

CONTEMPORANEITY VERSUS TRADITION:
LUO FU'S SONG OF EVERLASTING REGRET,
IN COMPARISON WITH THE POEM OF
THE SAME NAME BY BAI JUYI¹

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This study compares two poems with the same name, namely Bai Juyi's and Luo Fu's Song of everlasting regret, with an emphasis on the life and achievements of the fashionable poet Luo Fu, who was one of the main representatives of Modernism in Taiwan. The comparison takes into account the different historical and general context as well as the means of expression of the authors. It deals with the problem of reinterpretation of old texts and also examines to what degree they have become the inspiration for the contemporary writer, why the poet known for his modernist practices returns to the traditional Tang poems to what extent his poem is innovative as well as the way it handles the theme outlined in the original poem.

Key words: Song of Everlasting Regret, Chinese poetry, Luo Fu, Bai Juyi, Taiwan

Introduction

Two masterpieces of poetry written by two outstanding authors bear the same name. One of them is by Bai Juyi (白居易; 772 – 846), one of the three most famous poets from the Tang dynasty, the others being Li Bai (Li Bo) and Du Fu.

Bai Juyi's poetry was criticized because it was often considered inappropriate and did not reflect reality or Confucian values. His work was

¹ This study was published within the grant project VEGA2/0028/18, with a generous support of Marian Gálik, who let me to get the access to his personal library for the sources.

considered of lower quality because it was more accessible in content and imagery than that of poets like Li Po or Du Fu.² However, he is considered one of the most influential poets in Chinese history.

Luo Fu 洛夫 is a contemporary Taiwanese poet, writer, and calligrapher (the real name of the poet is Mo Yunduan 莫運端, 11 May 1928 – 19 March 2018) called the “Magus of poetry” 诗墨 which can also be understood in Chinese as the “Devil of poetry” for his astonishing ability to use the language. Luo Fu is one of the most representative contemporary poets in Taiwan, who is strongly connected with Surrealism and is the founder of the modernist movement in Taiwanese poetry.

Both outstanding poets wrote a poem concerning the tragic love story of Emperor Tang Huizong and his concubine Yang Guifei, 长恨歌 usually translated to English as the Song of Everlasting Regret or Song of Unending Sorrow.

It is obvious that Luo Fu was inspired by Bai Juyi, but his poem is much more than a mere “cover version” of his admirable ideal. Why was the source of inspiration taken from the Tang dynasty and what allowed the contemporary author to have the courage not only to “borrow” the topic but also to admit it in the title of the poem and by comparing himself with an accomplished master of the flowering Tang dynasty, which used to be called the peak period of Chinese culture? What is the relation between the two poems and what are the differences in the approaches taken by such different personalities living in two different epochs of Chinese history? What led one of the fiercest modernists back into history and was this poem unique among his works?

The study focuses on the work of the poet Luo Fu, especially his poem *Song of Everlasting Regret*. The emphasis is on how Luo Fu has been inspired by the heritage of traditional Chinese poetry, on the different point of view that he has brought to the Emperor’s love story and his concubine when he looked at the old story with the eyes of a contemporary man. The aim is not to make a simple comparison between the two poems that were created in different periods, but mainly and above all, to answer the question of how much Luo Fu and his generation of Taiwanese modernists were inspired by the Chinese legacy, as archaic elements appear there, but especially in Luo Fu’s work and how they function in cooperation with the modern language and a modern or modernist literary view of poetry. From the example of one poem, it will be seen how Luo Fu was able to work with tradition, how his remake could make the story look

² MARK, E. *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, published on 15 April 2016 [online] [cit. 19 June 2019]. Available from <https://www.ancient.eu/article/888/song-of-everlasting-sorrow/>.

contemporary. The strength and appeal of the Chinese tradition are shown here, and the way how this excellent poet has been able to handle the impulses that this astonishing tradition offers.

For the purpose of this study I shall use the translation by Michelle Yeh.³ The poem has been translated into Slovak by the author of this study⁴, but the final decision of the author was to use a more poetic version rather than an exact linguistic translation. Anyhow, the analysis of the poem is based on the Chinese, and the English translation is for reference only.

There are several translations of Bai Juyi's poem. Among the versions to be found, a translation by Witter Bynner⁵ was chosen to be used here, and the Chinese original is placed next to the translation for reference. Another translation of Bai Juyi's poem by Ying Sun has been found, but because the focus is on a contemporary poem by Luo Fu, there was no reason to attach another translation. There is not enough space here to go deeper into the linguistic analysis of Bai Juyi's poem, which remains an interesting challenge for future research. That is the reason for not including Bai Juyi's poem in the text of the study sentence by sentence or stanza by stanza but has been attached at the end as an appendix.

Sources

Chinese poetry is attractive for many scholars around the world, particularly its ancient poetry. Apart from the long tradition, modern and contemporary poetry started to be attractive to Western readers and it can even be argued that, due the close relationship with Western lyric and because it draws its inspiration from the poetic language typical of Western modernist movements e.g. Surrealism and Modernism, it might be more easily understood and accepted by foreigners than by the most contemporary Chinese readers who have been raised in the traditional way of memorizing ancient, especially Tang poems since childhood. The most important publications concerning modern and contemporary literature are *Modern Chinese Poetry: Theory and Practice since 1917* and *Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*, both by Michele Yeh, *New Perspectives on Contemporary Chinese Poetry* edited by Christopher Lupke, especially the study *To the Heart of Exile: The Poetic Odyssey of Luo Fu* by John Balcom, in which the author analyses a few of Luo Fu's poems from the point of view of

³ YEH, M. *Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*, pp. 90–94.

⁴ LUO, Fu. *Pieseň o nekonečnom žiali* [Song of Everlasting Regret], pp.123–126.

⁵ KIANG, Kang-Hu. *Heng-t'ang-t'ui-shih* [The Jade Mountain: A Chinese Anthology].

his constant feeling of deracination and the unceasing presence of violence and death in war.

However, although the essay focusses primarily on Luo Fu's poem, a few sources from Bai Juyi's poem are also examined. Emily Mark in *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*⁶ presents Bai Juyi's poem from its historical perspective as well as from the poetic point of view. The comparison of these poems is very popular in China, but most of them are very but most of them are not at the academic level. It is often used by students. Nevertheless, there are studies who concern this problem more in detail, what is the reason for using Chinese sources such as Chen Min's *Comparative analysis of Luo Fu's Song of Everlasting Regret and Bai Juyi's Song of Everlasting Regret* where the author introduces and analyses both poems. A certain number of similar articles can be found on Chinese websites, for example, Zhang Xin mentions both poems in his blog, but he is mostly concerned with introducing the situation rather than giving an analysis.⁷ Besides the abovementioned studies, there are studies in Chinese concerning Luo Fu's poetry, such as *Hardship and Rebellion, The Shoeprints of Luo Fu on the Route of his Cruel Life* by Ye Ruilian⁸, *A cognitive Investigation of Metaphor in Luo Fu's Poems* by Shen Ling and Fang Huanhai⁹, *The Oath of Wood and Stone, the Images of Skeleton, the Aesthetics of the World: A Discussion about the Mental Hardness of Luo Fu Poetry* by Tian Chongxue¹⁰, *A Discussion about the Images and the Metaphor of Illness in Luo*

⁶ MARK, E. *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, published on 15 April 2016 [online] [cit. 18 June 2019]. Available from <https://www.ancient.eu/article/888/song-of-everlasting-sorrow/>.

⁷ ZHANG, Xin 张欣. 《长恨歌》：从白居易到洛夫 [Song of Everlasting Regret: From Bai Juyi to Luofu] [online] [cit. 21 June 2019]. Available from <http://blog.sciencenet.cn/home.php?mod=space&uid=40281&do=blog&id=349894>.

⁸ YE, Ruilian 叶瑞莲. 悲苦与反叛：残酷生命途上的洛夫履踪 [Hardship and Rebellion, The Shoeprints of Luo Fu on the Route of his Cruel Life]. In *Han Zhong yuwen wenhua yanjiu*, 2007, Vol. 13, No. 6, from the private library of Marian Gálik.

⁹ SHEN, Ling, FANG, Huanhai 沈玲, 方环海. 文本的表皮与身体的外皮：洛夫诗歌的隐喻认知和研究 [A Cognitive Investigation of Metaphor in Luo Fu's Poems]. In *Han Zhong yuwen wenhua yanjiu*, 2007, Vol. 13, from the private library of Marian Gálik.

¹⁰ TIAN, Chongxue 田崇雪. 木石前盟，骨赂意象，天涯美学 - 论洛夫诗歌的精神硬度 [The Oath of Wood and Stone, the Images of Skeleton, the Aesthetics of the World: A Discussion about the Mental Hardness of Luo Fu poetry]. In *Han Zhong yuwen wenhua yanjiu*, 2007, Vol. 13, No. 6, from the private library of Marian Gálik.

Fu's Poems by Shi Yan¹¹, *The Holy Shit: A Scatological Study of Luo Fu's Poems* by Wen Yubei¹², *Deconstructing the Ancient: On Luo Fu's Reconstruction of Tang Poem* by He Yawen¹³ and many other studies. The last mentioned shows the relation of Luo Fu's poetry to Tang poems.

The Situation in Taiwanese Culture after 1949

The Chinese (and the majority in Taiwan) characterize their national identity as based on a continuous and homogenous civilization that has lasted for more than five thousand years and consider other nations as culturally less important. The situation in Taiwan has been even more specific.¹⁴ In Taiwan, unlike the Mainland China, the connection with the Chinese legacy has never been broken in such a violent and radical way as happened during the Cultural Revolution. On the other hand, contacts with Western poetry and all important art and poetic movements, such as Surrealism, Modernism and others, were not interrupted.

Taiwan's modern poetry has been subject to various influences during the last century.¹⁵ After the Guomindang left China and settled "temporarily" in Taiwan with the intention of fighting their way back to the Mainland and conquering the Communists, the political situation in Taiwan was far from that of a free society. A number of artists and writers were arrested or persecuted for political reasons. The Modernist movement in poetry was in the air in Taiwan in the 1950s and was tolerated by the regime owing to its apolitical nature, which distinguishes that movement from the other types of poetry. The Modernists

¹¹ SHI, Yan 史言. 论洛夫诗的疾病意象与疾病隐喻 [A Discussion about the Images and the metaphor of Illness in Luo Fu's poems by]. In *Han Zhong yuwen wenhua yanjiu*, 2007, Vol. 14, No. 10, from the private library of Marian Gálik.

¹² WEN, Yubei. 神圣之粪：洛夫诗歌的排泄研究/ [The Holy Shit: A Scatological Study of Luo Fu's Poems]. In *Han Zhong yuwen wenhua yanjiu*, 2007, Vol. 14, No. 10, from the private library of Marian Gálik.

¹³ HE, Yawen. 何雅雯. 解古构今：谈洛夫《唐诗解构》 [Deconstructing the Ancient: On Luo Fu's Reconstruction of Tang Poem]. In *Hanguo "Zhongguo xuebao"*, 2016, Vol 78, from the private library of Marian Gálik.

¹⁴ BENICKÁ, J. Taiwanci, Japonci alebo Čiňania? O taiwanskej spoločnosti počas japonskej okupácie očami spisovateľa Wu Zhuoliua 吴濁流 (1900 – 1976) [The Taiwanese, Japanese or Chinese? Of the Taiwanese Society during the Japanese Occupation As Seen by the Writer Wu Zhuoliua]. In *Studia Orientalia Slovaca*, 2005, Vol. IV, pp. 126–127.

¹⁵ SCHULTZ, J. In Search of Taiwaneseess. In *Studia Orientalia Slovaca*, 2012, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 39.

with their challenge to art and poetry in order to achieve a certain aesthetical purpose in their works or to express their own feelings or ideas escaped from political tension into the world of pure poetry. The strong political support of the United States for Taiwan caused the cultural impact of American literature.

The view of poetry as independent of non-aesthetic concerns, a tendency that began with European Symbolism in the second half of the nineteenth century and reached maturity with High Modernism in 1920, has greatly influenced Chinese poetry. This perspective was first evident during the 1930s and later in Taiwan starting in mid-1950, as revealed by the numerous translations of Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, R. M. Rilke, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, and others in contemporary journals and literary magazines.¹⁶ In this atmosphere, a reaction against official art arose, led by people with higher demands. The first of these leading figures were those who had taken part in literary movements before the war: Ch'in Tzu-hao 覃子豪, who had been involved with the Crescent Moon 新月, founded a literary supplement, which he called Blue Star 藍星; Chi Hsien 紀弦, who had taken part in the group led by Dai Wangshu in Shanghai, relaunched a journal under the same name of New Poetry Xin shi 新詩 in 1952, which then became Xiandai shi 現代詩 in 1953 (Modern Poetry).¹⁷ There is a certain influence of Japanese literature which is visible in Taiwanese literature. The process of development of Modernism was accelerated by numerous literary societies; literary journals published articles and discussions.

The third journal to make a decisive contribution appeared in 1954. This was Chuangshiji 創世紀 (Epoch, or alternatively Genesis or Creation, according to other translations). After Modern Poetry and the Blue Star this journal, which followed the direction opened up by the May 4th Movement, gave a new impulse to poetry in Taiwan in the 1960s. Chuangshiji was launched by three young men, Luo Fu 洛夫, Ya Hsien 痲弦, and Zhang Mo 張默, who were naval officers at the time. Their primary intention was to “assert the national direction in the new poetry”.¹⁸

Given the official policy of introducing literature and the arts into the military since the 1950s, it is hardly surprising that in 1954 the three navy officers Ya Xian 痲弦 (b. 1932), Luo Fu and Zhang Mo 張默 (b. 1931) founded the poetry society Epoch (Chuangshiji 創世紀).¹⁹

¹⁶ YEH, M. *Modern Chinese Poetry: Theory and Practice since 1917*, pp. 18–19

¹⁷ LEROUX, A. *Poetry Movements in Taiwan from the 1950s to the late 1970s*, p. 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁹ YEH M. “On Our Destitute Dinner Table”: “Modern Poetry Quarterly” in the 1950s. In *Writing Taiwan: A New Literary History*, p. 119.

Modernism quickly became the dominant form of poetic discourse on the island, eclipsing anti-Communist propaganda and Romanticism. The Modernists were primarily concerned with the primacy of art and eschewed political commitment. Thus they never met with government opposition as did the social-realist and nativist poets. For nearly two decades, from the 1950s until the 1970s, the movement's authority was unchallenged. But in the early 1970s, a new generation of poets emerged. Stung by Taiwan's declining political fortunes in the West, they rejected Modernism and all elitism in art, advocating a new realism. Facing such popular opposition, Modernism went into decline. Luo Fu gradually abandoned his avant-garde position in favour of writing increasingly steeped in tradition.²⁰ In the middle of his literary career, he started to be more and more attracted by ancient poetry, which became a source of inspiration. A similar revival of traditional poetry and re-using it in a very new way is visible in the works of other Modernist poets such as Yu Guangzhong. Using ancient Chinese poetry as a source of inspiration was common among modernists in Taiwan. The poets who felt to a certain extent connected to the Western modernism were searching for their self-expression in the way offered by Surrealism, Modernism but, alongside that, they were aware of thousands of years of Chinese literary heritage.

Luo Fu was a stranger in Taiwan. His hope was always for the Mainland and not for Taiwan. Later, in 1960 Luo Fu left Jinmen for Taiwan. He was sent to Vietnam in 1965, and in 1996 the poet emigrated to Canada.²¹ He returned to Taiwan in 2016.²² Luo Fu, like a number of Taiwanese poets, was born in Mainland China and considered himself more as Chinese, strongly connected with Chinese culture. Leaving his country led to his feeling uprooted from his homeland. Adapting the themes and drawing inspiration from Chinese literary tradition, especially from Tang poetry, which was considered as the heyday of Chinese civilization, was one of the ways to handle this alienation and loneliness.

Luo Fu grew up during the war with Japan and the subsequent civil war and division of China. On Quemoy, violence continued. It is the violence, the uncertainties, and ultimately death that most people prefer to ignore.²³ In the face of this absurd and cruel life, the rebellious poet is not willing to let things

²⁰ BALCOM, J. *To the Heart of Exile: The Poetic Odyssey of Luo Fu*, p. 68.

²¹ AU, Chung-to, *Modernist Aesthetics in Taiwanese Poetry since the 1950s*, p. 58.

²² Kinmen Project to Honor Late Poet Might be Reborn. In *Taipei Times* [online] [cit. 21 June 2019]. Available from <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2018/03/24/2003689935>.

²³ BALCOM, J. *To the Heart of Exile: The Poetic Odyssey of Luo Fu*, p. 71.

be; he wants to subvert the status quo and break away from the system.²⁴ On Quemoy, the regular shellings had a catalysing effect on Luo Fu's art. An acute awareness of death led Luo Fu to an awareness of his own alienated condition, which he shared with all the people of China, if not with the entire modern world.²⁵ As he wrote in the preface to his book *Magic Songs*: "In the heart abandoned in exile, for the soldier who helplessly left his mother mainland, the reappearance of war is the repeated teasing of cruel fate."²⁶ The constant presence of violence during his service in the army paradoxically caused his extremely critical attitude towards war and violence, which is prominent in his poetry, and which can be seen in the *Song of Everlasting Regret*.

Luo Fu's Song of Everlasting Regret

Song of Everlasting Sorrow written by Bai Yuyi was especially criticized by Confucian scholars for distorting people's impression of what really happened to Lady Yang and how her death came about. Literary critics condemned the poem's sensuality and romanticism and claimed that Bai was lowering the standards of his art by writing for the masses. Fans of Bai's work did not care about the judgments of scholars or critics; they just responded to the beauty of the verse and the story of the tragic love affair. It elevated Lady Yang from her role in history as the woman who brought down the Tang Dynasty to the girl who allowed herself to be sacrificed for the greater good of the country. The poem also elevated Lady Yang to a mythical level as one of the Four Beauties of China.²⁷ Bai Yuyi's approach to the personality and to the fate of Yang Guifei was significantly different from Confucianist's point of view, which blamed Yang for the crisis in the Tang dynasty. This understanding is closer to Buddhist philosophy, the compassion for a beautiful woman who did not choose her destiny resonates even more in the work of Luo Fu, who is much more radical.

After his early period, Luo Fu became more and more inspired by ancient Chinese poetry. It is remarkable that Taiwanese society is more based on Chinese traditions than the society of the Mainland China, which lived through

²⁴ YE, Ruilian 叶瑞莲. *悲苦与反叛: 残酷生命途上的洛夫履踪* [Hardship, and Rebellion, The Shoeprints of Luo Fu on the Route of his Cruel Life] p. 472.

²⁵ BALCOM, J. *To the Heart of Exile: The Poetic Odyssey of Luo Fu*, p. 71.

²⁶ LUO, Fu 自序. [Preface], *魔歌* [Magic Songs]. In *Zhongwai wenxue chubanshe*, p. 3.

²⁷ MARK, E. *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, published on 15 April 2016 [online] [cit. 19 June 2019]. Available from <https://www.ancient.eu/article/888/song-of-everlasting-sorrow>.

the Cultural Revolution which destroyed not only an incredible amount of Chinese material cultural heritage, but even to a greater extent ruined the traditional system of Confucian values, causing deep wounds in Chinese society that have not yet been healed.

Luo Fu brooded on the imagining and the images of death for such a long time that he felt an urgent need to write them down.²⁸ Regardless of the style of Luo Fu's early works, the way of using the tradition and borrowing from the classics after the middle period, as can be observed from the "Jinlong Temple", "Entering with the rain to the mountain without seeing the rain" is quite impressive.²⁹ The influence of Li Bai is visible in some of his poems, especially in the abovementioned "Jinlong Temple", but he interacted with more ancient poets in his works.

In Luo Fu's poetry, it is always possible to feel some noble breeze and the sound of a golden stone; there can always be felt some toughness and rigour of mind. This toughness is a sort of emotional intensity, a depth of thought.³⁰ Luo Fu is able to crystallize the abstract in controlled language and rhythm, much like Wallace Stevens, a Luo Fu favourite. He also begins to incorporate elements of classical poetry in his verse and to examine Chinese history, an attempt to reground himself in Chinese culture. Returning home might be impossible, but fashioning a home by situating himself more firmly in the Chinese poetic tradition is not. This shift occurred as the entire island was having doubts about the whole Modernist position, which was being openly attacked by younger poets and critics. His poem *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, for example, is a modern commentary on Bo Juyi's Tang masterpiece.³¹ Luo Fu did not change the title of the poem, which suggests that he has laid claim to the legacy of the classics, which has been a very common practice in Chinese history among poets and painters, the so-called "borrowing" of ideas, when an author in admitting an inspiration shows admiration for an ancient master and his work. It is remarkable that the poem was written in 1972 when the Modernists were no longer at their most influential in Taiwanese literature,

²⁸ AU, Chung-to. *Modernist Aesthetics in Taiwanese Poetry since the 1950s*, p. 58.

²⁹ HE, Yawen 何雅雯. 解古構今: 談洛夫《唐詩解構》 [Deconstructing the Ancient: On Luo Fu's Reconstruction of a Tang Poem]. In *Hanguo Zhongguo xuebao*, 2016, Vol 78, p. 252.

³⁰ TIAN, Chongxue 田崇雪. 木石前盟, 骨賂意象, 天涯美學 - 論洛夫詩歌的精神硬度 [The Oath of Wood and Stone, the Images of the Skeleton, the Aesthetics of the World: A Discussion about the Mental Hardness of Luo Fu's poetry], p. 291.

³¹ BALCOM, J. *To the Heart of Exile: The Poetic Odyssey of Luo Fu*, p. 75.

because more and more poets started to search for the roots, which might be one of the reasons why he turned his attention to ancient topics.

Luo Fu, in his poem, is observing the tragic story of the emperor and Yang Guifei from the point of the non-participating viewer, which is similar to Bai Juyi's, but his attitude is different from Bai's. Luo Fu is much more critical; he points out the tragic fate of a beautiful woman who did not choose to become a concubine of the emperor, but was picked up by the emperor. There are strong erotic motifs appearing in this poem, which are prominent especially in the second and the third part, where he describes intercourse between the emperor and Yang.

Luo Fu's Song of Everlasting Regret rewrites the classic poem of a tragic romance by portraying the Chinese emperor as hedonistic, selfish, and cowardly.³² Luo Fu sympathizes with Yang Guifei; he is more concerned about the relationship between a male with absolute rights, and in questioning feudalism, and he blames Xuanzong for her tragic end. He expresses his grief and sadness about this unequal love relationship.³³ He attributes the tragic ending to the status of the emperor Tang Minghuang³⁴, and this unequal relationship of love, with more grief and tragic meaning. The emotional charge in Luo Fu's poem is much more emphatic than in Bai Juyi's.

From the structure of the poems it is clear that while Bai Juyi's poem is written in classical seven-syllable verse, typical of ancient Chinese long poems, while Luo Fu uses a looser structure for the poem. Tang poetry formally followed earlier tradition, when the poems used to be written according to the rhythmic structure of old songs and the ballads. The last relics of this tradition can be found in the title of the poem where the word *song* is reminiscent of the fact that ancient poems and ballads were not only recited but also sung based on the melody of old songs, which can sometimes be seen in the sub-headings of some ancient poems. However, it is not solely free verse in Luo Fu's poem, as even in this case some elements of rhythm may be noticed. It is clear that the structure of Luo Fu poems admits inspiration by Surrealism, as we can see, for example, in part 4 on the placement of the verses: stamp a seal/ stamp a seal/ stamp a seal/ stamp a seal 盖章/盖章/盖章/盖章.

³² YEH, M. *Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*.

³³ CHEN, Min 陈繁. 洛夫《长恨歌》与白居易《长恨歌》的对比赏析 [Comparative Analysis of Luo Fu's Song of Everlasting Regret and Bai Juyi's Song of Everlasting Regret]. In *Shidai wenxue: Shang ban yue*, 2010, Vol. 5 [online] [cit. 21 June 2019]. Available from <http://www.ruiwen.com/wenxue/changhenge/73621.html>.

³⁴ The name of the emperor during his life was Tang Minghuang, Tang Xuanzong is the ritual name given to him posthumously.

长恨歌³⁵

那蔷薇，就像所有的蔷薇，
只开了一个早晨
——巴尔扎克

Song of Everlasting Regret

That rose, like all roses, only bloomed for one morning.

— H. Balzac

I

唐玄宗
从
水声里
提炼出一缕黑发的哀恸

1

From
The sound of water
Emperor Xuan of the Tang dynasty
Extracts the sorrow in a lock of black hair

From the first part of the poem, the motif of sorrow or melancholy is visible. Lady Yang is compared here to melancholy or sorrow, as a strand of black hair coming from the water. In the ancient Chinese philosophy of the Five Elements, black is the colour connected with the element of water, which is the reason why it appears here. These two motifs, black hair and water, are repeatedly revealing themselves as a leitmotif that will recur in later strophes.

³⁵ LUO, Fu 罗夫. 罗夫诗全集 上 [Complete Collection of Luo Fu's Poems], Vol. I, pp. 174–179.

II

她是
杨氏家谱中
翻开第一页便仰在那里的
一片白肉
一株镜子里的蔷薇
盛开在轻轻的拂拭中
所谓天生丽质
一粒
华清池中
等待双手捧起的
泡沫
仙乐处处
骊宫中
酒香流自体香
嘴唇，猛力吸吮之后
就是呻吟
而象牙床上伸展的肢体
是山
也是水
一道河熟睡在另一道河中
地层下的激流
涌向
江山万里
及至一支白色歌谣
破土而出

2

In the genealogy of the Yang clan
She is
An expanse of white flesh
Lying right there on the first page
A rose bush in the mirror
In full flower, caressed by
What is called heaven-born beauty

A
Bubble
Waiting to be scooped up
From the Huaqing Pool
Heavenly music is everywhere
In Li Palace
The aroma of wine wafts in body odours
Lips after being sucked hard
Can only moan
And the limbs outstretched on the ivory bed
Are mountains
And rivers too
A river sound asleep in another river
Underground rapids
Surge toward
The countryside
Until a white ballad
Breaks out the soil

The beginning of the second part describes Lady Yang as the white flesh lying on the first page of the chronicle of the family Yang. Reference to the white flesh clearly points to the attitude of the emperor towards his lover, in Luo Fu's eyes, as someone without a will, just lying there in order to be picked up by anyone. Although the metaphor of the blooming rose bush in the mirror refers to her astonishing beauty, it is still passive, more passive than the animal that could run away. The sexual act is compared to the waves and flow of rivers, erotic symbols continue with *white ballad breaking out the soil* [一支白色歌谣/破土而出].

III

他高举着那只烧焦了的手
大声叫喊：
我做爱
因为
我要做爱
因为
我是皇帝
因为
我们惯于血肉相见

3

He raises his burned hand high
And cries out:
I make love
Because
I want to make love
Because
I am the emperor
Because we are used to encounters
Of flesh with blood

In this part, Luo openly speaks of sex, but it is much clearer here that it is understood by the emperor as something due to him, what he is entitled to simply from his position. No love, no romance, only his lust, and desires. The language is clear, outspoken, the arrogance of the absolute ruler of China, who has the right to do anything he wants is undoubtedly shown here.

IV

他开始在床上读报，吃早点，看梳头，批阅奏折

盖章
盖章
盖章
盖章

从此
君王不早朝

4

He begins to read newspapers, eat breakfast, watch her comb her hair,
handle official papers in bed

stamp a seal
stamp a seal
stamp a seal
stamp a seal

From them on
The emperor no longer holds court in the morning

The sarcasm of the previous part continues here. Reading newspapers in bed evokes the absurdity of the dynasty; it brings the story from the history into the present, making it timeless. Unlike Bai Juyi, Luo Fu does not pay attention to describing the emperor giving titles to the Yang family, which makes *parents be more willing to have girls than boys* (遂令天下父母心/不重生男重生女). Instead of that, he focuses on the romance between the emperor and his concubine, which is expressed with considerable sarcasm.

V

他是皇帝
而战争
是一摊
不论怎么擦也擦不掉的
黏液
在锦被中
杀伐，在远方

远方，烽火蛇升，天空哑于一
一锅叫人心惊的发式
鞞鼓，以火红的舌头
舐着大地

5

He is the emperor
But war
Is a puddle of
Sticky fluid
That cannot be wiped off
Under the brocade coverlets
Slaughter is far away
Distant beacon fires snake upward, the sky is dumbfounded
By heart-stopping hairstyles
Leather drums with flame-red tongues
Lick the earth

In this part, there is a remarkable description of the war, which is stronger than the emperor...*war/Is a puddle of/Sticky fluid/That cannot be wiped off*

战争/是一摊/不论怎么擦也擦不掉的/黏液. Comparing the war to disgusting sticky fluid clearly shows Luo Fu's strong anti-war attitude. No heroes to be praised, no heroism in battle appear here, only red flames compared to tongues, licking the air. The feeling of fear is visible.

VI

河川
仍在两股之间燃烧
仗
不能不打
征战国之大事
娘子，妇道人家之血只能朝某一方向流
于今六军不发
罢了罢了，这马嵬坡前
你即是那杨絮
高举你以广场中的大风

一堆昂贵的肥料
营养着
另一株玫瑰
或
历史中
另一种绝症

6

Rivers and streams
Burn between the thighs
War
May not be abandoned
Campaigns are an affair of state
My lady, women's blood can flow in only one direction
Now the armies refuse to budge
All right, all right, you are the willow catkins
Before the Mawei Slope
Let the wind in the square hold you aloft
A pile of expensive fertilizer

Is nourishing
Another rose bush
Or
Another incurable disease
In history

Luo Fu's bitter sarcasm is even more obvious here. The emperor's decision to kill Lady Yang is explained with cynical words typically expressed by Luo Fu *My lady, women's blood can flow in only one direction* 娘子，妇道人家之血只能朝某一方向流. His ironic attitude is taken to the absurd by comparing the imperial court to *a pile of expensive fertilizer* 一堆昂贵的肥料 and by comparing another concubine to *another incurable (terminal) disease in history* 历史中/另一种绝症.

VII

恨，多半从火中开始
他遥望窗外
他的头
随鸟飞而摆动
眼睛，随落日变色
他呼唤的那个名字
埋入了回声

竟夕绕室而行
未央宫的每一扇窗口
他都站过
冷白的手指剔着灯花
轻咳声中
禁城里全部的海棠
一夜凋成
秋风

他把自己的胡须打了一个结又一个结，解开再解开，然后负手踱步，鞋声，鞋声，鞋声，一朵晚香玉在窗子后面爆炸，然后伸张十指抓住一部水经注，水声汨汨

，他竟读不懂那条河为什么流经掌心时是嚶泣，而非咆哮
他披衣而起
他烧灼自己的肌肤
他从一块寒玉中醒来

千间厢房千烛燃
楼外明月照无眠
墙上走来一女子
脸在虚无飘渺间

7

Regret probably begins in the middle of a fire
He gazes out the window into the distance
His head
Sways with the flight of birds
His eyes change colors as the sun sets
The name that he cries out
Sinks into the echoes

All night long he paces around the room
In front of every window in Waiyang Palace
He stops
Cold pale fingers nip the candlewick
Amid muffled coughs
All the hibiscuses in the Forbidden City
Wilt overnight in
The autumn wind
He ties his beard into a knot after knot, unties and ties it again, then
walks with his hands behind his back, the sound of his footfalls
footfalls footfalls, tuberose exploding behind the curtain, then he
stretches out all ten fingers to grab a copy of the *Annotated Classic
of Waters*, the water drip-dripping, he cannot understand at all why
the river sobs instead of bellows when it flows through the palm of
his hand
He throws on a gown and gets up
He sears his own skin
He is awakened by cold jade
A thousand candles burn in a thousand rooms
A bright moon shines on the sleepless

A woman walks toward him along the wall
Her face an illusion in the mist

After the poem has reached a sarcastic climax, the atmosphere breaks into mourning, but even in this part, in addition to the unambiguous tone of mourning, there is also some irony in the observing the emperor, who is shown as weak, looking at himself, walking and nervously playing with his beard. He is described by Luo Fu more as a weak personality than as the ruler.

VIII

突然间
他疯狂地搜寻那把黑发
而她递过去
一缕烟
是水，必然升为云
是泥土，必然踩成焦渴的苏苔
隐在树叶中的脸
比夕阳更绝望
一朵菊花在她嘴边
一口黑井在她眼中
一场战争在她体内
一个犹未酿成的小小风暴
在她掌里
她不再牙痛
不再出
唐朝的麻疹
她溶入水中的脸是相对的白与绝对的黑
她不再捧着一碟盐而大呼饥渴
她那要人搀扶的手
颤颤地
指着
一条通向长安的青石路.....

8

Suddenly
He searches in a frenzy for that lock of black hair

And she hands over
A wisp of smoke
It is water and will rise to become a cloud
It is soil and will be trampled into parched moss
The face hiding among the leaves
Is more despairing than the sunset
A chrysanthemum at the corner of her mouth
A dark well in her eyes
A war raging in her body
A storm brewing
Within her palm
She no longer suffers from toothache
She will never again come down with
Tang dynasty measles
Her face dissolved in water is a relative white and an absolute black
She will no longer hold a saucer of salt and cry out with thirst
Her hands, which were used to being held
Now point
Tremblingly
To a cobbled road leading to Chang'an

The grief of the emperor is getting deeper here. He recalls the touching details of Yang, the mention of toothache, her thirst after eating salty food, or the allusion to Tang measles, in which the author is playing with a similar motif to comparing the concubine to the incurable disease of history in the previous section, giving us an authentic picture of mourning. The image of a gentlewoman which was created in the previous part of the poem is rather suggestive and vivid.

IX

时间七月七
地点长生殿
一个高瘦的青衫男子
一个没有脸孔的女子
火焰，继续升起
白色的空气中
一双翅膀
又

一双翅膀
飞入殿外的月
色渐去渐远的
私语
闪烁而苦涩

风雨中传来一两个短句的回响

1972

9

Time: the seventh day of the seventh month
Place: Palace of Longevity
A tall thin man in blue
A faceless woman
Flames still rising
In the white air
A pair of wings
Another pair
Fly into the moonlight outside the palace
Whispers
Receding farther and farther away
Glint bitterly

An echo or two through the storm

1972

The last part of Luo Fu's poem is very different from Bai's interpretation. In Bai Juyi's poem, the emperor has a Taoist priest contact the land of the dead so he can speak to his lover again. The poem describes the priest searching everywhere for her and finally waking her up where she slept on a magic island in the afterlife. She has moved on, though, and no longer has anything to do with earthly desires. The poem ends with the lines "Earth fades, Heaven fades, at the end of days. But Everlasting Sorrow endures always".³⁶

The mystical motif, which was much more elaborated by Bai, is in evidence here, too, but the presentation differs radically from the original version, where

³⁶ MARK, E. *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, published on 15 April 2016 [online] [cit. 19 June 2019]. Available from <https://www.ancient.eu/article/888/song-of-everlasting-sorrow>.

Yang intercedes with the emperor from another world, from the company of fairies or goddesses. Luo Fu as a modern man of the contemporary era has worked out a mutual mythical encounter between the emperor and his dead love in a way that looks more like a dream or a metaphor. Instead of a particular meeting somewhere in a mythical island in Heaven, where Yang was situated in Bai Juyi's poem, as a heavenly fairy meeting with her earthly husband, in Luo Fu's poem we see an unclear picture of flying wings, like incoherent shots of a film, snatches of dreams, or distorted fragments of memories. All that remains are impressions, fleeting and unclear, only the feeling of immense sadness is certain.

Conclusion

The above analysis shows clearly that Luo Fu was inspired by contemporary Western poetry, as well as by traditional Chinese poetry but the tradition was for him the material from which he created his own poem within the framework of contemporary poetry, a poem which attracted a lot of attention after being published. Luo Fu's poem has a strong flavour of Surrealism and is more political than the ancient poem of Bai Juyi. Luo Fu's poem is a deeper, more refined adaptation of the poem to modern society. For instance, in the context of his interpretation of the ancient story he proposes his own solution, not only in terms of content but above all in terms of how to re-tell the old well-known story and the author's personal aesthetic approach. There is undoubtedly an influence of Western literature, which Luo Fu was used to translating, in the poem, but to the same extent the feeling of tradition remains. Apart from the formal and aesthetic point of view, Luo Fu's approach to the story carries a certain humanistic message, a sense of dissatisfaction with the unfair fate of a beautiful woman in ancient feudal China.

The historical situation in the 1970s in Taiwan explains at least in part why Luo Fu's evocation of an ancient essence merging with the elements of Modernism in his poetry seems to be so appealing not only to Chinese readers. It should be remembered that at the time when the poem was written the painful experience of the Cultural Revolution in the Mainland, which was still considered by Luo Fu as his homeland, was taking place. The situation in Taiwan was in that time much better than in Mainland China, but Luo Fu was very probably aware of what was happening in Mainland China. Of course, the remarkable talent of the *Magus of poetry* should be taken into the consideration, which is obvious from his use of metaphors and language and from the way in which he created the whole scenery of the poem, its atmosphere. At this point, it is obvious that his poem is a new milestone in contemporary Chinese literature.

In Luo Fu's poem, his interpretation of a historical event is much more critical of reality. Along with sympathy for Yang Guifei, there is a stronger tone of dissatisfaction, reminding us that in a patriarchal society where men determine everything, women are presented mostly as passive objects of love and passion. He expresses strong dissatisfaction with the emperor, with unequal love. The poem should be understood in its historical context: it was written in 1972, during the second half of the Cultural Revolution that took place on the mainland.

Luo Fu remains, after all, a product of classical Chinese Literature and philosophy, while being a re-maker or re-inventor of this literature and philosophy in modern Chinese and English in the new, third millennium.³⁷

After comparing both poems a deeper analysis of Luo Fu's poem is visible, that although Luo Fu "borrowed" the title and the subject of Bai Juyi's poem, he used a completely different way of retelling the old story. At first glance his adaptation seems more realistic but actually, it contains intense elements of surrealism and dream reality. His *Song of Everlasting Regret* points out the absurdity of the war; he provides a new reflection and produces a new literary achievement. Images are elevated to a higher level in order to express Luo Fu's feeling of the absurdity of human existence.

³⁷ CHEN, John Z. Ming, Ji Yuhua. *Canadian-Daoist Poetics, Ethics, and Aesthetics: An Interdisciplinary and Cross-cultural Study*, p. 69.

Bai Juyi's poem

長恨歌 (白居易) *A Song of Unending Sorrow*³⁸

Translated by Witter Bynner

漢皇重色思傾國， China's Emperor, craving beauty that might shake an empire,
御宇多年求不得。 Was on the throne for many years, searching, never finding,
楊家有女初長成， Till a little child of the Yang clan, hardly even grown,
養在深閨人未識。 Bred in an inner chamber, with no one knowing her,
天生麗質難自棄， But with graces granted by heaven and not to be concealed,
一朝選在君王側。 At last one day was chosen for the imperial household.
回眸一笑百媚生， If she but turned her head and smiled, there were cast a hundred
六宮粉黛無顏色。 spells,
And the powder and paint of the Six Palaces faded into nothing.

春寒賜浴華清池， ...It was early spring. They bathed her in the Flower Pure Pool,
溫泉水滑洗凝脂； Which warmed and smoothed the creamy-tinted crystal of her skin,
侍兒扶起嬌無力， And, because of her languor, a maid was lifting her
始是新承恩澤時。 When first the Emperor noticed her and chose her for his bride.
雲鬢花顏金步搖， The cloud of her hair, the petal of her cheek, gold ripples of her
芙蓉帳暖度春宵； crown when she moved,
春宵苦短日高起， Were sheltered on spring evenings by warm hibiscus curtains;
從此君王不早朝。 But nights of spring were short and the sun arose too soon,
And the Emperor, from that time forth, forsook his early hearings

承歡侍宴無閑暇， And lavished all his time on her with feasts and revelry.
春從春遊夜專夜。 His mistress of the spring, his despot of the night.
後宮佳麗三千人， There were other ladies in his court, three thousand of rare beauty.
三千寵愛在一身。 But his favours to three thousand were concentrated in one body.
金屋妝成嬌侍夜， By the time she was dressed in her Golden Chamber, it would be
玉樓宴罷醉和春。 almost evening;
姊妹弟兄皆列土， And when tables were cleared in the Tower of Jade, she would loiter,
可憐光彩生門戶。 slow with wine.
Her sisters and her brothers all were given titles;
And, because she so illumined and glorified her clan,

³⁸ 唐詩 *Tang Shi Introduction Table of content – 300 Tang poems. An anthology of 320 poems. Discover Chinese poetry in its golden age and some of the greatest Chinese poets.* [online]. Available from <http://wengu.tartarie.com/wg/wengu.php?l=Tangshi&no=71>. The Chinese original was downloaded from the page <http://www.musicated.com/syh/TangPoems/EverlastingRegret.htm>.

遂令天下父母心，
不重生男重生女。
驪宮高處入青雲，
仙樂風飄處處聞。
緩歌慢舞凝絲竹，
盡日君王看不足。
漁陽鼙鼓動地來，
驚破霓裳羽衣曲。

She brought to every father, every mother through the empire,
Happiness when a girl was born rather than a boy.
...High rose Li Palace, entering blue clouds.
And far and wide the breezes carried magical notes
Of soft song and slow dance, of string and bamboo music.
The Emperor's eyes could never gaze on her enough-
Till war-drums, booming from Yuyang, shocked the whole earth
And broke the tunes of The Rainbow Skirt and the Feathered Coat.

九重城闕煙塵生，
千乘萬騎西南行。
翠華搖搖行復止，
西出都門百餘里；
六軍不發無奈何？
宛轉蛾眉馬前死。
花鈿委地無人收，
翠翹金雀玉搔頭。

The Forbidden City, the nine-tiered palace, loomed in the dust.
From thousands of horses and chariots headed southwest.
The imperial flag opened the way, now moving and now pausing- -
But thirty miles from the capital, beyond the western gate,
The men of the army stopped, not one of them would stir.
Till under their horses' hoofs, they might trample those moth-
eyebrows...
Flowery hairpins fell to the ground, no one picked them up.
And a green and white jade hair-tassel and a yellow-gold hair- bird.

君王掩面救不得，
回看血淚相和流。
黃埃散漫風蕭索，
雲棧縈紆登劍閣。
峨嵋山下少人行，
旌旗無光日色薄。
蜀江水碧蜀山青，
聖主朝朝暮暮情。

The Emperor could not save her, he could only cover his face.
And later when he turned to look, the place of blood and tears
Was hidden in a yellow dust blown by a cold wind.
...At the cleft of the Dagger-Tower Trail, they crisscrossed through a
cloud-line
Under Omei Mountain. The last few came.
Flags and banners lost their colour in the fading sunlight...
But as waters of Shu are always green and its mountains always
blue.
So changeless was His Majesty's love and deeper than the days.

行宮見月傷心色，
夜雨聞鈴腸斷聲。
天旋地轉迴龍馭，
到此躊躇不能去。
馬嵬坡下泥土中，
不見玉顏空死處。
君臣相顧盡霑衣，
東望都門信馬歸。

He stared at the desolate moon from his temporary palace.
He heard bell-notes in the evening rain, cutting at his breast.
And when heaven and earth resumed their round and the dragon car
faced home,
The Emperor clung to the spot and would not turn away
From the soil along the Mawei slope, under which was buried
That memory, that anguish. Where was her jade-white face?
Ruler and lords, when eyes would meet, wept upon their coats.
As they rode, with a loose rein, slowly eastward, back to the capital.

歸來池苑皆依舊，
太液芙蓉未央柳；
芙蓉如面柳如眉，
對此如何不淚垂？
春風桃李花開日，
秋雨梧桐葉落時。
西宮南內多秋草，
落葉滿階紅不掃。

...The pools, the gardens, the palace, all were just as before,
The Lake Taiye hibiscus, the Weiyang Palace willows:
But a petal was like her face and a willow-leaf her eyebrow –.
And what could he do but cry whenever he looked at them?
...Peach-trees and plum-trees blossomed, in the winds of spring;
Lakka-foliage fell to the ground, after autumn rains;
The Western and Southern Palaces were littered with late grasses.
And the steps were mounded with red leaves that no one swept
away.

梨園子弟白髮新，
椒房阿監青娥老。
夕殿螢飛思悄然，
孤燈挑盡未成眠。
遲遲鐘鼓初長夜，
耿耿星河欲曙天。
鴛鴦瓦冷霜華重，
翡翠衾寒誰與共？

Her Pear-Garden Players became white-haired.
And the eunuchs thin-eyebrowed in her Court of Pepper Trees;
Over the throne flew fire-flies, while he brooded in the twilight.
He would lengthen the lamp-wick to its end and still could never
sleep.
Bell and drum would slowly toll the dragging night hours
And the River of Stars grow sharp in the sky, just before dawn,
And the porcelain mandarin-ducks on the roof grow thick with
morning frost
And his covers of kingfisher-blue feel lonelier and colder

悠悠生死別經年，
魂魄不曾來入夢。
臨邛道士鴻都客，
能以精誠致魂魄；
為感君王輾轉思，
遂教方士殷勤覓。
排空馭氣奔如電，
升天入地求之遍；

With the distance between life and death year after year,
And yet no beloved spirit ever visited his dreams.
...At Lingqiong lived a Taoist priest who was a guest of heaven,
Able to summon spirits by his concentrated mind.
And people were so moved by the Emperor's constant brooding
That they besought the Taoist priest to see if he could find her.
He opened his way in space and clove the ether like lightning,
Up to heaven, under the earth, looking everywhere.

上窮碧落下黃泉，
兩處茫茫皆不見。
忽聞海上有仙山，
山在虛無縹緲間。
樓閣玲瓏五雲起，
其中綽約多仙子。
中有一人字太真，
雪膚花貌參差是。

Above, he searched the Green Void, below, the Yellow Spring;
But he failed, in either place, to find the one he looked for.
And then he heard accounts of an enchanted isle at sea,
A part of the intangible and incorporeal world.
With pavilions and fine towers in the five-colored air
And of exquisite immortals moving to and fro.
And of one among them-whom they called The Ever True-
With a face of snow and flowers resembling hers he sought.

金闕西廂叩玉扃，
轉教小玉報雙成。
聞道漢家天子使，
九華帳裡夢魂驚；
攬衣推枕起徘徊，
珠箔銀屏迤邐開。
雲鬢半偏新睡覺，
花冠不整下堂來。

So he went to the West Hall's gate of gold and knocked at the Jasper door
And asked a girl, called Morsel-of-Jade, to tell The Doubly- Perfect.
And the lady, at the news of an envoy from the Emperor of China,
Was startled out of dreams in her nine-flowered, canopy.
She pushed aside her pillow, dressed, shook away sleep,
And opened the pearly shade and then the silver screen.
Her cloudy hair-dress hung on one side because of her great haste.
And her flower-cap was loose when she came along the terrace,

風吹仙袂飄飄舉，
猶似霓裳羽衣舞。
玉容寂寞淚闌干，
梨花一枝春帶雨。
含情凝睇謝君王，
一別音容兩渺茫。
昭陽殿裡恩愛絕，
蓬萊宮中日月長。

While a light wind filled her cloak and fluttered with her motion
As though she danced The Rainbow Skirt and the Feathered Coat.
And the tear-drops drifting down her sad white face
Were like a rain in spring on the blossom of the pear.
But love glowed deep within her eyes when she bade him thank her liege.
Whose form and voice had been strange to her ever since their parting –
Since happiness had ended at the Court of the Bright Sun,
And moons and dawns had become long in Fairy-Mountain Palace.

回頭下望人寰處，
不見長安見塵霧。
唯將舊物表深情，
鈿合金釵寄將去。
釵留一股合一扇，
釵擘黃金合分鈿。
但教心似金鈿堅，
天上人間會相見。

But when she turned her face and looked down toward the earth
And tried to see the capital, there were only fog and dust.
So she took out, with emotion, the pledges he had given
And, through his envoy, sent him back a shell box and gold hairpin,
But kept one branch of the hairpin and one side of the box,
Breaking the gold of the hairpin, breaking the shell of the box.
“Our souls belong together,” she said, “like this gold and this shell—
Somewhere, sometime, on earth or in heaven, we shall surely”

臨別殷勤重寄詞，
詞中有誓兩心知，
七月七日長生殿，
夜半無人私語時。
在天願作比翼鳥，
在地願為連理枝。
天長地久有時盡，
此恨綿綿無絕期。

And she sent him, by his messenger, a sentence reminding him.
Of vows which had been known only to their two hearts:
“On the seventh day of the Seventh-month, in the Palace of Long Life,
We told each other secretly in the quiet midnight world
That we wished to fly in heaven, two birds with the wings of one.
And to grow together on the earth, two branches of one tree.”
Earth endures, heaven endures; some time both shall end.
While this unending sorrow goes on and on forever.

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