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Fragrance and Anger in Milton's *Paradise Lost* *

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Abstract: This short paper concerns one local aspect of a long poem, Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It seeks to isolate for analysis a single item in the poem's latinate vocabulary, so as to trace the threads of divergent meaning that re-converge in course of the unfolding grand narrative, in order to identify a small but distinct echo of the dialectic play between unfallen innocent nature, fateful transgression, and consequent divine wrath.

Keywords: John Milton; Paradise Lost; Latin; Nature; innocence; fragrance; incense/incensed; divine wrath; sacrifice.

John Milton the English scholar-poet was quite exceptional for his depth of learning, even in the English seventeenth century which was notable for many scholars of high accomplishment who were also significant poets. In the modern age T.S. Eliot was intellectually well-equipped in a variety of fields of knowledge, but Ezra Pound's range of information and access to specialist mental skills probably exceeded even those possessed by Eliot, despite Pound's often proclaimed disrespect for systematic scholarship and the standoffish attitudes that frequently went with it. The comparison of Pound with Milton, although perhaps surprising, is especially apt and in two major ways: their knowledge-practice was based in technical skill with many different languages; and it was fundamental equipment for each of them in the business of being an ambitious poet, determined to combine deeply understood tradition and unprecedented originality on the vastest scale.

Milton was a rigorously trained linguist, and as could be expected in any

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* This paper is a transcription modified by the author on the basis of a talk presented in The Third National Conference on English Poetry Studies, sponsored by EPSAC (English Poetry Studies Association of China), and hosted by Shenzhen University (Shenzhen, P.R. China) during December 20th to 22nd of 2012. It is agreed to let this paper follow its own style.
serious theologian of the period, was adept in the three sacred languages of the
Christian Bible: Hebrew, Greek and Latin; to Hebrew he also added knowledge of
Syriac and Aramaic. To this ambitious set he supplied complete proficiency in
French (not a favourite language for him) and in Italian, and a close understanding
of the English language, in its historical and literary evolution. He composed
poems in Latin and Italian, and indeed served from 1649 as Latin Secretary to the
Council of State. Latin was especially important to him, not only as the mode of
transmission of the literary culture of antiquity but also as the medium for
theological learning and debate, for the work of the Western church fathers and the
biblical scholars of post-medieval Europe. Fully to understand the Reformation at
this time, the split of the Protestant dissenters from the traditional Roman Church,
meant study of the whole controversy through Latin texts and commentaries and
polemic; Milton early recognised that he was set to become a theological poet, and
that first-hand knowledge in all these areas would be necessary to him.

He also knew, through direct acquaintance and study, how the Latin language
was an important territory of origin for the emergence of English, forming much of
the then-modern English vocabulary and the grammar of argument. The forms of
heroic narrative composition owed more to Greek examples; but argument and
analysis and enquiry into interpretation derived important precedents from
thought-structures and propositional sequences for which Latin had become
exemplary. Milton was a scholar by temperament but also a vigorous and
independent-minded controversialist, as strongly evidenced by his parts in the
national and international political debates of his day. Latin was for him well
suited to these habits of mind, as the living culmination of his work as a scholar-poet;
Paradise Lost was not principally an heroic narrative poem (though it was also this);
it was a rational, passionately argumentative epic, deeply pre-occupied with human
and divine motive, as not just the sequence of actions but their interpretation, how
they might be understood from the many conflicting viewpoints involved. It's my
opinion that these characteristics to Paradise Lost give its composition a distinct
element of Latin thought-practice, perceptible in grand design and also in very close
detail of language use.

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1 See especially John K. Hale, Milton's Languages; The Impact of Multilingualism on Style
67-81), and Chap. 6: 'Latin and Milton's Other Languages in the Style of Paradise Lost' (pp.
have working knowledge of the Latin language, but much inner richness is revealed if some of the Latin roots and origins of Milton's vocabulary can at least be glimpsed. Milton's use of syntax and sentence structures that part-imitate the typical grammar of Latin, with its distinctive word order and clause positioning, has become notorious; but I choose here to concentrate on vocabulary, on word-choice as a deliberate and conscious device for the polemical enhancement of meaning and threads of signification.

Here we might remind ourselves of the principle of *scale* and its working in poetical composition. By this I mean that very small, local details can point to and complicate very large ideas or features of argument; not just by allowing the small to illustrate or endorse the large, but by using the small as primary instruments to think with, to uncover and investigate connections that can extend far beyond their immediate occurrence. In this spirit I shall actually concentrate on one single word, so as to trace its many echoes and ambiguities of reference across the entire poem. But before we come to this word, we first need some further background.

Despite Milton's popular reputation as a thinker of puritanical habit of mind, intellectual and austere, concentrating on man's fall from grace by his (and her) yielding to self-pride and material appetite, he is a consistently sensuous poet, both in his treatment of the tragic love-story of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Paradise, and also in his incomparably rich and impassioned portrayal of the joys of innocent nature and natural innocence. Milton does not just reluctantly accept the technical absence of human guilt or blameworthiness in nature before the Fall; he treats this aspect of original creation with dignity and profound recognition, that human love and human pleasure at the beauty of God's world, devised by God specifically for enjoyment by his highest and best-beloved form of creation, is a central part of man's human and spiritual destiny. As Raphael the angelic messenger counsels the yet unfallen pair, 'Be strong, live happy, and love'.

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05-30); and further, John K. Hale (ed.), *John Milton, Latin Writings: A Selection* (Assen, 1998) [bilingual, Latin with facing English translations], Introduction (pp. 3-42).


Let’s take one aspect. The Paradise world is like a garden, abundant with delights and occasions for wonderment at its beauty. There are no seasons, and of course no mortality, because time and death have not yet entered this domain. We the modern readers know in advance that the innocence of this entire experience was destroyed, not from without but from within; but Adam and Eve together have originally no knowledge of their fate, even though they receive ample warnings of the need to be ever-vigilant about the risks of disobeying God's commands and prohibitions. It is a garden of amazing delights to all the senses, sights, sounds, touch and smell. Even this last, the sense of smell, is everywhere part of the natural pleasure, and even though it might be thought to be rather a 'lowly' aspect of creation. This natural domain is the demonstration of God's generosity towards his principal work of creation at the apex of his purpose, which is mankind: man first, and then woman. Within this entire world order they represent nature's best, the condition of innocent being, expressed in the structure and texture, large and small, grand and modest, all disposed in fundamental unity. Milton does not restrict his admiration for sheer beauty and the joys of appetite both intellectual and sensuous, under the guidance of reason. As readers we know that he knows how all this must come to a grievous end, which can make the enjoyment all the more precious
under latent threat; but he gives to Adam and Eve in their Paradise garden a range of fulfillsments only slightly, it may seem, subdued by forward glimpses of the contamination ahead.

Here from Book Four is one masterly presentation of this world of noble pleasure, given in descriptive mode but, as always with this poem, there is implicit argument within and beneath the delicate brilliance of the surface. Night is approaching, and Nature bids Adam and Eve to prepare for rest. Eve exclaims with passionate admiration of Nature's breathtaking beauty in all its orderly aspects:

With thee conversing I forget all time,
All seasons and their change, all please alike.
Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,
With charm of earliest birds; pleasant the sun
When first on this delightful land he spreads
His orient beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flower,
Glistering with dew; fragrant the fertile earth
After soft showers; and sweet the coming on
Of grateful evening mild, then silent night
With this her solemn bird and this fair moon,
And these the gems of heaven, her starry train:
But neither breath of morn when she ascends
With charm of earliest birds, nor rising sun
On this delightful land, nor herb, fruit, flower,
Glistering with dew, nor fragrance after showers,
Nor grateful evening mild, nor silent night
With this her solemn bird, nor walk by moon,
Or glittering starlight without thee is sweet.\(^1\)

This is both Eve's hymn at twilight to God's sweetly ordered creation, innocent nature, and also by like token her deep pleasure at the spousal company of Adam; all is melodious and fragrant.\(^2\) Advised by many similar passages and moments in the early stages of the narrative we come fully to know and accept this position: nature

\(^1\) PL, IV.639-56; charm = singing (from Latin, *carmen* = song; seasons here indicates times of day, since in Paradise before the Fall there were no seasons in the modern sense.

\(^2\) A comparably rhapsodic hymn is at PL, V.153-208, part-modelled on AV, Psalmes, CXLVIII. The counterpart landscape of fallen and corrupted Nature is the curtailed background to Adam's lament, at PL, X.860-2.
is sweet, and precious, an object of supreme wonderment.① We are gratefully to notice all the details; among many, fragrance is quite conspicuous: the very earth is 'fragrant ... / After soft showers'. Sweet odours and perfumes are a part of God's gift to mankind.②  

But as is sufficiently well-known in the outline of the story, there is one major prohibition in the scope of this enjoyment, which is to be the test of their obedience to the command of their creator: that one single part of the natural order, the fateful tree of knowledge, is strictly forbidden them.③ This is not a fault in Nature but rather a focus of trial, that with their grand freedom of personal will they shall freely choose to obey this demonstration of God's ultimate power and control.④ Milton makes it abundantly clear that they fully understand what this means: it would trivialise the whole argument to allow any possibility of mistake; though Satan in counterargument calls the prohibition 'reasonless', which at one level is true in one sense, since God does not give reasons.⑤ Further to condense the darker grandeur of these events, we trace the course of Satan's ingenious temptation set before Eve, who is beguiled, who takes the forbidden fruit, and eats thereof. Satan's ambush of Eve's over-secure independence was concealed, we learn, beneath these very same sweet flowers.⑥  

This turning-point in the fate of mankind comes late in the grand tale, because the war in Heaven against Satan and his fallen angels takes up a major portion of the story, giving the amplest evidence of God's wrath against this rebellion, his 'Anger and just rebuke',⑦ and setting out very full warning that divine anger is a terrible thing, also transferred from Father to Son;⑧ which throws its shadow forward as anticipating later events in the Paradise garden. After Eve is seduced, her transgression immediately becomes known in Heaven. God pronounces his terrible

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① This sweetness and beauty of all Nature, including the innocence of the first human love following the creation of Eve, is reprised at PL, VIII.510-20. It is this same sweetness of sight and smell that Eve remembers as attending her nuptial bower (PL, IV.690-775), from all of which by cause of the expulsion she will be forever parted (PL, XI.280-85).  
③ E.g., PL, IV.419-39.  
④ Milton has God describe the tree to Eve as 'The pledge of thy obedience' (PL, VIII.325, following Augustine; compare Lycidas [1638], 107); Eve herself describes the latent challenge to virtue as 'trial unsought' (PL, IX.370).  
⑤ PL, IV.516.  
⑥ PL, IX.408-10.  
⑦ PL, IX.10; compare again Ricks, Milton’s Grand Style, p. 36.  
⑧ PL, VI.826.
curse against the pair of mortals; his wrath is majestic and implacable, for he is incensed at this rank disobedience. Satan as Tempter tries on a facile, serpentine defence:

Shall that be shut to man, which to the beast
Is open? Or will God incense His ire
For such a petty trespass, and not praise
Rather your dauntless virtue, whom the pain
Of death denounced, whatever thing death be,
Deterred not from achieving what might lead
To happier life, knowledge of good and evil?

Earlier in the story of these struggles the loyal seraph Abdiel confronted Satan's self-proclaimed aggrandisement, before his host of vassals, with imperious rebuke:

"Cease then this impious rage,
And tempt not these; but hasten to appease
Th'incensèd Father and the incensèd Son,
While pardon may be found in time besought."②

This verb to incense or to be incensed is to be on fire with anger and rage, to be in the very hottest fury of justified wrath, the word coming via French from the Latin incendere, to set on fire. Here this is not revenge ③ but divine, righteous justice, carried out strictly according to the warnings given; indeed the strictness has dismayed some commentators who could have wished for a softer landing, just as Adam is consternated by the prospect that divine wrath shall be infinite and endless.④ Now by this vast betrayal of innocent Nature the sweet fragrance of the garden is polluted, by the first act of sin that imparts an indelible stain. Sin and Death, newly empowered, are well pleased at the prospect; Death pronounces to Sin:

Such a scent I draw
Of carnage, prey innumerable, and taste
The savour of death from all things that here live. [...]
So saying, with delight he snuffed the smell

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① PL, IX.691-7; denounced (here) = threatened. The phrase 'incense / His utmost ire' has already been defiantly uttered by Moloch, in Book Two: PL. II.94-5.

② PL, V.845-8; these accent-marks are editorial and are not found in the 1667 ed. (sig. Sv).

③ Despite, e.g. PL, X.1023, and compare Fowler, p. 468 (note).

④ PL, X.794-5; 810.
Of mortal change on Earth.  

So what has happened to the sweet fragrance of innocent nature, so prominent in the early descriptions of Paradise? Clearly the contamination is to be the fate of mankind's entire subsequent history. But yet there is a turn implied in the incensed rage of divine justice, which is the close-linked noun *incense*. This too derives from the same Latin root-word, and in this sense-development it denotes a natural substance giving off a sweet fragrance when ritually set on fire and burned. Here there is an almost covert play on words, discovered from the Latin roots, that will permit Nature to be offered as a sacrificial appeasement for the very crime against natural innocence which made such recompense requisite, to be offered up on the Earth's 'great altar' as a silent praise and thanksgiving, as 'morning incense'.

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1. *PL*. X.267-9, 272-3; this usage here of a 'low' vocabulary (*snuff*, *smell*) confirms how a new era of ignoble word-choice is symptomatic of a now-fallen language, gleefully tainted and coarsened. Perhaps in the phrase 'savour of death' a reader might ironically also hear 'saviour of death'? Compare *PL*, XI.26, where the saviour himself utters this word in salvific prayer.

2. Even Satan, in his flight over Eden and Paradise, could sense with rueful chagrin this natural sweet-smelling richness: *PL*, IV.246-68; for *sweet-smelling*, e.g. *PL*, IV.709, etc.

3. Book Four describes Paradise as containing 'Groves whose rich trees wept odorous gums and balm' (*PL*, IV.248; compare also V.291-4), natural aromatic resins from which fragrant incense was prepared; thus Nature, whose once-innocent tree of knowledge was by God's decree made fateful/fatal to man, also by anticipation provided the material (incense) for remedial sacrifice, just as *wept* (= exuded) punningly anticipates the grief that would make incense a token of sorrow as well as of praise. Adam and Eve adopt as their 'tended plants' these notable resin-producing species: 'how blows the citron grove, / What drops the myrrh, and what the balmy reed' (*PL*, V.22-3, Fowler provides a very full and informative note), again at first unaware that as their innocence is lost these plants might help them to part-repair the loss. Once again the alert reader already foresees the loss: what *drops* must *fall*, and this (by part standing for whole) images the more general Fall that lies ahead (compare also *PL*, II.933). Compare further, Geoffrey Hartman, 'Adam on the Ground with Balsamum', *English Literary History*, 36 (1969), 168-92, reprinted in his *Beyond Formalism; Literary Essays 1958-1970* (New Haven, 1970), pp. 124-50; discussed in Edwards, *Milton and the Natural World*, Chap. 11: 'The Balm of Life', esp. pp. 196-7.

4. *PL*. IX.192-7. There is a solemn further play on words, with *morning/mourning*. The innocent dawn of human personal and social being had initially no history and no memory, was bright with forward promise; compare the blissful, innocent awakening of the loving pair's first morning, as he whispers to her: 'Awake / My fairest, my espoused, my latest found, / Heaven's last best gift, my ever new delight, / Awake, the morning shines ...' (*PL*, V.17-20, effectively an *aubade* or dawn-song). Likewise, the tasks that await these new tenants in Paradise are morning work, 'Tomorrow ere fresh Morning streak the East / With first approach of light, we must be risen, / And at our pleasant labour' (*PL*, IV.623-5, compare also their morning prayers at *PL*, V.136-52); the ironical proleptic shadows falling across these scenes are all in the mind of the forward-looking reader who now realises what henceforth it means to look backwards. And yet very early, Raphael counsels Adam: 'that thou mayst beware / By what is past, to thee I have revealed / What might have else to human race been hid' (*PL*, VI.894-6), adding: 'remember, and fear to transgress' (VI.912). After the Fall the overt memory of what had been lost was a constant burden: the sense-origins of *to mourn* are related to terms for memory and remembering, because retroflexive
By this means the stricken pair may convert the innocence of natural fragrance into a propitiatory sacrifice, to lay upon the altar of their contrition in hope of appeasing this wrath or at least expressing profound regretful sorrow at its cause in their disobedience. Their prayers for some remission of sentence, carried upwards by Christ to the throne of God, are offered to the accompaniment of burning incense:

To heaven their prayers
Flew up, nor missed the way, by envious winds
Blown vagabond or frustrate: in they passed
Dimensionless through heavenly doors; then clad
With incense, where the golden altar fumed,
By their great intercessor, came in sight
Before the Father's throne: them the glad Son
Presenting, thus to intercede began.

See Father, what first fruits on Earth are sprung
From thy implanted grace in man, these sighs
And prayers, which in this golden censer, mixed

mourn is now a task and a duty. (mourn is from Old English murnan, grieve over, also be anxious, careworn, in turn from Proto-Germanic *murnanan, cognate with Latin memor, remembering and Greek word-elements for care, trouble, be anxious or thoughtful.) This is the knowledge which they defiantly took, and which is now its own punishment. Mourning is now their regime of contrition and penitence, to be marked every morning of the day with constant sacrifice as Nature is consumed in voluntary burnt-offering: incense as memorial substitution for the lost innocent sweetness from which it derives; and compare AV Leuiticus, I:9, Ezekiel, XX:40-1. (We may note, too, a potential phonetic overlap between the sounds of innocence and incense, words otherwise not related.) There is a similar latent play on these two words morn and mourn in Lycidas (1638); the innocent early companionship 'under the opening eye-lids of the morn' (26, my italics) gives way to all nature in mourning for the lost friend (39-41); the same punning wordplay (morn/mourn) is found explicitly in Shakespeare's Sonnet 132; and see also Ricks, Milton's Grand Style, pp. 57-75; also John Leonard, 'Self-Contradicting Puns in Paradise Lost', in Thomas N. Corns (ed.), A Companion to Milton (Oxford, 2001), 24 (pp. 392-410), and Fowler, note to PL, VI.566 (p. 367).

In Book Eleven these grateful altars are reared up 'in memory or monument to ages' to bear sweetly fragrant offerings (PL, XI.323-7; for grateful compare PL, IV.165, VIII.55; Ricks, Grand Style, pp. 113-4). For a classical account of propitiatory or expiatory sacrifice, see Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function (1898), trans. W.D. Halls (London, 1964): of the man about to make a sacrifice 'the impurity that he acquires by not observing religious laws or by contact with impure things is a kind of consecration. ... If he sacrifices, the sacrifice has as its aim, or at least one of its aims, to rid him of his impurity. It is an expiation. ... There is no sacrifice into which some idea of redemption does not enter' (pp. 53, 99; compare AV, Leuiticus, XVI:11-13 ['sweet incense'], 16).
With incense, I thy priest before thee bring.\(^1\)

The implicit combination of these two senses of *incense* had already been foreshadowed in the conversation between God the father and his son, in Book Three, where God foretells Satan's successful undoing of mankind. Other than the elect, marked out for salvation, the rest of humanity should be warned of the need 'to appease betimes / Th'incensed Deity'.\(^2\) God shall be wrathful against those fallen from grace, and already he is depicted as *incensed* with this wrath, and requiring to be appeased by prayer, repentance and obedience: the declared signs of remorse offered up with here-implied fragrant *incense* that shall subsequently become the explicit formula of propitiatory sacrifice.\(^3\)

We may stand back now from this stupendously grand spectacle, the argument over the fundamental paradox concerning how original unqualified innocence could ever have become contaminated within the free will of these abashed creatures, once created perfect and in their creator's divine image. This miniature sub-narrative of, initially, lexical manoeuvre, brought up to the surface out of a tacit Latinate origin, confirms how Milton recognised that Nature was fragrant in its unsullied innocence; that God was a wrathful enemy to rebellion and transgression, incensed against them; and that this natural fragrance could be redirected to supplicate for mitigation of divine anger through its function as ritual propitiatory sacrifice and mark of contrition, offered up on the altar of repentance.\(^4\) Such sacrificial rites, 'with

\(^1\) PL, XI.14-25. Perhaps because more natural behaviour has here been replaced by heavily deliberated formal ritual, the syntax of these lines is bound into tightly Latinate construction. For biblical usage of incense in the ritual of supplication compare Psalm 141: 'Let my prayer bee set forth before thee as incense: and the lifting vp of my hands as the Euening sacrifice' (AV, Psalms, CXLI:2); thus *altar*, borrowed from Latin *alter(e)*, possibly related to Latin *adolere* (= to burn in propitiary sacrifice), perhaps here also with a play on *alter* (= cause to change), which is the purpose of sacrifice as attempting conversion of guilt to repentance; compare AV, Exodus, XXXVII:25 ['incense altar'], XXXVIII:1. *Fumed* reminds that the origin of *perfume* is related to smoke from burning incense; *fume* by itself is vain distracted smoke (PL, VIII.194), or worse (PL, IX.105).

\(^2\) PL, III.186-7.

\(^3\) The dear and only son of God makes early intervention, in Book Three, to appease the divine wrath against frail Man, to motivate divine pity and by offering himself to die for the offence (PL, III.400-410). After the expulsion from Paradise and in parallel with this sacrifice, Adam and Eve and their progeny make ritual sacrifice a regular part of their lives, in remembrance and atonement: PL, XI.13-24; XII.19-21, 230-35. Fowler contends (legalistically) that in God's view the expulsion was not a punishment (gloss to PL, XI.49-57, p. 601): but these expiations imply a different view, and Adam describes himself reproachfully as 'punished man' (PL, X.803).

\(^4\) supplicate: PL, V.867, XI.31, compare AV, Psalms, VI:9; mitigate: PL, I.556, X.76, XI.41; expiate: PL, III.207; propitiate: PL, XI.34, compare AV, To the Romans, III:25, I.John, II:2, IV:10;
Incense strewed', are a continuing of man's newly-fallen life, of exile from Paradise.\(^1\) All this, as Christopher Ricks has briefly but alertly indicated,\(^2\) lies within the interwoven strands of meaning derived from a Latin word which filtered into English usage by divergent routes, as if to conclude in distinctly separate words. But Milton glimpsed the benefits of insight into these entwined derivations, not at all as mere displays of erudition or witty lexical devices, but because the conversion of Nature into an instrument to intercede for its rescue from wrathful destruction is part of the way in which human language, a fallen instrument, pleads for understanding and perhaps mercy in this august and eloquent poem.

\(\text{Edited by Li Zhimin}\)

\(^{1}\) PL, XI.436-40. The unexpected prominence of incense in a poem displaying no overt sympathies with the ritual practices of the Roman church is discussed by David Robertson, 'Incensed over Incense: Incense and Community in Seventeenth-Century Literature', in Roger D. Sell and Anthony W. Johnson (eds), Writing and Religion in England, 1580-1689: Studies in Community-Making and Cultural Memory (Farnham, Surrey, 2009), Chap. 19 (pp. 390-409); but the conception of sacrificial incense as 'fallen fragrance', as propitiation or expiation, is not observed.

On Gu Cheng: Rise and Fall of a Fairy Tale

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Abstract: Gu feels the most dear to nature and often retreats into a world of fairy tales created in his literary imagination which provides him spiritual freedom. It is in his devoted communication with nature that Gu’s poetic sensibility is shaped and sharpened, while it is in the poems that address at the fate of the people that he is classified as one representatives of the Misty Poetry. The influence of Western poetry on Gu, which he readily acknowledges, is manifest in his cultural identification rather than in his use of poetic techniques. After actually moving to the West, Gu, inexperienced as he is, unconsciously imprisoned himself in an island, which, together with his desperate dependence on his wife and the anguish of dwindling inspiration in poetic creation, eventually lead to his tragic suicide.

Keywords: Gu Cheng, Nature, Fairy Tale, the West

The Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976) brought calamities to the Chinese people, of which two notable consequences are material shortage and spiritual depression. In 1978, China made a dramatic turn by adopting the Reform and Opening-up Policy which started the continuous rapid economic growth up till now. In the meantime, the policy also slacked off the once heavy ideological control and thus greatly liberated peoples’ minds. It is within this socio-historical context that the Misty Poetry Movement sprung up, became prominent in the late 1970s and rapidly popular nationwide, and gradually faded in the late 1980s.

Gu Cheng (顾城, 1956—1993) is one of the few representative Misty Poets, son of the army poet Gu Gong (顾工, 1928--) who was loyal to ideological causes and produced more slogans than literary works (as he himself openly admitted). Gu did not receive much education because of the Cultural Revolution. At the age of 12, Gu quit school and accompanied his father to the countryside who was sent down there to breed pigs. In 1974, Gu moved back to Beijing with his father and took
various occupations as carpenter, porter, editor and etc. At a very early age Gu had read many literary works and showed an interest in poetry. He began to publish his poetry in 1974 and established his name in March 1979 by publishing some poems in a tabloid literary journal entitled *Dandelion*, which paved the way for him to gradually grow into one of the major Misty Poets.

**Gu of a World of Fairy Tales**

Gu is nurtured by the beauty of nature. In his poem “Notes on Learning Poetry”, Gu wrote:

The first that offered me poetic feelings is Raindrops.

There were fir-trees that said nothing as I passed by on my way to the primary school.

One day, after raining, the world became clear and fresh and the fir trees started to shine. The crystal raindrops that were hanging on the leaves made me forget about myself. In each raindrop I saw swimming rainbows, a beautiful blue sky and my own world…

I understood then that even a small drop of rain could contain everything and purify everything. The shining world within raindrops is much purer and more beautiful than the actual world that we are living in.

Poetry is the raindrop on the tree of ideals. (Gu, 1995, 895)**

Of all Gu’s poems, more than half have a title associated with nature and even more are actually about nature. Gu’s very first poem “Fir Tower”, composed when he was only eight years old, portrays the pure beauty of nature.

On the fir tree,  
Dew drops are clear and shining,  
As if on a green-painted tower,  
As silver ring-bells are hanging all over. (Gu, 1995, 3)

During the years of exile in the countryside, Gu was immersed in the everyday  

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**All translation from Chinese to English is done by the author of this essay if not otherwise notified.**
world of nature and learned poetry from nature:

I began to write poems spontaneously as I heard the sound of dew drops and insects that echoed inside me. And as I went to the countryside at the age of twelve, the sound in me had become so loud and had all merged together... I began my poetry creation there. I stayed a few years there and I felt love and passion in life itself... The most beautiful is that I could even hear the gentle dialogues in nature, with me as a part of them... I wrote poems on the river-bank with a wooden stick and completed poems such as ‘A Fantasy of Life’ and ‘Ode to the World’. I sang the songs of bees, I danced the dances of butterflies and I wrote poems of flowers...(Gu, 1995, 919)

Gu’s feels the most dear to nature, a world that is drastically different from that of human beings. Despite that Gu and his family suffered a harsh treatment during the Cultural Revolution years, he could always find peace and have his sensibility and imagination exercised in nature in the countryside.

Gu once talked with Suizi Zhang-Kubin about the source of his creation:

Z(hang-Kubin): What inspired you poetic creativity initially?
G(u): I heard a secret sound within nature and the sound turned itself into poetry in my life.

Z: What kind of secret sound did you hear?
G: It was a sound produced while the whole world, including myself, changes and grows. They were the same sound and so I could hear it.(Gu, 1995, 1)

When Gu returned to the city at the age of seventeen, he lost the contact with his world of nature and felt isolated: “At the age of seventeen, I went back to the city. I saw many, many people and I felt very embarrassed for I lost the capability of speaking. All people were speaking the same words and they could not understand me as I said something different. It seemed that they did not speak themselves, there was a devil in them” (Gu, 1990, 920). In one short poem “Far and Near”, Gu depicts his restlessness and fear, or incapability in coping with other humans.

You,
Sometime look at me,
And sometime watch a cloud.

I feel,
You are far while looking at me,  
And near while watching a cloud. (Gu, 1995, 170)

Gu always had a strong sense of isolation among human beings. In the countryside, he could retreat into nature and communicate with non-human beings, while in the city, he could only retreat into his literary imagination to find consolation. To live in the nature is solid, while to create a world of fairy tales is just a strategy for Gu to deal with the society, which, nevertheless, appeal strongly to many readers who have also suffered in the human society. Gu well understand the value of fairy tales in literary creation, as shown in a poem that he dedicates to Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875). The poem, entitled as “For My Admired Teacher Andersen”, ends with the following two stanzas:

No flags,  
No gold, or silver, or colourful silk clothes  
But no king in this world  
Is richer than you.

You are carrying a heaven,  
With balloons of flowers and dreams,  
And all the pure hearts of children  
Are your harbours. (Gu, 1995, 151)

Gu’ sharp sensibility and rich imagination as a talented poet is well demonstrated in his poems of fairy tales, yet he did not retreat into his world of fairy tales to turn away from the society. On the contrary, he created a world of fairy tales to purify human souls and the society. He has a deep concern of the fate of the people. In the dialogue with Suizi Zhang-Kubin, Gu mentioned Jean-Henri Fabre:

Z: Which books influenced you initially?
G: Those of Jean-Henri Fabre (1823-1915) had the first and the greatest influence upon me. I read his Stories of Insects at the age of ten and the benefit I got from this has never decreased.

Z: What kind of influence did Fabre have on you?
G: In the world of nature, Fabre described the fates of human beings. That made me understand that each feeble creature has its own life, and this made me
think of myself too.” (Gu, 1995,1)

In fact, it is not in the poems of fairy tales, but in a poem that directly addresses to the fate of the people that Gu wins the most admiration. The two-line poem “One Generation”, the most well-known of all Gu’s works, can be read as posing a powerfully challenge towards the Cultural Revolution Movement:

Our dark pupils are fostered by the dark night
Yet we use them for hunting the bright. (Gu, 1995, 121)

**Gu’s Connection with the West**

Modern Chinese Poetry, or New Chinese Poetry as it is termed, took shape by modeling on Western poetry, and many modern Chinese poets expressed their admiration of Western poetry and poets. Gu, who does not really know much of the West, also ardently connects himself with it, without knowing what consequence it would bring out to him eventually. While answering a Hong Kong Poet’s questions, Gu said:

I do not know any foreign language, so I can read only translated works. Fortunately my wife knows some English and we together translate a few poems occasionally, which helps me understand foreign poems better… Just as you have mentioned, I was deeply influenced by foreign poets, among them I like Lorca and Whitman most. For a certain period of time, I read their works every day, bringing their poems into my dreams… I read Whitman quite early, yet I truly felt him rather late. It was in the morning of a day in 1983 that the lead wall between Whitman and me was melted by a painful electric current, which enabled me to feel the great spirit of Whitman… I was overwhelmed, lying and listening to the dripping of rain without eating anything for a whole day. (Gu, 1998, 397-403)

Since Gu could not read any Western poem in the original, it remains a question how much poetic beauty he could detect while reading translated works. It is widely

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accepted that “Translation could hardly do justice to a paragraph in which so many levels of meaning and implication are kept in continuous operation.” (Watt, 543) In the strict sense, poems are not translatable, since the sound of the original language—upon which the beauty of a poem greatly depends—could hardly be translated. It is true that poetry is very much “tied to the languages” (Wellek, 74). Some translators applied the principle of “foreignisation” and coined some dictions and syntaxes in accordance with the original works, which, however, could not really convey much poetic beauty that is tied to the original language. Thus it is quite a mystery why Gu feel “overwhelmed” while reading Whitman.

In terms of poetics, it is difficult to discern in what ways Gu was influenced by Western poetry. The poem “Fir Tower” can be read as an Imagist poem, yet it is arguable whether Gu had read any Western Imagist poets and intentionally intimated their style in his composition in the year of 1962 when he was only eight years old. What is clear, however, is that Gu was fascinated by and enjoyed greatly reading classical Chinese poems in his early years. We should be reminded that classical Chinese poetry (such as Ma Zhiyuan’s poem “Tianjinsha—Autumn Thought”) is rich in images and that Ezra Pound, the initiator of the literary movement of Imagism, learned from ancient Chinese poetry and translated some Classical Chinese poetry in Cathay which are often taken as models of imagist poetry. As such, it is more likely that this poem was created under the influence of classical Chinese poems. It is also possible that this poem was written under the influence of early modern Chinese imagist poems, some of which carry the influence of Ezra Pound, even though this is hard to verity. The fact that Gu’s father Gu Gong is a poet suggests that Gu might have access to some early New Chinese Poems which, as generally understood, were directly initiated by Western poetics. But we could also assume that Gu, talented as he is, probably just wrote this poem mostly by intuition, even if his poem does show traces of influences of some sort.

In fact, as a poet, it is poetic talent that really matters. One more technique is just one more alternative or helpmate. New Chinese Poetry, albeit with borrowed poetics from the West, has not yet made any great achievement compared to that of the lyric masters such as Su Shi or Li Qingzhao, not to mention Li Bai and Du Fu. Although a mastery of poetic theories can help with the growth of masters, a complete dependence on it can only produce craftsmen.

Gu, like all modern Chinese poets, showed great interest in Western poetry and claimed that he began to learn “modern skills” in the beginning of 1979”(Gu, 1995,
907-919). Yet there is no evidence to show how much Gu benefited from the “modern skills”, as no skill has made him better than his peers. In the last few years of his life, when his poetic inspiration has dramatically dwindled, he indeed applied some techniques that are unusual in modern Chinese poetry, as in the poem “Naming”:

To pour out water from the stove,

From the stove-door

Looking at face looking at day
Cut money knocking twenty times
Cigarettes

West-straight Gate being carried running towards West-straight Gate

Y
Y
Y

(Gu, 1995, 767)

The line breaking and line arrangement are quite bold. It is also the first time for Gu to make direct use in his poem of an English letter “Y” which has the same pronunciation as the word “why”. Despite of these bold innovations of techniques, the poem, however, is not interesting.

Indeed, there is no satisfactory explanation of why Gu is so eager to connect himself with the West, and even feels “overwhelmed” while reading Whitman so far as poetics is concerned. Yet we might get a glimpse of Gu’s interest in the West if we should be reminded of Whitman’s love of freedom as well as all modern cultural values upon which a modern society in the West is built. It is the modern values that appeal so powerfully to the Chinese people, which explains why they would have undergone great difficulties in learning them from the West and in making efforts to apply them in China. This is also the most profound reason why modern Chinese poets, as well as modern Chinese people in general, have shown high respect and admiration of the West. Most probably it is the cultural faith of modernist spirit as evident in Whitman’s poetry that has produced resonance in Gu who had struck to the spirit of freedom so earnestly in his world of fairy tales. It also explains why Gu
would actually move to the West and live there in 1986.

**Fall of Fairy Tale**

Gu’s reputation rose dramatically in early 1980s and millions of his books were sold. In 1986, he went abroad and finally settled in New Zealand.

For those Chinese who show great admiration of Western culture, moving to the West is a beautiful. For Gu, however, when the dream comes true, it bought nothing but disasters. One of the most damaging consequences is that his poetic inspiration dramatically dwindled as soon as he left his homeland: taking a close look at *A Complete Selection of Gu Cheng’s Poems* edited by his father, we find that Gu created 320 poems altogether from 1981 to 1985, while from 1986 to 1990 the number is 86. In the last two years before he committed suicide in 1993, Gu wrote only six poems. By the end of 1991, Gu wrote an omen-like poem “Poetry Walks Out of My Heart”:

Poetry walks out of my heart  
For confronting his own fate  
I alone remain silent for a long time  
The foot that might have been placed on the floor  
Is actually on his face  
He alone remains silent for a long time… (Gu, 1995,839)

There are many reasons that have caused Gu’s tragedy, among which the most fundamental one should be his own character. He is a talented poet as well as an impractical person. He not only loves and creates poems of fairy tales but also lives in them; he is himself a fairy tale that is easy to be broken. Wang Guowei (王国维, 1877—1927), a famous Chinese critic, divides all writers into two categories, i.e., the Objective and the Subjective. He said: The Objective Poets, such as the authors of *Water Margin* and *A Dream of Red Mansions*, have to be experienced, as the more experienced they are, the richer and more diversified materials they could base upon in the process of literary creation. However, the Subjective Poets, such as the famous poet Li Yu (李煜, 937-978), should not be too experienced with the world, as less experienced they are, more true their feeling would be. (Wang, 37)
Gu, as a poet of fairy tales, is indeed a typical representative of the subjective poets. More than being inexperienced, Gu simply does not want to get experienced at all, as he has another world of his own. He just follows his intuition, either in literary creation or in real life. He believes that “you can write poetry and then again you can’t. It comes into this world of its own accord, not by the will of the poet.” (Gu, 1990, 11) It does carry some truth in terms of poetic creation. However, the implied attitude of passive acceptance of and inaction to respond to whatever fate brings about will certainly lead him into terrible troubles.

Gu’s poetic productivity should not have dwindled if the beauty of nature alone could bring him poetic inspiration, as the place he settled in is the picturesque Waiheke Island of New Zealand, which is surely no less beautiful than the countryside Gu stayed many years ago. Gu is not a poet of the nature, or he must have taken great interest in depicting the natural beauty Waiheke Island in and other places in New Zealand in his works. Gu is a poet of fairy tales, and he created them not for their own sake, but in order to respond to people around and the society as a whole when he was in China. However, when he moved to the West, a foreign land, Gu lost the sense of people around and the society he was actually staying with, which would certainly cause the loss of the orientation of his poetic creativity. Since there is nothing to respond to, there is nothing to be inspired. Gu should have done something to regain his poetic inspiration, yet he did not do anything, which is very much determined by his own character.

Gu’s life in Waiheke Island is more like self-imprisonment rather than a romantic life style of withdrawing from the public. Gu is extremely clumsy in taking care of himself in the daily life, and had been heavily relied on his wife even since the day they got married. After moving to the West, the situation gets worse as Gu depend upon his wife Xie Ye to communicate with people around. Gu put himself into a situation in which his independence is completely tied to another person, though he might seem to be the master of the house. Gu might have subconsciously felt bored with the situation himself, because Li Ying, an ordinary woman from China, very soon won his great admiration when she paid his family a visit and stayed with them for sometime. This affair could be Gu’s intuitive attempts to escape from being imprisoned, yet it is not a success. Li left after a short time, which caused a lot of complaints and pain for Gu. Finally, when Gu’s wife decided it was time for her to divorce and leave him in March 1993, Gu became completely desperate and killed his wife with an axe, and hanged himself afterwards.
Conclusion

Unlike Li Bai, William Shakespeare, Walt Whitman, or others who belong to all ages, Gu Cheng is a poet who belongs to a specific age.

William Wordsworth’s claim in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” indeed reveals an important principle in poetic composition. Yet, I think, an equally important or even more important principle to make a poem good is a “new” perspective provided to help readers see and feel the world differently. There has to be something new in any piece of literary work to make itself different, and a “new” perspective is what matters the most. Keeping this in mind, we can advocate that the most important factor that makes Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* a masterpiece is that it depicts an unconventional way in which revenge takes its course. Likewise, the most valuable for Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* is that it presents a new image of a black man as a noble Christian in contrast to the stereotyped perception of black people in those days. And in the *Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot provides a new perspective for readers to see and feel the dark side of modern world. People could not really defend themselves if they fail to bring about anything new and thus are accused of talking cliché. Probably this is why modern and postmodern poets have been so eager to have initiated and applied so many new techniques, which the simple principle to evaluate is how much “newness” they could help to bring about. In theory, something new in any artistic work, or even in any human knowledge in general, can always help people grow more sophisticated in their minds, as well as responses followed, so that people could cope with life more effectively. To “make it new”, as Pound called for in a loud voice, is indeed of the most significance.

Gu indeed created something “new” in his poems, especially to people who were living at that particular socio-historical background in China in the 1970s. During the Cultural Revolution years, there had been a strict ideological control over the activity of literary creation so that only political slogan-like works were published and provided to the public, as those by Gu’s father. Therefore, the Misty Poetry, including those of Gu, indeed offered a completely different perspective for Chinese people to see and feel the world and life. In fact, not only Misty Poetry, but also many other literary works that had been forbidden to the public, even the poems
of the Nine-Leave poets that were produced in the early twentieth century, all gained
great popularity all of a sudden. It is an age that that witnessed a sudden spiritual
liberation in all walks of life in China. Among all works that helped the spiritual
liberation, Gu’s poetry of fairy tales are without doubt of the most curing power for
the people who had just shaken off the heavy chains deeply carved in their spirits.

Despite his talented poetic sensibility and great success, Gu’s literary
achievement should not be exaggerated. In fact, Misty Poetry in general are not
necessarily artistically superior to new Chinese poetry occurred at the beginning of
the twentieth century in terms of either poetics or cultural values. Misty Poets, as a
group, were not offered an opportunity to receive good school education or
systematic training in the profession of poetic composition because of the Cultural
Revolution Movement. The lucky ones of them were offered an opportunit
to attend a few short-term training courses organized by the leading poetry Journal Shi
Kan (《诗刊》), in the name of Poetry Forum for the Young Generation (“青春诗会”),
where most of the leading Misty Poets are produced. In the training camp, almost all
the lecturers were people who had produced slogan-like works during the Cultural
Revolution years, whose literary careers more often than not ended with the
termination of the movement. They probably understood that their age had passed,
and they did their best in the promotion of the young generation and were very
successful. The young poets indeed created a gust of fresh air, yet they did not really
make any breakthrough in terms of poetics or cultural values. Their contribution is
heavily associated with the particular age that needs them, and when China moved
out of the trauma of the Cultural Revolution into a new phase in the late 1980s, the
influence of Misty Poetry soon faded and passed away. With the passage of time,
Gu’s poems are read by fewer and fewer readers, which is really inevitable as only
works of lasting artistic value could always remain shining in the sky.

Gu is lucky, as he is born with poetic talent that is well sharpened by nature,
and further more, he was put into an age that needs him and generously offered him
great success and high reputation. Gu is also unfortunate, as he was placed at the top
just in order to be tormented by a tragic fall. Gu should have never left his homeland:
no matter how beautiful the West seemingly is, it is not for him. It seems that his
talent is born just to serve his people, and when it is misplaced and disorientated, it
is immediately destroyed, together with the body that carries it.
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Sense and Sensibility: Understanding Hughes through *Cave Birds*

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**Abstract:** This article aims to explore how in the *Cave Birds* poems Ted Hughes employs innovative poetic strategies to subvert the established and dominant value system of modern humanism and rational determinism. Through an internal but metaphorical expression of an individual’s transformation, His poetic works attempt to defamiliarize the recurrent subject matter of Man-Nature relationship.

**Keywords:** Ted Hughes, subversion, *Cave Birds*

Ted Hughes' critical attitude towards dominant value system of secular humanism and scientific determinism is constant. And his criticism about modernity enters a new stage in *Cave Birds* (1978). This collection is a complex set of poems. They reflect that the poet continued to be pre-occupied with the division between the subjective and the objective, between the conscious and the unconscious. The poet’s attitude towards the moral and philosophical foundations of the modern world remains unchanged. *Cave Birds*, as compared with other works by Ted Hughes, lies mainly in the apparent changes that characterize his mood in the poems. Alternatively, Jung's 'individuation' process is essential to a proper reading of Ted Hughes' poems in *Cave Birds*.

The theory of 'individuation process' or development of “wholeness of

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being” (Fordham 77) seems to provide the poet with a new mode of responding to the present-day cultural crisis in the Western society. But the central point of attack in *Cave Birds* is not merely instrumental rationality. Ted Hughes actually wants to subvert the secular value-system of the modern Western world in its completion. This is why, the poetic representation of Jung's 'individuation process' which in *Cave Birds* involves a total estrangement from history and society, needs a more critical examination than the critics have generally done by regarding it as the final stage of the poet's spiritual development. Further, the features of mysticism and religiosity that are integral to Ted Hughes's notion of Nature and secular world, in the process of his poetic growth, constantly assume new forms and meanings which have to be carefully defined at each stage of his growth as a poet. The careful examination of Jung's 'individuation process' in the poetic drama of *Cave Birds*, marks important changes in the poet's mood and his general characterization of Nature which makes this work different in some significant ways from his other poems. The poems in *Cave Birds* are either presented through the persona's own account of his relationship with the social world or through a voice of the poet-narrator. *Cave Birds* is constantly controlled by a distanced poetic-consciousness which corrects supplements and sometimes, even overturns the meanings projected through the perception of the persona. Nature as a regenerative force is represented by varied symbols. But unlike earlier poetry, its emergence and subsequent presence is largely not so aggressive.

However, some important changes in the poet's mood and the mode of Nature's presence in Ted Hughes's poetry demand a close examination of the strategies that suit to the poet's new ideological orientations. With a display of the self sufficiency of the poet's alternative view of the world, the poems in *Cave Birds* leave behind the desperation and violent turns which were characteristic of his earlier negations of rationalist humanism and secular modernity. The persona in some of the poems of *Cave Birds* is not merely a rationalist. Rather he represents the modern sensibility through reliance on the humanism oriented notions of the universe and the scientific or rational modes of cognition. Poems such as "After the First Fright", "In These Fading Moments I Wanted to say", and "The Accused", strongly expose the limitations of the moral order established on the basis of instrumental rationality. These poems carry the ideological overtones of the earlier poems like the Crow poems. But the earlier aggression has largely subsided and the characteristic irony yields to milder forms of satire. The dichotomy between the civilized human world
and the universe of Nature is presented with remarkable control and precision.

Beginning with a critique of the complacent rationalist persona, "The Scream" announces the ironic tone of the whole Cave Birds drama: There was the sun on the wall- my childhood's / Nursery picture. And there my gravestone/Shared my dreams, and ate and drank with me happily. (Three Books 65) In a certain sense, the apparent tone of empathy with the surroundings is misleading. The persona is pleased that the worms in the "ground were doing a good job". However, when he sees the "inane weights of iron / that come suddenly crashing into people, out of nowhere", the indifference with which the poet talks about this issue is not at all reassuring.

It can be felt that the character of the pleasure here is not a form of empathy with Nature in its totality. It is on such occasions when he has vivid glimpses of senseless violence in the universe. Thus, the persona who represents the moral order of the modern world is totally devoid of the basic humanity and sensitiveness that show a genuinely human relationship with the surrounding world. The poet's implicit contention is that the "self-satisfied cosmic generalization,” (Gifford and Roberts 205) which asserts its supremacy over the human as well as non-human world, is an instance of narrow humanism. Emphatically asserting that the persona's outlook is a crime deserving severe punishment, this poem implicitly asserts that rationality is a vicious instrument that suppresses the unconscious and natural drives. The poem goes: And his hard life -lust - the blind / Swan of insemination. / And his hard brain - sacred assassin. (Three Books 16) It can be seen from the above cited lines that the poet's discontentment with the patterns of life and experience associated with the Enlightenment humanism is expressed with aggressive overtones. To the poet, the hegemonic status of scientific objectivity and instrumental rationality is basically violence against the laws of Nature. The persona's state of existence and patterns of thinking, as implied in the above lines, are devoid of a genuine respectability towards the non-human universe. But in the scheme of the Cave Birds series, he is in a prepared state necessary for "self-purification, self-purgation and self transformation." (Hirschberg 156) Some poems clearly indicate the poet's underlying contention that the spiritual transformation of the persona as variously envisaged by the poet, cannot coexist with rationality, humanism and a general moral order of a highly modernized Western society. To the poet, these aspects of the contemporary Western society which are dominant in people's consciousness, are actually incapable of reviving a social cohesion and individual wholeness of being.
In the collection, such poems as “The Doubtful Charts of Skin” and "In These Fading Moments I Wanted to Say” extend the implication of the newly found attitude of Ted Hughes's poetry. These poems also mark subtle variations in the tone of the speaking voice. The persona, as his rationalist and humanist outlook demands, is quite determined to avoid any actual affinity with the non-human universe and the non-rational part of his own consciousness. "In These Fading Moments I wanted to Say" irony appears from the persona's assertions. The merging of the modern world and the natural universe constantly exposes the gulf that the persona claims to have overcome: How I cry unutterable outcry / Reading the newspaper and smell of stale refuse / How I just let the excess delight / Spill out of my eyes, as I walk along / How imbecile innocent I am. (Three Books 73) The concluding lines of the poem witness the speaker's increasing obsession with his own perceptions of the external reality. The earlier tone gives way to a detached and emotionally unexcited description. The inherent irony in the evolution of the persona's attitude and claims awakens the reader to the fact that the apparent assertions are basically exaggerations. There are no overt claims but a daring confrontation and acceptance of a new reality. That is why, his "finding weapons in his own grave suggests that he must discover his own subjection to death and that this knowledge strengthens his life." (Gifford and Roberts 213) But this "death' is metaphorical. The whole civilized order comprising the achievements of Enlightenment heritage is finally at stake. The "I" is the representative figure for those who – because they live in the world of modern civilization -- have to be subjected to a traumatic experience for the sake of their spiritual regeneration.

Ted Hughes constantly utilizes some mysterious and female figures. These identities as projected by the poet carry immense moral implications. The poems in Cave Birds which celebrate these figures also explicate some aspects of these identities. But violence and certain inclinations are still integral to the poet's view of this figure. Poems such as "The Summoner", "The Interrogator", "The Baptist", "The Judge", "The Executioner" and "She Seemed So Considerate" mainly dwell upon the workings of this force. Its various forms include a female figure, some mysterious birds and the earth itself. While some poems bring out its violent and authoritarian nature, others concentrate mainly upon its regenerative potential. "The Summoner" establishes the identity of an apparently “gangster protectionist”: Spectral, gigantified, / Protozoic, blood-eating / The carapace / Of foreclosure / The cuticle / Of final arrest. The underlying irony in the titles, as well as the structure of some of
these poems, adds to the intensity of subversiveness in the poet's attitude towards the moral and intellectual orientation of the persona. Most of these poems are in third-person narrative style.

It is significant to note that the regeneration of the persona in Cave Birds is essentially dependent upon the ambivalent benevolence of an ahistorical force in whose mode of working death and birth, violence and peace are simply indivisible and unavoidable both as means and consequences. "The Summoner", "The Interrogator", "The Judge" and "The Baptist" serve to scrutinize these claims and these poems show violence as an attribute of a metaphysical and symbolic significance.

"The Summoner" and "The Interrogator" are illustrative in this respect. The use of judicial vocabulary in the title inverts the prevailing and dominant views of crime and punishment, the poet implicitly dismisses the prospects of civility in the judgment. The interrogator is a bird: The bird is the sun's key hole./ The sun spies through. Through her/ He ransacks the camouflage of hunger (Three Books 69)

This metaphorical bird which is the "blood-louse of Ether" and is troubled by some "angered righteous questions", is quite unmistakable with "her eye on the probe" (Three Books 69). Interrogated by such a figure, the assertive and complacent protagonist of "The Scream" is "as helpless as a skin-and-bone mule trying to hide in a desert but betrayed by the black shadow of its own inescapable physicality". (Sagar 174) Ted Hughes seems to contend that the persona has to admit and accept the punishment that his humanist and rationalist outlook invites for him from the forces of Nature.

There are poems like "The Plaintiff, "She Seemed So Considerate", "The Executioner" and "The Green Mother" which intensify the drama of the sequence and highlight the transforming capabilities of the mysterious and regenerative 'female' figure. The poems in Cave Birds display a balanced reliance on these strategies. The tone of the priestly voice constantly endows a mystic and visionary character to these poems. "The plaintiff refers to the "life-divining bush of your desert" and the "heavy-fruited, burning tree/of your darkness" (Three Books 72). Sometimes, the protagonist is just listening to his own fate. The suppressed non-rational and uncivilized principle of the protagonist's existence is even more effectively dramatized in "She Seemed So Considerate", narrated in the third person. In this poem, the unconscious which puts the individual in touch with Nature in its wild processes comes to the fore. It is confirmed when: But my potted pet fern,
one fellow spirit / I still cherished, / It actually had witnessed./ As if Life had decided to desert me./ As if it saw more hope for itself elsewhere (Three Books 70).

Here the protagonist has undergone a remarkable transformation in his consciousness. But it would be wrong to see this change in the persona's attitude towards this deity in isolation from the all prevailing theme of Man-Nature relationship in Ted Hughes poetry. The state of consciousness that marks the revival of the persona's sensitivity and involvement with the forces of Nature is also to be seen as a state of experience where civilization and history become irrelevant. The calm and mild tone of these poems bespeaks Cave Birds's significant advancement over his earlier poems.

The poems of "The Green Mother" and "The Executioner" make the reader feel the vastness and virtual inaccessibility of the deity. The forces being celebrated in these poems are essentially foreign to the modern consciousness. "The Green Mother" which reveals that the "earth is a busy hive of heaven" (Three Books 87), is primarily a celebration of the heterogeneity of life that earth fosters. The recurrence of the word 'heaven' in the context of flora and fauna demands a metaphorical reading. Though in the first person narrative and exceptionally emphatic in its convictions, the speaking voice is initially neither of the persona nor of the female or bird-like deity. The concept of a heaven beyond this life is apparently rejected. The trees, flowers, birds, beasts and fish all have their own heavens, but not altogether different from the one the persona has to strive for. The godly voice tells him: These are only some heavens / Not all within your choice. / These are also the heavens / Of your persuasion. / Your candled prayers have congealed an angel, a star / A city of religions. (Three Books 88)

Here the above poem has demystified religion. It foregrounds the richness of life that the earth offers. But this over-emphasis on 'earth' as the sole originator of diverse sorts of heavens is not an affirmation of the modern conditions of life which basically bear the present character of this planet, but of the inherent elements of mysticism and transcendentalism. "The Executioner" reads: "It feels like the world /before your eyes ever opened…. The poem is primarily a critique of secular humanism. And the poet celebrates the centrality of a non-human but intensely mystified source of life in the universe: Fills up / Sun, moon, stars, he fills them up / With his hemlock / They darken / He fills up the evening and the morning, they darken / He fills up the sea. (Three Books 75) The presence of 'hemlock' endows the poem with a wider meaning. Thomas West explains this point in these words: "Here
with the mention of Hemlock, one senses another drama, historical and concerned with a real, objective world that treats the misfortunes (according to Hughes) of our own culture, so that a cultural as well as a personal renewal is hinted at." (West 84) But whether, individual or collective, this regeneration in Ted Hughes's world-view is firmly rooted in the "incomprehensibility of consciousness" which exists beyond "the shams of personality" (Ibid) as reflected in the modern world.

The realization of authentic existence made improbable by the dominance of rationalistic thinking and the civilized coverings of the persona's consciousness, is achieved in the poems of Cave Birds where the recovery of mystic reverence for Nature residing in the human as well as the non-human world characterize the persona's behavior. Here, the breach between the subjective and objective worlds that characterized Ted Hughes's poetry at large seems also to have been resolved. These poems do, however, also witness the poet having attained the knowledge which makes the earlier excesses in ideological aggression towards the modern world look unnecessary. Poems such as "Something Was Happening" and "As I Came I Saw a Wood", variously explore the possibilities of mystic and visionary experiences in the human as well as the non-human world. The persona representing the civilized and rationalist consciousness, as reflected in the discussion of the foregoing poems, has finally awakened to a new form of existence which has to be acknowledged and accepted through means other than instrumental rationality.

Ted Hughes, in these poems, seems to suggest that the freshness, openness and humility achieved by the persona are the only substitute for the arrogance and insensitivity that characterized his attitude in his earlier poems. Apparently showing the persona's oneness with the material processes of Nature, the poet indirectly confirms that the more spontaneous urges of non-rational character have now been acknowledged by the persona with all their mystery and forms of mysticism. Overturning the humanistic patterns of thinking in the modern world, these poems celebrate the demise of rationalistic and secularized forms of feeling and thought that were inseparable from the persona's behavior at the beginning of Cave Birds poems. The total evasion of 'history' and social consciousness is essentially integral to the poet's vision of an alternative mode of existence to be reflected through the persona's transformed state of mind.

Such poems as "After There Was Nothing Came a Woman" and "Bride and Groom Lie Hidden for Three Days" mark the culmination of the internal drama of Cave Birds. While celebrating the persona's wholeness of being, both poems subvert
the modern world's preoccupation with the rationalistic modes of cognition. Without apparently using any conventional and religious language, the poet explores the consummation of Rung's 'individuation process' by mystifying 'phallic reality' which was also central to the poet's vision of an alternative mode of existence. The poet in "After There Was Nothing Came a Woman" overtly dramatizes the re-emergence of Nature as the Great Goddess of mankind, and the Mother of all life. It is implied in the feminine figure. But this 'she' is the most modest version of the mysterious female figures in Ted Hughes's poetry: She looks at the grass trembling among the worn stones / Having about as much comprehension as a lamb / Who stares at everything simultaneously / With ant-like head and soldierly bearing / She had made it but only just, just (Three Books 93)

Like the whole of Cave Birds, this poem is essentially working at a symbolic level. The narrator who begins with the pretensions of a detached and calm commentator on the events of the objective world, as implied in the tone of the last lines, finally senses mystery and immensity in the action and appearance of 'She'. The use of lamb and ant imagery for highlighting her innocence and distance from what is imagined to be the corrupted and decaying world of civilized and rational man, indirectly asserts the continued primacy of the irrational and instinctual mode of existence in the poet's world-view. But as contrasted with this fantastic but emphatic revival of primitivism in symbolic terms, in "Bride and Groom" the poet mainly displays the physical union of the protagonist-lover with his beloved. Using the human body as a machine, the poet suggests through a union of the bodies, a higher spiritual union. She inlays with deep-cuts scrolls the nape of his neck / He sinks into place the inside of her thighs / So, gasping with joy, with cries of wonderment / Like two gods of mud / Sprawling in the dirt, but with infinite care / They bring each other to perfection. (Three Books 98)

The physical union actually carries within it a spiritual renewal and the expression of the 'phallic reality' is merely a reflection of the highest form of consciousness. As Gifford and Roberts observe: "Sexual union is a metaphor for wholeness of being and oneness with the world, it is also both a cause and a consequence of wholeness and unity." (Gifford and Roberts 206) But this form of resolution of the contradictions in Ted Hughes's poetry in general and Cave Birds in particular, suggests the protagonist's gradual entry into an intimate and mystical relationship with the world of Nature. Any attempt to explain Ted Hughes's ideal state of existence has to consider the knowledge of the underlying mysticism and
religiosity in his poetry. Though apparently at odds with Christianity and other forms of worship, the poet consistently seeks solutions capable of explaining the most ordinary and non-religious events of our individual or collective life. Through a Jungian process of 'individuation', it is evident from the above discussion of *Cave Birds* that Ted Hughes always lays emphasis on transcendence as a mode of resolution of all kinds of conflicts between opposites. The need to subvert the structure of the established values of the contemporary Western world is inseparable from the fundamental character of the alternative that he projects throughout his poetry. His affirmation of what he considers as positive actually involves a good deal of abstraction from the complex predicament of man in modern world. The form of individuality and the wholeness of being that the poet propagates in *Cave Birds* basically demand a disengagement of consciousness from the outer reality. His strong naturalistic inclinations correspond to a practical disengagement with the social identity of the individual as well as an overall internalization of meaning in life.

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Positioning Brecht’s China in Western Intellectual Tradition

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Abstract: This study argues that Brecht’s perception and usage of Chinese thought and theatre as continuing the tradition of the interpenetration of Chinese thought and culture into Western intellectual traditions. This study will be contextualized in his encounter with China both from an aesthetic perspective and from a cultural-social-political perspective. That is, it attempts to examine Brecht’s use of Chinese thought and theatre as more than a coincidence, but, firstly, an outgrowth of his response to the global political and economic changes since the beginning of twentieth century, and secondly, the continuation of a long tradition of ideas from China penetrating into Western systems of knowledge.

Keywords: Brecht, China, Western intellectual traditions, orientalism

The extensive collection of Brecht’s work reveals that Brecht was familiar with the major trends in classical Chinese philosophy (i.e. Confucianism, Taoism, and Moism), even before he became acquainted with Marxism in the mid-twenties. His interest in China grew with the development of his theatrical aesthetics (one needs only mention the widespread Chinese references in his later plays). Brecht read Chinese poems: Li Po and Po Juyi especially appealed to him, and he retranslated some of Po Juyi’s poems from Arthur Waley’s English versions. He also incorporated Chinese theatrical techniques and set many of his plays either in China or included significant references to China and its culture, including two of his most important plays, The Good Person of Szechwan and The Caucasian Chalk Circle. The Tui novel

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Becky B. Prophet listed Brecht’s thirteen plays (out of his thirty-five full length plays) and six short plays, which have connection with China or Chinese sources. See Prophet pp. 3-8.
and *Me-ti: Book of Change*, two major prose fragments written in the years of his Danish and Swedish exile (1933-1940), address issues in a contemporary European context while employing extensive references to Chinese thought. Besides his interest in Chinese philosophy and theatre, he kept a close eye on the social and political situation in China and on more than one occasions showed his concerns with China’s socio-political situation. And while he never visited China, according to a report from one of Brecht’s friends (recorded in John Willett’s *Brecht in Context*), Brecht was talking of Chinese exile towards the end of his life (223).

Nevertheless, nearly all critics who are concerned with the topic of Brecht and China are confronted with the same difficulties of assessing Brecht’s relation with China. First, Brecht is vague about his connection with China: in his observation of Chinese theatre and his reflection on Chinese philosophy, he is ambiguous about his intentions and reluctant to clarify and/or justify his admiration for China. Secondly, besides his direct contact with the Chinese theatre (through Mei Lanfang’s lecture-demonstration in Moscow and his meeting with the Chinese author and actor Tsiang in New York), his exposure to Chinese plays and poems was largely through others’ work related to China (either translations of Chinese plays and poems or literary works set in China): in the early years he read Richard Wilhelm’s translations of Chinese philosophy, i.e. the *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Zi, Confucius’ *Analects* and the works of Zhuang Zi, and Alfred Forke’s translation of Yuan plays and his book on Mo Zi in German (Prophet 8), and later, with the help of Elisabeth Hauptmann, he turned to Arthur Waley’s translations of Chinese poems and philosophy (Berg-Pan “Mixing Old and New Wisdom” 201, 205).

Comprehensive and admirable research have been conducted on Brecht’s interest in Chinese thought, culture and acting, together with their impact on his dramaturgy and theatrical works. Two major studies of Brecht and China in English need to be noted: Antony Tatlow’s *Mask of Evil* (1977) and Renata Berg-Pan’s *Bertolt Brecht and China* (1979).\(^1\) Tatlow shows the significance of Chinese and Japanese thought in Brecht’s life and texts while he, as Eric Hayot suggests, “at times hints at the presence of a Chinese [or more generally Eastern] Brecht in the shadow of the

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\(^1\) It is a regret that due to my very limited German I won’t be able to fully trace the steps of the German critics who have studied Brecht’s connection with Chinese culture and intellectual traditions.
Western one” (55). Berg-Pan provides a more biographical study in which she argues that “Brecht studied Chinese literature, art, and philosophy in order to find a viable relationship between his political views, his literary talent, his integrity as an artist and his physical survival as a man” (ix). Even so, she still believes that Brecht’s *Good Person of Szechwan* “draws heavily upon various “chinoiseries” (including quotations from Confucius, Chuang-tse, and Mo-tzu, as well as Po Chü-i)” (“Mixing Old and New Wisdom” 210). For them, even though the relationship is deep and significant, the ambiguities remain unsolved. Others have been less enthusiastic: Martin Esslin, for example, cautions that “these exotic and folk influences” from the theatre of China, India, and Japan, and the folk theatre of Austria and Bavaria “should not lead one to overlook the large extent to which the Brechtian theatre represents a return to the main stream of the European classical tradition” (*Evils* 129).

The inevitable question that critics find hard to liberate themselves from is: How to come to terms with Brecht’s China and Western traditions, for a European dramatist who has deep roots in various Euro-American cultural and intellectual traditions, but at the same time strongly revolts against Western traditions, such as the “orthodox” theatre (especially of German classic stage)? This question is further complicated by the fact that Brecht, by contrast to his vagueness about China, always readily acknowledged his European influences (such as Piscator’s). When shown an article accusing him of falling between two stools and being in a no-man’s-land between East and West, Brecht told Erwin Leiser (a Swedish colleague), “This must be corrected. I am sitting on one stool, in the East. But it is unsteady. It has only three legs” (Leiser 22). Brecht’s remarks suggest that even simply trying to understand him and his theatre as a “bridge” between East and West presents difficulties. Indeed the above dialogue may not clarify the ambiguities of his relationship to China, but it does suggest that his commitment to Asian cultures, including Chinese thought and theatre, is more than a chinoiserie or a disguise.

With this ambiguity in mind, this study, other than involving sorting out the details of Brecht’s connection to China, argues that Brecht’s perception and usage of Chinese thought and theatre as continuing the tradition of the interpenetration of Chinese thought and culture into Western intellectual traditions. This study will be contextualized in his encounter with China both from an aesthetic perspective and from a cultural-social-political perspective. That is, it attempts to examine Brecht’s use of Chinese thought and theatre as more than a coincidence, but, firstly, an outgrowth of his response to the global political and economic changes since the
beginning of twentieth century, and secondly, the continuation of a long tradition of ideas from China penetrating into Western systems of knowledge.

Orientalism as a “Self-Questioning Strategy”

Since Brecht’s response to Chinese thought and theatre exists in a specifically European context, any discussion of Brecht and his encounter with Asian culture, however unique or nuanced it may appear, must necessarily be contextualized in relation to the debate of the West’s relationship with Eastern thought—a topic that was initiated by Edward Said’s seminal book *Orientalism*. In *Orientalism* Said summarizes the relationship between East and West as “a relationship of power, domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony” (5). Said’s critique of Western representations of the Orient is an ambitious undertaking in that he desires to delineate a coherent history of Western representation of the Orient, in other words, a history of justifying the global authority of the West through reconstructing an imperialist knowledge of the peoples of the Orient as the conquered.

If we remember Brecht’s essay “Alienation Effect” which identified the V-effect in Chinese theatre, adopting a Saidian model to analyze Brecht’s representation of Chinese theatre is tempting, especially given a primary concern with Brecht’s identifying similar theatrical techniques in the Chinese theatre and various Western traditions (which disrupt the rules of the dominant naturalism of the European drama). In his aim to identify the universal theatrical practices in Europe and China, Brecht did not give particular attention to specific cultural identities. This emphasis on universality inevitably accords with Said’s accusation of Eurocentrism in Western representation of other cultures and thus provides support for the Sadist model of a universal narrative as defined and dominated by Western culture. Such a reading is not completely ungrounded, yet it turns out to be inadequate, reductive.

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1. Although Said’s main concern in *Orientalism* was with the cultures of the Middle East, it is widely accepted by scholars that Said’s argument remain valid in the case of the “Far East” (Clarke 23).

2. Clarke notes how Said’s orientalism, as a single narrative of world history, is criticized by historians such as Lisa Lowe and Rosanne Rocher. See Clarke p. 9.
and slanted, for the very reason that it ignores that this representation could also be destructive (and constructive in another way) in challenging and, furthermore, redefining the speaker’s cultural entity.

While admitting that colonial attitudes were one aspect of Orientalism, Clarke, in his historical review of the cultural encounter between Asia and Europe, notices “the historical discontinuities and changes in the focus of the West’s attitude towards Asian thought that have occurred over the past few centuries” (10), and arrives at the conclusion that Western interest in Asian ideas has been more than out of a condescending and colonialist attitude. Instead of dismissing a Saidian model of Orientalism, Clarke proposes another notion of Orientalism as a “self-questioning strategy”. According to his model, the otherness of the East is not merely perceived as a negative counterpart of the West or a conquered other to assert the Western self-glorifying superiority. Rather, Clarke argues that it is a constant theme in Western intellectual traditions to question its own indigenous traditions through the mirror of Eastern thought. Clarke’s argument offers a useful way to conceptualize Brecht’s involvement with China that takes place well within the Western traditions, which is, in Clarke’s words, “draw[ing] Eastern ideas into the orbit of their intellectual and cultural interests, constructing a set of representations of it in pursuit of Western goals and aspirations” (10).

This study follows Clarke’s path in emphasizing that the relations between different cultures is not one single story of exclusion and subjugation, it is also a story of interaction and penetration, where the boundaries between the so-called “Eastern” culture and “Western” culture is always in the process of re-division. While locating my discussion of Brecht and China within various trends of Western intellectual engagement with China in his time, I also want to take into account the West’s historical relationship with China, in which the different views of China (and accordingly European perceptions of Chinese theatre) are generated. With an emphasis on cross-cultural dialogues, I wish to show that Brecht’s perception of China (which, as we shall see, is far from a coherent one) is a direct response to general patterns of the image of China in his time as well as in historical times.

**Evolving Images of China in the Western tradition**

The evolving image of China in the Western tradition—reviewed within the framework of social, political, and economic developments in Europe and
Asia—shall be roughly divided into four stages beginning from the fifteenth century until the first half of twentieth century in the context of my study (though we should always note that this categorization never depicts the whole picture): 1) The publication of The Travels of Marco Polo in the late thirteenth century inspired utopian expectations of the East and had great initial impact on Europeans for their voyages of exploration; 2) From the 1500s to the 1750s, especially during the Enlightenment, the cult of China flourished: China was elevated to an exalted height of perfection as an example of a state governed by a philosopher king; 3) From the 1750s to the break-out of World War I, with the intrusion of European powers into the East and the subsequent subjugation of Asian peoples, the assessment of Asia in general grew more negative; 4) From 1918 to the 1940s, the ending of the long period of European expansion and imperialist hegemony is accompanied by the spreading influence of Socialism and a turning to a so-called “Eastern spirit” (Clarke 95-112). While I am tracing the many and multifaceted encounters between the West and China, I note that the Western attitude towards Asia is “schizophrenic”: at times predominantly permeated with a condescending, exploitative and imperialistic attitude (from the 1750s to 1910s), but, more often than not, as Clarke suggests, seeking “self-correction” through its interpretations of Asian ideas (from the fifteenth century to the eighteenth century, and since the twentieth century). As such, Said’s association of Orientalism with colonizing power fails to represent the whole picture.

Marco Polo’s thirteenth-century travels and adventures in China, India, and Persia were recorded in The Travels of Marco Polo, which exerted the most powerful cultural and historical impact on Europeans’ perception of other countries and cultures, and provided the prototype images of Asia in a great variety of situations. The tales of Polo were widely known during his era, and, obviously, Europeans were largely attracted by “the riches of the Orient” (Murphey 9) more than by the more advanced and varied civilization existing in Asia. The image of these fabled rich civilizations in the East (India, China, the Spice Islands of Southeast Asia, Japan) which Polo described as hearsay, came to share

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1 The judgment was made by Rhoads Murphey in his analysis of the development of the civilizations at the western and eastern ends of the Eurasian landmass long before Marco Polo’s time, see Murphey p. 9.
commonalities with the Garden of Eden and Arcadia within the European consciousness (Schaer 5).

This partially explains why in the following centuries the utopian writings of Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), T. Campanella’s *City of Sun* (1623), and Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1627), all situate their ideal city in an ambiguous geographic position in the East, i.e. an island in the pacific ocean, or somewhere in the far-away Eastern land. Notably, even their writings differ from those of Marco Polo’s time in that they are more interested in expressing their vision of the future of human society and their ideal organization of society through projecting an alternative political system and culture in an imaginary geographical “East”.

Nevertheless, on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century stage, a respect for the East was still in a large degree “expressed through the spurious image of riches and plenty” (Mackenzie 181). Edward Mackenzie discusses how in Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* and Dryden’s *Alexander Feast*, the image of the East embraces riches and beauty and “was depicted as an ideal, contrasting strikingly with a disadvantaged West” (181). Asian merchandises, its artistic styles and techniques in arts, and its thought are all linked together in the minds of the Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth century (The term Chinoiserie itself signifies that this image of China is imaginary rather than realistic).

It is during the Enlightenment that an interest in and enthusiasm for Chinese literature and ideas, especially Confucianism, first gained admiration among Europeans. The prevalent literary device for dealing with intercultural topics was defined by Leonard A. Gordon, as “making a fictional foreign observer the mouthpiece of his criticisms of European institutions and customs” (131-2). This literary device was utilized by Montesquieu, together with other writers of the eighteenth century, including Voltaire, Diderot, and Oliver Goldsmith. This is a cunning technique, according to Gordon, as the critical distance made the author’s voice and point of view more sensible, humane, convincing and allowed him a platform from which to “criticize the west,” and “undercut authority and tradition at home” (132). Later Brecht continues this tradition in his use of China, pointing to a strategy in which China is employed as a position from which to reflect upon Western intellectual cultures.

Regarding the introduction of Asian elements into Western theatre in particular,
the adaptations of Chinese Yuan zaju Orphan of Zhao Family (the translated title is Orphan of China) during the Enlightenment are worthy of discussion. The Orphan of Zhao Family was written by Ji Junxiang during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368 AD). Based on Joseph Prêmare’s translation, Voltaire composed his own version of the drama titled L’Orphelin de la Chine (1755). Voltaire’s choice of adapting this Chinese play—and its subsequent great success among French society—is not a coincidence (nor is it any indication of its quality as translation), but, rather, an indication of the general fascination among European scholars towards Chinese moral philosophy, as well as its political system. Traces of Confucian thought are paramount in Voltaire’s version. Voltaire, however, in his adaptation of the play was exploiting a fictionalized China “in a frontal assault on the political and religious institutions of his day” (Clarke 44). The adaptation serves as a compelling example of how Western utopian and Enlightenment traditions employ a Chinese model as an ideal polity as a point of contrast to that of European society (Gordon 131). The China in Voltaire’s play is a continuation of this earlier ideal city tradition, and in Brecht’s use of Chinese sources in The Caucasian Chalk Circle and The Good Person of Szechwan (both of which are loosely based on Yuan zaju: The Chalk Circle and The Orphan of Zhao Family), we see how Brecht, though out of different

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1. The text of Orphan of China is the first translated Chinese traditional drama. There have been five different versions adapted in France, Italy and England. For a discussion on the different adaptations, see Du “The Chalk Circle Comes Full Circle” pp. 307-25.

2. In 1731, Joseph Prêmare first translated part of it and published the French version L’orphelin de la Maison de Tchao in 1735.

3. The purpose of Voltaire’s adaptation was three-fold: firstly, to compare Confucian morality with Christian ethics, as Voltaire and his contemporaries considered Confucian and his theories to advocate a cultivation of ethics, where virtue is instilled as practical, closely related to politics and reality, and “inculcated by action and dialogue” (Voltaire 9). Secondly, believing in the power of rationality as the legitimacy of authority, Voltaire, in the Enlightenment spirit, comes to the conclusion that the “tranquil and harmonious” political system of China was based on Confucian philosophy—a foundation of rational principles which prevails in all aspects of Chinese society (Clarke 43-6). Thirdly, Voltaire portrayed Kubla Khan as one who accords with the image of a philosopher king: rational, governing the country according to Confucian teachings, and observing laws.
needs and aims, continued this tradition in the twentieth-century in his reflection upon man’s relation to others and man’s position in society.

The image of China, however, became predominantly negative in the following two centuries with the intrusion of European power into Asia and the subsequent change of power relations. In *The Spirit of the Laws* (1798)—Montesquieu’s vision of Asia—China is associated with despotism. In Gordon’s view, Montesquieu’s vision of Asia could be categorized into the western narrative of despotisms in Asia beginning from Aristotle, to Wittfogel’s *Oriental Despotism* and finally to Marx (127-45). The drive to integrate the East into a stage of historical progress among Romantic writers would culminate in Hegel’s theory of world history, in which he argues that Asia, including both China and India, represents the childhood of humanity, while the modern Germanic Protestant world, on the other hand, was the highest stage of “the unfolding of the development of the self-consciousness of freedom” (Goldman 148). Indeed, the practice of putting Asia into a Eurocentric scheme and agenda is in accord with the imperialist view of non-Western cultures. Consequently, the model of East-West relations during the colonial period dovetails with Said’s study of the relations between Europeans and non-Europeans, since the development and maintenance of the European subject “requires the existence of another different and competing alter ego” (Said 35) to justify the act of colonization.

Even so, the cultural dialogue between West and East in relation to the theatre (both during the Enlightenment and Romanticism) was not of a monolithic discourse. When specifically discussing the stage, Mackenzie argues that commentators on the East “were capable of separating out attitudes towards religion and politics from approaches to the arts” (193). While admittedly “in the later nineteenth century the presentation of eastern characters, particularly Indian and Chinese, was unsympathetic,” the success of *A Chinese Honeymoon* (1901), *The Cingalee* (1904) and *The Mikado* (1885) in Europe, though offering an unreal vision of the East, demonstrates a high regard for the arts and crafts of the East in their use of stage and props.

In fact, besides the increasing ethnocentrism and attitude of an unbridled arrogance towards the East in Western writings, there still existed a high regard of Asian literature and philosophical thought. What primarily captured the Western Romantic imagination was the Indian and Japanese theatre. For example, Mackenzie cites a review of the pantomime *Harlequin and the Red Dwarf* in 1813 *The Times*,
which “extolled the advantages of Orientalist scenery and Asian history” (183). In the review the East was not viewed as “the Other to be despised and conquered, but as illustrating all the characteristics most highly valued in the cultural fashions of the age” (184). While admitting that the East is “a generalized and stereotypical East”, Mackenzie also pointed out that the review suggests “a certain amount of escapism from the grinding and bitter warfare of Europe” (184).

To draw a tentative conclusion, the discourse of representation of Asia in Western writing is never stable and coherent. And yet while it is never clean of prejudices and bias, there also exists a strong fascination with Asian thought and culture. Although the focus of this study is on Brecht’s uses of China, we need to note that in the long history of the West’s cultural encounter with China, the influence of Yuan zaju and the literary device of adopting “a foreign voice” to reflect one’s own culture and tradition (which has emerged and still be part of the popular themes) has been carried through into the twentieth century by Brecht.

**Brecht’s Perception of China**

While we measure Brecht’s response within the context of the Western reaction to China, such a response is best observed on two levels: synchronically and chronologically. On the one hand, we should see how Brecht’s discourse (s) on China, formed in specific social contexts, both inherits and disrupts Western discourses on China more generally; on the other hand, we need to compare his perception of China with those of other writers in his time, especially left-wing German intellectuals and theatre innovators. One fact that we could be certain of at this stage is that, as Hayot points out: “There exists no metadiscourse on China with which to begin to think about not only Brecht’s relation to China, but his own understanding of that relation” (55). Hence, instead of categorizing Brecht’s China into certain Orientalist themes, we situate our discussion of Brecht’s relation to China within the tradition, in Clarke’s words, of Western deployment of the “East as a means of intellectual and cultural criticism” (107) and begin by investigating the literary movement and the socio-economic-political circumstances that Brecht was involved in.

In the early twentieth century, there emerges a new movement in art committed to adopting radical forms and attempting to find new artistic expressions unrestrained by the conventions of a previous generation. These artistic innovations
on the early twentieth-century literary scene are accompanied more or less with an engagement with the cultural influence of the Far East. This influence may not be sufficient enough to herald the arrival of the Modernist movement in poetry, fiction and theatre, yet, as Zhaoming Qian suggests, the Far East (chiefly China) played a penetrating influence in the Modernist movement: first in pictorial art around the turn of the century and then in the Modernist movement in poetry (2-5). Clarke claims that Chinese thought and culture, after its eclipse in the Romantic period, “regained some of its popular appeal through the series of translations of Chinese poetry undertaken by Arthur Waley (1889-1966)” which not only had a strong influence on modern poets such as Yeasts and Pound, but also “has become once again an object of interest to Western scholars and philosophers” (98). Indeed, we only need to recall the profound effect of Japanese haiku and tanka, and the verse of China (such as the poetry of Bo Juyi) through Waley’s translation on modern poets like Brecht. On the modern stage, theatre directors and theoreticians who have shown an intense interest in performance traditions of Asian countries include: Edward Gordon Craig, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, and Jean Genet. It soon becomes clear that despite the abundant negative representations of Asia either in literary writings or characterization on stage, the perceptions (or misperceptions) of Asian cultures has served as important sources of inspiration in the Western theatre.

The renewed interest in China emerging in Western revolution in culture and thought can be seen as a direct response to changing historical conditions and relations within trans-cultural influences. Among historians, the consensus view is that the process of decomposition of the European imperial powers in Asia began with the outbreak of WWI (Malefakis 180) and as a consequence of WWI and the Great Depression of the 1930s, European control over Asia were gradually weakened. The popular view has it that there is a “prevailing sense of cultural crisis in the period preceding World War I” (Clarke 101). A growing disbelief in the superiority of their own culture among Europeans was, as critics like Clarke, Berg-Pan and Qian point out, linked with growing appreciation of the culture and arts of Asian countries (especially China). Qian emphasized the significant position of the Chinese influence in the Modernism of the 1910s and 1920s, and argues that Orientalism “helped to give expression and substance to a sense of deep cultural crisis and to loss of faith in the West’s idea of progress through scientific rationalism, and to a need for new modes of representation” (5). Berg-Pan, when explaining this
general interest in China among the Germans, expressed a similar view by claiming that “Europeans had discovered that the Far East, and especially China, possessed values and a belief in humanity which they themselves had lost as a result of their intellectualism” (Bertolt Brecht and China 9-10).

In his discussion on Brecht’s interest in East Asian aesthetics and in ritual forms, Tatlow ascribes this attraction towards other cultures to the fact that “they give us access to the unconscious of our own episteme” (The Intercultural Sign 29). Underneath this attachment, according to Tatlow, is the constant theme in cultural exchange: the acceptance of other cultures is out of the “need or lack” in one’s own culture. Tatlow further suggests that “we abandon forever the notion of cultural essentialism that still haunts the discourse when East and West meet or analyze each other” (The Intercultural Sign 29). Tatlow’s argument provides one possible explanation for Voltaire’s association with China as embodying a superior stage of human civilization and for Clarke’s summary of the Romantic imagination of the Indian culture: “a more fully realized human existence and a more holistic and spiritually driven culture” (60). In both cases, China (in Enlightenment) and India (in Romanticism) are employed as a “self-corrective strategy” in the Europeans’ reflection on their own cultures. During the Enlightenment the self-criticism was directed towards traditional institutions, customs and values, whereas, during Romanticism the exaltation of rationality was questioned and even rejected.

While there is much to support the idea that a spiritual crisis can be seen in the Modernist experiments of the early 20th century, I do not intend to misleadingly emphasize the salvational role of China (as a cultural other) in the project of “cultural regeneration or renewal” (in Clarke’s words) in Western civilization. In fact, the idea that classical Chinese philosophy produced thousands years ago could be used to address the problems of modern industrialized European societies (take Germany for example) would be suspicious, especially when we think about how these patterns of thought, ever in modern China, were ever considered to be outdated and “reactionary” by the Left in the New Culture Movement (1915-1921). On the other hand, one’s cultural background does serve as the root of one’s ideas; in other words, the complete rejection of one’s cultural background is more of a gesture than a practice.

As we attempt to differentiate between various cultural traditions, it is also important to note that it is apparent commonalities between Chinese thought and “lost” Western tradition which Western writers (like Brecht) aim to return to or to
rediscover (consciously or unconsciously) that draws their attention to China. Two points need to be noted. First, although these disquieting historical elements anticipate the mood of change and questioning in Western cultural life that dominate the 20th century and the cultural and intellectual encounter between Europe and China, concerns and responses—which are inextricably linked into this agenda of breaking with traditions and searching for inspiration from other cultures—are varied and even divergent. It is reductive to assume that all Western scholars who are interested in China are pursuing similar agendas. We have already given a historical review to trace the specificities of China mainly in European writings. Thus it is necessary to make a distinction between Brecht’s response to China and the vision of China of his contemporaries. Second, even within Brecht a variety of motivational factors were linked in his use of China, which simply cannot be generalized as a coherent story of his China. Nevertheless, as I shall suggest in this study, his China(s), integrated within his concerns of expressions of Man in the changing economic and social realities, does serve, to quote Clarke, as “an agency for self-criticism and self-renewal, whether in the political, moral, or religious spheres” (27).

As for the cross-cultural theatrical stage, the twentieth century saw the increasing popularity and veneration of Asian theatrical techniques and philosophical ideas, and considerable growth in comparative studies. This enthusiasm for Asia ideas was largely generated by discontent with the Realist theatre and the Stanislavsky method of acting (which, for each of them, is outdated and must be discarded), and a search for alternatives. They are all inevitably interested in theatrical innovations in form and the incorporation of philosophical ideas underneath acting. Brecht appears to be the most representative figure in a growing trend towards engaging with Asian thought and theatrical traditions, especially so given that, as compared with other Western avant-garde anti-illusionist theatre practitioners such as Artaud, Craig and Meyerhold, Brecht shows a genuine interest in Chinese ideas and its philosophy as well as the social and political realities of contemporary China.

It is also notable that, unlike his contemporaries, Brecht deviates from the tradition of romanticizing tendency, which, according to Clarke, is “clearly present within orientalistic discourse throughout its whole history” (20). One need only think about the sharp contrast between Brecht’s Szechwan in which “industrialization and the invasion of European customs” “are infringing upon the
Gods (and upon the morals)” (Journals 76) and James Hilton’s Shangri-La, the fictional paradise in the mountains of Tibet described in Lost Horizon (1933). (Ironically, geographically Tibet and Szechwan are neighboring provinces.). Moreover, Brecht himself warned of the dangers of employing Chinese elements as simple disguises in his plays. On May 1930 when Brecht brooded over the Good Person, he noted that “some attention must be paid to countering the risk of chinoiserie. The vision is of a Chinese city’s outskirts with cement works and so on. There are still gods around but aeroplanes have come in” (Journals 30).

Indeed, if we compare his awareness of the conventions of Chinese culture with Artaud’s understanding of the Balinese culture, the divergence in their perception of Asian cultures is obvious. Artaud’s association of Balinese dance with his conception of the Theatre of Cruelty reflects an escape from rationalism and a stereotyped view of Eastern culture characterized with mysticism and exoticism. Nevertheless, Artaud still shares with Brecht a critical reflection upon Western culture, as both launched an assault on traditional methods of rational inquiry.

Apparently, Brecht’s choice of Chinese settings and references to Chinese sources is not, as has frequently been suggested, the result of a romantic disposition. We are reminded by Berg-Pan that the growing interest in China among the group of German left-wing intellectuals (which Brecht was inevitably involved with) are inseparable from the intellectual and political atmosphere in the years of the Weimar Republic. Within this context, the increasing interest in Chinese literature and philosophy was coupled with concerns of the sociopolitical situation in China. Of the twenties, Berg-Pan wrote,

The revolutionary movement in China had become very powerful and its members fought both against Chiang Kai-shek and the intervention of foreign powers, notably Great Britain. German left-wing writers and intellectuals followed events in China with keen interest and declared their solidarity with the struggling Chinese people in numerous manifestoes, articles, and plays. (Bertolt Brecht and China 17)

Berg-Pan further ascribes this interest in the struggle for the liberation of China’s oppressed working classes to its function in “stir[ring] up the hopes of Germany’s working classes for a better world” (“Mixing Old and New Wisdom” 207). In fact, Brecht’s political involvement and his commitment to the Marxist project did accord with his interests in China.

Like most German left-wing intellectuals, Brecht followed the news about
China: the wars with Japan and the civil war between the Nanking government and the Communists in China. Brecht’s first poem dealing with a “Chinese topic” is about the fall of Tsingtao (a German colony established in mainland China in 1898 and which was captured by Japan in 1914 after a three-month siege). In his journals Brecht specifically recorded his concerns about the progress of revolution in China in the year of 1948: a news clipping posted in his journal titled “Chinese Destiny” analyzes why the Communists with poor weapons were able to wrest their opponents with tanks and artillery and comes to the conclusion that “the old Clausewitzian contention that war is but an extension of polities” is particularly true to Chinese wars (Journals 413). In 1948 after reading an ode by Mao Zedong written during his first flight over the great wall, Brecht wrote: “my expectation of a renaissance of the arts, triggered off by the rising of the Far East, seems to be approaching fulfillment earlier than one might have thought” (Journals 413).

The evidence shows that Brecht’s motivation for using China as background may not be exoticism, but an intellectual and political concern. Nevertheless, for those plays which are set in China or include Chinese references, we still need to decide the degree of historical accuracy of Chinese elements in Brecht’s plays. The Measures Taken, according to Willett, is based on Gerhard Eisler’s experiences as a Comintern emissary in China: “He had been one of a group of foreign Communists—along with Heinz Neumann and Besso Lominadze—who took part in the short-lived Canton Commune of December 1927, and he later returned to China as political secretary of the Communist unions in Shanghai” (176-77). Tatlow further confirms the connection between Brecht’s plot and historical truth in China by saying: “at this time the Comintern agitators were branded as foreign agents by the anti-Communist Koumintang, appealing to the understandable anti-foreign resentment of the Chinese. This is why the Young Comrade endangers his colleagues when he removes the mask” (Mask 262). Nevertheless, the play is never intended for a realistic portrayal of Communist activities in China. The Good Person of Szechwan, though often considered as a parable, could be interpreted as reflecting the oppressive nature of imperialism and Capitalism system in China (implied by the fact that China was involved in the global tobacco industry since the later 19th century). Likewise, one would not deny the fact that China is more of a disguise than a meaningful historical entity in Brecht’s Turandot which deals with the role of the intellectuals. (However, we also note that the Chinoiserie in Turandot is dramatically distinctive from Schiller’s Turandot and Reinhardt’s 1926 Salzburg
production of Gozzi’s *Turandot.*

Even showing the same concerns towards Chinese sociological issues and a serious interest in Chinese philosophy like Alfred Döblin (who based his novel *The Three Leaps of Wang Lun* [1915] upon “careful research and historical documentation” [Berg-Pan 15]) and Sergei Tretiakov (who tried to depict a revolutionary China in *Roar China* [1913]), Brecht, however, took a different path from them. In his novel, Döblin depicted the rise and fall of a historically documented religious sect in the 18th century China. Berg-Pan differentiates the China shown in Döblin’s novel from previous images stating that “Döblin was the first to break with the established tradition in which China was used either as a metaphor for European institutions and concepts or as a country symbolizing peace and serenity” (*Bertolt Brecht and China* 16). Tretiakov’s *Roar China*, though containing “the familiar poetical Chinoiserie”, is set firmly in contemporary China which “portrays the outrageous behavior of European businessmen and militarists in China; their evident contempt for the Chinese eventually provokes a reaction among those long-suffering people” (*Mask* 262). In this sense, the China in the writings of Tretiakov and Döblin differs considerably from the general image of China held by Germans.

Unlike Tretiakov and Döblin, Brecht never intended to portray in minute details life in China. On a closer look of Brecht’s plays which have Chinese sources or refer to Chinese social realities (such as *The Measures Taken* or *The Good Person of Szechwan*), we could easily find that Brecht never aims to give a realistic portrayal of definite historical events, and that by avoiding such portrayals, he demonstrates his rejection of literary realism. Nevertheless, both Tretiakov and Döblin had a great impact upon Brecht’s uses of China: according to Berg-Pan, Brecht saw the production of *Roar China* in Berlin in 1930 and “was impressed by the combination of politics and his new methods of dramatic expression” (“Mixing Old and New Wisdom” 208); he also showed great interest in Döblin’s interpretation of the Daoist concept of *wu wei* (the Taoist principle of non-contention) and praised “its ‘great dynamic force’ which brought everything into motion” (*Bertolt Brecht and China* 15).

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¹ For a comparison of *Roar China* and *The Measures Taken*, and Brecht’s response to the production of *Roar China*, see Tatlow *Mask* pp. 262-264.
Realizing the incongruities between Brecht’s interest in Chinese sociopolitical background and a refusal to depict a realistic China, Berg-Pan argues that China is assigned the function of “disguising German political problems under a ‘far eastern veil’” (Bertolt Brecht and China 5) due to the increasing tension in Germany between the rising of the Nazi and the communist movements. We are tempted to agree with Berg-Pan, partly because using China as a disguise seems to be the most effective strategy to confront the pressing and immediate problems in Germany. However, Berg-Pan’s remarks do not provide us with a fully satisfying explanation, for the very fact that Brecht’s concerns are not strictly limited to a German context. We shall be reminded that although Brecht has never been to China, his interest in the political and social situation in China is integrated with his general concerns of the human race under Capitalism in the general sense. Reviewed against an increasingly interconnected process of world economy and history, China, with its distinctive cultural traits, had begun to share increasing similarities with modern Germany economically, politically and socially; to borrow Tatlow’s words, “China and Europe had begun to share a common history” (Mask 264), meaning the issues that Brecht deals with in his plays are equally important to China.

Likewise, Tatlow has warned us, when he discusses the geographical setting in The Measures Taken, that “[i]t would be a hardy literalist who wished to insist that Brecht wanted to portray the tribulations of the Communist Party in North-east China” (Mask 261). Tatlow’s explanation is linked with the spirit of Brecht’s theory of Verfremdungseffekt; however, surprisingly, Tatlow, in his argument that Chinese theatre are used as a model and an example for Brecht to follow, also suggests that China’s “exoticism” is exploited in Brecht’s plays, such as Man Equals Man, The Exception and the Rule and The Measures Taken, in order to “make strange’ human behavior” (Mask 261). He also reminds us of the necessity of “distinguish [ing] different degrees of exoticism in Brecht’s work” (Mask 260). In other words, we need to be aware that a Chinese setting in his play, aside from fulfilling the Verfremdungseffekt, has a different meaning (and function) than a British, American or Indian setting world: “the ‘Chinese’ setting cannot be compared with the ‘India’ of Mann ist Mann”, because it is related to actual historical events in China (Tatlow Mask 261).

If we wish to assess properly Brecht’s China, even when we acknowledge the importance of “Chinese presence” or the “Chinese dimension” in Brecht’s critical thinking about Chinese theatre and its systems of knowledge (Jameson 3, 13 17;
Tatlow *Mask* 3), the first measure taken is to avoid strictly categorize Brecht’s use of China either to a superficial disguise or to a more substantial connection. Tatlow summarized the two difficulties in isolating and analyzing Brecht’s response:

> We will need to distinguish between levels of engagement, between Chinese disguises and Chinese ideas. … The second difficulty lies in the nature of his interest in philosophy: the very reason why Chinese thought appealed to him makes it hard to assess its impact. Brecht was no systematist; he had a lively distrust of technical philosophy. (*Mask* 349)

*Me-Ti: Book of Changes*, for example, best demonstrates: firstly, the unlikelihood that Brecht would rely on a single philosophical theory as the overarching and guiding one of his career (neither any school of Chinese philosophy nor Marxism), and secondly, the fact that Brecht’s perception and use of China is never unified or consistent, and more often than not, unsystematic and even contradictory. For while the title references *Me-Ti* (the German translation of Mo Zi), the subtitle, *Book of Change*, is taken from Richard Wilhelm’s 1924 translation of the *I-Ching: Book of Changes* (one of the oldest classic Chinese texts which contains the theory of *yin* and *yang*, the theory of complementary opposites). The book borrows the form of the Confucian *Analects*, in which every sentence begins with “The Master said” or “Me-ti said”, but deals with various aspects of political and social developments in the Soviet Union. It is a mixture of Moism, Taoism, and Confucianism, as well as Marx, Engels, Hegel, Lenin and Korsch; Brecht manipulates and links these varied (either conflicting or conflating) traditions to express his political views. Indeed, the example of *Me-Ti* suggests that Brecht’s use of China is complex and motivated by his philosophical vision, political concerns and artistic pursuits. This explains why, even though the readings provided by Tatlow and Berg-Pan are reasonable and justified in specific cases, it still is not possible to generalize a coherent understanding of Brecht’s conception of China.

This study does not intend to raise the question of authority (such as the extent to which Brecht represents China accurately concerning its cultural and historical realities), or the question of intentionality (i.e., what is Brecht’s purpose in setting a play in China?). In belief that Brecht’s use of China depends upon the particular context, I suggest that Brecht appears to have turned to China for four main things.
First of all, China is as employed “an external point” or a critical position to reflect upon the Western cultures. (Even so, China is evidently more than Chinoiserie.) Secondly, Confucianism, Daoism and Moism provide Brecht varying perspectives in his configuration of the human subject, even while it is the differences and affinities between Western and Chinese culture that enrich Brecht’s understanding of man. Thirdly, in his effort to reject dramatic Realism, Brecht’s quest for theatrical techniques finds common ground (albeit with notable differences) between Chinese xiqu and the Western theatrical traditions. Finally, Brecht’s political commitment requires him to reflect upon universal issues that exist both in Germany and China and search for alternatives for the future of humanity. One should always note that these four aspects more often than not overlap and intersect in confusing and complicated ways.

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Emotion, the Enduring Content in Creeley’s Poems

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Abstract: Robert Creeley, a chief representative of Projective Verse, declares that emotion is the most significant content of a poem. Creeley’s declaration is nothing new in the history of both Chinese and Western poetics. Yet it seems to contradict his post-modern background in that post-modern writing aims to get rid of the lyrical ego. An inquiry into love in Creeley’s poetry shows that emotion is always the content of his writing no matter what age he is at.

Keywords: Robert Creeley, emotion, a Poet of Love

Feeling, or perhaps best call it emotion, is for me the most significant content of a poem.

--- Robert Creeley (Essays 491)

It is never easy for a reader to detect the exact emotion or feeling of a poem, just as Laurence D. Lerner says, “A poem in itself can never offer conclusive evidence that the poet did not feel a certain emotion, nor (except on certain rather naïve theories) that he did” (Preminger 329). According to Lerner, consideration of the poet’s emotion must be a descriptive instead of a normative inquiry (Preminger and Brogan 329). This also applies to the present study, which attempts to make a descriptive inquiry into the emotion throughout Creeley’s poems. The emotion singled out for the inquiry is love since it is one of the most universal and

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representative emotions.

Emotion has always been a significant element in poetry. However, it is supposed to lose its significance, at least partly, under the post-modern circumstances since the author or the poet that used to be the thinking subject is now de-centered and thus has died or lost subjectivity: one aim of post-modern writing is to get rid of the lyrical ego. In terms of Creeley’s post-modern background, his remark that emotion is the most significant content of a poem seems unaccountable. The inquiry of this study will tell if Creeley is true to his own remark. Before we examine the emotion in his poems, let’s have a brief look at the relation between emotion and poetry in history.

1. Emotion and Poetry

In the history of both Western and Chinese poetics, emotion has always been closely related with poetry. The creed that marks the opening of Chinese poetics is poetry expresses what is on one’s mind (shi yan zhi). When it first appeared in Shang Shu, Zhi or what is on one’s mind meant “thought and ambition” so that it was related to reason. However, when it came to Chuangzi, a famous thinker in Ancient China, he interpreted Zhi as “will and emotion.” Thus derives the opposition of emotion and reason in Chinese poetics. The undulant surges of emotion and reason have become a driving force in the progression of Chinese poetry. No matter which surge became the mainstream, the evolution of Chinese poetry has made it clear that emotion and reason are both contradictory and complementary. In as early as the 5th century, Liu Xie, a great Chinese literary critic, pointed out in Elaborations on the Literary Mind (Wenxin diaolong) that emotion and reason should supplement each other in literary creation. The issues of emotion and reason were also much debated during the following Tang era (618-907), the so-called “Golden Age” of Chinese poetry, with the emphasis fell on emotion. Yet another great upsurge of critical thinking and writing which arose in the Song period (960-1279) reversed the situation, and made reason superior to emotion. Whether the emphasis fell on emotion or on reason, critics had always been aware that the two were closely related. It was impossible to separate one from the other to make a good poem. Liu Xie’s idea witnessed further development in the Qin Dynasty by Zeng Guofan and Shen Deqian. Zeng stressed that the writer of either prose or poetry must attain to the situation where sincere emotion had to be poured out and where reason
expounded must suffice to convey such emotion (Wu 228). Shen in *Daily Remarks on Poetry* (*Shuoshi zuiyu*) refuted the reason-dominated theory by declaring that reasoning must be conducted with emotion (Shen 249-50).

In modern China, Zhu Ziqin expounded in *On the Idea of Shi Yan Zhi* (*Shi yan zhi bian*) that there had been two trends in the history of Chinese poetry, namely the old trend of poetry expressing thoughts and the new trend of poetry expressing emotion. He held that the new trend had dragged in the shadow of the old one until the Qing Dynasty, when Yuan Mei changed the situation. Yuan not only extended the implication that poetry expresses thoughts but also regarded romance-based poetry—emotion-generated poetry in the narrow sense—as thought-expressing. Since then, the new trend has been widely acknowledged (Zhu 38-39). Gong Liu, a contemporary poet said to the effect that one cannot place the emphasis solely on expressing thoughts because this is only one of the wheels of poetry. There should be other three wheels, namely, expressing emotion (*yuandqing*), residing in imagery (*ji xiang*), and conveying Tao (*zai dao*), so as to make up a four-wheeled vehicle for the poet to drive conveniently even for long journeys (Gong 44). Gong’s categorizing may sound very arbitrary, yet from his words it can be inferred that emotion is indispensable in poetry. Dr. Li Zhimin, who has made a conscientious research into New Chinese Poetry against its Western background, writes in *Poetics Construction: Form and Imagery* (*Shixue Goujian: Xingshi Yu Yixiang*) that expressing emotion has always been an essential character of poetry home or abroad and that it is still the essential character of New Chinese Poetry (Li 15-20). All in all, emotion has always been an indispensable element in both classical and modern Chinese poetry.

Emotion has also been an important element in western poetry and it has been both conflicting with and complementing for reason too. Plato had Socrates speak in *Republic* that feelings such as sorrow, anger, pain and pleasure, “which are held to be inseparable from every action—in all of them poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up” (35). Plato, or at least the fictive Socrates believed that poets should be exiled from the ideal common-wealth for the happiness and virtue of its citizens. The only poetry to be admitted into the ideal republic would be hymns to the gods and praises of famous men. Plato’s words affirm the existence of emotion in poetry on the one hand, and on the other, they identify in a negative way the emotional effect of poetry on the reader. For Plato, eligible poetry is supposed to cultivate reason and negate emotion and sentimentalism. He proposed
to suppress emotion and foster reason in order to be in agreement with divine ideas. The seed of the conflict between emotion and reason has thus been sowed. When it came to Aristotle, emotion assumed a clearer and more positive function. Aristotle wrote in *Poetics*: “Given the same natural qualifications, he who feels the emotions to be described will be the most convincing; distress and anger, for instance, are portrayed most truthfully by one who is feeling them at the moment” (61). By rooting poetry in the emotions of the poet, Aristotle liberated poetry from the dominance of ideas or reason. Meanwhile, he laid an equal importance on reason. In his opinion, when the poet writes his story, “whether already made or of his own making, he should first simplify and reduce to a universal form, before proceeding to lengthen it out by the insertion of episodes” (60). Aristotle’s universal form is similar to Plato’s divine idea, which is another name for reason.

Emotion was suppressed in both life and literature in the Middle Ages, when Scholasticism dominated the Western ideology. Theorists of this period such as Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas preached that literature should break away from the reality and serve the church or God. Literary works that reflected life and emotion were denounced by the church. However, the authoritative theology could scarcely prevent folk secular literature from developing, which presented itself in various genres in local languages or vernaculars rather than in the official language of Latin. Unbound by either the Greek and Roman tradition or the dominant contemporary literary standards, such literature freely expressed thoughts and emotions. A famous representative was Peter Abêla, French philosopher and theologian, who composed songs and love poems and insisted on the stimulating function of emotion in literary creation.

In the Renaissance, although reason reigned poetic creation in that poets turned to Greek and Roman texts for an understanding of form, genre, and technique, emotion still occupied a critical position in poetic composition, as is shown in Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* and *Trionfi*, both with emotion as the theme, capturing the imagination of posterity and cultivating their imitative and critical faculties, in the outbreak of Ovidian love lyrics, in the blooming of lyric forms, and in pastoral poetry, where shepherds lamented from unavailing loves or dead shepherds (Preminger and Brogan 1030-33). Central figures in Renaissance poetry such as Sir Thomas Wyatt, Edmund Spenser, and above all, William Shakespeare demonstrated through their poems that emotion endures in poetry. Other Elizabethan poets contemporary with these masters, including John Donne, Thomas Nash, Thomas
Campion, Ben Johnson, John Milton, also dealt with love and other emotions in various ways.

Emotion found its full expression in Romanticism. In the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, a joint volume with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth declared that “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” (490) He thus established the central position of emotive subjectivity in poetic composition. A similar expression of emotion in poetry can be found in the poems of other romantic poets such as George Gordon Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats. The romantic tradition of emotive subjectivity sustained from the first and second generations, through “the third generation”① of romantic poets, Alfred Tennyson and the Brownings to the fourth generation, Mathew Arnold, George Meredith, and the Rossettis. Emotion continued to play an important role in the late 19th-century poetry which was “filled with the romantic love of the mysterious and the suggestive, with nostalgia, painful love, and religious longing” (Preminger and Brogan 350) typified by the early poetry of William Butler Yeats.

Romantic outburst of emotion was replaced by deliberate craftsmanship in symbolist poetry. Yet emotion still played a part in poetic composition. The symbolists held that in the creation of a symbol “an ambivalence prevails, much in the manner in which music affects us as an immanent experience, a sensual reception impossible to identify with any particular emotion or idea.” (Preminger and Brogan 1256) In order to avoid romantic subjectivity, the symbolists were devoted to concealing their “I” in the object of their creation. Their practice saw an inheritor in T. S. Eliot, an important poet and critic of modernism who believed that poetry is not a “turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion” (“Tradition” 58) and that “The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an ‘objective correlative’” which is “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion.” (“Hamlet” 100) For Eliot,

① Laurence D. Lerner thinks that “romantic” and “Victorian” make an odd pair, since the former attempts to “describe qualities in literature itself (as well as in other arts)” whereas the latter “is simply borrowed from political history.” Therefore he suggests: “It might be better to regard Tennyson and Browning as the third generation of romantic poets, and Arnold, Meredith, and the Rossettis as the fourth.” See Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan, eds. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 348.
although emotion cannot be directly transferred to the reader, it is still the generative power for the poet and the invisible content of the poem. Another master of modernist poetry, Ezra Pound, the founder of the Imagist Movement, attributed great significance to emotion in poetry. Despite the fact that many critics have seen imagism as an effort to make the poem an entity that intensifies objective reality rather than expressing subjective feelings, Pound stressed the key function of emotion in poetry in the two often-quoted remarks: “Nothing endures but emotion” and “Nothing matters save the quality of emotion.” (qtd. in Allen 91)

When poetry entered the post-modern period, it seemed that the role of emotion was to be minimized. Since the subject is de-centered and dispersed, emotion that is supposed to belong to an autonomous subject has trouble in occupying a position in poetry. However, poets in the post-modern period do talk a lot about emotion. For example, poets belonging to the school of Confessionalism such as Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and John Berryman, are known to “treat personal experience, even in its most intimate and painful aspects.” (Preminger and Brogan 61) Robert Creeley, a chief representative of Projective Verse, quoted the above-mentioned remarks of Pound’s on various occasions to emphasize the importance of emotion in poetry. For example, as is mentioned in the introduction, when asked about the standard or measure of a good poem, Creeley answered that one primary measure for him throughout the years is these two remarks of Pound’s. (Allen 91)

2. Emotion and Creeley’s Poetry

Creeley’s poetry appears so abstract and intellectual that the reader tends to regard it as emotionless. However, this is a misconception. Michael Davidson speaks of Creeley as follows: “The value of any statement is not dependent on how much it contains or how well it expresses a given condition but, rather, how accurate it is to the emotional nexus” (555-56). Davidson means that the value of any Creeley statement lies in its accurate relation to emotion. While commenting on On Earth (2006), Hank Lazer points out that from 1995 to 2005, Creeley “unabashedly explored (and embraced) the realm of what we’d usually think of as pure sentimentality” (Earth). Lazer also says: “Earlier in his career, there were plenty of readers who found Creeley’s poetry to be cool, aloof, overly abstract, overly intellectual – a misconception made possible only if the movement and grace of
finely lineated thinking is deemed to be without emotion” (Earth).

Lazer’s words tell us that Creeley’s poetry, whether early or late, is always rich in emotion. This is further testified by Tom Clark, who writes in *Robert Creeley and the Genius of the American Common Place*, “The ache of separation from a common life” is “inscribed in Creeley’s early poetry” (69). The speakers in his early poems appear to be isolated and tortured. By early poetry, Clark means the poetry from the 1940s to the early 1960s. Clark also argues that from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, Creeley’s poetry is imbued with “a new awareness of the human commonalty of all experience”. These poems are marked “with some sacrifice in tension but also a new amplitude of feeling” (70). Still according to Clark, Creeley’s later poems, that is, his poems since the mid-1970s, “speak of life’s basic and immediate pains, needs and pleasures: birth and death, the aging process, distance, time passing, regret, sadness, loss, and the ‘ridiculous/simple happiness’ that come with all living” (70). One fact can be inferred from Clark: emotion endures in Creeley’s poetry.

More intimate proofs can be found in the prefatory notes to the two books (*The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley, 1945-1975 and The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley, 1975-2005*) that collect all Creeley’s poems. In the prefatory note to the first book, Creeley writes: “There is a sense of increment, of accumulation, in these poems that is very dear to me” (*Poems A ix*). He then clarifies this sense of increment by adding that he has not omitted any single poem in this book because “To define their (the poems’) value in hindsight would be to miss the factual life they had either made manifest or engendered” (*Poems A ix*). That is, his poems have either made manifest or engendered the factual life. The factual life cannot be detached from emotion, nor can his poems. The prefatory note to the second book is written by Creeley’s wife Penelope since he has passed away a few months earlier. Penelope says in the note: “In retrospect, I realize the courage such an act takes, the courage artists have every day to produce something out of the raw feelings and intimate perceptions of life, then to hold it up to public scrutiny. In reading these poems again, I hear Robert’s voice, and I see that last twenty-seven years of my own life laid out, almost a diary” (*Poems B vii*). It can be seen from Penelope’s words that the second book is no less a manifestation of the factual life than the first one and that “raw feelings and intimate perceptions of life” are what the poems derive from.

In the book *The Lost America of Love: Rereading Robert Creeley, Edward Dorn, and Robert Duncan*, Sherman Paul calls Creeley a “poet of love” (5). While it is true
that many of Creeley’s poems have something to do with romantic love, it is wrong to assume that this is the only kind of love he deals with. What contributes to the honor of a “poet of love” involves love for women, for friends, for family members and even for the whole nature and humanity.

From the 1940s to the early 1960s, when Creeley’s poetry is inscribed with the “ache of separation from a common life,” love is seen cynically as an “old habitual relationship” (Poems A 128) that is almost synonymous with exchange, conspiracy, and even crisis. The speaker in these poems often appears perplexed by such a relationship. In Part I of For Love, there is a poem entitled “The Operation”:

By Saturday I said you would be better on Sunday.  
The insistence was part of a reconciliation.

Your eyes bulged, the grey  
light hung on you, you were hideous.

My involvement is just an old  
habitual relationship.

Cruel, cruel to describe  
what there is no reason to describe. (Poems A 128)

The hero in this poem speaks to his sick wife in such a way that makes himself sound sick. He knows that it is “cruel” to describe the relationship with his wife in this way. He knows that such description only makes it appear crueler, but he still does it. The indifferent tone in lines such as “The insistence was part of a reconciliation” and “My involvement is just an old / habitual relationship” reflects that love is no tender feeling of affection, but a socialized relationship. It is not out of sincere care that the speaker wishes for his wife’s recovery, but out of the desire to make peace with her that he insists that she would be better. Thus “The insistence was part of a reconciliation.” The hero’s perplexity is shown in the last two lines. He has no idea as to why he describes “what there is no reason to describe.” In another poem of this period, love between friends is named “The Conspiracy”:

The Conspiracy
You send me your poems,
I’ll send you mine.

Things tend to awaken
even through random communication.

Let us suddenly
proclaim spring. And jeer

at the others,
all the others.

I will send a picture too
if you will send me one of you. (Poems A 131)

The exchange of poems and pictures between friends, which is usually thought of as a sign of love, becomes a conspiracy for the speaker. It seems that there is no pure love between friends. The so-called love between friends is not spontaneous affection but rather impure intention to wake up things and “jeer // at the others.” The first and last stanzas show that the speaker is less perplexed than passive. He always does what his friend has done to him. Love given by a friend is taken and returned. Yet it may not be the case for the love between a man and a woman, as is shown in “The Business”:

To be in love is like going out-
side to see what kind of day

it is. Do not
mistake me. If you love

her how prove she
loves also, except that it

occurs, a remote chance on
which you stake

yourself? But barter for
the Indian was a means of sustenance.

There are records. (Poems A 138)

Love is first depicted to be something rather contingent: “To be in love is like going out-side to see what kind of day // it is.” It is then compared to “barter,” the exchange of goods. Just as “barter for / the Indian was a means of sustenance,” so is love between a man and a woman. One has to take and give love to sustain himself / herself. But the problem is: even “If you love // her,” it is not easy to find out if she loves you equally. The only thing you can do is to “stake // yourself” on “a remote chance” and offer your love to her as if she loved you as much. If love is not returned, crisis may arise, as reflected in another poem entitled “The Warning”:

For love—I would
split open your head and put
a candle in
behind the eyes. (Poems A 140)

It is evident that in this poem the speaker’s love is one-sided. He cannot but resort to violence to produce light—a sign of love—in the eyes of his beloved woman.

Although the speaker is perplexed or even hurt by love in these poems, he still trusts it: “But how account for love, even if you look for it? / I trusted it” (Poems A 141). In the poem “Oh No,” despite the fact that the speaker seems not to have discovered the secret of the power of love, he is sure that there will be a place for him among all the friends:

If you wonder far enough
you will come to it
and when you get there
they will give you a place to sit

for yourself only, in a nice chair,
and all your friends will be there 
with smiles on their faces 
and they will likewise all have places. (Poems A 158)

Hugh Kenner thinks that like many Creeley poems, this poem turns on its title “Oh No” (91). The speaker seems to be responding to the question: “Do you know why it is this way?” He cannot answer this question, but he knows it is the way that friends get together. The last poem and also the title poem in For Love states in no clearer terms what love means to the speaker: “Into the company of love / it all returns” (Poems A 258). In other words, everything is possible in the company of love.

Anyway, from the 1940s to the early 1960s, love in Creeley’s poetry is either a habit or an exchange or conspiracy, but the hero still trusts it. At the end of this period, as Creeley “seems to have become more at ease in the world and less haunted by his relations with others,” his poetry is slowly “gaining in humanity and breadth” (Rexroth 92). Such humanity and breadth are amplified in Creeley’s poetry of the next period. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, when his poetry is imbued with “a new awareness of the human commonalty of all experience” (Clark 70), love is less cynically depicted. The hero seems to be more at ease with love, however inaccessible it is. In the bits and pieces of daily life, love, whether present or absent, is somehow with him: “Sit. Eat/a doughnut. // Love’s consistency favors me” (Poems A 383). Love is to give, or to sacrifice, as shown in the following poem:

Pieces of Cake crumbling
in the hand trying to hold
them together to give each
of the seated guests a piece. (Poems A 383)

If we think of the Bible story in which Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples, love in this poem can then emerge between the lines and assume greater significance. Jesus broke the bread, which symbolized his life, for mankind’s salvation. This is holy and sovereign love. Similarly, the hero in this poem is ready to distribute his love to those who come into contact with him, and such distribution is not out of humbleness but out of sincere consideration and with self-dignity, as is shown “The Friends”:
I wouldn’t joke about
your wife wanting to wash
her hair at eleven o’clock
at night but supposing she
wants to I’d consider her
thoughts on the matter equally
with yours wherever your were
and for whatever reason.

Do not think I’m
so awful you can
afford my company
so as not to
put me down more. (Poems A 411)

While putting himself in his friend’s shoes in understanding his wife’s behavior and thoughts, the speaker in this poem maintains self-dignity: “Do not think I’m / so awful you can / afford my company.” Love for friends is evidently more positive and active compared with that of the earlier stage. Love for a woman, or romantic love in the poetry of this period, although less optimistic than love between friends as it is always marked by an absent other, or a woman that he desires to be with but is unable to, runs deeper and ampler. “The Finger,” one of the longest poems in Pieces, is a good example. The speaker searches for his loved woman, but in vain:

… At moments
I knew they had gone but

searched for her face, the pureness
of its beauty, the endlessly sensual—
But no sense as that now reports it. (Poems A 384)

“They” refers to the woman’s image which is shattered by light into “endlessly opening patterns” (Poems A 384). “At moments” the speaker is aware of the
disappearance of the blinding patterns, but he still searches for the woman’s face, for its pure beauty and endless sensuality. Later in this poem, the poet clarifies that this woman is no specific person, but the embodiment of all lovely women or of all lovely qualities in a woman:

She was young,  
she was old,  
she was small.  
she was tall with extraordinary grace. Her face  
was all distance, her eyes  
the depth of all one had thought of,  
again and again and again.

To approach her, to hold her,  
was not possible. (*Poems A 387*)

Louis L. Martz is quite reasonable in observing that it is not possible for the speaker to approach or hold the woman “because her loveliness exists only in theory” (241). Martz believes that the woman is “an abstraction of all ancient mythological qualities named Aphrodite or Athena; not a woman, then, but rather the varied presence of woman-ness” (241). The incapability of reaching the ideal woman persists throughout Creeley’s poetry books from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s including *Pieces, In London, Thirty Things, Backwards, Away*, and *Hello*, reflected in (*Backwards*), and “So There” (*Hello*), to name just a few.

“Here I / am. There / you are” (*Poems A 389*). The speaker’s awareness of his own presence is always accompanied by his consciousness of the other’s absence, which is inevitable because every person is a unique “one” as is shown in the poem “One”: “You are not / me, nor I you.” (*Poems A 396*) It is a matter of fact that presence is impossible without absence, as Creeley says: “‘here,’ as a habit, is what we are lacking here” (*Poems A 424*).

Compared with the speaker in earlier poems, the speaker in these poems are more at ease with the absence or departure of love:
How That Fact of
seeing someone you love away
from you in time will
disappear in time, too.

Here is all there is,
but there seems so
insistently across the way.

Heal it, be
patient with it—be quiet. (Poems A 438)

The speaker has come to know that the hurt caused by seeing the loved one go
away “will / disappear in time,” that “Here” is all he has, and that “there” is always
“insistently across the way” beyond his reach. He is not eager to take hold of it by
means of exchange or conspiracy, nor does he border on crisis any longer. Instead,
he keeps on longing for or pursuit after love: “Do not leave me. / Love me. One by
one;” (Poems A 397) “I want you. I am still alone, / but want you with me;” (Poems
A 441) “In / bed I yearn / for softness, turning / always to you. Do not, // one wants
cry, / desert me!” (Poems A 488) Love is no longer defined in terms of exchange
value, but by a self-sufficient meaning:

Whatever constitutes
the act of love,
save physical

encounter, you are
dear to me,
not value as

with banks—but a meaning self-
sufficient… (Poems A 480)

These are the opening lines of “The Act of Love” collected in In London. It tells
that no matter what “constitutes / the act of love,” love is “dear” to the speaker not in
the sense of money, but in “a meaning self-/sufficient.” Cynthia Dubin Edelberg thinks that in this poem Creeley’s “careful tenderness seems to stem more from his painful, insistent longing to love ‘Everywhere, / everyone’ than from his affection” for a particular woman (152), which testifies to the fact that love in this period runs deeper and ampler.

With deeper and ampler love, the speaker seems to have come to terms with the reality, trying to be content with what he has: “Happy the man who loves what/ he has and worked for it also” (Poems A 414). Life is what it is despite what has happened and what will happen, or in other words, despite what is absent. Most importantly, his love is expanded to nature and to all humanity as well:

I’ll miss the small birds that come
for the sugar you put out
and bread crumbs. They’ve
made the edge of the sea domestic
and, as I am, I welcome that. (Poems A 484)

This is the beginning part of “The Birds,” collected in In London. The speaker admits here that he will “miss the small birds that come” for the food, for “They’ve // made the edge of the sea domestic.” The words “miss” and “domestic” denote how much he loves the birds. He will miss them just because he loves them. The edge of the sea is a wild place, but owing to the birds, it becomes “domestic” or warm and homely. For the ones that make a place domestic, isn’t the feeling love? At the end of the poem, the speaker acknowledges his love for life and nature: “I love water, I love water— // but I also love air, and fire.” Water is where all life starts. The repetition of “love” and the italicization of the second “love” both indicate the poet’s deep love for life. The last line tells that his love is not confined to life but to all nature represented by such basic elements as “air” and “fire.” His love for all humanity is typified in the poem “People”: “See the form of their / movement pass, like the wind’s. // I love you, I thought, suddenly.” (Poems A 491) Watching people passing by, the speaker feels a spontaneous love for them. In fact, he not only loves those who come into his sight, but the “myriad people:”

I’ll never die or else will

71
be the myriad people all
were always and must be—

in a flower, in a
hand, in some
passing wind. (Poems A 491)

The speaker identifies himself with the “myriad people,” who are then identified with “a flower,” “a hand” or “some passing wind.” Therefore, to love the “myriad people” is to love himself and nature as well.

From the mid-1970s on, when Creeley’s poems “speak of life’s basic and immediate pains, needs and pleasures, birth and death, the aging process, distance, time passing, regret, sadness, loss, and the ‘ridiculous, / simple happiness’ that come with all living” (Clark 69), romantic love fades out while love for friends, family members, and all humanity continues. Ekbert Fass points out: “The dramatis personae of Life and Death (1998) as well as their joys and woes stand for ‘Humanness, like / you, man. Us’” (324). As the poet is faced with the process of aging, his penchant for the commonplace has found appropriate expression. He tells us that in his head is: “a common room, / a common place, a common tune, / a common wealth, a common doom” (Poems B 529).

Meanwhile a desire to love friends and family members and to be loved by them is expressed throughout volumes from Later to On Earth. “Place,” a poem in Later, is an example:

This is empty landscape,
in spite of its light,
air, water—
the people walking the streets.

I feel faint here,
too far off, too
enclosed in myself,
cannot make love a way out.

I need the old-time density,
the dirt, the cold,  
the noise through the floor—  
my love in company. (Poems B 103)

The place isolated from friends is empty and alien for the speaker. Being alone, “enclosed” in himself without friends, he “feels faint” and “cannot make love a way out.” He desires “old-time density” and his “love in company.” “Love has no other friends/ than those given it” (Poems A 191). The two lines from Mirrors express the speaker’s firm belief in love. He thinks that love is “as true/as water-- // as sky’s light, ground’s / solidness, rock’s hardness.” Such sincere and true love is reflected in Memory Gardens by an indulgence in memories of love for his family and friends. He misses his mother: “Could you come back again, / bones and all, / just to talk / in whatever sound, // like letters spelling words, / this one says, Mother, / I love you-- / that one, my son” ) (Poems B 272) and his father: “Father’s odor / in bed years ago” (Poems B 273).

The poet’s love for his wife is best exemplified in a poem in Windows entitled “Age.” Faced with the problem of aging and the deterioration of health, she is “crucial” to him:

I stood so close  
to you I could have  
reached out and  
touched you just  
as you turned  
over and began to  
snore not unattractively,  
no, never less than  
attractively, my love,  
my love – but in this  
curiously glowing dark, this
finite emptiness, you, you, you
are crucial...(Poems B 337)

As his wife slept, the speaker stood so close to her that he could have touched her, but he did not, which is a sign of deep love. He only watches her turning and listens to her snoring “attractively,” which is another sign of deep love. The repeated use of “my love” with the second one italicized, and of “you,” all italicized, adds to the sense that his love for her runs deep. For Love is the volume that has brought Creeley fame and he affirms in Echoes, the third volume from the last, that love is all that he is for:

For Nothing Else

For nothing else,
this for love

for what other
one is this

for love once
was and is

for love,
for love. (Poems B 404)

“For nothing else,” but “for love,” which “was and is” always the case. “For love” is repeated four times in this short eight-line poem, producing resounding echoes. From love, he rises to fame; and in love, his poetic career comes to rest. The last two poems of Creeley (“To My/Little: Pen’s Valentine” and “Valentine for you”) dedicated to love puts a perfect coda to his career as a “poet of love.”

All the above analyses testify to Creeley’s remark that emotion, or love in particular, is the most significant content of a poem. With love, other emotions come out subtly and sincerely. For love of his company, he feels pain and anxiety in
isolation. For love of a woman, he feels joyful when united and tortured when separated. For love of the family, he misses the lost ones and enjoys the domestic bliss. For love of all humanity, he eulogizes the commonplace and values other life forms. For love of everything and everyone, he feels an increasing fear of aging and death from the middle age on. A poet of love is a poet of emotion, whose poetry is bound to bear evidence to the statement that “emotion endures in poetry.”

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Incredible Style (Cervantes - De Sade)*

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Abstract: Satirical novels can be read as devices for thinking about poetry, especially when characters are represented as exceeding or falling short of their supposed standards of eloquence. Proceeding from the premise that poetry is a language-organism alien both to its author and its witnesses, this essay shows how discourses on poetic authority are present in Miguel de Cervantes’ Don Quixote (1605-10) and the Marquis de Sade’s Justine (1791).

Keywords: Novels, Satire, Poetic Authority, Alienness, Thomas Love Peacock, Miguel de Cervantes, the Marquis de Sade

Introduction

In his infamous pseudo-dismissal of poetry, “The Four Ages of Poetry”, the satirical English novelist Thomas Love Peacock claims:

in whatever degree poetry is cultivated, it must necessarily be to the neglect of some branch of useful study: and it is a lamentable spectacle to see minds, capable of better things [i.e. the modern sciences], running to seed in the specious indolence of these

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empty aimless mockeries of intellectual exertion.\(^1\)

Peacock’s friend Percy Bysshe Shelley, the Romantic poet, responded to this article with a brilliant manifesto, “A Defence of Poetry”, where he counters Peacock, declaring that poetry is “the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own”, that “[i]t is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred.”\(^2\) Unable to reconcile these positions into a sustainable poetic career of his own, Peacock wrote novels which cast the disciplines of human art and science as characters around a well-stocked dinner table, each speaker contorted into the comedy of allegorising its own self-proclaiming intellectual trade.\(^3\)

Peacock’s close ties to the Romantic poets, his own failed poetic career, and his ambivalence about poetry’s task in the struggle to better the human condition—these all make Peacock a useful prelude to thinking about poetry through the novel. A footnoted passage in his second novel *Melincourt*, quoting from Lord Monboddo’s *Antient Metaphysics*, is one of many pieces of pseudo-scholarly evidence used in

\(^1\) Thomas Love Peacock, “The Four Ages of Poetry” [1820]; text online at: http://www.thomaslovepeacock.net/FourAges.html; originally published in Ollier’s Literary Miscellany. I note here that it was my curiosity about Peacock which initiated the thinking in this essay, and my first exposure to his work was through the encouragement of the passing reference to Peacock’s novel Crotchet Castle in a speculation on J.H. Prynne’s “The Plant Time Manifold Transcripts” in: Jow Lindsay, “Excerpt from an Open Letter to J.H. Prynne”, in *Quid* 17, For J.H. Prynne, In Celebration, edited by Keston Sutherland (Brighton: Barque Press, 24th June 2006), pp. 35-9 (35).


\(^3\) Note especially the satire on Kantian metaphysics in Peacock, *Melincourt: or Sir Oran Haut-ton* [1817], Ch. XXXI (“Cimmerian Lodge”), in *The Novels of Thomas Love Peacock* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. Ltd.; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903), pp. 666–72, which treats of the poet Mr. Mystic and the calamities that befell him at his radically non-illuminated dwelling on the “Island of Pure Intelligence”. 
Melincourt to buttress an intellectual fantasy adhered to by Mr. Sylvan Forester, one of the novel’s protagonists, who maintains that humankind has undergone a progressive degeneration in its physical dimensions, proportional with a progressive corruption of human values and culture. This familiar Golden Age thinking has parallels with Peacock’s thesis in “The Four Ages of Poetry”, written three years later, but the closest Peacock comes to addressing such a connection is in his quotation of Lord Monboddo. In the course of speculating on the people of ancient Greece and the consciousness among them of an historical class of heroes, titanic in size and sentiment alike, Monboddo writes:

I believe there was not the most vulgar man in Greece, who did not believe that those heroes were very much superior, both in mind and body, to the men of after-times. Indeed, they were not considered as mere men, but as something betwixt gods and men, and had heroic honours paid them, which were next to the divine. On the stage they were represented as of extraordinary size, both as to length and breadth; for the actor was not only raised upon very high shoes, which they called cothurns, but he was put into a case that swelled his size prodigiously (and I have somewhere read a very ridiculous story of one of them, who, coming upon the stage, fell and broke his case, so that all the trash with which it was stuffed came out and was scattered upon the stage in view of the whole people). This accounts for the high style of ancient tragedy, in which the heroes speak a language so uncommon, that, if I considered them as men nowise superior to us, I should think it little better than fustian, and should be apt to apply to it what Falstaff says to Pistol: ‘Pr’ythee, Pistol, speak like a man of this world’. ¹

¹ Lord Monboddo, Antient Metaphysics [1779–99], quoted in Peacock, Melincourt, Ch. XIX (“The Excursion”), pp. 597–604 (600), in the second part of the footnote appended to “Herodotus”. Compare this passage with Peacock’s first novel, Headlong Hall (1815), Ch. XI (“The Anniversary”), pp. 58–62 (60-1), where Mr. Cranium uses two monstrous neologisms—the first in Greek (“osteosarchæmatosplanchnochondroneuromuelous”) and the second, “more intelligible”, in
Peacock must have seen here a satirical vision of the conditions for poetry’s possibility, for its survival in a technological age: a poet requires stilts, a figure-amplifying costume, and a stage, which spectacular paraphernalia would be the means of neutralising the propensity for rebuke of the real linguistic manifestation of what Shelley calls “the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own”, i.e. poetry. More specifically, Peacock saw here an image of his own poetic impossibility: the condition for writing in the unconditional language of poetry is a super-human disguise, a mask symbolic of divine inspiration. Peacock possessed an intuitive, sympathetic understanding of Shelley’s convictions about the gravity and necessity of poetry, but without the power to really address this concept through the developmental architecture and design of his novels, as greater novelists like Miguel de Cervantes and the Marquis de Sade have done.

**Incredible Style in the Novel**

What do satirical novels of the European tradition offer as a means for thinking about poetry? They contain a very specific narrative device, the calling-card of a strain of embodied or immanent discourse about the alienness of poetry. The general identity of the device is this: a character speaks in a style, or with some knowledge, presented as either beyond their own competency or beyond the measure of what a reasonably intelligent (which is not to say “learned”) interlocutor might expect to comprehend. Some limit of competency has been breached, be it the assumed competence-level of the speaker, or that of their interlocutor. A sense of the alien

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Latin ("osseocarnisanguineoviscericartilaginonervomedullary")—in his announcement to Squire Headlong’s dinner guests about the lecture he will very shortly be giving. See also François Rabelais, *The Works of Rabelais* [1532–64], Bk II, Ch. VII (“How Pansagruel came to Paris, and of the choice books of the library of St. Victor”), translated by Sir Thomas Urquhart and Peter Anthony Motteux [1653–94] ([London]: The Bibliophilist Society, [1890]), pp. 136–42 (140), where, amongst other fabulous works, there is this title entered upon the library catalogue of St. Victor: “Antipericatametanaparbeugedamphicribrationesmendicantium”. And see Rabelais, Bk IV, Ch. XV (“How the ancient custom at nuptials is renewed by the catchpole”), pp. 437-9.

predominates in either case: projected onto the speaker by the resistance of the interlocutor/narrator, and projected onto the auditor by the speaker’s resistance to speaking in a more comprehensible way. The interlocutor/narrator becomes thereby a commentator, criticising the language of the foremost speaker. This commentator is naturally sure of their own authority on the question of what is stylistically appropriate to the socio-linguistic occasion (an occasion often defined by the economic class of the speakers). Those who speak this relatively alien tongue might exceed the expectations of some identity class: too young; too uneducated; lacking too much some specific life-spirit; they might be presumed to lack initiation into an exclusive domain of savoir-faire and its attendant jargon. Or any of these parameters might be flipped: what matters is that the character who reports upon this speech (whether present auditor or narrative historian) cannot believe it possible for such a character to speak in the way they have done.

This is to be distinguished from those speakers presumed to be putting on airs in self-aggrandising shows of learned inauthenticity, speechifying like some “funny talker” from a “seat of higher learnin” (to quote American poet Edward Dorn’s great comic epic Gunslinger).⁠Edward Dorn, Gunslinger [1975], Bk I [1968], Collected Poems, edited by Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, et al (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2012), pp. 389–430 (396); Gunslinger, Bk I (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989), pp. 1–42 (8).⁠① Rabelais gives us a rich picture of this when he has

Miss Lil! I intervened
you mustn’t slap my
Gunslinger on the back
in such an off hand manner
I think the sun, the moon
and some of the stars are
kept in their tracks
by this Person’s equilibrium
or at least I sense some effect
on the perigree and apogee of all
our movements in this, I can’t quite say,
man’s presence, the setting sun’s
Pantagruel encounter a university student who advertises his learning by using Latin vocabulary to stylise his native French to the point of incomprehension. This pretense enrages Pantagruel and his companions, leading one of them to declare:

“Without doubt, sir, this fellow would counterfeit the language of the Parisians; but he doth only flay the Latin, imagining, by so doing, that he doth mightily pindarize it in most eloquent terms, and strongly conceiteth himself to be therefore a great orator in the French, because he disdaineth the common manner of speaking.”

attention I would allude to
and the very appearance
of his neurasthenic mare
a genuine Nejdee
lathered as you can see, with abstract fatigue

Shit, Slinger! you still got that
marvelous creature, and who is this
funny talker, you pick him up
in some sludgy seat of higher
learnin, Creeps! you always did
hang out with some curious refugees.

Note that an early review of Gunslinger critiques the poem’s final book for promoting the speech of Miss Lil to an uncharacteristically advanced style, which apparent infringement occurs when Miss Lil provides some obscure scientific information to her fellow protagonist-heroes. See Geoffrey Ward, “Gunslinger IIII”, Perfect Bound 1 (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 74-76.

Rabelais, Bk II, Ch. VI (“How Pantagruel met with a Limosin, who affected to speak in learned phrase”), pp. 134-5. See also Bk II, Ch. IX (“How Pantagruel found Panurge, whom he loved all his life-time”), pp. 146-9, wherein Panurge, wounded and starving, begs food and assistance from Pantagruel in thirteen different foreign tongues, to the great incomprehension of Pantagruel and his companions, before finally speaking in French, Panurge’s native tongue, and the language in which he was by Pantagruel initially addressed.
Such instances, where “the common manner of speaking” is learnedly spurned, participate in the economy of speech discussed here; but they are not the focused concern of this essay. Rather, this essay is concerned with those instances where the diamond limits of expectation are shattered by an intensity of passion or inspiration. When characters are made to speak impossibly above their positions, or impossibly below them, their language, cast in Incredible Style, imitates the dramatic movement into consciousness of a poetical vehicle. This vehicle carries a body of alien truth, discontinuous with the world as we have known it, because the world is what we have failed persistently to know.

The shock of disbelief in the face of Incredible Style is the symbolic indication that a discourse on poetry’s service in the protection and delivery of truth is structurally embedded within the satirical repertoire of the European novel. This

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1 See Peacock, *Nightmare Abbey* [1818], Ch. VIII, pp. 127–32, a satire upon the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

2 See Rabelais, Bk I, Ch. XIII (“How Gargantua’s wonderful understanding became known to his father Grangousier, by the invention of a torch-cul or wipe-breech”), pp. 30-3, wherein the five-year old Gargantua, after running through a litany of those objects with which he has experimentally wiped his ass, declares: “And think not, that the felicity of the heroes and demigods, in the Elysian fields, consisteth either in their Asphodele, Ambrosia, or Nectar, as our old women here use to say; but in this (according to my judgment) that they wipe their tails with the neck of a goose, holding her head betwixt their legs, and such is the opinion of Master John of Scotland”. Note that it is not in the face of such incredible rhetorical flourish, but after Gargantua’s earlier display of some tautological reasoning regarding the unnecessity of wiping one’s ass before shitting, that Gargantua’s father declares, “I will make thee very shortly proceed doctor in the Belles Lettres, by G—, for thou hast more wit than age”, and proceeds in the following chapter to seek out for him a distinguished tutor, drawing an historical analogy to Aristotle’s instruction of Alexander the Great.

device can be discovered in Rabelais, Cervantes, Laurence Sterne, de Sade, Thomas Carlyle, and David Foster Wallace. From this provisional list Cervantes

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4. Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Times of Herr Teufelsdröckh* [1836] (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 2002). See Bk I, Ch. XI (“Prospective”), pp. 81–90 (86): “[. . .] continues he [Hofrath Heuschrecke], with an eloquence which, unless the words be purloined from Teufelsdröckh [no “ordinary mortal”], or some trick of his, as we suspect, is well-nigh unaccountable”. The bracketed quotation is from a description of Herr Diogenes Teufelsdröckh in Bk III, Ch. X (“The Dandiacal Body”), pp. 279–93 (293), which chapter is of particular interest in regards to dialectical materialism and class struggle.

5. David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (London: Abacus, 1996). See the ‘professional conversationalist’ episode early in the novel, in the section headed “1 April—Year of the Tucks Medicated Pad”, pp. 27–31. See also three moments occurring within the extensive “Notes and Errata”, pp. 983–1079, which refer back to the Eschaton match described in the section headed “8 November / Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment / Interdependence Day / Gaudeamus Igitur”, pp. 321–42. Eschaton, “the most complicated children’s game anybody around [the Enfield Tennis Academy]’d ever heard of” (p. 322), involves adolescent tennis prodigies playing as warring governments on an international stage, engaging in nuclear combat by slamming tennis balls into each others’ territories, with intensive real-time computation of detail-rich background scenario conditions. ¶ The first instance is in note 123, pp. 1023-5 (reference p. 323 of the main body text), which is protagonist Hal Incandenza’s dictation, *from memory*, of math wiz Michael Pemulis’ explanation of the “Mean-Value Theorem for Integrals”, a means of speedily calculating the
and de Sade are singled out in the analyses that follow.

**Don Quixote**

Our subject is Sancho Panza, ingenious unread squire to the gentleman bookworm-turned-knight, Don Quixote. Throughout *Don Quixote*, Sancho talks. And he does so to the great, though progressively ineffectual, disapproval of his master. ① His speech is an endless source of amusement, shame, confusion,

“[p]ractical distribution of total megatonnage” among the Eschaton combatants. Hal’s memory of this mini-lecture is so precise (even though he is incompetent in mathematics) that he reproduces Pemulis’ malapropisms and grammatical mistakes, marking their numerous instances with the notation “[sic]”. And not without style, Hal inserts the notice “[occasional verbal flourishes Hal’s — HJI]” early in the transcription, following the presumably un-Pemulis-like usage, “past thermonuclear largesse”. ¶ The second instance is in note 127, p. 1025 (reference p. 325), which is a qualification regarding Hal’s literary stylisation of Otis Lord’s “TRIGSIT” (i.e. narration of Eschaton’s background story or “Triggering Situation” that prompts and sets the diegetic coordinates for the nuclear war to be fought in an Eschaton match): “A lot of these little toss-ins and embellishments are Inc. amusing himself, not Otis’s TRIGSIT, which is 100% all biz.” ¶ The third instance is in note 130, p. 1025 (reference pp. 337-8), which is a similar notice regarding Hal’s ornamentation of indirect speech, as we are informed that when “Pemulis howls that Lord is in his vacillation appeasing Ingersoll in Ingersoll’s effort to fatally fuck the very breath and bread of Eschaton”, he “doesn’t actually literally say ‘breath and bread.’”

① See Cervantes, Pt I, Ch. XX (“Of the unexampled and unheard-of adventure which was achieved by the valiant Don Quixote of La Mancha with less peril than any ever achieved by any famous knight in the world”), pp. 131–41 (141), wherein Quixote chastises his squire: “For the future bear one thing in mind, and see to it you curb and restrain your loquacity in my company. In all the books of chivalry I have read, and they are innumerable, I never met with a squire who talked so much to his lord as you do to yours. In fact I feel it to be a great fault of yours and of mine; yours, that you have so little respect for me and mine, that I do not make myself more respected. There was Gandalin, the squire of Amadis of Gaul, who was Count of the Ínsula Firme. We read of him that he always addressed his lord with his cap in his hand, his head bowed down, and his body bent double, *more turquesco*. And what shall we say of Gasabal, the squire of Galaor? He was so silent that in order to convey the greatness of his marvelous taciturnity his name is only
annoyance, and embarrassment for Quixote.⁰ Speech is a particular point of pride once mentioned in the whole of that history, which is as long as it is truthful. From all I have said you will gather, Sancho, that there must be a difference between master and servant, between lord and lackey, between knight and squire. So from this day forward we must observe more respect and take less liberties”.

⁰ Consider, by analogy to speech, Sancho’s pre-defecatory flatulence, in Cervantes, Pt I, Ch. XX (“Of the unexampled and unheard-of adventure . . .”), p. 137: “‘What was that noise, Sancho?’ asked Don Quixote when he heard it. ¶ ‘I don’t know, señor,’ answered the squire. ‘It must be something new, for adventures and misadventures don’t stop, once they start.’” Regarding this last expression, compare Rabelais, Bk II, Ch. XXXIII (“How Pantagruel became sick, and the manner how he was recovered”), pp. 215-6 (215): “because one mischief seldom comes alone”, said in the course of noting that Pantagruel suffers not only a bout of constipation, but also untenantly hot urine. ¶ There is a great curiosity in the history to the translation of the Cervantes passage. Without regarding explicitly abridged versions of the text, virtually all English translations of Don Quixote—Shelton (1612/1620), Stevens (1700, revision of Shelton), Motteux (1700/1712), Jarvis (1742), Smollett (1755), Ozell (1771, revision of Motteux), Smirke (1818), Ormsby (1885), Watts (1888), Smith (1911), Putnam (1949), Cohen (1950), Starkie (1957), Grossman (2003), Rutherford (2001), Lathrop (2005/2010), Montgomery (2009), and Reed (2009, revision of Smollett), to name all of the texts I have been able to access—put this passage into more or less accurate and literal renditions of the original Spanish. For example, Cervantes’ “las auenturas y deſuenturas nunca comiençan por poco” (Don Quixote de la Mancha: An Old-Spelling Control Edition Based on the First Editions of Parts I and II, prepared by R.M. Flores, Vol. I, [Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988], p. 189) becomes, in the unrevised Ormsby, The ingenious gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha, Vol. I (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1885), p. 320: “‘adventures and misadventures never begin with a trifle.’” Or it becomes in J.M. Cohen, The Adventures of Don Quixote (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), p. 154: “‘these adventures and misadventures never begin for nothing’”. These are typical of the mostly unassuming history of the passage’s translation, but I find them inferior to the version of Jones and Douglas (1981). The Jones and Douglas translation claims to be a revision of Ormsby (with most of the work completed by Douglas before his untimely death), though in their rendering of this passage, Jones and Douglas very much exceed the humble terms of the intervention described in Jones’ preface, pp. ix–xii (xi). Their version (given at the top of this footnote) decisively breaks away from four centuries of relative consensus, by the explicit introduction of a sense of urgent momentum, of the persistent
reality of dialectic, of the inevitability of profound transformation. This departure from Cervantes’ idiom and the convention of its English translation is especially radical because it occurs in a scene of symbolic power and developmental significance, a chapter whose simplicity of abjection (however politely Latinised) makes it just the kind of episode that gets purged in an abridged edition. I read this episode as very much a centerpiece to Quixote’s first round of adventures, and it is in this crucial chapter, which reeks of a peasant’s shit, while Quixote and Sancho are near to dying of thirst, holding vigil through the night to the crashing sound of a waterfall and the ceaseless battering of fulling-hammers (which the adventurers believe are thrashing, blood-thirsty giants)—it is in this chapter that Jones and Douglas rear their redactive powers in a most creative light, casting a bold illumination upon the historical and dialectical meaning of Sancho’s fearful and rather unavoidably desperate response to his shamed (and also very frightened) master. I grant, however, that I have not studied the Jones and Douglas revision well enough to know how unique such an exhibition of writerly exuberance within their work actually is. ¶ The Jones and Douglas version is taken up and blatantly travestied by Burton Raffel, *Don Quijote: A New Translation*, edited by Diana de Armas Wilson (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995/1999), p. 115: “‘once they get started these adventures and misadventures don’t ever stop.’” It is not for nothing that Sancho’s response to Quixote, in the Jones and Douglas version, ends with the word “start”. In his “Translator’s Preface”, pp. xvii–xviii, Raffel makes no mention of any of the English translations, claiming to have worked directly from the Spanish. Yet his distortion of Jones and Douglas proves this to be patently untrue. The mild stench of fraudulence is intensified by the editorial introduction, pp. vii–xvi, where de Armas Wilson refers to Raffel’s version as a “sprightly new translation”. She goes on to refer to their correspondence, wherein she quotes Raffel emphasising his great intimacy with the Spanish original; and she praises the Herculean effort of his “attempts to match, in English prose, what he calls Cervantes’s ‘matchless original’” (p. xv). De Armas Wilson’s introduction exhibits well enough an understanding of *Don Quixote’s* revolutionary-political significance, but this understanding is not brought to bear upon the history of the work’s translation, which is especially surprising considering Raffel’s adoption of Jones and Douglas’ radical and welcome “revision” of so ripe a passage as Sancho’s description of his own forthcoming shit. De Armas Wilson’s editorial indifference to this question, and Raffel’s refusal to acknowledge his obvious translator-predecessors in this especial instance, is brazen and unscholarly. For its simultaneous daring and modesty, the Jones and Douglas edition deserves renewed publication. ¶ Purposefully not listed in the catalogue of translations given above, note the wayward agreeability of *Don Quixote’s* second translation into English, by John Phillips, with
for Quixote, who, doomed to slapstick failure in his knight-errant exploits, rarely fails to shock his interlocutors with the eloquence and clarity of his speech. Sancho’s talking, meanwhile, develops in the second part of Don Quixote into a very different kind of incredible phenomenon, provoking amazement and a transformative understanding in Quixote. As this transformation begins to work, Quixote says to his hosts, a duke and duchess:

“I would have your graces understand that Sancho Panza is one of the most amusing squires that ever served knight-errant.

the relevant passage reading as follows: “the Devil has always five Acts to his play” (The History of the most Renowned Don Quixote of Mancha: and his Trusty Squire Sancho Pancha, now made English according to the Humour of our Modern Language [London, 1687], p. 88; available at Early English Books Online: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/). ¶ Note that the translation of A.J. Duffield, The Ingenious Knight, Don Quixote de la Mancha, III Vols (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1881) blatantly skips over the scene of Sancho’s defecation, purging it completely from the text, where it should appear in Vol. I, ca. pp. 255-6. Yet Duffield strenuously defends the credibility of his translation; see “Of this Translation and Others”, one of the edition’s various introductory essays, in Vol. I, pp. xli–lx (xliii): “When I began to make this new translation I proposed to myself to preserve, as far as in me lay, all the excellences of the original, and to enable all classes of readers to see the Ingenious Knight through a clean glass, free from stain of blue or green or other colour.” It is no surprise that Duffield invokes “all classes” in drumming up the sham-transparency of his travesty, because the work opens with a dedication to the British Prime Minster William Ewart Gladstone, pp. v-vi (vi), which proclaims: “[Cervantes] was one of the most renowned refiners of taste and manners of whom Christendom can boast, and, though dead, yet speaks in all the languages of the polite nations of the world.” What is strange about Duffield’s elision this is that Cervantes takes obvious pains to use no vulgar word or expression in the description of Sancho’s defecation; he describes this misadventure with utmost tact and politesse, and this is part of what makes the episode so entertaining. Duffield’s censorship cannot be a function of revulsion from the mere abject: his censorship of this great episode of Don Quixote can only make sense in light of class warfare. It can only make sense as a manifestation of liberal violence, defined as cutting out anything that stinks of revolution and naming the remainder as the totality, representative of the interests of “all classes”. This largely forgotten Quixote comes to us reeking most of that which its translator attempts so discretely to deny.
Sometimes there is a simplicity about him so shrewd that it is an
amusement to try and make out whether he is simple or sharp; he
has mischievous tricks that show him to be a rogue, and
blundering ways that prove him to be a fool. He doubts
everything and believes everything; when I think he is about to
fall headlong from sheer stupidity, he comes out with something
shrewd that raises him up to the skies.” ①

But before Quixote is able to make such profound dialectical admission, knight
and squire are preparing for their second round of adventures. As Sancho works up
to addressing the question of his compensation for those services he shall render to
Quixote, Sancho’s penchant for malapropism lands itself upon a revelatory utterance.
In declaring himself entirely obedient to the learned will of his master, Sancho utters
the truly unheard-of phrase, “I am so fossil . . .”. And Quixote is left with a choice:
to give himself over to an imaginative encounter with a painful truth; or to purge the
abnormality from Sancho’s language, rendering it consonant with his own
world-fantasy. The relevant passage, with its necessary context, reads thus (Pt II, Ch.
VII):

> While Don Quixote and Sancho were shut up together, they
> had a discussion which the history records with great precision
> and scrupulous exactness. “Señor,” Sancho said to his master, “I
> have reduced my wife to let me go with your worship wherever
> you choose to take me.”
>
> “Induced, you should say, Sancho,” said Don Quixote, “not
> reduced.”
>
> “Once or twice, as well as I remember,” replied Sancho, “I
> have begged your worship not to correct my words as long as
> you understand what I mean by them. If you don’t understand
> them say ‘Sancho,’ or ‘devil, I don’t understand you.’ And if I
> don’t make my meaning plain, then you may correct me, for I am

① Cervantes, Part II, Ch. XXXII (“Of the reply Don Quixote gave his censurer, with other
incidents, grave and droll”), pp. 600–11 (608-9).
“I don’t understand you, Sancho,” said Don Quixote at once. “For I do not know what ‘I am so fossil’ means.”

“So fossil’ means I am so much that way,” replied Sancho.

“I understand you still less now,” said Don Quixote.

“Well, if you can’t understand me,” said Sancho, “I don’t know how to put it. I don’t know any more, God help me.”

“Oh, now I have hit on it,” said Don Quixote. “You mean you are so docile, tractable, and gentle that you will accept whatever I tell you, and submit to what I teach you.”

In describing this dialogue as “a discussion which the history records with great precision and scrupulous exactness”, Cervantes explicitly draws attention to the letter of the text, a domain of textual detail more typically associated with poetry. Of course, even the phrase “great precision and scrupulous exactness” is itself a translation, but the crucial linguistic aspect of this passage is more or less present to English readers, in that the relevant words in both languages are Latinate in derivation: “fossil” / “focil” and “docile” / “docil”. Furthermore, in Old Spanish and American English, Sancho’s usage and Quixote’s emendation together form two halves of a rhyme.

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1 Cervantes, Pt II, Ch. VII (“Of what passed between Don Quixote and his Squire, together with other very notable incidents”), pp. 457–62 (458).

2 This flags up a site of significant difference between American and British English: in British English, “docile” does not rhyme with “fossil”. This transatlantic ambiguity is avoided by the tradition that translates the Spanish “focil” as “focile”; e.g. Smirke (1818), Watts (1888), Cohen (1950), Starkie (1957), and Raffel (1995). In addition to securing the rhyme sound, this translation also introduces a different semantic register: the English “focile” is an anatomical word referring to bones in the arms and legs. Some other translations use “focible” (which is not an English word, though close to “forcible”) and “docible” (an obsolete synonym for “docile”). From Flores’ Don Quixote de la Mancha: An Old-Spelling Control Edition, Vol. II (1988), p. 59, the relevant section of the passage at hand reads: “y si yo no me declarare entices podra emendarme que yo foy tan focil. No te entiendo Sancho, dixo luego don Quixote, pues no fè que quiere dezir, foy tã focil. Tan focil quiere dezir, repondio Sancho. Soy tan aſsi.” The translation of Smith That Imaginative
As if memorising a difficult poem for the instructive purpose of meditative recitation, an imaginary poem that he eventually regularises through the agency of rhyme, Quixote repeats the phrase—“I am so fossil”—bringing it a second time to the eyes and ears of the readers of his history. Yet the master is incapable of addressing himself to the literal and potentially truthful implications of what his squire has actually said. He is focused upon what he would prefer to hear, on what his books of chivalry have taught him that he should hear. Rather than allow Sancho’s bewildering expression to stand immaculate and uncorrected, as a rare flower of a native poetic genius, resistant to all but the most patient and imaginative consideration, Quixote interprets the usage as an uncultured deformation of a more conventional expression, holding within itself no possibility for radical interpretation. He will spend no time considering what it might mean to say and really mean the phrase “I am so fossil”, and he will not countenance the possibility that some alien glimmer of poetic truth has spoken through the peasant that he is coercing into working for him.

Sancho’s choice of words hints at the speed and grace of poetic wit: replacing “docile”, meaning imminent malleability and flexible passivity of life, with “fossil”, meaning stone-like inflexibility and the obduracy of ancient death. Indeed, Sancho is a fossil, a frozen relic dug up from a corpus of pseudo-histories and coerced into leaving his daughter and his wife (whose desires and better judgment are “reduced”), to suffer through the fantasy role of a medieval squire. Sancho’s chaotic linguistic dexterity, and the message delivered thereby, are alien to Quixote’s understanding of the anachronistic universe, to which he has just convinced Sancho to commit himself for the second time, and again without any promise of wages. Quixote’s refusal to comprehend, much less believe in, the truth of his squire’s words stifles a

_Gentleman Don Quijote de la Mancha_ (London: George Rutledge & Sons, Limited; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1911), p. 282, puts an explicitly gendered interpretation of “I am so fossil” into Sancho’s mouth: “‘then I am fossil enough to let you correct me.’ ‘Sancho, I don’t understand you—I don’t know what “I’m fossil enough” means.’ ‘It means,’ explained Sancho, ‘I am man enough.’ ‘Still more am I at a loss.’” (Note that in his “Translator’s Preface”, pp. I–XI (IX), Smith admits to removing the intradiegetic tales and “poor poetry” that are woven throughout _Don Quixote_, yet he goes on to insist that his text should be considered neither abridged nor expurgated.)
seed of revolutionary class consciousness. This seed is a truth alien to the interests of Quixote, and it passes through a fissure in Sancho’s speech, manifesting itself in nothing but the singular body of the words that Sancho discovers himself speaking. It is a poetic truth because its paraphrase happens to be unattainable. And since, in the fantasy of Quixote, it is not the place of a squire to compose intellectual poetry, Sancho’s revelation is negated into a mistake and neglected.

What Quixote cannot proscribe is the persistence of “I am so fossil” meaning that its speaker is “so much that way”. The insubordination of this meaning is the beginning of a process of transformations undergone by both knight and squire, a process which comes to maturity some thirty-five chapters later.

As the second round of adventures develops, so does Sancho’s liberty to exercise his faculties of critical and imaginative speech. Not long after the Romantic poet John Keats proposed his theory of Negative Capability, and in the midst of stating his refusal to be “bullied into a certain Philosophy engendered in the whims of an Egotist [i.e. William Wordsworth]”, he wrote in a letter to J.H. Reynolds: “Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven, and yet want confidence to put down his halfseeing. Sancho will invent a journey heavenward as well as

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2 See Sterne, Vol. I, Ch. XIX, pp. 77–82 (79–80), wherein during a discourse on the mental implantation and adoption of the opinions of others, readers are warned to protect the chaste integrity of their minds from the “singularity” of Walter Shandy’s “thousand little sceptical notions”: “I mention this, not only as a matter of hypothesis or conjecture upon the progress and establishment of my father’s many odd opinions,—but as a warning to the learned reader against the indiscreet reception of such guests, who, after a free and undisturbed entrance, for some years, into our brains,—at length claim a kind of settlement there,——working sometimes like yeast;—but more generally after the manner of the gentle passion, beginning in jest,——but ending in downright earnest.”
anybody." In the chapter to which Keats alludes (Cervantes, Pt II, Ch. XLI), we find Quixote taking a very different position on the incredible function of Sancho’s speech as a conduit for alien truth. Sancho’s poetic consciousness proceeds into a more complete stage of fruition, compelling Quixote to acknowledge the terminal instability of his anachronistic world-fantasy.

This scene takes place on the lands of the duke and duchess mentioned earlier, a pair well-versed in the novel account of Sancho and Quixote’s first round of adventures, and eager to provoke them into fresh humiliations. These nobles entertain the adventurers, using the vast resources at their disposal to ensnare them into a web of complicated pseudo-adventures, involving cruel pranks and theatrical hoaxes perpetrated upon the occasionally skeptical but virtually unwitting men. One such prank, after the guests’ first dinner with the nobles, involves “kitchen-boys and other underlings” cleaning Sancho’s beard with dishwater, resulting in a great outburst from Sancho, whose anger was quelled by the duchess shamefully chastising her servants: “you are wicked and ill-bred, and spiteful as you are, you cannot help showing the grudge you have against the squires of knights-errant.” (Note especially how the duchess maintains the condition of her own false innocence by pitting members of servant-classes against one another; even her own servants, “with something like shame and confusion”, “took the duchess to be speaking in earnest”.) But the most exceptional and significant of the spectacles involves Clavileño, a wooden horse who is sent to magically fly Sancho and Quixote to the giant-enchanter Malambruño, a malignant gentleman who has disdainfully bearded the faces of a company of land-ladies (dueñas). Quixote, in order to restore the faces of the dueñas to their natural smoothness, must vanquish Malambruño in single combat; but Malambruño’s strict condition for riding Clavileño into battle is that the journey must be undertaken blindly.

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2. Cervantes, Pt II, Ch. XXXII (“Of the reply Don Quixote gave his censurer . . .”), pp. 609–10.
3. Cervantes, Pt II, Ch. XLI (“Of the arrival of Clavileño and the end of this protracted adventure”), pp. 645–53 (647): Before mounting Clavileño, Quixote comments upon Sancho’s fear of undertaking this adventure: “‘Since the memorable adventure of the fulling mills,’ said Don Quixote, ‘I have never seen Sancho in such a fright as now; were I as superstitious as others, his
Prepared to ride the skies in undiminishable glory, Sancho and Quixote mount and blindfold themselves. Air and then fire are blown in their direction, making them to believe that they are ascending into the upper reaches of the atmosphere. The astronauts discuss the progress of their flight, most of which discussion is taken up by the knight lecturing his squire. But after what Quixote reckons is “not half an hour since we left the garden”, this singular prank is brought to a mortifying climax.

The duke, the duchess, and all in the garden were listening to the conversation of the two heroes and were greatly amused by it; and now, desirous of putting a finishing touch to this rare and well-contrived adventure, they applied a light to Clavileño’s tail with some tow, and the horse, being full of exploding rockets, immediately blew up with a prodigious noise and brought Don Quixote and Sancho Panza to the ground half singed.

The pair are “filled with amazement at finding themselves in the same garden from which they had started”; and awaiting them is a parchment declaring that the adventure has been completed “by merely attempting it”. But this feigned victory and its attendant laurels have little to do with the exploit’s most profound achievement: an assault on the economic privilege of the duke and duchess, on the supremacy of the great body of intellectual and material resources that make possible their graceful humiliations of Sancho and Quixote.

The weapon is Sancho’s account of his tour of the heavens. And though the history does not relate any witness to the supposed doffing of his blindfold, the tour itself can be denied neither by Quixote nor by the duke and duchess.

abject fear would cause me some little trepidation of spirit.” In referencing “the memorable adventure of the fulling mills”, Quixote draws a bridge between this episode and the one in Pt I, Ch. XX (“Of the unexampled and unheard-of adventure . . .”), pp. 137-8, previously discussed, wherein Sancho, out of terrible fear, defecates right next to Quixote, who is proudly mounted in full armour upon his horse Rocinante, though the horses’s hind legs are tied together, making it impossible for Quixote to ride even a few steps away from the scene of Sancho’s crime, thereby causing the valiant knight to suffer throughout the night the full blast of a most rich historical metaphor.
The duchess asked Sancho how he had fared on that long journey, to which Sancho replied, “I felt, señora, that we were flying through the region of fire, as my master told me, and I wanted to uncover my eyes for a bit. But my master, when I asked permission to uncover them, would not let me; but as I have a little bit of curiosity and a desire to know what is forbidden and kept from me, quietly and without anyone seeing me I raised the handkerchief covering my eyes just a little, close to my nose, and from underneath looked towards the earth, and it seemed to me that it was no bigger than a mustard seed and that the men walking on it were little bigger than hazel nuts; so you can see how high we must have been going then.”

The duchess demands that Sancho revise his account, claiming that if what he says were the truth, then “one man alone would have covered the whole earth.” Yet it is extraordinary that the duchess attempts to remove the paradoxical elements of Sancho’s vision. Not only is this a vision which she knows has had no occasion for physical realisation (though this is a knowledge to which she cannot admit), but previous to this adventure, Sancho’s ridiculous sayings and paradoxical notions had been a source of endless entertainment for the duchess. She had even gone so far as to claim, after the beard-cleaning prank, that “Sancho Panza is right, and always

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1. Cervantes, Pt II, Ch. XLI (“Of the arrival of Clavileño . . .”), pp. 650-1.
2. After the duchess and Sancho have had a few argumentative volleys, with Sancho piling paradox upon paradox, he employs the failsafe defense of using the terms of the adventure against its author. Sancho speaks, in Pt II, Ch. XLI (“Of the arrival of Clavileño . . .”), pp. 651-2: “I only know that your ladyship will do well to bear in mind that since we were flying by enchantment, I might have seen the whole earth and all the men by enchantment whatever way I looked.”
3. See Cervantes, Pt II, Ch. XXXII (“Of the reply Don Quixote gave his censurer . . .”), pp. 603-4: “The duchess, as she listened to Sancho, was dying [of] laughter, and in her own mind she set him down as funnier and madder than his master”. Note that the bracketed interpolation into this passage corrects one of the far too numerous typos in the Ormsby revision of Jones and Douglas (1981).
will be in all he says.”

So why is it that Sancho’s self-contradicted vision of the planet and its inhabitants becomes for the duchess an occasion of near anti-mirth? The answer is that Sancho’s vision is a species of radical thought.

In his essay “XL Prynne”, Keston Sutherland argues that “radical thinking” in the poetry of J.H. Prynne takes as a central concern the question of “what size [man] is and what size his world is”.

Radical thinking takes the size, measure or extent of the person as something that it alone must imperatively decide. To decide may mean to emphasise with new strength, to know by looking more closely or intently, or to restrict or aggrandize. [. . .] The question of size, in any case, is not just missing data for radical thinking. It is, in every case, a controversy.

Just such a controversy is played out between the duchess and Sancho, because Sancho’s vision is a profound threat to the class privilege of the duchess. Sancho has decided for himself that the planet is smaller than the humans dwelling upon it; he has decided with full authority of over-sweeping distance—as his vision was that of one alienated from his home—that he has seen a world obscured by its own inhabitants. This calls into question the size of the duchess’ own life, the spatial and ideological extension of her own power, the extent of her own consumption, her diminishment of the world by self-aggrandising material force, and her accumulation and defense of her own class interest by coercive attacks upon the bonds of class solidarity. The duchess is therefore eager to have Sancho correct himself by stripping the dangerous insight of dialectics from his imagination. Sancho’s vision is not paradoxical, but rather mirrors the contradiction already present in the world around him. That this radical thinking-by-reflection is embodied in a poetic vision is even more frightening to the duchess, who knows that Sancho’s dialectics are the explicit product of imagination, a power capable of endlessly

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1 Cervantes, Pt II, Ch. XXXII (“Of the reply Don Quixote gave his censurer . . .”), p. 610.
creative re-embodiments of the contradictions within economic class relations.\(^1\)

The duke and duchess have unwittingly generated a scenario in which alien truth can once again make its unimpeded descent into the world through Sancho’s speech. The poetical agency is now not a mere flower of linguistic daring, as with the “I am so fossil” dialogue at the beginning of the second round of adventures; it is now the linguistic manifestation of an imaginative structure large enough to house a fully dialectical contradiction. And as the discursive housing of Sancho’s incredibility has changed dramatically, so has Quixote’s relation to his squire’s veracity. Like Sancho, Quixote is a victim of the duke and duchess’ gentle malice, and in good faith to that consciousness, he is unable to contradict Sancho’s report on the relative sizes of the planet and its inhabitants: “‘As all these things and such like occurrences are out of the ordinary course of nature, it is no wonder that Sancho says what he does’”. But Quixote is at first unable to believe a further aspect of Sancho’s report.

After winning his argument with the duchess, Sancho goes on to say that while in flight, and arriving in the vicinity of the Pleiades (known in Spanish as “the Seven

\(^1\) See Cervantes, Pt II, Ch. LI (“Of the progress of Sancho’s government, and other such entertaining matters”), pp. 706–12 (712), wherein the duke and duchess give Sancho the governorship that he has long been promised by Quixote. After reading a letter of counsel from his master, and while the duke and duchess’ people are planning “how [Sancho] was to be dispatched from the government”, the squire-turned-governor drafts what comes to be known as “The ordinances of the great governor Sancho Panza”, among which are included these decrees: “He established a ceiling on servants’ wages, which were becoming recklessly exorbitant. He laid extremely heavy penalties upon those who sang lewd or satirical songs either by day or night. He decreed that no blind man should sing about any miracle in verse, unless he could produce authentic evidence that it was true, for it was his opinion that most of those the blind men sang about are imaginary, to the detriment of the true ones.” We can see in these ordinances a negation of the radical poetical thinking embodied ten chapters earlier in Sancho’s wondrous account of his flight upon Clavileño. In the three decrees given here, he shows himself to be an enemy of the working class, he suppresses popular forms of political dissent, and he outlaws those products of the prophetic imagination that both defy the received laws of the physical world and which have no basis of proof in empirical testimony. The last of these, by extension, throws into disastrous question the poetical authority of his own visionary access to radical truth.
Goats”), he recalled his youth as a shepherd, dismounted from Clavileño, “‘and amused myself with the goats—which are like gilly flowers and blossoms—for almost three-quarters of an hour.’” Quixote refuses to believe this, claiming with authority: “‘either Sancho is lying or Sancho is dreaming.’”① The controversy is of the same type as Sancho’s argument with the duchess: not only would it take considerably longer than half an hour to approach any celestial body, and not only did Sancho’s recreation amongst the Pleiades supposedly last longer than the whole time they were mounted upon Clavileño, but more to the point, constellations are comprised of celestial bodies and enormous blocks of interstellar space, entities many times more vast than Earth itself (not to mention Earth’s inhabitants, even if they are, according to Sancho, larger than Earth). So if Quixote were to accept that the human-scale Sancho had made pastoral dalliance with a celestial-scale constellation, then Sancho’s person would have been, godlike, hyperbolically scaled up many countless times beyond its natural dimensions. By analogy, Sancho would be glorified into a trans-historical, universal myth, transposed literally into the fabric of a constellation. And whosoever could brag of such a celestial monument would deserve unlimited bounties of liberty and reward upon the Earth, far outshining the honor due to a mere knight-errant. All of which is naturally too much for Quixote. He has no ears for the alien truth of his own pettiness. Neither can he believe that he is relatively unsubstantial, nor that he is to be eclipsed by Sancho. This eclipse is effected not only by the implications of the content of Sancho’s vision, but also by the fact of the vision itself. It is not supposed to be Sancho, but Quixote, who sees incredible visions.

As Sancho maintains the veracity of his testimony under the further questioning of the duke and duchess, Quixote is reminded of his own earlier narrative of his

① Cervantes, Pt II, Ch. XLI, (“Of the arrival of Clavileño . . .”), p. 652. The pedantic terms of Quixote’s refutation of Sancho’s celestial recreation are especially funny: “for my own part I can only say that I did not uncover my eyes either above or below, nor did I see sky or earth or sea or shore. It is true I felt that I was passing through the region of the air, and even that I touched that of fire. But that we passed farther I cannot believe; for the region of fire being between the heaven of the moon and the last region of the air, we could not have reached that of heaven where the Seven Goats Sancho speaks of are without being burned; and as we were not burned, either Sancho is lying or Sancho is dreaming.”
adventure in the cave of Montesinos, when it was Sancho who “made up his mind at last that, beyond all doubt, his master was out of his wits and stark mad”, claiming that Quixote was “talking the greatest nonsense that can be imagined.”

What Quixote saw in the Cave of Montesinos was an elaborate dream-like fantasy whose supposedly real content drives much of the knight’s heroic imperatives in the second part of Don Quixote. Not only was Quixote shamed and disgraced by Sancho questioning the authority of the Montesinos narrative, but this offense was made in the presence of a “famous scholar” who, engaged in the concurrent composition of four different books covering an endless array of subjects, is liable to make a reference in one of them to the unparalleled disrespect shown by this squire to his

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1 Cervantes, Pt II, Ch. XXIII (“Of the wonderful things the incomparable Don Quixote said he saw in the deep cave of Montesinos, the impossibility and magnitude of which cause this adventure to be deemed apocryphal”), pp. 549–57 (556). Note the prelude to the chapter which follows, in Pt II, Ch. XXIV (“Wherein are related a thousand trifling matters, as trivial as they are necessary to the right understanding of this great history”), pp. 558–62 (558): “He who translated this great history from the original written by its first author, Cide Hamete Benengeli, says that on coming to the chapter that dealt with the cave of Montesinos, he found written on the margin, in Hamete’s own hand, these exact words: ‘I cannot in any way persuade myself that everything related in the preceding chapter could have actually happened to the valiant Don Quixote. The reason is that all the adventures that have occurred up to this moment have been possible and plausible. But as for this story of the cave, I see no way of accepting it as true, as it so much exceeds all reasonable bounds. It is impossible for me to believe that Don Quixote could lie, since he is the most truthful gentleman and the noblest knight of his time. He would not tell a lie though he were shot to death with arrows. On the other hand, when I consider how he related the story in minute detail, he could not in so brief a time have put together such a vast network of absurdities.’ ‘If, then, this adventure seems apocryphal, it is no fault of mine. So, without declaring it false or true, I write it down. Use your own wisdom, reader, to decide as you see fit, for I am not required, nor is it in my power, to do more. Some maintain, however, that at the time of his death he retracted and said he had invented it all, thinking it a perfect match for the adventures he had read in his histories.’”

2 Cervantes, Pt II, Ch. XXII (“Wherein is related the great adventure of the cave of Montesinos in the heart of La Mancha, which the valiant Don Quixote brought to a happy termination”), pp. 543–9 (545).
master. But Quixote is also aware that the tiniest hiccup in his adventures is being recorded by the unseen hand of some unknown historian. The self-conscious knight is thus eager to consolidate his credibility, to regain some of the face that he previously lost. The chapter ends with Quixote demanding of Sancho that he trade belief for belief, and approaching him with such discretion that one might think Quixote hopes to evade the ubiquitous attention of his invisible historian:

Don Quixote, coming close to his ear, said to him, “Sancho, as you would have us believe what you saw in heaven, I require you to believe me as to what I saw in the cave of Montesinos. I say no more.” ①

This is no longer the hero too proud to climb down from his horse when assaulted by the rising fumes of Sancho’s shit. This new Quixote submits himself to the poetical license of Sancho in order to protect his fantasy of his own reputation, even though the terms of that submission imply the promotion of Sancho’s reputation to a height equal to, if not higher than his. This active summoning of contradiction is Quixote’s desperate response to a speech practice that has developed such confident ignorance of its own incredibility that it can no longer be negated. Sancho’s speech, even more “so fossil” than before, now admits no correction. It has become an edifice of irrefutable law; it has become the law beneath the law, a truth-complex that Quixote now requires as leverage to prop up the fantasy of his own credibility.

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There are many episodes and subtleties and strains of development in Don Quixote that this account does not address. But these two landmark moments in the history of Sancho’s speech outline a thesis on the development of poetic authority. This thesis is more than just a thread in Cervantes’ great fabric: it is a fundamental component of Don Quixote’s conception and design.

① Cervantes, Pt II, Ch. XLI (“Of the arrival of Clavileño . . .”), p. 653.
JUSTINE, OR GOOD CONDUCT WELL CHASTISED

It is morally impossible the reader should understand this,.—

The following argument about the Marquis de Sade’s novel Justine adopts in its three section headings an internal jargon specific to thinking about Justine drawing out its indications for a discourse on poetic authority. This is distinct from being a discourse on the development of poetic authority, such as may be found in Don Quixote. To read in Justine a discourse on poetic authority means to taxonomise specific types of language practice (or linguistic analogies in physical characteristics, gestures, dramatic actions, etc.) as part-constituents which organise the complex of poetic authority.

Justine is an heroic and allegorical narrative focused on an idealist champion of virtue, whose quest is the infinite resistance of a sophisticated wilderness of vice, and whose fate is the suffering of endless variations of mostly sexual misanthropic crime. Justine is a Christ in a Hell of systematic personifications of evil practices and their philosophical justifications. But it is useful to think of this the other way around, considering the character of Justine not as anything like a human actor, but as a condition of the world, an array of facts about the world, a finite set of the world’s laws. Imagine Justine’s malefactors as human-like actors questing to transform Justine into something resembling themselves. If Justine is not a heroine but a universal law, and as poetry speaks through human actors, then the criminals and rapists who endlessly abduct and enslave and abuse Justine are an allegory for poetry itself. It is to the laws of the universe, in all their true contradiction, that the language of poetry addresses itself, and so Justine’s body and subjectivity are poetry’s audience, the set of conditions it wills to transform, the subjective object that it endlessly tortures and harasses.

The philosophical speeches of Justine’s malefactors cast the general shadow of Incredible Style over de Sade’s novel. The discourse which this shade illuminates is a three-mode schematic for understanding poetic authority, and perhaps even the

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1 Sterne, Vol. III, Ch. XVII, p. 198.
authority of dialectical poetic language in revolutionary struggle (considering that de Sade wrote *Justine* from the Bastille, from which prison he was freed by revolutionaries in 1789). It is this schematic that that the present argument will work through, giving extended analysis to the third mode, the allegory for which is found in the climactic group rape involving the capitalist Saint-Florent and the judge Monsieur de Cardoville.

### 1. Incredible Style

Incredible Style characterises the speech of the army of libertines through whose ranks Justine is fated to spend much of her short life progressing. Their speech is a body of extended monologues or essays, rhetorically sophisticated, espousing the materialist philosophy of libertinism, defending crime of all kinds and the domination of the weak by the powerful. Justine’s tormentors force her to listen endlessly to their theses, before and after committing their crimes against her, crimes progressively more violently abusive of her body and soon stabilising into ritualistic and repetitive rape.

It is difficult to imagine brutal rapists endeavouring to convince their victim of the morality of their deeds; it is even more difficult to imagine every one of them possesses full mastery of the rhetorical arts. And that is part of the satirical machinery of de Sade’s novel: Justine, en route to her execution, is framed as the book’s main interior narrator, recounting her troubled life to the powerful Madame la Comtesse de Lorsange, who will become Justine’s savior and is in fact her long-lost sister Juliette. The novel’s design presumes Justine to have either memorised the speeches of her rapists, or to have internalised them so profoundly that she can reproduce them with more craft of persuasion than they originally possessed. Either case would be incredible if we were to be expected to believe it, as if the text of Justine’s narration were a living affidavit, its precision sworn off by the tale’s arch-historian, de Sade. This is explicitly not the case; in his preface to *Justine*, de Sade writes: “we ask the reader’s indulgence for the erroneous doctrines which are to be placed in the mouths of our characters”. But then there is the fact that de Sade leaves no shortage of reminders that the diegetic origin of the novel’s lurid

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1 De Sade, p. 458.
physiological and sexual details is no other mouth than that of the innocent Justine, who speaks her life-testimony in desperation and grief, on the eve of her own execution. This is a satirical pair of conceits: Justine is made to be the incredible stylist of both the pornography of her rapes and their tedious defences.

Before Justine is given the floor to tell her story, the beginnings of her life are told through the narration of de Sade. Here we have the first of only two commentaries on the incredibility of the monologues spoken by the novel’s libertines. After Justine is made an orphan at the age of twelve, on the way to beginning her fated journey through a Hell of physical and psychological debasement, Justine’s fifteen-year old sister, Juliette, defends her own choice to become a prostitute. Juliette’s speech is described as possessing “a philosophical acuity far beyond her years”. In one sense, de Sade admits the improbability of Juliette’s eloquence for metonymic effect: the apology for the incredibility of one speech is a default apology for the incredibility of them all. We are in a fantasy of ubiquitous rhetorical grace. But in another sense, this metonymic default is the cryptic sign that his novel is haunted by the presence of alien truth, of truth that does not belong in the mouths of those who speak it, of truth whose survival is impossible according to the laws of the world into which it has emerged, of truth that will struggle without cease to negate and transform the world by which it is ceaselessly negated. So de Sade’s apology is the sign of coming struggle.

But there is a second instance of such apologetic commentary, from a layer of narration further interior than de Sade’s. This commentary comes from Justine, once de Sade has handed her the narrative voice. Justine is describing Monsieur de Harpin, a landlord and usurer, in whose house Justine takes work as a servant, early on in the biography of her struggle. In an attempt to persuade Justine to steal valuable treasures from his own tenants, de Harpin delivers a defence of theft. Justine describes this speech as possessing “an erudition of which I had not dreamed Monsieur de Harpin capable”. Many more rhetorically capable speakers bar Justine from pursuing a free life of virtue, using not only their patient sophistries, but coercion, imprisonment, and violent force.

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1. De Sade, p. 460; and see p. 459, describing the fifteen-year old Juliette as one “whose mind and character were to all intents and purposes as completely formed then as at thirty”.
These indications of Incredible Style by de Sade and by Justine, may be understood to echo throughout the course of the novel, inflecting every thesis made in defence of theft, murder, conspiracy, sodomy, rape, and libertinisms of every sort. Incredibility is the condition of Justine’s universe, of which she is the centre, endlessly barraged with rhetoric. Incredible Style is the negative force of poetic expression, endlessly manoeuvring in its quest to prove the decomposition of the standing laws of the world. Without this force, Justine’s life would not be a dedicated martyrdom to virtue. The language of this force is a moral power, incredible not only because of the eloquence of speakers otherwise expected to possess little if any rhetorical finesse, but also because their moral purpose is a defence of and exhortation to vice. ¹

2. Contradiction

In the scheme of Justine’s discourse on poetic authority, contradiction is the language of refusal, poetry’s positive force. It makes no rhetorical appeal in confronting the laws of the world; it has nothing to do with persuasion. In the face of the world it declares a new law. This declaration is non-discursive. It names without ears, unresponsive to objection. It refuses any dialogue with what it transmutes. It names the world in a way radically disrupting our understanding of the world. The names that it gives contradict our prior conceptions and the system of relations that once ordered them. It is an invasion by the relatively nonsensical, impossible to adopt without the dramatic requirement of alien truth resolved as the law of a new world that has replaced the old. For Justine, the contradictive name is adopted only through the imposition of necessity by threat of brute force.

This mode is enacted moments before Justine’s first rape. The rape is committed by a man named Saint-Florent, thirty-six years of age, “one of the most important merchants of Lyon”. ² Justine, no older than sixteen, has just saved him

¹ I take the height of such discourses to be the young Comte de Bressac’s defence of murder; de Sade, pp. 518–21.
² De Sade, p. 498.
from death at the hands of a band of highwaymen. The two make their escape through an obscure wilderness, and Saint-Florent, having heard of Justine’s misfortunes, promises to see to the welfare of his saviour. Justine narrates:

It was toward four o’clock in the afternoon when we entered the forest. Until then Saint-Florent had not once contradicted himself; always the same propriety, always the same eagerness to prove his sentiments for me; I should not have thought myself more secure had I been with my father. The shades of night began to descend upon the forest and to inspire the kind of religious horror which at once causes the birth of fear in timorous spirits and criminal projects in ferocious hearts. We followed mere paths; I was walking ahead, I turned to ask Saint-Florent whether these obscure trails were really the ones we ought to be following, whether perchance he had not lost his bearings, whether he thought we were going to arrive soon.

“We have arrived, whore,” the villain replied, toppling me with a blow of his cane brought down upon my head; I fell unconscious . . .”

Oh Madame, I have no idea what that man afterward said or did; but the state I was in when I returned to my senses advised me only too well to what point I had been his victim. It was darkest night when I awoke; I was at the foot of the tree, away from the road, injured, bleeding . . . dishonored, Madame;

Justine knows, as her rapist does, that she is not a whore. Coming to consciousness no longer a virgin, whore is the last word she hears before she is knocked out cold. Whore is the name she is given by the man to whom she has given the gift of renewed life. A rape survivor, Justine is unable to accept this epithet, but will eventually take it up out of love for a fellow victim of perverse molestation. Later in her misadventurous career, at the age of twenty-three, Justine spends a year

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De Sade, pp. 501-2.
imprisoned as a sex slave in the château of the extraordinarily fat Comte de Gernande, where she is also put to work as the personal attendant of the Count’s enslaved wife, the sixteen-year old Countess, Madame de Gernande. This latter role gives Justine first-hand knowledge of how the Count’s wicked abuses endanger the life of his wife.

The Count’s scheme of sexual gratification is to conclude an orgy by hungrily watching his wife bleed to death (granted this is not his first wife), while he gives oral sex to two young male sex slaves, and receives oral sex from a female sex slave (in this case, Justine). It is in the narration of one such scenario, as if assuming the name in afterthought by way of virtuous self-criticism, that Justine takes up Saint-Florent’s contradictive usage.

Blood leaps far: he is in ecstasy; and adjusting himself so that he has a clear view of these two fountains, he has me kneel between his legs so I can suck him; he does as much for one and then the other of his little friends, incessantly eyeing the jets of blood which inflame him. For my part, certain the instant at which the hoped for crisis occurs will bring a conclusion to the Countess’ torments, I bring all my efforts to bear upon precipitating the dénouement, and I become, as, Madame, you observe, I become a whore from kindness, a libertine through virtue.¹

¹ De Sade, p. 643. Note Justine’s description of the Count’s daily supper, which “amazing feast” is the prescribed ritual prelude to the Countess’ bleeding; de Sade, pp. 639–40: “The morrow was the Countess’ fatal day. Monsieur de Gernande, who only performed the operation after his dinner—which he always took before his wife ate hers—had me join him at table; it was then, Madame, I beheld that ogre fall to in a manner so terrifying that I could hardly believe my eyes. Four domestics, amongst them the pair who had led me to the château, served this amazing feast. It deserves a thorough description: I shall give it you without exaggeration. The meal was certainly not intended simply to overawe me. What I witnessed then was an everyday affair. ¶ Two soups were brought on, one a consommé flavored with saffron, the other a ham bisque; then a sirloin of English roast beef, eight hors d’oeuvres, five substantial entrées, five others only apparently lighter, a boar’s head in the midst of eight braised dishes which were relieved by two services of entremets, then sixteen plates of fruit; ices, six brands of wine, four varieties of liqueur and coffee. Monsieur
The unprecedented intensity of this occasion forces Justine to adopt the name of what most she is not. The parameters of this occasion are defined by the Comte de Gernande, whose desires dictate the brutal identity of this dramatic scenario. In order to save the Countess’ life (or at least cut short her life-threatening suffering), Justine must not be a passive sexual receptacle, but an active sexual force. She must make the Count ejaculate as quickly as possible; in her mouth she holds not only the penis of the Count, but the life of the Countess. The quicker the Count is made to come, the more likely will the death of the Countess be averted. This collaboration of erotic and deadly intensities demands of Justine a heroic part-sacrifice of virtue.

The exceptional moral difficulty of the situation has its analogical foreshadow in Justine’s description of the Count’s physical person.

I can describe him to you: the portrait’s singularity merits an instant’s attention. Monsieur de Gernande was at that time a man of fifty, almost six feet tall and monstrously fat. Nothing could be more terrifying than his face, the length of his nose, his wicked black eyes, his large ill-furnished mouth, his formidable high forehead, the sound of his fearful raucous voice, his enormous hands; all combined to make a gigantic individual whose presence inspired much more fear than reassurance. We will soon be able to decide whether the morals and actions of this species of centaur were in keeping with his awesome looks.¹

de Gernande attacked every dish, and several were polished off to the last scrap; he drank a round dozen bottles of wine, four, to begin with, of Burgundy, four of Champagne with the roasts; Tokay, Mulseau, Hermitage and Madeira were downed with the fruit. He finished with two bottles of West India rum and ten cups of coffee. ¶ As fresh after this performance as he might have been had he just waked from sleep, Monsieur de Gernande said: ¶ ‘Off we go to bleed your mistress’”.

¹ De Sade, pp. 629–30. Note, however, Justine’s description of the Count’s penis; de Sade, p. 641: “It was then I noticed, not without astonishment, that this giant, this species of monster whose aspect alone was enough to strike terror, was howbeit barely a man; the most meager, the most miniscule excrescence of flesh or, to make a juster comparison, what one might find in a child of three was all one discovered upon this so very enormous and otherwise so corpulent individual”.

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The very physical extent of the Count and his unquenchable thirst for witnessing his wives’ life-force diminish: this is the motive force behind Justine’s crisis of virtues, leading her to accept a whore’s condition as the lesser of two evils, which condition is for Justine otherwise alien and categorically resistible. Just as the Count is rendered half-human in Justine’s description, Justine is coerced into a state of half-virtue by the Count. It is apparent that her Christic sacrifice was premeditated by the Count; the employment of Justine as the Countess’ private attendant was calculated to generate a conflict of interests entirely favourable to the Count’s desire for heightened sexual intensity in the face of mortal danger. Justine must become a whore, otherwise she will be a murderer by proxy. Out of a desperate longing to

— Note that the Count also literally drinks his wife’s blood, as Justine narrates the beginning of the orgy; de Sade, pp. 640-1: “and soon carried away by his passions’ ferocity, he plucked up a pinch of flesh, squeezed it, scratched it. Immediately he produced a small wound he fastened his mouth to the spot.”

— Note the echoes of Quixote’s whispered appeal to Sancho at the close of the Clavileño adventure. Quixote and Justine are in a sense the same character, heroes created to be mocked and killed off once their quest for the impossible is safely beyond the realm of feasible pursuit. Justine’s death is especially remarkable; de Sade, 741-2 (but note that Thérèse is the pseudonym that Justine self-adopts throughout her narrative, a contrivance which makes it possible for Justine and her sister to spend the duration of Justine’s narration ignorant as to each other’s true identity): “Lightning glitters, shakes, hail crashes down, winds wrathfully, heaven’s fire convulses the clouds, in the most hideous manner makes them to seethe; it seems as if Nature were wearied out of patience with what she has wrought, as if she were ready to confound all the elements that she might wrench new forms from them. Terrified, Madame de Lorsange begs her sister to make all haste and close the shutters; anxious to calm her, Thérèse [aka Justine] dashes to the windows which are already being broken; she would do battle with the wind, she gives a minute’s fight, is driven back and at that instant a blazing thunderbolt reaches her where she stands in the middle of the room . . . transfixes her. ¶ Madame de Lorsange emits a terrible cry [. . .] but the unhappy Thérèse has been struck in such wise hope itself can no longer subsist for her; the lightening entered her right breast, found the heart, and after having consumed her chest and face, burst out through her belly. The miserable thing was hideous to look upon; Monsieur de Corville orders that she be borne away. . . .”
protect the flawless integrity of her life-history as a wandering bastion of virtue in a world rotten with vice, Justine cuts her losses. She saves the Countess’ life by living out a sliver of that truth forced upon her by her philosopher-rapists. She accepts the vicious designation given to her in an idealistic rage by a man whose life she saved, the capitalist Saint-Florent, a man that she will meet again in the gang rape that will be the last physical abuse she will be made to endure.

3. Dialectic of the First and Second Modes

A dialectic of the two modes thus far identified manifests itself in the simultaneous presence, in one body-image, of the incredible and the nonsensical, where the laws of the world are doubly-assaulted by persuasive speech and alien nomenclature. The collision of these language-modes results in a cycle of breakdown and renewal, which process is played out in the gang rape that functions as the grand climax to Justine’s catalogue of sexual abuses.

Justine’s suffering comes to its violent climax with this hateful orgy of punishment. The scene is climactic not just because of its intensity, its duration, and the obscurity of the fetishes pursued by the rapists, but because the teleological sense of Justine’s own heroical fate hangs in the balance. Justine is under the impression that her ability to endure complete submission to her rapists will resolve the question of whether history will regard her as a virtuous hero or a villainous libertine. Here, Justine’s foremost rapists are powerful economic and judicial officials who use their influential political resources to feed and protect their ferocious appetites for rape. They are Justine’s first rapist, the capitalist merchant Saint-Florent, and the eminent jurist Monsieur de Cardoville, presiding official over the criminal case in which Justine has been framed.

In a prison cell, where she has been recently raped by a visiting monk, and where in misery she awaits her probable execution, Justine is visited by Saint-Florent, who has especially considerable influence in the locality where Justine is imprisoned.

“Look here,” he said, “your case rests entirely in the hands of Monsieur de Cardoville; I need not tell you what official post he occupies; it suffices that you know your fate depends absolutely upon him; he and I have been intimate
friends since childhood; I shall speak to him; if he agrees to a few arrangements, you will be called for at sunset and in order that he may see you, you’ll be brought to either his home or mine; such an interrogation, wrapped in secrecy, will make it much simpler to turn matters in your favor, which could not possibly be done here.”

No matter how many times Justine will be raped by her jurist, he will unfailingly show up at her cell the next morning, declaring her indefensibly guilty of all charges and thereby sentenced to death. Without this foreknowledge, and hopeful that her past saving of Saint-Florent’s life will finally be repaid through the assurance of just treatment, Justine is escorted that evening to the mansion of Saint-Florent. “Silence enshrouds everything”. She enters the prescribed room; it is windowless, locked, and guarded from the outside. In addition to Saint-Florent and Monsieur de Cardoville, two young men named La Rose and Julien are present to participate in the proceedings. We can imagine that Monsieur de Cardoville holds in his hands a massive casebook of the false charges that have been brought against Justine. These charges embody the second mode of the novel’s schematic discourse on poetic authority: the name which they give to Justine are an explicit contradiction of what she knows herself to be. Monsieur de Cardoville claims that the charges pre-justify Justine’s execution, needless of trial, and that there has never been a case so singularly transparent to judge. While the capitalist who first raped Justine got his way using violence, the jurist who participates in her final rape gets his way by threatening to have her executed under the pretense that she is undeniably a prolific and violent criminal. Justine, incredulous, protests this claim, occasioning an outburst of obscene screaming by the jurist, just as the orgy is about to start.

Saint-Florent spoke up: “Thérèse [Justine],” said he, presenting me to Cardoville, “here is your judge, this is the man upon whom your fate depends; we have discussed your problem; but it appears to me that your crimes are of such a nature we will have much to do to come to terms about them.”

“She has exactly forty-two witnesses against her,” remarks Cardoville, who takes a seat upon Julien’s knees, who kisses him upon the lips, and who permits his fingers to stray
over the young man’s body in the most immodest fashion; “it’s a perfect age since we condemned anyone to die for crimes more conclusively established.”

[Justine:] “I? Conclusively established crimes?”

“Conclusively established or inconclusively established,” quoth Cardoville, getting to his feet and coming to a shout, with much effrontery, at my very nose, “you’re going to burn pissing if you do not, with an entire resignation and the blindest obedience, instantly lend yourself to everything we are going to require of you.”

“Yet further horrors!” I cried; “ah indeed! ’tis then only by yielding to infamies innocence can escape the snares set for it by the wicked!” ①

The first words spoken to Justine by her ruling judicial authority, a man no doubt a specialist in the rhetorical arts, are obscene, vicious, and spoken with a bare minimum of eloquence. This is the terrifying realism of incredible style, pitched notably downward. Who would believe that an Earthly judge, in a parley with his defendant, would condemn his subject to burn in Hell?

The negativity of this non-exemplary speech (the inverse of the incredible style we get from Sancho in Don Quixote) is more terrifying than any of the crimes committed in Justine. It is terrifying because it is a clear depiction of autocratic political power. De Sade very specifically plants a jurist in the scene of Justine’s final rape to be the speaker with whom he stops painting his libertines as a family of tedious rhetoricians making philosophical justifications of their various fetishes and vices. And while the modes of torturous rape that are employed in this scene are for Justine more gruesome than any other as yet depicted in her narrative, it is the speeches of the capitalist and the jurist that give this scene its most profound tenor of hideous monstrosity.

And so two conditions confront Justine before she has the chance to plea her case (which chance she will not get from the capitalist or the jurist). First, she is shocked with the incredibility of being rudely cursed by her jurist, an introduction

① De Sade, pp. 723-6.
defying her expectations. Second, her knowledge of her own identity is contradicted by the testimonies that are both falsely leveled against her and feigned to be assumed indefensible. This is the dialectic of the negative and positive modes of the novel’s schematic discourse on poetic authority, and its power does more than mortify Justine into “yielding” absolutely: it is the definitive condition of her experience of this climactic spectacle of physical and emotional abuse.

Though unconscious during her first rape, Justine is conscious during her last. Yet she is not only conscious of the disgusting physical abuse that she is made to endure: she is also conscious of the speech of her rapists, a speech that is, incredibly, unlike any she has thus far encountered. After Monsieur de Cardoville’s outburst, Justine is fondled by Saint-Florent and Monsieur de Cardoville in turn, who comment crudely comment upon Justine’s buttocks, her vagina, and the extent to which she is no longer a virgin.

“Well, now,” Saint-Florent said to his friend, “did I not tell you she had a splendid ass!”

“Yes, by God! her behind is sublime,” said the jurist who thereupon kissed it; “I’ve seen damned few buttocks molded like these: why! look ye! solid and fresh at the same time! . . . how d’ye suppose that fits with such a tempestuous career?”

“Why, it’s simply that she’s never given herself of her own accord; I told you there’s nothing as whimsical as this girl’s exploits! She’s never been had but by rape”—and then he drives his five fingers simultaneously into the peristyle of Love’s

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1. Justine narrates and comments upon the concluding moment of the gang rape in Saint-Florent’s mansion; de Sade, p. 733: “And then the last measure of seed is sown by La Rose—’twas high time, for I was ready to swoon.”

2. Note Justine’s narration of a moment early on in the gang rape, after she has been inspected, fondled, licked, slapped, bitten, and made to suck and masturbate the men’s cocks; de Sade, pp. 729–30: “They backed away, reviewed the situation, and then warned me to prepare to receive the treatment I richly deserved. An analysis of these libertines’ appalling language allowed me to conclude that vexations were about to descend like a hailstorm upon me. To have besought mercy in the state to which they had just reduced me would have further aroused them.”
temple—“but she’s been had . . . unfortunately, for it’s much too capacious for me: accustomed to virgins, I could never put up with this.” ①

Several episodes earlier, before her incarceration, a brief confrontation with Saint-Florent taught Justine of his fetish for devirginating young girls kidnapped from financially destitute families. With Saint-Florent thus needful of a means of synthesizing Justine’s virginity, the conversation between the capitalist and the jurist proceeds:

Then, swinging me around, he repeated the same ceremony with my behind wherein he found the same flaws.

“Ah well, you know our secret,” said Cardoville.

“And I’ll employ it too,” replied Saint-Florent; “and you who have no need of the same resource, you, who are content with a factitious activity which, although painful for the woman, nevertheless brings enjoyment of her to perfection, you, I hope, will not have her till I’m done.” ②

The practice referred to as “our secret”, though they do not yet explicitly name it, involves sewing shut the anus and vagina; penetrating these bindings requires powerful thrusting, which in turn engenders violent pain in Justine. When the gang rape eventually reaches its climax and this secret is employed, it is variously referred to as “tailoring” and “artificial barricadings”. ③

The coded words “our secret” not only give a name to the capitalist’s innovative means of sexual torture; they also declare that innovation to be a political conspiracy between the commercial and legal institutions. The secret is a law unto itself, and the obscure terms of its declaration make its comprehension impossible, save to all but those powerful enough to buy their way into participation. This is contradiction in hyperbolic form, the positive force of poetic authority rendered as a

① De Sade, pp. 726-7.
② De Sade, p. 726-7.
③ De Sade, pp. 731, 733.
process of studied unnaming, as a means of explicitly terrifying a political enemy. Yet the speaker of this phrase is the judicial authority, Monsieur de Cardoville, representative of a profession that trades not in secrets and lies, but in revelations and truths. In defying the ethos of strict legal practice, his phrase “you know our secret” simultaneously introduces the negative force of poetic authority, the mode defined for Justine as incredible style. What the Monsieur de Cardoville has said cannot be the language of a jurist. Justine is faced once again with poetic authority in the mode of full dialectic. While Justine cannot yet know what “our secret” actually is, she knows simply from Monsieur de Cardoville’s professional role that she must willingly play her part within that terrifying obscurity. Ignorant of the particular content of her fate, Justine understands that it will require the endurance of a species of pain she has never yet experienced.

The speech of Justine’s rapists is mortifying because it is a code that employs the crudest possible means of encryption. And as before with the analogical function of Justine’s physical description of the Comte de Gernande, there is an analogy between the power of her rapists’ language and her response to their bodies. In this case, Justine describes the penises that will soon be penetrating her mouth, anus, and vagina. The jurist’s penis is notably common in size, but those of La Rose and Julien are unprecedented.

about Cardoville, nothing that was not of the most ordinary; as for Saint-Florent, ’twas monstrous: I shuddered to think that such was the dart which had immolated me. Oh Just Heaven! what need of maidenheads had a man of those dimensions? Could it be anything other than ferocity which governed such caprices? But what, alas! were the other weapons I was going to be confronted by! Julien and La Rose, plainly aroused by these exhibitions, also ridded themselves of their clothes and advanced pike in hand. . . . Oh, Madame! never had anything similar soiled my gaze, and whatever may have been my previous representations, what I now beheld surpassed everything I have been able to describe until the present: ’tis like unto the ascendancy the imperious eagle enjoys over the
The speech of Justine’s rapists is overwhelming, just as the size and number of their cocks produces within her a sublime, indescribable fear. It is these four organs that eventually penetrate Justine in all of her orifices, and of course “[t]here were moments when all those bodies seemed to form but one”. The sexual energy of her rapists is endless, as are their verbal abuses. Saint-Florent and Monsieur de Cardoville each impose their own horrifying fetish technologies on Justine, by which they bring about their dramatic final ejaculations; and the jurist’s obscure techniques are just as hateful as the capitalist’s “secret”. I will refrain from quoting passages directly related to these scenes, in order to encourage uninitiated readers to approach these scenes for themselves, according to de Sade’s own timing.

Mortified and half-obliterated, Justine sees the hopeful future of her virtuous history on the verge of total suppression. In such a state of crisis, analogous to the life-threatening scenario with the Count and Countess de Gernande, Justine is intensively vulnerable to those agencies of renewal which emerge spontaneously from the suspended crisis of dialectic. Though Justine is repeatedly beaten and raped in the mansion of Saint-Florent, she is given intermittent periods of rest, during which time her extensive bruises are mysteriously healed by her abusers. Justine narrates:

A brief respite succeeded these vicious orgies, I was given a few instants to catch my breath; I had been beaten black and blue, but what surprised me was that they doctored and healed the damage done me in less time than it had taken to inflict it, whereof not the slightest trace remained. The lubricities were resumed.  

Justine’s body is refreshed for session after session of rape and torture. Consider this in light of Justine’s first descriptions of the bodies of La Rose and Julien, the rapists whom she would later discover to possess such monstrous penises.

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1 De Sade, p. 727-8.
2 De Sade, p. 730.
The two men who had led me hither, and whom I was better able to make out by the gleam of the twenty candles which lit the room, were not above twenty-five and thirty years old. The first, referred to as La Rose, was a dark handsome chap with Hercules’ own figure; he seemed to me the elder; the other had more effeminate features, the loveliest chestnut locks and large brown eyes; he was at least five feet ten inches tall, a very Adonis, had the finest skin to be seen, and was called Julien.

This is a clear image of how poetry’s aesthetic design (i.e. the bodies of the young men) actively volunteers itself as a material foundation for the reconstruction of the world that it has just destroyed (i.e. the body of Justine). The resistant facts of poetry, the unalterable precision of what, at the bare minimum, any one poem will always be, is an endless beginning of poetry’s truth, ever-stable in the wake of however many disruptions of the world for which it may be responsible.

Towards the end of the orgy, Justine’s Adonis takes it upon himself to repair more of Justine’s wounds. But these wounds are not bruises, as before, and they are not caused not by the horrors of Monsieur de Cardoville and Saint-Florent’s unexampled assaults. Justine’s sexual organs have been ripped and torn by the enormous cocks of La Rose and Julien.

The two youthful libertines seize me. While one entertains himself with the front, the other buries himself in the rear; they change places and change again; I am more gravely torn by their prodigious thickness than I have been by Saint-Florent’s artificial barricadings.

Just as the “secret” of the capitalist is revealed by manifest practice, the method of bodily repair is now no longer left to our imaginations.

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1 De Sade, p. 725. See also Justine’s description of the buttocks of Monsieur de Cardoville; de Sade, p. 727: “indeed, each was womanishly made in this region: ’twas especially Cardoville who was possessed of elegant lines and majestic form, snowy white color and enviable plumpness”.

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“My comrade has certainly hurt you, Thérèse,” says Julien, “and I am going to repair all the damage.” He picks up a flask of spirits and several times rubs all my wounds. The traces of my executioners’ atrocities vanish, but nothing assuages my pain, and never had I experienced any as sharp.①

In this narration, Justine describes a category of activity whose means were previously a secret, i.e. the means of removing and repairing bruises. Her revelation analogises a general release from dialectic into renewed unity of the subject. But just as we are never given to know the secret of the bruises’ repairs, Justine’s pain is unrelenting.

And so even though Justine is eventually given a new life in the home of her sister and her saviour, the influential Monsieur de Corville, she is unable to enjoy a life of virtue.

She became somber, uneasy, troubled, was given to dreaming, sometimes she burst into weeping before her friends, and was not herself able to explain what was the subject of her woe. “I was not born for such felicity,” she said to Madame de Lorsange, “. . . oh, dear sister, ’tis impossible it last much longer.” She was assured all her troubles were over, none remained, said they, no more inquietude for her; ’twas all in vain, nothing would quiet her; one might have said that this melancholy creature, uniquely destined for sorrow, and feeling the hand of misery forever raised above her head, already foresaw the final blow whereby she was going to be smitten down.②

Poetry can be a force of actual terror, all the more powerful because it endlessly rebuilds the world that it has so mercilessly shattered. But each rebuilding is preparation for yet further disorganisation and dispersal, in a cycle that progressively strengthens the world’s own essence (which it accrues perhaps by residual

① De Sade, p. 732-3.
② De Sade, p. 741.
assemblage). This cycle is a material lesson in sustaining more and more violent and deforming self-transformations. All of life would desist in the absence of such onslaughts.

**Conclusion**

To admit the truth of poetry is to invite an unstable organism to invade our consciousness, where once housed, it is capable of inflicting unforeseeable damages, disorientations, and disorganizations upon its host. The emotional and intellectual structures to which poetry will lay waste and deform will be extremely dear to us. They will have been compiled over many years, and they will have been painstakingly maintained. Those poems that find traction among the genetic materials of the vast living complex of consciousness are embedded dialectical explosives, ever-threatening the unpredictable transformation of that which surrounds them. Novels can help to teach us how poetry can never be a joke, no matter what species of laughter it draws out of us. Poetry should not be carelessly handled.

*Edited by John Wilkinson*
Editorial Memoir: A Promise

1

God do not promise
God make Adam promise

Satan hates it
Eve does not like it
Adam breaks it
all claiming freedom

The created turns against the creator
the world is divided
trust is lost
April becomes the cruellest month

in want of a promise.

2

Babies are poisoned by milk
A girl is repeatedly crushed by trucks
Oil is filtered from the waste
to make the most delicious dishes

Dark smog covering the sky
Heavy metal swallowing the earth
Rubbish swimming in the water
and many dead pigs too

Rich people hide in their expensive houses
equipped with cage bars
Pool souls wander in the open streets
wrapped by a piece of dirty cloth

Waiting for a promise.

3

The Son of God has himself murdered
by the sons of Adam
The Sin that caused the Original Sin is cleared up
with blood and flesh.

God is dead
speaking no more
Leaving behind a pure Tian the heaven
promising

a promise

4

YAO keeps his promise and throne
and passes it to the chosen SHUN
who is twice murdered by his mother
and twice resurrected as a humble son

YU turns himself into a big dark bear
and bites off huge mountains and tames the flood
yet his son grows into a godless god
and robs his people of the divine apple
Confucius signs
Tian is speechless
Spring comes and goes

Calling for a promise.

5

Gump says
promise is promise
He is inarticulate
and does not speak much

He runs from the East to the West
and from the West to the East
“Wherever you go, we will follow”
Yet Gump goes home

Whitman is born a poet
he looks at the grass
Kant is born a philosopher
he looks up into the sky

Tian the Heaven do not promise
neither do Tian make anyone promise

a promise.

Li Zhimin
April 1, 2013
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.

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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

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