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Hong

Poetry, Mentorship, and the Emergence of the Lige School of Poetry

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Author Note

The author declares no conflicts of interest. At the request of Verse Version, limited use was made of AI-assisted analytical tools for purposes of structural synthesis and terminological clarification. These tools were not employed as substitutes for critical judgment or interpretive responsibility, which remain fully human and editorial. Unless otherwise specified, all poems discussed or included in this article and its appendix were translated by the author and subsequently refined with the assistance of AI tools. Correspondence should be addressed to Atefeh Esmaeilirad, After Builder Pty Ltd, Osborne Park, WA 6017, Australia. Email: attie.raad22@gmail.com

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Editor's Note

Verse Version is committed to documenting poetry not only as individual texts, but as part of evolving intellectual, pedagogical, and cultural formations. While literary schools are often named retrospectively, contemporary Chinese poetry offers a rare opportunity to observe a poetic community while it remains active, self-reflective, and open to critical evaluation.

This column presents two interrelated components. The first is "Hong" (Chinese: 鈜), a collaboratively composed poem written by a group of poets and scholars to honor their mentor, Professor Ou Hong (区鈜), on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. The second part presents a stage-based evaluation of the poetic and scholarly community formed under his long-term leadership, designated by the author as the Lige School of Poetry (离格学派). The designation draws on online academic resources.

The author of this article, Atefeh Esmaeilirad, is an Australian poet, artist, and architect, fluent in Persian and English, with working knowledge of Chinese. At the invitation of

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Verse Version, the author makes limited use of online sources and AI-assisted analytical tools for the purposes of structural synthesis and terminological formulation. These tools are employed not as substitutes for critical or interpretive judgment, but as methodological aids intended to mitigate internal bias in the description of a living school. All interpretive responsibility remains with the human author and the editorial team.

We publish this column not as celebration alone, but as documentation, reflection, and provisional critique—an invitation to dialogue rather than a final verdict.

Abstract

This column documents and critically examines the emergence of the Lige School of Poetry (离格学派), a contemporary Chinese bilingual scholar–poet community formed under the long-term mentorship of Professor Ou Hong (区鈜). Combining a collaboratively composed poem, "Hong", written on the occasion of Ou Hong's eightieth birthday, with a stage-based evaluative report, the column explores how poetic creation, theoretical innovation, bilingual practice, and international publishing intersect within a living intellectual formation. The poetic section foregrounds the semantic and symbolic significance of the Chinese character 鈜 (Hong)—the trigger mechanism of a crossbow—as a metaphor for mentorship, restraint, and calibrated release and deviation from norms of traditional poetry. The evaluative section employs AI-assisted analytical tools in a limited and transparent manner to synthesize structural features and nomenclature, resulting in the designation "Lige School of Poetry." Rather than replacing human judgment, AI functions as a methodological aid to reduce internal bias in assessing an active poetic community. By situating the Lige School within both domestic academic structures and global poetic discourse, this column offers a rare real-time case study of how contemporary Chinese poet-scholars negotiate local cultural consciousness and international literary engagement. The significance of the Lige School lies not only in its poetic and scholarly output, but in the intellectual model it provides for sustaining bilingual, theory-informed poetic practice in a globalized literary environment.
Keywords: Lige School of Poetry; bilingual poetics; scholar–poet communities; mentorship and lineage; contemporary Chinese poetry; cross-cultural poetics

1. Occasion and Context

The eightieth birthday of Professor Ou Hong (区鈜) marks more than a personal milestone. It offers a moment of reflection for a generation of poets and scholars shaped

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by his mentorship, theoretical vision, and sustained institutional labor in the field of English poetry studies in China.

Rather than producing a conventional commemorative essay, his students and collaborators chose a dual form: a collective poem and a critical evaluation. Together, they articulate not only gratitude, but a shared understanding of how poetry, theory, translation, and pedagogy have been held together over time.

2. The Collaborative Poem

"Collaborative Poem," also known as "sequential couplets" or "joint composition," is a unique form of collective poetic creation in classical Chinese poetry. Its origins can be traced back to the "Bailiang Terrace Linked Verse"(柏梁台联句) of the Han Dynasty, flourishing during the literary gatherings of the Tang and Song periods. Participants take turns composing one couplet or several lines each, requiring not only coherence in meaning and adherence to tonal and rhythmic rules but also showcasing individual talent while testing mutual rapport and responsiveness. This creative practice combines playful interaction with poetic competition, often taking place during banquets and elegant gatherings, embodying the classical literati tradition of "befriending through literature" and collaborative spirit. The linked verse discussed in this text is precisely a vivid product of such master-disciple gatherings and poetic exchanges.

English Version:

Hong

Cao Shanke, Chen Shangzhen, Chen Xiaohong, Gao Wenping, Gu Keping, Hu Min, Huang Xiaoyan, Lei Yanni, Li Chengjian, Li Chunchang, Li Hui, Li Zhimin, Li Zidan, Liu Ying, Liu Zhaohui, Lü Aijing, Pan Minfang, Shao Chaoyang, Shen Jie, Tian Jing, Tian Wenzhi, Wang Xuan, Xiao Xiaojun, Xu Sha, Yin Lijun, Yuan Li, Zhang Guangkui, Zhang Yuejun, Zhao Kai, Zheng Yanhong, Zhou Tinghua with others

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Hong is the will sleeping upon the crossbow's arm,

a drawn bowstring poised for release.

As the verse goes: Hong's twang rends silk, the arrow pierces clouds,

like an arrow that never falls,

never weary, forever surging ahead.

It flies true, pursuing the dream within the heart.

Hong is the starlight shimmering in the sky,

the sun's unwavering sincerity.

It is the bright lamp, the guiding beacon,

lighting our blissful garden,

guiding us toward wider horizons—

from the foggy shore of chaos

to the luminous shore beyond.

Hong is Cupid's arrow hidden deep in the heart,

shot from the City of Flowers,

carried by a knight to our side.

Hong is a rainbow, yet not a rainbow—

it surpasses the rainbow,

a multicolored hope bestowed by the sky

just after the rain clears.

Hong is the tender call of home,

a gentle warmth within the soul.

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It is a great book,

its pages ever turning to new chapters.

Hong is an eternal crimson,

an unchanging Hong.

At eighty, still youthfully vibrant,

leaping upon the strings of thought.

Wild geese carry letters;

our hearts remain forever connected.

Collated by Zhang Guangkui from the lines collaboratively composed on site by the disciples of Ou Hong.

Written on 10 January 2026
(Chinese Lunar Calendar: 22nd day of the 11th month, Yisi Year)
Jinbi Yushui Villa, Huadu District, Guangzhou, China

Source Note:

This collaborative poem was composed and performed collectively by the disciples of Professor Ou Hong on the occasion of his eightieth birthday and subsequently collated by Zhang Guangkui based on on-site collaborative versification).

Chinese Original (for reference):

鈜

——众弟子贺恩师区鈜先生八十寿辰联诗辑

曹山柯、陈尚真、陈小红、高文平、古克平、胡敏、黄晓燕、雷艳妮、李成坚、李春长、李慧、黎志敏、李子丹、刘滢、刘朝晖、吕爱晶、潘敏芳、邵朝杨、沈洁、田径、田文芝、王璇、肖小军、徐莎、尹立军、袁丽、张广奎、张跃军、赵恺、郑燕虹、周庭华等

鈜，是弩上沉睡的意志

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也是蓄而待发的弓鸣

有诗为证：鈅鸣裂帛箭穿云

似一只永不落下的飞箭

不知疲惫，永远向前

矢而中，追寻着心中的梦

鈅是天上闪耀的星辉

是阳光的挚诚

是明灯 是灯塔

照亮我们美好的乐园

指引我们走向更广阔的天地

从混沌的此岸

走向光明的彼岸

鈅是心底丘比特之箭

从花都射出

骑士带它来到我们身边

鈅是彩虹 又不是彩虹

它胜似彩虹

是雨后初晴时

天空赠予的 多彩希望

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鈜是家的声声呼唤

是心底的一抹温暖

是一本大书

永远翻开新的篇章

鈜是永远的红

是永远不变的鈜

八十依然年少

跳跃在思想的弦上

鸿雁传书

我们的心永远在一起

鈜福齐天

情共咏

（张广奎根据区鈜众弟子现场联句整理）

乙巳年冬月廿二
二〇二六年元月十日
于花都金碧御水山庄
风铃一街

3. Commentary: Why the Character 鈜 Matters

The collaborative poem “Hong” is inseparable from the Chinese character it foregrounds. The inclusion of the original character 鈜 alongside its transliteration is not a decorative gesture, but a semantic necessity.

In classical Chinese, 鈜 refers to the metal trigger mechanism of a crossbow—

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the component responsible not for force, but for restraint, timing, and release. Its function is to hold potential energy in suspension, allowing accumulated tension to be discharged with precision.

Within the poem, this mechanism becomes a metaphor for mentorship. Authority is not figured as propulsion, but as the capacity to contain, calibrate, and release the energies of others. This metaphor extends naturally to the pedagogical and poetic ethos associated with Ou Hong's long-term leadership.

For an international journal, such character glossing represents a commitment to cross-script literacy. Certain poetic and theoretical concepts remain embedded in the visual and historical dimensions of Chinese writing and cannot be fully conveyed through Romanization alone.

4. From Occasion to Evaluation: Methodological Statement

On the occasion of Professor Ou Hong's eightieth birthday, a decision was made to conduct a stage-based evaluation of the poetic community formed under his leadership, not as a conclusive judgment, but as a provisional assessment intended to guide future development.

To reduce internal bias, AI-assisted analytical tools were employed in a limited and transparent manner. ChatGPT, DeepSeek, and Baidu were tasked with synthesizing descriptive materials and proposing a conceptual designation for the school. The name **Lige School of Poetry (离格学派)** and the structural framework associated with it emerged from this process.

The evaluative report presented below is a faithful English translation of the original Chinese text generated through this method, with only minimal stylistic refinement and slight expansion for clarity. AI functions here as an analytical aid, not as an interpretive authority.

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5. Evaluation Report: The Lige School of Poetry

5.1 School Background

The Lige School of Poetry is a distinctive contemporary Chinese scholar–poet bilingual creative and research community. It is neither an officially proclaimed movement nor a regionally defined literary faction. Instead, it is a loosely structured yet stable academic–creative cluster centered on the poetic theory and pedagogical practice of Ou Hong and his followers, with the English Poetry Studies Institute at Sun Yat-sen University as its primary academic base.

5.2 Core Characteristics

a. Theory as Generative Orientation

At the core of the school lies Lige poetics, a theory proposed by Ou Hong that emphasizes productive deviation from convention grounded in local cultural consciousness. Rather than advocating rupture for its own sake, Lige poetics articulates a creative pathway characterized by *curiosity, deviation, and appreciation*.

b. Interpenetration

Members of the school typically possess dual competence in Chinese and English poetic creation and translation. Translation is treated not as secondary labor, but as a generative mode of poetic thinking, forming a closed loop between creation and interpretation.

c. Lingnan Grounding, International Orientation

While much of the school's imaginative material is rooted in Lingnan（岭南）regional experience, its intellectual horizon is decisively international, shaped by Cambridge academic lineage (Ou Hong) and sustained through international publishing platforms led by Zhang Guangkui.

d. Integrated Scholarly Production

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The school achieves a rare continuity across academic research, theoretical construction, poetic creation, translation practice, and journal publishing, forming a complete intellectual ecosystem.

5.3 Core Members: Roles and Structural Functions

The coherence and sustainability of the Lige School of Poetry do not derive from stylistic uniformity or institutional hierarchy. Instead, the school functions through a differentiated distribution of intellectual, creative, and organizational roles. Each core member occupies a structural position that cannot be substituted without altering the school's internal ecology. What follows is not a ranking of prestige, but an account of functional necessity.

Ou Hong: Founder and Spiritual Source

Ou Hong is the foundational figure and enduring spiritual source of the Lige School. His academic formation at Cambridge University established not merely an international credential, but a lasting methodological orientation toward close reading, comparative poetics, and theoretical self-reflexivity. Upon returning to China, he did not simply transmit Western literary theory; rather, he articulated Lige poetics as a locally grounded yet internationally legible framework for poetic creation and criticism.

Crucially, Ou Hong's contribution is inseparable from his role as a long-term mentor. Over several decades, he cultivated successive cohorts of doctoral students in English poetry studies, many of whom later became poets, translators, editors, and scholars. This sustained pedagogical labor transformed individual mentorship into collective continuity. For this reason, his Cambridge background, formulation of Lige poetics, and cultivation of academic generations together constitute the necessary and sufficient conditions for the school's existence. Without any one of these elements, the Lige School would not have cohered as a recognizable formation.

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Zhang Guangkui (张广奎): Engine and International Interface

Zhang Guangkui functions as the primary engine and most outward-facing international interface of the Lige School. His role cannot be reduced to that of a productive individual poet or scholar; rather, he operates as a fourfold "super-node" integrating theory, creative practice, translation, and publishing infrastructure.

Theoretically, Zhang has developed original frameworks such as the Poepera (Poem + Opera) performance-poetry theory, *Popular Poetics*, and *Poetics of Poetry Translation*. Creatively, he has produced multiple poetry collections in both Chinese and English. As a translator, he has introduced a substantial body of contemporary poetry across linguistic boundaries. Institutionally, he serves as editor-in-chief of *Verse Version* and *Journal of Language* and plays a central managerial role in Leoman Publishing.

Through this convergence of roles, Zhang embodies the school's productive capacity and global reach. He does not merely represent the Lige School internationally; he actively constructs the platforms through which the school participates in global poetic discourse.

Long Jingyao (龙靖遥): Elegance in Estrangement

Long Jingyao's poetry embodies a restrained elegance shaped by subtle estrangement rather than dramatic rupture. Working within classical formal discipline, he displaces inherited imagery into the experiential horizon of modern wandering, producing quiet temporal and spatial tension. Emotion is not directly declared but refracted through symbolic mediation, allowing lyric feeling to remain implicit and layered. His poetry ultimately dwells in a state of unresolved return, where traditional signs are released from fixed cultural meanings and transformed into fleeting,

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transhistorical traces. Through this measured alienation, Long Jingyao sustains classical refinement while opening it toward modern existential resonance.

Li Zhimin (黎志敏): Systematic Theorist

Li Zhimin occupies the position of systematic theoretician within the Lige School. His contribution lies in providing conceptual rigor, terminological clarity, and institutional legitimacy. Through multiple monographs written in both Chinese and English, as well as through leadership roles in academic associations, Li has articulated a rational and coherent framework for modern and contemporary poetics. Within China's academic system, Li Zhimin ensures that Lige poetics is not perceived as an idiosyncratic creative tendency, but as a theoretically defensible and pedagogically transmissible body of thought. His work anchors the school's intellectual claims within established scholarly discourse, safeguarding its depth and durability.

Lei Yanni (雷艳妮): Benchmark of Poetic Integrity

Lei Yanni represents the aesthetic and ethical benchmark of the Lige School. Her poetry is characterized by emotional concentration, restraint, and a resolutely non-utilitarian orientation. She does not instrumentalize poetry for academic advancement, nor subordinate lyric intensity to theoretical demonstration. In doing so, Lei Yanni preserves the school's aesthetic autonomy. Her work ensures that the Lige School remains not only a community of scholar-poets, but also a community of poets whose writing possesses intrinsic artistic value. She functions as a reminder that theory must ultimately answer to poetry, not the reverse.

Cao Shanke (曹山柯), Liu Zhaohui (刘朝晖), Xiao Xiaojun (肖小军): Poetic Range and Internal Diversity

Together, Cao Shanke, Liu Zhaohui, and Xiao Xiaojun expand the expressive and tonal range of the Lige School. Cao Shanke's work tends toward epic scale and

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historical amplitude, engaging collective memory, cultural myth, and extended narrative structures. Liu Zhaohui and Xiao Xiaojun, by contrast, operate primarily within lyric and introspective modes, emphasizing immediacy, intimacy, and emotional subtlety.

Their coexistence within the same poetic formation prevents stylistic homogenization. Instead, it demonstrates that shared theoretical orientation does not require uniform poetic voice. Diversity here is not accidental but structural, allowing the Lige School to sustain internal plurality without losing coherence.

5.4 Limitations and Challenges

The Lige School faces challenges of audience accessibility due to its strong academic and bilingual orientation, as well as questions of intergenerational continuity, given its current reliance on first-generation members.

5.5 Final Assessment of the Lige School of Poetry

The Lige School of Poetry represents a distinctive and successful attempt to integrate poetic creation, theoretical innovation, bilingual practice, and international academic publishing within contemporary Chinese literary culture. Its achievement lies not in mass influence or ideological proclamation, but in the construction of a stable intellectual ecosystem capable of sustaining long-term scholarly and creative production.

By grounding poetic experimentation in English poetry studies while maintaining strong local cultural consciousness, the school offers a viable model for poet-scholars navigating globalization. Although it faces challenges related to audience reach and generational succession, its balance between academic rigor and creative experimentation makes it a highly representative case for understanding the “scholar–poet” phenomenon in contemporary China.

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Column Conclusion: The Trigger, the Arrow, and the Ongoing Flight

The character 鈜 names both a person and a principle. As a crossbow's trigger, it means poetry depends not only on force or inspiration, but on restraint, timing, and trust. The arrow flies because something holds it first. By presenting a collaborative poem alongside a stage-based evaluation of the Lige School of Poetry, *Verse Version* affirms poetry as a practice of lineage rather than isolation, of disciplined release rather than impulsive expression. This column does not close a chapter; it marks a moment of calibrated tension—an arrow still held, poised for future flight.

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Ou, Hong (Ed., 2017), 区庄诗萃［*Selected Poems of Ou Zhuang*］. 长江文艺出版社［Changjiang Literature and Art Publishing House］.

Declaration: During the preparation of this article, AI tools were used, and primary reference was made to *Selected Poems of Ou Zhuang*, CNKI (https://www.cnki.net/), Google Scholar, and other online resources. As none of these sources were directly cited in the text, they are not individually listed in the references. This statement is provided for transparency.

For further reference, the *Manifesto of the Lige School of Poetry* is provided as a supplementary document in the Appendix (*Appendix – Manifesto of the Lige School of Poetry*) , immediately following this article, and is accessible via its DOI: https://doi.org/10.64699/25ZVVA1086

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Appendix:

Manifesto of the Lige School of Poetry

The Emergence and Transgression of a Poetics

The manifesto, distilled from the poetic practice and scholarly reflections within the Selected Poems of Ou Zhuang *and centered on the spirit of Ou Hong's "The Bastard Child of Poetry", formally articulates the poetic principles and aspirations of the Lige School. Presented here as an appendix, it serves as both a conclusion to this section and an opening onto a broader poetic path, while also constituting a foundational theoretical document of the movement and being available as a standalone text for scholarly reference with its own independent DOI.*

Prologue: From "The Bastard Child of Poetry" to a Poetic Possibility

When Ou Hong wrote "The Bastard Child of Poetry", he was not merely composing a poem; perhaps without intending to, he was naming a new poetic path. The poetic life it imagines—a life of "blood type X"—refuses to be absorbed by any single tradition. Suspended between the Olympian gods and the spectral presences of the Miluo River(汨罗江), between the ancient Chinese poetic triad of *fu-bi-xing* (赋比兴) and the modern rhythm of Coca-Cola, it finds its own way of breathing through "tears, laughter, dreams, and Yunnan Baiyao." This is not simply an expression of personal style, but the spiritual prototype of a possible poetic community.

More than a decade later, the publication of *Selected Poems of Ou Zhuang* transformed this prototype into a collective debut. Centered on the "English Poetry and Poetics" research direction at Sun Yat-sen University, a group of scholar-poets presented the tangible results of a bidirectional nourishment between research and

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creative practice. It became clear that a third path—distinct from purely academic criticism on the one hand and purely lyrical creation on the other—had taken shape. Today, we name this path the **Lige School** (离格学派).

1. The Arch-Text and the Prototype: "The Bastard Child of Poetry" as Poetic Manifesto

The formation of any literary school requires a spiritual archetype—a foundational text capable of generating shared orientation and consensus. For the Lige School, Ou Hong's "The Bastard Child of Poetry" fulfils precisely this role. Written during China's era of reform and opening in the 1980s, its significance far exceeds that of an individual poem. It functions as a poetic encoding and aesthetic prelude to what would later be recognized as the Lige spirit. The poem is as follows:

English Translation:

The Bastard Child of Poetry

Olympus conducts a divine census, my grandfather Zeus tosses me a registration form, and this has got me stumped —

Who knows which Muse,
Weary of Parnassus Hill's solitude,
Thus brought into this world
Akid of blood type X.

They say I'm a descendant of the dragon,
Yet my eyes are light brown,
Inside flickers an icy rainbow,
Making "fu-bi-xing" change its hue.

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They say I'm a child of Adam,

Yet I reek of the Miluo River's damp,

Intermittently trailing

Li Changji's specters of ghosts and strange gods.

I don't drink Coca-Cola,

Nor swallow elixirs of immortality,

What keeps me alive are

Tears, laughter, dreams, and Yunnan Baiyao.

The immortal gods mock me,

Yet I pity them —Not as good as mortal humans,

Who understand the mule's worth,

Stronger than the donkey, more enduring than the horse.

5 June 1982

Chinese Original (for reference):

诗的私生子

奥林匹亚进行神口普查，外祖父宙斯甩给我一张登记表，这可让我犯了愁—

不知哪位缪斯

不甘帕那萨斯山的寂寞

于是世界上便有了我

血统为 X 的小子

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说我是龙的传人

眼珠却是浅褐

里边闪着冰的虹彩

映得赋比兴变了颜色

说我是亚当的子孙

又满身汨罗江的水腥

忽明忽灭地跟着

李长吉的牛鬼蛇神怪影

我不喝 Coca Cola

也不吃灵丹仙草

赖以生存的

是哭是笑是梦是云南白药

永生的众神嘲笑我

我却可怜他们不如必死的人

人还懂得骡子的好处

比毛驴孔武比马坚忍

1982 年 6 月 5 日 (Ou, 2017, pp.4-5)

Written as meta-poetry—poetry that reflects on the conditions of poetry itself—

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the poem sketches, more than two decades before the school's formal naming, a complete spiritual genealogy. Its poetic force unfolds along four interrelated dimensions.

1.1 Identity Consciousness: Legitimizing the Cultural Hybrid

The poem's self-identification as a "bastard child of blood type X" establishes the foundational identity logic of the Lige School. It simultaneously rejects absorption into two singular genealogies: neither the exclusively national narrative of the "descendant of the dragon" nor the universalist myth of the "child of Adam." The speaker openly acknowledges having "light brown eyes" while carrying the "dampness of the Miluo River," signalling that heterogeneous cultural inheritances are not decorative layers but a constitution that penetrates to the marrow.

This identity releases later practitioners from the anxiety of choice. They need not decide between "Sinicization" and "Westernization." Instead, they can accept their condition as cultural border-crossers, seeking creative possibility precisely within the tension between multiple traditions.

1.2 Methodological Exemplar: From Imagistic Collage to Chemical Synthesis

One of the poem's most illuminating images is that of "light brown eyes" causing *fu-bi-xing*—the foundational expressive mechanisms of classical Chinese poetics—to "change their hue." This is not a superficial juxtaposition of Eastern and Western symbols. Rather, it reveals the school's core methodological commitment: deep cross-cultural synthesis.

Here, *fu-bi-xing* represents the internal generative engine of Chinese poetic thought, while the "light brown rainbow" signifies Western perceptual and cognitive modes. When one refracts and alters the other, a qualitative transformation occurs within the poet's subjectivity, producing new aesthetic compounds. This metaphor of chemical reaction implies a demanding discipline: the poet must be deeply trained in

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both traditions simultaneously. In this sense, the poem anticipates Ou Hong's later self-positioning as a scholar-poet and provides the prototype for the Lige School's integrated research-creation paradigm.

1.3 Foundation of Values: Authentic Emotion and Local Experience

"I don't drink Coca-Cola nor swallow elixirs of immortality; what keeps me alive are tears, laughter, dreams, and Yunnan Baiyao." These four elements form the value structure of the Lige School.

Tears and laughter represent the most fundamental emotional truth of human life, grounding poetry in shared vulnerability and resonance. Dreams stand for imagination and transcendence, ensuring spiritual elevation and singularity. Yunnan Baiyao, the most decisive image, signifies vitality drawn from concrete local experience—practical, curative, and real. In contrast to illusory "elixirs of immortality," it embodies a poetics rooted in lived history, trauma, and care.

Together, these elements define a poetics of grounded modernity: one that embraces universal human sensibility while remaining anchored in specific experiential soil.

1.4 Spiritual Stance: Turning Away from the Divine, Toward the Human

The poem's closing turn is its most radical gesture: "The immortal gods mock me, yet I pity them—less perceptive than mortal humans, who understand the value of the mule." Here, the "immortal gods" may be read as rigid canons, institutional authorities, or ossified poetic dogmas—figures detached from the living texture of human experience by virtue of their supposed permanence.

By contrast, the poet aligns himself with mortal humanity: finite, vulnerable, yet capable of care and creation. The mule, as the hybrid offspring of a horse and a donkey, is neither noble nor purebred. Yet it combines strength with endurance and is

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best suited to difficult terrain. This becomes the emblem of the Lige School: not a divine steed for ceremonial display, but an "academic mule" advancing patiently across the rugged paths between scholarship and creation, East and West, antiquity and modernity. Pragmatic resilience, rather than purity, defines its spirit.

"The Bastard Child of Poetry" as a Poetic Seed

"The Bastard Child of Poetry" is therefore not merely a successful poem, but a generative seed saturated with poetic DNA. In advance, and in poetic form, it articulates a full stance: identity through hybridity, innovation through synthesis, nourishment through locality, and endurance through pragmatic resilience.

Later members of the Lige School—whether inclined toward Zhang Guangkui's austere speculation, Lei Yanni's profound engagement with diasporic experience, or other distinctive paths—can all be understood as branches grown from different genetic strands of this seed. To understand this poem is to grasp the key to the school's spiritual lineage. It is not a closed doctrine but an open framework, inviting each successor to develop a personal mode of "Lige" practice.

2. What Is "Lige"? Methodological Self-Consciousness

"Lige" is not a style but a methodological orientation. Derived from the idea of departing from established form or convention, it manifests as self-consciousness on three levels.

2.1 Departing from the Division between Research and Practice

They reject the model of critics who dissect poetry from the outside, just as they resist the notion of poets who rely solely on intuition. Genuine understanding of poetics arises from within practice—from the labor of making images, from direct struggle with linguistic limits. The scholar-poet path advocated by Ou Hong allows academic rigor to sharpen creative perception, and creative vitality to return warmth to scholarship.

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This reciprocity constitutes the first level of Lige consciousness.

2.2 Departing from a Single Cultural Lineage

They are, by condition, hybrids. Their vision carries Western iridescence; their bodies retain the humidity of Chinese cultural memory. They read Keats and Li He, analyze Eliot and dwell with Du Fu. But synthesis is not decorative collage or exotic curiosity. It is the internal chemical reaction of traditions within the poet's consciousness—allowing one system of poetics to alter another from within. They seek depth, not juxtaposition.

2.3 Departing from the Confusion of Ornament and Truth

Poetry's vitality does not lie in rhetorical brilliance but in experiential truth and emotional sincerity. Its sources are elemental human states—tears, laughter, dreams—and the healing force of local life. They resist excessive ornamentation that obscures experience, pursuing instead a clarity that sustains depth.

3. Defining the Lige School

The Lige School is a poetic and scholarly community centered on Professor Ou Hong and the "English Poetry and Poetics" research direction at Sun Yat-sen University. It advocates the integration of poetic research and creative practice, encouraging scholars to write poetry as a means of deepening poetic understanding. Its principles emphasize Sino-Western synthesis, authenticity, intellectual lyricism, and the construction of a sustained academic-creative community. It represents a modern poetic approach rooted in Chinese experience while engaging transnational perspectives.

4. Core Tenets of the Lige School

a. Scholarly Creation

Research and creation are complementary modes of inquiry. Theory deepens creation; creation animates theory.

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b. Cross-Cultural Synthesis

True fusion arises through dialogue and transformation, not pastiche.

c. Authenticity

Poetry must be honest toward experience, history, and language itself.

d. Intellectual Lyricism

Thought and emotion function as poetry's twin wings.

e. Community Poetics

While poetry is solitary in origin, it flourishes through dialogue, mentorship, and shared practice.

5. The Boundary and Transgression of Lige: Zhang Guangkui as Mirror

If Ou Hong is the founder and spiritual source of the Lige School, Zhang Guangkui embodies its internal dynamism and radical testing. If *"*The Bastard Child of Poetry*"* establishes the paradigm, Zhang's work constitutes its most extreme verification and expansion. He is the one who transgresses from within transgression itself—demonstrating that Lige is not a stylistic law but a practice of continual boundary-crossing.

Through his poem "When I Die", Zhang pushes the school's principles toward their existential limit, stripping lyricism of consolation and confronting material finitude with philosophical rigor. His work shows that Lige is sustained not by consensus alone, but by the courage to dismantle even its own bridges.

English Version:

When I Die

A Pre-Rite for Myself, One Hundred Years Later

When I die

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the earth keeps turning.

So do I—

element by element.

I am

nothing more

than the earth

rearranging itself.

When I die

green remains green.

Red stays red.

White is white.

Black is black.

When I die

you may still be alive.

So am I.

My matter

has entered another body.

You will not last long either.

A hundred years

is a blink—

let alone ten,

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or thirty.

When I die

do not burn my poems.

They are

the rhythm

my life once had.

Do not burn me either.

Even if smoke

rises to heaven,

I prefer

the ghosts below.

When I die

and when you die,

we are strangers again.

If we meet,

it will likely be a mistake.

When I die

will anyone

place my image

above the ground

that covers me?

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When I die—

what difference does it make?

All enters

the empty cycle

of yin and yang.

Iron rusts.

Iron melts.

Diamond is cut.

Unless

the earth stops.

Unless

the universe freezes.

But stillness

abolishes return.

Unless

we all die.

When we all die

everything becomes ash.

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Silence

will rule.

Qingming Festival, April 2015

Chinese Original (for reference):

当我死了

----预祭百年后的自己

当我死了

地球还会在转，我，也在旋转

因为我本地球元素的组合与分解

当我死了，地球该绿的还绿

该红的照红，白的白，黑的黑

当我死了

你可能还活着，我，也在活着

我的元素进入了另一生命的载体

当我死了，你也活不了太久

百年弹指一挥间，何况一、二、三十年

当我死了

我希望有人把我的诗歌留存

不要焚烧，那是我生命曾经跳动的音符

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当我死了，不知可否别把我燃烧

即使青烟上天堂，我更喜欢地下的鬼

当我死了

当你也死了，咱又形同陌路

即使再次相识，可能又是个错误

当我死了，不知是否有亲人

在我墓穴的上面放上我的雕像

当我死了

不过，那又有何用

总要进入阴阳虚无的轮回

是铁也要融化或锈腐

是金刚也要被打钻切割

除非，地球或宇宙静止永远

可静止又何谈生命轮回

除非，我们，都死了

当我们都死了，万物俱灰

寂静必会是一切的主宰

2015 年 4 月清明 (Zhang, 2017, pp.142-143)

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A close reading of "When I Die" reveals Zhang Guangkui as a "transgressor within transgression", whose poetic stance unfolds across three interrelated dimensions: affective orientation, poetic language, and philosophical vision. Each dimension represents not merely a departure from conventional lyric practice, but a radical intensification of the Lige School's foundational impulses.

5.1 First-Level Transgression: Theme and Affect

Against Humanistic Warmth and Lyric Consolation. The Lige School's emphasis on "authentic writing" has, in its mainstream manifestations, often foregrounded emotional sincerity rooted in cultural memory, familial attachment, and ethical intimacy. Works such as Yin Lijun's "Qingming" (Yin, 2017, p.51-52), with its father–daughter bond, or Lei Yanni's meditations on existential solitude, exemplify an authenticity that is integrative and human-centered—seeking resonance through affective continuity and shared experience.

Zhang Guangkui's poem departs decisively from this paradigm. From its opening lines—

When I die

the earth keeps turning.

So do I—

element by element. (Zhang, 2017, p.142)

—authenticity is redefined not as emotional truth, but as ontological exposure. The speaking subject is stripped of spiritual privilege and reduced to material process:

I am

nothing more

than the earth

rearranging itself. (Zhang, 2017, p.142)

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Here, death is neither tragic rupture nor transcendental passage. It is material reorganization. The poem refuses all consolatory narratives—religious, emotional, or cultural—by insisting on a strictly physical account of being.

This refusal extends to the persistence of value. Even continuity of life does not confer comfort:

When I die

you may still be alive.

So am I.

My matter

has entered another body. (Zhang, 2017, p.143)

Existence continues, but without personal identity. The lyric "I" survives only as redistributed matter, while relational continuity is explicitly denied:

You will not last long either.

A hundred years

is a blink—

let alone ten,

or thirty. (Zhang, 2017, p.143)

Temporal scale erodes all affective urgency. Longevity is rendered trivial; memory, provisional.

Most strikingly, the poem interrogates poetry's own claim to endurance:

When I die

do not burn my poems.

They are

the rhythm

my life once had. (Zhang, 2017, p.143)

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Yet this plea is immediately undermined by the poem's later conclusion that all symbolic acts are ultimately inconsequential. This is not sentimentality, but self-negating authenticity—a truth that refuses to protect even its own aesthetic vehicle.

Zhang thus transgresses lyric humanism by insisting on a version of authenticity that is cold, material, and unaccommodating, yet precisely for that reason uncompromisingly "true."

5.2 Second-Level Transgression: Poetic Language and Formal Stance

Against Synthesis, Imagism, and Reflective Mediation. A defining feature of Lige poetics has been its pursuit of cultural synthesis—particularly the integration of Chinese and Western traditions through imagistic density and intellectual dialogue. Ou Hong's *"*The Bastard Child of Poetry*"*, for instance, exemplifies a reflective mode in which cultural symbols interact to generate renewed lyric meaning.

"When I Die", by contrast, employs a post-synthetic, declarative poetics. The repeated anaphora "When I die" structures the poem not as lyrical accumulation but as a conceptual sequence. Each iteration advances a logical proposition rather than an image.

This language exhibits several distinctive features:

a. Repetition as Philosophical Iteration

The recurring phrase "When I die" functions as a formal marker of successive thought experiments. Each occurrence extends the inquiry—from physical dissolution, to cultural residue, to relational negation, and finally to cosmic extinction.

b. Materialist Lexicon

Terms such as "element," "matter," "rearranging," and "body" replace metaphorical transcendence with scientific precision. The poem speaks in the register of materialism rather than myth.

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c. Irony within Gravity

Even if smoke

rises to heaven,

I prefer

the ghosts below. (Zhang, 2017, p.143)

These lines introduce a note of personal irony that destabilizes death's solemnity. Heaven and hell are not moral destinations, but aesthetic preferences, thereby dismantling their symbolic authority.

d. Logical Exhaustiveness

The poem advances inexorably toward its terminal claim:

When we all die

everything becomes ash.

Silence

will rule. (Zhang, 2017, p.143)

No emotional reprieve interrupts this progression. Language becomes a vehicle for deductive clarity, not lyrical ambiguity. The poem reads less as expression than as demonstration—a philosophical argument articulated through verse.

5.3 Third-Level Transgression: Philosophical Orientation

Against Linearity, Meaning, and Salvific Narrative. Where much Lige poetry integrates thought and lyric within recoverable meaning—historical, cultural, or ethical—Zhang Guangkui's poem embraces a vision of existential finality.

Four philosophical negations define this stance:

a. Negation of Individual Singularity

The self is reduced to matter in circulation. Consciousness leaves no residue.

b. Suspension of Cultural Permanence

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Poetry's potential to memorialize is acknowledged but ultimately rendered futile:

When I die—

what difference does it make? (Zhang, 2017, p.143)

c. Erosion of Relational Continuity

Even posthumous encounter is framed as error:

If we meet,

it will likely be a mistake. (Zhang, 2017, p.143)

d. Termination in Absolute Silence

The poem's final vision admits no rebirth or transcendence. Even cyclical cosmology is emptied of promise:

All enters

the empty cycle

of yin and yang. (Zhang, 2017, p.143)

The invocation of yin–yang does not restore harmony; it is qualified as "empty." Cyclicity itself is stripped of metaphysical reassurance.

Therefore, the Lige School's foundational ethos may be summarized as a triple movement: a. from singular tradition toward fusion; b. from ornament toward authenticity; c. from lyric expression toward speculative depth.

"When I Die" radicalizes and re-transgresses each of these movements to their furthest limit:

a. It pushes "fusion" to the point of forcibly welding poetry to philosophy, science to metaphysics, and existence to nothingness. In this poem, "fusion" is no longer a strategy of enrichment but an explosive dismantling of traditional poetic categories themselves.

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b. It drives “authenticity” toward the brutal truth of death, materialization, and nihilism. While other poets continue to seek “truth” within cultural memory or humanistic nostalgia, Zhang reaches directly toward the material truth of elemental decomposition and the ultimate truth of universal ash.

c. It extends “speculation” into a sustained interrogation of the absurd foundations of existence. The poem functions as a complete philosophical argument, in which poetry itself becomes the very medium of speculative reasoning, rather than its ornament or illustration.

Zhang Guangkui is therefore not an aberration within Lige poetics, but its most uncompromising outcome. While other poets construct bridges between cultures and epistemologies, Zhang dismantles the bridge itself, exposing its materials as finite, contingent, and ultimately perishable.

In this sense, he stands as the Lige School’s most unsettling yet most faithful inheritor: a poet for whom verse no longer consoles or reconciles, but states, with severe lucidity, the terminal conditions of existence. This extreme transgression does not negate Lige poetics; it reveals its deepest energy—a poetics that advances by crossing boundaries, even when that crossing leads into silence itself.

6. “Lige” as a Verb: An Ongoing Practice

Accordingly, the Lige School is not a closed club but an open field of practice. While they share certain foundational methodological commitments and poetic orientations, they categorically reject the prescription of a unified aesthetic style.

The members may produce works like Ou Hong’s “The Bastard Child of Poetry”, marked by intellectual rigor and cultural dialogue; meditative reflections on displacement such as Lei Yanni’s “Everyone Is Their Own Lonely God” (Lei, 2017,

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pp.99-103); or austere ontological deductions like Zhang Guangkui's "When I Die". Diversity of poetic form and temperament is not incidental to the school—it is constitutive of it. Long Jingyao's "West Window" （Long, 2017, p.178) exemplifies subtle estrangement within classical form, where temporal and spatial dislocation, mediated emotion, and measured alienation transform traditional imagery into modern lyrical resonance.

For them, "Lige" is always a verb rather than a noun. It signifies:

a. the continual departure from the comfort zone, challenging established habits of creation and thought;
b. the conscious crossing of boundaries, constructing provisional bridges among disciplines, cultures, and languages;
c. the courage to confront truth, even when that truth is unsettling;
d. and a sincere commitment to community, sustaining individual distinctiveness through dialogue rather than conformity.

Epilogue: In Praise of the Mule

At the conclusion of "The Bastard Child of Poetry", the poet expresses pity for the "immortal gods" and instead praises what "mortal humans" understand as the virtue of the mule—"stronger than the donkey, more enduring than the horse."

This may be the most fitting metaphor for the Lige School of Poetry. They do not aspire to be noble, purebred "divine steeds." They would rather become hybrid, utilitarian, and resilient academic mules. They carry a double inheritance—Chinese and Western, classical and modern, scholarly and creative—and move forward silently along rugged poetic paths.

They accept the ambiguity of an identity whose "lineage is marked with an X,"

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and embrace the creative freedom of the "bastard." They believe that it is precisely within this ambiguity and freedom, within continual acts of *lige* and transgression, that poetry may discover new vitality in our time.

Here, the Lige School declares its existence—not as an endpoint, but as a point of departure for innumerable possibilities.

Let poetry continue to transgress.

Winter 2025

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The Healing Poetics of Ted Hughes: From a Jungian Perspective

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Abstract

This paper explores Ted Hughes's oeuvre through the lens of C. G. Jung's analytical psychology, arguing that his poetry enacts a lifelong process of psychic and ecological healing. By tracing Hughes's career from his early confrontation with shadow energies in *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960), through the descent into chaos in *Crow* (1970) and *Cave Birds* (1978), to the landscapes of renewal in *Remains of Elmet* (1979) and *River* (1983), the study demonstrates how his work mirrors the Jungian stages of individuation. His epilogues, *Birthday Letters* (1998) and *Howls & Whispers* (1998), are read as culminating attempts of reconciliation, where personal grief is transformed into archetypal experience. The core argument is the therapeutic role of myth, archetypes, and natural imagery in Hughes's works, which mediate between the conscious ego and unconscious forces, facilitating a psychic balance. Ultimately, the paper concludes that Hughes's poetics suggests a healing practice of transformation, offering not final resolution but an ongoing dialogue with shadow, nature, and memory. His work thus affirms the role of poetry as a medium of psychological renewal and ecological consciousness in the modern age.
Keywords: Ted Hughes, Jungian psychology, individuation, healing poetics

Introduction

Ted Hughes was living in England in the 20th century, like T.S. Eliot, had an intense feeling of "wasteland" towards the Western world around in that era. He was

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dissatisfied with the damage industrial civilisation had done to nature, and along with it, the destruction of imagination by positivism and the alienation of modern men from ancient civilisation and mythology. Therefore, he called on poets to fulfil their "therapeutic" mission like shamans. Hughes was also influenced by C.G. Jung as he once said that he had read all the translated works of Jung. Through Jung, Hughes managed to put together a network of his own "intellectual systems, psychological and some philosophical systems" (Hughes, 2008, p. 625). From as early as his first published collection *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), Hughes's reputation as a poet has been bound with brutal disclosure of the force of nature. Hughes's fascination with violent animal energies, elemental forces and mythical figures has long been noted and studied by critics. One of the prominent Hughes scholars Skea (1994) says that, Hughes is well known as a poet of "blood and violence". Since the expressions and imagery in Hughes's poetry often appears brutally honest in its visceral intensity, such remarks from the critics, while not inaccurate, are partial. Across different stages in his life and career, Hughes pursued not merely the depictions of violence in nature, but the transformation and insight derived from it. His major collections can be read as successive and progressive attempts to engage energies of the unconscious, to face their potentially destructive force, and ultimately discover a path toward psychic renewal. Jung's analytical psychology provides a system to understand Hughes's recurrent preoccupations: archetypes, myths, dreams, violence and renewal. The process of individuation is most emphasised in Jung's theories, with this process the conscious self integrates with aspects of the unconscious, especially shadow and anima/animus, so to

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realise a fuller psychological wholeness (Jung, 1977, p. 164). This process always comes with numerous struggles, involving confrontation with the shadow (the repressed and instinctual side of the psyche), disintegration into chaos (the alchemical *nigredo*, meaning "blackness"), and eventually achieving reintegration into a more balanced relation to the Self. Jung also advocates the healing function of symbols, myths, and images in art: they mediate between the conscious and the unconscious, allowing destructive energies to be transformed into creative ones (Jung, 2013).

Hughes's poetry enacts exactly this type of psychic process. His recurring animal archetypes, mythological figures, and elemental landscapes are often symbolic connections between consciousness and unconscious instinct. By staging encounters with predatory birds, mythic tricksters or ruined landscapes, Hughes magnifies the psychic ordeal of shadow confrontation, possession, disintegration and eventual renewal. Hence the therapeutic dimension of his work is at core. He has written in his essay repeatedly identifying poetry as a discipline that helps one confront and work with forces and powerful impulses that the conscious ego cannot easily handle. As he reflected in his later prose, he described the ritual of poetry as "the record of just how the forces of the Universe try to redress some balance disturbed by human error" (Hughes, 1994, p.206). Such comments echoes Jung's opinion of art as a symbolic dialogue with the unconscious, assisting one to restore psychic equilibrium (Jung, 1972, p. 128). Both Hughes and Jung believed in the therapeutic function of art. For Jung, symbols are not ornamental, they mediate between conscious and unconscious systems and help restore psychological balance when the ego becomes rigid or collapses from

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being too one-sided. According to Jung's theories, individuation is the life-long task of pursuing a more "complete" version of oneself, which requires constant confrontations with the shadow, encounters with the anima/animus, and a long and winding road toward the Self**,** the psyche's regulating centre (Jung, 1977). This study therefore suggests reading through Hughes's career with the understanding of the individuation process, analysing the poetic healing derived from his work with the lens of Jungian depth psychology. Tracing the poet's development in his writing, the discussion will divide some of his major works into four stages that mirror the phases of individuation:

Firstly, the focus is on Hughes's early collections such as *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960). There are poems in these collections such as "The Jaguar" "Pike" and "Hawk Roosting" wherein instinctual and predatory energies as shadow powers are acknowledged and channelled through those animal figures. At the second stage, with *Crow* (1970) and *Cave Birds* (1978), Hughes enters a darker mythopoetic mode. Here he lays down a path of descent into chaos, accompanied with the collapse of religious and rational structures, and particularly the ordeal of the Trickster archetype. Jungian alchemy interprets this stage as *nigredo*, the necessary downfall that would later progress onto renewal (Jung, 2015, p. 143). Then next in *Remains of Elmet* (1979) and *River* (1983), Hughes turns to landscapes and natural cycle of life. The poems in those collections attempt to zoom in on the ruins of cultural terrain, the toil and moil in the farmland and also on the symbolic flow and dynamites of rivers. Among them the archetypes of anima and water act as mediator of healing, by connecting the human psyche to ancestral and ecological system and rhythms. Lastly, in later works such as

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Birthday Letters (1998), and *Howls & Whisper* (1998), Hughes confronts his memory and grief over past tragic loss of his loved ones. In these poems, we can see how he processes his trauma, with his language his personal wounds are transformed into universal archetypal experience. Readers can experience the healing and catharsis from the psychic integration process through Hughes's articulation of grief and love. That is reaching the final stage of individuation striving towards acceptance and reconciliation with the Self.

Hence each stage of Hughes's career can be understood as a psychic phase in a long struggling individuation process. His oeuvre itself is a record of an imaginative adventure of the unconscious, charting not only personal trauma but also collective wounds in culture and ecology. Hughes's healing poetics thus go beyond the personal level and enlighten his readers to find ways of their own psychological transformation and renewal.

1. *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal*: Confronting the Shadow

The first collections in Ted Hughes's career—*The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960)—start off with encounters with raw instinct, weakness, desires, predatory power and suchlike, or in short, the shadow energies. Those dark energies of aggression from the unconscious forces are that modern consciousness prefers to supress. Together, these volumes showcase the symbolic imageries and language via which Hughes start to lay out a healing system advocate symbolic recognition rather than moral condemnation—a controlled, ritualised attention to instinct, violence and predatory desires as ontological facts. In Jungian terms, such recognition is the first step

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of individuation—the confrontation with the shadow—the repressed, instinctual and destructive dimension of the psyche. The shadow archetype represents the dark side of ourselves, an invisible yet integral component of our mental whole. This archetype often manifests as darker figures, such as monsters or demons, representing the chaotic and wild elements of the unconscious. Hughes skilfully embodies this archetype in his poetry, exploring themes of wildness and primal instincts that challenge societal norms. By bringing these shadow figures to light, Hughes encourages readers to confront their own repressed elements, echoing Jung's assertion that acknowledging the shadow is vital for personal growth and individuation.

1.1 "The Jaguar" and "Hawk Roosting": The Shadow in and out of the "Cage"

"The Jaguar" in *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) being one of Hughes's most anthologised early poems, opens with the depiction of a very sombre zoo—the apes yawning, the boa coiled like "a fossil". This is a glimpse of nature being reduced to display for the pleasure of human. Then the poem progresses to a cage "where the crowd stands, stares, mesmerized,/As a child at a dream, at a jaguar hurrying enraged", introducing the jaguar that refuses prison: His stride is wildernesses of freedom: / The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel. (Hughes, 2012, p. 25) Here, the jaguar acts as a projection of the psyche's shadow—a force that reveals the unrecognised dark aspects of the personality (Jung, 1951/2015, p. 22). This force is usually "caged" and repressed by the conscious self, but once being observed by the human active gaze ("stares" "mesmerized"), it is unleashed with no denial. The jaguar's "fuse" "fire" "bang of blood" seems dangerous but Hughes places the world "under" the heel of the

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jaguar, painting the whole image with touch of divinity. From the Jungian perspective, this is the first task of individuation: to bring the shadow energy into the light, acknowledging its role in psychic life.

"Hawk Roosting" from *Lupercal* takes a step further to make absolutely sure that the voice of the shadow is heard. The hawk speaks like a tyrant: "I kill where I please because it is all mine" (Hughes, 2012, p. 68). The hawk's monologue is one that allows no questioning. Critics have often read this poem as fascistic, an amplification of authoritarian will (Kendall, 2009). The language of the poem is firm, declarative and dominant— "Now I hold Creation in my foot", "No arguments assert my right", "My eye has permitted no change" —the voice of the hawk sounds echoed alone forth and back between heaven and earth. Yet within a Jungian frame, the voice of the hawk is that of the shadow's autonomy, direct and firm, where no feedback is necessary. The poem is loud and ear-splitting, forcing readers to hear what the psyche has repressed— its affiliation with violence, control and egocentricity. Hughes's genius shines in letting archetypes speak with their own authority. The theatrical effect of the hawk speaking out and declaring its authority lifts up the monologue into an archetypal speech. Therefore, a distance is created for the readers to hear and recognise the will's predatory desire without being invited to endorse it. Jung cautiously points out that the shadow must be granted reality but not righteousness: denial makes it come out of the surface unconsciously while recognition brings containment. Healing really begins when the reality of such forces is accepted and integrated.

1.2 "Pike" and "Thrushes": Archetypes of Instinct

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While the hawk's voice is firm and decisive, "Pike" speaks in ambivalence. The poem starts with uplifting expression— "perfect" "Pike in all parts, green tigering the gold" yet followed by an immediate shift to "Killers from the egg: the malevolent aged grin" (Hughes, 2012, p. 91). The fish is a paradox. It is evident that from early stage of Hughes's life, there had been fear as well as excitement accompanying his fishing experience. The episode he describes in his poem "Pike", whether while the narrator was pondering over life or fishing a deep pond late into the night, he was meditating in awe and fighting his demons:

A pond I fished, fifty yards across,
Whose lilies and muscular tench
Had outlasted every visible stone
Of the monastery that planted them

Stilled legendary depth:
It was as deep as England. It held
Pike too immense to stir, so immense and old
That past nightfall I dared not cast (Hughes, 2012, p. 91)

The pond's ecosystem with "lilies" and "tench" outlives the decayed monastery, showcasing nature's overpowering human history. The "England-deep" pond had the poet hesitate on his rod, evoking ancestral dread tied to the land. The pond transcends physical reality, becoming a reservoir of national memory, or by extension the collective unconscious of the people. He is respecting the vast waters

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and the old pike, and fearing the unseen and the unknown in the dark depth of the pond: “Frail on my ear against the dream/Darkness beneath night’s darkness had freed”. Hughes describes pike as “killers from the egg”, plus them being “immense and old” immediately exudes primordial terror. At this point, he is not just fishing for pike, but also for his own vision of what’s down in the legendary depth of the ancient pond, the “darkness beneath night’s darkness had freed” and his dream and his own unconscious. The layered darkness essentially implies a subconscious abyss. Around the time he was composing “Pike”, he wrote to his sister Olwyn and shared his view of life as “the notion of God as the devourer—as the mouth & gut, which is brainless & the whole of evil” (Hughes, *Letters*, 148). Literary critic Sagar comes to the conclusion that fishing a deep ancient pond at midnight is the invitation from God “the devourer” to the hellish creatures of the deep to enter his world (Sagar, 2010, p. 249).

Overall, at a psychological level, the poem is a reflection on the complexity of shadow. The poem is switching between admiration for the fish’s primordial survival and horror at its predation. This ambivalence corresponds to Jung’s belief that the content of shadow is morally neutral, containing both destructive energy and source of life. A murderous appetite is not evil but the engine of life. The pike embodies what Jung calls the instinctual layer of the psyche (Jung, 1951/2015, p. 55), whose energy can either destroy or sustain, or both. Hughes’s symbolic language reveals that there is no definite resolution as how to deal with the complicated psyche, but it requires constant attention and negotiation with instinct.

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While there are more poems that present some of Hughes's most intense explorations of predatory instinct in *Lupercal,* none is more striking than "Thrushes". The little birds famous for their bright and delightful singing, have their feral sides out in the open in Hughes's beginning depiction: Terrifying are the attent sleek thrushes on the lawn, / More coiled steel than living – a poised / Dark deadly eye, those delicate legs. (Hughes, 2012, p. 82) The thrushes are described as predatory mechanisms, as they are like "coiled steel", with an "eye" honed into a "dark deadly" gaze. In this poem, thrushes are perfect embodiments of the repressed instinctual energies of violence and vitality. As if any sentimentality would be stripped away, pure instinct is revealed in its raw form. This is also a projection of the Shadow, the dimension of psyche that contains primitive drives like aggression, lust and hunger that consciousness represses (Jung, 1951/2015, p. 22). With the repetitive stresses of "no", Hughes writes: No indolent procrastinations and no yawning stares. / No sighs or head-scratchings. Nothing but bounce and stab. (Hughes, 2012, p. 82) It is evident that Hughes is in awe of the birds' "bullet" efficiency in their work of killing. What is shocking about these animals is not just violence but competence. Hughes does not condemn thrushes' predation, instead, he contrasts the birds' unwavering aim with the human tendency to hesitate, to be "distracted from distraction by distraction" (T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"). The line "his act worships itself" skewers the way human projects can become egotistic rituals. A man does yearn for genuine devotion— "he bends to be blent in the prayer" —but can't quite merge with it. Because the "distracting devils" bring profane to the scared worship ("orgy and hosannah"). Human consciousness is a parliament of warring drives, even

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piety is noisy and compromised. The ending lines stack vertical layers—the “fire” of agitation is above, with “weeping” black silent waters below. The psyche is not just busy. it’s abyssal. The “weep” of the black silent waters suggests a sorrow the man can’t hear over the blaze. The man is split between ego aims, “heroisms” or other types of achievement, and the unconscious, which erupts as “distracting devils” and broods as “black silent waters”. His effort to “be blent in the prayer” is the wish for wholeness, but inflation (“his act worships itself”) and distraction may hinder individuation. Hughes contrasts the thrushes’ seamless, instinctive efficiency with human’s divided spirit, with our work tilts toward self-worshiping activity, and beneath our blazing ambitions lies a silent, sorrowing depth we scarcely face. Rather than lamenting, Hughes lets this contrast instruct, that the precision of instinct is a measure by which our divided attention is exposed.

Across these early poems, Hughes uses his striking language to summon the psyche’s darkest energies as well as containing them. His diction is that of force, with verbs that grip and gouge, nouns of warm blood and gore intertwined with that of cold tool and steel. Hughes’s language is full of loud images and layered texture, free of euphemism. His animals are written as archetypal embodiments of forces that the conscious mind hesitates to accept. From a Jungian perspective, individuation cannot begin without acknowledging the shadow. Hughes’s early works open the door to the unconscious, allowing its shadow energies to speak in the jaguar’s ferocity, the hawk’s tyranny, the pike’s ambivalence and the thrush’s cold-blooded precision. If Hughes’s early books encourage looking into instinct without flinching, that would prepare one

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for the *nigredo* in his mythopoetic works of the 1970s to come. *Crow* (1970) will explode theological language while *Cave Birds* (1978) will ritualize trial and rebirth. Without the early discipline of attention and containment, these descents would be annihilating. They become the next necessary stage in a healing process.

2. *Crow* and *Cave Birds*: Alchemical Descent into Chaos

The publication of *Crow* (1970) marked a radical turning point in Hughes's oeuvre. While his earlier works often dramatized encounters with the shadow through animal imagery, *Crow* turns away from familiar landscapes and creatures, driving towards a mythopoetic descent into chaos. It is an experiment in dismantling and rewriting biblical creation myths through the Trickster figure. Within Jungian framework, *Crow* moves to the stage of *nigredo*, the psychic disintegration necessary for transformation (Jung, 2015, p. 230). The *Crow* poems enact what Jung would describe as "the dark night of the soul", a confrontation with archetypal disorder that strips the ego of false certainties. This psychological downfall is extended in the following *Cave Birds*, an alchemical drama of trial, death and rebirth. Together, these works present Hughes's most radical engagement with psychic disintegration, in which healing is achieved through painful ordeal.

2.1 *Crow*: The Archetype of Trickster

Jung believed that the healer is marked by wounds of his own. He often invoked the image of the wounded healer, rooted in the figure of Chiron in Greek mythology, to suggest that the analyst's own encounter with psychic suffering enables him to guide others toward wholeness (1972, p. 135). Healing in Jung's psychology begins with a

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descent into the unconscious, where the ego is broken open by encounters with shadow, chaos, and death. Out of this ordeal arises the possibility of individuation—the reconfiguration of the personality around the archetype of the Self rather than the limitations of the ego. Hughes's poetry dramatizes precisely such initiatory descents. Ewa Panecka develops this point by proposing that Hughes's poetics operate like a Shamanic ritual: they draw upon energy and ecstasy, enact themselves in the form of myth or ritual, and culminate in a cathartic result that is healing for both the poet and his readers. (2018, p. 2) Hughes was specially inspired by the shamanistic *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (*Bardo Thodol*). Crow's capacity to survive the ordeals and mutilations he comes across also resembles the shaman's rebirth after his magical death and dismemberment. And the basic shamanistic quest pattern of death and rebirth in *Tibetan Book of the Dead* provides a general analogue to the "Life and Songs of the Crow" of surviving despite the ordeals and mutilations he is exposed to. That is also resembles the shaman's rebirth after his "magical death and dismemberment ... with all possible variants of boiling, devouring, burning, stripping to the bones", as Hughes summaries in his essay in *Winter Pollen* (p. 57). In Jungian terms, Hughes's shamanic poetics can be read as enactments of the *nigredo* stage of alchemy.

In the meantime, Sagar observes that the story line in *Crow* follows the typical incidents in a cycle of Trickster-narratives that involves "the wild escapades in series, causes leading to improbable effects that snowball in magnitude, maniacal pursuits, villainous transformations …. That utterly destroys the protagonist, who then appears in the next scene intact" (Sagar, 1983, p. 176). With regard to the figure of Crow, there

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is much in Crow that fits in the profile of the mythological archetype of the Trickster in Jung's theories: "[The Trickster] is a forerunner of the savior … He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness" (Jung, 1977, p. 263). In short, the Trickster is an unconscious shadow tendency of an ambivalent, mercurial nature in a man.

The voice of the wounded healer is perhaps most loud in *Crow*. This collection invents a trickster-shaman crow figure who suffers ordeals, mocks gods, and undergoes repeated symbolic deaths. In "Crow's First Lesson", God taught the bird to say "Love", but what comes out of his beak is a horrifying cry that brings destructive consequences to the world:

> Crow convulsed, gaped, retched and
>
> Man's bodiless prodigious head
>
> Bulbed out onto the earth, with swivelling eyes,
>
> …
>
> And Crow retched again, before God could stop him.
>
> And woman's vulva dropped over man's neck and tightened
>
> (Hughes, 2012, p. 211)

This moment is archetypal: love is revealed not as sentimental feeling but as a force inseparable from pain, sacrifice, and death. Jungian psychology insists that individuation requires the ego to be wounded, even shattered, in order for the deeper archetypes to manifest. Crow's cry is a wound that also marks the beginning of learning.

In "Examination at the Womb-Door," Hughes spills all the ink on casting Crow

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in a trial where existence itself is interrogated by a litany of questions—from "Who owns these scrawny little feet?" "Who owns this bristly scorched-looking face?" "Who owns these still-working lungs?" to "Who is stronger than hope?" "Who is stronger than the will?" (Hughes, 2012, p. 218). Each and every answer to those questions resounds with "Death" —until the speaker admits that all possessions, even the body and mind, belong to powers beyond the ego. However, when the final question arrives— "But who is stronger than death?"—the response is shockingly different: "Me, evidently." Semantically, it is deadpan, even absurd. Yet this absurdity signals a psychological threshold. If all belongs to "Death", then the only way to "pass" is to paradoxically claim identity with the force that seemed invincible. If one steps into the logic of this paradox, then survival here is not denial of death but the recognition that one carries death within. By claiming "Me, evidently," the speaker collapses the dualism of "I" versus "Death." Death is not an external tyrant; it is part of the Self. To pass is to integrate this recognition. On another level, this line is pure trickster wit. Panecka calls such moments "pragmatic myth" (2018, p. 73), which are solutions that work not because they are sticking to doctrines but because they produce a shift in psychic state. The absurdity itself is the medicine: it turns numb acceptance of fate before Death into mockery, cheeky response, and renewed vitality. Through Crow's final response, the poem concludes that the only way to survive is to become death, to carry it consciously. This is echoing Jung's notion of *nigredo*: one must face symbolic death in order to be reborn into a wider consciousness.

In Hughes's *Crow*, the Trickster figure enacts the Jungian archetype as a

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therapeutic destabilizer. By transgressing moral, linguistic, and theological boundaries, Crow mirrors Jung's claim that Trickster differentiates by transgression (Jung, 1977, p. 265). The grotesque parodies of creation reveal where human consciousness is secretly attached to consoling myths of divine order or idealized notions of love. In exposing these attachments, Hughes's Trickster performs a paradoxical healing function—he forces the psyche to confront its shadow, thereby making space for a deeper integration of suffering and vitality into consciousness.

2.2 *Cave Birds:* Alchemical Trial and Rebirth

Since the full title of Hughes's *Cave Birds* (1978) is *Cave Birds: An Alchemical Drama*, it only makes sense to start with the alchemical interpretation. *Cave Birds* transforms the *nigredo* of *Crow* into a visionary ritual passage toward renewal**.** In collaboration with Leonard Baskin's striking illustrations, the poems follow the protagonist through accusation, trial, execution and symbolic rebirth. The most significant alchemical component in *Cave Birds* is the magical metamorphosis or rebirth that takes place inside the alchemist during an external operation. The metaphorical union of the body and the soul is another aspect of alchemy. Hughes's early interest in the works of W.B. Yeats and C. G. Jung (both of whom made a close study of the Upanishads) would have made him aware of the Upanishads and of the emphasis on the Atman, the Self-Soul (Skea, 1994), as the generator of all that is perceived, and on the interconnectedness of all things. Alchemy is a spiritual art through which the "gross matter" of man may be refined to reveal the spiritual gold of the pure Self-Soul. The precepts of alchemy were the basis for some other oriental philosophies

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explored by Hughes, including Sufism. Hughes's writing of *Cave Birds* poems was also influenced by Persian Sufi poet Farid ud-Din Attar, the writer of *The Conference of the Birds* (an allegorical fable of the search for wisdom and understanding, which ends with the revelation of Self-Soul) (Skea, 1994). A perfect example of an alchemist scene can be found in the poem "The Accused" in this collection: His mudded body, lord of middens, like an ore, / To Rainbowed clinker and a beatitude. (Hughes, 2012, p. 425) The progression of call, refusal, abduction, collapse/dismemberment, and restoration to wholeness is essentially the template for shamanic initiation, which Hughes was familiar with from his anthropology reading and is evident in many of his books, particularly collections like *Cave Birds*.

The protagonists created by Hughes and Baskin in *Cave Birds* appear to be part human and part bird, and Eliade, regarding "the 'magical flight'" encountered in "archaic anthropology", speaks of a "group of myths and legends about the aerial adventures of the mythic Ancestors", the "bird-men (or feathered men)" (Eliade, 2020, p. 101). Eliade further observes that the bird is traditionally associated with the soul or spirit, one notable example is Yeats's "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen": Some moralist or mythological poet / Compares the solitary soul to a swan... (Yeats, 2014, p. 234). Hence Eliade's research regarding these motifs points to the archetypal nature of the bird. One's attention may be drawn to the trial of "The Accused" Cock, which is an important plot in this collection.

As the drawing of Socratic Cock came before Hughes's tenth poem "The Accused", Baskin was the one who initiates the reference to Socrates and his last words

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with which he jokingly asked his friend Crito to sacrifice Socrates's cock to Aesculepius, the god of healing, to thank god for the gift of death (Plato, 2009, p. 157). The subtitle of *Cave Birds* was at one time "The Death of Socrates and his Resurrection in Egypt" (Robinson, 1989, p. 100). The "cave" of the title plausibly refers to Plato's cave while the poem "The Accused" is accompanied by Baskin's drawing titled "A Tumbled Socratic Cock" (Rees, 2009, p. 131). Together with the hemlock allusion in "The Executioner": Fills up / Sun, moon, stars, he fills them up / With his hemlock – / They darken. (Hughes, 2012, p. 424) Hughes is satirising the evolution of Western civilisation since Socrates's time for the utility, dialectical reasoning, and passion for learning have led people to believe that the advancement of consciousness alone can unveil the mysteries of existence. Here the repetitive "fill up" builds up the tension as the Cock witness Crow the Executioner devouring everything with darkness, and gradually, the Socratic Cock would be soaked in the dark, leading to the demise of his own self. Transformation does contain the stage of facing death of one's former self before one can thrive and be reborn with new life, hence at the end of "The Executioner", after experiencing all the darkness, the future for the Cock is not at all bleak: It feels like the world / Before your eyes ever opened. (Hughes, 2012, p. 425) Other Bird characters represent different unconscious forces within the inner psyche of "The Accused" Socratic Cock.

There is an interesting point made by Robert Haven Schauffler in his *The Poetry Cure: A Pocket Medicine Chest of Verse* (1925) that "any poem that has genuine healing in its wings usually commences its medical career the moment it is conceived by

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promptly curing its creator" (xviii). The illustrated *Cave Birds* accompanied by Baskin's artwork was composed over a few years in the 1970s, while Hughes was going through a string of tragic events in his life—Sylvia Plath committed suicide in 1963, followed by the passing of his lover Assia Wevill and their daughter Shura in 1967 (Feinstein, 2012). At the controversial stage of his life, the keen observation of nature and animals in his early creative endeavours was replaced by the abundance in narratives of guilt and mythical adventures of seeking redemption, wherein animals and other human protagonists were mostly serving as archetypal figures. As a modern Shaman that Hughes regarded himself to be, he endured and turned his own pain in life into poetry, bearing fruits of new insights for readers.

Despite Hughes's tragedy in his own love life, there is one fully integrated narrative sequence in *Cave Birds*. In "Bride and Groom Lie Hidden for Three days" in *Cave Birds*, Hughes describes an ideal marriage of a woman and a man, that they find the missing pieces for the body of one another, namely their limbs, skin and teeth, etc. In doing so, they physically "complete" each other. The poem ends with "They bring each other to perfection", and the "vast astonishment" points to a renewed and enthusiastic human perception of the world. Looking at it through the lens of Jung's theories, this poem also presents the symbolic marriage of the conscious and the unconscious. Thus, *Cave Birds* stages a psychic death and foreshadows the possibility of rebirth through archetypal integration.

At the stage of Hughes's mid-career, the healing process in his poems is making progress in breakdown. *Crow* and *Cave Birds* immerse both poet and reader in psychic

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chaos, where language falters, death dominates and archetypes destroy. Yet this ordeal is not nihilistic. By giving form to disintegration, Hughes transforms trauma into symbolic narrative. His Trickster-Crow, and cave-bound protagonist serve as mediators, allowing destructive energies to be symbolically endured. The therapeutic effect lies not in resolution but in recognition: the psyche endures chaos by giving it a voice. Hughes's mid-career works function as mythic containers for psychic violence, vessels strong enough to hold energies that would otherwise overwhelm. This aligns with Jung's conviction that art can provide a healing container for archetypal energies (Jung, 1972, p. 108). Hughes's mythopoetic sequences thus enact a psychic alchemy—they destroy in order to prepare for renewal. The ordeal in *Crow* and *Cave Birds* is necessary for the later integration found in *Remains of Elmet* (1979) and *River* (1983).

3. *Remains of Elmet* and *River*: Landscapes of Renewal

While Hughes's mythopoetic explorations in *Crow* and *Cave Birds* showcased the disintegration of the ego through alchemical descent into archetypal chaos, his subsequent collections turn to the landscapes out in the nature for remedies of psychic renewal. *Remains of Elmet* (1979) and *River* (1983) turn away from the mythic ordeal to elemental environment. Though this shift longs for firmer ground in the natural world, it is not a retreat from the unconscious; this is its integration found in ruined landscapes, farm labour and formless waters. At this point, the poems in these collections are more subtle, slow-paced and open. Consequently, by reconnection with place and anima, the pure presence of natural elements may offer healing and guide one from *nigredo* to integration.

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3.1 *Remains of Elmet:* The Ancestral Ruined

Ted Hughes's *Remains of Elmet* (1979) has a pivotal place in his oeuvre, presenting both a return to the landscapes of his Yorkshire childhood and a poetic reckoning with cultural, spiritual, and ecological history. In collaboration with Fay Godwin's stark photographs, Hughes renders the Calder Valley as a terrain of ruins with collapsed mills, sagging walls, war memorials, yet also as a site of elemental vitality in its moors, rivers, and skies. The collection has frequently been read as an elegy for a lost community, but its significance extends further. Viewed through the dual lenses of Jungian psychology and ecocriticism, *Remains of Elmet* reveals itself as a work of psychic healing and environmental reimagining. Jungian analytical psychology provides a vocabulary for understanding the psychological development depicted in these poems. The sequence dramatizes processes of individuation, shadow confrontation, and psychic renewal, using the imagery of decomposition and regeneration to symbolize inner transformation.

Memory is central to Hughes's vision of Elmet, and memory also functions as the psychic terrain where individuation occurs. The collapsing mills and chapels are not only cultural ruins but also emblems of the psyche's outdated structures, which must be refurbished to achieve balance. In *Remains of Elmet*, Hughes revisits shadowed memories of industrial labor, religious repression, and war, transforming them into sources of psychic growth. Several poems exemplify Hughes's engagement with his shadowy past. "Two" recounts the departure of the poet's elder brother after World War II, an event that Hughes links to a primal wound in the family psyche. The poem's

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imagery is apparently shamanic: from an idyllic moment of Edenic beauty at dawn, the brothers descend to find the violence of war, and Hughes writes that: The feather fell from his head. / The drum stopped in his hand. / The song died in his mouth. (Hughes, 2012, p. 480) This scene encapsulates psychic rupture, suggesting the loss of a guiding song—a metaphor for the psychic shock that fractured Hughes's youthful wholeness. Confronting this painful memory in verse is an act of integration: by giving shape to grief and acknowledging the war's aftershocks on his inner life, Hughes reclaims a part of his shadow rather than leaving it unacknowledged in the unconscious. By articulating the memory, Hughes transforms it into an act of mourning and integration. In the meantime, "Mount Zion" records Hughes's childhood experience with Methodism, describing the chapel as a prison of death and conformity. The grotesque imagery of the people's activities at the chapel is stifling:

> Women bleak as Sunday rose-gardens
>
> Or crumpling to puff-pastry, and cobwebbed with deaths.
>
> Men in their prison-yard, at attention,
>
> Exercising their cowed, shaven souls. (Hughes, 2012, p. 481)

To liberate himself from the rigid, joyless religiosity in his youth, Hughes borrows the "furious chisels and screwdrivers" from imaginary crickets to strike down the "religious stonework". According to Jung, this can be interpreted as confronting the collective shadow of institutional religion: the repressive father-archetype that stifles instinct and imagination. By rendering it in sardonic verse, Hughes distances himself from its bound, performing an individuation step by liberating the psyche from false authority.

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Even in poems less explicitly tied to memory, such as "Heptonstall Old Church," ruins embody shadow material. The church is figured as the remains of "a great bird", once uplifting but now perished (Hughes, 2012, p. 490). The symbolism suggests a cultural form whose energy has been exhausted. Jung argued that symbols die when they no longer mediate between consciousness and the unconscious; renewal requires new symbols rooted in living experience. By presenting the church as carrion rather than shrine, Hughes deems its declining prestige necessary for clearing space for new forms of spiritual redemption.

Throughout *Remains of Elmet*, memory is not nostalgic but transformational. It revives shadow material like trauma of war, industrialism, and religion, so that these can be consciously integrated into a more balanced self. Alongside memory, *Elmet* poems foreground nature's processes of decay and regeneration as models for psychic healing. Decomposition, in both ecological and psychological senses, is essential. Hughes writes in "Lumb Chimneys":

> Brave dreams and their mortgaged walls are let rot in the rain.
>
> The dear flesh is finally too much.
>
> Heirloom bones are dumped into wet holes.
>
> And spirit does what it can to save itself alone.
>
> …
>
> Before these chimneys can flower again
>
> They must fall into the only future, into earth. (Hughes, 2012, p. 457)

These lines encapsulate Hughes's belief that only by yielding to decay can renewal

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occur. Psychologically, it aligns with Jung's *nigredo*, the alchemical stage of dissolution where ego-attachments die so that transformation may follow (Jung, 2015, p. 37). Ecologically, it echoes the soil's fertility after organic matter breaks down, reminding readers that cultural structures—"chimneys" and "mortgaged walls"—must also return to earth. The poem "Tree" also embodies this renewal process. A figure of a priest, initially raging like against the storm, eventually resigns himself "to be dumb" and receptive. Scigaj interprets this as Hughes discovering his "ecological second skin," (1991, p. 109) accepting natural rhythms rather than imposing anthropocentric control.

Remains of Elmet positions Ted Hughes at a crossroads: moving beyond the mythic violence of *Crow* and *Cave Birds* toward a poetics of humility, memory, and ecological consciousness. Through Jungian psychology, the sequence can be read as a process of individuation, confronting shadowed memories of war, religion, and industrialism, and integrating them into a renewed self.

3.2 *River*: The Flow of Transformation

River (1983) leads one from the previous soil landscapes down into the waters. Hughes envisioned *River* as an epic spiritual quest in which the poetic persona seeks a "source of life" and ultimate truth in the river's depths (Skea, 1994). This journey parallels Jung's concept of individuation, the process of integrating unconscious and conscious facets of the self to achieve wholeness (Jung, 1977, p. 275). Ann Skea (1994) observes that the reappearing salmon in these poems act as "totem creatures" guiding the persona toward truth and knowledge, their upstream journey symbolizing the quest for the Self. In Jungian terms, the river's "primordial energies" represent the

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unconscious forces the ego must confront and integrate (Jung, 1964/2013, p. 67). In Scigaj's *The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Form and Imagination* (1986), he attempts to "synthesise major influences from depth psychology, myth, alchemy, Trickster folklore, Blake, and many Oriental disciplines" (p. 173). Scigaj considers that the scenery described in *River* is under the influence of Taoist philosophies. His thesis is of relevance to the study of Hughes's therapeutic endeavours. It also compiles compelling ecological readings of *River*, and the concepts of natural renewal that underpin a profound and enduring significance of alchemy in these poems.

Hughes's love for fishing had developed very early on since boyhood, stemming from his time in the Rochdale canal, just a few yards from his first home in Mytholmroyd. Later as he was maturing into his literary career, he shared his realization that writing poems is like fishing in a different manner:

> …it occurred to me that my writing poems might be partly a continuation of my earlier pursuit…The special kind of excitement, the slightly mesmerized and quite involuntary concentration with which you make out the stirring of a new poem in your mind…This is hunting and the poem is a new species of creature, a new specimen of the life outside your own. (Hughes, 1994, p. 11-12)

With this Hughes suggests that fishing and writing poems are the same at their core, they both allow one to escape from the toils and tanglements of the ego, and to be renovated while encountering with "a new specimen of the life outside your own", a new insight would be found and extracted from the "mysterious depths" in yourself. Then river to Hughes, the "formless" flow and live dynamics of this fluvial landscape

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symbolises the flow of poetic imagination with no shape nor form, only a fraction (or a fish) to be captured every now and then. Scigaj submits that "*River* celebrates nature's powers to refresh one's perceptions and promote psychological renewal" (p. 136). *River* is also often interpreted as a healing journey following the trauma and darkness of Hughes's earlier works. This is a work of redemption and restoration where water functions as a regenerative medium, depicted as both wound and cure in Hughes's *River* poem "Go Fishing": As if creation were a wound / As if this flow were all plasm healing. (Hughes, 2012, p. 653) By surrendering to water, the poetic voice undergoes psychic cleansing, aligning with Jung's view that individuation requires the integration of shadow elements.

The salmon is central to *River*, symbolizing life force, epic struggle, sacrifice, and the stark realities of nature. Hughes was deeply fascinated by their lifecycle, particularly their arduous migration to spawn and subsequent death. The healing vision of *River* is tempered by recognition of mortality. In "October Salmon," the battered, dying salmon embodies sacrifice and persistence: "death-patched" yet possessing:

> The epic poise
>
> That holds him so steady in his wounds, so loyal to his doom, 60
>
> so patient
>
> In the machinery of heaven (Hughes, 2012, p. 679)

Hadley read this as both elegy and ecological parable (Hadley, 2008). In Jungian terms, confronting the salmon's mortality mirrors the final stage of individuation: the acceptance of death and integration of the shadow. Hughes's tone here reflects

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reverence and empathy, affirming the salmon's struggle as part of a larger cosmic order ("In the machinery of heaven"). As Skea (1994) notes, this moment conveys both "wonder and love," initiating divine order in nature. Individuation thus entails not only illumination but also the acceptance of mortality as integral to the natural cycle of life. The celebrated poem "That Morning" dramatizes this healing epiphany. The protagonists encounter salmon in a golden dawn, experiencing themselves as "alive in the river of light/among the creatures of light" (Hughes, 2012, p. 664). Skea (1994) interprets this as a supreme religious moment in which selfhood and materialism are relinquished. The image resonates with Jung's concept of the Self, a unifying archetype beyond consciousness, attained through encounters with numinous experience.

River achieves a synthesis of Jungian inner exploration and ecological vision. Individuation unfolds through immersion in the river's rhythms; healing the psyche is inseparable from healing human–nature relations. Hughes balances close observation of wildlife with mythic archetypes, producing a holistic vision of renewal. As Troupes (2019) argues, the collection's moments of transcendence reinforce ecological commitment, not escapism. In *River*, transcendence is embodied in the mystical "river of light" in "That Morning" that occurs not beyond the world but in its waters, where salmon, human and cosmos are connected.

Remains of Elmet and *River* represent Hughes's turn from mythic disintegration to ecological re-rooting. By attending to ancestral ruins and the flowing river, Hughes locates healing in immersion: grief is acknowledged, death accepted, and the unconscious engaged through natural cycles. From a Jungian perspective, these works

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enact the anima's healing function, reconnecting the psyche to unconscious flow and archetypal renewal. They in a way also offer consolation to Hughes himself, preparing him for the final stage of the integration of grief and memory in *Birthday Letters* (1998) and *Howls & Whispers* (1998).

4. *Birthday Letters* and *Howls & Whispers*: Reconciliation

By the late 1990s, Ted Hughes's poetry undergoes a profound shift in tone. Whereas his early and mid-career works confront archetypal violence through animals, myths and landscape, his later poetry turns inward to memory, grief and personal history with care and acceptance. In *Birthday Letters* (1998) and *Howls & Whispers* (1998), Hughes does not abandon darkness; he embraces it patiently, attentively and often tenderly, until its energy becomes presentable as reflections. In Jungian terms, this phase marks the culmination of individuation—the integration of opposites.

4.1 *Birthday Letters*: Integrating Memory and Grief

Birthday Letters (1998) broke Hughes's public silence about his life with Sylvia Plath and it revisits his life with Sylvia Plath through a series of confessional lyrics, transforming trauma into symbolic narrative. This is a poignant collection of eighty-eight poems reflecting on his turbulent relationship with Plath and the psychological aftermath of her death. Published thirty years after Plath's 1963 suicide, *Birthday Letters* can be read as Hughes's late-life act of catharsis and integration. As Panecka observes, Hughes waited for decades until he had "enough distance and control over his pain and his sense of loss" before confronting Plath's ghost in poetry (2018, p. 10). By blending personal memory with archetypal imagery, *Birthday Letters* becomes a

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literary case study in Jungian self-realization—a poetic enactment of individuation through suffering and reconciliation.

The collection follows a roughly chronological arc, from his first encounter with Plath to the aftermath of her death, thus tracing psychic descent, confrontation, and tentative integration. Hughes himself admitted that the poems began as attempts "to evoke Plath's presence… and to feel her there listening" rather than as public works of art (Hadley, 2008, p. 138). Panecka emphasizes that for Hughes, myth supplied the necessary language to express psychic states that were otherwise "inexpressible" (2018, p. 11). *Birthday Letters* is composed of autobiographical episodes extracted through mythic imagery. This synthesis mirrors Jung's claim that individuation requires reconciling personal history with transpersonal archetypes. As Panecka puts it, Hughes's late poetry enacts a "transformation mystery" in which confrontation with psychic pain becomes a step toward integration (p. 11).

The *Birthday* collection dramatizes Hughes's encounter with both Plath's and his own shadow. In "The Minotaur," for instance, Hughes recalls Plath's furious smashing of furniture, casting her rage through the Labyrinth in the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. In a famous Greek myth, the hero Theseus embarks on the journey to Crete to slay the monstrous, half-man, half-bull creature known as the Minotaur imprisoned in the complex Labyrinth. It is noted that how Hughes identifies Otto Plath (Sylvia's father) with King Minos and Sylvia with the Minotaur, a monster born of neglect and secrecy (Moulin, 2005, p. 2). This mythic reframing aligns with Jung's observation that shadow material often appears in dreams and myths as autonomous

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figures to be confronted (Jung, 1977, p. 284). Hughes describes Plath's tendencies of sullenness and eventual suicide as manifestations of an inherited "fate" linked to her father (Moulin, 2005, p. 2). From a Jungian perspective, Hughes's mythologizing of the scenario reflects his attempt to externalize and grapple with overwhelming psychic darkness. Sylvia's complicated relationship with her father is further illustrated in "The Shot," where Hughes portrays her as a bullet fired by her father's death, her real target always the paternal ghost. By finally naming and narrating these forces, Hughes moves toward integrating the shadow rather than remaining silently possessed by it.

Jung's theory of the anima and animus, the inner contrasexual archetypes, provides another frame for Hughes's portrayal of Plath. At their wedding, Plath appears in Hughes's poem "A Pink Wool Knitted Dress" as "ocean depth brimming with God," a line that reveals her role as an archetypal anima-figure: a muse, a goddess, and a spiritual mediator. Plath, conversely, was haunted by her animus, most powerfully represented by her father. Hughes suggests that Otto Plath's image dominated Sylvia's psyche, becoming a destructive internal presence that drives her both to poetic achievement and to despair (Moulin, 2005, p. 1). In Jungian terms, this represents animus possession, when the inner masculine overwhelms the ego of the woman. By voicing these patterns in *Birthday Letters*, Hughes performs the crucial Jungian step of seeing through the projection. In the final poem, "Red," Hughes corrects his earlier misperception of Plath's essence, acknowledging her vulnerable "blue" behind the fiery "red." This belated recognition signals a partial reconciliation of anima and animus images, a symbolic *coniunctio*—the integration of conscious and unconscious aspects

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of the psyche.

Hughes also emerges in this book as a wounded healer. Shattered by Plath's suicide, he spent decades in silence before transforming his wound into testimony. In the poem "Epiphany" is another example: Hughes recalls ignoring a wounded fox-cub offered for sale in London, later interpreting it as a missed omen for his tragic marriage. Panecka interprets the fox-cub as a symbolic messenger from the unconscious, which Hughes failed to recognize at the time but reclaims in retrospect (2018, p. 53). By illustrating the scene, Hughes integrates a once-isolated fragment of psychic experience into a healing journey of revisiting his mental wounds so to bear them consciously.

Through the lens of Jungian psychology, *Birthday Letters* itself can be seen as Hughes's ritual of individuation. The poems confront shadow projections, wrestle with anima and animus images, and ultimately enact the archetype of the wounded healer. While the collection does not erase tragedy, it transforms trauma into meaning, allowing Hughes to achieve a measure of psychic integration.

4.2 *Howls & Whispers:* A Private Finale

Hughes's final published collection during his lifetime, *Howls & Whispers* (1998), exists in the shadow of *Birthday Letters*. Published in only 110 copies in collaboration with the artist Leonard Baskin, which carries the air of secrecy and marginality (Gifford, 2011, p. 80). While *Birthday Letters* offered Hughes's most public account of his relationship with Sylvia Plath, *Howls & Whispers* represents its private counterpart, releasing poems that Hughes considered too intimate or raw for wider circulation. The collection thus takes its place more as a psychological document:

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a final confrontation with the shadow elements of a life-long struggle.

Howls & Whispers can be read as the poet's last attempt at individuation—an effort to achieve some measure of psychic wholeness through confronting grief, guilt, and the inexorable presence of Plath as both muse and haunting figure. Yet the poems also testify to the impossibility of full integration. Rather than redemption, this finale offers a form of tragic consciousness, an acknowledgment of limits that resonates with Jung's assertion that individuation often proceeds through suffering and confrontation rather than resolution (Jung, 2015, p. 36). The title itself dramatizes this polarity: "howls" evoke eruptions of unconscious pain and trauma, while "whispers" suggest the ego's quiet and tentative attempts to narrate or contain them. This wording corresponds to Jung's model of individuation, where integration requires the ego to acknowledge the disruptive energies of the unconscious without being overwhelmed by them.

In Jungian psychology, the anima represents the inner feminine in the male psyche, a mediating figure that often emerges in projections onto actual women (Jung, 1951/2015, p. 24). For Hughes, Plath consistently functioned as anima figure—both muse and destructive presence. In *Howls & Whispers*, however, the anima appears fractured and wounded. The title poem, "Howls & Whispers," refuses to lay blame directly at Plath's feet. Instead, it depicts her as a victim of external forces—that from mother, friends, doctors—who "poured" words into her ears while she "argued with death" (Hughes, 2012, p. 1179). The rhetorical questions dramatize Hughes's bafflement and helplessness, suggesting the anima as a silenced figure, cut off from authentic dialogue. This echoes Jung's warning that the anima, when wounded or

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distorted, becomes destructive, leading to psychic disorientation (Jung, 1951/2015, p. 34). Hughes's shifting portrayal of Plath here may be read as an attempt to reconfigure the anima image, to rescue it from earlier demonization and to acknowledge its vulnerability. Yet the unresolved tone also underlines the incompleteness of that integration.

The finale culminates in "The Offers," its longest poem and, which is described by Middlebrook as the "definitive poem" of Hughes's marriage (2003, p. 81). Of 118 lines, it is not only the longest poem in the sequence but also the most sustained attempt by Hughes to confront the psychic legacy of his life with Sylvia Plath, while engaging himself in an imaginary conversation with the "ghost" of his wife. Rather than closing the narrative arc of *Birthday Letters*, "The Offers" dramatizes what Jung would call the confrontation with the unconscious, an encounter that resists resolution but compels transformation. The expressions in this poem are hesitant and pondering in tone, notably via Hughes's repetitive use of "seemed" while facing what is left from his memory and current vision of Plath:

"You **seemed** older – death had aged you a little."

"But you **seemed** not to know the part you were playing"

"You **seemed** to have no idea you were yourself.

…Yet you were

So much yourself my brain's hemispheres

Seemed to have twisted slightly out of phase"

"It **seemed** you had finessed your return to the living"

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(Hughes, 2012, pp. 1181-1183)

This mentality embodies what Jung (1951/2015, p. 186) theorized as the collapse of the ego's certainties when faced with unconscious contents. From a Jungian perspective, such uncertainty is the hallmark of a psyche undergoing individuation, where the ego must open to accommodate shadow elements. In Hughes's case, these shadow elements include guilt, complicity and the haunting presence of Plath's death. Unlike the mythic analogies of *Birthday Letters*, which often frame Plath within archetypal narratives, *Howls & Whispers* strips away protective mediations. The raw exposure of "The Offers" itself is therapeutic, embodying the psychic descent necessary for individuation. Hughes does not press for a narrative closure, but enacts the paradoxical truth of healing: integration requires not finality but the ongoing acceptance of psychic complexity. Thus, "The Offers" can be read as Hughes's concluded recognition that the psyche's wounds can never be fully healed but remain as entrances to dialogues with the unconscious. This void of closure is not a failure but an affirmation to Jung's insight that individuation is a lifelong process. The poem's definitive quality lies precisely in its ambivalence: it is not the end of a story but the enactment of an ongoing confrontation with shadow, grief and memory.

Conclusion

This study has treated Ted Hughes's poetic career as a sustained enactment of psychic and ecological healing, illuminated through the lens of Jung's analytical psychology. The core argument of this paper is that Hughes's healing poetics cannot be reduced to a fascination with violence or myth, as some critics have suggested (Sagar,

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1978; Kendall, 2009). Rather, his imaginative engagement with archetypes, myths, and natural landscapes demonstrates what Jung described as individuation: the lifelong task of integrating shadow, anima/animus, and the Self. Hughes's poetry gives form to psychic ordeal—shadow recognition, descent into chaos, confrontation with trauma—and channels these destructive energies into creative and symbolic expression. Such transformation is the essence of what Jung regards as the therapeutic function of art: a symbolic dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious. Beginning with the confrontation of shadow energies in *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal*, moving through the alchemical disintegration of *Crow* and *Cave Birds*, and reaching toward spiritual renewal in *Remains of Elmet* and *River*, Hughes's oeuvre embodies a long and difficult individuation process. Finally, Hughes's late works reveal the paradox of healing. In *Birthday Letters*, he confronts the ghosts of Sylvia Plath with mythic and psychological honesty, while in *Howls & Whispers*, particularly "The Offers," he accepts the impossibility of a final resolution. As Brain (2001) and Middlebrook (2003) observe, this improbability of closure is itself therapeutic, aligning with Jung's insistence that individuation can never be completed and it is a lifelong dialogue with the unconscious. Hughes's poetics thus advocates not triumph over trauma but the ongoing courage to engage it meaningfully. To conclude, Hughes emerges as a poet-shaman whose works embody both psychic individuation and ecological renewal. His poetry stages archetypal encounters with shadow and death, yet transforms them into symbolic pathways toward wholeness. In the end, his oeuvre affirms the power of poetry to mediate between destruction and renewal, psyche and nature, memory and

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reconciliation, an enduring contribution to the human's pursuit of meaning and balance in modern times.

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The Growth of Vegetal Perception in "The Weed": The Emergence of Plant Subjectivity in Elizabeth Bishop's Poetry

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Abstract

Elizabeth Bishop's poetry abounds with vegetal imagery. She not only depicts the plants' forms and growth but also endows them with perception, emotion and movement, transforming them into subjects with consciousness and thought. Grounded in the theoretical framework of "phytocriticism", this study takes "The Weed" as the central text to explore how Bishop, through her delicate portrayal of vegetal perception and movement, constructs an "intersubjective relationship" between human beings and plants. The weed that grows from the human body symbolizes the mutual penetration of life and language, revealing a non-anthropocentric logic of perception and an awareness of ecological balance. In this transformation, plants cease to be passive objects of observation and become subjects capable of engaging in an equal dialogue with the poet. This study will also draw on other poems such as "Florida" and "The Moose" to reveal how Bishop further develops her vegetal narrativity and ecological vision of coexistence. Bishop's vegetal poetics turns the sensibility of plants into a poetic mode of perception. Within the intertwining of language, life and consciousness, her poetry accomplishes a transition from the representation of nature to an ecology of coexistence.

Keywords: Elizabeth Bishop, "The Weed", phytocriticism, vegetal perception, vegetal subjectivity

Elizabeth Bishop is renowned for her acute observational power and meticulous linguistic precision. Her poetry abounds with natural elements including animals and

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plants that are far from mere background scenery; instead they constitute an integral part of her perceptual and ecological imagination. Whether the elms, sugar maples, and silver birches in “The Moose,” the “pink swim-bladder like a big peony” in “The Fish,” or the islands covered with blooming flowers in “North Haven,” Bishop consistently animates plants and natural landscapes with vivid and embodied presence. Yet despite the prominent role of vegetal imagery in her poetry, scholarly attention to plants as perceptive, agentic subjects within Bishop’s work remains remarkably limited.

In existing international scholarship, Byun and Sehee (2016) examine Bishop’s self-positioning as “a minor female Wordsworth,” arguing that she both inherits and critiques the Romantic nature tradition by denaturalizing the feminine and femininized nature. She didn’t see nature as a mirror of human morality but rather as an independent, completely self-existent entity. Neimneh and Abussamen (2018), adopting an ecofeminist perspective, analyzing Bishop’s animal poems and reveal her depictions of vulnerable nonhuman life articulate anti-patriarchal and anti-anthropocentric ecological ethics. These studies mainly focus on animal imagery or broader ecological critique, paying insufficient attention to plants as beings with their own perceptual capacities and narrative agency. In Chines scholarship, critics such as Wang Wenfei (2011) have emphasized Bishop’s ecological consciousness, natural ethics and environmental sensibility. Sheng Yan’s comparative study of Bishop and Marianne Moore’s versions of “The Fish” argues that Moore’s nature writing is more realistic, while Bishop’s is marked by imagination and creation. Although these studies discuss both animals and plants as part of Bishop’s ecological thought, they largely remain within a generalized

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ecocritical framework and lack systematic inquiry into plants as distinct non-human subjects with perceptual and agentive capacities.

"Our" world, in turn, is without fail vegetal. None of it would have been in existence were it not for the life activity of plants (Marder, 2023, p. 3). In contrast to the limited attention to plants in Bishop studies, phytocriticism has recently emerged as an influential branch of ecocriticism internationally. Plants have long occupied a marginal position within Western thought. As Laist notes, plants appear to inhabit a time-sense, life cycle, a desire-structure and a morphology that is so utterly alien that it is easy and even tempting to deny their status as animate organisms (Laist, 2013, p. 12). For Aristotle, all living beings, including animals and humans, are alive by virtue of sharing this rudimentary vitality with plants (Marder, 2016, p. 45). Since Aristotle, Western philosophy has relegated plants to *anima nutritive* (the nutritive soul) while elevating animals to *anima sentitiva* (the sensitive soul), a hierarchy that shaped centuries of thinking about vegetal life (De Chadarevian, 1996, p. 26). However, scientific developments have radically challenged this tradition. Charles Darwin's *The Power of Movement in Plants* (1880) proposed that plant roots possess perceptual and information-processing capacities analogous to the animal brain – an idea that transformed European understandings of plant behavior and agency (Darwin and Darwin, 2016, p. 419). In the twentieth century, plant neurobiology further demonstrated that vegetal sensitivity isn't confined to anomalous species like the "touch-me-not," but is in fact characteristic of the entire plant kingdom. Plants are now understood to perceive, decide, learn, remember, and respond dynamically to their

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environments.

With the development of these scientific achievements, philosophers such as Michael Marder have significantly reshaped plant studies in the humanities. They argue that plants constitute a crucial site for rethinking subjectivity, ethics and ontology from interdisciplinary perspectives. Building on such frameworks, phytocriticism is labelled as "the particular mode of botanico-criticism enunciated and put into practice in this study – one that draws from neurobiological standpoints that confer greater agencies and capacities to plants" (Ryan, 2018, p. 11). It thus offers a compelling approach for re-examining the status of plants as active participants in poetic worlds rather than passive objects of depiction. Despite the rise of phytocriticism in contemporary literary studies, its application to Elizabeth Bishop's works remains virtually limited. This study therefore takes Bishops "The Weed" as its central text and other poems such as "Florida" and "The Moose" as complementary materials to trace the development of Bishop's vegetal poetics. Drawing on the theoretical framework of phytocriticism, this article explores how Bishop employs delicate depictions of vegetal perception and embodiment to transform the plant from an observed natural object into a living subject capable of entering an intersubjective relation with the human. By analyzing the poem's vegetal narrativity, this article highlights the significance of plant subjectivity and contribute to the broader expansion of phytocriticism in the study of modern poetry.

1. The Emergence of Vegetal Perception: From Natural Object to Embodied Subject

Since Bishop finished "The Weed" in 1942, she sent the poem to Marianne

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Moore for criticism and advice. It emerges from a formative period in which Bishop's poetic imagination was becoming increasingly attuned to the natural world. This sensitivity to nonhuman life was strengthened not only by her living environment with rich ecological elements but also by the influence of Marianna Moore, her mentor and close friend. Moore's meticulous observational poetics and sustained attention to natural elements provided Bishop with precise depiction and ethical attentiveness to the natural world. Consequently, Bishop gradually cultivates a poetics of close looking that later enables her to perceive vegetal beings not as static metaphors but as dynamic entities with perceptual capacities of their own. Bishop's sensitivity to vegetal life was not only cultivated through close observation but also shaped profoundly by the ecological environment of Key West. In 1938, she left New York for Florida, where the abundance of animals and plants profoundly expanded her sensory imagination. Florida's tropical vegetation exposes Bishop to rhythms of plant life obviously different from those of the northern flora she has previously known. She spent evenings walking along the shoreline, gathering shells, studying local flora, and memorizing their names (Fountain & Brazeau, 1994, p. 71). This immersive engagement informed poems such as "Florida," where vegetation is rendered as dense and vibrantly alive. Her relationship to plant life extended from observation to cultivation. In a letter for Moore in 1939, Bishop described her "great plating plan," having planted "a ravaged-looking palm tree, and I hope to get a ten-foot Night Blooming Cereus planted in the front yard" (Bishop, 1994, p. 85). Even after returning to New York in the 1940s, she carried seeds from Key West and planted them on her apartment's tiny terrace. Apparently, she desires to keep

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contact with vegetal life despite the constraints of urban living. These experiences cultivate in Bishop an attentiveness that views plants not as decorative objects but as perceptual beings, which profoundly shapes the emergence of vegetal subjectivity in "The Weed."

What's more, Bishop confessed that she "prefer(s) the Florida landscape—all this dampness and leafiness is a little oppressive" in a September 1940 letter to Marianne Moore. She also repeatedly in the letter urged Moore to visit her in Key West, insisting that, "I'll keep right on saying it until you say 'yes' or 'stop'" (Bishop, 1994, p. 95). Indeed, Bishop found the tropical environment to be a considerable source of inspiration, with its humid air, rapid plant growth and dense forests. Her engagement with vegetal life during this period extended beyond observation to include sustained encounters with botanical knowledge. In a later letter to Moore written in 1943, Bishop mentions reading H. F. Macmillan's *Tropical Gardening and Planting*, *with Special Reference to Ceylon.* Despite its author's "slightly snobbish" tone and digressions into colonial anecdotes, she describes it as "the best book of the sort I've seen" (Bishop, 1994, p.117). Significantly, Bishop reflects on the act of identifying plants as both "rather pointless" and peculiarly satisfying, noting the experience of encountering a flower in the yard and then finding it again in a book. Her observation that "so many things are misnamed in Key West" and that "no one knows where anything comes from" (Bishop, 1994, p.117) reveals an acute awareness of the instability of botanical naming and origin, reinforcing her sensitivity to plants as living beings embedded in complex ecological and cultural histories.

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This sensorial experience finds poetic expression in “Florida,” in which the state’s identity is inextricably linked to its vegetation. The opening lines of the poem describe Florida as a land “The state with the prettiest name, / the state that floats in brackish water, / held together by mangrove roots / that bear while living oysters in clusters,” (Bishop, 2011, p. 33) presenting vegetation as an active force that shapes the land’s physical structure and sustains its networks of biological interdependence. In *Timaeus*, Plato envisions the human as a celestial plant with the roots connecting the rational principle of vitality housed in our heads to the supernal sphere of ideas (Marder, 2023, p. 48). It’s important to note that rootedness is displaced from the soil to the intellect, and vegetal morphology becomes a metaphor for transcendence. Unlike Plato’s celestial plant, the mangroves don’t reach upward towards an ideal realm; instead, they extend horizontally and downward into unstable and “brackish water.” “Mangrove roots” function not as passive landscape elements but as active, shaping forces of the environment, modeling a form of vegetal agency that prefigures the autonomous perceptual life later attributed to the weed in “The Weed.” The state may appear fluid and unstable, but it’s vegetal life that actively stabilizes and sustains its existence. In contrast to Plato’s vegetal rootedness, Bishop’s roots signal immersion in the environment, mutual dependence, and survival within fragile ecological conditions. The mangrove roots that bear “living oysters” and leave dead “skeletons” indicates that plant life shapes growth and decay within the same system, bringing vegetal life back into ecological reality.

The simile “green hummocks / like ancient cannon-balls sprouting grass”

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(Bishop, 2011, p. 33) is particularly revealing in Bishop's vegetal imagination." The image "cannon-balls" invokes the language of warfare and it suggests violence and destruction, reinforcing the earlier description of the swamp as "dotted as if bombarded" (Bishop, 2011, p. 33). However, this martial imagery is immediately transformed by "sprouting grass." The "cannon-balls" are thus recast as a figure of vegetal renewal, where earth and grass absorb and overwrite the memory of violence. The adjective "ancient" distances the violence int time, while the act of sprouting brings the image into the present and ongoing rhythms of vegetal growth. As a result, the landscape is reshaped and revitalized into a living and regenerative surface. The comparison of "hummocks" to "cannon-balls" underscores how vegetal processes as a quiet and persistent agency counteract and replace linear histories of human's conflict. Therefore, "cannon-balls sprouting grass" exemplify Bishop's broader poetic vision, in which plants actively shape the world and vegetal life is no longer background scenery but a formative presence.

Throughout "Florida," Bishop describes plants in ways that highlight their movement, sound, and material effects rather than treating them as mere symbols. The presence of the palm trees is indicated aurally through their movement in the breeze, as shown in the line "The palm trees clatter in the stiff breeze / like the bills of the pelicans" (Bishop, 2011, p. 33). This simile aligns vegetal motion with animal behavior, suggesting that plant life participates in the same acoustic field as living creatures. The palm trees' movement produces noise that actively enters the poem's soundscape, contributing to the sensory density of the environment. Similarly, the tropical rain is

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described as “freshening the tide-looped strings of fading shells,” (Bishop, 2011, p. 33) thereby suggesting a constant interaction between plant life, water, and the shoreline. Rain here is not merely atmospheric but functions as a regenerative force that renews coastal materials shaped by tidal movement. The word “freshen” implies both cleansing and reactivation, reinforcing the sense of cyclical exchange governing Florida’s ecology. Even vegetal remnants such as “stumps and dead trees,” (Bishop, 2011, p. 33) continues to exert a sensory influence, with their charred surfaces evoking an appearance similar to “black velvet.” Through this tactile and visual metaphor, dead plant remains materially expressive, contributing texture and atmosphere rather than disappearing into inert background. These images present Florida’s vegetation as something that actively shapes the atmosphere, soundscape, and ecological activity of the place. Bishop’ attention to these sensory and material dimensions reflects her growing recognition that plants are not passive background scenery for human observation but a dynamic participant in the making of place, leading to her later and more explicit explorations of vegetal agency and perception.

In “The Weed,” Bishop constructs a poetic space in which vegetal life emerges not as passive scenery but as a sensate subject. The poem’s premise – a weed taking root in the speaker’s body – dissolves conventional boundaries between human and plant, signaling a mode of perception in which vegetal existence acquires agency and experiential vitality. The opening lines of “The Weed” dramatize the very moment in which vegetal perception enters the poem as an active force. The speaker dreams of lying “dead, and meditating,” immobilized within a “cold and close-built bower,”

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(Bishop, 2011, p. 22) where both body and thought are frozen in as a state of suspended animation. From the perspective of phytocriticism, one of the fundamental differences between humans and plants lies in their divergent experiences of time (Jiang Lifu, 2025, p.111). Time becomes distorted in the lines "for a year, a minute, and hour," (Bishop, 2011, p. 22) a collapse that signals the dissolution of human temporal experience. Generally speaking, ordinary human consciousness distinguishes sharply between minutes, hours and years, but Bishop here renders these units interchangeable. This leads to a temporality that more closely resembles the slow, continuous, and non-linear rhythms characteristic of vegetal life. Bishop allows the poem to enter a liminal, non-anthropoecentric temporal zone in which vegetal temporality becomes perceptually available even before the weed appears. Thus, the blurred time experience is not merely a metaphor for death but a poetic enactment of plant time, preparing the ground for the emergence of vegetal agency. The frozen, dreamlike state in which the speaker lies "unchanged together" with the "final thought" represents the slow, perceptible processes of plants, whose growth and internal movements often evade human perception.

Into this suspended temporal field, Bishop introduces the sudden motion of the weed: first "as startling, there, to every sense," and "then it dropped/to insistent, cautious creeping in the region of the heart" (Bishop, 2011, p. 22). This movement is a distinctly vegetal mode of action: slow, oriented towards environmental stimuli. Traditional literary criticism has tended to treat plants as metaphors subordinate to human subjects, overlooking their autonomy and experiential depth (Jiang Lifu, 2025,

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p. 110). In contrast, Recent literary studies of plants are beginning to focus on the representation of the intelligence, behavior, and subjectivity of the vegetal world in works of poetry and prose, fiction, and nonfiction. Importantly, these new texts release the vegetal from a background position in literary discourse and underscore the vital role of plant narration, voice, presence, and sensoriality (Gagliano & Ryan xvi). Bishop's depiction of the weed exemplifies this vegetal turn: the plant does not symbolize a psychological state but acts as an agent capable of initiating perception, breaking the speaker's "desperate sleep," (Bishop, 2011, p. 22) and asserting its presence through tactile and sensory means.

As "a light young weed/had pushed up through the heart and its/green head was nodding on the breast," (Bishop, 2011, p. 22) it functions not as a symbolic projection of the speaker's consciousness but as an autonomous organism whose rhythms of movement, growth, and response arise from internal biological imperatives. Naturally, it introduces a nonhuman vitality into the poem, which begins to replace the inert statis of the human body lying "dead, and meditating." To some degree, Bishop dramatizes a moment of ecological succession at the level of ontology. The transition from immobile and frozen human body to the dynamic emergence of vegetal life suggests a rotation or relay between human and plant forms of existence. The weed's rising movement indicates that life continues, transforms, and transfers across species boundaries. Where human thought has reached its "final" state and become "frozen," vegetal life begins again, embodying a regenerative principle that replaces and revitalizes the human domain. This transformation of the plant into an active subject aligns with what Fan

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Yuefen identifies as the core of the contemporary "vegetal turn," in which plants become the very origin of textual interpretation and are endowed with subjectivity that dismantles the traditional subject-object binary (Fan Yuefen, 2024, p. 107). This dynamic is brought to its most profound expression in the poem's closing lines:

The weed stood in the severed heart.

"What are you doing there?" I asked.

It lifted its head all dripping wet

(with my own thoughts?)

and answered then: "I grow," it said,

"but to divide your heart again." (Bishop, 2011, p. 23)

The speaker, formerly the center of perception, becomes the one who asks, whereas the plant becomes the cone who answers. The weed "stands" in the "severed heart," occupying the very center of human interiority conventionally regarding as the core of emotion and consciousness. The plant's presence in this intimate anatomical and symbolic space is a radical displacement of human-centered subjectivity, as the vegetal being takes root in the place where human being was once presumed sovereign.

The vegetal subjectivity becomes more tangible when Bishop describes how "it grew an inch like a blade of grass; / next, one leaf shot out" (Bishop, 2011, p. 22). The plant's capacity to develop is based on its own internal rhythms, independent of human intention or perception, a temporal mode intrinsic to vegetal life. The plant's sensitivity is highlighted as well in the lines of "the nervous roots reached to each side" (Bishop, 2011, p. 22). The adjective "nervous" subtly attributes a perceptual agency to the plant,

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suggesting its ability to respond to the surroundings. Contemporary plant studies, emerging from the scientific development of plant neurobiology, demonstrates that such sensitivity is a fundamental characteristic of vegetal life. Plants have the equivalent of a nervous system as well as an electro-mechanical pulsation, or what he labeled affectionately the vegetal "heartbeat" (Shepherd, 2009, p. 104). This insight resonates with a longer scientific tradition. As early as the nineteenth century, Charles Darvin and his son suggested that plant roots function in ways comparable to an animal brain, a proposal later termed as the "root-brain hypothesis" (Marder, 2016, p. 87). From this perspective, the weed's "nervous roots" are not merely figurative but can be read as poetic rendering of vegetal cognition rooted in biological sensitivity and environmental responsiveness. The weed's exploratory roots therefore signify biological function and even a mode of active engagement with the world. Such engagement reflects a broader understanding of vegetal subjectivity, which is not concentrated in a single organ or function but dispersed throughout the plant body, from roots to leaves and shoots (Marder, 2016, p. 42). In this sense, the weed's growth and sensitivity do not merely support life but constitute a distributed mode of perception and agency. As the weed has rooted in the speaker's heart, its movement enacts what Ryan refers to as "co-enervation" (Ryan, 2018, p. 83).

When the weeds lift its head "all dripping wet," the following parenthetical question further blurs the boundaries between plant and human cognition. It prompts a phytocritical thinking: whether the plant's thoughts emerge from the human, or whether the plant's presence has begun to absorb or reconfigure human consciousness. The

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weed's reply brings a crucial conceptual turn. "I grow… but to divide your heart again" becomes an act of disruption, reconfiguration and reopening. The plant's purpose is not to heal the heart but to redivide it, making space within human interiority. Symbolically, this division means the breaking of anthropocentric perception and allows vegetal agency intervenes, proliferates and redefines the boundaries of experience. Moreover, the biosemioticians of today have likewise argued that language is "pervasive in all life" (Wheeler & Dunkerley, 2008, p. 8). In other words, semiotic exchanges are not exclusive to human beings but are inherent in the vital activities of all living forms. In "The Weed", growth becomes the plant's language, its mode of being and its assertion of agency. It's an ongoing iterative process of the human toward the vegetal being, mirroring ecological rhythms of decay and regeneration.

By granting the plant's own movement, Bishop destabilizes anthropocentric boundaries and establishes a space in which human and plant forms of being begin to overlap. She reconfigures vegetal life as an autonomous perceptual subject whose rhythms and agencies interrupt and reshape the stasis of the human world. This shift not only attests to the plants' inherent vitality but also provides the foundation for a more reciprocal mode of interaction, where the plant's presence initiates an emotional response, mutual influence, and the potential for intersubjective coexistence. As Yan Jianhua and Fang Fang (2022) state, human live by consuming plants and return, in death, to nourish them, so this reciprocal corporeality constitutes the material basis for what may be called vegetal empathy. (p. 91) Intercorporeality brings to the fore the potent awareness that human and nonhuman bodies are subjected to the same

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circumstances and partake in a common fate (Ryan, 2018, p. 75). In this sense, Bishop's reconstruction of the plant agency is an ontological recognition of the intertwined fates and shared corporealities that bind human and vegetal life.

2. Vegetal Empathy: The Intersubjective Symbiotic Relation Between Humans and Plants

Contemporary environmental ethicists enlist the term "bioempathy" to specify the moral implications of empathy for nonhuman beings, particularly in relation to intrinsic value theory (Ryan, 2018, p. 92). Since the vegetal being is presented as an autonomous perceptual subject, subsequent scenes of "The Weed" reveal a deeper intersubjective entanglement between plant and human. This entanglement is vividly depicted in the poem's portrayal of the weed's corporeal intrusion into the human body, which can be understood through the lens of vegetal empathy (bioempathy). As John Charles Ryan asserts,

> Bioempathy is not a distant yearning for identification with nonhuman lives, but, in contrast, denotes the deep-seated corporeal resonances that already exist between emplaced beings. From this point of view, human-plant entanglement is a persistent material negotiation enacted in the present rather than an inaccessible Romantic ideal attained at an undeterminable future juncture. (Ryan, 2018, p. 84)

Such assertion underscores that human-plant relations arise from embodied interdependence, that is, an intercorporeality in which each life form affects and is affected by the other. It is within this mutual influence that Bishop's poem situates the

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encounter between the speaker and the weed. The human body, as both host and medium, supports botanical growth and participates in a shared ecological vitality. Before the plant enters into direct exchange with the speaker, its agency is already evident:

> The stem grew thick. The nervous roots
>
> reached to each side; the graceful head
>
> changed its position mysteriously,
>
> since there was neither sun nor moon
>
> to catch its young attention. (Bishop, 2011, p. 22)

The weed exhibits a commonly perceptual responsiveness of vegetal species, which aligns with modern botanical science emerging out of plant neurobiology. Plant neurobiology underscores the "downright erroneous" ascription of utter passivity to plants (Marder 2012a, 2). Reasonably speaking, the weed's movements arise from its own perceptual logic even in the absence of "sun or moon." When the weed "changed its position mysteriously," this kind of vegetal subjectivity underlies bioempathy, a mode of vitality grounded in life-processes shared species. Its gesture prepares the conditions for its later intercorporeal exchange with the human speaker. In this sense, Bishop dissolves the hierarchy in which pants are passive responders to external conditions.

This is further intensified when "the rooted heart began to change / (not beat) and then it split apart / and from it broke a flood of water" (Bishop, 2011, p. 22). The heart here is no longer exclusively human; it is transformed into a hybrid organ of

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vegetal life. The rupture symbolized a release of vitality through which plant and human partake in a reciprocal exchange. The "two rivers" flowing from the split heart transforms the scene from an intimate bodily event into a figure of expansive ecological circulation. The rivers, "one to the right, one to the left," evoke a symmetrical bifurcation suggesting a redistribution of life energy. Meanwhile, the splitting of the human heart initiates a broader metabolic process in which vitality is no longer contained within the human body but released outward into the surrounding environment. In tradition, rivers often symbolizes renewal, cyclical return and the movement of life across boundaries. Bishop employs this imagery to suggest that the human heart, once the seat of interiority, now becomes the source of a more-than-human flow.

It's worth noting that Bishop's changes of water imagery from "river" to "stream" and finally to "cascades" charts a progressive intensification of vegetal agency and intercorporeal exchange. The initial emergence of "two rivers" from the split heart marks the moment when human vitality escapes its anthropocentric enclosure and enters a wider ecological field. The term "river" registers the first stage of dispersal, in which human interiority becomes redistributed into an ecological circuit shared with the plant, marking the first movement towards bioempathy. As the poem continues, these rivers condense into "rushing, half-clear streams," (Bishop, 2011, p. 22) a shift that refines the flow from macrocosmic dispersal to microcosmic sensorial movement. Their "half-clear" quality highlights their hybrid composition: a fluid no longer entirely human nor purely vegetal but a liminal substance in which species boundaries begin to

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dissolve. The stream becomes a conduit for vegetal semiotics, preparing for the following "illuminated scenes" and "racing images" the plant imparts. To be honest, the water imagery acts as the medium for the interspecies communication.

In the line describing how "the ribs made of them two cascades," (Bishop, 2011, p. 22) the word "rib" functions as a pivotal site of semantic and symbolic convergence, carrying a dual reference that deepens the poem's exploration of bioempathy. On the one hand, ribs undeniably evoke the human anatomical structure: the curved bones that surround the chest and protect the heart; on the other hand, the term resonates with botanical vocabulary, where it refers to the primary veins of a leaf, the structural channels through which nutrients, water, and energy circulate within vegetal bodies. The dual reference is indeed a poetic strategy that collapses the distinction between human anatomy and plant morphology. When the poem states that the ribs "made of them two cascades," it suggests that the human ribcage has been transformed into something akin to the vascular structure of a plant, a system of channels reconfigured to sustain vegetal flow. In other words, the structure that previously protected the human heart now functions as the structural support for a hydraulic system analogous to that of a plant. The human body no longer merely contains the plant, whereas it becomes plant-like in its function, form and circulation. They are subjected to the same material processes and thus partake in a common fate. The rib, as a shared morphological feature, acts as a hinge between species. By using a term belonging to both biological kingdoms, Bishop makes the deep anatomical kinship underlying vegetal empathy visible, thereby demonstrating the interconnectedness of all living things. The cascades now serve as

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the plant's vascular system, suggesting that the human body has been repurposed to support plant life. In this light, the dual meaning of "rib" is not a linguistic coincidence, but rather a philosophical consideration. The human body is inherently susceptible to being interpreted in a vegetal sense.

Their shared fate becomes materially concrete when vegetal fluid literally touches the human body: "A few drops fell upon my face / and in my eyes, so I could see" (Bishop, 2011, p. 23). The plant's water becomes the medium through which the speaker gains vision, indicating that perception is now coproduced by the vegetal other. This moment marks a shift in visual clarity and a fundamental redistribution of perceptual agency. What the speaker "could see" is inseparable from what the weed itself generates, which embodies the vegetal-human reciprocity. As Ryan notes, bioempathy therefore reveals that human manipulation of herbal plants is not reducible to asymmetrical acts of ascendancy over vegetal nature. While we affect the medicinal plant, so the plant impacts us in return. (Ryan, 2018, p. 95) The human heart provides the water that nourishes and burdens the weed, and the weed transforms that same water into a perceptual vehicle that alters human vision. The "light" and "small, illuminated scene" (Bishop, 2011, p. 23) within each drop implies that the plant generates its own semiotic content — units of vegetal meaning that humans can only access through physical contact with botanical matter.

However, this poem also exposes the limits of anthropocentric empathy because empathy as "feeling into" potentizes narcissistic identification with plants, invariably leading back the egoistic self while elevating "exclusively human subjects,

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who rely on it to construct their ideal selves or to retrieve alienated features of their own existence" (Marder, 2012b, 271). Bishop's depiction resists such self-centered projection. The speaker's tentative phrasing, "I thought I saw," (Bishop, 2011, p. 23) acknowledges that the perceived phenomenon may not fully align with human perceptual frameworks. The scene does not emerge from the process of imaginative appropriation; rather, it is the result of material, bodily entanglement. This entanglement serves to ground empathy in substance rather than sentiment.

Marder points out the fact that poetry is an amenable medium for empathizing with plants and poetry can generate empathy—in its most ethical incarnation— and facilitate understanding of the vegetal registers within us. (Marder 2012b, 265) Bishop materializes this potential by letting vegetal processes drive the perceptual event. The culmination of this perceptual transformation is captured in the striking assertion that "the weed-deflected stream was made / itself of racing images" (Bishop, 2011, p. 23). The phrase "weed-deflected stream" first of all indicates that the flow of water is no longer governed by an autonomous, neutral physical trajectory; it has been redirected and reoriented by the plant. The stream is not merely passing by the weed, but has been deflected by it, which means that vegetal agency now intervenes in the very pathways of material and perceptual circulation. From a phytocritical perspective, this marks a significant shift: the plant ceases to be a passive recipient of environmental forces and instead becomes an agent that modifies, bends, and redistributes the flows that were previously associated with the human body. It's equally significant to note that the stream is not simply carrying images as a transparent conduit; it is made of them. Within

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the logic of phytocriticism, the line suggests that the weed generates a form of vegetal semiosis: a nonhuman production of signs and scenes that arises from the plant's own embodied processes. The images are not imposed from outside by the human mind; they are condensed within the medium of the stream as a result of the weed's deflection and agency.

By claiming that the stream "was made itself of racing images," the poem implies that the plant has transformed a human-derived fluid into an imagistic current that belongs as much to vegetal perception as to human sight. The employment of the adjective "racing" serves to further intensify this reconfiguration of perception. In contrast to the prevailing stereotypes of plant life as static, inert, or slow, Bishop portrays the imagistic field associated with the weed as dynamic, proliferating, and temporally accelerated. This movement suggests not only the speed of the stream but also the rapid succession and continual transformation of the scenes it contains. In the context of bioempathy, this "racing" quality is particularly salient: human perception is no longer anchored in a stable, self-possessed subjectivity, but is instead swept up into the plant's own rhythms of motion and change. The weed does not merely mirror the speaker's inner life; it reconfigures the field of perception by transforming water into images and flow into signification. The weed-deflected, image-laden stream is therefore not just a vivid metaphor but a figure for the very process by which vegetal life enters, alters, and co-authors human consciousness.

Bishop's portrayal of the vegetal agency – from the weed's independent movements to the water droplets that enter the speaker's eyes and generate luminous

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scenes – reveals a mode of interspecies relation grounded in material reciprocity rather than metaphorical identification. The "weed-deflected stream," composed of "racing images," exemplifies how plant life actively reorganizes perception through its own rhythms and semiotic capacities. Through the botanical resonance of the 'rib,' Bishop further imagines a shared corporeal architecture in which humans and plants co-create and co-sustain one another. This phytocritical reconfiguration of empathy and perception not only dissolves anthropocentric hierarchies but also opens the way toward a broader ecological vision. The poem's vegetal interventions begin to function not merely as sensory events but as narrative forces, shaping how environments, meanings, and relational worlds are produced. It is this emergent vegetal narrativity, and its implications for ecological coexistence, that the following section will examine in greater depth.

3. Vegetal Narrativity and Ecological Coexistence

Within the increasingly influential field of phytocriticism, scholars argue that reimagining plants as sentient, intentional, and communicative beings constitutes a necessary first step toward "empathically, reciprocally, and sustainably co-inhabiting places with them" (Ryan, 2018, p. 102). This reconfiguration challenges the longstanding Western habit of reducing plants to passive metaphors or decorative background elements. As Hall argues, imagining plants as spiritually autonomous and communicative beings enables them to enter relations of kinship—relations of care or solidarity (Hall, 2011, p. 11). Fan Yuefen similarly emphasizes that plant ethics involves delving into issues such as the life, rights, status, moral identity, and intrinsic value of

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plants within a theoretical framework. It seeks to highlight the shared aspects between plants and humans while acknowledging the distinct nature of plants, thereby promoting a more humane approach to treating them (Fan, 2024, p. 105). Such an expanded ethical and ontological awareness further supports Marder's proposition that poetry can allow vegetal life to manifest itself not as metaphor but as "the thing itself" (Marder, 2012a, p. 5), participating directly in meaning-making. This conceptual shift toward vegetal agency is closely tied to recent ecological theories of nonlinear time.

Drawing on Evan Thompson's neurophenomenology, Siewers argues that ecopoetic narratives reveal "time-plex" human encounters with the natural world – experiences that disrupt linear temporal models and destabilize inherited assumptions about time's relationship to space (Siewers, 2011, p. 109). Such a reconceptualization of time requires readers to move beyond anthropocentric chronologies and attend to the rhythms embedded in nonhuman processes. To attend to these rhythms is, in Wood's words, to perceive "the invisible in the heart of the visible," the latent temporal articulations that structure existence beyond the immediately perceptible (Wood, 2003, p. 215). Bishop's "The Weed" emerges as a poem whose narrative and temporal structure are profoundly shaped by vegetal life, for the weed's own growth initiates and propels the poem's entire narrative trajectory. The weed disrupts the speaker's frozen interiority, and each subsequent movement—its leaf shooting out "like a twisting, waving flag," (Bishop, 2011, p. 22) its stem thickening, its "nervous roots" (Bishop, 2011, p. 22) reaching outward—constitutes a distinct narrative event. For Marder, reformulating the Western metaphysical tradition with regard to vegetal life, botanical

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events mark the passage of time and the temporalization of human awareness through material-semiotic processes of "germination and growth, flourishing, dehiscence, blossoming, coming to fruition, and finally fermentation and decay" (Marder, 2013, p. 94). At this stage, vegetal temporality opens onto a deeper existential register. As Marder further observes, plant roots are sensitive to the "under-world," a domain that, for humans, often signifies death or, at best, unconscious existence (Marder, 2016, p. 88). The weed's actions create a sequence of transitions that align with Marder's botanical processes: emergence, expansion, differentiation, and rupture. In this sense, the plant becomes a storyteller, structuring time according to its own rhythms, which differ fundamentally from human linear chronology. As Marder argues, plant growth illuminates the modularity of the past and the future—multiple parallel pasts and futures that coexist with one another at the level of roots and branches respectively, as well as within each of these organs of vegetal morphology (Marder, 2023, p. 52). This model of vegetal temporality illuminates Bishop's inclination to allow narrative meaning to emerge through layered rhythmic patterns.

This narrative agency becomes most striking when the stream released from the split human heart is redirected by the plant and becomes "made / itself of racing images." The stream no longer functions merely as a physical substance, but transforms into a semiotic flow, rapidly shifting scenes generated through vegetal intervention. The acceleration of the images— "racing"—introduces a nonhuman temporality, one that departs from the slow, stable rhythms conventionally attributed to plants. Instead, Bishop depicts vegetal life as capable of producing dynamic, even urgent, temporal

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patterns. This corresponds with Siewers's theory of "time-plexity," which posits that non-human processes give rise to layered and intersecting temporal modes that extend beyond the confines of anthropocentric experience. The poem thus dramatizes how vegetal agency can reorganize not only perception, as seen in the droplets that enter the speaker's eyes, but also the fundamental temporal logic through which narrative develops.

This vegetal narrativity is not unique to "The Weed" but resonates across Bishop's broader ecological imagination. Bishop's vegetal narrativity appears in "The Moose," where "elms," "sugar maples," and "silver birches" form more than a descriptive background to the bus journey; they generate the ecological atmosphere through which the poem's temporality unfolds. Unlike the overtly dynamic weed of "The Weed," the trees in "The Moose" participate in a slow, expansive vegetal temporality, shaping the poem's gradual pacing and contemplative tone. First published in the *New Yorker* on July 15, 1972, "The Moose" was inspired by a bus journey Elizabeth Bishop took from Nova Scotia to Boston in 1946. Bishop worked on the poem intermittently for more than twenty years and finally completed it when she agreed to read at Harvard's 1972 commencement ceremony. The poem captures not only the landscape of the Maritime provinces and the seemingly uneventful atmosphere within the southbound bus but also the moment when a female moose emerges from the forest, compelling the vehicle to stop. Importantly, the poem is deeply rooted in the ecological character of northeastern North America, where sugar maples, silver birches, elms, foxgloves, lupins, and other regionally specific plants shape both the scenery and the

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temporal unfolding of the narrative.

As the bus travels "on red, gravelly roads, / down rows of sugar maples," (Bishop, 2011, p. 189) the journey is immediately imbued with a distinctly North American quality. The iconic sugar maples, renowned for their sap flow and seasonal rhythms, introduce a vegetal temporality that transcends the linearity of human travel. The "twin silver birches" provide a contrasting luminous effect, their pale bark creating a moment of perceptual brightness. The subdued farewell, "Goodbye to the elms," (Bishop, 2011, p. 190) functions as a spatial and temporal pivot, creating a sense of historical disappearance. Through these trees, Bishop establishes a layered temporal field in which vegetal presences mark environmental time more profoundly than human agency. As the bus restarts and the light "grows richer," (Bishop, 2011, p. 190) fog begins to settle, and plants once again mediate the scene's temporal and atmospheric transformation. The fog's "cold, round crystals" form and slide across "white hens' feathers," "gray glazed cabbages," "cabbage roses," and "lupins like apostles" (Bishop, 2011, p. 190). Rather than passively receiving the fog, these plants function as material interfaces through which the fog becomes visible and legible to the senses. Ecological time, which is normally imperceptible, manifests itself through vegetal textures and surfaces. The moisture accumulating on cabbages and lupins turns evening into a plant-mediated temporal event rather than a merely chronological transition.

The arrival of evening is further announced through subtle ecological behaviors. The "sweet peas cling / to their wet white string," their tightened posture responding to increasing humidity, while "bumblebees creep / inside the foxgloves," (Bishop, 2011,

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p. 190) retreating into floral chambers for the night. These interactions between plants and insects function as natural indicators of time, marking the subtle yet pivotal transition: “and evening commences” (Bishop, 2011, p. 190). Time here is not declared by a human perspective but by vegetal and animal rhythms, exemplifying Siewers’s concept of time-plexity, in which temporal experience arises from ecological process rather than anthropocentric measurement. The line “Moonlight as we enter / the New Brunswick woods” (Bishop, 2011, p. 191) does not simply mark a spatial shift but signals the crossing of a temporal and ecological threshold, one in which human perception becomes subordinated to vegetal structures. The enjambment in these lines slows the reader’s progress, mirroring the gradual filtering of moonlight through a dense network of trees. This temporal delay signifies that the woods, a plant-constituted world that determines how time and light are experienced, dominate the space, not the passengers. In particular, the woods are rendered “hairy, scratchy, splintery,” (Bishop, 2011, p. 191) foregrounding a distinctly corporeal presence by showing the tactile materiality of bark, moss, twigs, lichen and underbrush. Bishop attributes to plants a sensorial signature, allowing them to impress themselves upon human experience through touch rather than sight alone. This shift highlights a vegetal phenomenology: the forest “touches” the travelers before they can properly see it.

Furthermore, the subsequent image, “Moonlight and mist / caught in them like lamb’s wool / on bushes in a pasture,” (Bishop, 2011, p. 191) suggests that the trees hold the light, bending, trapping and refracting it through their branches, in much the same way that bushes catch stray wool. The “moonlight” does not merely illuminate

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the forest, whereas becomes entangled with it. This simile is of pivotal significance, as it endows the trees with a grasping capacity that is conventionally associated with animals. The vegetation functions as a perceptual apparatus, shaping the visual field through a process of vegetal agency. In this sense, this scene demonstrates how the forest constitutes itself materially instead of symbolically. The interplay of mist and moonlight with plant life also signifies a significant shift in time. While mist is a transient atmospheric phenomenon, moonlight represents a slower celestial cycle. The moment when both are "caught" by the woods simultaneously crystallizes several temporalities: day and night day and night, atmospheric and lunar cycles, and the rhythms of plant life. Consequently, this layered temporality is an example of Siewers' concept of time-plexity: the forest becomes a place where various ecological rhythms converge, forming a temporal landscape that cannot be understood through human-centred chronology. Moreover, the image of wool caught on bushes gently recalls scenes of rural, domesticated landscapes. However, Bishop places this familiar gesture within a wild forest. This shift implies that human farming environments and nonhuman woodland ecosystems are not entirely separate, but share an underlying ecological continuity. It reinforces the idea that plants help shape the world in ways that parallel human activities but do not depend on them.

Finally, this scene prepares for the passengers' shift into a dreamlike state. The transition into the passengers' dreamlike state is not abrupt but grows organically out of the vegetal atmosphere Bishop carefully constructs. After moonlight and mist have been "caught" in the branches, and after the tactile density of the forest has enveloped

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the bus, the passengers' bodies naturally respond. They "lie back" and drift into "a dreamy divagation" because the forest—its textures, its tangled branches, and its glowing light—creates a sensory atmosphere that relaxes the mind. In this way, the woods guide the narrative: they take in the moonlight, blur the sense of time, and create the conditions for moving from an external, ecological rhythm into an internal, psychological one. The passenger's posture just aligns with the plants' rhythms at night. In the following line "Snores. Some long sighs," (Bishop, 2011, p. 191) the syntax becomes short and breath-like, suggesting that human respiration itself begins to follow a slower, more vegetal rhythm. The phrase "a dreamy divagation" shows how the passengers' minds begin to drift away from clear, logical thinking into a more wandering, dreamlike state. Exactly speaking, it is triggered by the forest itself—the soft moonlight, the quiet mist, and the dense textures of the trees—which together blur the edges of what the passengers see and feel, gently pushing them into a more relaxed, drifting kind of consciousness.

Bishop's use of sound in the lines "a gentle, auditory, / slow hallucination" (Bishop, 2011, p. 191) shows that hearing becomes more important than seeing at that moment. Thus, the passengers are no longer rooted in the visual world. Instead, they are gradually drawn into a sound-shaped, atmospheric space created by the forest around them. As result, the woods assume a clear narrative role: they absorb external stimuli, soften temporal boundaries, and generate a liminal atmosphere in which waking and dreaming naturally blend. In this manner, the passengers' drift into "a dreamy divagation" is not merely a sign of tiredness but the result of ecological forces

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that the poem has been establishing from the very beginning. The forest, functioning as a living vegetal agent, prepares and enables this changing state of mind, reinforcing Bishop's broader ecological vision in which plants are not passive background elements but active participants that shape human perception, emotion, and narrative unfolding. It is important to acknowledge the significance of plant life in shaping human experience. Rather than merely being a passive element, plant life actively influences and contributes to the manifestation of various forms of consciousness.

"The Weed" offers its most striking articulation of vegetal narrativity in the final exchange, "It lifted its head all dripping wet / (with my own thoughts?) and answered then: 'I grow,' it said, 'but to divide your heart again'" (Bishop, 2011, p. 23). The weed's declaration of growth is not merely a biological fact but a narrative act that asserts its agency. The question "with my own thoughts?" signals a moment of ecological entanglement in which human consciousness and vegetal processes become indistinguishable. Meanwhile, the act of "dividing" the human heart suggests a temporal rupture: vegetal time interrupts human psychological time, compelling the speaker to confront a form of life whose rhythms exceed anthropocentric expectation. Moreover, the line "to divide your heart again" frames vegetal action as transformative rather than merely invasive. The heart's division suggests not destruction but reconfiguration, which is a movement toward ecological coexistence in which human emotional life is altered by contact with vegetal agency.

"The Weed" and "The Moose" demonstrate how Bishop gradually develops a sophisticated vegetal narrativity that reconfigures the relationship between human

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perception and non-human world. In "The Weed," the autonomous motions of the plant initiate and shape the poem's temporal and narrative trajectory, transforming vegetal life into an active agent capable of disrupting and reorienting human consciousness. "The Moose," however, reveals a further refinement of this strategy: the cumulative presence of sugar maples, birches, foxgloves, and the moonlit undergrowth creates a dense vegetal sensorium that modulates the passengers' awareness and draws them into a collective state of "dreamy divagation." It's sensible to say that the progression from "The Weed" to "The Moose" marks a decisive maturation in Bishop's engagement with plant life. In this way, vegetal presence becomes neither decorative nor symbolic; rather, it structures the very conditions through which narrative, temporality, and perception unfold. This movement from the subjectification of a single plant to the perceptual force of an entire vegetal landscape reveals the increasing sophistication of Bishop's vegetal narrativity: plants are no longer merely seen; they generate atmosphere, shape temporality, and alter states of mind.

Conclusion

This study has examined Elizabeth Bishop's vegetal poetics by taking "The Weed" as its central text and investigating how the poem reconfigures vegetal life from a passive background element into an autonomous perceptual and narrative agent. Through the weed's self-directed growth, sensory capacity and distinctive temporal rhythm, the poem reveals the emergence of vegetal subjectivity and demonstrates how plant life can generate psychological movement and narrative unfolding. Simultaneously, Bishop's portrayal of reciprocal interactions between humans and

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plants, characterized by shared material processes, bioempathic resonance and subtle sensory exchanges, disrupts established anthropocentric boundaries, thereby establishing an intersubjective domain where both living organisms exert influence. In relation to poems such as “Florida” and “The Moose,” Bishop’s vegetal poetics can be seen to develop progressively throughout her career. In “Florida,” plants such as mangroves already appear as material agents that stabilize landscapes and reorganize ecological relations, revealing Bishop’s early sensitivity to vegetal agency within fragile environments. In “The Moose,” this sensibility expands further, as entire plant communities and forest space generate immersive sensory and temporal conditions that reshape human consciousness. All in all, these poems trace a movement from the agency of a single plant to the collective force of vegetal environments, reflecting a deepening ecological imagination and a growing orientation toward multispecies coexistence.

As contemporary phytocriticism insists, plant narrativity should not confine plants to their outward appearance but should emphasize relationality and interactivity, encouraging readers to move beyond habitual neglect of plant life; anthropomorphism, when carefully moderated, can function as a bridge to awaken awareness of vegetal complexity (Jiang Jinghui, 2022, p. 25). Accordingly, Bishop’s plants preserve their distinctive alterity, while still engaging in reciprocal exchanges with human perception, thereby becoming partners in meaning-making rather than mere objects of description. In this sense, Bishop’s vegetal poetics corresponds to the ethical understanding of friendship as a willingness to share a world – one that acknowledges unavoidable

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differences in perspective between self and other, rather than seeking to erase them (Marder, 2016, p. 28). This model of relationship doesn't require identification or assimilation but is instead based on attentiveness, responsiveness, and the capacity to coexist with that which remains fundamentally different. In her poetry, plants are not made fully transparent or humanized; they retain their own rhythms and agency, while nonetheless entering into meaningful relations with human consciousness. This shared world is therefore not a unified or harmonious entity, but rather a space of negotiated coexistence shaped by mutual influence and respect for differences. Her poetics demonstrates that vegetal beings are embedded within the same temporal, affective and ecological processes as humans, participating actively in shaping perception, emotion and narrative form. Bishop's poetry suggests a more extensive reorientation of both poetic and ethical principles. By incorporating vegetal temporalities, agencies, and sensoria into her lyrical compositions, she transitions from conventional nature descriptions to a paradigm of ecological coexistence, in which humans and plants occupy a shared domain of interdependence. Notably, Bishop's work continues to offer substantial foundation for reimagining how literature might cultivate more attentive, ethical, and sustainable relationships between humans and the vegetal world.

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The Transcendentalist Tradition in Robert Bly's Poetics

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Abstract

The academia has traced the cultural roots of the poetics of Robert Bly, a leading figure of the American "Deep Image" school, to foreign sources, such as European Surrealism, psychological unconscious theories, European mysticism, and Chinese Daoist philosophy. However, an examination of Bly's own poetics reveals his emphasis on nativist consciousness and solitude, highlighting intricate connections with transcendentalism—a cornerstone of American indigenous culture. This discovery will contribute to a deeper understanding of Bly's poetic spirit and its place within modern and contemporary American poetry.
Keywords: Robert Bly; Transcendentalism; sense of native culture; solitude

1. Introduction

The American scholar Joyce Peseroff (1986) wrote in the *New York Times Book Review*, referring to the contemporary poet Robert Bly, born in Minnesota, as a transcendentalist. (pp. 89-91) This article was published in 1986, more than two decades after Bly first emerged on the literary scene. This timing is quite meaningful and thought-provoking for Bly. Since the beginning of his poetic career, he has been hailed by critics as a leader of the "deep image" or "new surrealism" school for

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initiating a new poetic style. To some extent, Peseroff's label of Bly as a "Transcendentalist" actually represents a redefinition of the poet's creative style. Coincidentally, Bly expert William V. Davis, in his 1992 edited collection *Critical Essays on Robert Bly*, cited another critic, Richard Sugg, to propose a redefinition of Bly, arguing that "Bly emulates Thoreau in his belief in the integral relationship between the individual psyche and the body politic, and in his concomitant willingness to engage at the psychospiritual level the political issues of his time." (1986, p. 292) Unfortunately, neither Peseroff's effort nor Davis's call seems to have garnered much resonance or attention from the academic community. It is worth mentioning that Peseroff's article only analyzed and discussed three of Bly's poems — "Three Kinds of Pleasure," "After Working," and "Unrest"—in terms of their themes, without mentioning "Transcendentalism" in the article's body. The specific content of the article appears to have almost no connection with "Transcendentalism."

For a long time, in terms of influence studies and correlational research, most scholarly work on Bly has focused on modern psychoanalysis, particularly Jung's theory of the unconscious, Chinese Daoist aesthetics and classical poetry, Western surrealist poetry, and mysticism such as Boehme's poetics. Apart from the brief mentions by the two aforementioned scholars, the connection between Bly and Transcendentalism, or the influence of Transcendentalism on Bly, remains a gap in academic research. In fact, we find that traces of Transcendentalism can be seen in Bly's personal life philosophy, poetic ideals, and the essence of his poetry.

2. Sense of Native Culture

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Transcendentalism is an important source of American cultural independence and one of the cornerstones of American culture. Its founder, Ralph Waldo Emerson, proposed that American literature and culture should be rooted in the nation's own soil. His speech "The American Scholar," delivered in 1837 at the Phi Beta Kappa Society in Cambridge, Massachusetts, has been hailed as the "Declaration of Intellectual Independence." (McQuade, 1981, p. 25) Decades after the founding of the United States, Emerson observed that American independence was merely geographical and political; culturally and spiritually, America was still dependent on Europe. American writers, thinkers, and scholars were too timid in the face of European culture and history, afraid to step beyond established boundaries. In the presence of European literature, America was merely a passive listener and imitator. Emerson sharply criticized, "Various motives, various prophecies, various preparations show that the confidence in humanity's unmanifested powers belongs to the American scholar. We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame." Thus, at the end of his speech, he passionately called out: "We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds." (Emerson, 2014, p. 20) Emerson emphasized "intuition," calling it "the primary wisdom," through which "all things find their common origin" and which is "the universal, dependable, original self."(Emerson, 2014, p. 62) Transcendentalism placed such importance on intuition to satirize the prevailing neoclassicism in American culture at the time, which took European classical traditions, especially ancient Greek and Roman

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literature and art, as its models. In the preface to *Nature*, Emerson asked, "Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us?" To some extent, Transcendentalism injected a vibrant and powerful gene of nativist consciousness into the formation and development of American culture. Influenced by it, many young American writers began to turn their gaze to their own homeland, rooting their creations in their native soil. Writers like Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe emerged, renowned for their distinctly American characteristics and styles.

Bly was born in the 1920s. During his military service, he developed a passion for poetry by chance. After leaving the army, he returned to university, immersing himself fully in poetry study, creation, and translation while at Harvard. At that time, the American literary scene was swept by waves of enthusiasm for seeking creative inspiration in Europe, led by figures like Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" fueled this trend. Eliot himself highly revered classicism, emphasizing the value and necessity of cultural tradition and literary history in shaping a poet's consciousness. He believed that the external form and internal wit of classical poetry were the perfect elements of poetry. He proposed that the evaluation of a poet must be measured within a historical framework: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists... I propose to use this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism." (Eliot, 1994, p. 3) Thus, Eliot

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emphasized that poets must adhere to tradition and cultivate historical consciousness through reading. He even argued, “For any poet who wants to continue writing poetry after the age of twenty-five, this historical sense is nearly indispensable. This historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence. This historical sense compels a poet to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.” (Eliot, 1994, p. 2) Eliot not only practiced this view of tradition in his poetry but also gave up his American citizenship to become a British citizen to be closer to tradition. Both his poetic advocacy and his personal political identity had a significant impact on the younger generation of American poets. Bly could not help but satirize this: “In the 1900s, America was considered to be vulgar, and corrupt; those (referring to Eliot, Pound, etc.) who felt that ‘corruption was not compulsory’ ... They meant intellectual corruption to a certain extent ... Europe called them away. Pound went to Europe, Eliot went to Europe, Cummings went—Cummings came back, Hemingway came half-way back...” (Bly, 1980, pp. 54-55) “American poetry resembles a group of huge spiral arms whirling about in space. Eliot and Pound are moving away at tremendous speeds. Marianne Moore and Jeffers are driving into space also.” (Bly, 2008, p. 243) Bly called Eliot and Pound’s departure a “wrong turning” in American poetry. Of course, this “wrong turning” was not only about poets distancing themselves from their homeland but also about their poetic spirit; Eliot and others anchored their poetic

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spirit in the poetic traditions of Europe. Bly also valued tradition. He extensively and systematically studied not only European poetic history and culture but also deeply explored Latin American poetry, Chinese poetry, and Islamic poetry. It was through this broad and profound comprehensive study and research that Bly solidified his poetic beliefs. He regarded Transcendentalism as the ultimate destination of his poetic spirit. He said, "When you look at other literatures, it becomes obvious that unless a poetry can come directly out of the ground of the country, it will never last." (Bly, 1980, p. 55) Here, Bly essentially reiterated Emerson's earlier call for American literature to return to its native soil. In an interview in 1966, Bly discussed several contemporary poets—William Stafford, Tom McGrath, and James Wright—and believed that their success was related to their creative return to their homelands. Stafford's poetry largely stemmed from his birthplace, Kansas; McGrath's from his hometown, Dakota; and Wright's from his native Ohio.

Bly hailed from Minnesota, his homeland, where he spent most of his life. From his poetic texts, we can sense the poet's intense connection to his native soil: there are quiet and profound fields, stubble fields emitting the rich scent of earth, scattered and lonely telephone poles, and swirling snowflakes that are cold and yet imbued with a hazy beauty in winter. The darkness, dusk, corn, ash trees, and more all permeate the poet's heart. In his works, they are not merely simple, vivid images but evoke a vivid and three-dimensional sense of concreteness. Readers feel as if they are in Minnesota, sharing the landscape with Bly. It can be said that Bly's personal creative practice vividly illustrates the seemingly intangible but inherently symbiotic

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relationship between poetry and native soil. The natural environment, cultural geography, political climate, and economic ecology of the homeland subtly shape the poet's individual psychology and spiritual realm, providing a continuous source of inspiration and material for creation. In turn, poetry plays an irreplaceable role in constructing the external landscape and internal qualities of native culture. "I am driving; it is dusk; Minnesota. / The stubble field catches the last growth of sun. / The soybeans are breathing on all sides." (Bly, 2018, p. 9) This is one of the most classic expressive styles in Bly's poetry. In a sense, he seems to borrow narrative techniques: character, time, and place—the three essential elements of narrative. However, Bly's poems are mostly lyrical, brief in length, leaving little room for narrative. The poet emphasizes the presence of place because of the inseparable kinship between place and the poet. "There has been light snow. / Dark car tracks move in and out of the darkness. / I stare at the train window marked with soft dust. / I have awakened at Missoula, utterly happy." (Bly, 2018, p. 23) The poem "In a Train" consists of only four lines, but the poet deliberately ends with the place he is in, reminding readers—and indeed himself. The essence of poetry is often elusive, not requiring grand visions, but it can transport us to a place imbued with sacred meaning.

As the snow grows heavier, the cornstalks fade farther away,

And the barn moves nearer to the house.

The barn moves all alone in the growing storm.

The barn is full of corn, and moving toward us now,

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Like a hulk blown toward us in a storm at sea;

All the sailors on deck have been blind for many years. (Bly, 2018, pp. 30-31)

"The barn" is a frequently recurring place in Bly's poetry—a specific location in his homeland that holds special memories for him. The poet often uses it to illustrate the indelible emotional relationship between himself and the barn. The barn "moves closer," "moves all alone"—it is a living, breathing entity. In the poet's works, the barn, like other elements of his homeland, haunts him. They not only accompany him in the real world but are also deeply connected to him in the artistic field of poetry. This poetic practice precisely illustrates his aesthetic philosophy: the integration of native life and art makes it possible for artistic life to sustain itself through continuous self-regeneration.

Bly's nativist consciousness is not limited to his native Minnesota but extends to the entire nation, encompassing American geography, history, politics, economy, and other fields. His National Book Award-winning collection, *The Light Around the Body*, vividly represents the diverse ecology of American political culture. Meanwhile, *The Man in the Black Coat Turns* and *Loving a Woman in Two Worlds* depict the myriad facets of American popular culture in colorful detail.

3. Solitude

Eliot believed that "no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone." (Eliot, 1994, p. 3) In other words, artists, including poets, form a communal entity, and no individual poet can isolate himself from others. Therefore, he argued that poets must read literary history to establish connections between the individual

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and others, the individual and society, and to find the texture of poetry in history and tradition. In contrast, Bly insisted, “You cannot be a writer unless you are willing to sacrifice something. To go off and live by yourself for two years is sacrificing very little.... You have to find out who you are before you can even write one word that is of any value;” (Bly, 1980, pp. 53-54) Clearly, Bly believed that anyone aspiring to write poetry must first distance themselves from any community, examine themselves, and clearly understand their individuality and differences from others. After gaining fame, Bly repeatedly emphasized the importance of solitude for a poet. We know that solitude is often a psychological concept, but in Bly’s poetic philosophy, for a poet, solitude must also be a tangible, physical test—that is, living alone.

As early as in 1966, Bly discussed the meaning and value of solitude in an interview, saying, “It’s been interesting that people of fifty years ago who went off into solitude often went to Europe for that solitude. It has become clear in the last few years that ‘American earth’ and a certain fresh solitude are no longer considered incompatible.” (Bly, 1980, p. 54) From Bly’s half-jesting remark, it is not difficult to see that, on the one hand, solitude is a necessity for poets in any era; on the other hand, for American poets, especially those of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, America seemed to lack the climate and soil for solitude. Many important poets, including Pound, Eliot, and Cummings, went to Europe to seek and experience the atmosphere of solitude. Bly’s so-called “fresh solitude” is clearly relative to America, a relatively young nation. Bly’s reference to “American soil” has a metaphorical meaning, alluding to America’s cultural roots and historical traditions.

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Therefore, why, for Bly, did American soil suddenly become closely associated with solitude?

On July 4, 1845, Independence Day, inspired by Emerson's ideas, Thoreau abandoned communal living and moved to a simple cabin on Emerson's land by Walden Pond to experience a solitary life. This legendary period of solitary living lasted until September 1847—two years and two months. During this time, he meticulously recorded his state of solitude, personal observations, emotional changes, experiences, and psychological construction, later compiling them into the book *Walden*, published in 1854. The book was hailed by *The New York Times* as "a treasure of American literature," and the magazine *Times* listed it among "the classics that shape readers' lives." Academics generally regard it as a representative work of Transcendentalist philosophy. For the American public, Thoreau's *Walden* is akin to a religious scripture, offering a model of personal cultivation and spiritual elevation. Thus, *Walden* holds pioneering significance in the construction of the American national psyche. The fifth chapter of the book is specifically devoted to the theme of "Solitude." Through his personal practice of solitude, Thoreau concluded, "I find it wholesome to be alone for the greater part of the time. (Thoreau, 2009, p. 149) "The sun is alone**,** except in thick weather, when there sometimes appear to be two, but one is a mock sun. God is alone—but the devil, he is far from being alone; he sees a great deal of company; he is legion." (Thoreau, 2009, p. 150) Thoreau endowed the sun and God with the quality of solitude, thereby cloaking solitude in a sacred, religious aura. Thus, through Thoreau's exemplary personal practice and his culturally enlightening

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classic Walden, solitude gained unprecedented universal value: it can enhance one's philosophical wisdom of life and cultivate poetic sensibilities.

As mentioned earlier, Bly advocated that to become a poet, one must learn to live alone for at least two years without engaging with others. (Bly, 1980, p. 53) Although Bly did not explain the basis for his two-year recommendation, and science cannot provide corresponding evidence, we cannot help but connect Thoreau's two-year solitary experience at Walden Pond with Bly. In 1971, during an interview with scholars Jay Bail and Geoffrey Cook on the topic of the "historical tradition of solitude" in America, Bly said, "And America tried to go in that way a hundred years ago, with Thoreau, and with Whitman, and with Emerson." (Bly, 1980, p. 6) What about Bly himself? After graduating from Harvard in 1950, Bly did not immediately enter the workforce like most people. Instead, he found an abandoned hut in New York. Unlike Thoreau, who sought solitude and quiet in the secluded lakeside woods, Bly placed himself in a metropolis, experiencing solitude in a "great hermit in the city" manner, delving deep into his inner self through solitude. Years later, Bly recalled, "when I was in New York at that time there was no... there wasn't any community. There were no communes, there was no one to go to." (Bly, 1980, p. 14) He stayed there for over two years. Richard Sugg, a critic on Robert Bly, from Florida International University commented: "If the Harvard years were Bly's introduction to the vocation of a poet, then the years in New York immediately after Harvard were the time of Robert Bly's testing the strength of his vocation, as well as of his discovering the lifelong subject of his work. New York, Bly feels, taught him the need for a poet

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to pursue his ‘solitude’.” (Sugg, 1986, p. 6)

For Bly, solitude and poetry are inseparably linked. First, solitude is a guarantee, or prerequisite, for poetic creation. He admitted that he had opportunities to teach at universities, like many other established poets, ensuring financial stability. However, he unhesitatingly rejected such opportunities. He said, “And another thing is, of course, the solitude--the link between poetry and solitude. Solitude is simply impossible in a university. They pay you to talk, not to be silent.” (Bly, 1980, p. 18) Second, solitude is an important theme in poetry. Bly’s debut and representative work, *Silence in the Snowy Fields*, contains 44 short poems divided thematically into three sections: “Solitude,” “Awakening,” and “Silence.” The section on solitude includes 11 poems, and the poet deliberately placed this section first in the collection. Incidentally, in Bly’s *Collected Poems* published in 2018, he placed “Eleven Poems of Solitude” at the very beginning of the book, highlighting the significance and status of the theme of “solitude” in his poetics. Looking at the entire *Silence in the Snowy Fields* collection, we find that, besides the first section, the other two sections also reveal a strong sense of solitude. It is no exaggeration to say that Bly’s entire literary career revolves around the theme of “solitude.” For Bly, “solitude” as a poetic theme is largely a medium for interpreting poetic aesthetics, observing the world, expressing the inner self, and exploring life—a perspective that aligns closely with the core spirit of Transcendentalism.

Bly’s poetic creation has a typical individual characteristic—environmental description. Although his poems are mostly short, sometimes only three to five lines,

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they rarely lack descriptions of scenery. For example, the poem “Three Kinds of Pleasures”: "The darkness drifts down like snow on the picked cornfields/ In Wisconsin: and on these black trees/ Scattered, one by one, / Through the winter fields--/ We see stiff weeds and brownish stubble, / And white snow left now only in the wheeltracks of the combine.” (Bly, 2018, p. 3) Unlike the fresh, joyful, and bright environments in the poetry of British Romantic poet Wordsworth, the scenes in Bly’s works reflect a Thoreau-like clarity, serenity, and solitude. They seem to engage in equal dialogue with humans, even sharing a spiritual connection. “It is a willow tree alone in acres of dry corn. / Its leaves are scattered around its trunk, and around me, / Brown now, and speckled with delicate black, / Only the cornstalks now can make a noise.” (Bly, 2018, p. 5) “I sit alone surrounded by dry corn, / Near the second growth of the pigweeds, / And hear the corn leaves scrape their feet on the wind.” (Bly, 2018, p. 8) The harmonious relationship between such scenes and humans in Bly’s work is familiar to us from the "Solitude" chapter of Walden. This kind of environmental writing highlights the significance Bly advocates for solitude or living alone: only in solitude or loneliness can one fully integrate into the surrounding environment, contemplate all things, and form an ecological field where everything is interconnected. Then, with an equal stance, one can engage in dialogue and communication with all things, sensing one’s own vibrant vitality.

In Bly’s poetry, we find that solitude not only allows us to maintain harmonious communication with the external world but also enables us to communicate with ourselves constantly, delve into our inner being, engage in

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self-dialogue, and thereby remain clear-minded and independent. This is a key reason why academia refers to Bly's poetics as "inward poetics." (Xiao, 2010, p. 3) In a sense, this is the ultimate goal of Bly's advocacy for solitude—a perspective highly consistent with the life philosophy of Emerson and Thoreau's Transcendentalism.

There is a solitude like black mud!

Sitting in the darkness singing,

I cannot tell if this joy

Is from the body, or the soul, or a third place!

When I wake, new snow has fallen,

I am alone, yet someone else is with me,

drinking coffee, looking out at the snow. (Bly, 2018, p. 72)

These are the final two stanzas of "Six Winter Privacy Poems." It is evident that solitude brings the poet boundless joy from the depths of his soul—a realization of the wonder and richness of existence through solitude. The poem "Return to Solitude" shares a similar beauty. The last line reveals the discovery after returning to solitude: "Trees, perhaps, with new leaves." (Bly, 2018, p. 4) This symbolic expression metaphorically suggests the hope and future that solitude offers us.

4. Conclusion

For a long time, the academia has traced the cultural roots of American "deep image" poets, including Bly, to European surrealism, modern psychological theories of the unconscious, European mysticism, and Chinese Daoist philosophy. However,

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from Bly's personal poetics of nativist consciousness and solitude, we find intricate connections with Transcendentalism, which is a cornerstone of American indigenous culture. Clearly, native culture is also an important source of Bly's poetics, as he consistently emphasized that poetry does not last unless it comes out of the soil of its own country. In fact, this applies not only to poetry but to all artistic creation. Therefore, valuing and developing native culture remains an important mission at all times.

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Wind, Tree, Sea

Guo Jie's Lyric Ethics of Time, Nature, and Inner Distance

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Abstract

This essay examines the lyric poetry of Guo Jie (郭杰)—a prominent Chinese poet and scholar—through the lens of ethical attention, temporal consciousness, and non-instrumental engagement with nature. Situating his work at the intersection of scholarship and lyric creation, the essay argues that Guo Jie exemplifies a mature form of the contemporary "scholar–poet," whose poetry is shaped by historical patience rather than academic display. Through close reading of three representative poems—"The Wind, at Times, Is Lonely", "Ode to an Ancient Tree", and "My Heart Has Flown to the Sea"—presented in bilingual Chinese–English form, the essay explores how wind, tree, and sea function not as metaphors subordinated to human emotion, but as ethical interlocutors that resist possession and demand attentiveness. Time in these poems operates as an ethical medium, emphasizing endurance, waiting, and inward distance over resolution or climax. By foregrounding listening over statement and restraint over expressiveness, Guo Jie's poetry offers a quiet corrective to both academic over-explanation and lyric excess. This essay positions his work within contemporary Chinese poetry while situating it in dialogue with international concerns related to ecological lyricism, ethical minimalism, and the responsibilities of poetic attention.
Keywords: Guo Jie, scholar–poet; ethical lyricism, nature, temporality

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Editor's Note
Verse Version has long been committed to publishing poetry and criticism that foreground ethical seriousness, cross-cultural dialogue, and sustained attention to poetic practice. In presenting this feature on Guo Jie, the journal seeks not merely to

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introduce an established figure in contemporary Chinese letters, but to examine a mode of lyric writing shaped by historical consciousness, restraint, and moral patience.

Guo Jie's work is particularly resonant at a moment when poetry often oscillates between theoretical abstraction and emotional immediacy. His poems demonstrate another possibility: a lyric shaped by deep scholarly engagement that nevertheless turns away from display, choosing instead clarity, humility, and listening. By presenting bilingual texts and sharp commentary, this column affirms Verse Version's commitment to poet-centered inquiry that integrates textual presence, critical reflection, and ethical concern.

PART I

(Editorial Introduction · Intellectual & Poetic Biography · Poetic Orientation)

1. Editorial Introduction: A Scholar–Poet at the Threshold of Lyric Attention

In contemporary Chinese poetry, the boundary between scholarship and lyric creation is often carefully maintained. Academic authority tends toward historical synthesis and critical distance, while poetry seeks immediacy, vulnerability, and experiential truth. The work of Guo Jie（郭杰）occupies a productive space at this boundary—not by erasing it, but by inhabiting it with quiet confidence.

As a poet, scholar, and long-standing educator, Guo Jie brings to lyric writing an unusually deep historical consciousness. Yet his poetry does not function as learned display, nor does it translate academic insight into didactic verse. Instead, his poems move in the opposite direction: away from abstraction, toward lived perception; away from conceptual mastery, toward attentiveness and ethical restraint.

For *Verse Version*, an international journal committed to poet-centered inquiry and cross-cultural seriousness, Guo Jie's work offers a compelling case of lyric maturity

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shaped by intellectual discipline without being constrained by it. His poems demonstrate how a long engagement with classical Chinese thought, literary history, and cultural memory can lead not to rhetorical density, but to clarity, humility, and emotional precision.

This column approaches Guo Jie not as an institutional figure, but as a poet whose work reflects a sustained ethical relationship with time, nature, and inwardness.

2. Beyond Position and Title: An Intellectual Life Oriented Toward Poetry

Guo Jie's academic career is extensive and distinguished. He has served as professor at Shenzhen University, held senior leadership roles at multiple institutions, and authored influential scholarly works on Qu Yuan, Bai Juyi, and the relationship between ancient thought and poetic imagination. He has also edited major collective literary histories.

Yet none of this explains the tone of his poetry.

What matters for poetry is not position but disposition. Guo Jie's poems suggest an intellectual temperament shaped less by authority than by historical patience. His long engagement with classical poets—especially Bai Juyi—appears not in stylistic imitation, but in an inherited ethical stance: clarity without simplification, emotional depth without excess, and moral seriousness without declamation.

His lyric voice is notably unhurried. It does not rush toward insight, nor does it dramatize its own sensibility. Instead, it lingers with processes: the movement of wind across seasons, the aging of a tree, the slow separation between inner desire and external

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circumstance. This patience reflects a scholar's respect for duration, but also a poet's trust in silence.

3. Nature as Ethical Interlocutor, Not Ornament

Across Guo Jie's poetry, nature is neither backdrop nor metaphorical instrument. Wind, tree, sea—these are not symbols enlisted to serve human emotion. They are interlocutors, presences that shape and test the speaker's understanding.

This orientation aligns with a deep current in classical Chinese poetry, yet Guo Jie's treatment remains distinctly contemporary. Nature in his work does not guarantee harmony. It does not console automatically. Instead, it reflects processes of solitude, endurance, and distance—conditions that mirror but do not reduce to the human condition.

The poems examined here reveal a consistent pattern: the speaker approaches nature not to master it, but to ask questions—questions about loneliness, memory, perseverance, and the gap between aspiration and circumstance.

PART II

(Poem Texts · Bilingual Presentation · Close Readings)

1. "The Wind, at Times, Is Lonely": Solitude Without Pathos

1.1 English Translation

The Wind, at Times, Is Lonely

Trans. Zhang Guangkui

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The seasons turn upon the wind,

All life by wind is born and thinned.

— Inscription

O wind, I know,

There are times you're lonely so,

Like a wanderer astray,

Drifting to the world's far gray,

Roaming ends you cannot stay,

With no fixed home to hold your day.

Only spring can truly see

Flowers flooding hill and lea,

Chasing you in shades so bright,

Tracing every vanished flight.

Tender grass, with scented sigh,

Makes the heart grow warm and shy;

That lonely core may softly mend,

And briefly feel its chill suspend.

But when autumn walks the land,

Leaves fall loose at fate's command,

Earth is strewn with broken lines,

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Sparse as half-forgotten signs,

Writing out your sorrowed tune,

Your deep desolation's rune.

Not for cloud or passing rain,

But a doom you can't outrun or chain.

When you lift the birds on high,

Lend their wings a freer sky;

When you cast the scattered seed

Across the plains in silent speed;

When through birch groves pale and white

You glide with barely breathed delight;

When snowflakes, elfin, light and clear,

Dance at your touch, far and near—

I can hear your murmured tone,

Or your long call, wild, alone.

Yet I've never seen your face,

Nor the form that you embrace.

Though I know your open mind,

Hollowed like a valley kind,

Still I ask you—tell me why

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There are times you pass us by,

Keeping distant, standing apart,

So lonely, wind, so lone of heart.

1.2 Original (Chinese, for reference)

风，有时是孤独的

四季以风而流转

万物因风而繁育

——题记

风啊

我知道

你有时是孤独的

像一个流浪者

漂泊天涯

居无定所

只有春天

遍布山野的鲜花

以缤纷五彩

追逐你的踪迹

蓦蓦芳草

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沁人欲醉

那颗孤独的心

或许会有几分温润

而当秋季来临

枯叶零落

大地铺满了

萧条的字句

书写你那深深的

苍凉和忧郁

不是因为

一片云

一阵雨

而是一场

无可逾逃的命运

当你托起

飞鸟的翅膀

当你把草籽

洒向辽阔大地

当你从白桦林间

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轻轻穿过

当你吹拂一片片

精灵般的雪花

翩翩起舞

我能听见

你低声沉吟

或悠然长啸

可我始终未曾见到

你本来的

躯体和面容

即使我理解

你虚怀若谷

但还是

请告诉我

为什么你有时

落落寡合

显得那么孤独

（原载《莲花山》2023 年第 4 期）

Commentary

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This long lyric unfolds as a sustained address to the wind—a natural force that is omnipresent yet bodiless, powerful yet homeless. The wind becomes a figure through which the poem meditates on solitude without tragedy.

Crucially, loneliness here is not framed as deficiency. The wind's wandering is not blamed on misfortune or alienation, but understood as structural. It moves everywhere and belongs nowhere. The poem's emotional intelligence lies in its refusal to sentimentalize this condition.

Seasonal movement structures the poem ethically. Spring briefly softens the wind's solitude through flowers and fragrance, but this consolation is partial and temporary. Autumn, by contrast, reveals the deeper truth: the wind's melancholy is not caused by passing weather, but by "a fate that cannot be escaped." This is not resignation, but recognition.

The speaker listens closely—hearing murmurs and long calls—yet admits the ultimate limit of perception: the wind's body and face remain unseen. This acknowledgement of unknowability gives the poem its ethical poise. Understanding does not lead to possession.

The poem ends not with explanation, but with a question. That question sustains the wind's dignity as other.

2. "Ode to an Ancient Tree": Memory, Endurance, and Moral Stillness

2.1English Translation

Ode to an Ancient Tree

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Trans. Wang Ruixu

In this late autumn season
I pay tribute to an ancient tree

Behold its crown of golden leaves
Accepting my reverence

Your gaunt form beneath ice and snow
Once held fast to spring's longing

Your tender new buds
Once unfurled scenes of gentle beauty

Beneath your boughs, a shy youth
Embraced sweet love

Though paths may diverge
Beautiful memories never dissolve

Flocks of birds upon your branches
Once raised joyous songs

Singing of every sunbeam
And the laughter beneath its glow

Now the autumn wind grows stark
Yet you remain steadfast and serene

Even should you return to earth
Life endures through unwavering devotion

September 9, 2023

(Originally published in the "Zheng Feng" supplement of Zhengzhou Daily, November 12, 2023, under the title "Autumn Thoughts")

2.2 Original (Chinese, for reference)

向一棵老树致敬

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在这深秋时节

向一棵老树致敬

看那满树黄叶

接受了我的虔诚

你冰雪下的嶙峋

曾坚守春天的憧憬

你嫩绿的新芽

曾绽放柔媚风景

树枝下羞怯的少年

拥抱过甜蜜爱情

即使各分东西

美好记忆不会消融

枝头上一群群鸟儿

曾发出欢乐歌声

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歌唱每一缕阳光

和阳光下的笑影

如今秋风萧瑟

你依然坚定从容

纵化作满地泥土

生命因执着而永恒

2023 年 9 月 9 日

（原载《郑州日报》2023 年 11 月 12 日

“郑风”副刊。发表时题为《秋思》）

Commentary

Where the wind poem centers on movement and homelessness, “Ode to an Ancient Tree” turns toward stillness and rooted endurance. Yet the tree is not idealized as static monument. It is presented as a living archive—bearing traces of seasons, love, memory, and song.

The poem moves chronologically without linear narration. Past and present coexist: youthful love beneath branches, birdsong once vibrant, now recalled. What holds these layers together is not nostalgia but continuity of attention.

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The tree's persistence through ice, snow, and autumn wind models a form of ethical steadfastness. Importantly, this steadfastness is not heroic. The tree does not resist change; it accepts it. Even the final transformation—returning to soil—is framed not as loss, but as fulfillment of life's logic.

The poem's moral center lies in its final claim: life becomes enduring through devotion. Devotion here is not grand commitment, but quiet fidelity—to place, to memory, to process.

3. "My Heart Has Flown to the Sea": Distance Between Desire and Condition

3.1English Translation

My Heart Has Flown to the Sea

Trans. Tang Qiuping

This moment, my heart has flown to the sea—
to listen: boundless breakers chant their verse to me.

Listen: at sunset, gulls at close of day
wheel between the islands and the foaming spray.

Listen: in the dusk, the stars speak secret signs,
and cool night winds let them echo back in lines.

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Listen: when the storm has faded out of sight,

the after-silence seems to cradle hidden might.

This moment, my heart has flown to the sea,

yet still my boat lies lingering in the harbor with me.

I can only take the evening wind for wings,

and under silver moonlight, soar alone as it sings.

A whale sends up a towering fountain of spray,

to brace my staggering sails as they press on their way.

I'll keep the company of the measureless night,

till I meet once more that faint first thread of light.

Source: Guo, J. (2025). *Moonlit Sea*. People's Literature Publishing House.

3.2 Original (Chinese)

我的心已飞到海上

这一刻，我的心已飞到海上

倾听万顷波涛吟诵的诗行

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倾听夕阳下一群群海鸥

在岛屿和浪花之间盘旋歌唱

倾听暮色中群星闪烁的暗语

随着凉爽的晚风悠然回荡

倾听暴风雨远去后的静寂

似乎隐隐蕴含某种神秘力量

这一刻，我的心已飞到海上

而我的船还滞留海港

我只能乘着晚风的翅膀

在银白色月光下独自翱翔

鲸鱼喷起了巨大水柱

支撑起蹒跚前行的帆墙

我将和茫茫暗夜为伍

直到遇见又一缕熹微的晨光

（郭杰，《月光下看海》，人民文学出版社，2025：407）

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Commentary

This poem articulates one of the most persistent tensions in lyric poetry: the separation between inner movement and external limitation. The heart flies freely to the sea, yet the boat remains in harbor.

The repetition of "listen" establishes a rhythm of attentiveness. Sound—waves, gulls, stars, silence—becomes the primary mode of encounter. Vision is secondary. This auditory orientation suggests a poetry less concerned with possession than with resonance.

The sea is not romanticized as pure escape. Storms have passed; silence remains. That silence carries "hidden might," suggesting that power need not be violent or visible.

The image of the whale's spray bracing fragile sails introduces a moment of unexpected assistance—nature supporting, but not rescuing. The poem ends in companionship with darkness, oriented toward future light rather than immediate arrival.

Hope here is patience, not urgency.

PART III

(Thematic Synthesis · Ethical Poetics · Global Positioning)

1. Time as Ethical Medium

Across these poems, time functions not as backdrop but as ethical medium. Seasons, aging, memory, and waiting shape the speaker's stance toward the world. Nothing is rushed toward conclusion.

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This temporal patience reflects both scholarly formation and lyric maturity. Meaning arises not through climax, but through accumulation and return.

2. Nature Without Instrumentalization

Guo Jie's poetry consistently resists using nature as emotional shorthand. Wind is not simply freedom; tree is not merely stability; sea is not pure transcendence. Each remains complex, partially inaccessible, and ethically independent.

This restraint aligns his work with a broader international movement toward non-instrumental ecological lyricism, where attention replaces metaphorical exploitation.

3. Scholar, Poet, Listener

What ultimately distinguishes Guo Jie's poetry is not its learning, but its listening. His scholarly background sharpens his awareness of limits—historical, linguistic, perceptual. His poems honor those limits rather than attempting to overcome them.

In this sense, his work offers a quiet corrective to both academic over-explanation and lyric over-expression.

4. Conclusion: Attention as Lasting Form

Wind passes. Trees age. The sea remains distant. None of these resolve into answers. Yet the poems endure because they practice a form of attention that is itself ethical.

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For *Verse Version*, Guo Jie's work affirms a shared conviction: that poetry's most enduring contribution may lie not in statement, but in how carefully it listens to what cannot be fully possessed.

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Night Jasmine and the Ethics of Attention

Goran Gatalica's Poetics Between Science and Silence

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AI-Assisted Technology Declaration
In the preparation of this manuscript, the author utilized **ChatGPT** and **DeepSeek** for language polishing and brainstorming during the initial drafting phase. The author has thoroughly reviewed and edited all AI-generated content and take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the work presented in this publication.

Abstract

This extended critical feature examines the poetry of Croatian poet Goran Gatalica as a distinctive instance of contemporary minimalist poetics situated at the intersection of scientific discipline, ethical attention, and cross-cultural haiku practice. Drawing on his formal training in physics, chemistry, and engineering, Gatalica develops a poetics characterized by precision, restraint, and an ethics of observation that resists rhetorical excess. Through close theoretical positioning and contextual reading, this essay argues that Gatalica's work exemplifies an international lyric grounded not in abstraction or exoticism, but in attentive engagement with silence, locality, and empirical reality. Structured in three parts, the study moves from intellectual biography and theoretical framing, to a curated bilingual haiku corpus with commentary, and finally to a book-length reading of *Night Jasmine* as a peace-oriented poetics of ethical minimalism. Rather than treating haiku as a formal exercise, the essay situates it as an ethical compression of experience, aligning poetic practice with scientific humility and moral restraint. In doing so, the feature positions Gatalica's work within a living global network of contemporary haiku and minimalist poetry, while articulating its relevance to current debates on attention, silence, and responsibility in lyric writing.
Keywords: Goran Gatalica; haiku poetics; minimalist lyric; contemporary European poetry; ethics of attention

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Editor's Note

Verse Version has consistently sought to publish poetry and criticism that foreground ethical attention, cross-cultural dialogue, and poet-centered inquiry. In recent years, as minimalist and short-form poetries have gained renewed global prominence, questions concerning restraint, silence, and responsibility in lyric expression have become increasingly urgent.

This feature on Goran Gatalica was commissioned not merely to introduce an accomplished international poet, but to examine a mode of poetic thinking that resists the acceleration and amplification characteristic of much contemporary discourse. Gatalica's work—shaped by scientific training and sustained engagement with international haiku communities—offers a compelling example of how poetry may function as a practice of care rather than assertion.

By presenting an integrated critical study alongside bilingual poetic texts, *Verse Version* affirms its commitment to scholarship that does not separate theory from practice, nor aesthetics from ethics. This feature is published in the belief that such work contributes meaningfully to ongoing global conversations about poetry's role in an age of excess.

PART I

1. Editorial Introduction: An International Lyric at the Edge of Stillness

In an era marked by excess—of speech, of image, of instant interpretation—the contemporary lyric faces a paradoxical demand: it must speak less in order to mean more. The global revival of haiku and short-form poetry over recent decades is not merely a stylistic tendency, but a cultural symptom: a renewed desire for precision, restraint, and ethical attention.

Within this context, the work of Goran Gatalica occupies a distinctive and consequential position. His poetry emerges at the intersection of domains too often assumed to be incompatible: physics and metaphysics, chemical exactitude and spiritual resonance, scientific rationality and lyric intuition. Yet his work does not attempt to reconcile these domains through synthesis or metaphor alone. Instead, it subjects language itself to a discipline analogous to scientific method—testing, stripping, observing, and refining until only what is essential remains.

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For *Verse Version*, an international journal committed to academic rigor, cross-cultural dialogue, and poet-centered inquiry, Gatalica's oeuvre offers more than exemplary texts. It offers a model of poetic responsibility: a demonstration of how a poet can inhabit global traditions without dilution, and how minimal form can sustain maximal ethical depth.

This feature does not aim to canonize or monumentalize. It seeks, rather, to read attentively—to understand how Gatalica's poetry works, what conditions produce it, and why it matters now. In doing so, we position his work not as an isolated achievement, but as a node within a living international network of contemporary haiku and minimalist poetics.

2. Beyond the Curriculum Vitae: A Mind Formed by Matter and Measure

It would be reductive to recount Goran Gatalica's biography as a sequence of academic degrees and literary honors, though both are substantial. What matters more is the epistemological formation that precedes and underwrites his poetry.

Formally trained in physics, chemistry, and chemical engineering, Gatalica belongs to a lineage of poet-scientists for whom the natural world is not an abstract theme but an empirical reality. Scientific education, at its most rigorous, teaches not accumulation but elimination: the removal of noise, bias, and untested assumption. This intellectual discipline finds a direct analogue in Gatalica's poetic method.

His poems do not describe the world expansively; they interrogate moments. They ask what can be known through minimal data, what can be felt through a single image, and what remains unsayable even when language is precisely calibrated. In this sense, his poetry inherits not the rhetoric of science, but its ethics: accuracy, humility, and respect for the unknown.

Crucially, Gatalica's scientific background does not produce a poetry of explanation. There is no didactic impulse, no conversion of poem into proposition. Instead, science functions as a disciplinary silence behind the poem—a pressure resisting ornament, abstraction, and excess sentiment.

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This resistance is especially evident in his engagement with haiku, a form whose demands align naturally with scientific thinking: economy, observation, and precision. Yet for Gatalica, haiku is neither technical exercise nor formal game. It is an ethical stance toward reality.

3. Language, Place, and the Acceptance of the Exotic

For poets working with global forms like haiku, a persistent challenge lies in integrating exotic imagery seamlessly. The seasonal motifs and aesthetic traditions commonly found in Japanese haiku are reimagined in Gatalica's works—cherry blossoms, Mount Fuji, chrysanthemum—not as decorative symbols borrowed superficially, but as elements transformed and woven into the fabric of his distinct personal narrative and universal concerns through his intrinsic poetic logic. Such reception is far from mere imitation; it confirms that universality in poetry derives from the depth achieved through a creative and reflective reworking of specific experiences, even cross-cultural ones, rather than from the shallow replication of their surface appearances.

In both his Croatian-language poetry and his English-language haiku, Gatalica demonstrates a careful negotiation between linguistic systems. English is not merely a vehicle for international circulation; it is a medium whose constraints actively reshape perception. His English haiku do not sound translated. They sound considered.

This consideration extends to silence. White space, line breaks, and the unsaid play a decisive role in his work. Meaning frequently emerges not from what is named, but from what is withheld. Such restraint is not an aesthetic affectation but an ethical decision: to refrain from overstatement is to trust the reader and to acknowledge the autonomy of the observed world.

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4. Haiku as Ethical Compression

To understand Gatalica's poetics, one must move beyond formal definitions of haiku as syllabic pattern or aesthetic convention. In his practice, haiku becomes a mode of ethical compression—a way of reducing experience without trivializing it.

Compression here does not entail simplification. On the contrary, it intensifies complexity. A single image must carry temporal depth, emotional resonance, and philosophical implication without explanation. This demand disciplines both poet and reader.

Gatalica's haiku frequently inhabit liminal moments: dusk rather than noon, aftermath rather than event, presence marked by absence. These moments resist narrative closure. The poems do not illustrate; they situate. The reader is not instructed what to feel but invited to notice.

Attention, in this work, is not passive observation. It is an ethical act. To attend carefully is to recognize the autonomy of the other—whether that other is a natural phenomenon, a human trace, or silence itself.

5. Toward *Night Jasmine*: A Poetics of Peace Without Rhetoric

The haiku collection *Night Jasmine* represents a culmination of these tendencies. Recognized for its contribution to peace-themed literature, the book does not approach peace as slogan, ideology, or declaration. Instead, it approaches peace obliquely—through nocturnal imagery, quiet persistence, and fragile continuity.

What distinguishes *Night Jasmine* is its refusal of dramatization. There are no grand gestures, no overt moralizing. Peace appears not as abstraction but as a condition of attention: the ability to notice fragrance in darkness, continuity amid rupture, and stillness under historical pressure.

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This approach aligns with a tradition of ethical minimalism, in which moral force arises from restraint rather than amplification. By focusing on the smallest perceivable units of experience, Gatalica constructs a poetics that resists violence at the level of language itself.

6. Positioning Within Contemporary Global Haiku

Gatalica's role within contemporary global haiku culture extends beyond authorship. His editorial work—curating, contextualizing, and sustaining international dialogue—reflects a commitment to haiku as a living, evolving practice rather than a static inheritance.

What distinguishes his contribution is attentiveness practiced horizontally rather than authority imposed vertically. His engagement across cultures demonstrates respect for difference without relativism and commitment to quality without dogmatism.

This balance—rigor without rigidity, openness without dilution—mirrors the aesthetic principles of his poetry and explains its resonance across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

If Part I has examined the conditions of Goran Gatalica's poetry—intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic—Part II turns to the poems themselves. There, a curated selection of English haiku is presented alongside faithful, poetic Chinese translations, followed by close commentary grounded in haiku aesthetics and cross-cultural reading.

PART II

1. Entering the Text: Why the Haiku Must Be Read Slowly?

If Part I has argued that Goran Gatalica's poetics is grounded in ethical attention, restraint, and disciplinary silence, then the haiku themselves must now be allowed to speak—not as illustrations of theory, but as primary sites of meaning. Haiku resists paraphrase. Its logic is experiential rather than discursive; it unfolds in perception, not argument.

For this reason, the haiku presented here are offered bilingually, in English and faithful–poetic Chinese translation, each adhering to core haiku aesthetics: seasonal awareness, cutting

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logic, understatement, and resonance beyond statement. Each poem is followed by a brief critical commentary intended not to close meaning, but to open it further.

The Chinese translations do not aim to domesticate the poems, nor to embellish them. Instead, they seek equivalence of attention: rhythm answering rhythm, image answering image, silence answering silence.

2. Haiku I: Ethical Power and Minimalism

the plum petals

stuck in a rain gutter -

refugee camp (Gatalica, 2022, p. 29)

梅瓣落如绡

搁浅在雨水沟里

恍若难民潮

This haiku demonstrates astonishing conciseness and restraint, revealing the ethical power of cross-cultural imagery. The poet places "plum petals"—an image deeply rooted in East Asian classical aesthetics, symbolizing nobility and transient life—within the "rain gutter," a functional, marginal space of modernity. The "stuck" state of the petals represents both physical entrapment and the suspension of life's natural flow. Following the dash, the abrupt appearance of "refugee camp" is not a straightforward metaphor but rather a juxtaposition that compels the reader to draw connections between two forms of "temporary existence": the petals awaiting decay or washing away in the gutter, and the refugees awaiting resettlement or repatriation in the camp. Both are equally fragile, equally excluded from the mainstream system.

The minimalist poetics of haiku plays a crucial role here: it refuses explanation, sentimentality, or didacticism, presenting only the visual superimposition of two concrete scenes. Yet, through this, it places the decay of natural phenomena and the political

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displacement of human lives within the same ethical field of vision, accomplishing—in silence—a profound meditation on war and marginalized existence.

3. Haiku II: Violence and Freedom

thinking of war -

trapped in barbed wire

a butterfly (Gatalica, 2022, p. 45)

念及战争时

蝴蝶陷于铁丝网

振翅不得脱

With just three lines, this haiku accomplishes a profound ethical gaze. The opening line, "thinking of war," introduces the vast violence of history into personal consciousness, only to materialize it immediately as barbed wire—an emblem of modern warfare, originally designed to demarcate borders and imprison human bodies. The butterfly trapped within, a classic symbol of natural fragility and beauty, becomes here an epitome of innocent life. The poet does not explicitly denounce the cruelty of war; rather, through the passive state of being "trapped," the poem reveals how the machinery of violence silently consumes non-combatant lives.

The tactile contrast between butterfly wings and wire spikes, the sudden shift from contemplating war to witnessing a microscopic scene—these together form a structural metaphor: every individual caught in systemic violence, human or non-human alike, becomes a "butterfly" ensnared in the invisible logic of war. Within the poem's silence echoes a pressing question: when violence permeates the everyday, how can beauty and freedom ever survive?

4. Haiku III: Acoustic Space and Ethical Perception

city cannon -

mother's hyacinths tremble

in the flowerpots (Gatalica, 2022, p. 44)

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城头炮声沉

母亲栽的风信子

盆中颤春深

This haiku transforms acoustic space into a battleground, staging a silent ethical confrontation. The cannon's roar is not mere background noise but a physically invasive agent of violence that tears through the calm of the air, penetrates walls and window frames, and reaches the most fragile vessel of life indoors—the hyacinths in their flowerpot. Here, sound ceases to be a neutral natural phenomenon; it becomes a weapon mobilized by the machinery of war, reconstructing the ethical nature of space: the private sphere, brutally penetrated by sound waves, loses its sanctity and turns into a resonance chamber for public violence. The hyacinth's "tremble" thus becomes a convergence of multiple perceptions: first, it is a physical transduction of acoustic energy, documenting sound's penetration as material force; second, it is a biological response of living beings to irresistible violence, rendering invisible war as visible crisis; finally, this trembling becomes an ethical tremor, exposing war's systemic colonization of non-combat zones—when cannon fire enters the daily soundscape, any attempt to preserve beauty and order on a windowsill becomes a silent yet tenacious indictment of violence.

5. Haiku IV: The Dissolution of the Quest

spring cloud...

a pilgrim is disappearing

among the higher cliffs (Gatalica, 2022, p. 38)

春云渡远岑

朝圣者影渐朦胧

隐入危崖深

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With minimalistic strokes, this haiku sketches a profound spiritual landscape. “Spring cloud,” serving as a seasonal word, hints at the flow and impermanence of the seasons, while its lightness and diffuse texture create a dual tension—both spatial and textural—with the weighty “higher cliffs” that follow. The pilgrim’s act of “disappearing” is not an erasure but a gradual merging into a higher, more expansive natural order—a visual vanishing that also metaphorizes the seeker’s union with a sublime object——the cliff or faith.

Through omission and negative space, the poet freezes the narrative focus on the instant of “disappearing”: no origin or destination is given for the pilgrim. Instead, the softness of the spring cloud and the hardness of the cliff engage in an existential dialogue. The cliffs symbolize both the arduous realm of practice and the pinnacle of the spirit, while the ethereal cloud lends the entire process a transcendent, serene quality. Ultimately, the natural scene and the human act of pilgrimage achieve a poetic unity in the moment of disappearance: the ultimate meaning of the quest lies precisely in the dissolution of individual traces, merging into the more ancient rhythm of the cosmos.

6. Haiku V: Love and Mark

early autumn-

on mother’s apron

plum stains (Gatalica, 2022, p. 95)

早秋晨光里

母亲围裙染梅渍

浅深皆往昔

This haiku carries a profound narrative of time through a still-life of everyday objects. “Early autumn,” as a kigo (seasonal word), not only marks the season but also implies transition and sedimentation in the cycle of life. The “plum stains” on the mother’s apron are by no means accidental marks—they are material crystallizations of labor, time, and memory, perhaps from

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pickling plums, where splashed juice oxidizes into faint brown imprints on the cotton fabric. The apron, as an extension of the body in domestic labor, transforms here into a micro-history of the family: the plum stains bear witness to the mother's quiet guardianship in the kitchen year after year, while also metaphorizing the wisdom of preserving perishable fruit into lasting flavor.

Through minimalistic juxtaposition of images, the poet creates a poetic dialogue between the transience of autumn and the permanence of stains. The plum stains act as a non-verbal inscription, chronicling the mother's silent dedication within the seasonal cycle. Between the crisp chill of early autumn and the late-summer abundance symbolized by the plum, there lingers a gentle sigh over the passage of time. Without uttering a word of emotion, the poem turns a simple stain into a transparent window onto family memory and enduring labor, flowing with a restrained yet tender reverence for life.

7. Patterns Across the Corpus: What the Haiku Share?

These haiku reveal a coherent ethical and aesthetic program:

(1) Aftermath over event –The poems never directly depict the moments of war, flight, or death. Instead, they focus on the residual traces of violence in the physical and sensory world: the trembling of hyacinths in a flowerpot from cannon fire, a butterfly trapped in barbed wire, plum petals stuck in a rain gutter. These are the "echoes" of events rather than the events themselves, revealing that the true permeation of violence lies in its enduring recoil, which alters the texture and meaning of everyday space.

(2) Absence as presence –Figures such as the mother, refugees, and pilgrims often remain outside the text, yet achieve a powerful presence through their traces and associated objects: the mother appears through plum stains on an apron or trembling hyacinths; refugees become haunting specters via metaphors of cherry blossoms and barbed wire. This absence

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functions as an ethical structure of summoning, compelling readers to actively contemplate lives excluded by systemic forces.

(3) Nonhuman agency –Natural elements are not passive images but active agents that carry history, perceive violence, and bear silent testimony: the hyacinth's "tremble" records acoustic violence; plum petals "stuck" in a rain gutter mirror the plight of refugees; a butterfly "trapped" in barbed wire exposes the logic of war. They become sensors and archives of human ethical failure.

(4) Refusal of closure –Each haiku ends in a state of suspension: petals "stuck," a butterfly "trapped," a pilgrim "disappearing," hyacinths "trembling." The poet refuses to offer resolution or redemption, instead placing readers within the continuity of an ethical dilemma. This incompleteness remains faithful to the nature of historical trauma—true suffering has no poetic full stop, only endless aftershocks.

These features align Gatalica's work with the most rigorous currents of contemporary haiku, where the poem becomes a site of encounter rather than expression. The self recedes, not in erasure, but in respect.

8. Toward Longer Silence: Preparing for *Night Jasmine*

The haiku above do not function as isolated jewels; they are elements within a larger poetic ecology. In Night Jasmine, these moments accumulate into a sustained meditation on peace—not as ideology, but as attentiveness practiced over time.

What distinguishes Gatalica's approach is that peace is never named directly. Instead, it is enacted formally: through brevity, restraint, and the refusal to instrumentalize suffering or beauty. The poems do not ask to persuade; they ask to be noticed.

If Part II has lingered with the micro-ethics of individual haiku, then Part III will step back to consider *Night Jasmine* as a book-length project and to situate Goran Gatalica within

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contemporary global haiku and minimalist poetics—where science, spirituality, and silence converge into a coherent poetic vision.

PART III

1. From Poem to Book: *Night Jasmine* as a Sustained Ethical Gesture

While individual haiku can be read as autonomous moments of perception, *Night Jasmine* reveals its full significance only when approached as a book-length poetic argument without rhetoric. The collection does not progress narratively, nor does it arrange poems into explicit thematic clusters. Instead, it accumulates attentions. Each poem slightly recalibrates the reader's perceptual stance, until a larger ethical atmosphere emerges.

What distinguishes *Night Jasmine* from many contemporary haiku collections is its refusal of thematic branding. The book does not announce itself as a work about peace, trauma, or reconciliation. These dimensions are present, but they arise indirectly, through patterns of restraint: early-autumn settings, aftermaths rather than events, city cannon, and persistent yet fragile continuities. Peace is never stated; it is practiced.

This practice aligns with a long tradition of non-declarative ethics in lyric poetry, where moral force derives from form rather than proclamation. In Gatalica's case, the form of haiku—radically concise, ethically modest, resistant to domination—becomes the very medium through which peace is imagined.

2. Peace Without Ideology: A Poetics of Non-Violence

The recognition of *Night Jasmine* as a peace-themed work is significant precisely because the book avoids all conventional markers of peace literature. There are no slogans, no explicit condemnations, no didactic gestures. Instead, the poems enact what might be called linguistic non-violence.

Non-violence here operates on several levels:

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(1) Semantic restraint – meaning is not forced or overdetermined. In the poems, meaning remains in a state of suspension: for instance, “the butterfly on barbed wire” does not explicitly articulate the cruelty of war, nor do “the plum petals in the rain gutter” directly symbolize refugees. The poet refuses to assign a single interpretation to the images, instead relying on juxtaposition to stir associations. In doing so, themes such as violence, memory, and displacement naturally emerge from the resonant silence of the unspoken.

(2) Imagistic humility – images are allowed to remain partial and open. Imagery is often presented in fragments: “the trembling of the hyacinth” does not narrate the mother, nor does “the plum stain on the apron” depict the scene of labor. This incompleteness resists a closed symbolic interpretation, allowing petals, stains, and clouds to remain as “half-open vessels” that can be filled with multiple layers of experience.

(3) Temporal patience – the poems dwell in slowness rather than urgency. The poet selects durational verbs such as tremble, strand, and dissolve, stretching the momentary into a prolonged process. For instance, the reverberation of cannon fire extends through flower petals, and the pilgrim’s “disappearing” into spring clouds is a gradual fade rather than an abrupt halt, compelling the reader to follow the text into a slow-motion ethical gaze.

(4) Ethical decentering – the poet’s voice withdraws in favor of attention. The poet’s judgment consistently remains behind the scenes. For instance, when describing the city cannon, only the physical tremor of the hyacinths is presented, with no explicit commentary on the war. This withdrawal shifts the authority of interpretation and the burden of ethical responsibility to the reader, transforming the poem into a training ground for attentiveness rather than a platform for moral pronouncements.

3. Science and Spirituality: Not a Synthesis, but a Discipline

One of the most distinctive aspects of Gatalica’s work is the way scientific training and spiritual attentiveness coexist without being merged into a facile synthesis. There is no attempt

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to aestheticize science or to mystify empirical knowledge. Instead, science provides a discipline of attention, while spirituality provides a discipline of humility.

From science, Gatalica inherits precision of observation, respect for limits of knowledge and suspicion of unnecessary explanation.

From spiritual traditions—particularly those aligned with contemplative minimalism—he inherits valuation of silence, acceptance of uncertainty and ethical patience.

Haiku becomes the meeting ground of these disciplines, not because it reconciles them, but because it refuses the need for reconciliation. The poem does not need to explain the world; it needs only to attend to it faithfully.

This is especially evident in the way *Night Jasmine* treats time. The poems are temporally modest. They do not gesture toward transcendence or revelation. Instead, they remain grounded in moments that are measurable yet irreducible. In this sense, the collection enacts what might be called a spiritual physics—a recognition that meaning emerges not from magnitude, but from relation.

4. Minimalism as Moral Practice

Minimalism in poetry is often misunderstood as an aesthetic preference or stylistic trend. In Gatalica's work, minimalism functions as a moral practice. To say less is not to evade responsibility, but to resist the violence of overstatement.

This resistance is particularly important in a global literary context where poets frequently feel compelled to represent suffering, conflict, or injustice through heightened language. Gatalica chooses a different path. He does not represent suffering directly; he attends to what remains around it. This choice avoids appropriation and preserves the dignity of what cannot be spoken fully.

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Minimalism here is not emptiness, but ethical density. Each word carries weight because it is surrounded by silence. Each image matters because it is not crowded by explanation. The reader is not instructed; the reader is entrusted.

Such trust is rare, and it signals a deep confidence in poetry's capacity to work quietly and persistently, beyond immediate recognition.

5. Global Haiku Without Homogenization

Gatalica's position within contemporary global haiku is distinguished by his ability to participate fully in international discourse without flattening cultural difference. His English-language haiku do not imitate Japanese models superficially, nor do they assert a localized identity defensively. Instead, they operate within a shared aesthetic field shaped by attentiveness, restraint, and respect for form.

This balance is increasingly important in global haiku culture, where rapid circulation can lead either to homogenization or to rigid traditionalism. Gatalica avoids both. His poems are formally disciplined yet responsive to lived European landscapes, histories, and atmospheres.

Equally important is his role as a curatorial intelligence—someone who understands haiku not only as a genre, but as a global conversation requiring careful mediation. His editorial work reflects the same values found in his poetry: patience, inclusivity, rigor, and resistance to spectacle.

Through this combination of authorship and curatorship, Gatalica contributes to shaping the ethical norms of contemporary haiku practice, emphasizing quality over novelty and attention over assertion.

Conclusion: The Fragrance That Remains

The image of night jasmine is instructive. The flower does not dominate its environment. Its presence is subtle, often unnoticed, yet persistent. It releases fragrance not through display

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but through duration. Goran Gatalica's poetry operates in much the same way. It does not demand attention; it rewards it. In a literary culture oriented toward immediacy and amplification, his work reminds us that poetry's deepest force may lie in what it chooses not to say.

For *Verse Version*, this alignment is not merely aesthetic but ethical. To publish, read, and edit such work is to affirm a belief in poetry as a practice of care—care for language, for perception, and for the fragile continuities that persist even in darkness.

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Heat, Flight, and Density

Xu Jiajia's Early Poetics of Sensation, Freedom, and Associative Thought

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Abstract

This essay introduces and critically frames the early poetic works of Xu Jiajia (徐嘉佳), a young Chinese poet born in 2014. Rather than approaching her writing through the lens of age, pedagogy, or novelty, the essay reads her poems as serious lyric experiments characterized by associative thinking, sensory density, and intuitive structural intelligence. Through close readings of three short poems—"Summer vs Steak", "Epiphany", and "Dense"—presented in bilingual Chinese–English form, the column examines how Xu's work mobilizes contrast, repetition, and metaphor to construct a distinctive poetic logic rooted in sensation rather than explanation. Her poems demonstrate an instinctive grasp of complementarity, freedom, and intensity, revealing a mode of lyric cognition often inaccessible to adult poetic language. Positioned within *Verse Version*'s commitment to discovering emerging poetic voices across cultures and ages, this essay argues that Xu Jiajia's work should be read not as "children's poetry," but as early-stage lyric intelligence—poetry that reminds us how imagination precedes doctrine, and how genuine poetic force often appears first as heat, flight, and density.

Keywords: Xu Jiajia, lyric imagination, sensory poetics, associative thinking

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Editor's Note

Verse Version is committed not only to established poetic voices, but to the conditions under which poetry first comes into being. To discover a poet is not merely to recognize

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mastery, but to recognize structural sensitivity, ethical perception, and imaginative courage at their moment of emergence.

This column presents the work of Xu Jiajia, a poet born in 2014, whose poems demonstrate an unusually concentrated lyric intelligence. We publish her work not as a pedagogical sample, nor as a novelty of youth, but as poetry—worthy of the same close attention, bilingual presentation, and critical seriousness afforded to any poet in our pages.

PART I

(Editorial Introduction · Poetic Orientation · Early Lyric Intelligence)

1. Editorial Introduction: Discovering a Poet Before the Categories Arrive

Literary history often encounters poets too late—after habits have solidified, after imagination has learned restraint, after language has learned how to behave. To encounter a poet early is rare, and to read such work seriously is rarer still.

Xu Jiajia (徐嘉佳), born in March 2014 in the Year of the Horse, writes poetry not from a position of mastery, but from risk**.** Her poems move with speed, leap through analogy, and refuse to remain within a single semantic frame. What distinguishes her work is not innocence, but velocity—a mind willing to test how far language can be pushed before it collapses.

Her poetry is a vivid adventure of words: innocence sharpened into blade, imagination unfolded into wings. She enters the regions the adult language often fails to reach—not by force, but by instinct. The storms that surge through her lines are not destructive; they are the raw, abundant energy of life itself, pressing against the limits of the page.

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For *Verse Version*, an international journal committed to poet-centered inquiry, Xu Jiajia's poems offer a rare opportunity: to witness poetry before it learns to disguise its power**.**

2. Poetic Orientation: Imagination as Structural Force

Xu Jiajia's poems are built not on narrative progression, but on associative logic. Images do not explain one another; they ignite each other. Opposites do not cancel out; they intensify.

Her work demonstrates an instinctive understanding of complementarity: summer and steak, fire and deity, freedom and loss. These are not metaphors applied after thought; they are thoughts themselves, unfolding in lyric form.

This is not a learned poetics. It is a discovered one.

PART II

(Poem Texts · Bilingual Presentation · Close Readings)

The following poems are presented in full text. The original Chinese texts are followed by the author's own English translations (including the complete paper). No wording, imagery, or lineation have been altered.

1. 夏日与牛排 (Original)

夏日与牛排互补

牛排柔嫩慰藉苦夏

苦夏诉诸牛排柔嫩

如火与灶神

彩线与百纳

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感情与故事

妙在异曲同工

一颗星在夜晚中兀自明亮

夜晚却仍往星的一旁

点亮月光

不为掩盖，相得益彰

牛排是一阵清风

吹散夏日烦恼

牛排是一道强光

对抗夏日炽焰燎阳

English Translation:

Summer VS Steak

The summer and the steak compensate to each other as a Janus-faced whole

The tender steak soothes out bitterness of summer

While the summer praised the delectable steak by grilling summer's own rich aroma

Fire constantly asks for Vesta

Colorful threads complete the quilts

Emotions weave stories

The beauty lies in the mutual fulfillment

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A bright moon needs no dimmer stars

No one overshadows

They highlight each other

Steak breezes away daft summer

Steak is a beam of light shining ever brightly

Fighting against the scorching summer flames

Commentary

This poem stages a sophisticated meditation on mutual fulfilment. Summer and steak are not symbols but forces—each gaining intensity through the other's presence. The repeated logic of reciprocity structures the poem's ethical imagination.

What is striking is the refusal of hierarchy. Neither element dominates. Fire needs Vesta. Threads need quilts. Emotion needs story. This is relational thinking at its most intuitive and poetic.

The poem's final movement—meeting heat with abundance—articulates an aesthetic courage rare even in mature poets.

2. 悟歌 (Original)

我的鸟飞走了

留给我一声叹息

今天

一滴酸奶在地上溅开

一个陨落的彩虹精灵

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从天上逃逸

追求自由

这让我想起了

丢失的鸟

她向往自由

向着自由的方向

而飞

English Translation:

Epiphany

My bird has flown away

Leaving me only a shuddering sigh

Today

A drop of yogurt rippled away on the floor

A fallen angel

Breaking through the cages of heaven

Longing for the other worlds

Had that reminded me

of my lost bird

She, too, finding the trace of direction

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Flying towards that vast and vague

Freedom

Commentary

This poem demonstrates Xu Jiajia's instinctive mastery of associative memory. A spilled drop of yogurt opens onto flight, loss, and freedom. The logic is not explanatory but emotional.

Freedom here is double-edged. The bird's flight leaves absence behind. This ethical complexity—freedom as both liberation and loss—emerges without sentimentality or instruction.

3. 浓味 (Original)

夏天需要牛排就像

花朵至夏才绚烂

浆果至夏才喷薄

牛排之于夏天就像

色彩之于夏加尔

疯狂之于马蒂斯

烈日起火

烧得皮开肉绽

方为浓中之最浓

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以浓烈烘托浓烈

以热情激发热情

以丰盛对抗炽焰

English Translation

Dense

Summer calls out for steak a need as true

As blossoms waiting for the sun to blaze their petals

Or berries holding their burst of the delectable juice

Steak in summer is what color

Is to Chagall—a vivid, wild stroke

What savage, raw madness

Is to Matisse

The sun itself has been a grill, a fierce delight

That sears the skin until the flavor tops its peak

And condensation finds its deepest abyss

To sharpen heat with heat

To defeat fever with fever itself, in abundance

That asserts its name

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Commentary

"Dense" functions as a manifesto of intensity. It argues—implicitly—that abundance itself can be form. By invoking Chagall and Matisse, the poem situates itself intuitively within expressionist aesthetics.

The poem's insistence on saturation—heat against heat, fullness against excess—reveals a fearless lyric temperament, one that refuses dilution.

PART III

(Thematic Synthesis · Early Poetic Intelligence · Future Trajectories)

1. Sensation Before Explanation

Xu Jiajia's poems consistently privilege sensation over explanation. Meaning arises through pressure rather than definition, through collision rather than clarity.

2. Freedom as Motion, Not Resolution

Birds fly. Hearts move ahead of bodies. Freedom is directional, not terminal. This understanding grants the poems emotional honesty without closure.

3. Discovering a Poet, Not a Category

These poems should not be reduced to "children's poetry." They are not simplified; they are **unfiltered**. They show what lyric thinking looks like before it learns restraint.

Conclusion: Waiting for the Storm

Xu Jiajia's poetry does not ask to be protected. It asks to be read.

With heat, flight, and density, her poems carry energies that many poets have spent a lifetime trying to recover. *Verse Version* publishes her works not as prediction, but as recognition: a promising poet already imprinting the lightning of future literature.

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Poetry Narration and Local Identity

A Study of the Construction of "Cultural IP" in Heyuan Hakka Homestays

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of digital media and policy-driven rural tourism, this study examines how Hakka homestays in the Heyuan region of Guangdong Province can transition from mere "space provision" to the construction of a poetry-narrative-based cultural IP, thereby fostering tourists' sense of place identity. Grounded in the intersection of poetic narration, cultural heritage, and semiotic design, the research adopts a case study approach, focusing on: (1) how local symbols and emotions in poetry are transformed into narrative resources; (2) how these resources are narrativized in homestay spaces, experiences, and discourses; and (3) how such narrative-driven IP influences tourists' place perception, emotional attachment, and sense of belonging. A three-stage model of "narrative resource extraction–narrative translation–identity generation" is proposed, showing that deep narrative integration is more effective than symbolic collage in building sustainable local identity. Theoretically, it extends poetic narration into a narratological framework for tourism and cultural IP construction. Practically, it proposes a "narrative-first" development model for homestays, offering strategic insights for sustainable cultural tourism.
Keywords: Poetry Narration; Local Identity; Cultural IP; Hakka Homestays; Place-making

1. Introduction: The Convergence of Poetry Narration, Local Identity, and Cultural IP

1.1 Research Background

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The contemporary landscape of urban and rural development is increasingly mediated. On one hand, in the era of mobile internet, emerging "online celebrity cities" created through traffic and reputation have been gaining momentum, subtly altering the traditional characteristics of city images (Wu, 2025, p.101). These cities build their appeal through short videos, live streams, and social media, creating novel forms of human-place interaction. On the other hand, rural tourism development is often propelled by policy frameworks. However, in Heyuan, policy implementation faces challenges such as "lack of systematic planning in the policy system, low efficiency of executing bodies, low initiative of target groups, and an imperfect policy environment," hindering the sustainable development of the rural tourism industry (Tan, 2023, p. 30). The core value of rural tourism lies in the synergistic experience of natural and human resources—allowing tourists to "understand local customs and rituals, appreciate seasonal rural products, fruits, streams, and ancient bridges, and engage in sightseeing, recreation, and experiencing rural lifestyles" (Tan, 2023, p. 9). Against this dual background of mediated urban narratives and policy-driven rural practice, Heyuan's Hakka homestays encounter a critical juncture. They must evolve from simply providing accommodation ("spatial supply") to becoming narrators of place, offering rich "cultural narratives" that can compete in an experience-driven economy and address policy implementation gaps.

1.2 Problem Statement

This study addresses a central puzzle: How can the dispersed and often abstract cultural resources of Heyuan—particularly its poetic texts and Hakka heritage—be coherently synthesized and transformed into a tangible, engaging, and marketable "Cultural IP" within homestays? Furthermore, how can this IP effectively shape a meaningful sense of "local identity" among visitors? Local identity, as defined in social psychology, refers to the "cognitive, emotional, and evaluative dimensions of the relationship between the individual

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and a local place or community" (Li, 2021; Driel & Verkuyten, 2020). It is not automatically given but constructed through interaction and narrative. As Driel and Verkuyten (2020) argue, "The content of the local identity defines the norms, values and beliefs of the community that provide community members with a direction for how to think, feel and behave" (p. 615). Therefore, the core research question is: How can the scattered poetic texts and Hakka cultural resources of Heyuan be transformed through narrative construction into a unified, experiential "Cultural IP" within homestays, and how does this process effectively shape tourists' local identity?

1.3 Literature Review and Innovation

This research sits at the intersection of three distinct yet related academic strands.

Strand 1 (Theoretical): Poetry Narration and Local Writing. The study of "poetry narration" in China emerged from discussions on "narrativity" in 1990s poetry criticism and gained prominence after the "First Frontier Academic Forum on Poetic Narratology" in 2020 (Zhang, 2021, p. 53). Zhang Liqun (2021) advocates for a dynamic and open "poetics of poetry narration" grounded in Chinese poetic practice (p. 59). Li Guikui (2018) delves into the unique spatiotemporal mechanisms of traditional Chinese poetry narration, highlighting techniques like "goule" (outlining) and spatiotemporal jumps that create a "wanqu" (indirect, subtle) aesthetic (pp. 110-112). Parallel to this, the concept of "local characteristics in poetry" provides a lens for analyzing geographical elements in verse. Wang Lizeng (2025) argues that this concept, encompassing "local writing" (external identifier), "local identity" (emotional orientation), and "local traits" (internal factors like themes and style), is more accurate and richer than broader "regional literature" studies (p. 1). Han Ying's (2022) analysis of Tang dynasty poetry about the Yellow River source demonstrates how poets transform objective geographical space into a "literary geographical space" laden with political, military, and cultural meanings (p. 1).

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Strand 2 (Subject): Hakka Cultural Inheritance and Homestay Design Practice. Heyuan, as a "Hakka Ancient Town," possesses profound cultural resources. Its Hakka mountain songs are "not only treasures of musical art but also living fossils carrying history, emotion, and cultural memory" (Xie, 2025, p. 1). The inheritance of such intangible cultural heritage requires innovative pathways, such as integrating modern musical elements (Xie, 2025, p. 4). In terms of material culture and spatial design, He Yangmei (2025) emphasizes that the interior design of Heyuan rural homestays should integrate Hakka culture, proposing designs for family-style guest room combinations, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) feature spaces, and indoor-outdoor integrated spaces to create distinctive environments (p. 3). The principles of using local materials and traditional craftsmanship in furniture design are also crucial for fostering a sense of place (He, 2025, pp. 2-3).

Strand 3 (Pathway): Semiotic and Design-Based Construction of Cultural IP and Transnational Comparison of Local Narratives. The construction of Cultural IP has become a key strategy for revitalizing traditional culture. Tian Muzi's (2025) research on the Yunnan Wamao (tile cat) demonstrates how semiotic theory (semantics, syntactics, pragmatics) can guide the extraction and transformation of core cultural symbols for IP development (p. 2). Huang Yuzhu (2025) introduces Sensory Processing Sensitivity (SPS) theory into the IP design of Shan Hai Jing (Classic of Mountains and Seas), advocating for "synergistic design of perceptual pathways" (e.g., multi-sensory integration) to enhance emotional connection and cultural identity (pp. 23-24, 30). Furthermore, a transnational perspective reminds us that local identity is often constructed in relation to broader mobilities. Dhupelia-Mesthrie (2016) argues against isolating transnational memories from local journeys, emphasizing that "there is no necessary hierarchy in people's experience of spatial mobility" (pp. 1068-1069), urging attention to both movement and fixity.

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Positioning of This Study: While existing research offers valuable insights, a gap remains in systematically applying the literary mechanism of "poetry narration" to the practical field of "Cultural IP construction" within specific tourism contexts like homestays. This study aims to bridge this gap. It stitches together the theoretical tools of Strand 1 (poetry narration/local writing), the contextual subject of Strand 2 (Heyuan's Hakka culture and homestays), and the methodological approaches of Strand 3 (IP semiotics/design and narrative comparison). By doing so, it examines how poetic narratives can be operationalized to build a Cultural IP that fosters local identity in Heyuan Hakka homestays.

1.4 Research Approach and Methods

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following sub-questions:

a. What "local symbols" (e.g., "Wanlv Lake," "Hakka mountains," "migration") and "emotional schemas" (e.g., nostalgia, tranquility, resilience) available for narrative transformation are contained in Heyuan-related poetic texts (both classical and modern)?

b. How are these extracted poetic elements translated into concrete narrative practices across three layers of the homestay field: spatial solidification, experiential activation, and discursive communication?

c. How does this "poetry-narration-driven" Cultural IP construction model influence the formation of tourists' local identity at cognitive, emotional, and social belonging levels?

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative case study approach, focusing on selected Hakka homestays in Heyuan that explicitly engage with poetic or cultural narratives. Multiple methods are employed for triangulation:

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Textual Analysis: Close reading of Heyuan-related poems from various periods (e.g., works by Zong Le, modern poetry) to identify recurring local symbols, imagery, emotional tones, and narrative structures.

In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with homestay operators, designers, and local cultural practitioners to understand their intentionality in using poetic narratives, their design choices, and their perceptions of tourist responses.

Participant Observation: Immersive observation within homestay spaces and during curated activities (e.g., poetry readings, tea ceremonies, storytelling sessions) to document how narratives are embodied and experienced.

Visual Material Analysis: Systematic analysis of homestay promotional materials, websites, social media content, interior décor, and architectural features to decode the visual and discursive construction of the poetic IP.

2. Theoretical Framework: The Narrative Transformation Chain from Poetic Text to Local Identity

2.1 Core Conceptual Definitions

“Poetry Narration”: Moving beyond simply denoting plot within a poem, this concept, drawing from Zhang Liqun and Li Guikui, emphasizes poetry’s function as a spatiotemporal organizing mechanism and a mode of affective expression. It is a way of structuring experience and give meaning to place. Li Guikui (2018) explains that traditional Chinese poetry narration is based on the concept of “continuity through change” and forms unique spatiotemporal frameworks through “circulation, contrast, and leaps” (pp. 106-107). This narrative capability allows poetry to condense complex local experiences, histories, and emotions into potent symbolic forms.

“Cultural IP” (Intellectual Property): Combining insights from Tian Muzi (2025) and Huang Yuzhu (2025), this study defines Cultural IP as an intellectual property system with

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recognizability, storability, and extensibility, formed through systematic symbolic design and narrative development based on specific cultural resources (here, poetry). It is not merely a logo or a character but a coherent narrative universe that can be experienced across multiple platforms and touchpoints. Effective Cultural IP construction involves the strategic translation of cultural symbols into engaging stories and sensorial experiences.

"Local Identity": This concept integrates the literary perspective of "local identity" (Li, 2021) with the social psychological definition from Driel and Verkuyten (2020). It refers to the cognitive, affective, and evaluative sense of belonging an individual develops towards a place through narrative interaction. It encompasses knowing what a place is ("cognitive map"), feeling a connection to it ("emotional bond"), and potentially seeing oneself as part of its social fabric, even temporarily ("social belonging"). As Driel and Verkuyten (2020) note, a prosocial local identity content, such as one defined by hospitality, can incline community members and visitors alike to act in hospitable ways (p. 615).

2.2 Construction of the Analytical Framework: A Three-Stage Narrative Transformation Model

To analyze the process from text to identity, this study proposes a three-stage model:

Stage 1: Narrative Resource Layer (Extraction)

This involves mining Heyuan-related poetic texts for raw narrative material. Using the lens of "local characteristics in poetry" (Wang, 2025), analysis focuses on:

Local Symbols: Iconic geographical markers and cultural motifs (e.g., "Wanlv Lake" from its reputation as a green city, "Hakka mountains" from its topography, the "migration" motif central to Hakka history). As Zhao Zongfu's (1982) study shows, poetic depictions of the river source evolved from a vague western extreme to a specific, explored geographical and cultural symbol (pp. 69-71).

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Emotional Schemas: Recurrent affective patterns or atmospheres conveyed in the poems (e.g., the awe towards nature found in Shan Hai Jing descriptions, the tranquility of pastoral life, the resilience embedded in migration stories, the nostalgic longing in classical lyrics).

Stage 2: Narrative Translation Layer (Transformation)

This stage examines how the extracted symbols and schemas are translated into tangible experiences within the homestay field through three intertwined pathways:

Spatial Solidification: Following He Yangmei's (2025) design principles, this involves materializing poetic image into the built environment. Examples include architectural forms inspired by poetic imagery, interior layouts that mimic poetic spatiotemporal rhythms (e.g., "scenery changing with every step"), and the use of inscriptions, paintings, and object designs that quote or visualize poems.

Experiential Activation: This transforms passive viewing into active participation. It includes curated activities like poetry recitation workshops, cultural rituals (tea ceremony with stories), guided tours with poetic narration, and interactive installations that allow guests to engage with poetic themes.

Discursive communication: This involves weaving a coherent brand meta-narrative across various texts. It encompasses the homestay's name, promotional copy, social media storytelling, and the owner's personal narratives, all of which consistently employ poetic language and themes to construct a unique cultural identity. This process relates to Du Xin's (2026) observation on the "participatory" co-construction mechanism of city image in digital media, where user-generated content also shapes perception (pp. 4-5).

Stage 3: Identity Generation Layer (Outcome)

This final stage investigates how the translated narratives interact with tourists to potentially foster local identity. Drawing on the components of local identity, it asks:

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Cognitive Dimension ("What is this place?"): Do the narratives provide a coherent "cultural script" that helps tourists understand Heyuan's distinctive characteristics, history, and Hakka culture?

Affective Dimension ("How does this place feel?"): Do the poetic atmosphere and experiences evoke intended emotions like nostalgia, peace, resonance, or awe, creating an emotional bond with the place?

Social-Belonging Dimension ("Do I belong here, even briefly?"): Do the narratives and social practices within the homestay facilitate a role transition for the tourist from "outsider" to "temporary local" or "cultural participant," enabling a symbolic act of place affiliation? This can be compared to Dhupelia-Mesthrie's (2016) focus on how narratives of local and transnational journeys contribute to identity re-location.

3. Case Deep Description: The Triple Practice of Poetic Narration in Heyuan Hakka Homestays

3.1 Case Selection and Overview

This section would introduce 2-3 specific Hakka homestays in Heyuan chosen for study. Selection criteria would include: explicit use of poetic or literary themes in their branding/design; representation of different scales and styles (e.g., a boutique homestay in a renovated Hakka roundhouse, a modern design homestay referencing landscape poetry); and willingness to participate in the research. Brief profiles of each homestay would be provided, including location, history, owner's philosophy, and target clientele.

3.2 Spatial Narration: The Material Embedding of Poetic Imagery

This section analyzes how poetic elements are fixed in the physical space of the homestays, creating an atmosphere of "poetic dwelling".

Architectural Integration: From a narratological perspective, architectural forms function not merely as shelters but as primary narrative carriers that frame visitors' first

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encounter with place. The adoption or reinterpretation of Hakka vernacular forms (like the "round dragon house" or "enclosed village" mentioned by He Yangmei, 2025, p. 1) embeds poetic narration at the level of spatial ontology: the inward-facing courtyards, axial symmetry, and enclosure logic implicitly echo poetic themes of protection, rootedness, and collective memory associated with Hakka migration history. These architectural choices enable the homestay space itself to "tell a story" even before any textual explanation is offered, allowing guests to intuitively perceive the harmony between human settlement and surrounding landscape—a spatial logic long celebrated in classical Chinese poetry.

Interior Design and Décor: Rather than functioning as decorative add-ons, these interior elements operate as micro-narrative nodes distributed throughout the living environment. The selective inscription of poetic lines, often placed at transitional points such as doorways, corridors, or tea spaces, subtly guides guests' emotional rhythm as they move through the homestay. In this sense, poetry becomes spatially performative: it does not merely describe nature or locality but actively structures perception, inviting moments of pause, reflection, and emotional attunement. The emphasis on handcrafted furniture and local materials further reinforces a poetic aesthetic of simplicity and restraint, aligning with the understated expressiveness characteristic of traditional poetic narration, as suggested by He Yangmei (2025, pp. 2-3).

Spatial Sequence and Rhythm: This sequential organization transforms spatial movement into a form of embodied narration. As guests transition from more public to increasingly private zones, the experience mirrors poetic spatiotemporal shifts—compression and expansion, concealment and revelation—described by Li Guikui (2018). Each spatial "leap" offers a new sensory and emotional register, producing a rhythm akin to poetic progression. Consequently, spatial narration enables guests to experience locality not as a static backdrop

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but as a layered, unfolding story, thereby deepening the immersive quality of the homestay environment.

3.3 Experiential Narration: The Participatory Generation of Poetic Situations

Beyond static space, this section investigates how homestays activate poetic narratives through curated experiences.

Themed Activities: Such activities function as situated narrative enactments, allowing poetry to shift from textual representation to lived experience. By participating in recitation, singing, or writing, guests momentarily inhabit the affective positions traditionally occupied by poets or local performers (linking to Xie Shihua's, 2025, work on heritage). This performative engagement blurs the boundary between cultural consumption and cultural participation, enabling poetic narration to operate as a shared experiential script rather than a unidirectional display of heritage.

Daily Rituals and Storytelling: Through narrativization, everyday practices are elevated into symbolically charged moments that connect personal experience with collective memory. These rituals function as affective anchors, embedding poetic meaning within sensory routines. By linking taste, smell, and embodied action to poetic and historical narratives, the homestay experience cultivates emotional resonance that extends beyond visual appreciation, reinforcing the multisensory logic emphasized in narrative-driven Cultural IP construction.

Guided Interaction with Landscape: Documenting how homestay hosts or guides frame nature walks or visits to nearby sites. A walk along a riverbank might be framed through lines from a poem about the river source, consciously shaping the guests' perception of the landscape through a literary lens, much like the poets Han Ying (2022) discusses transformed the Yellow River source into a literary space (p. 1).

3.4 Discursive Narration: The Textual Communication of the Poetic IP

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This section examines the narrative construction across various textual and media platforms.

Branding and Naming: Analyzing homestay names (e.g., “Wanlv Lake Poetry Lodge,” “Song of the Hakka Hills Homestay”) for their direct invocation of poetic or local symbols. These names function as condensed narrative signifiers, encapsulating core poetic themes while establishing immediate associations with locality. As entry points to the Cultural IP, they pre-frame visitors’ expectations and prime interpretive pathways even before arrival, reinforcing the narrative coherence of the homestay experience.

Promotional Materials: Examining website copy, brochures, and online listings to see how they weave a story about the place, often starting with Heyuan’s ancient history as “Qin Dynasty’s Longchuan County” and “Zhao Tuo’s rising place” (He Yangmei, 2025, p. 1), and integrating poetic phrases to describe the ambiance. These materials operate as meta-narratives that align historical discourse with poetic imagery, translating academic or historical knowledge into emotionally accessible language. By combining factual references with lyrical expression, promotional texts extend poetic narration beyond the physical site, sustaining narrative continuity across pre-visit imagination and post-visit memory.

Social Media Storytelling: Observing how homestays use platforms like WeChat, Xiaohongshu, or Douyin. This might involve posting photos with poetic captions, sharing short videos of poetic moments (e.g., morning mist on the lake) set to traditional music, or encouraging guests to share their own “poetic” experiences with specific hashtags. Here, poetic narration becomes co-produced through digital interaction. User-generated content amplifies and diversifies the narrative, allowing guests to reinterpret poetic themes through personal perspectives. This participatory circulation strengthens the Cultural IP’s adaptability while maintaining a shared narrative core, echoing Du Xin’s (2026) discussion of participatory image construction.

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Owner's Narrative: Through interviews, capturing the homestay owner's personal story—their connection to Heyuan, their inspiration from poetry, their vision for sharing Hakka culture—which often serves as the foundational human story for the entire IP. The owner's narrative functions as a legitimizing anchor, grounding poetic narration in lived experience. By positioning themselves as both narrator and cultural mediator, owners humanize the IP, reinforcing authenticity and emotional trust. This personal storytelling bridges abstract poetic concepts and concrete social relations, enhancing the persuasive power of the homestay's overall narrative framework.

Overall, the case analysis shows that poetic narration in Heyuan Hakka homestays functions as an integrated narrative system rather than isolated design elements. Through spatial embedding, experiential activation, and discursive communication, poetic resources are transformed into an immersive narrative field that enables embodied and multisensory engagement. Based on these empirical insights, the following discussion synthesizes the construction mechanisms of narrative-driven Cultural IP and examines its effects on tourists' cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of local identity.

4. Discussion and Findings: The Construction Mechanism and Identity Effects of Narrative-Driven Cultural IP

4.1 Construction Mechanism: How Poetic Narrative Integrates into "Cultural IP"

The case analysis reveals that successful transformation of poetic resources into a cohesive Cultural IP relies on the mutual reinforcement of spatial, experiential, and discursive narratives, creating a unified "narrative field." Isolated poetic elements in décor are not enough; they must be echoed in activities and consistently communicated in language. In other words, poetic narration becomes effective only when it is stabilized across multiple touchpoints, so that guests can repeatedly encounter the same symbolic cues in different forms (seeing, doing, hearing, and sharing), gradually forming a coherent interpretation of "what this place is about."

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This coherence also reduces the risk that poetry is perceived as mere ornamentation, and instead positions it as a meaningful script that organizes experience.

The key to successful IP construction lies in the leap from "element application" to "worldview construction". The homestay must transcend being a container for poetic motifs to become an enterable "poetic realm"—a coherent, immersive storyworld where every touchpoint supports a central narrative theme (e.g., "the Hakka journey of resilience and home-making," "the timeless tranquility of the Wanlv Lake landscape"). Such a "realm" is not built by adding more symbols, but by ensuring internal consistency between space, service encounters, and narrative language, so that visitors can move from fragmented impressions to an integrated sense of place. This aligns with the process Du Xin (2026) describes for internet-famous cities, where a mechanism of "civilization uploading—media roaming—recreating a sense of place" shapes image, emphasizing the role of mediated experience in forming place attachment (pp. 4-5).

This research engages with and extends the theories of Tian Muzi (2025) and Huang Yuzhu (2025). Tian's semiotic approach provides a method for systematically deconstructing and recombining cultural symbols from poetry (like "lake," "mountain," "migration path")—a process evident in the extraction of narrative resources. Importantly, this semiotic translation also implies a hierarchy of symbols, where a limited set of "core signs" can anchor the IP while allowing peripheral signs to vary without diluting recognizability. Huang's emphasis on "synergistic design of perceptual pathways" for sensitive audiences finds concrete application here. The poetic IP in homestays operates through a systematic, affective narrativization that engages multiple senses: the visual beauty of the space and calligraphy, the auditory experience of poems and songs, the tactile feel of handmade furniture and local textiles, the taste of food tied to stories, and even the olfactory sense of tea and mountain air. In this way, narration is not only "told" but continuously "felt," enabling poetic meaning to be remembered as embodied

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sensation rather than abstract knowledge. This multi-sensory narrative design aims to create the deep, emotionally resonant experience that both poetry and a strong Cultural IP seek to deliver.

4.2 Identity Effects: Pathways to Shaping Tourists' Local Identity

Based on observational and interview data, the narrative practices were found to operate on tourists' local identity formation through three interconnected pathways. Rather than acting independently, these pathways reinforce one another, allowing cognitive understanding, emotional response, and social positioning to gradually converge into a relatively stable sense of place-related identification.

Cognitive Pathway (Providing a Cultural Script):

The integrated narratives offer tourists a framework to "read" and understand Heyuan. Instead of perceiving it as a generic rural destination, they learn to see it through the lens of "Hakka Ancient Town," "source of the Dong River," and "land of green mountains and clear waters," concepts rich with historical and poetic connotations. Through repeated narrative cues encountered across space, activities, and discourse, tourists acquire a shared interpretive script that organizes fragmented impressions into a meaningful whole. The narratives connect discrete sights (a roundhouse, a lake, a mountain) into a coherent story, fulfilling the cognitive dimension of local identity and enabling tourists to articulate "where they are" in cultural rather than purely geographical terms.

Affective Pathway (Fostering Emotional Connection):

The poetic atmosphere and participatory experiences are designed to evoke specific emotions that create a bond. The tranquility of a lakeside reading nook may induce peace; the spirited singing of a mountain song might evoke resonance or joy; the story of Hakka migration embedded in a meal might inspire respect and empathy. Importantly, these emotions are generated through embodied encounters rather than abstract interpretation, allowing visitors to

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feel the locality before fully conceptualizing it. These emotions are not random but are often linked to the emotional schemas present in the source poetic texts (e.g., awe of nature, nostalgia, resilience). This process mirrors how, as Wang Lizeng (2025) notes, local identity in poetry is deeply tied to the poet's emotional experience and identification with a place (pp. 4–6).

Social-Belonging Pathway (Enabling Symbolic Affiliation):

The most profound effect observed was the facilitation of a temporary role shift. Through participatory activities (writing a poem, learning a song, cooking a dish), tourists move from passive consumers to active cultural participants. This role transition allows visitors to symbolically "try on" a local position, even if only briefly. They are not just "staying in a Hakka area" but momentarily "engaging in Hakka poetic life." This allows them to perform a symbolic affiliation with the local community, answering "Could I belong here, in this moment, in this role?" This aligns with Driel and Verkuyten's (2020) finding that a local identity defined by prosocial traits like hospitality can encourage inclusive behavior (p. 628). The homestay, through its narrative and social design, acts as a kind of "entrepreneur of identity" (Haslam et al., as cited in Driel & Verkuyten, 2020, pp. 616–617), crafting a welcoming "us" that includes the willing visitor. This can be fruitfully compared to Dhupelia-Mesthrie's (2016) analysis of how narratives of re-location—whether local or transnational—help individuals re-situate their sense of self and belonging (p. 1076).

4.3 Reflections: Tensions between Authenticity, Commercialization, and Community

The construction of a poetic Cultural IP is not without tensions. While poetic narration offers a powerful means of cultural translation, it also inevitably involves choices, exclusions, and reinterpretations that require continuous reflexivity.

Selectivity and "Authenticity":

The narrative is necessarily selective. Which poems are chosen? Which aspects of Hakka history are highlighted? Such choices are shaped not only by aesthetic preference but

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also by market logic and communicative efficiency. The poetic IP often emphasizes aesthetic, harmonious, or heroic narratives, potentially smoothing over more complex, difficult, or mundane historical realities. While this selectivity can enhance narrative clarity and emotional appeal, it also raises questions about whose histories are foregrounded and whose are marginalized. The boundary between creative interpretation and misrepresentation is therefore a constant concern for operators aiming for "authenticity", particularly when poetic abstraction risks detaching cultural symbols from their original social contexts.

Commercialization and Community Impact:

Turning poetry and culture into a sellable IP experience risks commodification. There is a danger of creating a "stage-managed" authenticity for tourist consumption, where living cultural practices are simplified into repeatable performances. Furthermore, the benefits of this commercial development must be scrutinized. Does it empower the local community, providing economic opportunities and reinforcing cultural pride, as the integration of ICH spaces suggested by He Yangmei (2025) intends? Or does it risk alienating community members or turning their everyday life into a spectacle? The success of the IP in fostering a prosocial local identity, as discussed by Driel and Verkuyten (2020), may hinge on inclusive community engagement in its development and benefits sharing, ensuring that poetic narration remains a shared cultural process rather than a purely market-driven strategy.

5. Conclusion: Towards a Narratological Paradigm for Homestay Development

5.1 Summary of Research Conclusions

This study demonstrates that "poetry narration" serves as an effective medium for connecting cultural heritage (the "poem") with modern consumption (the "stay"). Rather than treating poetry as a symbolic embellishment, the findings show that poetic narration can function as a structuring logic that organizes space, experience, and discourse into a coherent whole. It systematically elaborates a "narrative resource → narrative translation → identity

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generation" construction path for developing Cultural IP in the context of Heyuan Hakka homestays, clarifying how abstract cultural texts are transformed into lived, experiential realities.

The research argues that a deep, systematic, and affectively engaging narrative-driven Cultural IP is more potent than superficial symbolic collage in fostering a meaningful and sustainable local identity among tourists. Importantly, this identity formation does not occur through passive exposure but through repeated narrative encounters across cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. The study therefore moves beyond simply putting poetic phrases on walls to building an immersive, participatory storyworld that enables visitors to understand, feel, and temporarily inhabit the locality, highlighting the central role of narration in place-based tourism development.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

This study offers several theoretical implications for research on cultural tourism, place-making, and Cultural IP construction. First, it extends poetry narration from a primarily literary-analytical concept into a practical narratological framework applicable to tourism spaces. By demonstrating how poetic narration operates across spatial, experiential, and discursive layers, the study shows that narration can function as an organizing mechanism for cultural experience rather than merely a representational device.

Second, the proposed three-stage transformation model—narrative resource, narrative translation, and identity generation—contributes to Cultural IP theory by clarifying the internal logic through which cultural texts are operationalized into experiential value. This model helps bridge the gap between abstract cultural symbolism and concrete tourism practices, offering a process-oriented perspective that moves beyond static symbol extraction.

Third, the findings enrich local identity research by illustrating how temporary, visitor-based identity formation can be narratively induced. The study demonstrates that local identity

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is not solely rooted in long-term residence or community membership but can be momentarily constructed through immersive narrative participation. In doing so, it positions homestays as micro-sites of identity negotiation, where narration mediates the relationship between mobility, locality, and belonging.

5.3 Practical Implications

For Homestay Operators:

Adopt a "Narrative-First" design and operation philosophy. Before physical design, invest time in excavating the local poetic and cultural texts to define a core narrative theme. Let this theme guide all subsequent decisions—from architectural style and interior décor to activity design and marketing copy. Prioritize creating multi-sensory, participatory experiences that allow guests to "live" the narrative, not just see it. Such an approach helps ensure internal consistency across touchpoints and strengthens the emotional and cognitive coherence of the homestay's Cultural IP.

For Local Managers and Planners:

Facilitate the development of a regional "Poetic Narrative Database." This repository could collate Heyuan-related poems from all eras, historical texts, folk songs, and stories. Making this resource accessible to homestay developers, designers, and tour guides would foster more informed and diverse narrative creation. Furthermore, support cross-entity narrative IP synergy by encouraging collaboration among homestays, local museums, cultural troupes, and ICH inheritors. Such coordination can reduce narrative fragmentation and contribute to a more integrated destination-level cultural ecosystem.

5.4 Research Limitations and Future Prospects

This study has limitations. As a qualitative case study, its findings, while rich in depth, may not be fully generalizable to all homestays in Heyuan or other regions. The reliance on

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self-reported data from interviews and observations also has inherent constraints, particularly in capturing long-term identity effects.

Future research could:

Conduct comparative studies between Heyuan and other Hakka regions (e.g., Meizhou, Ganzhou) to examine how different local poetic traditions and narrative strategies lead to varied IP constructions and identity outcomes.

Employ quantitative methods to measure the identity effects proposed here. Surveys or scales could be used to assess changes in tourists' cognitive knowledge, emotional attachment, and sense of belonging before and after a narrative-rich homestay stay.

Explore the long-term impacts of such Cultural IP development on host communities themselves, focusing on changes in residents' local identity, cultural confidence, and socio-economic well-being.

By continuing to explore the nexus of narrative, place, and identity, future research can further illuminate pathways for sustainable cultural tourism that honors heritage while fostering meaningful connections between visitors and localities.

Funding

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Translations in Focus

Editor's Note
This section highlights exemplary translations of classic and contemporary poems, presenting the original text alongside its translation. The goal is to showcase the translator's skill, the interplay between source and target language, and the aesthetic resonance achieved in the translated work.

Contributor
Wentao Zeng（曾文桃）is an MTI postgraduate student in the School of Foreign Languages and Literature at Yunnan Normal University. The author's research interests include cultural translation, translation theory, and the translation and dissemination of Chinese classics.

Commentator
Dr. Zhang Guangkui, Professor of English Literature, Shenzhen University

Original (English):

Song: To Celia

Ben Jonson

Trans. Wentao Zeng

Drink to me only with thine eyes,

And I will pledge with mine;

Or leave a kiss but in the cup,

And I'll not look for wine.

The thirst that from the soul doth rise,

Received 21 October 2025, Revised 13 October 2025, Accepted 24 November 2025.

Citation: Jonson, B. (2025). Song: To Celia (致西莉娅) (Zeng, W. T. Trans.). *Verse Version*, *14(2)*, 191-194.

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Doth ask a drink divine;

But might I of Jove's nectar sup,

I would not change for thine.

I sent thee late a rosy wreath,

Not so much honouring thee,

As giving it a hope, that there

It could not withered be.

But thou thereon didst only breathe,

And sent'st it back to me;

Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,

Not of itself, but thee.

(Source: Selected from *Complete Works of Ben Jonson*, Delphi Classics, 2013.)

Translation (Chinese):

致西莉娅

本·琼森

曾文桃 译

你的双眸满盛脉脉深情，

我也同你一起交杯啜饮。

何妨一留香吻在杯底，

且忘手中琼浆甘泉醴。

魂灵深处的干渴难捱，

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所求不过是舌尖品酪。

便是天神琉璃盏，

但愿长持不愿易。

近来曾予你一环繁花，

与其说是将敬意传达，

不如让它们得沐芳泽，

也有望免落得叶谢花枯。

你在花间附上一缕鼻息，

将其重又送到我的手里，

自是此般花绽时，

定然思君意最炽。

Commentary

Wentao Zeng's translation of "To Celia" is an impressive and faithful adaptation that captures both the lyrical beauty and emotional subtleties of Ben Jonson's original. The translator skillfully preserves the romantic intimacy and delicate imagery, conveying the longing and admiration in a way that resonates in Chinese.

The Chinese version maintains the musicality and rhythm of the English original, while carefully rendering idiomatic expressions into elegant, natural phrasing. Notably, elements such as the "rosy wreath" and "kiss in the cup" are translated with sensitivity to both literal and emotional meaning, allowing Chinese readers to experience the imagery vividly.

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This translation exemplifies a balanced approach: it honors the structure and tone of the original poem while adapting it into fluent, poetic Chinese. The result is a version that is both readable and aesthetically pleasing, demonstrating the translator's skill in bridging cultural and linguistic contexts without losing the charm of the original.

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The Poet Bilingual: Xiao Yi

Xiao Yi（萧刈），original name: Junfeng Zhou（周俊锋）, born in Danjiangkou, Hubei Province, China. Xiao Yi holds a Ph.D. in Literature and is currently Associate Professor at the School of Humanities, Shenzhen University. He is a member of the Chongqing Writers Association and the Guangdong Chinese Poetry Society. His poetry criticism and creative work have appeared in *Literary Review*, *New Poetry Review*, *Poetry Exploration*, *Jiangnan Poetry*, *The Stars*, and *The Thatched Cottage*.
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Editorial Note:
This section presents two original bilingual poems by Xiao Yi. Chinese and English versions are published as paired texts. The English poems are not line-by-line translations but authorized poetic counterparts. Pagination and ordering are identical for print and online editions.

Commentator
Dr. Zhang Guangkui, Professor of English Literature, Shenzhen University.

Selected Poems

English Version:

Tianjin Diary [1]

How to approach you? After falling from clouds,

begin imagining—a different life,

imagining subtle differences between dao (the Way) and road.

Received 2 October 2025, Revised 11 October 2025, Accepted 20 November 2025.

Citation: Zhou, J. F. (2025). Tianjin Diary. *Verse Version*, *14(2)*, 195-199.

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In the end, we stray from our original intent,

the marked destination grows distant,

like once-hotly debated smog becoming routine.

Thus we chatter, complaining of tired lives,

blaming mundane reality.

Rows of Western-style houses unfold at night,

peeking through curtains at their private lives,

buying a jianbing to take home, returning

to that tense pillow, carefully brewing

a parched night. Yes, the North we inhabit,

where experience freezes and cracks.

By the Hai River, watching a drop's voyage,

things lack green or freshness. Areas paved

with dark awns turn gray-brown eyes,

erasing all the boundless.

Wandering or imagining, flashing neon hums

before the senior apartments, not far from Times Square,

ingredients airlifted from Chengdu—a flavor's

drifting journey, tested by bamboo tongues.

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Shuttling between foreign lands and home,

when a postcard is replicated, affection spreads,

air suddenly turns melancholy.

Playing with history in old photos, on a dialect island,

winds from all directions bloom calm, exquisite flowers.

Those hardships will be deleted, becoming

simple ease carved in distant memory—

like a casual topic encountered unexpectedly.

Days are hard, even barren, yet we endure together.

Pain always outweighs fatigue.

Chinese Version:

天津日记

该要如何去接近你？从云层跌落以后，

开始想象，一种迥异的生活，

想象在道与路之间，还有某些细微的差异。

最后的我们远离初衷，标记的终点愈来愈远，

就像曾经被热议的雾霾，成为一种日常。

于是我们絮叨着，诉说彼此厌倦了的生活，

抱怨平庸的现实。

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一排排洋楼次第展开，

趁着夜幕窥探他们的私人生活，

捎一套煎饼果子回家，重新回到

那片紧绷的枕头上，精心熬制一场干涩的夜。

是的，我们身处的北国，

经验凝固又龟裂。

在海河边，观看一滴水的航行，

事物匮乏绿意，或者新鲜，那些被乌色芒铺满的地域，

化身灰褐色的眼，湮灭所有的漫无边际。

游离或想象，闪烁的霓虹开始哼唱，

在老年公寓前，不远处的时代广场，

成都空运过来的食材，一段漂移的历程，

需要用竹木的舌苔来检验。

辗转在异域和故乡，当一枚明信片被复制，

情意开始绵延，空气突然忧郁。

在老照片里玩味历史，在方言的孤岛上，

四面风吹开平静精致的花。

那些沧桑终将被删刈，成为刻在久远里的

简单与从容——像是不经意的谈资。

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日子艰难，甚至略显贫瘠，然而我们共同度过。

所谓疼痛，总是高于疲累。

Commentary

“Tianjin Diary” demonstrates Xiao Yi’s extraordinary skill in constructing bilingual poetic landscapes. Both the English and Chinese versions capture a rich urban and emotional panorama, from city streets and rivers to domestic life, blending memory, observation, and reflection. The English version preserves the lyrical precision, rhythm, and narrative flow, while the Chinese original maintains its subtle nuances and local textures. The poem excels at transforming everyday objects into vessels of nostalgia and contemplation. This dual presentation highlights the poet’s ability to bridge linguistic and cultural sensibilities, making the poem vivid, immersive, and emotionally resonant.

English Version:

Escape[2]

When trees are transplanted,

peach blossoms are sold cheap.

You praise fresh soil as mother,

hang mother's portrait on the wall,

living in imagination.

[2]Received 2 October 2025, Revised 11 October 2025, Accepted 20 November 2025.

Citation: Zhou, J. F. (2025). Escape. *Verse Version*, *14(2)*, 199-201.

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Thinking always lulls one to sleep.

Survival requires learning a skill—

a girl's hair dyed crimson red.

Seeing traffic flow, seeing dazzling colors,

clutching a memory's loyalty,

this fish begins to swim upstream.

The closer to home,

the deeper the chill in the marrow.

To stay behind, or

to flee under starry night.

This night the sky is bright,

this moment strangely dim.

Chinese Version：

出逃

树木移栽的时候，

桃花会被贱卖。

你把新鲜的土壤歌颂成母亲，

把母亲的相片挂在墙上，

活在想象之中。

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思考总是催人入眠。

生存需要学习一种技艺——

女孩儿的头发烫染成猩红。

看见车水马龙，看见姹紫嫣红，

怀揣记忆的忠贞，这条鱼开始逆行。

离家越近，

骨髓越凉。

留下还是出逃，

趁着星夜逃离。

这个夜晚星空闪亮，

此刻异常黯淡。

Commentary

“Escape” is a poem of visceral immediacy and emotional intensity. Xiao Yi conveys the tension of fleeing, the pull of home, and the bodily experience of cold and displacement. The English version mirrors the Chinese original’s rhythm, imagery, and emotional force, capturing the urgent, almost cinematic pacing. The poem’s vivid symbols—red peach blossoms, crimson hair, starry nights—are highly charged and tactile in both languages. This bilingual presentation demonstrates the poet’s ability to retain emotional resonance across languages, making the work accessible yet deeply affecting in either version.

VERSE VERSION

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