose or the human face; part of the special charm of beauty, that can make it precious, is that it will fade (19) and wilt (20) soon enough; even its preservation in the forms of art will not survive for ever the ravages of neglect or deterioration. It may be asserted that beauty of appearance can indeed be deceptive in regard to deep fundamental character, but here that kind of apparent beauty would not qualify as beauty at all, because not true beauty. What does it
mean to assert that these apparently opposite values in principle are, without qualification, the same: identical with each other, even though in their different modes—we can see beauty, and hear it, but truth is beyond the reach of direct sensual experience? Are we to ignore our awareness that ideals of the beautiful themselves change, are not constant as between historical eras and cultural traditions? A beautiful melody in ancient China may be unintelligible to a modern European listener. Can this advice which the urn is said to convey to humans, unchanging across the multiple eras of human history, be perhaps ironic, or even, not true?

After all, the content of the urn is apparently empty, void; and so it can hardly contain any wisdom that could or should be valuable to us; if it embodies this wisdom but cannot ‘know’ it, then the form of its declaration may lie in the recognition of the human viewer, by ascription credited to the poem’s readers. But maybe the function of the urn’s message is to make us think, to make us distrustful of universal messages, not merely to accept them without question? Perhaps the “message” of the urn is in conclusion pitched up into impressive but impossible, idealised abstraction, as a last-minute compensation for the pains and disorders of actual human life; the overall poet in struggle to survive in his now increasingly sombre poem. But this would make it in essence an avoidance of reality, which indeed the thoughtful reader might do well to reject, as a false and demeaning substitution, leaving the whole tangled issue unresolved in the reader’s mind: a task for thought? Yet the alternative to the desolation of the little town’s unchanging perpetuity may be no more attractive: the prospect of no-longer youthful old age (46), which is the fate of real men (this generation, line 46).

For we are surely brought to recognise that the urn’s message to its then-contemporary world, whatever it was, cannot be our message or a message to us as modern readers; any more than it could have been a valid message to Keats himself; the conception of reality and the tests for beauty and truthfulness had shifted and have shifted, into an historical dislocation which simply refuses this poem’s claim that it can somehow bridge this rift between ancient and modern. It was Keats’s ardent ambition to restore this rift, even by an ambiguous final device; but the strain is evidence of severe impossibility. Maybe it’s the urn that will tease us out of thought (44), and then tease us back into thought, over and over again. Maybe Beauty and Truth are both cold, abstract ideas, sharing this aspect of their frigid natures; but maybe, also, neither of them is true enough, maybe we in our modern selves and modern world do need more than the apparent advice of a poem.
like this, in order to be truly human? If that is not the lesson of the urn, maybe it is the lesson of the poem? Otherwise, why should a mere piece of crafted stoneware be claimed to have power to direct our lives?

_a friend to man_ (48): this easy and natural-seeming expression brings its own set of questions. A friend is normally a special individual in our lives whom we know and trust well on equal terms and in shared sympathy, to open in confidence our private thoughts and feelings, person to person on both sides. It is quite hard to imagine how an _urn_ could be this kind of friend, especially as the friendship here is not individualised but indiscriminately general (_man_). Also if the urn tacitly claims the authority of its ancient origin (ageless and wise) and is to be a paramount surviving example of poise and serenity in a troubled modern world, this relation cannot be one of trust as between equals; the urn nominates itself rather grandly as a necessary mentor, instructing us without any evidence of particular insight into our various conditions of life. All of this is, of course, the invention of John Keats, as a mediating friend to the reader. Is he truly our friend, should we accept him as such?

The highly-respected Roman orator and philosopher Cicero, promoting ideals widely accepted through the ancient world, outlined as a principle of friendship that there should be mutual sympathy between the parties, each supplying by loyalty and respect what the other lacks, ‘using friendly and sincere words.’ It was a serious relation, not one-sided, no one getting up on their high horse but expressed with frankness and generosity each towards the other. Especially to be prized was the loyal friend who gives good, honest advice, based on attentive close understanding as well as on cool objective judgement. The urn is presented as constant in friendship (_Thou shalt remain_, line 47), but otherwise there is little evidence of personal warmth or specific personal regard: it’s a distant and skewed relationship, a mandate only for lofty ideals. The word _friend_ could even carry a slightly sinister undertone, as in an interfering relationship compulsory beyond our power of choosing; thus, imposed and authoritarian and not truly reciprocal, and deaf to our own feelings: since the urn would surely never accept even a word of advice from us, or listen in to our point of view. Indeed, how could it possibly do such a thing, since it has a mouth but no ears?

_on earth_ (50): this location, even so close to the ending of the poem, is loaded with potential contradiction. Does it represent the complete and inclusive span of human experience, across the sequence of generations; or is the realm of the _spirit_
free of this specifically bounded horizon; and if so, is thought subject to on-earth restriction, or not? If knowledge is required, to find a way through actual life, is this the only and sufficient knowledge, for example excluding or incorporating the ideal of love (20, 25)? on earth could thus stand either for an universal application, or an earth-bound and limited alternative; again leaving the reader with the task of dealing with the dilemma. In earth would certainly be cold, a lifeless burial. It may be, indeed, that the dilemma is fundamentally representative of what could be the experienced value, for the reader, of this poem as a whole; how far, and with what persuasiveness, can it reach into the reader’s life-experience, as not only a self-limiting special case but as inclusively, convincingly true?

Cold Pastoral! (45): a further note. This phrase of two words only, followed by an exclamation mark, does not contain any verb-element, and thus is grammatically not a full sentence: it cannot assert a proposition, almost as if at this stage in the poem’s contradictory logic of positive and negative aspects it’s impossible to make any clear decisive statement at all. The phrase perhaps functions as a retrospective summary topic marker, to gather diverse aspects and features into a condensed focal point; in that respect it mirrors the previous similar exclamatory phrase, fair attitude! (41), both of them cast in exactly the same metrical shape. And yet the exclamation mark signals a moment of strong feeling, about what is happening (or not) in the poem’s story, and also what is happening in the composition of the poem. These two words could be read as also setting down and admitting a fierce paradox, by implication a total contradiction of categories, with a sudden impulse of resistance to the argument of this poem which has brought it and us to this point. We know of course that the urn itself, its object nature and status, must be cold; just as also we know that the pictorial decoration on its outer surface must be cold even as it represents scenes of human, natural warmth: the renewing of life of the spring landscape and the emotional ardour of the figures, amorous, musical or ceremonial according to the arousing motive.

In this wide context the word cold seems strongly negative and reproachful, as if the mark of some failing or deficiency, or else an admission of unwelcome constraint against spontaneity, of a stern control. We recognise too that old (as within cold) represents a value of inherent equivocation: the ancient world of Greek pastoral preserves an ideal beauty of conception, but old age (46) will threaten and overcome the values of fair youth (15), because there is no prospect of living growth towards maturity and fulfillment. Yet what is the call for an unwanted frigid aspect;
if it’s not the result of some intrinsic necessity then who or what is to blame for its pressure here of spoiling chill? Is there an implied instinct to resist this coldness, to recognise the exclamation mark as sceptical and even sarcastic? It is no fault of or in the nature of the urn, to be cold. Art objects cannot themselves be warm with the aspects of warmth which they represent. But the scenes within this poem include this pervasive coldness as its underlying presence only because the poet-author has made it so, has installed the logic that makes it unavoidable. Does the poet/narrator inside the poem therefore reproach himself for presiding over an irresistible invasive frigidity, for succumbing to a manipulation of theme that delivers the poem hostage to its own self-immolation?

With the formal momentum of this poem’s assembled movement up to this point, there is little chance for the poet/narrator to back-track out of this impasse; the exclamation recognises this entrapment but it was implicit from the opening invocation, even though "ecstasy", line 10, would scarcely be cold; but then, that is like a trance, internalised and self-consuming. The impasse could not now be merely denied; the coldness is no incidental side-issue but is functionally central to the latent theme of the poem, which looks like joyous pictorial description but which inwardly pursues a dialectical argument with itself (and perhaps with the reader, too). The final turn in the poem’s resolution might be readable as an attempt to rationalise and validate this impasse, not by argued confrontation but by installing the problem itself as a directive and exemplary theme, a paradox re-categorised as a profound verity. Should the reader assent to this manoeuvre? Perhaps on the contrary he or she is to be aroused to resistance, and then to think hard on what such resistance would mean: what are the alternative positions in the face of marmoreal aesthetic idealism? If such dissentient reading is outside the poem then the poem stands as unsatisfactory, perhaps as inwardly self-damaged; but if such a reading is invited and called for within the poem’s struggle for its own meaning, then a full dialectic is in place which can (could) give the poem a power to survive its own interior weakness, by conceding and adopting it.

But then, what of Pastoral? Has this too become a term of reproach, a draining away of reality into formal or conventionalised subterfuge, as if too much was being asked or expected of what could only in the end be a kind of pantomime: is Pastoral itself condemned by its very artifice to fall short of ‘real’ life and its rich complexities? We can be sure that Pastoral mattered a lot to Keats. The idea was, as he knew, at the very earliest origins of Western poetry itself, intrinsically musical and ceremonial and giving the lyric impulse its hitherto fullest expressive per-
formance in (Western) human history. The original idealised *pastors* were shepherds, far from towns and cities, caring for their sheep in the fields of Arcady, thus *arcadian*, in the simplified rustic habit of a communal life close to nature and the seasons. Keats revered the power of imagination in poetry as the highest achievement that the human mind was capable of aspiring towards, and the Pastoral of the Greek and Roman poets was for him a mode wondrous and exemplary: a simplicity of life redolent with truth to its origins and beauty in its expression, in which poetry and life itself sprang from the same root. But, had this always been in some sense *cold*, nature framed within artifice; or did this poem of Keats progress into a kind of lapse from the ancient coherence of Pastoral, its status as an allegorical transcription of shepherd life that imaged a natural warmth which by definition it could not itself embody? Was this for Keats a self-division unavoidably implicit in the self-consciousness of his being, now, a modern poet?

What was here for Keats *Cold* was also *old*, so distant as to be hard to interrogate without imputing division: we have met this punning contradiction before, in *Bold Lover* (17), since the forward-pressing young man (*bold*) must already be *old* before his time, stranded in perpetual nearness to a *goal* (18) that he will never attain: a predicament surely grievous? If this play on *Cold* seems a mere accident of sounds, it’s to be observed that *Pastoral* itself is *past*, perhaps beyond any definitive reach for the modern poet. Maybe this contradiction is implicit within the poem’s very title: the *ode* is to be for Keats a form of aspirational composition, following an awesome tradition in English poetry; and yet the form is avowedly Greek in origin, just as the *urn* is a Greek concept, and this current exemplar (in Keats’ imagination) is an archaic survivor, thoroughly in keeping within its original ceremonial context. The whole double-idea in the title is suffused with an invented ancient *pastness*, in character fixed beyond reach of change because locked into a closed cultural epoch.

This was an idea-space that Keats was not obliged to enter: but once inside, he was to find the internal logic difficult to modify, to accommodate to his modern impulse. Keats had the general ambition, in his series of odes, to revive this original form by infusing it with the new life of the English poetic resurgence, in a language reposed in imitation of classical serenity but also newly vitalised by modern feeling; the truly universal human motives that for him could connect the ancient to the here-and-now, breathing and even panting with immediate desire. Yet, what bridges past, present and future is *eternity* (45), an even colder prospect, more immune to the warm life of a current human moment; only the *sacrifice* (31)
gestures towards eternity and indeed may comprise a form of substituted offering in which immediate life is sacrificed to a containing negative form (like, indeed, an urn).

The forward flow of the poem’s development comes to a temporary halt with the end of line 45. How shall the poem surmount or even survive this blocking contradiction? Was such a poem doomed to weak compromise or failure by the contradiction lodged in its title, unless it should surrender fully to the demands of a “classical” consistency? What resisting escape could be devised, and would not escape be just that, an avoiding manoeuvre that concealed (or attempted to conceal) the head-on blockage? If not ancient and modern, then more painfully ancient or modern? The signal towards a full and hopefully non-evasive recognition of the dilemma resides, the reader may come to acknowledge, in the exclamation mark. This provocative, somewhat confrontational brevity of the self-verdict naturally but also quite abruptly rounds off the movement of previous reflectiveness, by a ruefully ironic halt. It seems, that is, an accommodated part of the verse tendency within the poem, but to the internal narrator and to the reader also it must come as a surprise and a check.

By making this halt, to allow an overflow of pent-up contrarian feeling, the poem’s inner consciousness of itself is challenged to make frank appraisal of the culminating contradiction, and to accept the double or multiple force of opposed valuations surrounding it. The moment is cold, is old and past and now we fully know this, beyond further postponement or dalliance (a flowery tale, line 4). The supervising idea of poetry is based in the very origins of human ceremonial expression, of imagination as intrinsic to the warm current of immediate human life and thought and feeling, is pastoral, the remote beginnings of poetry’s aspiration to be true to itself (cold) as well as true to our humanity (warm). This contradiction need not be a blockage if it is able justly to be understood as dialectical, rather than quailed at or brushed aside. The exclamation mark tells us that we can know this, for what it is, and that if we can know it, then by that token we do know it; and thus we know that we do.

This level of knowledge could bring with it a requirement to complicate the apparent earlier choice, between the warmth of human impulse and the containment imposed by form and the exterior wonderment of beauty. Now it could be the case that, even when we pant or lead an animal to a sacrifice, we know that we do these things, by proxy within the story: the urn is complete in its transfixing beauty and
that is its would-be self-sufficient truth; but the working of the poem has and works out a knowledge that is dialectical, that can include both beauty and truth not by identity but by argument, because they are words within the play of human meaning as well as ideas or ideals, and it is by words that we come to understand them, and not to be commanded by such agencies of purported meaning beyond our reach or control. All this could affirm that the apparently facile paradox of the poem’s conclusion, a formula asserting knowledge without in any way seriously proving or sustaining it, has no power to coerce or harm us, by demanding that we accept what could be a banal falsity because we have no other option.

We may wince a little at the cheerfully absurd banter of the final two lines, their owlish pedantry, because we are not required credulously to believe them; only to know that urns, like ancient Greeks, may claim mysterious (32) authority only because or if we have sacrificed (31) our reason and human instincts in paying them uncritical heed. Instead, by a dialectical alternative, we are to know that we (the readers in historical succession) can choose, as we decide and prefer, to deal with oracles by the use of our own imagination as a form of native intelligence: that this is something we modern (post-enlightenment) readers have in our power to do, within the range of the poem’s working (its instrumental dialectic) and not by stepping outside it: this perspective is declared and confirmed by the exclamation mark in line 45.

And yet here once more the poem does not cease to be in dialectical self-argument, by seeming to reach a precarious settlement; because the overflow of subarticulate feeling marked by the exclamation mark could almost equally well be a controlled but unpurposed expression of frustration and of resignation, an admission of defeat in the face of a total pressure of ancient superstition; we have accepted the bed laid out by the poem and the terms of its making, and now we must lie down in it. By this reading the exclamation mark is not so much ironical as cynical; only reader-judgement will decide this issue, because the two possibilities are (or certainly seem) mutually incompatible. Whichever we choose to follow is close-shadowed by the other, for which dilemma the verb tease (44) seems a pointed understatement. Nor can the poet/narrator, nor yet the poem’s innermost authorial presence, be summoned like the poem's own oracle, to give a deciding opinion. At very least, the operation of the dialectic would not permit such a manoeuvre; nor can it be considered a question of fundamental ambiguity, for this is a struggle beyond the limits of rhetorical contrivance, close to madness (9). Like the unheard music (11-14) the contest to locate resolution, of what we see and come to know, is
stationed within the reader’s mind: instinct, feeling, and knowledge.

It is also finally not possible for the reader to know accurately or even to estimate with confidence how far and how fully the overall poet, John Keats himself within this poem, may have constructed with secure deliberation and self-knowledge this sequence of encounters and confrontations. Did he hold complete control over what this poem does? Or, rather, a kind of struggling part-control, to recognise and only just to keep up with problem after problem, where some of the paradoxes reach beyond his own powers of resolution? Does the poet submit to his own doubts so as to declare, or to concede, how such doubts and the concepts of truth and beauty don’t match up very completely or convincingly? Is the reader brought into the field of argument as a deliberate partnership; or as an expedient for survival, to retrieve for the poem a coherence from its own uncertainties, its own admitted lack of coherence as not concealed within the poem? Indeed, would these need to be mutually exclusive alternatives?

This poem thus needs the reader’s fully-engaged active intelligence to work through its turns and layers of contradiction, so as to discover even temporarily an accomplishment not captivated by its conclusion; just as the reader needs the poem's overt courage and stamina-in-argument as instruments for a vigilant and fulfilled reading process. The dialectic is not a diagram, but a dual activity; and is thus, maybe, a poetic achievement of highest value if as readers we can play our part to discover and understand it.

Edited by Li Zhimin, Zhao Kai
The English Language Haiku Poet and Mentor: An Interview with Lenard D. Moore

Wang Zuyou
Henan Polytechnic University, China

Abstract: The English language haiku is a three-line poetic form with a kigo (season word), depicting the natural world. Haiku also has a way of showcasing our oneness of existence with the natural world, while having a cultural significance. Lenard D. Moore usually tries to employ music in haiku. Both music and poetry have ways of evoking deep emotions within the listener and reader. To that end, he writes what he calls jazzku and bluesku. He believes that a good haiku would have concrete details, a strong verb, a good contrast and a pleasing rhythm in it. Moreover, he believes that an excellent haiku employs at least three of the five senses. *The Open Eye* (1985) is a collection of haiku, arranged into seasons. *Forever Home* (1992) is a collection of longer poems showcasing the richness of home. *Desert Storm: A Brief History* (1993) is a book as one long poem or a sequence of haiku, which attempts to capture the essence of the Desert Storm conflict. The poem “Generations” of *A Temple Looming* (2008) sheds light on how close-knit and happy the family appears to be. Moore is thinking about writing a book on literary criticism, believing that a poet’s work could be strengthened by writing literary criticism. He says, “The poet must study, work on craft and listen to the cadence of the poetic line.” In a fundamental sense, to create and teach a distinct haiku is a way of living for Lenard D. Moore. He has mentored and continues to mentor poets.

Keywords: Lenard D. Moore, English language haiku, jazzku, bluesku, renku

A Brief Introduction to Lenard D. Moore: Lenard D. Moore, a North Carolina native, is the Founder and Executive Director of the Carolina African American Writers’ Collective and Co-founder of the Washington Street Writers Group. Moore’s poems, essays and reviews have appeared in over 400 publications, such as *Agni, Callaloo, African American Review, Prairie Schooner, Colorado Review, North Dakota Quarterly* and *Crab Orchard Review*. His poetry appeared in over one hundred anthologies, including *The Bedford Introduction to Literature* (Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008), *The Haiku Anthology* (Norton, 1999); *Trouble of Water: 250 Years of African American Poetry* (Mentor Books, 1997); *Haiku World: An International
Moore has taught workshops, served on literary panels, and given hundreds of readings in various occasions, including National Black Arts Festival, Zora Neale Hurston Festival, The People’s Poetry Gathering, The Walt Whitman Cultural Arts Center (Camden, New Jersey) and The Library of Congress. He has also been featured on several radio and television programs, including the radio program “Voice of America.” He is recipient of the numerous awards, including Haiku Museum of Tokyo Award (1983, 1994 and 2003), 1992 First Prize Winner in Traditional Style Haiku and Raleigh Medal of Arts for Lifetime Achievement (2008). He is former President of the Haiku Society of America (2008 and 2009) and longtime Executive Chairman of the North Carolina Haiku Society. He has taught at North Carolina State University (Raleigh), North Carolina A&T State University (Greensboro). He also has been Writer-in-Residence for the United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County. He has lived in South Carolina, Virginia, California, and Germany. An avid reader and listener of music, he writes about family, gardening, jazz, identity, sports and global issues. Currently, Mr. Moore teaches Advanced Fiction Writing and African American Literature at Mount Olive College, where he directs the literary festival and advises The Trojan Voices. He is working on two poetry collections, a novel, short stories, a play, and literary criticism. Mr. Moore mentors several other poets and writers.

Wang Zuyou (hereinafter referred to as “Wang”): Hi, Professor Lenard D. Moore! Thank you so much for your permission for this interview! As the founder and executive director of the Carolina African American Writers’ Collective, will you please tell me why you found it and how you direct it?

Lenard D. Moore (hereinafter referred to as “Moore”): You are welcome! I have founded the Carolina African American Writers’ Collective because I want to provide a safe haven for African American Writers to read, write and critique without having to explain cultural references and historical figures and events. To
that end, it is my hope that the writers could then concentrate on an in-depth critique of the literary works that are presented at the Carolina African American Writers’ Collective Workshops/Meetings.

Wang: You are President of the Haiku Society of America: does this mean you write Haiku in Japanese?

Moore: I am former President (2008 and 2009) of the Haiku Society of America and the first African American President of the Haiku Society of America. No, I write my haiku in English, though several of my haiku have been translated into Japanese and several other languages, including Chinese.

Wang: As a haiku writer and teacher, you must have a lot of experience, interest and vision to share with the readers. Would you please share with us your understanding of haiku?

Moore: I write haiku as often as possible. I keep a journal on me, so that I could capture the haiku moment. Thus, I write dozens of haiku each month. I understand that writing haiku is a way of life for me. English language haiku is a three-line poetic form with a kigo (season word), depicting the natural world. Haiku also has a way of showcasing our oneness of existence with the natural world. At the same time, haiku has a cultural significance. For example, I write haiku about jazz, blues, gospel, clothes, dance, and food. I also write haiku about sports, family, paintings, photographs, gardening and traveling. In addition, I write haiku about other subjects. However, I usually try to employ music in my haiku. To that end, I write what I call jazzku and bluesku. I believe that a good haiku would have concrete details, a strong verb, a good contrast and a pleasing rhythm in it. Moreover, I believe that an excellent haiku employs at least three of the five senses. On the other hand, a good haiku employs at least two of the five senses. For further information about my haiku writing, please read my essay “Deep in the Woods: The Haiku Journey”. Please note that my essay includes twelve of my haiku and was published in *Frogpond, Volume 31 Number 2, Spring/Summer* 2008. At that time, I was the President of The Haiku Society of America. The editor of *Frogpond* invited me to submit an essay for publication. Yet, I am the longtime Executive Chairman of the North Carolina Haiku Society.

I have taught haiku workshops at some of the Carolina African American Writers’ Collective Workshops/Meetings. I have also mentored several of the Carolina African American Writers’ Collective Members. Consequently, some of them have published haiku in various literary journals and anthologies. In addition, I
teach haiku in my Advanced Poetry Writing class and my Literary Forms class. Thus, some of my students have also published haiku. I hope I am able to create and teach a distinct haiku. In fact, I also hope my book, Desert Storm: A Brief History, demonstrates how I challenge myself with the haiku form.

Wang: *Poems of Love and Understanding* seems to be a very common name of a book. What makes your poems of love and understanding special?

Moore: When I wrote *Poems of Love and Understanding*, I was very young. I was 20 to 21 years old. So I was learning about poetry and writing poems to my girlfriend, whom I later married. In fact, I do not usually list that book.

Wang: What is *The Open Eye* (1985) about?

Moore: *The Open Eye* is a collection of haiku, which is arranged into seasons.

Wang: A forever home is a term that refers to an adopter who agrees to be responsible for an animal in its entire life. Do you want to show your care for the animals when you choose “forever home” as the title of a collection?

Moore: *Forever Home* is a collection of longer poems, which depicts my childhood, my family and the farm work that I did when growing up in a rural community. In short, I hope my book, *Forever Home*, showcases the richness of home.

Wang: While the United States celebrated an overwhelming military victory in the Persian Gulf conflict, in haiku-like verses, you attempt to capture the essence of the Desert Storm conflict. Your poems remind us that the human cost of war should never be underestimated. Did this collection of poems get you into any trouble, such as being accused of being unpatriotic?

Moore: No, my book, *Desert Storm: A Brief History*, did not get me into any trouble. In fact, some veterans have written and said good comments about it. A few scholars have also written about it. I wrote the book as one long poem or a sequence of haiku. One scholar called it a novel several years ago. I am also a veteran, though I did not serve in any war. I have served in the United States Army in August of 1978 to August of 1981.

Natural Bridge: A Journal of Contemporary Literature, and many other magazines. You have also had essays and book reviews published in North Dakota Quarterly, Colorado Review, The News & Observer, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, The Pilot, Independent Weekly, and Black Issues Book Review. I suppose they must be very popular. What elements in your poems make them as popular as hot cakes?

Moore: I need to update my bio because I think my poems have appeared in more than 100 anthologies.

Wang: You are reputed as “a poet of the soil, harkening back to the farmer-poets of the past”, what is your response to this title?

Moore: It is my hope that my poetry is layered with vivid imagery, concrete details, fresh figurative language, allusions, music and a sense of place. I also write poems about jazz, blues, rhythm and blues and other music. In addition, I write poems about sports, traveling, photographs and paintings as well as the soil. Moreover, I write haiku. Therefore, I hope that scholars would not label me as just one kind of poet, though I write mostly haiku.

Wang: I found on the website the following awards you won: “In 1996, Moore was awarded the Indies Arts Award. In 1997, he was awarded the Margaret Walker Creative Writing Award for poetry (College Language Association). In 1998, he was selected a Cave Canem Fellow for three years. In 1998, he was also awarded the Tar Heel of The Week Award. In 2006, he was awarded the Sam Ragan Fine Arts Award. He has also been nominated twice for the prestigious Pushcart Prize.” Among them which one is most significant for you? Why?

Moore: I am grateful for all of the awards that have been presented to me, including my most recent award from the Poetry Council of North Carolina. On April 20, 2013, I was presented a Certificate of Dedication for Outstanding Service To Poetry In North Carolina. Scott Owens, Vice President of The Poetry Council of North Carolina, presented the certificate to me and a copy of the awards anthology, Bay Leaves, Number Thirty-nine, 2013, because that issue of Bay Leaves is dedicated to me. Also, last week (April 24, 2013) I received a letter from Dr. Philip P. Kerstetter, President of Mount Olive College, informing me that he is promoting me to Associate Professor. I must inform you, however, that Cave Canem is a very special organization to me.

Wang: How many foreign languages have your poems been translated into?

Moore: I believe I have listed the languages in which my poems have been
translated on my bio. Thus, I will attach my one-page bio and my jazz poetry bio with this message.

Wang: In the poem “Generations”, you give no name to the family. Do you do it on purpose?

Moore: In the poem “Generations” on page 59 of A Temple Looming, I strove to shed light on how close-knit and happy the family appears to be. I also wanted to depict the completeness of the family. For example, the father is not missing. In contrast, we hear about many fathers missing from families in the twenty-first century.

To that end, both girls in the poem are able to get a sense of how a family works, interacts, engages socially and develops with a father and mother. The mother represents love, comfort, and safety. Without naming the family in the poem, perhaps other families could identify more easily with the concept of family. Hopefully, readers would be able to see themselves in the family that reflects life in the poem. Maybe the poem lends itself to expressing the persona's feelings about family. So, yes, I have purposely employed the words “mother”, “father”, “wife”, “husband”, “daughter’s”, “girl’s”, “child”, “man”, “sister” and the pronouns “she”, “her”, “his”, and “their” to introduce the family to my readers.

Wang: What does “gleam” and “strife” signify respectively in the poem “Generations”?

Moore: The word “gleam” is employed in the poem to demonstrate a radiance or splendor in each family member's eyes. Thus, there is an element of happiness. The word “strife” is employed in the poem to demonstrate that there is not any bitterness or distrust or conflict within the family in the poem.

Wang: Can we talk more about your haiku by making a comparison between that by yours and other poets’, for example, Etheridge Knight’s?

Moore: I try to document African American History and Culture with my haiku. I also try to document phenomena in the natural world. In addition, I try to create music in my haiku. In my haiku writing, specificity and narrative are pertinent. I strive to incorporate three sensory perceptions. Most importantly, I aim to be innovative with my haiku writing. Etheridge Knight wrote very moving haiku about his experience. He wrote traditional haiku, employing 5-7-5 syllables. In January of 1982, I began writing traditional haiku, too. For several years now, I have been writing haiku without adhering to the strict 5-7-5 syllables. I think it is more
important to capture the haiku moment.

Wang: Would you like to give us an example to illustrate your viewpoint? It is very important to Chinese readers, who are prone to things concrete instead of abstract.

Moore: Thank you very much for requesting one of my haiku as an example. Here is one of my recent haiku:

starry lightning...
silver compact player
spills Ella Fitzgerald’s scat

Wang: Have you written any haiku to remember your past relationship with individual fellow poet or group of poets?

Moore: Here is one of my haiku, which I have dedicated to the well-known haiku poet Roberta Beary and her husband Frank Stella:

husband and wife
walk the corgi on the towpath
autumn wind

For Roberta Beary and Frank Stella

Wang: You mention oftentimes “the haiku moment” in our interview. However, it is very vague to me. Is it fine for you to describe such a moment and how to catch it?

Moore: Roberta, Frank, Dave Russo and I walked on the towpath. I believe it was during the fall of 2007. Roberta and Frank had their pet dog, a corgi, with them. Just before traveling to the towpath, Dave and I had attended The Towpath Haiku Workshop/Meeting at Roberta and Frank’s house in Bethesda, Maryland. The haiku moment reveals what is happening at the present time; it is the pulse of a haiku.

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1 Lenard D. Moore's poem “husband and wife” has previously appeared in *Frogpond (The Journal of the Haiku Society of America)*, Volume 31, Number 2 Spring/Summer 2008.
Here is one of my poems about the haiku moment:

after all-day trip
I sit for a haiku moment
to spring

Wang: In Desert Storm, you employ a special haiku style—renku? Will you please illustrate it?

Moore: Renku is a very long poem of linking haiku and adding two-line verses and collaborating with other poets. The haiku and two-line verses alternate throughout the poem. I employ a sequence of haiku throughout Desert Storm: A Brief History. Here is a link for information about when I was the haiku editor of the online magazine, Simply Haiku: http://simplyhaiku.com/SHv6n3/bios/Lenard_Moore.html

Wang: So you are moving away from the tradition to the individual talent? I assume that there is also a tradition of western-style Haiku? Will you please narrate a short history of it?

Moore: I hope I am able to demonstrate individual talent with the haiku form. I also hope I am able to contribute to the haiku tradition. However, that is for scholars to decide where my haiku fits within the haiku tradition and outside the haiku tradition. I just want to write haiku that resonate. I want to write haiku that sing. I would like to do something new with the haiku form. To that end, I am consistently experimenting with haiku.

Western-style Haiku has to find its own way; it cannot do exactly what Japanese Haiku might do, especially because the language is different and syllables are different from onji. I think Western-style Haiku can contribute to the study and appreciation of the poetic form, which has a global reach.

Wang: An avid reader and listener of music, you must have a deep and unique feel about the relationship between music and poetry?

Moore: Yes, I definitely believe that there is a relationship between music and poetry. Both art forms have ways of evoking deep emotions within the listener and

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1 See Frogpond, Volume 31, Number 2 Spring/Summer 2008); It was featured in his essay titled “Deep in the Woods: The Haiku Journey”. p. 27.
reader. I also believe that music or rhythm is so important within the unfolding or movement of a poem.

Wang: You are a jazz aficionado, with a manuscript of jazz-inspired poems in the works? What is the relation between your jazz and your poetry?

Moore: I listen to jazz on a frequent basis. To that end, I am often inspired by jazz to write poetry. In other words, I write jazz-related poetry or jazz poetry. I try to capture the feeling of jazz in my jazz-related poetry. At the same time, I also try to employ concrete details and imagery. More importantly, I hope to create music in my poetry. On the other hand, I read and perform my longer forms of poetry and haiku with jazz musicians and jazz bands. It seems natural that poetry and music would accompany one another. Here is a link to a press release about my most recent poetry and jazz performance:


Wang: I know that jazz is an important influence in African American literature. At the core, it is about improvisation and variation and creation. So improvisational impulse moves through your work as you catch the haiku moment with your pen. Does my hypothesis about your writing trajectory make sense?

Moore: Yes, your hypothesis makes sense.

Wang: Will you please talk more about your poems that deal with domestic affairs, your family, your witnessing jazz performances and poetry reading and about your relationship to Cave Canem?

Also, how do you comment on your collaboration with Eugene B. Redmond?

Moore: I have written poems as praise songs and tributes to family members, including my wife, daughter, mother, father, brothers, sisters, nieces, and nephews. I have also written several poems about the loss of my daughter. In addition, I have written poems about jazz performances. When I write jazz poems, I strive to capture the feeling of the jazz. I have read and/or performed my jazz-related poems accompanied by jazz musicians and jazz bands. I believe the poetry and jazz blend well. I also believe that poetry and photography blend well. To that end, the poems in my book, A Temple Looming, were inspired by old black and white photographs. Poetry readings have also inspired me in various ways. I try to depict a sense of place with my poetry writing. I am a Cave Canem Graduate Fellow. I participated at the Annual Cave Canem Retreat for one week in June of 1998, one week in June of 1999, and one week in June of 2000. Cave Canem provided a safe
haven to write poetry uninterrupted and to workshop poetry. I am grateful to Cave Canem for providing me with three fellowships, so that I could attend its annual retreat. I have met lifelong friends at Cave Canem. In regards to the chapbook, *Gathering at the Crossroads*, my collaboration with Eugene B. Redmond went very well. He is a poet, photographer and friend who has been one of my mentors. He is an important Black Arts Movement poet. He is also an outstanding photographer who documents African American History and Culture. However, I am very pleased that the publisher selected Eugene B. Redmond's photos because I think they jell well with the haiku in the chapbook, *Gathering at the Crossroads*. Perhaps, *Gathering at the Crossroads* could unfold as haiga.

Wang: Your students’ poems were originally published in the special issue of *Drumvoices Revue*, Volume 16, Numbers 1 & 2, Spring-Summer-Fall 2008, celebrating the Richard Wright Centennial. What kind of journal is *Drumvoices Revue*?

Moore: *Drumvoices Revue* is a multicultural literary journal, which publishes poetry, fiction, essays, interviews, and photography. Eugene B. Redmond is the Founding Editor of *Drumvoices Revue*. My students' poems were kwansabas. Eugene B. Redmond invented the poetic form called kwansaba in 1995, in East Saint Louis, Illinois. It was first refined, employed and performed by his namesake The Eugene B. Redmond Writers Club. My students thoroughly enjoyed writing kwansabas.

My students’ kwansabas are featured on the former North Carolina Poet Laureate’s (Kathryn Stripling Byer) blog at the following link: http://ncpoetlaureate.blogspot.com/2009/05/kwansaba-poems-by-lenard-moores.htm

Wang: On the website, I found the definition of kwansaba like this: “……an indigenous poetic form called a kwansaba. It is a form developed by the Poet Laureate of East St. Louis, Professor Eugene B. Redmond, in 1995. A kwansaba is a poetic praise song that contains seven lines of seven words, with each word containing no more than seven letters.”

I read a kwansaba poem:

*Kwansaba for mother earth*

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the very planet has quite a memory
of feet having fallen in their time
to dance around, run from and through,
to cradle our shuffle, across made new
how much thanks do we give her?
our global mother on whose surface we
grow into our truth. strong and free. 

Wang: How do you advise The Trojan Voices?

Moore: *The Trojan Voices* is The Mount Olive College literary journal. I advise the student staff throughout the editing process and design, including the announcement for literary submissions and artwork, proofreading of the galley, sending the galley to the printer and distribution of the literary journal. A student from the Department of Art and Visual Communication usually designs the cover and produces the layout of The Trojan Voices. Most of the students are from the Department of Language and Literature.

Wang: Do you believe in inspiration? How much of your poem was “received” and how much was the result of sweat and tears?

Moore: Yes, there is inspiration. There is also imagination. In addition, there is experience. Thus, I think I write poetry with all of those entities. Some of my poem might be received, but much of it comes through hard work. I revise a lot.

Wang: Do you consciously employ any principles of technique in writing a poem?

Moore: Yes, I employ certain techniques in writing a poem, such as metaphor, similes, alliteration, euphony, parallelism, motif, symbolism, allusion, irony, narrative, personification, setting, assonance, imagery, onomatopoeia, meter and rhyme. Obviously, I do not employ all of these literary elements at the same time. I also write a lot of syllabic verse.

Wang: You mention in your biography that you mentor several other poets and

http://kinkywaves.wordpress.com/2013/02/28/poem-of-the-week-kwansaba-for-mother-earth/
writers. Who are they?

Moore: Yes, I have mentored several poets and continue to mentor poets. Some of the poets who have called me their mentor are Evie Shockley, L. Teresa Church, Grace Ocasio and Adrienne Christian, among others. Some of my students who have called me their mentor are Sharon Mervin, Rebecca Moore and Morgan Whaley, among others.

Wang: At Mount Olive College where you teach Advanced Poetry Writing and African American Literature? Will you please share with me some fun you have in your class?

Moore: When I teach Advanced Poetry Writing, I use poems as models. So we, my students and I, read and discuss poems by other poets. I play CDs, DVDs, and use YouTube. I also post articles about poetry and book reviews. I give them writing exercises. At times, my students correspond with contemporary poets whose works are assigned for study. We workshop their poems. My students are required to submit their poetry to literary journals. At the end of the semester, my students present a reading of their poetry to the entire Mount Olive College community.

Wang: The last question: What is the main idea about your recent ongoing book on literary criticism?

Moore: I have written some literary criticism, but I have not gathered such works into a manuscript. I hope to collect my essays for a book in the future. I believe it is important for a poet to read literary criticism. I also believe that a poet’s work could be strengthened by writing literary criticism. More importantly, a poet must read history and other works of nonfiction, such as philosophy, biography, field guides and literary criticism. I think it pertinent for a poet to read widely, including science and theology. Yet, it is crucial for a poet to read the Classics as well as contemporary literature. In short, the poet must study, work on craft and listen to the cadence of the poetic line.

Thank you very much for your interview questions.

Wang: Thank you very much for your time!

**Lenard D. Moore’s Major Works:**


*Edited by Zhang Yuejun*
Editorial Memoir: A Life Choice

I
We’ve never done anything against him, don’t even know him, yet he comes over to destroy us just for some idle entertainment.

The smoggy day grows smoggier, the wind shrieks, a bad storm is crawling like a snake towards our home.

Disciplined and organized, showing no fear, quiet and hardworking, busy moving from here to there, carrying food and dust to save ourselves and our home. We don’t want to attract any attention, just try to get by, on the fly.

Yet he caught sight of us, while idling around. He stared at us, and then stabbed us. We could do nothing but keep on walking our usual walk, watching a massacre going on and on among us.

It obviously pleased him. He found great fun in torturing us in a thousand ways. I doubt animals would have ever done that.

He got tired and bored, ready to go. He felt like to piss, so that he took out
his little cock with his dirty hands
and pissed at our home, and destroyed it completely.

He laughed a few laughs, enjoying
a moment of satisfaction, and soon
forgot about it altogether.
And we, we quietly carried the corpses
to the cemetery and started to
rebuild our home.

We do not complain.
It is not our way.
We just work out of it.
To survive is the win.

II
Only the most civilized could compete
with the most barbaric for the favor
of life. I was the most barbaric, and I grow
the most civilized. I die and
I revive.

I begin to respect and cherish life, I no more
kick my enemy’s asses in order to win their respect.
I become immune to the insults caused by people
and smile around to all.
Make love, not war.

I begin to admire vegetarians, though
I still hopelessly enjoy some sorts of meat.
I pray when I take them, and I hate to
waste any as it raises unnecessary
killing. I eat as it is the only way to
survive. I must survive
as it is the way.

I begin to understand the difficulty and danger in saying A is A, or a deer is a deer, a deer is not a horse, and would still always say it, at any rate. I shall be true to myself, and live my own life.

I begin to feel the feels of tiny creatures and grasses. I believe in all the most romantic and most moving fairy tales of them. I wish I could join them someday.

I begin to understand life and death. I no more mind being mocked at, or being beaten out of no reason, mocked by the most mindless, or beaten by the most heartless. My mind grows powerful, and my heart strong. They could hurt me no more.

As it’s said, when they spit on my face, let it dry out itself; when they beat my left face, show him the right. I realize the wisdom, strength and courage behind, and I’m also interested in the art of self-defense and have learnt it well. They only make me stronger. They fail and fall.

To hate is not the way out. To love is. Even a baby knows how to hate, while only the strongest knows how to well love.
III

I didn’t mean to become civilized,
It’s not always easy to guard
and fight against the evil sides,
within and without. I didn’t really choose
my own fate. He picked me up.

I didn’t mean to beat
my peers at school,
neither did I mean to be cruel
or kind. It just pleased me to
play well in fair competitions.

I was awarded a job, a job to preach
to serve the civilization. Indeed, I didn’t
really choose it. It fell to my lot, and
I’ve been doing my job,
and doing it well.

I’m not smart, neither am I that
stupid; I’ve just been keeping my heart honest
and my eyes open, which is more than enough
to pave the way for the spirits of the good,
the true and the beautiful to
flow in. My soul is
thus made.

To keep a soul alive, I must do a lot,
and must not do equally that much.
And I often feel lonely
or solitary. I realized danger
when people began to call me
an idealist, with a
distancing tone.

I know the destructive power
of the evil, and know it hates all idealists. It desires to strangle all the minds and hearts, making people stupid and cruel, banishing their souls, thus to enslave them, and to be enslaved too.

One has to fight to keep the mind cool and the heart warm. No way to escape. I shall carry on. I have entered into the wonderland of the SOUL, and I know I shall stay here.

To live on is easy. To keep a soul is difficult. Mine is shining in the heaven and at my heart, always.

**IV**

It’s all because of the soul that brings self-hood and self-respect, generating pains and pleasure. It’s whatever makes a human being divine.

I’m not alone, my soul is a particle of the SOUL of the human beings that only the most unlucky misses it altogether.

Many hearts beating at my heart, many eyes seeing through my eyes, many voices communicating
in my mind. Many spirits resurrect
in my soul. Theirs are mine,
mine is theirs. We’re one,
a historic unity, a present being.

There’s no life that is more life
than such a life, a life at its fullest scale,
one that always keeps the heart warm,
and the eyes and the mind open.
There’re questions and debates,
doubts and disagreements, faith
and harmonies. All trials
are rewarding.

I shall do my job, showing my fellows
to the fountain of life, to the fireplace
of the world. I shall fulfill my duty,
no matter how difficult it should be.
I’m content and shall not regret.
Peace is deep in my mind,
and at my heart.

To destroy a being is easy.
To save a soul is difficult.
I shall forge ahead on this road chosen.
One success beats one thousand failures.

V

“Your smell excites us, once for terror,
now for the sweetness of revenge.
You think you are super, yet we know
you are just a piece of rotten meat,
which we shall enjoy biting,
swallowing and excreting.”
“I do confess to the wrongs
I did to you! I’ve confessed it time and again.
I obey the rule without the slightest intention
to escape the punishment. I wish the sense
of revenge would bring you much fun and
make your meal more delicious.”

No one is a god. One who plays it
is always the most untrustworthy and often
commits the worst crimes. Everyone is
a sinner, even the most civilized ones,
as every body needs to be satisfied, not to say
we do run out of control sometimes.

One can keep one’s soul intact
only via confessions, after being pardoned
by either the wronged or the general public.
“I hope this body could pay it back to you.”

I was once the most barbaric, the most stupid,
the most unspeakable, the most untrue…
But I’ve been keeping myself honest,
and been learning ardently.
I was granted a soul, soaked
with my faith, my principles,
and my civilization.
I’ve kept it.

For dust my body is,
and to dust my body shall return.
But the good work we’ve done is not of dust,
neither is the soul a rotten piece of meat.
Every body dies, yet the Human Beings
do not, and the SOUL do not.
My soul does not belong to me.
It goes to the SOUL that are shining
in the heaven forever.
It resurrects.

I sinned and confessed.
I worked and was rewarded.
I have walked my way,
and reached my home.

Li Zhimin
March 1, 2014
Some Notes on EPSIANS

1. The journal’s title EPSIANS derives from EPSI, i.e., English Poetry Studies Institute of Sun Yat-sen University, of which there are more than thirty members of full professors or PhD holders.

2. The journal will publish papers in Englishes, either British English, American English, Canadian English, Singaporean English or Chinese English, so long as it communicates well. The journal is mainly devoted to poetry studies with occasional publications on or columns of other subjects.

3. The journal is meant to broaden the channels of direct academic communications between colleagues in China and the English speaking world.

4. The journal will warmly encourage scholars in China to publish in English, with strong assistance to help them tackle possible linguistic problems.

5. The journal accepts papers from whoever wants to contribute. The arguments constructed are taken as the priority for the evaluation of the quality of a paper. Some possible slight linguistic flaws of a non-native English speaker will be excused and some necessary assistance will be provided.

6. Papers submitted to the journal should be sent to: epsians2011@gmail.com. Papers submitted should follow the MLA style strictly. The proposed length is between 3,500 to 7,000 words (including notes and works cited), yet exceptions will be made if the editors are convinced. For any paper published, no fee will be charged, nor will any remuneration be offered.

7. EPSIANS is a peer review journal. Volunteers for peer review are welcome to send their academic background information to: epsians2011@gmail.com.

8. The basic requirements for a potential editor are: a. with strong academic and linguistic background; b. with genuine understanding of poetry; c. with reliable record of taking due responsibilities. Letters to recommend editors are to be sent to: epsians2011@gmail.com.

9. A free electronic copy of each issue will be sent to all editors, as well as the authors and peer reviewers concerned, as soon as it is published. A hard copy can also be obtained on request (free of charge for editors, authors and peer reviewers).

10. Each editor has an equal say in the editorial business. Discussions should be held in forum on the Internet whenever an issue occurs. Honorary editors shall
be consulted when a dispute occurs. Critical disputes will be decided by a voting of editors on the Internet.

11. The journal, either of electronic version or in hard copy, can be booked and purchased. Please send emails to: epsians2011@gmail.com for details of payment.

12. Publisher: EPSIANS, 120-3025 Credit Woodlands, Mississauga, ON CA L5C 2V3 (Contact: Ms. Hu Min).

13. Co-Publisher: EPSI (English Poetry Studies Institute of Sun Yat-sen University, P.R. China); Office 1: School of Foreign Languages, Sun Yat-sen University, P.R. China (Contact: Dr. Lei Yanni); Office 2: Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge University, England (Contact: Mr. J. H. Prynne).

14. The journal is sponsored by School of Foreign Languages, Sun Yat-sen University.

15. Suggestions and advices from the readership, at home and abroad, are welcome to be sent to: epsians2011@gmail.com

Editor-in-Chief
Ou Hong

August 15, 2011