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The New Romantics: Romantic Themes in the Poetry of Guo Moruo and Xu Zhimo

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The New Romantics: Romantic Themes in the Poetry of Guo Moruo and Xu Zhimo

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in Department of Modern Languages from
The College of William and Mary

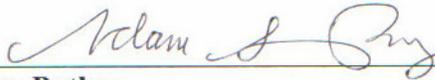
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Accepted for High Honors
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)



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Introduction:

Romanticism and the Chinese Perspective

In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs; in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed; the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it spreads over the whole earth, and over all time.

--William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802)

When speaking of the Romantic Movement, one generally has in mind a specific place and time—for example, England in the early 19th century. Perhaps the broadest definition one might give would limit the movement to Europe as a whole from the late 18th to early 19th centuries.¹ Very few people would associate the term “Romanticism” with Chinese poets of the 1920s, yet we find Chinese poets and their literary critics staking a claim on that literary genre. What exactly is meant by the term “Romantic” when it is removed by one hundred years and half the globe from its European origins? Can there be a close literary affinity between poets separated by time, place, and especially culture? Wordsworth’s conception of poetry, as quoted above, would certainly argue in the affirmative.

My task then is to analyze Chinese Romanticism by doing case studies of two of the most Romantic Chinese poets—Guo Moruo and Xu Zhimo. The purpose of this thesis is not to prove causality—that is, I am not attempting to definitively prove Guo Moruo had in mind a particular Romantic work when he wrote his own poems. We know that both Guo Moruo and Xu Zhimo read works by Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Keats, but it becomes nearly impossible to follow the influence of the Romantics through the myriad cross-currents of poetic styles that impressed Guo and Xu. My goal is to analyze the poetry of Guo and Xu, who are known as two of the most Romantic poets of their generation, looking in their poetry for strains of

¹ Arthur O. Lovejoy, “On the Discrimination of Romanticisms” in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. M. H. Abrams (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 9

Romanticism as embodied by the English Romanticism of the early 19th century. By analyzing Guo and Xu's poetry, I seek to discover to what extent they reflect European Romantic sensibilities and in what ways they adapt Romantic principles to their own unique situation.

Defining Romanticism

In order to begin any meaningful analysis, one first needs to define the term "Romanticism." This task is notoriously difficult, and there are critics who claim that the term has been overused to the point of meaninglessness: "The categories which it has been customary to use in distinguishing and classifying 'movements' in literature or philosophy...are far too rough, crude, indiscriminating—and none of them so hopelessly so as the category 'Romantic.'"² However, René Wellek challenges this notion in his work *Concepts of Criticism*. I find Wellek's analysis particularly applicable to my thesis because he analyzes the various versions of Romanticism that grew up in different European countries for their common threads. Clearly, this sort of international, cross-cultural conception of Romanticism lends itself well to a comparative literature study.

Wellek finds that all of the literature classified as "Romantic" shares similar tendencies—it is "dynamic rather than static, prefers disorder to order, continuity to discreteness, soft focus to sharp focus, has an inner rather than an outer bias, and prefers another world to this world."³ Besides these general traits, Wellek discovers three major conceptual elements within all Romantic literature: similar conceptions of poetry, the imagination, and nature.⁴ These three ideas provide the major themes of Romantic literature, and thus serve as a working definition for

² Lovejoy, 22

³ René Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism*, ed. Stephen G. Nichols, Jr. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 205

⁴ Wellek 160

it. If a work is Romantic, it will reflect a certain conception of the nature of poetry, the imagination, and a conception of nature as one animated, organic whole. Each of these criteria bears further investigation.

First, Wellek argues that all Romantics share the same conception of poetry “as knowledge of the deepest reality.”⁵ The poet sees beyond reality to a higher plane, the realm of immortality and eternal truths. Transcendence means reaching this realm of higher meanings, and poetry serves as both a description of the poet’s own journey to transcendence and a guide for the reader to reach it as well. As such, poetry is a function of “the totality of man’s forces, not reason alone, nor sentiment alone, but rather intuition, ‘intellectual intuition,’ imagination.”⁶ In this sense, Wellek argues, Romanticism challenges the classicism of the seventeenth century, valuing the former’s “poetry of infinite desire” over the latter’s “poetry of perfection.”⁷ As Wordsworth so famously wrote in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” The idea of poetry as intuitive and emotional represents a common thread throughout Romanticism. The Romantics find their “deepest reality” not in science or rational thought, but in an emotional sensitivity which provides the shaping force behind their poetry.

The reason the poet can use his sensibilities to achieve transcendence lies in the Romantic imagination. To Romantics, imagination provides “insight into the nature of reality,” which allows the poet to read nature as a symbol of the deeper forces beyond. In other words, “imagination is thus an organ of knowledge which transforms objects, see through them.”⁸ If poetry is the expression of transcendental knowledge, then imagination is the key to gaining that

⁵ Wellek 161

⁶ Wellek 165

⁷ Wellek 160

⁸ Wellek 179

knowledge. Imagination holds crucial importance to all the Romantics, and colors their conception of the poet as well. The poet, blessed with imagination, gains special insights into a world that few others can see. The need of the poet to spread his unique message becomes the basic justification for Romantic art—the “poet as prophet” conception, where the poet is not merely an artist but a social or cultural redeemer, come to share a unique truth with humanity.⁹ The imagination, through the poet, is an instrument of cultural transformation. While the conditions of human life impede transcendence, the poetic imagination can lead others towards it.¹⁰

Underpinning both the Romantic conception of poetry and that of the imagination is the quintessential Romantic theme—the supremacy of nature. To the Romantic, nature is “an organic whole... nature is animated, alive, filled with God or the Spirit of the World.”¹¹ Nature is the lens through which the poet sees the transcendental force that animates the world. When the poet looks beyond reality to find the eternal, a natural scene serves as his guide. Under this scheme, nature and the mind of the poet have a special symbiosis. Nature provides the poetic mind with glimpses of transcendence and the poet interprets and praises nature. The mind blends with nature in Romantic poetry—the natural scenery shapes and is shaped by the mind, and vice versa.¹² As a result of his understanding of nature, the Romantic poet tends to see the world as a symbol. Thus all Romantic poets “are symbolists whose practice must be understood in terms of their attempt to give a total mythic interpretation of the world to which the poet holds the key.”¹³

⁹ Morse Peckham, *The Birth of Romanticism: 1790-1815* (Greenwood, FL: The Penkevill Publishing Company, 1986), 66

¹⁰ Peckham 219

¹¹ Wellek 182-183

¹² Wellek 186

¹³ Wellek 188

The Chinese Perception of Romanticism

A Western definition of Romanticism highlights the three key traits of the function of poetry, the importance of the imagination, and the supremacy of nature. But how did Chinese scholars interpret this foreign literary movement? Mao Dun (1896-1981), a famous author in his own right, was also a literary and cultural critic. One of his books, *Xi Yang Wen Xue Tong Lun* (*A Survey of Western Literature*), published in 1930, describes and characterizes the different phases of Western literature, from the ancient Greeks and Romans through Romanticism and beyond. As a contemporary of Guo Moruo and Xu Zhimo, Mao's interpretation of Romanticism helps shed light on the Chinese perspective of his generation.

Mao emphasizes the naturalness, the passion, and the heartfelt emotion of Romantic poetry. He sees Romanticism as the literary embodiment of the urge for freedom—Romanticism “breaks open the rules that shackle human freedom.”¹⁴ Mao extends his view of Romanticism to general life rather than confining it to literature, so that Romanticism means breaking down any traditions that seek to limit individual creation.¹⁵ Thus Romanticism to Mao has two defining characteristics: “egotistic individual liberation” and “avoiding the common while striving for the splendid.”¹⁶ “The individual is holy” to the Romantics, and as part of their quest for individual liberation they seek the sublime and the supernatural.¹⁷

When specifically discussing English Romanticism, Mao praises the “naturalness” of their poetry. He uses the term to mean unaffected and down-to-earth, as opposed to the stylistically rigid poetry of classicism.¹⁸ According to Mao, the greatest period of the English

¹⁴ Mao Dun, *Xi Yang Wen Xue Tong Lun [A Survey of Western Literature]* (Shanghai, China: Fudan University Press, 2004), 77

¹⁵ Mao 77

¹⁶ Mao 77

¹⁷ Mao 78

¹⁸ Mao 85

Romantics came during the lives of Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Mao admires these poets for their emotional writing—Byron possesses “unrestrained passion” and writes “blaze-like poetry”; Shelley can “burrow into your heart”; Keats “moves the deepest regions of your heart” with his “touching melodies.”¹⁹ The overflow of emotion in poetry and the individual freedom to express oneself resonated with Mao, as they must have with many readers of his generation.

When Mao Dun and his contemporaries came of age, China was undergoing a major cultural renovation known as the May Fourth Movement. This Movement emphasized the need to do away with Confucian traditions, which May Fourth scholars saw as a stifling influence, holding China back from modernization. In place of the old traditions, the May Fourth Movement emphasized rationality, democracy, and individual freedom, with a heavy emphasis on Western and Japanese learning. Small wonder then that Mao identifies with the Romantic literature he describes: “Individual expression is always good, individual liberation is always rational; [if] I want to say this, it’s my personal freedom... personality is holy.”²⁰ Though speaking for the Romantics, Mao’s own sympathies show through in his enthusiastic declaration of the Romantic emphasis on freedom. He is less enthusiastic, however, about the Romantic quest for beauty and the sublime, suggesting that it leads to a fundamental disconnect from reality.²¹ Therein lies the May Fourth critique of Romanticism—the scientific and rational side of the May Fourth Movement conflicts at times with the boundless emotionality of the Romantics.

Traditional Chinese Nature Poetry and Romanticism

Interestingly, Mao says little about the role of nature in Romantic poetry. Perhaps this is because he did not see it as a unique characteristic in itself, as China too has a rich history of

¹⁹ Mao 86

²⁰ Mao 78

²¹ Mao 78

nature poetry. What separates the Romantic conception of nature from the traditional Chinese one are the two characteristics Mao has already noted: the intense individualistic nature of Romantic poetry and the use of nature in the quest for transcendence. Traditionally, Chinese poets also viewed nature as the key to the fundamental nature of the universe, but they tend to emphasize the “suppression of selfhood” rather than the “egoism of the experience.”²² Taoism especially holds similarities to the Romantic conception of nature, with an emphasis on the oneness of the universe and the possibility for seeing deeper meaning by communing with nature.²³ Taoism focuses on “communion with Nature and... mysteries of nourishing and prolonging life.”²⁴

Yet only Romanticism makes the claim that the creative power of the poet is the key to this transcendent realm.²⁵ For the traditional Chinese poet, transcendence is the realm of the monk. While Chinese nature poetry often focuses on a union between the “celestial and the terrestrial world,” the poet does not serve as a conduit to bring this about, but rather as the recorder of the moment.²⁶ In other words, traditional Chinese poetry emphasizes oneness with nature in the sense that the poet is willingly submitting to the natural order.²⁷ Conversely, in Romantic nature poetry, the poet’s union with nature represents a dynamic and reciprocal creative relationship.²⁸ The Chinese poet’s perceptions are not specifically linked to transcendence but instead a specific emotional experience. The “spots of time” describe deep

²² James Whipple Miller, “English Romanticism and Chinese Nature Poetry,” *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Summer 1972): 216-236, 217

²³ Miller 219-220

²⁴ Hans H. Frankel, *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady: Interpretations of Chinese Poetry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 14

²⁵ Miller 219

²⁶ Frankel 15-16

²⁷ Michelle Yeh, *Modern Chinese Poetry: Theory and Practice Since 1917* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 21

²⁸ W.K. Wimsatt, “The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery” in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. M. H. Abrams (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 31

emotions rather than transformative meetings with the pantheistic force, as in Romantic poetry.²⁹

The natural scenery acts as a medium for conveying the emotion of the poet—the famous relationship between the Chinese concepts of *qing* (emotion) and *jing* (scenery).³⁰

Despite the thematic differences in the use of nature imagery, the similarities between traditional Chinese poetry and Romantic poetry are large enough that a Chinese poet could easily identify with the poetry of the English Romantics. Added to the traditional background we have the iconoclastic forces of the May Fourth Movement, which also served to attract young Chinese scholars to Romantic ideals. The next section deals with the historical context of the May Fourth Movement, the cultural movement that nurtured both Guo Moruo and Xu Zhimo, and how such a movement could have led young Chinese authors towards Romanticism.

²⁹ Miller 231

³⁰ Frankel 1

Part I

Romanticism as “The Spirit of the Age”:

Historical Context

Why did the Chinese May Fourth writers identify with the English Romantic poets of the previous century? Why did poets such as Guo Moruo and Xu Zhimo feel drawn to figures like Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Keats? I suggest that the key lies in the similar intellectual contexts of late 18th and early 19th century Europe and China during the 1910s and 1920s. Romanticism grew out of larger cultural trends in England and across Europe, including a growing emphasis on liberty and revolution and a new tendency to question the predominant social and cultural norms.³¹ These same attitudes emerged in China during the May Fourth Movement (1915-1925), a diverse social and cultural movement that criticized Chinese traditional values and encouraged reliance on Western ideas like science and democracy. Chinese authors who adopted this sort of questioning and rebellious attitude within their own cultural context could easily have seen the Romantic authors as role models.

In the 1790s, the Romantics watched in horror as the French Revolution, which was supposed to represent a triumph of liberty and freedom, degenerated into bloodshed and terror.³² To many English Romantic poets, the French Terror represented the failure of reason.³³ An attempt at establishing a nation based on the principles of “equality, liberty, and fraternity” within five years turned into despotism and terror. In its wake, European Romantics began to reevaluate their culture and adjust their thinking about political revolution.³⁴ The Romantics

³¹ Peckham 13

³² Stephen Gurney, *British Poetry of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 21-22

³³ Peckham 103

³⁴ Peckham 15

faced a crisis of faith just as over a century later many Chinese intellectuals were losing hope in the establishment of a new China.

China by 1915 was at a crossroads. The imperial system that had united the country for thousands of years had fallen, and chaos ruled in its place as warlords divided China and fought for ultimate control. The republican hopes of those who overthrew the Qing dynasty in 1911 had been dashed by the political realities of China when the powerful general Yuan Shikai seized control in 1913. With his death in 1916, the final vestiges of the Chinese Republic disintegrated into decentralized warlord rule. The failure of the revolution came as a drastic ideological shock to the intellectuals who had championed republicanism, leading the Chinese intelligentsia to reexamine their goals.³⁵ China had attempted a democracy and failed, and the overwhelming question was why. Why could China not imitate Western democracies, and thus take its place among the modern nations of the world? In the wake of this disillusionment, many Chinese scholars of that generation felt their faith in emotion and patriotism had been betrayed.³⁶ To intellectuals such as Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi, the answer lay in Chinese culture, which they saw as stifling and out-dated. To ensure the success of further modernizing changes, China would first have to change its culture.³⁷

Both the Romantics and Chinese intellectuals engaged in a dynamic reevaluation of their own cultures, seeking personal and national redemption.³⁸ In China, this quest took the form of the May Fourth Movement (*wu si yundong* 五四运动) where intellectuals and students, often after studying abroad in Japan or Western countries, promoted the values of science and

³⁵ Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 34

³⁶ Schwarcz, 34

³⁷ Joseph T. Chen, "The May Fourth Movement Redefined," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1. (1970): 63-81, 64

³⁸ Schwarcz 36; Peckham 123

democracy, even demonizing Chinese traditions in their zealous promotion of cultural reform. This movement has been compared to the European Renaissance³⁹ and the Enlightenment movement,⁴⁰ but it also has definite ties to Romanticism. In both movements, the aim was to transcend one's own culture in order to promote the values of personal liberty and social justice.⁴¹ While both the Romantics and the Chinese May Fourth intellectuals emphasized the importance of personal transformation, for many Chinese intellectuals, this was only a stepping stone for eventual national transformation.⁴² Their main goal was to save China, a goal they thought could only be achieved after the cultural transformation of the nation. The connection between cultural questioning and national salvation represents a crucial difference between them and the Romantics, whose goals were on a more personal, individual level.⁴³

The challenge to save China was taken up by the founders of the May Fourth Movement, people such as Chen Duxiu (陈独秀), founder of the influential and ground-breaking journal *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian*; 新青年); Hu Shi (胡适), the major advocate of the use of vernacular Chinese in literature; and Lu Xun (鲁迅), arguably the most influential May Fourth writer. All of them studied abroad: Chen Duxiu in France, Hu Shi in the United States, and Lu Xun in Japan. All returned from their studies not only with new ideas about science, democracy, and individual freedom, but also with lasting impressions of Western, “modern” perceptions of China and Confucianism as weak and outdated.⁴⁴ These leaders saw themselves as uniquely placed to save China because of their cultural familiarity with their motherland combined with new ideas and

³⁹ John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History* (London: Belknap Press, 1998), 266

⁴⁰ Schwarcz 32

⁴¹ Gurney 34

⁴² Xiaoming Chen, *From the May Fourth Movement to Communist Revolution: Guo Moruo and the Chinese Path to Communism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 10

⁴³ Peckham 66-67

⁴⁴ R. Keith Schoppa, *Revolution and its Past: Identities and Changes in Modern Chinese History*, 2nd edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006), 163-164

perspectives from the West. They adopted Western emphases on personal freedom, political rights, and social change, all concepts that were at the heart of the Romantic movement.⁴⁵ Many of the concepts that were to be a part of the May Fourth Movement were borrowed from Western countries, so it is no surprise Chinese intellectuals turned to the early advocates of revolution, individuality, and social change as their role models. The Chinese May Fourth Movement adopted European Romantic values as part of its rallying cry, so naturally they held the Romantic poets in high regard.

Interestingly, the May Fourth Movement centered much of its efforts on the literary realm. In some ways, May Fourth intellectuals were the modern version of the ancient scholar-officials, empowered by special status to speak for the commoners.⁴⁶ Chinese scholar-officials traditionally functioned as advisors and advocates within the government, and during the early 1900s Chinese intellectuals still felt they had governmental or at least social responsibilities to fulfill.⁴⁷ The traditional way of affecting society was through literature, as shown in the idea of *wen yi zai dao* (文以載道) or “literature carrying the Tao (or the way).” In traditional Chinese thought, truth becomes known through literature, and thus writing is the most powerful tool to use in social reconstruction. It makes sense then that many scholars mark the beginning of the May Fourth Movement with a literary event: Chen Duxiu’s founding of *New Youth*, a periodical devoted to expressing and circulating the new cultural ideas of Chen and his students. He and many of the May Fourth advocates thought that any attempt to reform China would first have to do away with traditional morality and its emphasis on submitting to authority.⁴⁸ Thus any attempt to modernize China technologically or socially would have to begin with efforts to

⁴⁵ Gurney 2; Peckham 66

⁴⁶ Schwarcz 75

⁴⁷ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 267

⁴⁸ Schwarcz 18

modernize its culture. Lu Xun, one of China's most famous modern writers, reached this same conclusion when he decided to abandon his medical studies in order to pursue a literary career. His decision to *qi yi cong wen* (弃医从文) (give up medicine to follow literature) came when he famously realized that China's true illnesses were cultural and thus could only be cured culturally—through writing.⁴⁹

The idea of massive culture change through a literary campaign does have precedents in Chinese history. Often the scholar-officials were proponents of change, and would express their ideas through literature, usually stylized essays.⁵⁰ But the high regard for the transformative power of literature is also a central theme of the Romantic movement, where the poet especially had special status as a shaper of society. The “poet as prophet” motif, advocated by Romantics like Wordsworth and Shelley, meant that the responsibility for social change and even revolution lay in the hands of the poets.⁵¹ Both Chinese May Fourth and English Romantic poets saw their literary mission in similar terms, and thus many Chinese intellectuals like Guo Moruo came to idolize the Romantic poets who had previously waged a literary campaign for cultural change.⁵²

Even while both Chinese and Romantics saw themselves as elites guiding and shaping a movement, they also sought to include the common people in their efforts. One of the hallmarks of the May Fourth Movement was its attack on classical Chinese language (*wenyan* 文言), a program spearheaded by Hu Shi. Hu Shi believed the use of the classical language in literature confined and stifled the expression of new ideas, and furthermore prevented the commoners from reading and understanding literature.⁵³ It took years of training to be able to write in the classical language, and a substantial amount of education to be able to read anything written in this highly

⁴⁹ Schoppa 163

⁵⁰ Schwarcz 75

⁵¹ Peckham 66

⁵² Julia C. Lin, *Modern Chinese Poetry: An Introduction* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1972), 199

⁵³ Schwarcz 84

compressed and unpunctuated form.⁵⁴ Hu Shi suggested instead the use of Chinese vernacular, *baihua* (白话) in literature, as the language was already used in business-related and other documents. The vernacular mirrored spoken Chinese, making it far more accessible to both readers and writers.

The change from using classical Chinese to using *baihua* can be compared to the replacement of Latin by local vernaculars such as French, German, and Italian in Renaissance Europe.⁵⁵ While this comparison captures the scale and importance of the change, it also has similarities to the revision of poetic diction that occurred in the English Romantic period, where poets attempted to use common language to express their ideas. The literary revolution advocated by Wordsworth and Coleridge did not involve the rejection of one language for another; in this sense, the Chinese movement towards *baihua* is far more significant. However, both changes involved shucking off an increasingly confining and stifling traditional poetic diction and use of a language approximating the spoken word of the common people.

Wordsworth especially championed using “the real language of men” in poetry.⁵⁶ Wordsworth, like Hu, maintained that the classic forms of poetry (including traditional poetic diction and strict poetic forms) only served to “separate [the poet] from the sympathies of men.”⁵⁷ By writing *Lyrical Ballads* entirely in a colloquial style, Wordsworth and Coleridge sparked what Wu calls “a literary revolution.”⁵⁸ Poets in China who were trying to incite a similar revolution by switching to the use of *baihua* would naturally view their Romantic counterparts with admiration.

In addition to the use of the vernacular, both the Chinese May Fourth Movement and English Romanticism saw the rise of realistic literature, which Vera Schwarcz describes as “not

⁵⁴ Schoppa 167-168

⁵⁵ Fairbank and Goldman 266

⁵⁶ Duncan Wu, ed, *Romanticism: An Anthology*, 3rd edition (Malden; Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 495

⁵⁷ Wu 498-499

⁵⁸ Wu 327

only deal[ing] with topics from ‘real life,’ but also address[ing] itself to the audience’s literacy level and class circumstances.”⁵⁹ Instead of adopting aristocratic families as their main characters, many Chinese authors and poets strove to portray peasants, workers, and students. This trend strongly recalls the efforts of the Romantic poets to portray events and characters easily recognizable to the ordinary man. As Coleridge wrote in *Biographica Literaria*, “the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity.”⁶⁰ The movement towards realism also worked well as a form of social critique, allowing authors to portray the despair and poverty that many commoners faced both in 19th century England and in 20th century China.⁶¹ Once again, by pioneering the use of realistic literature, the Romantics served as a role model for the May Fourth thinkers.

These feelings of respect for and even identification with Romantic poets must have been exacerbated by the overall isolation of the May Fourth writers. Despite its undoubted importance, we must remember that the May Fourth movement was limited in its scope. When thinking about the influential writings in periodicals such as *New Youth*, it is important to bear in mind that readership of all Chinese papers, much less those affiliated with the May Fourth Movement, was at maximum 30 million, which at the time represented less than ten percent of China’s population.⁶² The May Fourth Movement, though it championed democracy and the rights of the “common man” was in reality influential only among the elite—the college students, professors, and educated urbanites.⁶³ Even then, there were many enemies of the movement, conservatives who attacked the May Fourth advocates as unpatriotic.⁶⁴ In a time when May

⁵⁹ Schwarcz 84

⁶⁰ Wu 692

⁶¹ Peckham 91; Schwarcz 84

⁶² Fairbank and Goldman 263

⁶³ Schwarcz 128-131

⁶⁴ Schoppa 177

Fourth intellectuals were isolated and condemned, perhaps they found comfort in knowing that the Romantics suffered the same fate.⁶⁵ Romanticism also started as a small, elite movement, and Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats all suffered massive criticisms of their works. Byron and Shelley even went so far as to self-exile themselves, spending much of their brief lives living overseas. These English poets thus are not only potential role models for the Chinese, but a source of moral support, having suffered through harsh critiques and endured.

However, the May Fourth Movement gained a massive boost of popular support from the events on May 4, 1919, the source of the movement's name. Some historical explanation is necessary to understand the context of the incident. China entered World War I on the side of the Allied powers in 1917, hoping that in return for its aid German territories in China would be returned to Chinese control. Instead, at the Versailles Peace Conference the Allied Powers decided to award control of the Shandong peninsula and other previously German holdings in China to Japan, which had conquered the German-held regions during the war. Thanks to a series of secret agreements, the imperialist powers supported Japan's claim, as did the warlord government that held Beijing at the time.⁶⁶ The Treaty of Versailles agreed to cede Shandong to Japan. When news of the decision reached the students in Beijing, thousands of them poured onto the streets in protest. When the government cracked down by arresting the student leaders, the students banded together further, organizing protests and strikes across the nation. These protests marked the beginning of the largest nation-wide patriotic movement China had ever seen.⁶⁷

The May Fourth Movement now began to attract members of society beyond the elite intellectual class, including merchants, laborers, and professionals. In the wake of May 4, 1919,

⁶⁵ Yeh , *Modern Chinese Poetry*, 30, 34

⁶⁶ Ebrey 271

⁶⁷ Schoppa 171

these diverse groups melded into one united force.⁶⁸ However, in reaching out to the masses, the movement changed from its original goals of science, democracy, and individual rights. These concepts had little meaning to the lower classes of China, who faced more pressing, immediate concerns such as constant mistreatment and poverty. Instead, the May Fourth Movement gained popularity through political events, and thus came to have political concerns as its center, which, being more concrete than the cultural ideals of the intellectuals, were better equipped to garner support.⁶⁹ The original ideas of science, democracy, and individualism became mixed with the rising patriotic sentiments, especially anti-imperialism.⁷⁰ While many of the original May Fourth thinkers fought to keep their literary and cultural transformation on track, the movement was adopted by patriotic and anti-imperialist forces who saw foreigners as the enemy. The movement soon split between those who clung to the original idea of evolution through cultural change and those who championed the more drastic and more popular alternative of revolution through political change.⁷¹

This shift obviously has implications for our historical comparison. During the early 1800s English Romantic poets faced a growing tide of patriotism due to the war against France, so that “it became difficult to express anything other than support for the national cause.”⁷² However, unlike their Chinese counterparts, the English poets did not have the added confusion of anti-imperialism to deal with. Many Chinese in the 1900s felt they had been humiliated and abused by the Western powers. To the Chinese, the terms of the Versailles Treaty gave another example of the duplicity and oppressive nature of the Western powers. This sense of national

⁶⁸ Schoppa 171-173

⁶⁹ Schwarcz 128-148

⁷⁰ Schoppa 174

⁷¹ Charlotte Furth, “May Fourth in History” in *Reflections on the May Fourth Movement: A Symposium*, ed. Benjamin I. Schwartz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 59

⁷² Wu xxxii

victimization by outside forces is absent in Romantic writings. The Romantic poets saw the cultural problems in England as self-inflicted, and they believed cultural and social change was the only solution.⁷³ Their campaign to save England differed fundamentally from the Chinese, who had to face the very real danger that their country would disintegrate into small pieces governed by warlords and foreign powers. Instead, when Romantics spoke of saving their nation they generally meant liberating the oppressed individual from the restrictive bonds of his own society, which would benefit society as a whole.⁷⁴ This social and cultural liberation was also initially a main goal for May Fourth thinkers, but for many Chinese this goal mixed with or was even subsumed by the anti-imperialistic fervor of 1919 and afterwards.⁷⁵

Of course, from the start the May Fourth Movement had included the ideas of nationalism and anti-imperialism. The ultimate goal of the movement was to make China stronger, so that it could be a power in its own right and not merely subservient to Western nations.⁷⁶ However, the intellectual leaders of the May Fourth Movement believed that before this could happen, China needed to undergo some radical cultural changes, especially dismantling the old Confucian traditions. In the wake of a failed attempt at political action (the Revolution of 1911), many Chinese intellectuals decided cultural change had to come first.⁷⁷ Thus while the May Fourth Movement included the values of patriotism and nationalism, it emphasized other ideas, especially science and democracy, believing that without a new culture patriotic and anti-imperialist movements would be futile.⁷⁸

⁷³ Peckham 15

⁷⁴ Wu xxxvi-xxxvii

⁷⁵ Furth 59, 67

⁷⁶ Schwarcz 35-36

⁷⁷ Schoppa 163

⁷⁸ Schwarcz 37

In a famous essay defending his anti-Confucian stance, Chen Duxiu explained his reasons for promoting “Mr. Science” and “Mr. Democracy”: “We now know that these two gentlemen can save China from the darkness of its politics, its morality, its learning.”⁷⁹ In other words, the Chinese had to adopt two central concepts of Western culture in order to make China stronger. Only once China had strengthened herself could she throw off foreign interference, using the Westerners’ own methods. This plan led to a rather contradictory situation where May Fourth thinkers attempted to save their country by attacking its traditions. Instead of embracing an emotional patriotism, they attempted to scientifically analyze Chinese culture.⁸⁰ They sought to reveal all of China’s flaws, which needed to be corrected before the Chinese people could begin to improve their country politically. European Romanticism has much more in common with this form of self-critique and the resulting push for cultural and social change than it does with the anti-imperialist sentiments that grew more and more prominent in China after 1919.

Under the influence of rampant anti-foreign sentiments, it also became more and more difficult to justify a movement that so explicitly borrowed from Western precedents. The May Fourth message of cultural change as a prerequisite for revolution became much less popular amidst the pro-Chinese, anti-Western atmosphere of the early 1920s.⁸¹ Many younger students began advocating revolution without focusing on introspection and cultural change.⁸² They focused on China’s humiliation, on the social problems caused by China’s weakness, and especially on the need to liberate China from its own corrupt warlords and the Western powers, both of which preyed upon the average Chinese citizen. Even while rejecting Western nations,

⁷⁹ Wang, Gungwu, “Outside the Chinese Revolution (in Studies),” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 23. (Jan. 1990): 33-48, 38

⁸⁰ Schwarcz 118

⁸¹ Ezra Vogel, “Unlikely Heroes” in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, ed. Merle Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 157

⁸² Schwarcz 146

however, many thinkers still continued to advocate the use of Western theories to modernize China.⁸³ And even in the midst of the most violent attacks on Western nations, Chinese authors, perhaps unconsciously, reflected the Romantic emphases on the importance of liberty for personal fulfillment.⁸⁴

In the early 1920s, Chinese thinkers began to embrace Communism as a means for achieving ultimate personal freedom as well as national salvation.⁸⁵ The leaders of the May Fourth Movement could not have foreseen that their quest for democracy would end in Communism, yet many of them believed strongly in the new ideal. They saw Communism as the final stage of democracy, combining political freedom with economic freedom.⁸⁶ In fact, Chen Duxiu, the great friend of “Mr. Science” and “Mr. Democracy,” was also one of the founding members of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. The subtle but crucial changes May 4, 1919 brought to the May Fourth ideals served as a bridge between the early May Fourth Movement and the rise of Communism.⁸⁷ After 1919, the May Fourth Movement added a new emphasis on patriotism and anti-imperialism, and an increased wariness of the previously embraced Western credo of liberal democracy. Many May Fourth scholars were disillusioned by the brutal war between the Western nations they had sought to use as models for building a new China. The secret dealings that awarded Chinese territory to Japan also made many Chinese believe Western nations could not live up to their own ideals of democracy and equality.⁸⁸ With their democratic ideals called into serious question, many scholars turned for inspiration to the recently formed

⁸³ Schwarcz 121

⁸⁴ Xiaoming Chen 101

⁸⁵ Hung-Yok Ip, “Politics and Individuality in Communist Revolutionary Culture,” *Modern China*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Jan. 1997): 33-68, 44

⁸⁶ Hung-Yok Ip, “The Origins of Chinese Communism: A New Interpretation,” *Modern China*, Vol. 20, No. 1. (Jan. 1994): 34-63, 37

⁸⁷ Schoppa 176

⁸⁸ Bonnie S. McDougall, “The Impact of Western Literary Trends” in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, ed. Merle Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977) 37

Soviet Union, which had just undergone its own Communist revolution.⁸⁹ Thus the May Fourth Movement opened the door for Communist influence.

The growing influence of Communism in China represents another divergence from the Romantic tradition, but perhaps not as large of one as might initially appear. Karl Marx grew up during the late stages of the Romantic movement, and his early writing reveals its influence.⁹⁰ Marx especially embraced the Romantic ideas of isolation of the artist and the potential of art to create revolution.⁹¹ Just as within Marx's work we find strains of Romantic thinking, among the Romantic poets themselves there are tendencies towards Communism. For example, Coleridge endorsed a system he called "pantisocracy," whereby twelve married couples would live and work together on a commune, with no personal property.⁹² Shelley in his youth also believed in a communal ideal.⁹³ And the Romantic utopia was "a promised land in which property was of no consequence."⁹⁴ Given the emphasis many Romantic poets placed on social justice and revolution, the leap from Romanticism to Communism is not as great as it first appears.

So it is not entirely bewildering that this drive to Communism found its expression in literary techniques borrowed from the Romantic authors. As Communism gained importance to Chinese intellectuals, the idea of class struggle took on more importance.⁹⁵ Thus the literature changed to reflect this, including the social criticism and emotional appeals to the common man that partly characterize English Romanticism. Poets such as Guo Moruo, who admired Byron, Shelley, and Keats and was "an ardent believer in pantheism" like Wordsworth and Coleridge,

⁸⁹ Schoppa 174

⁹⁰ William M. Johnston, "Karl Marx's Verse of 1836-1837 as a Foreshadowing of his Early Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Apr.-Jun. 1967): 259-268, 267

⁹¹ Johnston 265, 267

⁹² Wu 593

⁹³ Wu 1044

⁹⁴ Wu xxxvii

⁹⁵ Merle Goldman, Introduction to *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, ed. Merle Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 3

came to embrace Marxism.⁹⁶ Far from seeing a contradiction in this, Guo Moruo saw the Romantic poet and the Marxist fighter as extensions of the same ideal.⁹⁷ Guo is an interesting example of how, after the May Fourth Incident, intellectuals began changing their ideas of exactly what their new culture should embrace. However, many of the Western-influenced literary techniques and themes these Chinese intellectuals had adopted remained a part of the literature they produced.⁹⁸ And on the other end of the spectrum there were poets like Xu Zhimo, who rejected the influence of politics and insisted on writing pure (and largely Romantic) poetry.⁹⁹

With May 4, 1919 and the ensuing protests as a catalyst, intellectuals moved from an emphasis on cultural change to a stress on politics and actions. The theme was no longer “intellectual revolution” as embodied by the pre-May 4 May Fourth Movement but “social reconstruction.”¹⁰⁰ The active nature of the May Fourth Movement after the summer of 1919, complete with strikes, boycotts, and protests, made it easier for post-May Fourth intellectuals to accept the idea of violent Marxist-style revolution.¹⁰¹ The idea of revolution was in many ways anathema to the typical May Fourth intellectual; their revolution was passive, involving minds, not bodies.¹⁰² However, in the wake of May 4, 1919 many of them came to see the potential of physical action as a means of change. With the brutal crack-downs of the warlord government, peaceful revolution seemed less and less feasible. In this way, the idea of democracy slowly became linked to the Marxist idea of social revolution, where the people obtain freedom by

⁹⁶ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 183-184

⁹⁷ Lee 199

⁹⁸ Goldman 9-12

⁹⁹ Lee 169

¹⁰⁰ Edward X. Gu, “Who Was Mr Democracy? The May Fourth Discourse of Populist Democracy and the Radicalization of Chinese Intellectuals (1915-1922),” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3. (Jul. 2001): 589-621, 612

¹⁰¹ Ip, “The Origins of Chinese Communism” 54

¹⁰² Schwarcz 52

violently shaking off the bonds of their oppressors.¹⁰³ After the brutal murder of Chinese protestors by imperial military forces on May 30, 1925, the anti-imperialism, anti-Western drive towards political radicalism only grew stronger. By 1925 the May Fourth Movement had run its course.¹⁰⁴

And in all of this, lurking in the background was the Romantic ideal of revolution, the struggle for human rights, and the “idea of a poem that could precipitate revolution.”¹⁰⁵ A crucial difference between the Romantic advocates of revolution and the Chinese in the 1920s was immediacy. Many Chinese wanted a revolution sooner rather than later, and many May Fourth intellectuals were actively involved in organizing strikes and protests.¹⁰⁶ The Romantic poets of England had a different view. While they admired the idea of revolution and wrote about it in glowing terms, particularly praising the early French Revolution, there was not a sense that England itself was in dire need of an immediate revolution. Their revolutionary efforts were largely focused outward, at Ireland, Greece, or France.¹⁰⁷ The political stability of England gave them a sense of security, giving them a firm base from which to launch their critiques of their native society and culture.¹⁰⁸ This stability was not available to the Chinese thinkers of the May Fourth Movement, who saw their country torn apart by warlords and threatened by predatory foreign nations. For China, revolution was far more than an abstract utopian concept. The need for social change was real and urgent.

This urgent impetus for revolution, caused in a large part by Western imperialism, is a major dividing point between Chinese and English Romanticism. The similarities in the

¹⁰³ Gu 611

¹⁰⁴ Schwarcz 179-180

¹⁰⁵ Wu 328

¹⁰⁶ Schwarcz 130-131

¹⁰⁷ Wu xxxvi

¹⁰⁸ Schwarcz 147

historical backgrounds of China's May Fourth Movement and England's Romantic Movement help explain why many Chinese writers were drawn to English Romantic poets. However, Romanticism was by no means a perfect model for the Chinese. The historical problems China faced in the 20th century were far different than those facing England in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Thus turning to Romanticism was only partially helpful to Chinese writers trying to address China's national questions as well as their own personal insecurities. The writers that can be said to be a part of Chinese Romanticism adapted the movement to fit their own needs and the needs of their country. Their use of nature imagery, their ideas on transcendence, and their views on imagination and the role of the poet diverged from the English Romantic model, evolving into something uniquely suited for early twentieth-century China. The next section will examine how the works of Guo Moruo embraced both Romanticism and Communism.

Part II

Guo Moruo: The Romantic Marxist

Guo Moruo was one of the forerunners of vernacular poetry in China, and also one of the early proponents of “revolutionary literature” on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party. He was also a solid Romantic through much of his life. Guo’s version of Romanticism reflects subtle differences from the English model, including an ambivalent attitude towards the role of the poet and a unique conception of the power of nature. Yet in most of Guo’s poetry, especially his early works, we can easily see why his poetry is usually classified as Romantic.

Guo Moruo’s Life

Guo Moruo was born in 1892 to a fairly prosperous family that could afford to give their son an education. Guo, like many of his contemporaries, was originally given a classical education based on Chinese traditional works and thoughts. However, when the civil service examination (which focused on traditional Chinese learning) was abolished, so were the financial and social incentives for such an education. A traditional education no longer helped in securing a lucrative government job. Guo’s family then enrolled him in more Western-style schools.

Guo was a rebellious child, often getting into trouble with teachers and faculty at his various schools. At the same time, Guo began reading translations of Western writings that appealed to both his rebellious streak and his growing sentimentality.¹⁰⁹ Guo also admired traditional Chinese works that meshed well with his personality, including the Chinese classic *Zhuangzi* (or *Chuang-tzu*), a Taoist text with a strong emphasis on nature and the imagination.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 182

¹¹⁰ David Tod Roy, *Kuo Mo-jo: The Early Years* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 32

A fascination with emotionality, imagination, and the force behind nature would lead him “almost inevitably to Western romanticism.”¹¹¹ Guo was also affected by western concepts of love, romance, and individualism, which led to psychological tensions when Guo’s family pressured him into an arranged marriage in 1912.¹¹²

Like many members of his generation, Guo left China to further his education abroad. Guo arrived in Japan in 1914, and the experience was a formative one. While in Japan Guo studied a variety of works that would have major influences on his later writing—the Chinese Confucian scholar Wang Yangming, who emphasized the value of intuitive knowledge; the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, whose works attracted Guo to the values of free verse as well as furthering his growing pantheistic views; and Goethe, whose Romantic pantheism left a strong impression on Guo.¹¹³ During his time in Japan Guo also encountered the works of Walt Whitman and the English Romantics (especially Byron, Shelley, and Keats). While finding kindred spirits in the intellectual realm, Guo also formed an emotional bond with a Japanese girl named Tomiko, who became his lover and de facto wife (although he never divorced the girl he had originally married in 1912).

Guo was in Japan during the May Fourth Incident of 1919, but he too was caught up in the patriotic fervor that followed. Guo’s work blossomed from 1919-1921, his most productive period.¹¹⁴ He began writing vernacular poetry in 1919 as a way of expressing his boundless emotions, consciously adopting the role of a Romantic poet.¹¹⁵ As a result of his two year creative burst, Guo published his first collection of poetry, *The Goddesses* (*Nü Shen* 女神), in 1921.

¹¹¹ Roy 70

¹¹² Xiaoming Chen, 14

¹¹³ Roy 60-69

¹¹⁴ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 184

¹¹⁵ Roy 87

However, Guo's vigorous style soon faded as he faced the hardships of everyday life. From his return to China in 1920 until the mid 1920s, Guo had a difficult time supporting his family. As part of his Romantic ideals, Guo felt it was a betrayal of artistic integrity to sell one's work for money, yet this was his only means of support.¹¹⁶ Poverty and practical challenges to his idealism contributed to a growing alienation from his early Romantic enthusiasm.¹¹⁷ Guo began to give up his pantheism and his Romantic idols in 1923,¹¹⁸ just around the time he made a major shift towards Communism.¹¹⁹ Though Guo espoused Communist ideas as early as 1919, he only began to truly study the doctrine in 1923, after a disillusioning encounter with bitter reality.

The violent political situation in China only added to Guo's conviction that he had to abandon his previous thoughts on literature.¹²⁰ After 1925, Guo no longer championed art as a means of free expression; he instead led the trend towards revolutionary literature.¹²¹ Still, his new emphasis on revolutionary literature reflected a strong belief in the prophetic mission of the poet.¹²² Guo firmly believed writers could use literature to sway the masses, bringing about the revolution he hoped for.¹²³ And though Guo gave up his literary individualism in favor of a new nationalistic outlook, he viewed Marxism as a way of gaining ultimate individual emancipation for all.¹²⁴ He had little concern for the purely material aspects of Marxist philosophy—what attracted Guo to Marxism was the idea of revolution and emancipation.¹²⁵ In other words,

¹¹⁶ Xiaoming Chen 37

¹¹⁷ Xiaoming Chen 37

¹¹⁸ Xiaoming Chen 49

¹¹⁹ Roy 150

¹²⁰ Schwarcz 174

¹²¹ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 178

¹²² Schwarcz 174

¹²³ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 196

¹²⁴ Xiaoming Chen 2

¹²⁵ Xiaoming Chen 105-106

Marxism became the means for fulfilling the Romantic goals he had adopted during the May Fourth Movement. However, after 1925, nationalism was Guo's overwhelming concern.¹²⁶

Guo officially joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1927. During the 1930s, and especially during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) his nationalistic propaganda won him acclaim within the party. He remained a major figure in the CCP, holding various posts until his death in 1978. However, most scholars agree that Guo's later works, his forays into revolutionary literature, lack the emotional vigor that made his earlier works so appealing. According to Julia C. Lin, most of Guo's later poems "are barely verse, being prosaic, banal, didactic, and tediously propagandistic in character."¹²⁷ Guo's true poetic achievement came in the early 1920s, when he was in the throes of Romanticism. *The Goddesses*, his first and most would say his best collection of poetry, reflects these Romantic themes.

Influences on Guo Moruo

Guo Moruo offers an interesting case study of the role of Romanticism in China. Even in the early 1920s, when he was at his most Romantic, Guo shared sympathies with the Communist movement. In his introductory poem to *The Goddesses*, Guo explicitly calls himself a Communist.¹²⁸ The two movements are undeniably at odds over certain crucial points. Where Romanticism extols the creative power of the individual, Chinese Communism insists the individual should always serve the society.¹²⁹ Where Romanticism praises the value of nature and largely ignores technology, Communist theory applauds the urban working classes.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 193

¹²⁷ Julia C. Lin 221

¹²⁸ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 195

¹²⁹ Ip, "Politics and Individuality," 33-34

¹³⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, "The Romantic Temper of May Fourth Writers" in *Reflections on the May Fourth Movement: A Symposium*, ed. Benjamin I. Schwartz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 82-83

Interestingly, Guo's Romantic tendencies, even in his most Romantic work, show the imprint of Communist thinking and traditional Chinese collectivism.¹³¹

Of course the historical context of *The Goddesses* cannot be ignored. In the aftermath of the May Fourth Incident in 1919, a wave of patriotic nationalism swept over China and Guo, even though he was studying in Japan at the time, was certainly not immune. His poems reveal his deep concern for his homeland and its future.¹³² Read in this light, his Romantic concerns are more nationalistic and less focused on the individual than those of the English poets. Figures such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley all examine the individual's quest for transcendence. Guo extends the transcendental theme to an entire nation, holding out the possibility of rebirth to all of China.¹³³

When discussing Guo's poetry, even though Romantic strains are quite evident, one must acknowledge other authors and genres that also influenced Guo's work. Much work has been done exploring Guo's indebtedness to Walt Whitman, tracing Guo's pantheism and "dynamism" to his admiration of the American poet.¹³⁴ Guo himself was a great admirer of Whitman's famous work *Leaves of Grass*, and he remained an admirer of Whitman throughout his life.¹³⁵ However, many of the elements of Guo's poetry that can be traced to Whitman's influence are also Romantic—pantheism, for example, as well as the desire to return to nature and transcend the physical world.¹³⁶ Whether Guo was attracted to such ideas because of Whitman's work or

¹³¹ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 195

¹³² Xiaoming Chen 54

¹³³ Xiaoming Chen 52

¹³⁴ Liu Rongqiang, "Whitman's Soul in China: Guo Moruo's Poetry in the New Culture Movement" in *Whitman East and West: New Contexts for Reading Walt Whitman*, ed. Ed Folsom (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 175

¹³⁵ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 187

¹³⁶ Ou Hong, "Pantheistic Ideas in Guo Moruo's *The Goddesses* and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*" in *Whitman East and West: New Contexts for Reading Walt Whitman*, ed. Ed Folsom (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 188-189

because of Shelley or Byron's poetry has less bearing on this study than the fact that Guo did indeed embrace such quintessentially Romantic principles in his poetry.

The same can be said for the influence of Chinese traditional literature upon Guo's writing. The argument that traditional Chinese literature predisposed young Chinese authors to embrace certain themes is a convincing one.¹³⁷ Xiaoming Chen has done an interesting study on Guo Moruo, tracing his move from Romantic poet to Communist supporter in terms of traditional Chinese values. Chen ably demonstrates Guo's indebtedness to Chinese traditional literature, arguing that Guo embraced Western Romanticism because he had been so strongly influenced by similar concepts (namely, transcendence, pantheism, and the importance of nature) in Chinese literature.¹³⁸

Yet while traditional Chinese literature may have served to guide Guo's reading of foreign sources, the influence of Western authors upon Guo is undeniable. When he wrote *The Goddesses*, Guo was inspired and influenced by numerous writers, including Walt Whitman, the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, and Russian realists Nikolai Gogol and Leo Tolstoy, as well as by European Romantics Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, and John Keats.¹³⁹ Though one can see *The Goddesses* as Guo's synthesis of all these influences, the Romantic strain comes through the most clearly in Guo's pantheism, iconoclasm, and nature worship.¹⁴⁰ The poems he wrote from 1919 to 1921 show this Romantic influence especially strongly.

The Role of Nature in *The Goddesses*

¹³⁷ Goldman 9

¹³⁸ Xiaoming Chen 42-43

¹³⁹ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 183

¹⁴⁰ Rose Jui Chang Chen, "Human Hero and Exiled God: Chinese Thought in Kuo Mo-jo's *Chu Yuan*," PhD dissertation, University of Detroit, 1977, 193

What exactly make Guo's poetry so strongly reminiscent of European Romanticism? One of the most identifiable characteristics of the Romantic Movement is praise of and appreciation for nature. Nature for the Romantic poet is animated, alive, and an organic whole.¹⁴¹ Beyond this, nature is a conduit to higher knowledge.¹⁴² As Wellek says, nature itself is "unreal" because beyond it lurks a higher reality.¹⁴³ Nature functions both as an object admired for its beauty and also as a symbol that the poet must interpret in order to see the hidden knowledge behind it. Thus a poem that merely extols the beauty of nature is not strictly Romantic; there must be a suggestion of something more; something the poet sees beyond the natural scene.¹⁴⁴ In fact, this is one of the key differences between traditional Chinese nature poetry and the Romantic school—the Chinese nature poems do not link perception of nature with transcendence.¹⁴⁵

Guo Moruo's poems in *The Goddesses* are strongly tied to nature and natural images. In fact, many of the poems' titles contain nature imagery: "Sunrise," "Morning Snow," "New Moon and White Clouds," "Moonlight after Rain," "Stirrings of Spring," and so on.¹⁴⁶ The question, then, is whether nature imagery in Guo's poetry functions in the same way as nature imagery in Romantic poetry. Does the natural imagery connect to the idea of transcendence?

Guo provides a clear answer to this question in his poem "Morning Snow," significantly subtitled "On reading Carlyle's 'The Hero as Poet.'" Guo ties a natural image to an abstract idea, connecting nature with his emotional response to a book. The poem's first stanza reveals what thoughts Guo had while reading Carlyle's work:

Waves of snow.
A world all of silver.

¹⁴¹ Wellek 182-183

¹⁴² Gurney 13

¹⁴³ Wellek 184-185

¹⁴⁴ Wimsatt 31

¹⁴⁵ Miller 225

¹⁴⁶ All translations of Guo Moruo's poems taken from *The Goddesses/Nü Shen*, trans. Jong Lester and A.C. Barnes (Beijing, China: Foreign Languages Press, 2001)

My whole being is ready to resolve into light and flow forth,
an *open secret*.¹⁴⁷ (1-4)

The first two lines set up the natural scene: an ocean of snow, turning the entire world silver.

This natural image leads to an emotional response where the speaker feels his body is about to transform into light. Already in the first stanza, contemplation of a natural scene leads to a desire for transcendence; in this case transcending the limiting factors of the human body in exchange for the freedom to “flow forth.” (l. 3)

The transcendental drive is even clearer when we look at the English words “open secret” (l. 4). A note to the text tells us “open secret” is a quote from Goethe, found in Carlyle’s book. According to Carlyle, the “open secret” is none other than “the sacred mystery of the Universe” (p. 30). There is no mistaking the transcendental function of nature in “Morning Snow.” In just one stanza, Guo moves from appreciation of nature’s beauty to the transcendental reaction it sparks within him.

Many of Guo’s poems follow this same pattern. “Shouting on the Rim of the World” begins with a description of the “sublime arctic landscape” (l. 2) then moves to praise for the transcendental force behind the scene, a power of “unending destruction, unending creation, unending effort” (l. 5). Similarly, in “Drunken Song Under a Flowering Plum Tree,” Guo begins by invoking the plum tree, saying he wishes to sing its praises. However, he shifts quickly from the plum tree itself to the “Quintessence of the universe,/ source of life!” (ll. 7-8). Praising the plum tree leads Guo to recognize his kinship with it, and with all of nature.¹⁴⁸ Thus when he tells the plum tree “I sing your praises” (l. 13) his praise has a deeper meaning: “I sing the praises of myself,/ I sing the praises of the self-expressive universe” (ll. 14-15). Because all things are one, Guo realizes that praising the plum tree is tantamount to praising himself, because both are part

¹⁴⁷ The italicized words are in English in the original text.

¹⁴⁸ Julia C. Lin 207

of one greater whole. While the idea of the unity of all things also finds expression in traditional Chinese literature, what sets Guo's poetry apart is the egoism of the experience.¹⁴⁹ Traditional Chinese poetry involves the "suppression of all self-hood"¹⁵⁰ whereas Guo claims oneness with nature in order to connect himself to the eternal force of the "self-expressive universe" (l. 15).

We find the same sort of transition in Guo's poem "Pacing Through Jurimatsubara at Night," but here Guo more lovingly spells out the nature imagery. Guo's poems are mostly shorter works, and he has a tendency to establish the natural scene in a few lines before moving on to his main theme, man's interaction with nature and the transcendental urge.¹⁵¹ "Pacing Through Jurimatsubara at Night" is an exception to this pattern. Of the poem's ten lines, nine are devoted to describing the scenery. The language Guo uses grows more and more symbolic, revealing the unity of nature and providing a glimpse of the force behind it. For example, the heavens become a symbol for the transcendental force behind nature as Guo addresses the sky: "how lofty you are, how free, how mighty, how vast and serene!" (l. 4)

Yet the pantheistic force behind the scene is surprisingly quiescent—"The ocean sleeps in peace" (l. 1) while the "spacious heavens" are "serene" even while being "mighty" (l. 4). The only movement in the poem comes from the pine trees, which Guo envisions as raising "high their hands in silent adoration of the heavens" (l. 8). Guo himself is in a state akin to sensory deprivation as "only a misty glow can be seen,/ not the faintest murmur of waves can be heard" (ll. 2-3). Yet apparently this silent and darkened scene still provides a transcendental appreciation of nature and the force behind it. Just as the pine trees' hands "tremble in awe against the sky" (l. 9), so Guo says "every fibre of my nerves trembles in awe within me!" (l. 10)

¹⁴⁹ Miller 217

¹⁵⁰ J.D. Frodsham, *The Murmuring Stream*, Vol. 1 (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malay Press, 1967), 104

¹⁵¹ Julia C. Lin 210

Guo sees nature as a window through which the poet can glimpse the transcendental power of the universe. In this regard, he is in agreement with the Romantics.¹⁵² Examples of the pantheistic force experienced through nature abound, two of the more famous examples being Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and Shelley's "Mount Blanc." Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" expresses a similar theme. An encounter with a natural scene leads the poet to an encounter with a higher power. Coleridge's observation of frost, owlets, and a still night lead him to extol the idea of natural scenery as

The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself. (59-62)

Nature thus takes the role of "Great universal teacher" (l. 63), which Coleridge hopes his young son will be able to learn from. Interestingly, this famous poem also contains imagery of silence and darkness, just as Guo's poem "Pacing Through Jurimatsubara at Night." In both, the poet feels the power of nature despite the lack of stimulating sensory input.

Guo's seemingly boundless faith in the powerful connection between poet and nature does flag at times. In poems like "Spring Sadness," he explores the limitations of man to penetrate the mysteries of nature. The poem is a series of questions, none of which are answered. Thus the poem ends with the speaker's dejected admission: "But I can make nothing of the words of the sea,/ for me the flight of the white clouds has no meaning" (ll. 9-10). However, even in this poem where the speaker believes himself incapable of understanding nature, he views the natural world in anthropomorphic terms that mirror his depression. The sky is "desolate bleakness" (l. 2), and the "spring sunlight/ is so drear and bereft of brilliance" (ll.3-4). Even the hills seem to "bow their heads in frowning dejection" (l. 6). Thus even while the poem

¹⁵² Jonathan Wordsworth, "Wordsworth's 'Borderers'" in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. M. H. Abrams (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 173

expresses man's frustrated attempts to connect with nature, it upholds an individual's subjective, imaginative vision of the natural world.

These poems, where Guo's ego is relatively subdued, are closer to traditional Chinese nature poems than his more blatantly Romantic ones. Even the form of the poem, with its regular four character lines, resembles the structure of traditional poetry more than Guo's usual experimental verse forms. Traditional Chinese nature poetry tends to leave the meaning unspoken or even unclear.¹⁵³ Likewise, "Spring Sadness" is full of questions, none of which can be answered. Many Chinese traditional poems use natural scenery to reflect the poet's emotions, so that the scenery either sympathizes with or contradicts the poet's feelings.¹⁵⁴ Guo's poem takes this bond between nature and man one step further. The speaker cannot tell whether nature seems "drear" (l. 4) because he is sad or whether he is unhappy because nature is lacking its usual brilliance. "Is it that melancholy is clouding my mind?/ Or is it the desolate bleakness of the sky?" (ll. 1-2) he wonders. Guo's conflation of his own emotions with the external world serves not only to enhance the mood of the poem but also as a commentary on the poet's deep relationship with nature. This makes his inability to find meaning in the natural world all the more striking.

Guo Moruo and the Common Man

Subdued, more traditional nature poems like "Spring Sadness" are the exception within Guo's poetry. Normally, Guo's attitude towards nature and transcendence resonates with the classic Romantic paradigm, with several key differences. First, Guo extends this praise of nature

¹⁵³ Miller 222

¹⁵⁴ Frankel 11

to a praise of the simple life and manual labor.¹⁵⁵ Although the English Romantics also praise the common man, they hold tight to the sense that the poet, as the “favorite of nature” holds a superior position.¹⁵⁶ When Guo praises the peasantry, he places them above even the poet. One interesting example of this is Guo’s poem entitled “Three Pantheists,” which I include in its entirety:

I love our old Chuang-tzu
because I love his pantheism,
because he got a living by making straw shoes.

I love the Dutchman Spinoza
because I love his pantheism,
because he got a living by grinding lenses.

I love the Indian Kabir
because I love his pantheism,
because he got a living by knotting fishing-nets.

Guo “loves” these three figures for their pantheism; that is, for their recognition of the universal spirit that animates all things. However, this is only part of the reason. He also extols all three figures because they “got a living” by doing menial work. Chuang-tzu, a famous Chinese Taoist philosopher of the fourth century BCE, earns respect because he made straw shoes. Likewise, Guo admires the Dutch philosopher Spinoza and the Indian poet Kabir because of their mundane, humble occupations. In light of the powerful third line of each stanza, the second line seems rather banal. Merely saying he loves these figures’ pantheism does not do enough to explain why Guo is drawn to it. However, by expanding upon their occupation in the third line of each stanza, Guo makes it seem that this is the most important reason to love each man. Their humble occupations, which would put them among lower-class workers, cause Guo to love them.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Roy 141

¹⁵⁶ Peckham 225

¹⁵⁷ Xiaoming Chen 76

This is just one example of Guo's love for the common man adding to or supplanting his pantheism. In another poem, "O Earth, My Mother," Guo takes time out from a panegyric to the earth to praise the humbler workers. Here, Guo envies "the peasants in the fields" (l. 18), calling them "the nurse of mankind" (l. 19). He also admires miners, "the workers in coal-pits" (l. 22), who are significantly called "the Prometheus of mankind" (l. 23). Guo perhaps means this in a literal sense—by mining coal, the workers bring up fuel for fire on earth, playing the role of Prometheus. However, Prometheus was an important symbolic figure for the May Fourth writers, including Guo.¹⁵⁸ Writers of Guo's generation saw Prometheus as a figure of endurance, self-sacrifice, and the defiance of tyranny.¹⁵⁹ Usually, the poet identifies himself with Prometheus, bringing enlightenment to the population. However, in "O Earth, My Mother," Guo gives this heroic role to the lowly miners. Their connection with nature and their humble occupation exalt them over the poet, who can merely envy them and their situation. Perhaps Guo is thinking of the peasants and the coal miners when he ends his poem by saying: "I know that you [the Earth] love me and wish to encourage me to work,/ I shall learn from you to work, never to stop" (ll. 83-84).

Romantic poets also tend to extol the simple peasant above the jaded city-dweller, but almost never raise such a figure above the role of the poet. Wordsworth's poems in *Lyrical Ballads* mostly center on country people with simple lives, and for the most part these people are praised for their connection with nature and simple lives. However, these poems also seek to call attention to the impoverished lives of the country folk.¹⁶⁰ Wordsworth blends social critique and nature worship, making his portrayal of peasants far more complex than Guo's. In poems such as "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" and "Simon Lee," Wordsworth dwells more on the wretched poverty these characters suffer than their blessed connection to nature. "Goody Blake was old

¹⁵⁸ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 195

¹⁵⁹ Ip, "Politics and Individuality," 43

¹⁶⁰ Gurney 50

and poor,/ Ill fed she was, and thinly clad” (l. 21-22) while Simon Lee is “lean and he is sick” (l. 33). While Wordsworth extols the simple country life over the “din/ Of towns and cities” (“Tintern Abbey,” l. 26-27), he doesn’t extend this to a love of the harsh life of the peasantry.¹⁶¹ Compared with Guo’s rosy conflation of union with the pantheistic force and manual labor in mines and fields, Wordsworth’s portrayal is far more subtle, with underlying themes of social commentary.

We see another view of the common folk in Byron’s treatment of the peasantry in *Manfred*. In Act II, Scene I, Manfred speaks with a chamois hunter, who has just saved Manfred from suicide. The hunter is a commoner—he has heard of castles but confesses “I only know their portals” (l. 10). His attitude throughout the poem bears out his social class. While Manfred speaks in high Romantic vein about the merging of nature and self, the peasant sees only the immediate physicality of the situation. While the hunter comments “The mists begin to rise up from the valley” (l. 82), Manfred takes the mist as a sign of supernatural forces: “The mists boil up around the glaciers; clouds/ rise curling fast beneath me, white and sulphury/ Like form from the roused ocean of deep hell” (ll. 85-87). Though the hunter spends his entire life in communion with nature, he seems to lack the ability to see beyond its literal form.

Throughout the conversation between Manfred and the hunter, Manfred constantly takes the superior position. The hunter, at a loss to understand Manfred’s deep sorrow, can only offer platitudes: “whate’er/ Thy dread and sufferance be, there’s comfort yet-/ The aid of holy men, and heavenly patience” (ll.32-34). “The aid of holy men” does little to aid Manfred, if we can take the Abbot as the poem’s example of a holy man. And as for patience, Manfred will have none of it: “Patience and patience hence! That word was made/ For brutes of burden, not for birds of prey” (ll.35-36). The entire scene serves to demonstrate that the chamois hunter is a

¹⁶¹ Gurney 51

“mortal of dust” (l. 37) while Manfred continues to emphasize the spiritual over the physical. Far from extolling the virtues of the simple hunter, Manfred insists upon his own superiority as a spiritual being.¹⁶² The peasant, despite his close connection with nature, occupies a position decidedly inferior to that of the poet, who is able to truly appreciate natural beauty and its implicit meaning about man’s sublime potential.

These two quick examples from Romantic poetry demonstrate a complex attitude towards the common man entirely missing from Guo Moruo’s work. Guo’s treatment of the peasant places them on a pedestal, praising not just their close proximity to nature but the innate superiority of manual labor and country life. Guo’s tendency to extol the common man and the peasantry dovetails with his burgeoning Communist ideology as well as with the traditional Chinese tendency towards “the suppression of self.”¹⁶³ For Guo, the traditional restraint of egoism led to Communism, with its insistence on merging into the collective and serving the revolution.¹⁶⁴ Both the traditional emphasis on collectivism and the modern impetus towards revolution find expression in the prefatory poem to *The Goddesses*, where Guo cheerfully exclaims: “I am a proletariat!” We see this ebullient attitude towards the lower classes reflected in his poetry. While his Romanticism leads to praise of nature and the search for the life-force behind nature, it is Guo’s fledgling Communism that colors his portrayal of the peasantry.

Nature and Technology

The second difference in the Romantic’s treatment of nature and Guo’s lies in the comparison between nature and technology. While the majority of transcendental experiences in Guo’s poems are tied to nature imagery, in some poems man-made objects can spark the same

¹⁶² Gurney 79

¹⁶³ Miller 217

¹⁶⁴ Ip, “Politics and Individuality,” 45

emotional response. For example, in his poem “The Good Morning” Guo imagines himself greeting various symbols of a renewing and creative force, a force that he hopes will create a “millennial dawn” (l. 41). Heralds of this pantheistic forces include not only the “rolling ocean” (l. 2) and the “morning breeze” (l. 7) but also famous people such as “Tagore of Bengal” (l. 22), “Da Vinci” (l. 27), and the “poets of Ireland” (l. 31). Likewise, natural features such as the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers, and the “snow-capped Himalayas” (l. 21) get no more praise than man-made objects like the Great Wall, the Pantheon, and even the “*Thinker* of Rodin” (l. 28). What Guo envisions in this poem is a world where everything, not just nature, can serve as evidence of the transcendental force.

In another poem, entitled “I Am an Idolater,” Guo’s idolatry consists of worshipping not only the sun, the sea, and great rivers, but also worshipping the Suez and Panama Canals, the Great Wall, and the Pyramid, all man-made objects. This poem and others that praise nature and technology equally suggest that to Guo nature is just one possible route to transcendence. Most mentions of modernization are generally positive. In “Sunrise,” the “blazing headlights of motorcars” are “twentieth-century Apollos” (l. 5, 6) and in “Panaorama from Fudetate Yama” Guo praises the “steamers unnumbered,/ funnel upon funnel bearing its black peony” (ll. 14-15) as symbols of the “marriage of man and Nature” (l. 10). The world as a whole is the source of transcendence, and so any aspect of it that Guo considers inspiring, whether natural or man-made, can lead him to deeper knowledge or even connection with the pantheistic force.¹⁶⁵

For the Romantics, nature was of supreme importance for the seeker of transcendence, and technology, man-made objects, and especially the city all served only to cloud the universal force.¹⁶⁶ In “Frost at Midnight,” Coleridge specifically relates the transcendental experience to

¹⁶⁵ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 188

¹⁶⁶ Gurney 42, 46

nature. He regrets his childhood spent “In the great city, pent mid cloisters dim” (l. 52), saying that the urban world holds “nought lovely but the sky and stars” (l. 53). Here, the man-made world is a hindrance to transcendental knowledge, which is why Coleridge hopes his infant son can grow up surrounded by nature and thereby receive instruction from the “Great universal teacher” (l. 64).

Similarly, Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey” contrasts the natural world with the man-made. In the poem, natural beauty leads him to recognize “A motion and a spirit that impels/ All thinking things, all objects of all thought,/ And rolls through all things” (l.103-105). By contrast, the poet finds only “hours of weariness” (l. 28) and “lonely rooms” (l. 26) in “the din/ Of towns and cities” (ll. 26-27). Only the remembrance of natural scenes and the sublime experience of communing with a great power can bring “sensations sweet” (l. 28) and “tranquil restoration” (l. 31) to the poet while he dwells in the city. Urban life itself is tiresome and even damaging to the spirit. There is no hint that the city possesses any innate beauty or that man’s creations can also be part of the path to transcendence.

Guo’s Celebration of the Human Mind

In a way, however, Guo’s different conception of the value of the city and technology is also in touch with the Romantic strain. The second part of Wellek’s definition of Romanticism is the celebration of the imagination.¹⁶⁷ The Romantics saw imagination as a creative power that helps to penetrate reality and reach the greater or transcendent meaning beyond.¹⁶⁸ When Guo praises man-made creations such as the Suez and Panama Canals and the Pyramids, he celebrates

¹⁶⁷ Wellek 179

¹⁶⁸ Wimsatt 31

not only the actual object but the creative force behind it.¹⁶⁹ The imagination connects the poet to the world, letting him see its true nature. In other words, the imagination lets the poet read the symbolism of nature in order to see through it to the greater power beyond.¹⁷⁰ So when Guo extols man-made artifacts, he praises the creative spirit that the Romantic poets also valued so highly.

The most obvious example of this enthusiasm for creation is Guo's poem "Pyramids." In the poem, the pyramids of Egypt serve as a symbol of man's creative forces. The poet stands before them in awe just as in other poems he marvels at the powers of nature. To Guo, the pyramids seem to be calling out: "Create! Create! Create with all your might!" (l. 20) The pyramids not only present a visible example of the ingenuity of man, but they also call other men to create. At the beginning of the poem, the pyramids are merely one part of a scene:

First one, then two, then three pyramid peaks
range on the banks of the Nile...

.....

The river banks below run on neat as a knife cut.

Ah, those ripples in the river's flow, those rosy clouds surging behind the pyramids!

A white blur of light shows through the clouds; it must be the westering sun (ll. 1-2, 4-6)

The pyramids are on equal footing with natural symbols such as the river, the clouds, and the sun. By the end of the poem, this equality falls away. The pyramids assert their superiority over all of nature, saying "Even the sun in the sky must bow his head to us!" (l. 23) The poet, now in touch with his own creative feelings, begins to view nature as a subset of himself—"Surely that Z-shaped river in the woods must be me myself!" (l. 26) With nature thus subsumed by the creative forces of man's imagination, Guo confidently states that "The creative forces of man can rival those of the gods" (l. 21). Man becomes the embodiment of the universal force.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 188

¹⁷⁰ Wellek 179

¹⁷¹ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 190

Other poems similarly state the supremacy of the imagination over all else. Guo's poem "By Electric Light" provides an interesting exploration of the poet's ability to use his imagination to escape the dreariness of life, and what sparks his imagined episodes are others' creative works. The poem also denies the restorative properties of the city and technology, a very Romantic idea, as discussed above. The poem starts with the speaker musing on the loneliness of urban life: "The electric lights are already shining,/ but why is there gloom in my heart?" (ll. 1-2). To escape this gloom, he drifts into a fantasy, imagining the loneliness of the Chinese historical figure Su Tse-ching, who was banished to Lake Baikal for his refusal to betray the Han emperor. The speaker imagines a kinship between himself and Su Tse-ching: one is "a lone figure in the city" (l. 3), the other "a solitary figure in the boundless Siberian steppes" (l. 7). In the speaker's vision, Su Tse-ching is surrounded by nature and yet not comforted by it—"his eyes charged with infinite sorrow" (l. 15). Both Su in his natural setting and the speaker in a city share feelings of loneliness and depression, and yet in Su's eyes "there burned a thread of hope" (l. 16), hinting that for the speaker as well there may be hope of restoration.

The restoration here comes not from nature but from the creative powers of man. The speaker enters an art museum and glances at various painting before finding the one that lifts his gloom—a portrait of Beethoven. The great composer, part of the European Romantic movement himself, inspires the speaker, becoming an embodiment of the creative urge by the end of the poem. "Ah! Beethoven! Beethoven! You dispel my nameless grief!" (l. 39) the speaker exclaims. It is really the creative force that Beethoven symbolizes which Guo finds uplifting. Beethoven's features embody natural elements—his "hair streams life swiftly flowing waves" (l. 40), his collar is "a snow-capped ridge" (l. 11), and his facial features are compared to those of a lion and a tiger. To the speaker, Beethoven encapsulates nature within himself. Even further, Beethoven's

mind, the source of his creativity, “is like ‘the will of the Universe’ itself” (l. 43). The imagination of man can control the universe.¹⁷² Inspired, the narrator ends the poem by imagining that he hears Beethoven’s symphony.

“By Electric Light” is another example of how Guo both adopts and modifies the Romantic message. While he joins figures such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Byron in praising the creative forces of man, Guo praises not only intellectual creation but also the creation of technology, industry, and monuments. His vision of creative forces is broader than the Romantics, and sometimes he envisions man’s creativity as at odds with or in competition with nature instead of flowing from the universal pantheistic force. By contrast, Romantic poets usually treat nature as the nurturing force behind the soul’s development and, by extension, all creativity.¹⁷³ Guo envisions a human creativity that can escape the reins of nature, leaping beyond it.

The Need for Transcendence and Transformation

For Guo, the most important function of the imagination is to bring man up to the level of transcendence.¹⁷⁴ The primary motive for wanting to do this is escapist—the world is so horrible and corrupt that Guo can no longer stand it, and feels a desperate need to use his creative powers to either rise above the world or to remake it entirely.¹⁷⁵ The urgent need for transformation comes across most clearly in Guo’s poetic drama, “Rebirth of the Goddesses.”

¹⁷² Xiaoming Chen 41

¹⁷³ Geoffrey H. Hartman, “Nature and the Humanization of the Self in Wordsworth” in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. M. H. Abrams (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 123-124

¹⁷⁴ Xiaoming Chen 43

¹⁷⁵ Xiaoming Chen 58

The poem can be seen as an allegory, using mythical Chinese figures to represent Guo's dissatisfaction with China's modern situation. The poem begins with a quote from Goethe's

Faust:

All things transitory
But as symbols are sent;
Earth's insufficiency
Here grows to event;
The Indescribable,
Here it is done;
The Woman-soul leadeth us
Upward and on!¹⁷⁶

Guo uses Goethe, a German Romantic, to set the stage for his entire poem. The dark, bloody world of the drama is shown to be "transitory." Guo literalizes the "Woman-soul" in the form of the three Goddesses, who lead the world towards its bright future. Guo here envisions transcendence not as the goal of the individual but as the goal of society. China as a nation is being asked to transcend its dark present.¹⁷⁷

The Goddesses' commentary on their world functions as Guo's commentary on warlord-torn China. The Goddesses dread "a catastrophe" equal to the rending of the heavens in Chinese myth. This presentiment is heralded by the "harsh clamour" and "the counterpoint of evil cries" brought by war. Within the world of the play, the war is between Chuan-Hsu and Kung-Kung, two mythical Chinese kings who fought for control of the empire. However, one can easily imagine the Goddesses critiquing the warlords that fought over 20th century China: "They go, they said, to fight for some paltry hegemony;/ this turbulence has become intolerable." The constant threat of war and bloodshed threatens to crack open the heavens; even the sun is "weary" from the battle. This dark picture of life is both a social critique, calling the warlords to

¹⁷⁶ In the original Chinese text, the quote appeared in German beside a Chinese translation

¹⁷⁷ Julia C. Lin 213

task for their feuding, and also the beginning of the process of transcendence.¹⁷⁸ The warfare and accompanying noise awakens the Goddesses, who begin the drama as statues. Only after recognizing the direness of the situation do they decide to take action, proclaiming “no longer will we remain mere statues in niches.”

The Goddesses leave on their quest to create a new sun; meanwhile, Chuan-Hsu and Kung-Kung fight their battles. Guo satirizes both figures; they parrot each other, citing ancient sayings as justification for their war, but neither of them can answer the crucial question: “What necessity urges you to become ruler?” Kung-Kung answers, “Ask the sun—why must it shine?” The arrogance of comparing himself to the sun, particularly considering the powerful and redemptive function of the Goddesses’ new sun later in the poem, encapsulates Kung-Kung’s attitude. His only reason for desiring to rule, and thus starting a war, is his own personal ambition. This marks an interesting negative commentary on the transcendental urge—even while the Goddesses rush to help society rise above war and bloodshed, the two kings’ wish to ascend to absolute power is unequivocally condemned.

Guo emphasizes still further the negative consequences of unbridled ambition by showing the destruction the war causes. An old peasant and a shepherd boy both lament that the war has destroyed their livelihoods; they are followed by “wild men,” presumably bandits, who plan to take advantage of the war for their own personal gain. The greatest destruction comes from the final battle between Kung-Kung and Chuan-Hsu. Kung-Kung, unwilling to bear defeat, has his forces crack the “pillar of heaven,” one of four pillars that held up the sky, according to Chinese myth. This act destroys both armies, and by extension the world—Guo calls for darkness to cover the stage for a “silence of five minutes,” suggesting an end to the play.

¹⁷⁸ Rose Jui Chang Chen, 197

However, this massive destruction merely sets up the Goddesses' triumphant return. Their final dialogue takes place in total darkness, reminding the audience of the relationship between desolation and renewal.¹⁷⁹ The Goddesses bring with them their newly created sun, a Promethean-like gift to mankind. The play ends with the Goddesses singing a welcoming song to the sun, which significantly does not rise during the play. The Goddesses recognize that the sun is "still far away," but preparation for its arrival has begun: "the morning bell can be heard pealing in the sea" and a "funeral knell" for the old order (represented by the "Wolf of Heaven") rings out as well. The possibility of national transcendence is there.

The drama ends with a curious prose address by the "stage manager" to the audience, essentially hitting the audience over the head with Guo's message:

Ladies and gentlemen, you have become tired of living in the foetid gloom of this dark world. You surely thirst for light. Your poet, having dramatized so far, writes no more. He has, in fact, fled beyond the sea to create new light and heat. Ladies and gentlemen, do you await the appearance of a new sun? You are bid to create it for yourselves. We will meet again under the new sun.

This address, besides making the historical message of the poem crystal clear, highlights several interesting points about Guo's attitude toward transcendence. First, Guo addresses the role of poet in bringing about transcendence. While the poet is involved in the quest "to create new light and heat," he does so not by writing but by some other mysterious process. Thus the poet "writes no more"—he stops being a poet as he begins his revolutionary task. Also, Guo urges the audience to also take up the task of creating a new sun. Guo urges them to "create it for [them]selves," implicitly criticizing them for taking a passive role in waiting for national salvation. The poem ends with a note of hope, that both audience and poet "will meet again under the new sun," a sun created not by poetry but by collective effort.

¹⁷⁹ Rose Jui Chang Chen 197; Julia C. Lin 214

This hope for national salvation is an interesting expansion of the transcendental urge. When dealing with transcendence on an individual level, Guo's view of the concept closely follows the view of the Romantics. Like Wordsworth and Shelley, Guo believes in a pantheistic force that unites all things.¹⁸⁰ The poet, using his special powers of creativity and imagination, can tap into this force, particularly when he is inspired by the beauty of nature. However, when Guo attempts to raise the idea of transcendence to the national level, the concept is fundamentally changed. The goal is not to move beyond the physical world to the spiritual force behind it but rather to tear down the present and build the future.¹⁸¹ This task is no longer the poet's specialty but a duty that falls on all citizens. Poetry may be used to urge people to action, as Guo does with his poetic dramas, but in the end revolution must come from something besides writing.

The Role of the Poet for Guo Moruo

Guo shows a certain amount of confusion on the poet's role. On one hand, he believes that the poet or author can incite people to action through social critique and the call for change.¹⁸² Here he seems much in line with the Romantic perception of poetry.¹⁸³ However, Guo also seems to believe that mere poetry alone cannot cause the change he is looking for.¹⁸⁴ Thus in order to actively begin to create the new world, the poet must "write no more." Guo's life also reflects this paradox—as a Romantic author, he wants to use his words to inspire the

¹⁸⁰ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 183

¹⁸¹ Roy 160

¹⁸² McDougall 39; Vogel 147

¹⁸³ Wu xxxvi

¹⁸⁴ Ip, "Politics and Individuality," 64

masses; as a Communist Party member, he knows his role as poet is subordinate to party ideology and the good of the people.¹⁸⁵

The poem “Spring Silkworms” shows this tension. The poet addresses the silkworms of the title, realizing with astonishment that they are spinning poetry instead of silk. He praises the poetry as “gossamer,” “charming,” and “delicate” (l. 3). Ironically, he then runs up against the limitations of language: “I can find no words to describe you!” (l. 4) In the midst of a panegyric on poetry, Guo draws our attention to its inadequacies. The second stanza reflects the contemporary debate in 20th century China on the function and creation of art:¹⁸⁶

Silkworms, your poetry—
is it premeditated or unprompted?
Do you create with art, or is it a natural flow?
Do you make it for others,
or for yourselves alone? (5-9)

Taking a Romantic view of poetry, a view that Guo himself upholds in some of his earlier poetry, we should say that poetry is “unprompted” rather than “premeditated,” part of a “natural flow” rather than created by artifice, and (since poetry is self-expression) made for the poet instead of for others. Further, since the “poets” are silkworms, how could their poetry be anything but natural and spontaneous? Guo seems to be upholding a Romantic view of the organic nature of poetry.¹⁸⁷

Surprisingly, in the last stanza of the poem Guo turns this on its head:

Silkworms, I am afraid that your poetry
is, alas, spontaneous,
is, alas, a natural flow.
The Palace of Art you are erecting,
is, alas, for yourselves alone. (10-14)

¹⁸⁵ Xiaoming Chen 101

¹⁸⁶ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 19

¹⁸⁷ Lovejoy 12

The word translated as “alas” is *zhong pa* (终怕) in the original Chinese. *Zhong* means “end” and *pa* means “to be afraid”; thus, a more literal translation of “alas” would be “in the end, I fear.” I believe this better captures the attitude towards the silkworm’s poetry—in the final analysis, Guo must reject this style of poetry. It is indeed beautiful, but the very qualities that add to such poetry’s beauty undermine its social significance. The spontaneity, the “natural flow” (l. 12) of the poem, becomes a detriment because such characteristics mean the poetry is for the poet alone. The use of *zhong pa* or “alas” is really the only clue that Guo evaluates this poetry negatively; remove it from the last stanza and the evaluation is at worst neutral. However, *zhong pa* also gives the criticism a regretful or even wistful quality. Much as Guo may wish to create this type of poetry (and in fact many of the poems in *The Goddesses* could be subject to the same criticisms as the silkworm’s poetry), he must turn from it because, in the context of national salvation, poetry and art should have a more universal function.¹⁸⁸ Interestingly, May Fourth poets used the need for “spontaneous” and “natural” poetry as a justification for abandoning the strict verse forms of traditional Chinese poetry. By repudiating the values of these reforms, Guo reflects Chinese tradition rather than May Fourth sensibilities.¹⁸⁹

Guo envisions the poet as having a higher function than self-expression. In poems such as “Rebirth of the Goddesses,” Guo stresses the social and political function of the poet and his work. First, he must reveal to the people the dark reality of the world in which they live, and then he must spur them on to action, to the creation of a new sun.¹⁹⁰ Yet most of Guo’s poems vacillate between this mission and Guo’s own need for self-expression. For every overtly political poem, like “Rebirth of the Goddesses,” there are several nature poems such as

¹⁸⁸ Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China 1900-1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 79

¹⁸⁹ Milena Dolezelova-Velingerova, “The Origins of Modern Chinese Literature” in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, ed. Merle Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 18-19

¹⁹⁰ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 196

“Panorama from Fudetate Yama” and “Shouting on the Rim of the World.” Guo may believe that the poet’s higher calling is nationalistic social commentary, but he still cannot bring himself to abandon the Romantic need for individual expression, the exploration of nature, and the quest for personal transcendence.

The Romantic Tradition of Political Poetry

Of course, the Romantic poets also believed strongly in the political power of their poems. Guo was aware of this; in fact, he mentions being inspired by two of Lord Byron’s revolutionary poems, “The Glory that was Greece” (part of Canto III of *Don Juan*) and “Fair Greece! Sad Relic!” (from Canto II of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*). According to Guo’s note, these two poems inspired his most overtly political poem, “Victorious in Death.” This is one of the only direct references we have that link Guo’s poetry to that of a Romantic author. A comparison of Guo’s poem with Byron’s reveals a strong difference between their poetry. While both poets call upon men to take up the revolutionary duty, Byron feels sure that his call to arms will fall upon deaf ears. Guo, on the contrary, addresses his poem to a contemporary revolutionary figure, and his optimism for the cause knows no bounds.¹⁹¹

In both Byron’s poems, the narrator is the only one who heeds the call of freedom. The first poem Guo calls “‘The Glory That Was Greece’ from *Don Juan*.” I believe this refers to the passage in Canto III of *Don Juan* which begins with a description of “The isles of Greece! The isles of Greece!” These isles have lost their past glory. Abandoned by “burning Sappho,” “Phoebus” and the muses, Greece now festers in slavery. The passage is a harsh critique of present Greece compared to its glowing past. The narrator contrasts the Greek heroes of Marathon and Thermopylae, who fought and died to defend ancient Greece from invaders, with

¹⁹¹ Julia C. Lin 199-200

the present Greeks, who drown themselves in “Samian wine.” The dead heroes wait in vain for “one living head” that will arise to free Greece from its chains. The only one who responds to the call is the narrator, who throws down the wine cup and declares “A land of slaves shall ne’er be mine.” However, this very act of heroic defiance implies that the narrator acts alone within a country full of “slaves.”

There is a similar theme in “Fair Greece! Sad Relic!” of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. The narrator scornfully describes the Greeks: they “idly rail in vain,/ Trembling beneath the scourge of Turkish hand,/ From birth till death enslaved; in word, in deed, unmanned.” Again, here we see a Greece that has fallen far from its “glorious day” and has only shameful slavery left to look forward to. Byron is again skeptical of the potential of revolution. He phrases all his revolutionary statements as questions: “Who now shall lead thy scattered children forth,/ And long-accustomed bondage uncreate?”

When Guo read these poems, he clearly absorbed the call to revolution without the pessimism of the narrator. Perhaps it was easier for Byron as an Englishman to critique the Greeks than it would be for Guo to chastise his own country. Yet one cannot help but wonder if Guo saw that lines such as “Fair Greece! sad relic of departed worth!/ Immortal, though no more; though fallen, great!” (ll. 1-2) could easily be used to describe China, once a great empire, now humbled by foreign imperialism. Interestingly, “Victorious in Death,” Guo’s most revolutionary poem in *The Goddesses*, does not concern his home country, but rather Ireland. Like Byron, Guo distances himself from the action by observing a foreign country. Yet instead of using this distance to critique, as Byron does, Guo bubbles with enthusiastic praise of a revolutionary hero

living half a world away.¹⁹² Guo clearly sees the Irish revolutionary movement as a potential model for China.

Guo's poem is addressed to Terence MacSwiney, a leader of the Irish Republican Army who was arrested by the British government in 1920 and died in prison after a hunger strike. Guo traces his reaction to the story as he hears about it in news reports. Considering his distance from the action, which is emphasized in the poem by Guo's uncertainty over MacSwiney's fate, Guo shows an interesting amount of solidarity with the Irish:

Honoured MacSwiney!
Dear sons of Ireland,
the spirit of freedom will ever stand by you,
for you stand by one another,
you are the incarnation of freedom! (p. 41)

Such an attitude could not be more different from Byron's bleak view of the Greeks. Guo goes even further in his optimism in the last stanza of the poem. Here, nature itself mourns MacSwiney's death, which is a special kind of death: "Brave, tragic death! Death in a blaze of glory! Triumphal procession of a victor! Victorious death!" Guo even thanks the "God of Death" for saving MacSwiney. In the last lines of the poem, Guo elevates MacSwiney to a symbol of revolutionary power: "MacSwiney, fighter for freedom, you have shown how great can be the power of the human will!"

Though Guo may have been inspired by Byron's poem, his treatment of revolutionary spirit is far different. Byron offers a strident call for revolution, a call that he believes will go unheeded in the end. The narrator's urging reveals that he possesses a greater strength of will and a stronger sense of freedom than the Greek themselves, who are content to "Fill high the bowl with Samian wine" and forget all else. Guo instead takes a position of humility—MacSwiney is the inspiring example that calls the poet to revolution even as the poet himself transmits this call

¹⁹² Julia C. Lin 199

to the world through his work. In Guo's poem, the poet is not superior. Where Byron's poem exhibits the determination and isolation of a Byronic hero, Guo's poem shows humility and a desire to join in a revolutionary movement that has already begun.¹⁹³

The Poet as Revolutionary

In this way Guo gives an interesting twist to the Promethean figure of the poet. The poet still possesses the gift to call the masses into action, yet he is not doing so on his own behalf, but rather passing on the heroic example of MacSwiney and the Irish revolutionaries. To Byron, the poet himself is the supreme example. Here again there is a tension between Guo's Romantic tendencies and his commitment to the Chinese revolution. Guo's nature poetry evokes the Romantic image of the poet as special, with a unique tie to nature and thus unique insights into the transcendental force beyond it.¹⁹⁴ However, Guo also feels that the poet alone cannot win the revolution. The epilogue to "Rebirth of the Goddesses" makes it clear that Guo passes the revolutionary call on to people, without whom the revolution could not hope to succeed. Guo cannot decide who is more important: the poet himself, who issues this call to revolt or the people, who will actually create the revolution.

Thus we get poems like "Coal in the Grate," where Guo sees the revolutionary spirit as his unique possession: "only in my slavish breast/ could burn a fire so bright" (ll. 9-10). And in "Morning Snow," Guo praises the "*hero-poet, / Proletarian poet*" (ll. 11-12) for his special connection with nature. In both these poems, the special abilities of the poet are linked to the revolution; this is what makes the poet a "hero."¹⁹⁵ Yet in later poems, such as "Oh Earth, My Mother," Guo humbles the poet beneath the peasants and the miners, who take on the role of

¹⁹³ Xiaoming Chen 39-40

¹⁹⁴ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 183

¹⁹⁵ Ip, "Politics and Individuality," 44

nurturing and enlightening the world. Here, the poet envies the workers, placing himself beneath them. Guo alternately extols the poet as being above the common people and praises the commoners as higher than the poet.

“The Good Morning” experiments with these oppositions. Here, the poet seems to be playing the role of a Prometheus, awakening the various peoples and countries of the world. “I greet you with a Good Morning,” Guo repeats at the beginning of each stanza. This translation seems a bit wordy; the Chinese is *chen an* (晨安), which literally means “peaceful morning” but is used in much the same way as the English phrase “Good morning.” Though the Chinese does not include the “I” figure as overtly (and clumsily) as the English translation, the language still implies that the poet is speaking to the various parts of the world. Guo even asks the morning wind to “bear away my voice to the four quarters,” echoing Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind.” Yet even while awakening each item he addresses, asking them to join in the “millennial dawn,” Guo also praises their virtues. Russia is “the pioneer I hold in awe”; Tagore and the Himalayas are “fellow scholars in the school of Nature.” The common people have no place in this poem; Guo greets mountains, oceans, countries, and various great thinkers (such as Leonardo Da Vinci, Walt Whitman, and George Washington). Guo seems to have lost sight of the common peasants and workers that he elevates so highly in other poems.

Guo was clearly influenced by the Romantic tendency to lift up the role of the poet. Even his references to the superiority of the common man seem more tied to a Romantic-style love of nature and the natural life than any sort of political theory.¹⁹⁶ Yet Guo does take pains to check these impulses, as in “Spring Silkworms” when he dismisses self-expressive poetry devoid of a broader social function. Guo also seeks inspiration for the revolution outside of himself, whereas

¹⁹⁶ Xiaoming Chen 106-107

Romantics like Byron seem to view themselves as the epitome of the revolutionary spirit.¹⁹⁷ Guo sees his duty as the bringer of enlightenment, yet he also realizes that this function makes him depend upon the people for the fruition of his dreams.¹⁹⁸ Thus Guo's poetry swings from the most self-assured Romantic statements ("Shouting on the Rim of the World") to expressions of doubt ("Spring Silkworms," "O Earth, My Mother"). Guo's poetry reflects the psychological struggle of many May Fourth intellectuals who came to embrace Communism.¹⁹⁹ The switch from Romantic individualism to Communist collectivism was a difficult one to make.

¹⁹⁷ Gurney 74

¹⁹⁸ Rose Jui Chang Chen 182-183

¹⁹⁹ Ip, "Politics and Individuality," 33

Part III

Xu Zhimo:

If Guo Moruo's scathing political critiques and shouted emotions represent one end of the Romantic spectrum, Xu Zhimo sits firmly at the other end. Both poets share the Romantic qualities of a deep connection with nature and a profound appreciation for the power of the human imagination. Yet Xu's treatment of these subjects is more subtle than Guo's.²⁰⁰ Where Guo shouts from a mountaintop, Xu whispers from under the ocean, as in his poem "Coral." Xu's poetry represents a more delicate representation of Romanticism, and as such lacks much of the political and social critique that defines Guo's works.²⁰¹ Both poets were deeply attached to the idea of European Romanticism, yet their interactions with and modifications of the earlier movement are far from identical.²⁰² Xu represents a quieter, more subtler interpretation of Romanticism.

Xu Zhimo's Life

Xu Zhimo was born in 1897. His father was a wealthy businessman, so, like Guo Moruo, Xu thus had access to schooling, both classical and later on a more Western-style education. He was an extremely accomplished student from a young age.²⁰³ Because of his intelligence and his family's wealth, Xu was an attractive match for an arranged marriage, and he was indeed married in 1915. Unlike Guo Moruo, Xu seemed to genuinely like his new bride.²⁰⁴

As a young man, Xu was heavily influenced by the philosophy of Bertrand Russell. Like many young Chinese of that time, Xu wanted to rebuild China according to "foreign

²⁰⁰ Julia C. Lin 107

²⁰¹ Julia C. Lin 129

²⁰² Julia C. Lin 101, 199

²⁰³ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 126

²⁰⁴ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 126

blueprints.”²⁰⁵ He dreamed of becoming “a Chinese Hamilton.”²⁰⁶ With this as his goal, Xu left China in 1918, traveling to America to study politics and economics at Clark University and later Columbia. However, American life and schooling left a bad impression on Xu, who felt lonely and isolated in New England.²⁰⁷ In 1920, Xu left America to travel to Cambridge, hoping to meet Bertrand Russell.

However, when Xu arrived at Cambridge, Russell had just departed from the college. This marked a major turning point in Xu’s life—faced with the absence of his philosophical idol, Xu turned to other pursuits, most notably literature.²⁰⁸ It was during his stay at Cambridge that Xu “transferred his allegiance from Hamilton to Shelley and Keats, and decided on a literary career.”²⁰⁹ Xu abandoned his studies of politics and economics, deciding instead to become a poet, following in the footsteps of his new idols, the Romantic poets. He even began to experiment with Western verse and rhyme forms, which he would continue to do throughout his career.²¹⁰ As the birthplace of his poetic ambitions, Cambridge would forever hold a special place in Xu’s heart. He extolled its beautiful natural scenery as well as the atmosphere of learning and the exchange of wisdom.²¹¹

While at Cambridge, he met a young Chinese girl named Lin Hui-yin, the daughter of one of Xu’s friends. Xu was immediately taken with her, to the extent that he divorced his wife so as to be free to pursue Lin.²¹² Xu’s passionate insistence on the value of love was to become

²⁰⁵ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 129

²⁰⁶ Julia C. Lin 101

²⁰⁷ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 129

²⁰⁸ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 130

²⁰⁹ Julia C. Lin 101

²¹⁰ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 147

²¹¹ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 134-135

²¹² Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 133

his hallmark theme. Along with nature worship and an emphasis on personal fulfillment, Xu's insistence on the supremacy of the emotions, especially love, shaped all of his poetry.²¹³

In 1922, Xu returned to China, partially to follow Lin Hui-yin. However, upon his return he found that Lin was engaged to another man. Xu continued to shower her with affection, upsetting her family and his own.²¹⁴ Despite Xu's efforts, the relationship with Lin Hui-yin never progressed much farther than courtship. However, in 1922 Xu met another woman who would have a profound effect on his life—Lu Xiaoman.

Lu Xiaoman was beautiful, wealthy, part of the elite social class, and married. Yet Xu, ever the champion of free love, conducted a highly public courtship of her from 1922 until 1926, when they were finally married. He even published a sort of emotional diary recording his feeling for Lu, the popular "Love Letters to May."²¹⁵ Though Xu again drew criticism for courting a married woman, he withstood scorn and scandal, reveling in the strength of his emotions.²¹⁶

During this time, Xu was also gaining a name for himself as an author. He began publishing his first poems in 1922, writing in the vernacular style.²¹⁷ In 1924 Xu and some colleagues founded the Crescent Society, which upheld their artistic credo of "art for art's sake." Xu's first collection of poetry, *Zhimo's Poems*, came out in 1925, followed in 1927 by the collection *A Night in Florence*, both of which testify to Xu's Romantic belief in love, nature, and individual potential.

Yet by 1926, Xu's seemingly boundless idealism was beginning to flag. His marriage to Lu Xiaoman put a decidedly mundane spin on what had been an exciting and forbidden courtship.

²¹³ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 134

²¹⁴ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 136

²¹⁵ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 141

²¹⁶ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 141-142

²¹⁷ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 138

Their relationship became strained, causing Xu to rethink his endless faith in love.²¹⁸ Added to this was a growing depression over China's plight—the endless warlord battles and the growing burden of imperialism. Before 1926, Xu seems to have been content with his personal affairs, refraining from much involvement in politics. In the late 1920s, as Xu's national consciousness grew, so did his pessimism.²¹⁹

Yet Xu continued to insist on the sanctity of art, resisting pressure from figures like Guo Moruo who claimed that all literature must now serve the state. When the Crescent Society also adopted a political stance, Xu dropped out.²²⁰ By the 1930s, as the conflict between China and Japan intensified, most poets were either converted to Guo's idea of "revolutionary literature" or they were ostracized.²²¹ Xu never faced this pressure—he was killed in a plane crash in 1931. Xu kept his Romantic sensibilities until the end, as reflected by his final collection of poetry, *The Tiger*, published in 1931 just before his death.

Xu's Romantic Love of Nature

As discussed earlier, perhaps the most easily recognizable characteristic of the Romantic poet is his or her special relationship with nature. The praise of nature and natural beauty permeates nearly all of Xu Zhimo's poetry, just as nature plays a definitive role in the poems of Guo Moruo, Williams Wordsworth, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. For Xu, as for most Romantics, the beauty of nature represents the ultimate goal, the eternal, unchanging reality beyond human

²¹⁸ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 149

²¹⁹ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 154

²²⁰ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 148

²²¹ Vogel 158

life.²²² The image of the star most often represents this transcendental reality but other natural images (the ocean, the mountain, the flower) can have similar symbolic meaning.²²³

One of Xu's most famous poems, "Second Farewell to Cambridge"²²⁴ offers an excellent example of Xu's ideas on nature. The poem is both a hymn to natural beauty and an exploration of the poet's relationship with nature. Beautiful images abound: "the golden willow on the riverbank" with "her luminous reflection in the ripples" (l. 5, 7); "the pool in the elm shade" that "settles into a rainbowlike dream" (l. 13, 16). Yet each image of natural beauty also functions to draw the poet deeper into the world beyond nature, closer to his transcendental goal.

As the poet communes with nature, his relationship to it grows closer and closer. At the beginning of the poem, he waves goodbye as one would to a friend: "I wave my hand in gentle farewell/ To the clouds in the western sky" (ll. 3-4). By the next stanza, the relationship with nature has already become a closer one, that of husband and wife, where the "golden willow on the riverbank/ Is a bride" (ll. 5-6). In the third stanza, the poet expresses a wish to shed any sense of separation. He no longer wants to simply be close to nature, he wants to be a part of nature. Looking at the river plants, the poet decides "I'd rather be a water reed/ In the gentle river of Cam" (ll. 11-12).

The desire to subsume oneself into nature finds fruition in the "rainbowlike dream" of the fourth stanza. The dream itself is a facet of the search for transcendence, as the poet, helped by his bond with nature, journeys towards a higher reality.

...With a long pole,
Sail toward where the grass grows greener;

²²² Lawrence Lee Wing-yiu, "Some Aspects of the Western Influence on Hsu Chih-mo's Poetry," M.A. dissertation, University of Hong Kong, 1975, 17

²²³ Julia C. Lin 125-127

²²⁴ Translation by Michelle Yeh, ed and trans., *Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992)

In a skiff loaded with starlight,
Sing among the shining stars (17-20)

The poet experiences the transcendental moment, where he communes with nature and the force behind nature which even Xu cannot define.²²⁵ He cannot even describe what he seeks “among the shining stars.” “In search of a dream?” (l. 17), he asks himself, casting doubt on the reality of both “the rainbowlike dream” of nature and the possibility of a higher reality.

Whatever the nature of his “dream,” the poet emerges from it rather abruptly. The desire to “sing among the shining stars” is met bluntly with reality: “I cannot sing tonight;/ Silence is the tune of farewell” (l. 21-22). The transcendental moment, whether dream or not, is over. The need to depart, made explicit from the title and the first line (“Softly I am leaving”) reenters the poem, breaking the poet’s connection with nature and whatever force lies beyond the natural world. The last stanza, which mirrors the first, reiterates the transience of the experience, as the poet leaves “without taking away a whiff of cloud” (l. 28).

English Romanticism also provides examples of poems simultaneously describing transcendence and casting doubt on the transcendental experience.²²⁶ Shelley’s “Mont Blanc” speaks of “an unremitting interchange/ With the clear universe of things around” (ll. 39-40) but ends with a note of uncertainty—“what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,/ If to the human mind’s imaginings/ Silence and solitude were vacancy?” (ll.142-144) Even Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” with its exuberant proclamation of “A motion and a spirit that impels/ All thinking things, all objects of all thought,/ And rolls through all things” (ll. 103-105) casts intimations of doubt. Wordsworth holds out the possibility that transcendence might “Be but a vain belief” (l. 52), calling our attention to the fact that the transcendental experience might be nothing more than what Xu Zhimo calls a “dream.”

²²⁵ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 135

²²⁶ Gurney 88

In Xu's poem, however, the transient nature of the transcendental experience must be read in dialogue with the title. While the poem describes a farewell, it is the "Second Farewell." By making this the title, Xu ensures that the fleeting experience in the poem is seen as connected to the past (the first farewell, recorded in his poem "Goodbye Cambridge") and the future (the potential for another return, and a third farewell). Thus the momentary experience of communing with nature is layered with the forces of memory and imagination.

Again, Xu Zhimo is in good Romantic company. Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" describes not only an experience with nature, but the process by which remembering such an experience brings "tranquil restoration" (l. 31) to a wearied mind.²²⁷ For Wordsworth, the beauty of the scenery makes possible transcendence: "with an eye made quiet by the power/ Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,/ We see into the life of things" (l. 48-50). The "joy" is nothing less than the joy that comes from recognizing one's own connection to the pantheistic life force—recognizing one's "own immanence, which may be the same thing as God's immanence, in Nature."²²⁸ But "Tintern Abbey" does not merely focus on the joy that comes from harmony with nature. Wordsworth also explores how remembrance of that joy can serve as "life and food/ For future years" (ll. 66-67), sustaining the poet while he suffers from "the fevers of the world" (l. 55). While Xu's "Second Farewell to Cambridge" does not explicitly spell out the power of remembrance the way Wordsworth does in "Tintern Abbey," the act of returning to a beloved place and recognizing the inevitability of leaving again creates a strong parallel between the two poems.

²²⁷ Wimsatt 30

²²⁸ Adam Potkay, *The Story of Joy: From the Bible to Late Romanticism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 122

While Xu's exploration of remembered nature is only implied in "Second Farewell to Cambridge," he fleshes this theme out in "On the Mountain."²²⁹ This brief poem explores the possibility of connecting with nature through imagination and memory.

All's quiet in the courtyard,
Except for a lingering urban ditty;
Pine shadows have woven a rug—
Look, the moon is bright.

What is it like, I wonder,
On the mountain tonight;
There must be the moon and pines, too,
And quietness, only deeper.

I wish I could climb on a moonbeam
And turn into a puff of wind
To awake the pines from their spring hangover
And let them sway gently on the mountain.

I'd blow off a fresh green needle
And let it fall by your window;
Soft as a sigh—
It wouldn't startle you in your sleep.

Though the first stanza establishes the urban setting for the poem, the rest of the poem explores the imagined mountain and the poet's own desire to commune with nature. The "courtyard" where the poet finds himself is not utterly divorced from nature—there are pine trees and a bright moon. However, nature is tinged by human influence. The pine's shadows "have woven a rug" (l. 3) and an "urban ditty" (l. 2) disturbs the quiet of the night. Unsatisfied with his current surroundings, the poet begins to imagine what "the mountain" (l. 6) is like.

His familiar address, "the mountain" (*shan* 山) instead of a proper name, suggests a close connection with the mountain, in terms of experience or geography, and probably both. The familiarity of the poet with the mountain suggests he has visited it in the past, and it jumps into

²²⁹ Translated by Michelle Yeh

his memory now, offering a way of mentally communing with nature. As he imagines the deep, undisturbed quiet of the mountain, the poet envisions himself becoming a part of nature, turning “into a puff of wind” (l. 10). In this vision, the poet not only joins with nature, he also interacts with it, awakening the trees “from their spring hangover” (l. 11). He plays a dynamic role as a natural force.

Yet his role is not enough to let him connect with the human world. His actions as the wind wouldn't serve to awaken the sleeping “you” of the last stanza. The deep sleep of the unnamed second person comments on the unreality of the poet's wishful visions, reminding us that the middle two stanzas take place only in the poetic imagination. Yet the feeling of a meaningful connection with nature remains; the image of the unheeded “fresh green needle” (l. 13) seems to critique the sleeping figure's unawareness of the power of nature. While others sleep undisturbed in the city, the poet takes an imaginative journey up the mountain, and communes with nature within his own mind.²³⁰

Once again, Xu's poem finds an interesting counterpart in Romantic literature. Coleridge's poem “This Lime Tree Bower, My Prison” also explores the ability of the poet to imaginatively experience the transcendental power of nature.²³¹ The poem begins with the narrator, prevented from going on a walk with his friends, lamenting the loss of “Beauties and feelings, such as would have been/ Most sweet to my remembrance” (ll.3-4). The speaker begins to imagine what his friends must be seeing, and transitions from this into his own personal brush with the pantheistic force, brought about by “a self-conscious reflection on a deliquescent consciousness.”²³² In essence, the speaker uses his imagination to relive a previous communion with nature, a time when he stood “gazing round/ On the wide landscape...till all doth seem/

²³⁰ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 152

²³¹ Gurney 59-60

²³² Potkay 145

Less gross than bodily, and of such hues/ As veil the Almighty Spirit” (ll.39-42). The power of remembrance leads the speaker to a closer bond with nature, even confined as he is to a lime-tree bower—“No scene so narrow but may well employ/ Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart/ Awake to love and beauty!” (ll.62-64) Xu experiments with the same idea of finding transcendence through remembrance of nature, but does so more subtly, with less certainty.

Love as a Route to Transcendence

As of yet, we have explored how Xu’s portrayal of nature reflects a positive strain, emphasizing the Romantic view that nature is man’s conduit to a higher, more meaningful reality. However, there are other poems where his view of nature is more ambivalent, or even negative, where nature represents the forces of destruction and inevitable decay.²³³ In these poems, Xu finds the transcendental hope for immortality in other places. Usually for Xu, if transcendence cannot be found in nature, he finds it in love. The short poem “Build a Wall”²³⁴ is a good example of this theme:

You and I must never desecrate that word.
Let us not forget our vow before God.
I want your most tender love
To wrap around my heart like plantain peel
And your love as strong as pure steel
To build a wall in the flux of life.
Let the autumn wind cover the garden with sere leaves,
Let termites eat away carved pillars a thousand years old.
Even if a lightning bolt shattered the universe one day,
It could not shatter our freedom behind the wall of love.

In this poem, the speaker seeks to find transcendence not through the power of nature, but through the emotion of love.²³⁵ To him, the natural world is part of a harsh reality that seeks to

²³³ Julia C. Lin 117

²³⁴ Translated by Michelle Yeh

²³⁵ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 160-161

“desecrate” (l.1) the love between the speaker and his partner. Instead of using communion with nature to gain “freedom” (l. 10), the poet seeks to cut himself off from the outside world, building a “wall of love” (l. 10) behind which he and his lover can shelter themselves from a corrosive reality. The natural images of the poem are agents of decay. Line seven describes the autumn wind that covers a once blossoming garden with dry, dead leaves while line eight depicts termites slowly but inevitably destroying a stone pillar. The poem implies that the driving force behind nature is not one of transcendence or immortality, but rather entropy, where decay is inevitable.²³⁶

The speaker seeks to escape the process of decay by taking shelter in love.²³⁷ This love, both “tender” (l. 3) and “as strong as pure steel” (l. 5), will protect the speaker and his lover from the erosive effects of exposure to the outside world. “Behind the wall of love” (l. 10), the lovers can escape the change from summer to autumn and avoid the slow decay of passing years. Love becomes a sacred force, a vow made “before God” (l. 2), something that one must not “desecrate” (l. 1). In “Build a Wall,” Xu’s worshipful attitude towards love replaces his reverence for nature. Actually, Xu seems to attribute more power to love than he does to nature.²³⁸ While all moments of connection to the natural world are depicted as fleeting instants, with clear beginnings and endings, Xu believes that love can stand firm “in the flux of life” (l. 6). Xu recognizes change as a part of nature, but he insists that love can rise above this transience and stand forever, “even if a lightning bolt shattered the universe one day” (l. 9). One cannot help but see in this reflection of Xu Zhimo the lover, who broke away from an arranged marriage to conduct a highly romantic, highly publicized courtship of a married woman.²³⁹ The whole

²³⁶ Julia C. Lin 117

²³⁷ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 162

²³⁸ Lee Wing-yiu 19

²³⁹ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 137

weight of social condemnation could no more keep Xu from love than the poem's "lightning bolt."

Pessimism in Xu's Poetry

While "Build a Wall" maintain Xu's usual optimism, his poem "Broken"²⁴⁰ expresses a more negative view of nature and life in general. "Broken" depicts a figure who finds no solace in nature or the power of love. This poem expresses a level of pessimism and doubt that is rare in both Xu's poems and in English Romantic poetry (Wu xxxvii, Lin 129). As several critics have noted, the pessimism found in "Broken" and some of Xu's darker poems shows the influence of Thomas Hardy²⁴¹ who, in Xu's own words, "said optimism was the face of a corpse/ Made up with powder and rouge."²⁴² Each stanza of "Broken" begins with the same refrain: "Sitting on a deep, deep night." The darkness of night and the foreboding setting, which shifts from urban to natural, reflects the despair of the poet. Everything in the aptly named piece is indeed "broken"—the speaker's pen is dull; the window has chinks; the trees are "withered;" even the shadows are "grotesque." In this atmosphere, we can easily understand how the poet's very thoughts are "broken."

Besides giving a decidedly dark portrayal of a foreboding natural world, "Broken" offers an interesting commentary on another great Romantic theme, the power of imagination and the human mind. As seen above, many of Xu's poems express the hope that the poet, through a special connection with nature or the experience of love, can reach at least a moment of transcendence.²⁴³ In "Broken," the speaker's ability to reach this state is just as fractured as the world around him. He attempts to "compose a broken, broken tune... To express my broken

²⁴⁰ Translated by Michelle Yeh

²⁴¹ Lee Wing-yiu 8

²⁴² From Xu Zhimo's poem "Thomas Hardy," translated by Michelle Yeh

²⁴³ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 172

thoughts” (ll.5, 7) but his failure is a foregone conclusion. The dismal surroundings and the poet’s own heartache contribute to his inability to turn his misery into a meaningful work of art. His composition is merely the attempt of a “broken, broken consciousness/ Trying to rebuild a broken world” (ll. 20-21). Knowing this futility of this effort, the poet joins the “withered trees” (l. 17) in their “wild despair” (l. 19).

The speaker makes one final attempt to break out of his desolation, remembering a happy encounter with a woman: “Ah, when she was still a cool white lotus/ In the morning breeze, delicate beyond compare” (ll. 24-25). Again, as in “Build a Wall,” the poet seeks to find happiness in love rather than in nature. Yet in “Broken” even this attempt fails, overpowered by the knowledge that the moment is irretrievably passed. Unlike in “On the Mountain,” where the speaker could use his imagination to escape to a remembered place of beauty, here even the last refuge of one’s own mind fails. The would-be poet is left alone with his “broken breath/ Like the mice locked up in the wall,/ Scuffling about, chasing after darkness and the void!” (ll. 27-28) Not even imagination can help the speaker to escape a harsh, even frightening, reality. The very transience of that one encounter with an ideal woman precludes it from bringing the speaker any happiness.²⁴⁴ Ultimately, the mind fails to break through reality, leaving the narrator trapped in his dismal world.

This bleak pessimism does not permeate all of Xu’s poems. As we have already seen, many of Xu’s poems record a belief in the possibility of transcending, even if only for a moment. “Second Farewell to Cambridge” attests to the possibility of sharing one fleeting moment of transcendental unity with nature. The speaker’s dream-like state allows him to both connect with nature and transcend it, momentarily reaching a higher reality among the stars.²⁴⁵ Though the

²⁴⁴ Julia C. Lin 119

²⁴⁵ Lee Wing-yiu 7

moment ends, leaving a bittersweet flavor, the poem remains a testament to the potential of having such an experience. Further, as discussed above, “On the Mountain” reveals how the power of the human mind and remembrance can recreate the fleeting moment, extending a transient experience and bringing a second brush with transcendence. Clearly, Xu shares the extremely Romantic notion that memory and imagination combined with nature can bring about a connection to a deeper, everlasting reality.²⁴⁶ For Xu, this connection can also be found through love, as seen in “Build a Wall.”

Transcendence and Transience

Xu’s most explicit representation of the human mind achieving transcendence comes in his “Seeking a Bright Star.”²⁴⁷ Julia C. Lin describes the symbolism in this way: “The star, with its associations of steadfastness, permanence, and something beyond the world of flux and mutability, became Hsü’s [Xu’s] persistent symbol of man’s aspiration for the Absolute.”²⁴⁸ The speaker seeks the star, the symbol of the “Absolute” or transcendence of the non-Absolute, the earth-bound, and the mundane. Despite his limitations—“a limping blind horse” (l.1), the darkness of the night, and his own exhaustion—the seeker continues his quest, undaunted by the star’s unwillingness to show itself.²⁴⁹ Finally, the star emerges: “the sky reveals a crystallike radiance” (l. 13).

Interestingly, transcendence in this poem equals death.²⁵⁰ As the star appears, both the horse and rider die. “An animal falls in the wild;/ A corpse lies in the dark night” (ll. 14-15). Yet the poem ends with the repetition of the moment of hope, “the sky reveals a crystallike radiance”

²⁴⁶ Julia C. Lin 120

²⁴⁷ Translated by Julia C. Lin

²⁴⁸ Julia C. Lin 125

²⁴⁹ Lee Wing-yiu 37

²⁵⁰ Julia C. Lin 125

(l. 16), underscoring the rider's triumph even in death. The link between the transcendental moment and death is a prominent theme in Xu's work,²⁵¹ as it is in some Romantic depictions of transcendence.²⁵² Though many of Xu's poems attest to the possibility of experiencing a higher reality, they also emphasize the forces of physical and spiritual decay. With victory comes death, either metaphorically or literally. By linking death with transcendence, Xu constantly draws our attention to human and natural transience, even in his depictions of the quest for the eternal.²⁵³

This idea of impermanence, of life in constant flux, permeates most of Xu's work.²⁵⁴ The poem "A Chance Encounter"²⁵⁵ provides an interesting exploration of this complex theme. Xu examines the randomness and transience of a connection between two people:

I am a cloud in the sky,
By chance casting a shadow on the ripples of your heart.
No need to be surprised,
Even less to rejoice—
The shadow vanishes in a wink.

You and I met on the sea at night;
You had your direction, I had mine.
You may remember,
Better yet forget—
The light emitted at the moment of encounter.

In this poem, the meeting between the lovers represents only a brief instant, brought about "by chance" (l. 2). The impermanence of the meeting finds its reflection in the nature imagery—clouds and ripples, both ever changing and ever shifting.²⁵⁶ Just as ripples fade and clouds evaporate, so the moment of association between the two hearts "vanishes in a wink" (l.

²⁵¹ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 161

²⁵² Richard H. Fogle. "A Note on 'Ode to a Nightingale'" in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. M. H. Abrams (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 438

²⁵³ Julia C. Lin 119-120

²⁵⁴ Julia C. Lin 119

²⁵⁵ Translated by Michelle Yeh

²⁵⁶ Lee Wing-yiu 27

5). When the connection between two lovers is so tenuous, so fragile, the speaker sees “no need to be surprised,/ Even less to rejoice” (ll. 3-4) at the encounter.

This poem provides an intriguing counterpoint to poems such as “Second Farewell to Cambridge” and “On the Mountain,” which both suggest that the moment of transcendence, of connection with nature and forces beyond, is worthwhile despite its brevity.²⁵⁷ “A Chance Encounter” highlights instead the inevitability of the moment’s passing and advocates a sort of studied indifference to the experience.²⁵⁸ While Xu’s other poems suggest the power of memory and imagination, here he writes that it is better to forget “the light emitted at the moment of encounter.” (l. 10). The forces of chance and change overpower the possibility of emotional or spiritual unity between the speaker and the unnamed figure he addresses. Yet even as the speaker advises the “you” to forget the encounter, he prolongs the moment of contact. He says “forget,” and then gives a poignant description of the meeting as a luminous force, emitting light in the darkness. The speaker advises the “you” to let the meeting fade from memory, and yet makes it impossible to do so by immortalizing an ephemeral moment in verse. Thus “A Chance Encounter” has more in common with Xu’s other poems than appears at first glance.

However, one must not overlook the resigned tone of lines eight and nine: “You may remember,/ Better yet forget.” The speaker prefers the oblivion of forgetfulness to the memory of a beautiful moment that can never be reclaimed. This attitude could explain the bitterness of the speaker in “Broken,” who struggles unsuccessfully to recapture his one encounter with purity and loveliness in a broken world. Other poems also suggest that in dark times, the memory of happiness is only a further torment. “For Whom?”²⁵⁹, Xu’s poem lamenting the end of summer,

²⁵⁷ Julia C. Lin 124-125

²⁵⁸ Lee Wing-yiu 27, 37

²⁵⁹ Translated by Julia C. Lin

describes the autumn wind mercilessly hunting down the last signs of summer.²⁶⁰ Surrounded by bleakness and destruction, in a world without “life, color, and beauty” (l. 5), the speaker can only grieve for his loss, without even knowing how to give a name to what he misses. “Ah, for whom do I grieve?” (l. 20), he laments. The loss of beauty is a crueler blow than the absence of beauty; the speaker’s nameless grief results from his having known summer. The remembrance of departed beauty brings only “a deep sense of loss and melancholy.”²⁶¹

Yet in other poems, Xu adopts a more positive view of the transience of beauty, one that Lin compares to John Keats.²⁶² “Birth of Spring”²⁶³ overflows with joy as it describes the death of winter and the coming of spring.²⁶⁴ Spring, “born in the corpse of winter” (l. 5), brings new life to the world, also reawakening the emotions of the poet and his love. Just as “For Whom?” ignores the “anticipation of spring’s resurgence,” “Birth of Spring” studiously avoids the inevitable return of winter.²⁶⁵ The only acknowledgement of spring’s temporary nature comes from the speaker’s question to his lover at the emotional climax of the poem:

Do you not feel my arms
Anxiously seeking your waist,
My breath reflecting on your body,
Like myriads of fireflies thrusting themselves into the flame? (ll.16-19)

Here the speaker acknowledges that his passion cannot last forever. His love is too intense; it will destroy itself as surely as the firefly will burn within the fire.²⁶⁶ Yet the speaker feels no regret for this, only overpowering joy. This is the quest for “love, beauty, and truth, to which the poet is irresistibly drawn, even though it costs him his life.”²⁶⁷ In a sense, the

²⁶⁰ Julia C. Lin 118

²⁶¹ Julia C. Lin 118

²⁶² Julia C. Lin 119

²⁶³ Translated by Julia C. Lin

²⁶⁴ Julia C. Lin 119

²⁶⁵ Julia C. Lin 118

²⁶⁶ Julia C. Lin 119

²⁶⁷ Julia C. Lin 119

transience of beauty only makes it more beautiful, and makes its siren call to the poet that much stronger. Xu seems to prefer the ecstatic beauty that ends in death rather than fading beauty which, like summer, will melt into autumn and winter and leave the poet behind to grieve.²⁶⁸

Lin compares Xu's "obsession with the passing of beauty" to Keats' own observations on the transient nature of beauty.²⁶⁹ Many of Keats' poems, especially the odes, address the problem of ephemeral beauty. Keats reaches the conclusion that "only by being aware of sorrow can the poet devote himself wholeheartedly to joy, conscious the while that his respite will be brief."²⁷⁰ Thus in "Ode to a Nightingale" "the weariness, the fever, and the fret" (l. 23) the poet has experienced adds to his appreciation of the nightingale's song. He knows that the song must end, and sure enough by the end of the poem "fled is that music" (l. 80). Yet for a brief while, the nightingale transported the speaker above the grind of daily life, as he soars on the "wings of Poesy" (l. 33) closer to the transcendent realm of beauty. Though the bird's song must end, there is an immortal quality about it: "The voice I hear this passing night was heard/ In ancient days" (ll.63-64). Though in itself fleeting, the experience of beauty becomes a constant that connects all generations, paradoxically emphasizing both death and continuity.²⁷¹ The poet takes his joy in a beauty that will inevitably die—without this looming death beauty loses its attraction.²⁷² As Keats says in "Ode on a Grecian Urn," immortal beauty is "all breathing human passion far above" (l. 28). Such beauty is no longer connected to the human realm.²⁷³

While Keats ultimately feels that the inevitability of losing beauty only makes it that much more valuable, Xu's poetry reveals a darker interpretation. While beauty can be enjoyed,

²⁶⁸ Lee Wing-yiu 25

²⁶⁹ Julia C. Lin 119

²⁷⁰ Fogle 437

²⁷¹ Gurney 124

²⁷² Fogle 436

²⁷³ Gurney 124

its passing leaves men grieving in its wake.²⁷⁴ Xu's "Roaming in the Clouds"²⁷⁵ traces one man's encounter with beauty and its impact upon his life, using the allegory of a mountain stream and a drifting cloud. Xu's figure of beauty is effervescent to the point of being intangible.²⁷⁶ Beauty "roam[s] among the clouds in the sky" (l. 1), with little connection to reality and the earth below. The cloud takes "joy in infinite wandering" (l. 4), passing from place to place ceaselessly. When a stream encounters this nomadic figure of beauty, catastrophe ensues.

...Your radiant beauty
In your passing has kindled his soul
And startled him to awakening. He held close to your lovely shadow.
But what he held was only unending sorrow,
For no beauty can be stayed in space or time.
He yearns for you, but you've flown across many mountain peaks
To cast your shadow in a yet vaster and wider sea.
He now pines for you, that one mountain stream,
Despairingly praying, praying for your return. (ll.6-14)

This encounter with beauty brings mixed effects. While the stream has been awakened, this new love of beauty brings "only unending sorrow" because beauty can never last. This particular beauty seems indifferent, even "unaware that on this humble earth/ There is a mountain stream" (ll.5-6). Beauty's cold indifference to the stream casts a negative pall on its influence. While the stream is left alone and broken, to pray for a repeat encounter, the cloud has moved on without even noticing its effects. Read as a parable of the moment of transcendence, the encounter with the sublimely beautiful, this poem highlights Xu's troubled attitude towards such moments. True, an experience with transcendental beauty brings awakening and a newly "kindled soul" but Xu seems obsessed with the costs of that awakening.²⁷⁷ The knowledge of beauty, or of a higher reality not bound by the rules of the earth, brings only sadness that neither

²⁷⁴ Julia C. Lin 120

²⁷⁵ Translated by Julia C. Lin

²⁷⁶ Julia C. Lin 107

²⁷⁷ Julia C. Lin 129

can be a permanent part of human life. In this regard, the power of the human mind is sadly limited for Xu. Even when awakened by exposure to great beauty, the mind is fated to be left behind, “despairingly praying, praying” for that beauty to return.

Lin suggests that Xu’s “Roaming in the Clouds” can be compared to Shelley’s “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty.”²⁷⁸ Both poems describe an encounter with fleeting beauty, and lament the fact that beauty must “pass away and leave our state,/ This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate” (ll.16-17). Shelley even compares “Love, hope, and self-esteem” to clouds (l. 47), a metaphor Xu extends in his own poem. Like Xu, Shelley depicts beauty as “fleeting, evanescent, and unpredictable.”²⁷⁹ Yet Shelley’s poem, despite its pessimistic moments, also contains a certain optimism that the spirit of intellectual beauty will return, freeing “This world from its dark slavery” (l. 70). The speaker holds out hope that the “Spirit of Beauty” (l. 13) will “to my onward life supply/ Its calm” (ll. 80-81). The poem ends with the narrator’s continued commitment “To fear himself, and love all humankind” (l.84). Xu’s poem never makes the transition from gloom to hope that we see in Shelley’s “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty.”²⁸⁰

Xu’s Poetry and China’s Politics

Perhaps this is because Xu’s doubts parallel the situation of contemporary China rather than being simply intellectual uncertainties. Though Xu tried to distance himself from politics, he could not escape the growing desperation of China’s situation in the 1920s.²⁸¹ As part of the May Fourth Movement, which sought to free China from the restrictions of its traditions, Xu’s attitude in poems like “Roaming in the Clouds” lend themselves to comparison with the thoughts

²⁷⁸ Julia C. Lin 120

²⁷⁹ Gurney 87

²⁸⁰ Gurney 88

²⁸¹ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 144

of another great May Fourth writer, the great Lu Xun. In his most famous metaphor, Lu expresses doubts about the value of being awakened to the grim reality of the world:

Imagine an iron house without windows, absolutely indestructible, with many people fast asleep inside who will soon die of suffocation. But you know since they will die in their sleep, they will not feel the pain of death. Now if you cry aloud to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making those unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you think you are doing them a good turn?²⁸²

Lu Xun questions the value of awakening people to the truth, realizing the agony of being awakened to face a brutal reality that one cannot possibly change. Lu Xun's attitude here seems to me to reflect Xu Zhimo's unspoken question in "Roaming in the Clouds." Yes, the stream is "awakened" by his encounter with beauty, but if such an awakening brings only pain, would it not be better to remain asleep, like the suffocating sleepers in Lu Xun's iron house? This tendency to question (if not despair of) the value of awakening people runs deep within the May Fourth Movement.²⁸³ Though a similar line of questioning can be found in Romantic works, their doubts about the possibilities of transcendence and the value of beauty stem from an entirely different source than Xu Zhimo's and Lu Xun's. The Chinese writers constantly faced the poverty and abuse prevalent in their struggling society as well as the crushing feeling of inadequacy against the militarily and industrially stronger imperialist powers. Their doubts and insecurities flow from this sense of national humiliation and despair.²⁸⁴ By contrast, English Romantic doubt had its sources in personal feelings and philosophies.²⁸⁵

Given this widespread pessimism, Xu Zhimo's strong Romantic tendencies are even more incredible. His love of nature, yearning for transcendence, and hope that the human mind

²⁸² Translation from Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt, eds., *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 4

²⁸³ Yeh, *Modern Chinese Poetry*, 29-31

²⁸⁴ Schwarca 157

²⁸⁵ Gurney 16

could reach a better place all shine through in many of his poems.²⁸⁶ Lu Xun follows his iron house metaphor with a friend's rebuttal: "But if a few awake, you can't say there is no hope of the destroying the iron house."²⁸⁷ Xu Zhimo likewise has great hopes—for transcendence, for beauty, and for social change, the main concern of most May Fourth writers. However, as he grew older and China's situation worsened, some of these hopes dimmed, leading to melancholy poems such as "Broken" (1927) and "Roaming in the Clouds" (1929).²⁸⁸

As discussed earlier, Guo Moruo believed the main function of poetry was to bring about social change.²⁸⁹ For Xu Zhimo, writing played a different role. He likely would not have condemned Guo's silkworms for spinning poetry for themselves alone. Much of Xu's poetry explores the individual quest for transcendence, the individual's relationship with the world and nature, or the individual's reaction to beauty.²⁹⁰ Compared to Guo, Xu often seems isolationist. The standout example of this tendency is his poem "Go Away, World, Go Away."²⁹¹

The title of this poem, which is also the first line, reveals the tone of the poem. The speaker shouts respectively at the world, his youth, "the country of dreams" (l. 9), and the "all in all" (l. 13) to "go away" in the four stanzas. The speaker himself stands "alone on the lofty mountain peak" (l. 2), a symbol of a man communing with nature.²⁹² Cut off from the world, the speaker still feels the need to demand further isolation. While this poem clearly represents the wish to divorce oneself from the world, at a deeper level it expresses the futility of such a desire.²⁹³ Even the lone speaker, faced only with "the infinite blue canopy of sky" (l. 4) cannot

²⁸⁶ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 159-160

²⁸⁷ Lau and Goldblatt 6

²⁸⁸ Lee Wing-yiu 30

²⁸⁹ Julia C. Lin 198

²⁹⁰ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 169

²⁹¹ Translated by Julia C. Lin

²⁹² Julia C. Lin 124

²⁹³ Lee Wing-yiu 33

escape the world, and feels compelled to shout in frustration. The repeated refrain, “go away,” underlines the impossibility of escaping.

Part of the problem is that the speaker wishes to leave behind not just the outside world, but parts of himself. He tries to banish his own youth, wishing it could “be buried with the sweet grass of the valley” (l. 6). The speaker turns the typical connotations of youth—innocence, idealism, and purity—on their heads. He equates youth with death instead of life, regulating it to a grave. Instead of celebrating the happiness of being young, the speaker demands that youth “throw [its] sorrow to the crows of the darkening sky” (l. 8). The speaker rejects youth because he focuses only on its negative aspects. His isolationism results in no small part from despair.²⁹⁴

As an extension of this despair, the speaker even rejects imagination by banishing the “country of dreams” (l. 9). Most Romantic isolationism results from an inordinate love of the imagination, the desire to use the mind to forge a special relationship with nature and thus transcend the dismal realities of the world.²⁹⁵ Xu’s isolationism also rejects the power of his own mind, saying “I have scattered the jade cup of imagination” (l. 10). Based on his pessimistic interpretation of youth, we can infer that the decision to reject imagination comes from the speaker’s disillusionment with the “country of dreams” and the hope it represents.²⁹⁶ Yet despite his rejection of imagination, the speaker still sees value in communing with nature: “Smiling, I accept the congratulation of winds and waves” (l. 12).

Even though Xu’s narrator adopts the traditional Romantic pose, communing with nature, his attitude towards it is slightly different. Instead of an interaction with nature based on the imagination, Xu’s nature congratulates the speaker on rejecting the imagination and dreams. The poem implies that transcendence requires a rejection of both internal dreams and external

²⁹⁴ Lee Wing-yiu 33

²⁹⁵ Wellek 179

²⁹⁶ Lee Wing-yiu 31

reality.²⁹⁷ Thus in the final stanza the speaker rejects “all in all” (l. 13) (also translated as “all and all” by Kai-yu Hsu).²⁹⁸ Facing the “lofty peak piercing heaven...the infinite Infinity” (ll. 14, 16), the speaker chooses to reject everything—the world, his own youth, even his imagination—in order to reach that Infinity. “Go Away, World, Go Away” provides a different spin on the transcendental quest—one that involves rejection of the internal world of the speaker as well as the external world. The speaker must empty himself before being able to reach “the infinite Infinity” of transcendence, an attitude that strongly harkens back to China’s Taoism.²⁹⁹

“Go Away, World, Go Away” and its escapist message has important connotations for Xu’s style of poetry. Most of Xu’s poems are chronicles of his emotions and perceptions, the quest for transcendence, or hymns to the beauty of the natural world. Like “Go Away, World, Go Away,” his poems mostly reject the political and social problems of his day, either explicitly or implicitly.³⁰⁰ Usually Xu’s consciousness of politics only finds its way into his poems through a pervading sense of pessimism in poems such as “Broken” or “Roaming in the Clouds.” Xu is less comfortable with direct commentary on the political-social world than his contemporary, Guo Moruo.³⁰¹ Guo made it clear that his poetic mission was to bring about social change, ushering in a new utopia. Xu’s poetry lacks this clear purpose. His poems are usually a spontaneous expression of his intense personal emotions and as such lack any explicit political commentary.³⁰²

²⁹⁷ Julia C. Lin 124

²⁹⁸ Kai-yu, Hsu ed. and trans., *Twentieth Century Chinese Poetry: An Anthology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), 87

²⁹⁹ Julia C. Lin 120

³⁰⁰ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 155

³⁰¹ Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 144

³⁰² Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 169

Xu's Social Critiques

Here we see a division between two heritages of the Romantic traditions. Within the Romantic genre there are two distinct types of poetry—the deeply personal record of the poet's emotions and the impassioned critique of social ills and the political world.³⁰³ Guo Moruo's poems also generally fit in these two categories. For Xu Zhimo, poetry as an emotional record far outweighs poetry as a social critique. When he does write of social ills, he “offers no resolution, sounds no indignant protest; he supplies only the detached observation of a bystander.”³⁰⁴ In this way, Xu's few poems with direct social commentary are more closely akin to Blake's ironic social commentary in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* than they are to the harsh social critiques of Shelley's “The Mask of Anarchy” or “England in 1819.”³⁰⁵

A good example of Xu's social critique is the poem “A Picture of Happy Poverty.”³⁰⁶ The poem describes beggars picking through a pile of garbage, but accentuates the colors and movements so that the scene appears more like a festive dance than what it is, a picture of abject poverty.³⁰⁷ The title itself reflects this irony in the phrase “happy poverty.” Xu successfully uses the irony of what he describes and how he describes it throughout the poem.³⁰⁸ Thus the “garbage pile is a gold mine” (l. 8) and the beggars are “gold diggers” (l. 9). The experience of digging through garbage becomes an exercise in peaceful unity: “No argument, only silent poking and picking from the pile/...Shoulder to shoulder, head to head, poking and picking” (l.15, 17). At the end of poem, the scene has a festival air to it.³⁰⁹

One file of rags, like a moving merry-go-round lantern,
Going around and around and around.

³⁰³ Gurney 84-85

³⁰⁴ Julia C. Lin 132

³⁰⁵ Julia C. Lin 132; Gurney 34

³⁰⁶ Translated by Julia C. Lin

³⁰⁷ Julia C. Lin 131

³⁰⁸ Julia C. Lin 132

³⁰⁹ Julia C. Lin 132

The middle-aged women, the young girls, the grandmas,
There are also a few yellow dogs mingling in their midst to add to the gaiety.
(ll. 22-25)

Each of the ironic metaphors only serves to underline what the beggars will never experience—gold, joy, and the sort of abundant festival their scrounging recalls. As Lin comments, “The poem ends with the familiar Chinese lantern; its associations of festivity and gracious living subtly recall the life ‘behind the vermilion gates,’ where the garbage came from.”³¹⁰ The seeming happiness of the beggars likewise only serves to make their plight more poignant. Their joy over small scraps of food within a garbage heap drives home how desperate their situation is: “Grandma finds a strip of cloth. What a fine piece of cloth! ... ‘Mother,’ a girl shouts, ‘I found a piece of fresh meat bone! We can cook it with bean cakes. Won’t it be nice?’” (ll.18, 20-21).

The use of light-hearted vocabulary to create an ironic condemnation of social injustice recalls Blake’s poems in *Songs of Innocence*, especially when those poems are read in conjunction with those published as *Songs of Experience*.³¹¹ The poems in *Songs of Innocence* paint a picture of happiness and hope, even when the speaker or subject is disadvantaged socially. However, each of Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* contains an undercurrent of social critique that challenges the obvious interpretation.³¹² The potential for critical irony becomes especially apparent when reading the companion poems of *Songs of Experience*, which turn the optimistic tone of *Innocence* on its head with sharp social critique. One of the most famous examples of this is “The Chimney Sweeper.” In *Songs of Innocence*, “The Chimney Sweeper” emphasizes a strong religious message. The young chimney sweeper, Tom, dreams about an Angel coming to free all the chimney sweeps: “Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,/ They rise upon

³¹⁰ Julia C. Lin 132

³¹¹ Gurney 34

³¹² Gurney 34

clouds and sport in the wind” (ll.17-18). The poem deemphasizes the brutal nature of child labor and underlines the hope of eternal paradise for those who “do their duty” (l. 24). The poem “radiates an harmonious faith in the consolations of the Christian promise.”³¹³ By contrast, “The Chimney Sweeper” in *Songs of Experience* directly questions the hypocrisy of using the promise of heaven to justify current suffering: “They think they have done me no injury,/ And are gone to praise God and his Priest and King/ Who make up a heaven of our misery” (ll. 10-12). As Gurney puts it, in *Songs of Experience* “conventional Christian piety is rejected as a callow fraud.”³¹⁴ When the two poems are read side by side, it is easy to detect ironic undercurrents in the first version despite its cheerful tone and bright imagery.³¹⁵ Xu Zhimo also makes use of ironically merry imagery to create a harsh social critique in “A Picture of Happy Poverty.”

Xu adopts a sharper tone in his poem “Serves You Right, Beggar”³¹⁶ but still avoids either suggesting a solution or harshly chastising society.³¹⁷ Instead, the poem is one of despair, cataloguing suffering rather than tracing its cause. The poem portrays “the abstract theme of the suffering of humanity” without attempting to assign blame or offer hope for improvement.³¹⁸ The reader experiences the beggar’s overly polite pleas for help, for “a little bit of your leftovers, just a little bit!” (l. 3) and thus shoulders part of the guilt of ignoring his plight. Only the wind acknowledges the beggar’s existence, but, as in “Broken,” even this natural force assumes the role of tormenter. “Outside the gate, the northwest wind chuckles, ‘Serve you right, beggar!’” (l. 8) Utterly rejected, both by society and by nature, the beggar is reduced to “a pile of black shadows, trembling,/ Lying like a worm on the frontage road of humanity” (ll. 9-10).

³¹³ Gurney 33

³¹⁴ Gurney 34

³¹⁵ Wu 170

³¹⁶ Translated by Kai-yu Hsu

³¹⁷ Julia C. Lin 130

³¹⁸ Julia C. Lin 130

Despite the undeniable pathos of this description, Xu's poem of social critique lacks bitterness or anger.³¹⁹ The social elites who would naturally be the targets for such anger are almost entirely absent from the poem. The beggar addresses them, but they make no response, either positive or negative. Only the cruel wind interacts at all with the beggar. A poem that could have been an angry diatribe becomes only a deeply melancholy statement on human suffering.³²⁰ This separates Xu from his Romantic counterparts, both English and Chinese—his poems of social critique are sad instead of angry. Where Guo Moruo or Percy Shelley would roar in anger, Xu Zhimo sighs in despair.

What then is the purpose of Xu's social critique? If he neither seeks to galvanize a society into action through righteous anger, nor provides suggestions for positive change, then why depict poverty and misery?³²¹ It seems to me that in Xu's hands such subjects become extensions of Xu's emotional poetry. In "Serves You Right, Beggar" the world is closely akin to that found in "Broken," a record of personal suffering. Xu seems to be trying to give a voice to the emotions, especially the despair, of the poor. Thus he acts more as a conduit for feelings than a commentator.³²² Perhaps Xu shared Keats' belief in negative capability, whereby an author assumes the identity of the poetic subject without projecting anything of himself into it.³²³ Xu certainly achieves this in "A Picture of Happy Poverty," where, as Lin says, "The narrator of the poem...never intrudes with didactic comment or sentimental moralizing."³²⁴ Indeed, the narrator doesn't intrude at all into the poem; he merely describes the events placed before him.

³¹⁹ Julia C. Lin 132

³²⁰ Julia C. Lin 132

³²¹ Julia C. Lin 132

³²² Julia C. Lin 131

³²³ Wu 1336-1337

³²⁴ Julia C. Lin 131

Perhaps John Keats is indeed the best counterpart one can find among the English Romantics for Xu's style.³²⁵ Both share "an obsession with the passing of beauty" and a tendency to back away from explicit commentary on political events.³²⁶ Some critics suggest that Keats' poems contain a great deal of hidden political statements;³²⁷ one can also find this submerged style of social and political critique coloring the emotions expressed in many of Xu's darker poems, like "Broken" and "For Whom?"³²⁸ Yet ultimately Xu's Romanticism is his own, grown out of his deep commitment to the pursuit of beauty and emotional truth against the formidable obstacles to both in early twentieth century China.

³²⁵ Julia C. Lin 119

³²⁶ Julia C. Lin 119; Wu 1340-1341

³²⁷ Wu 1341

³²⁸ Lee Wing-yiu 118

Conclusion

Both Guo Moruo and Xu Zhimo's conceptions of Romanticism show the impact of the surrounding cultural and historical contexts. Guo's love of nature and the drive to transcendence is colored by his Communist ideology, leading to confusion about the role of the poet. While Guo is pulled towards transcendence and individual liberation, his growing class consciousness leads him to extol the common man even over the revolutionary poet, so that the need for national transcendence in the end outweighs the need for personal transcendence. Despite this, Guo cannot overlook the value of personal liberation and transcendence. His works represent a tension between the typical Romantic hope for individual transcendence and the Chinese Communist pull for collectivist efforts towards national salvation. His poems argue with each other—should the poet be above the common man or below him? Should art be the spontaneous expression of ego and emotion, or political propaganda made to push the masses towards revolution? After 1924, Guo made his choice, devoting himself and his art fully to the Chinese Communist Party.

Xu avoids many of these tensions by largely absenting himself from politics. Most of his poems reflect an individualistic Romanticism. He experiments with Romantic themes on the value of nature and the possibility of transcendence through use of the imagination and remembrance. Yet Xu also brings a unique perspective to Romanticism, giving transcendental power to love as well as nature. In fact, some of Xu's poems are downright pessimistic about nature, and love cannot always successfully combat the dark forces of the world Xu lived in. The realities of China's social and political struggles lead Xu to become more and more pessimistic, coloring his Romanticism. Xu becomes obsessed with the transience of beauty. He cannot decide whether the passing of beauty should bring increased appreciation for it or bitterness.

The Romanticism of 1920s China, as represented by Guo Moruo and Xu Zhimo, is a unique literary movement to itself. However, even while being unique, Chinese Romanticism definitely fits within the broad bounds of Romanticism as defined by René Wellek. The emphasis on nature and the pantheistic force, the awesome power of the imagination, and poetry as a powerful force are all found in Chinese Romanticism. The Chinese Romantics, rather than merely copying English Romanticism, adapt it and add their unique cultural perspective. They are the new Romantics, giving one of the West's great literary movements relevance to 20th century China.

Appendix: Full Text of Selected Poems

*Guo Moruo's Poems*³²⁹

By Electric Light

I. Inspired by an old theme: Su Tse-ching by Lake Baikal

The electric lights are already shining,
but why is there gloom in my heart?
I pace, a long figure, in the city;
I think of Su Tse-ching on the shores of Lake Baikal.
I see him with his white fleece on his shoulders,
a felt turban on his head, felt shoes, felt gown,
a solitary figure in the boundless Siberian steppes,
behind him a snowy sea of sheep.
I see him at dusk in early spring, waiting to return to the yurt,
his background the frozen waves of Lake Baikal
whose shapes mingle with the undulations of the clouds at the horizon.
I see him moving eastwards,
far away, looking towards the south, his head raised,
his eyes charge with infinite sorrow,
and yet as though there burned a thread of hope.

II. Before a painting—"The Shepherdess" of Millet

The electric lights are already shining,
but why is there gloom in my heart?
I imagine Su Tse-ching's thoughts turning to home.
I enter an art gallery from the street,
I enjoy the late afternoon scene of Vierwaldstätter Sea;
next I gaze on a waterfall in California—
an ideal picture, a picture more than ideal.
Person in the painting, surely you are a barbarian woman, yes a barbarian woman.
A vast emerald plain brilliant with wild flowers
unrolls before my eyes.
In it stands a woman with a crook in her hand,
at her back, homeward-bound, surges her flock of sheep.
Such must have been the scene to which Su Tse-ching returned:
his forsaken wife, his thriving flock.
But the eyes of the shepherdess, those eyes...
are they fraught with bitterness? With resentment? With despair?

III. Portrait of Beethoven

³²⁹ All poems by Guo Moruo translated by Jong Lester and A.C. Barnes. Asterisked lines are my own translations.

The electric lights are already shining,
but why is there gloom in my heart?
I look again at the painting by Millet,
I again search through “the world’s great paintings.”
Virgin Mary, head of Jesus, girl hugging a pitcher...*
dance before my eyes.
Ah! Beethoven! Beethoven! You dispel my nameless grief!
Your disheveled hair streams like swiftly flowing waves,
your high white collar is like a snow-capped ridge;
your leonine forehead, your tigerish eyes,
your brain which is like “the will of the universe” itself.
In your right hand a pen, in your left a manuscript,
an angry torrent flows from the point of your pen.
Beethoven! What are you listening to?
It is as if I were hearing your *symphony*.

Coal in the Grate

-dedicated to my native land

Ah, my fair young maiden,
I shall not betray your care,
let you not disappoint my hopes.
For her my heart’s delight
I burn to such a heat.

Ah, my fair young maiden,
you must know of my former life?
You must not shrink from my coarseness?*only in my slavish breast*
could burn a fire so bight.

Ah, my fair young maiden,
I believe in my former life*
I was a trusty pillar
buried alive for years one end:
today I must see the light of day again.
Ah, my fair young maiden,
since I saw the light of day again*
I often think of my native home:*
for her my heart’s delight
I burn to such a heat.

Drunken Song Under a Flowering Plum Tree

Plum tree! Plum tree!

I sing your praises! I sing your praises!
You from your innermost self
exhale your faint unearthly fragrance
and put forth your lovely flowers.
Flowers! Love!
Quintessence of the universe,
source of life!
Were spring without flowers,
life without love,
what kind of a world would it be?
Plum blossom! Plum blossom!
I sing your praises,
I sing the praises of myself,
I sing the praises of the self-expressive universe.

The Good Morning

I greet you with a Good Morning,
rolling ocean that knows no rest,
shimmering glow of the rosy dawn,
white clouds welling up like poetry from its source.
silken-rain threads evenly drawn (language of poetry),
crests over the sea burning with the fire of passion,
morning breeze combing the soul.
(Morning breeze, bear away my voice to the four quarters!)

I greet you with a Good Morning,
my youthful homeland,
my new-born kinsfolk,
boundless reaches in southern lands of my Yangtze,
frozen wastes in the northern lands of my Yellow River.
(Yellow River, may the ice-floes in your bosom thaw very soon!)
Thousand-league Great Wall,
wilderness of snow,
the Russia who inspires me with awe,
the pioneer I hold in awe.

I greet you with a Good Morning,
snow-capped Pamirs,
snow-capped Himalayas,
revered Tagore of the Bengal,
fellow scholars in the school of Nature,
Ganges! Sacred light glowing on the Ganges,
Indian Ocean, Red Sea, Suez Canal,
pyramids on the banks of the Nile!

Da Vinci, so early your dreams of flight,
Thinker of Rodin, seated before the Pantheon,
band of friends, half working half studying,
Belgium, people of Belgium, survivors of war,
Ireland, poets of Ireland,
Atlantic!

I greet you with a Good Morning,
Atlantic, flanked by the New World,
grave of Washington, of Lincoln, of Whitman,
Whitman! Whitman! The Pacific that was Whitman!
Pacific!
Pacific Ocean! Isles of the Pacific, ancient Fusang lying in the Pacific,
O Fusang! Fusang still wrapped in dream.
Awake! *Mésamé!*
Hasten to share in this millennial dawn!

I Am an Idolater

I am an idolater;
I worship the sun, worship mountain peaks, worship the sea;
I worship water, worship fire, worship volcanoes, worship the great rivers;
I worship life, worship death, worship light, worship darkness;
I worship Suez, worship Panama, worship the Great Wall, worship the Pyramids.
I worship the creative spirit, worship strength, worship blood, worship the heart;
I worship bombs, worship sorrow, worship destruction;
I worship iconoclasts, worship myself,
for I am also an iconoclast!

Morning Snow

-On reading Carlyle's "The Hero as Poet"

Waves of snow.
A world of all silver.
My whole being is ready to resolve into light and flow forth,
an *open secret*.

Water dripping from the eaves....
Surely it is my life's blood?
My life's blood drips with muted cadence,
in harmony with the waves of the sea, of the pines, of the snow.

Nature, how bold your sweep.
The *symphony* that is Nature.
Hero-poet.

Proletarian poet.

O Earth, My Mother

O earth, my mother,
the sky is already pale with dawn;
you rouse the child in your bosom,
now I am crawling on your back.

O earth, my mother,
you sustain me as I roam through the paradisiacal garden,
and within the ocean
you give forth music that soothes my spirit.

O earth, my mother,
though past, present and future
you are food, apparel, shelter for me;
how can I repay the benefits you have bestowed upon me?

O earth, my mother,
henceforth I shall seclude myself less indoors;
in the midst of this opening up of waste lands
I would fulfill my filial duty to you.

O earth, my mother,
I am envious of your dutiful sons, the peasants in the fields;
they are the nurse of mankind,
you have always cared for them.

O earth, my mother,
I am envious of your darlings, workers in coal pits;
they are Prometheus of mankind,
you have always cared for them.

O earth, my mother,
I am envious of every blade or twig, my brothers, your progeny:
freely, independently, contentedly, vigorously
they enjoy the life bestowed on them.

O earth, my mother,
I envy every living creature, the earthworm most of all;
only I do not envy the birds flying in the air,
they have left you to go their way in the air.

O earth, my mother,
I do not wish to fly in the air,
nor ride in carts, on horseback, wear socks or put on shoes,
I only wish to go barefoot, ever closer to you.

O earth, my mother,
you are witness to the reality of my existence;
I do not believe you are the mere shape of a bubble conjured forth in a dream,
I do not believe I am merely an imbecile creature acting without reason.

O earth, my mother,
we are all I-yin, born out of Kungsang;
I do not believe that in the shadowy heaven above,
a certain Father exists.

O earth, my mother,
I think everything in this world are incarnations of your body:
thunder is the breath of your might,
snow and rain the upsurge of your blood.

O earth, my mother,
I think that the lofty bowl of the sky is the mirror in which you adorn yourself,
and that the sun by day and the moon by night
are but your reflections in the mirror.
O earth, my mother,
I think that all the stars in the sky
are but the eyes of us your creatures reflected in the mirror.
I can only think you are the witness to the reality of existence.

O earth, my mother,
My former self was just an ignorant child,
I only enjoyed your affection,
I did not understand, I did not know how to repay your affection.

O earth, my mother,
henceforth I shall realize how loving you are;
if I drink a glass of water, even if it is from Heaven-sent dew,
I shall know it is your milk, my life-sustaining drink.

O earth, my mother,
whenever I hear a voice speak or laugh
I know it is your song,
expressly provided to comfort my spirit.

O earth, my mother,

before my eyes everything is in restless motion;
I know this is your dance
with which you wish to comfort my soul.

O earth, my mother,
I savour every fragrance, every colour;
I know they are playthings you have given to me
expressly to comfort my spirit.

O earth, my mother,
my spirit is your spirit;
I shall make my spirit strong
to repay your affection

O earth, my mother,
henceforth I shall repay your affection;
I know that you love me and wish to encourage me to work,
I shall learn from you to work, never to stop.

Pacing Through Jurimatsubara at Night

The ocean sleeps in peace.
Gaze into the distance, only a misty glow can be seen,
not the faintest murmur of waves can be heard.
Ah, you spacious heavens, how lofty you are, how free, how mighty, how vast and serene!
Countless stars look down the wide-eyed,
their gaze fixed on the beauty of the night.
Countless pines in Jurimatsubara
raise high their hands in silent adoration of the heavens;
their hands tremble in awe against the sky;
every fibre of my nerves trembles in awe within me!

Panorama from Fudetate Yama

Pulse of the great city,
surge of life,
beating, panting, roaring,
spurting, flying, leaping,
the whole sky covered with a pall of smoke:
my heart is ready to leap from my mouth.
Hills, roofs, surge on,
wave after wave they well up before me.
Symphony of myriad sounds,

marriage of man and Nature.
The curve of the bay might be Cupid's bow,
Man's life his arrow, shot over the sea.
Dark and misty coastline, steamers at anchor,
steamers in motion, steamers unnumbered,
funnel upon funnel bearing its black peony.
Ah! Emblem of the Twentieth Century!
Stern of modern civilization!

Pyramids

First one, then two, then three pyramid peaks
range on the banks of the Nile—are these not the Nile banks?
One high, one lower, the last lowest of all.
The river banks below run on neat as a knife cut.
Ah, those ripples in the river's flow, those rosy clouds surging behind the pyramids!
A white blur of light shows through the clouds: it must be the westering sun;
The sun has traversed the eastern hemisphere, it will now visit the western.
The natural and man-made beauties must all have passed before your gaze.
No! No! Not so! It is the earth that is turning and circling you
like a dancing girl approaching you.
Sun! Symbol of the sun! Pyramids!
Oh, that I might follow you in your course, fly towards you!

II

On either side runs a line of somber woods:
between them flows a Z-shaped ribbon,
flowing towards the foot of the cloud-lapped pyramids
seem at the same time to be proclaiming in sonorous voices:
Create! Create! Create with all your might!
The creative forces of man can rival those of the gods.
If you will not believe, look upon us, we grandiose structures!
Even the sun in the sky must bow his head to us!
Sonorous thunder, I am grateful for this your self-tested advice.
The surging feelings in the sea of my heart have converged into a river that flows towards you.
Surely that Z-shaped river in the woods must be me myself!

Prefatory Poem to *The Goddesses*

I am a proletarian:
Because except for my naked self,
I have no private property of my own.
The Goddesses is something that I gave birth to myself,
And perhaps I could say that it belongs to me,
But I would like to become a communist,

So I am going to share it with public.

Shouting on the Rim of the World

Endless tumult of angry white clouds,
sublime arctic landscape.

The mighty Pacific gathers her strength to engulf the earth,
the surging flood wells up before me:

unending destruction, unending creation, unending effort.

Ah, power, power!

Picture of power, dance of power, music of power, poetry of power, gamut of power!

Spring Sadness

Is it that melancholy is clouding my mind?

Or is it the desolate bleakness of the sky?

How is it that the spring sunlight
is so drear and bereft of brilliance?

Why do the hills on yonder shore
bow their heads in frowning dejection?

The air is filled with the beat of the waves on the shore.

O sea! to whom are you speaking?

But I can make nothing of the words of the sea,
for me the flight of the white clouds has no meaning.

Spring Silkworms

Silkworms, you are spinning silk....

No it is poetry you are spinning!

How gossamer your poetry, how charming, how delicate, how pure, how sparkling,
how very ...why I can find no words to describe you!

Silkworms, your poetry—

is it premeditated or unprompted?

Do you create with art, or is it a natural flow?

Do you make it for others,

or for yourselves alone?

Silkworms, I am afraid that your poetry

is, alas, spontaneous,

is, alas, a natural flow.

The Palace of Art you are erecting,
is, alas, for yourselves alone.

Sunrise

Fiery clouds girdle the rim of the sky
like crimson dragons roving the air,
like crimson lions, whales, elephants, rhinoceroses.
Perhaps you are all outriders of Apollo?

And you, blazing headlights of motorcars,
you twentieth-century Apollos,
have you not changed your mount for a car?
I would be your driver, will you engage me?

Ah! The vitality of light!
Agate morning birds scatter before my eyes.
Light and dark are divided with the clean cut of a knife.
This truly is the struggle between life and death!*

Ah! Light and dark, both are floating clouds.*
I hold my gaze on the darkness of the clouds:
all are dispersed by Apollo's potent beams.
The cock crows all about me boast of the triumphant return.*

Victorious in Death

Terence MacSwiney, the Sinn Feiner, a leader of the Irish Republican Army, was arrested by the British Government in the middle of August, 1920 and was imprisoned in Parkstone Jail. For seventy-three days he disdained to eat the English bread and died there on October 25.

I.

*Oh ! once again to Freedom's cause return
The patriot Tell—the Bruce of Bannockburn!
--Thomas Campbell*

True depiction of “the sea of tears,”
gaunt forbidding pile: can it be the gateway to a prison, or the outside of a church?
A countless throng of young men kneel at prayer.

“MacSwiney, leader of the Irish Republican Army,
cast into Parkstone Gaol fifty day ago and more,
has spurned ever since the shameful English bread.
We sons of Ireland, kneeling before this great building,

are deeply moved by his devotion.
We offer up our prayers for his protection.”

Honoured MacSwiney!
Dear sons of Ireland,
the spirit of freedom will ever stand by you,
for you stand by one another,
you are the incarnation of freedom!

October 13

II.

*Hope, for a season, bade the world farewell,
And Freedom shrieked—as Kosciusko fell!*
--Thomas Campbell

Terence MacSwiney, Irish patriot!
Today is the 22nd of October!
(Never has the calendar on the wall so fixed my attention!)
Are you still alive, locked in your prison cell?
Came a cable of the 17th from London:
It was sixty-six days since your fast began,
and yet you bear yourself as well as ever.
You talked for a while with your dear ones on the afternoon of the 17th,
and your face was even more radiant than before.
Your strength was fading daily...
and today is the 22nd of October.
Irish patriot, Terence MacSwiney!
Can you still be counted among living creature?
A cable of the 17th from your native Cork
told than a Sinn Feiner, a comrade of yours, Fitzgerald,
fasted for sixty-eight days in Cork City Gaol,
and suddenly died at sundown on the 17th.
Cruel deaths there are in history, but few so tragic.
The Shouyang Mountain of Ireland! The Po-yi and Shu-chi of Ireland!
The next cable I dread to read...

October 22

III.

*O sacred Truth! Thy triumph ceased awhile,
And Hope, thy sister, ceased with thee to smile.*
--Thomas Campbell

Now arrives a cable of the 21st:
Three times MacSwiney has fainted.
His sister has sent a telegram to his friends,
hoping that the citizens have offered prayers for her brother.
She prays that he may die the sooner, and his agony be ended.
Who could bear to read to the end these heart-breaking words?

Who could restrain his tears?

Bestial murderous government, are you bent on casting an indelible stain on the history of the world?

Cruel, callous Englishmen, has the blood of Byron and Campbell ceased to flow in your veins?
Lusterless moon, would that our somber earth
might on the instant be turned like you to ice!

October 24

IV.

*Truth shall restore the light by Nature given,
And, like Prometheus, bring the fire of Heaven!*
--Thomas Campbell

The mighty ocean is sobbing its sad lament,
the boundless abyss of the sky is red with weeping,
far, far away the sun has sunk in the west.

Brave, tragic death! Death in a blaze of glory! Triumphant death!*

Victorious death!

Impartial God of Death! I am grateful to you! You have saved MacSwiney, for whom my love
and reverence know no bounds!

MacSwiney, fighter for freedom, you have shown how great can be the power of the human will!
I am grateful to you! I extol you! Freedom can henceforth never die! The night has closed down
on us, but how bright is the moon...

October 27

Xu Zhimo's Poems

Coral³³⁰

No need to expect me to speak,
My heart's sunk to the bottom of the sea;
No use beckoning to me again,
For I can reply no more

Unless, unless you, too, would come
To this world surrounded by coral reefs;
In the quiet moment when the sea wind subsides,
You and I would exchange our sighs.

-Trans. Michelle Yeh

³³⁰ Translated by Michelle Yeh

Birth of Spring³³¹

Last night,
And the night before as well,
In the frenzied madness of thunder and rain
Spring
Was born in the corpse of winter.

Don't you feel the yielding softness underfoot,
The caressing warmth on your forehead?
Greenness floats on the branches,
Water in the pool ripples into tangled longing;
On your body and mine
And within our bosoms is a strange throbbing;

Peach flowers are already in bloom on your face.
And I more keenly relish
Your seductive charm, drinking in
Your pearly laughter.
Do you not feel my arms
Anxiously seeking your waist,
My breath reflecting on your body,
Like myriads of fireflies thrusting themselves into the flame?

These and untold others,
All join the birds in their ecstatic soaring,
All join hands in praise of
The birth of spring.

Broken³³²

1
Sitting on a deep, deep night,
A dim glow at the window,
Dust balls rolling
Down the alley:
I want to compose a broken, broken tune
With the dull tip of my pen
To express my broken thoughts.

2
Sitting on a deep, deep night,

³³¹ Translated by Julia C. Lin

³³² Translated by Michelle Yeh

The night chill at the window chinks,
Jealous of the warmth fading from the room,
Does not forgive my limbs:
I'll use my drying ink to sketch
Some broken, broken patterns,
For broken are my thoughts.

3

Sitting on a deep, deep night,
With grotesque shadows around me:
Withered trees
Screech on the bank of an icy river
And gesture in wild despair,
Like me in my broken, broken consciousness
Trying to rebuild a broken world.

4

Sitting on a deep, deep night,
I reminisce with my eyes closed:
Ah, when she was still a cool white lotus
In the morning breeze, delicate beyond compare.
But I am neither sunshine nor dew;
All I have is my broken breaths
Like the mice locked up in the wall,
Scuffling about, chasing after darkness and the void!

For Whom?³³³

In the last few days, the autumn wind has become notably sharp.
I am afraid to look at our courtyard.
The leaves, like wounded birds, wildly swirl,
As if shot by invisible arrows—
Gone, completely gone, are life, color, and beauty.

Only a few streaks of creeping vine are left on the western walls.
Its leopard-spotted autumn color still
Bearing the beatings of the wind's fists,
Lowly it moans a sound of sorrow.
"I endure for you!" it seems to tell me.

It endures for me! That splendid autumn vine.
But the autumn wind mercilessly pursues,
Pursues (Blight is its only act of grace!),
Pursuing to the end of life's remaining radiance.

³³³ Translated by Julia C. Lin

Now on the wall is no longer seen the brave autumn vine.

Tonight there are three blue stars in the sky,
Listening close to the empty autumn courtyard,
So quiet, not even a sigh is heard.
The fallen leaves are asleep above the ground.
I am left alone in the deep night. Ah, for whom do I grieve?

Go Away, World, Go Away³³⁴

Go away, world, go away!
I stand alone on the lofty mountain peak;
Go away, world, go away!
I face the infinite blue canopy of sky.

Go away, youth, go away!
And be buried with the sweet grass of the valley.
Go away, youth, go away!
Throw your sorrows to the crows of the darkening sky.

Go away, country of dreams, go away!
I have scatter the jade cup of imagination.
Go away, country of dreams, go away!
Smiling, I accept the congratulations of winds and waves.

Go away, all in all, go away!
Before me is the lofty peak piercing heaven.
Go away, all in all, go away!
Before me if the infinite Infinity!

A Picture of Happy Poverty³³⁵

There is a large pile of newly dumped garbage before the lane.
Probably it is from behind the vermilion gates.
They are not all ashes. Still some good cinders left.
Not all bones. There is marrow in them;
Perhaps there are even slivers of meat.
There are rags and untorn newspapers;
Two, three lamp wicks, a few cigarette butts.

This garbage pile is a gold mine.
It is full of crouching gold diggers:

³³⁴ Translated by Julia C. Lin

³³⁵ Translated by Julia C. Lin

A squadron of dirty rags, tattered pants and jackets,
One, two, countless humped backs.
Young girls, middle-aged women, old grandmas are all there,
One hand clutching a basket, the other holding a tree branch,
Their waists bending low, not a cough, not a chatter;
No argument, only silent poking and picking from the pile,
Poking in the front, poking in the back, poking from both sides;
Shoulder to shoulder, head to head, poking and picking.
Grandma finds a strip of cloth. What a fine piece of cloth!
Some are collecting cinders, a ground filled with cinders.
“Mother,” a girl shouts, “I found a piece of fresh meat bone!
We can cook it with bean cakes. Won’t it be nice?”
One file of rags, like a moving merry-go-round lantern,
Going around and around and around.
The middle-aged women, the young girls, the grandmas,
There are also a few yellow dogs mingling in their midst to add to the gaiety.

Roaming in the Clouds³³⁶

That day you lightly roam among the clouds in the sky,
Carefree, delicately graceful, you have no thought to tarry
Along the sky’s edge or the land’s end.
You have found your joy in infinite wandering.
You are unaware that on this humble earth
There is a mountain stream. Your radiant beauty
In your passing has kindled his soul
And startled him to awakening. He held close to your lovely shadow.
But what he held was only unending sorrow,
For no beauty can be stayed in space or time.
He yearns for you, but you’ve flown across many mountain peaks
To cast your shadow in a yet vaster and wider sea.
He now pines for you, that one mountain stream,
Despairingly praying, praying for your return.

Second Farewell to Cambridge³³⁷

Softly I am leaving,
As I softly came;
I wave my hand in gentle farewell
To the clouds in the western sky.

The golden willow on the riverbank

³³⁶ Translated by Julia C. Lin

³³⁷ Translated by Michelle Yeh

Is a bride in the sunset;
Her luminous reflection in the ripples
Is swaying in my heart.

Plants in the soft mud
Wave in the current;
I'd rather be a water reed
In the gentle river of Cam.

The pool in the elm shade
Is not clear but iridescent;
Wrinkled by the swaying algae,
It settles into a rainbowlike dream.

In search of a dream? With a long pole,
Sail toward where the grass grows greener;
In a skiff loaded with starlight,
Sing among the shining stars.

But I cannot sing tonight;
Silence is the tune of farewell.
Summer insects are quiet for me too;
Silent is Cambridge tonight.

Quietly I am leaving,
As I quietly came;
I raise my sleeve and wave,
Without taking away a whiff of cloud.

Seeking a Bright Star³³⁸

I ride on a limping blind horse,
 Spurring it on into the dark night;
 Spurring it on into the dark night,
I ride on a limping blind horse.

I dash into this long dark night,
 Seeking a bright star;
 Seeking a bright star,
I dash into this vast darkness of the wild.

Exhausted, exhausted is my riding animal,
 Yet the star remains invisible;
 Yet the star remains invisible,

³³⁸ Translated by Julia C. Lin

Exhausted, exhausted is the body on the saddle.

Now the sky reveals a crystallike radiance,
An animal falls in the wild;
A corpse lies in the dark night,
Now the sky reveals a crystallike radiance,

Serves You Right, Beggar³³⁹

“Kind-hearted ladies, charitable sirs,”
The northwest wind slashes his face like a sharp knife.
“Give me a little bit of your leftovers, just a little bit!”
A patch of dark shadows curls up near the gate.
“Have pity my wealthy lord, I’m dying of hunger.”
Inside the gate there are jade cups, warm fire and laughter.
“Have pity, my lord of good fortunes, I’m dying of cold.”
Outside the gate the northwest wind chuckles, “Serves you right, beggar!”

I am but a pile of black shadows, trembling,
Lying like a worm on the frontage road of humanity;
I wish only a bit of the warmth of sympathy
To shelter what’s left of me, after repeated carving.
But this heavy gate stays tightly closed: Care who might?
In the street only the wind continues to ridicule, “Beggar, serves you right!”

Thomas Hardy³⁴⁰

Hardy, world-weary, life-weary,
This time has no need to complain.
Has a black shadow covered his eyes?
Gone, he will show his face no more.

Eighty years are not easy to live.
That old man, he had a hard time.
With heavy thoughts burdening him,
He could not let go morning or night.

Why did he leave sweets untasted
And comfortable couches unused?
Why did he have to choose a gloomy tune to sing
And spices that burned his tongue?

³³⁹ Translated by Kai-yu Hsu

³⁴⁰ Translated by Michelle Yeh

He was born a stiff old man
Who loved to glare at folks.
Whoever he looked at got bad luck—
No use begging mercy from him.

He loved to take the world apart;
Even a rose would be ruined.
He did not have the gentle touch of a canary,
Only the queerness of a night owl.

Strange, all he fought for was
A little freedom of the soul.
He didn't mean to quarrel with anyone;
To see truth was to see it clearly.

But he was not without love—
He loved sincerity and compassion.
They say life is a dream;
Still, it shouldn't be without comfort.

These days you blame him for his regrets,
Blame him for his thorny words.
He said optimism was the face of a corpse
Made up with powder and rouge.

This is not to give up hope;
The universe will go on.
But if there is hope for the future,
Thoughts cannot be taken lightly.

To uphold the dignity of thought,
The poet dared not relax.
He lifted his ideals high, his eyes wide open,
As he picked at life's mistakes.

Now he's gone, he can no longer speak.
(Listen to the quietness in the wild.)
Forget him if you will.
(Heaven mourns the demise of a sage.)

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