English Metaphysical and Mid-Late Tang Poetry: A Baroque Comparison

by

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Abstract

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As the title indicates, the thesis is a comparative analysis of the Metaphysical poets and Mid-late Tang poets, under the general style of the Baroque. The scholarship on this topic is very minimal because only recently with the study of James Liu on Li Shangyin and the Baroque we have learned to think of Tang poets as Baroque poets. The same goes for the Metaphysical poets who were so-called by Dr. Johnson but who can also be grouped under the Baroque, because they are seventeenth century poets. My definition of Baroque, however, does not conform to that of James Liu who uses the term historically, and by comparing "baroque" terms that metaphysical poets have in common with Tang poets. My concept of baroque is based on Nietzsche's definition of "baroque" as a poetic "style" that can be found in any period, and in any place and any country: in the West as well as in the East, in England and in China. Nietzsche's definition of baroque is associated with a notion of art as allegory which is in opposition to traditional poetic, forms that that are defined as symbolic. According to Nietzsche, we have allegorical, or Baroque poetry, when traditional, symbolic forms are disrupted or are in decline. An analysis of Baroque poetry, therefore, cannot be based on a symbolic approach but on an allegorical reading that is attentive at the ways in which the poetry is displaced from traditional forms. The three metaphysical poets I have chosen are John Donne, Andrew Marvell and John Crashaw and for each poet I discuss three of their poems. For the Mid-late Tang poets I have chosen three poems of Meng Jiao, Li He and Li Shangyin. The thesis is divided in an Introduction, a first chapter on Metaphysical poets, a second chapter on Mid-late Tang poets, the third chapter is on a comparative analysis of Metaphysical and Mid-late Tang conceits. A brief conclusion and a Bibliography conclude the thesis.

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Introduction

> Don't reproach us our lack of clarity because this is what we do. (Pascal)

A comparison between English Metaphysical and Mid-late Tang Poetry is only possible if we understand by Baroque a poetic style that occurs in opposition to traditional, mimetic or symbolic forms of art. This definition, which comes from Nietzsche, describes the Baroque, which is usually associated with the arts and poetry of the seventeenth century, as a style that can occur in any period and in any place whether in England or in ninth-century China. Nietzsche writes that the Baroque style emerges when "any great art starts to fade, whenever the demands in the art of classic expression grow too great."[1] He gives the example of Michelangelo, whom he calls the father or grandfather of Italian baroque, and the artist who broke from the artistic mold of classical rules of art. The baroque style may lack the nobility we confer on the symbol and on symbolic representations, nonetheless, it is always to allegory that we turn to understand the artistic and the poetic; just as we turn to baroque poets to learn about our modernity, as I hope to show in my discussion of the English Metaphysical and Mid-late Tang poets. The Baroque does not belong solely to the seventeenth century in Europe or ends with it, as Benedetto Croce had hoped.[2] The Baroque is not an artistic style that is determined by history or literary history. An historical approach brings about the repression of allegory in favor of a symbolic mode of art and poetry.

The Baroque, when understood as allegory, has not fared too well with literary critics or philosophers. Benedetto Croce, the twentieth century Italian critic and philosopher, regarded the Italian seventeenth century as a "century without poetry" (un secolo senza poesia)"[3] He also

denied that the Baroque can be found in any century and in any place. He claimed that the Baroque, and allegory, had ended with the seventeenth century and that we had done with them. For Croce, Baroque poetry as allegorical poetry is not artistic, because only the symbol is artistic. Allegory, on the contrary, is the non-artistic, the anti-artistic, and should be avoided at all costs. Croce spent a lifetime expunging allegory from poetry, and separating it from the symbol, without much success.[4] Croce's notion of allegory came from Hegel who, in the *Aesthetics* identified the artistic with the symbol, and allegory as the non-artistic.[5] Hegel defined allegory as "*frostig und kahl,*" (*icy and bleak)* and dismissed it as "a product of the intellect and not of concrete intuition and of the deep feeling of imagination, and lacking inherent seriousness, prosaic, and distant from art" (Hegel 501). Following Hegel, Croce wrote that "Allegory is not a direct form of spiritual expression, only a kind of writing or cryptography" (Croce's *La Poesia 227).* Nonetheless, on a closer look, for both Hegel and Croce, allegory is, after all, the name of the artistic while the symbol is only apparently that.[6]

In Art criticism the Baroque is usually confused with Mannerism, an exaggeration of traits found in the Late Renaissance. However, they are the expression of two dominant and opposing artistic styles. The former emphasizes unity, the latter vitality and multiplicity. Jorge Luis Borges defined the Baroque as "that style that deliberately exhausts (or at least tries to) its own possibilities, and that borders on self-caricature."[7] There have been many definitions of the Baroque. Benedetto Croce, in his study on the Baroque mentioned above, defined it as "Barocco," after the fourth mode of the second figure in the nomenclature of syllogisms in Scholasticism. (If A=B and some C does not equal B, then some C does not equal A). He also thought that the term came from the Portuguese for *perrola barroca*: a jeweller's term for an irregular shaped, or flawed pearl. Rene Wellek, despairing of a definition, after presenting all possible variations, concluded that "the

Baroque has provided an aesthetic term which has helped us to understand the literature of the time, and which will help us to break the dependence of most literary history from periodization derived from political and social history" (Wellek 97).[8]

In England poets like Donne who seemed to stray from accepted and traditional poetic forms were declared non-poetic and prosaic.[9] When John Dryden read Crashaw and Dr. Johnson read John Donne, they found their poetry distasteful and abstract. They called it "metaphysical" but they might as well have called it "Baroque." In his *Lives of the English Poets*, Dr. Johnson suggested that metaphysical wit was the result of a "discordia concors: a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike."[10] John Dryden in "A Discourse of the Original and Progress of Satire" (1693) disapproved of John Donne's wit and satire: "Would not Donne's satires, which abound with so much wit, appear more charming if he had taken care of his words, and of his numbers? But he followed Horace so very close that of necessity he must fall with him. And I may safely say it of this present age, that if we were not so great wits as Donne, yet certainly we are better poets."[11] They had to wait for T. S. Eliot to counter Dr. Johnson's negative assessment and to recognize their rightful place in the history of English poetry, and reinstate them as modern poets.[12] However, contemporary criticism is still divided as to whether to keep the name "metaphysical" or to call them "Baroque" poets, as the rest of the European poets of the seventeenth.[13] The real issue, though, does not seem to be a question of terminology but an aesthetic one, of symbol and allegory.

English critics have listed many characteristics of the Baroque or of English Metaphysical poetry: conceit and emblem, theatricality, antithesis and paradox, quiddity (a form of syllogism), contrast between erotic love and religious love, *ars est praesentare artem*, as opposed to the Renaissance poetic ideal of "*ars est celare artem*." Samuel Johnson was the one who pointed out

that the Baroque poet perverted the doctrine of the "*'ars est celare artem*" into its very opposite. On the contrary, the distinctive originality of the Metaphysical poets can be shown by their radical break from traditional Renaissance poetry, and from the modalities of the Petrarchan sonnet, in particular, with its compulsory form of 14 lines, the characterization of the beloved as the *donna angelicata*. For the purposes of the thesis I will limit myself solely to a consideration of the conceits used both by the metaphysical poets and by the ninth century Chinese Mid-late Tang poets, and their use and purpose within the structure of the poems. Other characteristics will be mentioned, as a matter of course, as they occur.

The question of the Baroque is a version of the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns, the classical and the contemporary. On the one hand, the Baroque is decidedly on the side of the ancients as a 17th century aesthetic which is superseded by more modern poetic forms, such as Romanticism and Modernism. On the other hand, when the Baroque is understood as an artistic style, and not as an historical period, it belongs to the moderns. The in-between character of the Baroque, which situates it both in the past and in the present, is what accounts for the complexity of the Baroque but also for its modernity. As Paul de Man has characterized it: "Modernity exists in the form of a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier, in the hope of reaching at last a point that could be called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure. This combined interplay of deliberate forgetting with an action that is also an origin reaches the full power of the idea of Modernity."[14] In severing itself from the past, the Baroque also severs itself from the present. Modernity, adds de Man, confronts us at all times with an unsolvable paradox: "Literature exists at the same time in the modes of error and truth, it both betrays and obeys its own mode of being" (de Man, 163-64).

The modernity of the Baroque, and of Baroque literature or of the Baroque lyric, is determined by its non-mimetic, non-symbolic form or, simply, by its allegorical form. As such Baroque's modernity is determined by its distance from a symbolic form, from the way it departs and undermines a concept of art as symbol. As allegory, the Baroque undermines and obscures the specific literal meaning of a representation open to (symbolic) understanding. On the other hand, allegory contains a representational element that allows for understanding but only in order to show that the understanding it reaches is necessarily in error. Since allegory can only blindly repeat the earlier model without final understanding it, it is, essentially, the negation of modernity. The less we understand a poet, writes de Man, the more he is misinterpreted and made to say the opposite of what he said, the more he is truly modern, that is, different from what we, mistakenly, think we are ourselves (de Man, 164). This paradox defines the modernity of the Baroque and its essence as allegory.

One other critic who has made an important contribution to the study and the understanding of Baroque is Walter Benjamin. Although his study, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, was meant to describe the German Baroque Mourning Drama, the German *Trauerspiel*, his work makes an important contribution to the relation of Baroque and allegory, and to notions of social decline and decay.[15] Central to his view is the notion of a divine concept of violence that interrupts the course of time and initiates a future in a long tragic "suspense." In this suspense is inscribed what has been called "the politics of suspense," or "the suspension of the political," founded on the belief of an absolute break, or rupture, with the past. In Benjamin this radical abolition, inversion and reversal of the past, is explicitly established in the German classical Baroque. [16] However, only the poetry of Men Jiao seems to come close to Benjamin's concept of allegory, as I point out in my discussion of the poet in chapter two.

Chinese poets of the Mid-late Tang experienced a similar case of ostracism from their contemporaries. Although their poetry was admired, the poetry of Meng Jiao, Li He and Li Shangyin, which I discuss in the thesis, went unappreciated and almost forgotten until they were discovered by later poets and recognized not only as great poetry, and modern poetry, but also as "Baroque" poetry. According to Tak-wai Wong, J. D. Frodsham was the first to apply the term Baroque to Chinese Literature, and to the Tang poets in particular, in a lecture in 1968 on *New Perspectives in Chinese Literature*.[17] Frodsham applied the term "baroque" to the poetry of Han Yü and Meng Chiao but his definition was not limited to the Tang poets or to the post-Renaissance period of the seventeenth century, but was applicable to any "recurring historical phenomenon." Frodsham followed Nietzsche and his view, as I have indicated, that the Baroque implies a decline in art into rhetoric and that "tropes and catachresis, hyperboles and oxymorons in the poetry of Meng Chiao and Lu T'ung might simply be "the decorative overelaboration of a highly conscious, skeptical craftsman, the pilings-up of calculated surprises and effects." He argued that what these Chinese poets share with their Western counterparts is a deep concern with the mobility of things, with "Time as a creator and destroyer" (Wong 26).

For Wong, however, Frodsham's definition of Baroque is too limited and pejorative. He believes that his concept of the Baroque has to be modified "with a more perceptive reading of the text, and a more comprehensive understanding of the term before it can be applied to the study of Chinese literature" (Wong 26). Wong's critique also extends to James J. Y. Liu's *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (1962)[18] where Liu contends that the poetry of Meng Chiao, Lu T'ung and Chia Tao is comparable to English metaphysical poetry in its use of "farfetched and elaborately developed comparisons, and in its tendency towards complexity and ambiguity in imagery and syntax" (in Wong 28). Wong also turns his attention to Liu's *The poetry of Li Shang-yin. Ninth-*

century Baroque Chinese Poet, the first comprehensive study not only of Chinese Baroque poetry but also of a major Late Tang poet.[19] With the exception of a couple of paragraphs at the end of Liu's study, the issue of the Baroque, for Wong, is "not properly posed and adequately explored" (Wong 29). He finds a similar restrictive view of the Baroque as he noted in Frodsham, when Liu refers to the Mid-late Tang poetry, as the period comparable to the seventeenth century period in Europe, "typified by tendencies toward the exuberant or the grotesque" (Wong 29). For Wong Liu, did not illustrate sufficiently, and with specific examples, the elements of Li Shangyin's poetry that would identify him as a Baroque poet on the same level as the European Baroque poets. He is also critical of Liu's claim that if Li Shang-yin had been a Western poet of the seventeenth century, he would have qualified as a Baroque poet. This historical fact alone, Wong rightly states, would not have made Li a baroque poet.

Despite his critique of Frodsham and James Liu, Wong himself does not make a strong case for a Baroque reading of Li Shangyin, or other Mid-late Tang poets. Like Liu, Wong seems to believe that a simple correspondence between Chinese and Western poets suffices to establish a Baroque comparison. They believe that it suffices to show that Tang poets share with the English Metaphysical poets similar characteristics to qualify them as Baroque poets. These include time, historical or mythological allusions, exploitation of conventional verse, momentary resolution of opposites, the use of conceit, and the use of language (Wong 33-35). However, these characteristics are not exclusive to the Baroque and can be said to apply to any poem without, necessarily, defining it as baroque. Wong's comparisons with the metaphysical poets are too general to apply to a reading of a Baroque poem. It also does not help to know that Li Shang-yin, like Donne, as Wong claims, is "remarkable in his intricate use of diction and dramatic situation;" that like Crashaw he is capable "to interpenetrate the metaphysical and the high baroque style with

potentially sensual images"; or that like Góngora he is able to use "innumerable classical allusions in a constant periphrastic style." These associations with established Western baroque poets may contribute to regard Tang poets as baroque, but do not help us in reading their poetry. The same can be said for Wong's claim that Li Shangyin "attempts to cover the enormous range between temporality and eternity, emotion and intellect, illusion and intellect, the duplicity of language and style, etc., are all strong indications of the baroque" (Wong 36). These indications are descriptive and not critical and while they may define Li Shangyin's poetry as baroque poetry, they don't help us to read it.

The main difficulty in reading Li Shangyin's poetry, or any Chinese poetry, as Baroque lies not in the similar devices that they may have in common with Western Baroque poets, or even English Metaphysical poets, but in the allegorical character of their poetry. Wong and Liu, however, while claiming that Li Shangyin is a baroque poet, they reject allegory as an artistic mode, and read his poems as if they were traditional and symbolic. As critics and translators, in deciding between a "literal" or symbolical translation and a "literary" or allegorical one, they always choose the literal. Liu believes that one should steer clear of the "literary," or the allegorical, because its "excessive freedom" makes translation not only "undesirable, but at times impossible" (Liu 35). Indeed, the navigation between the literal and the literary, or the figural or allegorical, is difficult to chart, both for the translator and the interpreter. However doing away with the figural is not only undesirable, but also impossible. However, both Wong and Liu believe that a literal and symbolic approach will enable them to steer clear of the difficulties of reading the poems s baroque but, in so doing, they only encounter a web of ambiguities, which they cannot resolve.

Since allegory is what characterizes and defines the Baroque style of poetry, in the seventeenth century and in ninth century Mid-late Tang poetry, in opposition to traditional and symbolic forms, reading the poems symbolically is reading them against the grain, or misreading them. The problem with Wong's and Liu's approaches is that they attempt to read a baroque poem as a traditional poem, or, which is the same, to read an allegorical poem symbolically. Once the figural, or the allegorical, is displaced in Liu, and allegory and rhetoric have been dismissed in Wong, how can they hope to read the poetry of Li Shangyin, or of any other Baroque poet? Both critics overlook the essentially rhetorical or allegorical mode of the baroque, and they choose to read it symbolically, as a dramatized narrative. What characterizes a Baroque poem, instead, is the way it departs from classical or symbolic forms of art and privileges tropes over the meaning they produce, poetics over hermeneutics, allegory over symbol.

A similar negative attitude towards allegory is found in most translators and commentators of the Tang poets that I discuss in the thesis. Stephen Owen, the well-known critic and translator, shares a similar aversion to allegory, which he regards as not being an acceptable subject for poetry, but only a superficial and incidental supplement to artistic form.[20] For him allegory is a pejorative mode of representation that we need not be concerned with. Frodsham, however, as I mentioned, was one of the first to acknowledge these Mid-late Tang poets as Baroque and allegorical poets. He understood with Nietzsche that the baroque style is not an historical concept but a style of art that is predicated on the demystification of art as symbol. The poetry of poets like Donne, Marvell, Crashaw or Meng Jiao, Li He or Li Shangyin, which I discuss in the thesis, does not depend on a mimetic representation of external reality, as one could claim for the classical or traditional modes of symbolical art. Their models are folklore, myths, or even traditional poems, which they re-adapt and re-construct, but never imitate. This poetry stands alone as an allegory of

the impossibility of imitating these models and this is what makes them modern. For this reason, their poems are not really "lyrics" in the traditional sense. They are non-lyrics, or anti-lyrics; they are prosaic or allegorical, or simply Baroque. That is why we read them as poets of the past but as poets of our modernity.

In addition to this Introduction, the thesis consists of three chapters, a brief conclusion and a bibliography. The first chapter is on English Metaphysical poets, the second on the Mid-late Tang poets, the third chapter is a comparative analysis of their conceits. The first chapter investigates three poems by John Donne, Andrew Marvell and John Crashaw respectively. In this chapter my aim is not to provide a critical analysis of Metaphysical poetry, but I have limited myself to give the standard reading of their poems, and to identify the main conceits which qualify them as baroque. I have also added a brief discussion of how contemporary critics approach and analyze these Metaphysical poets in the light of modern literary theory and theories of the Baroque.

On the other hand, in chapter two, the issue, in the analysis of the three Mid-late Tang poets, is translation. The three poets I deal with, Men Jiao, Li He and Li Shangyin, make it necessary that I provide two translations for each of the three poems I discuss, in order to better confront and relate them to the original. However, finding two translations was not always an easy task. For example, in the case of Li Shangyin's "Written on a Monastery Wall," I could only find two translations by Arthur Cooper and by A. C. Graham. Whenever possible, I have chosen the best translators but, as it turned out, one translation was always too literal and faithful to the original and the other more interpretative and figural. For instance, in the case of "Written on a Monastery Wall," Cooper's translation of the poem seems to have been prompted by A. C. Graham's more literal translation. Cooper does not tell us why, of course, but he must have felt that A. C. Graham

did not translate the poem adequately. He is a well-known translator and a very good one, but this particular translation does not do justice to the poem. I leave further discussion of their different translations to the analysis of the poem in Chapter Two.

The translators that I have used most often are Stephen Owen and J. D. Frodsham who have devoted most of their work to translating the poets I deal with. Stephen Owen has translated most everything by Li Shangyin and Meng Jiao, while Frodsham has translated Li He and Meng Jiao. For Meng Jiao I have also made use of David Hinton who is a good and reliable translator. For Meng Jiao I have also used a translation by Tak-wai Wong who, compared to Hinton's more liberal translation, gives a more literal interpretation. For Li He, I have also used the translation of Fusheng Wu who, compared to Frodsham is also more literal. The difference between Frodsham and Owen does not need elaboration. Stephen Owen is an excellent scholar and translator but his translations tend to be very literal and leave the reader to guess much of the poem. Frodsham, on the other hand, who, as I mentioned earlier, is an early promoter of ninth century Tang poetry as Baroque, has always the Western reader in mind and his translations tend to provide a more readable, if less accurate translation. He was a well-known Sinologist, scholar and translator, and the first to come up with the idea that there are some periods in Chinese literature that could be defined as Baroque. Actually, this idea was part of a greater plan to restructure Chinese Literary history on the model of Western Literary history. This plan did not receive much enthusiasm from Chinese scholars but his enthusiasm is clear in his translations, which attempt to read Chinese poems as Western poems. Even for me, who am a Chinese speaker, J.D. Frodsham's translations have been of great help. All the translators, each in his own way, have been of great help to me to read the original, and all of them have given me not only a better understanding of the poem, but have also enabled me to explain why, in my view, this poetry should be considered Baroque.

The third Chapter has been the most difficult to write. The comparative analysis of the English Metaphysical poets and mid-late Tang poets could not be based on comparing, supposedly, their similar devices, as Wong and Liu tried to do. Since my claim is that the poems are "Baroque" because they are allegorical, it remained for me to show how their conceit illustrated their allegorical style. I decided to discuss their conceits, or their wit, the main themes they deal with, and the poetic context in which they wrote. In other words, what rhetorical elements identify these poems as allegory, that is, as narratives of the impossibility of reading them for the literal meaning they seem to refer to; that is, as symbolic poems. I hope I have succeeded in showing, at least, how these poems cannot be read symbolically, as lyrics, but as allegories, or as non-lyrics.

Notes

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche. "On the Baroque style." *Human, All too Human. A Book for free spirits,* 245-46.

[2] For Croce's attitude toward allegory see the next note.

[3] See the Introduction to Benedetto Croce. *Storia dell'eta Barocca in Italia*.

[4] For Croce's lifelong debate on allegory see M. Verdicchio. *Naming Things. Aesthetics Philosophy and History in Benedetto Croce.*

[5] See Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Arts,* 499-501. For further discussion see Verdicchio's *Naming Things*.

[6] See Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics." *Aesthetic Ideology,* 91-104. For Benedetto Croce see note 4.

[7] See Jorge L. Borges, *Universal History of Infamy*.

[8] For a good survey of writings on the Baroque, see Rene Wellek's "The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship," 77-109. See also his bibliography of works on the Baroque from 1888-1946.

[9] For a lengthy discussion of the English Metaphysical poets see Rolf P. Lessenich, "The "Metaphysicals": English Baroque Literature in Context."

[10] Samuel Johnson. "Life of Abraham Cowley." *Lives of the English Poets*, quoted in Wellek 90.

[11] John Dryden. "A Discourse of the Original and Progress of Satire." Ed. Watson (1962), 2: 144.

[12] For a discussion of T. S. Eliot's contribution see the next chapter.

[13] See my discussion of recent contemporary criticism on the "English Metaphysical poets" in chapter one.

[14] See Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity," *Blindness and Insight*, 148.

[15] Walter Benjamin. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.

[16] For a different view of Benjamin's concept of the baroque see my discussion of Hugh Grady in chapter one. Grady associates Benjamin's poetics with those of Baudelaire and with those of John Donne.

[17] Tak-wai Wong. "Toward Defining Chinese Baroque Poetry." *Tamkang Review*, 25-72. For J. D. Frodsham, see his *New Perspectives in Chinese Literature*, quoted in Wong 25.

[18] James J. Y. Liu. *The Art of Chinese Poetry.*

[19]James J. Y. Liu. *The Poetry of Li Shangyin. Ninth-century Baroque Chines Poet*.

[20] For a reading of Owen's aesthetics see Verdicchio' s "Under Wetstern Literary Eyes."

Chapter 1

English Metaphysical poetry

Introduction.

Metaphysical poetry is usually described as highly intellectualized poetry characterized by bold and elaborate metaphorical conceits and wit, subtle thoughts with learned themes. Herbert Grierson compares their conceits with those of the Elizabethans as being more intellectual and less verbal, more learned and argumentative, and above all subtle in the evolution of their lyrics. Above all their greatest achievement is "the peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and reaction."[1] The term "metaphysical" was coined by Samuel Johnson in the eighteenth century as a derogatory term for a type of poetry that varied radically from the previous Elizabethan model. Since then it has become a general term for a type of poetry that has often been characterized as Baroque, since its themes and conceits are similar to the Baroque poetry of other countries and of other times.[2] In this chapter, I discuss three poems of three of the most representative metaphysical poets by focusing mainly on their themes and use of conceits and wit. Since this is a comparative thesis with Chinese poets of similar tendencies, I have chosen the poems with their similarity in mind. My aim is to explore the love theme in John Donne, Andrew Marvell and Richard Crashaw, although the latter is mostly a religious and not a love poet.

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John Donne or The Erotic and the Divine.

John Donne is considered the leading figure of the metaphysical poets. His themes deal with the conflict between soul and body, spirituality and sensuality which we find expressed in poems like "The Flea," "The Good Morrow" and "The Sun Rising." Donne, usually, makes use of a single elaborate metaphorical conceit throughout a poem, in order to develop an always deeper understanding of the speaker's emotions. The three poems I have selected by John Donne are from the *Songs and Sonnets*, which is mainly a collection of love lyrics.[3] The themes of these love lyrics vary, but most of them focus on the conflict between body and soul, spirituality and sensuality in the microcosm of love, through images that are geographical, astronomical and cosmological. The best representative of this theme is, of course, "The Flea" (Shawcross, 127).

The Flea

Before Donne, "the flea" was already a popular and widely used conceit in erotic poems in sixteenth century Europe. The reason the flea has strong erotic connotations, besides the influence of Ovid, is the popular view in the seventeenth century that sex is the mingling of bloods and the flea's bloodthirsty nature makes possible for them to drink blood from different people and mix human blood in their body.[4] This belief makes the flea an excellent erotic metaphor that John Donne exploits to his advantage to seduce his woman.

The Flea

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deniest me is;
It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;
Thou know'st that this cannot be said

A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pampered swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, nay more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.
Though use make you apt to kill me,
Let not to that, self-murder added be,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?
Wherein could this flea guilty be,
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou
Find'st not thy self, nor me the weaker now;
'Tis true; then learn how false, fears be:
Just so much honor, when thou yield'st to me,
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

In the poem, Donne creates a dramatic scene the moment that he finds that a flea has just bit them. He compares the minute size of the flea with the denial he gets from his beloved: "how little

that which thou deny'st me is." He tells his woman about the flea and its tendency to mingle blood in order to suggest the possibility of their having sex. As she refuses, he tells her that the mingling of their bloods in the body of the flea is not a sin: "cannot be said/ A sin, or shame or loss of maidenhead,/Yet this enjoys before it woo." And because the flea has drunk both their bloods it has already united them in a way that they do not dare to do: "more than we would do."

In the second stanza the poet stops his beloved from killing the flea. In the flea there are three lives: his, hers and the flea. In the flea they are almost married and the flea is their marriage bed, their "marriage temple." Although her parents are not agreeable to their union and she refuses to make love with him, they are, nevertheless, united in the body of the flea: "in these living walls of jet." The poet tells her that if she kills the flea, she will not kill only it but also him and her, so she will be committing three sins: "three sins in killing three."

She eventually kills the flea with her fingernail, purpling it with the "blood of innocence." He tells her that she is "cruel" and asks her what wrong the flea had done to her except that she took a drop of her blood, "it suck'd from thee." She tells him now that she has killed the flea they are not any less noble, but he replies that, likewise, she would not be losing any less honor if she slept with him, "when thou yield'st to me" than when she killed the flea. The conceit of the flea in Donne is not simply an image but a narrative of the erotic relationship of the poet and his beloved. The flea is an extended metaphor, or an allegory, that goes beyond the literal meaning of the flea, in the style of Baroque poetry, typical of the seventeenth century.

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The Good Morrow.

The next poem I want to discuss is “The Good Morrow” (Shawcross, 89) whose theme is still love, but the erotic aspect, which is in the foreground in “The Flea,” is secondary here. The poem is as follows:

The Good Morrow

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers’ den?
’Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, ’twas but a dream of thee.

And now good-morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love, all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres,
Without sharp north, without declining west?
Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I

Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

As the title indicates, the action of the "Good Morrow" takes place when the poet and his beloved wake up on the "good morrow." The poem is in the form of an address in a language which is direct and colloquial. The poet asks what they did before they fell in love, "what thou and I did, till we lov'd." Before, they were mere babies at their mothers' breasts or indulging in childish "country pleasures," or perhaps they were asleep as in the Seven Sleepers' den, a reference to an ancient legend when persecuted Christians slept for several hundred years in a cave near Ephesus. With these three questions, the nature and roles of Love are emphasized and metaphorically explained: 1) "were we not wean'd till then? 2) But suck'd on country pleasures, childishly?" 3) "Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?"

The first two questions are related: "not weaned" indicates the souls' lack of maturity and ignorance of their infancy before Love wakes them up. Before they fell in love, they were like babies and indulged in childish "country pleasures." Both questions have strong indications and are allusions to sexual gratification. The third question "snort'd we in the Seven Sleepers' den" addresses the title directly: waking and sleeping. More than that, in this sentence there is the implication of a miraculous sleep, which is compared to the sleep in the poem. The original legend of the seven sleepers is a reference to both the Christian and the Mohammedan religion at the dawn of Christianity, which Helen Gardner in her co-edited work, *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets* explains its importance in detail.[5]

The legend, according to the translation from the Syrian in *De Gloria Martyrum* by Gregory of Tours, relates that about AD 250 or 251, during the persecution of the Christians by the Emperor Decius, seven Christian youth from Ephesus took refuge in a cave in a nearby mountain. Their

pursuers walled them in a cave, with the intention of starving them to death, but the young men fell into a miraculous sleep, from which they did not wake until some time during the reign of Theodosius II (possibly AD 439 or AD 446). When they woke up, they thought they had been asleep for only a single night, and one of them, who went to the city for food, was amazed to find, on the churches and other buildings, the cross, which, when he had fallen asleep, had been an object of desecration. The legend has strong implications that devoutness brings miracles. This literary reference shows not only Donne's Roman Catholic background, but also the dawn of spirituality, as Bloom has suggested.[6] Besides, the opposing concepts in this legend reveal an insight in the difference between before and after waking. First of all, the contrast between one night and two centuries, within which there are two possible levels of meaning: 1) one night could be as long as two centuries, during which things change: the dawning of the morning brings a new world. Christianity in the legend, once the subject of hatred, is now believed and worshiped. 2) Two centuries could also be as short as one night. Things are unchanged, uninspired and unknown before waking up. One night here refers to the night the seven youths of Ephesus spent in the cave, and also the night the speaker spent with his lover that was just past. When the seven youths of Ephesus wake up, they find a new world dominated by the victory of their belief, Christianity; when the lovers wake up, the new world they find is the miraculous joy of Love over sexual pleasures. The analogy also emphasizes the unpredictability of the world as it changes in time and space. As the literary reference implies, the sense of time is uncertain and distrustful. The seven youths of Ephesus feel that they have slept one single night, but the night turns out to be two centuries. During their sleep, although the physical place does not change, the spirituality of the outside world has been turned upside down. This gives us a clue to why the waking soul did not

realize the change in spirituality until the morning after. Once the lovers wake up from their sleep, they question the time difference and the difference between the world before and after.

As the speaker wonders why they fall in love so late, the first four lines focus mainly on "sleeping" and its unconscious state – the time before they fall in Love. Before falling in love, the poet saw in ignorance, desired and got what he thought was beauty. But now that he has found his "true" love, he realizes that all his past pleasures, and the women he "desir'd," were merely "fancies," they were only a "dream" of this one woman he is in love in with, only "a dream of thee."

On the "good morrow" their souls wake up to a constant, trusting love. They do not need to keep a jealous eye on each other because their love subdues the desire to look for others. It is so complete, so self-sufficient, that it "makes one little room, an everywhere." In the next stanza, the emphasis moves to the external world that the lovers have abandoned for each other. There may be worlds out there: let discoverers go and find them, or map-makers draw them, the lovers will use their time taking possession of their own private world. This world is complete because it is made up of two hemispheres that perfectly complement each other. The poet also suggests that if their love is constant, they cannot die, since only what is contrary or of different measure can disintegrate. "If our two loves be one, or, thou and I/ Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die." They will be able to live in perfect harmony.

The second stanza begins with a greeting to their "waking souls" as they awaken into a constant trusting love. Their waking souls look at each other not "out of fear" – as they have no need to fear that their lovers may look for other partners. Their love controls sight; as sight is on each other, there is no space for other things, and the little room they are in is everywhere. The

speaker abandons the outside world and cares only about each other. Therefore, let the sea-discoverers find new continents and let the world expand and the rest of the people get to know the planet they live on. For they want one world of spirituality combined from two originally separated souls, same as the two hemispheres of the planet that is under exploration by the sea-discoverers and the mappers. Each of the couple and their souls is an independent world, thus, each of them has one world. As they are combined by Love, they become one in the one world they want to possess, which probably still needs the two to explore and discover more of each other to merge them completely and be one. Harold Bloom suggests juxtaposition to understand the two worlds each has between the sensual world and the spiritual world and concludes that "this juxtaposition of the sensual with the spiritual suggests that those who live solely in the sensual world, busying themselves in mundane matters, are lost to the world of true love" (Bloom 16).

In the third stanza, their love is attuned not only to physical appearances but also to their hearts: their eyes can see only their faces, and their sight can only see their true hearts. They want an ideal world all to themselves, without any shortcomings: a world without sharp north or declining west. As commentators suggest, the sharp north represents the coldness that may freeze the warmth of love and the declining west represents the sunset or the decay of the outside world. The last three lines deal with the immortality of love: "whatever dies, was not mix'd equally." Equality is extremely valued as the preventer of Death, but also an important factor that requires that their hemispheres shall be equal in every sense, including their geographical dimensions. When the lovers find their ideal world where they are equal, their love will not die. The poet now expresses the wish, which is, arguably, the point of the poem: If "thou and I" really love each other, they will put equal effort in their united world, so that their love will not die and they, because of their everlasting love, will not die as well.

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The Sun Rising.

"For love … makes one little room, an everywhere." This witty conceit appears again in "The Sun Rising," the third poem by John Donne that I have chosen discuss (Shawcross, 93):

The Sun Rising

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains call on us?
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late school boys and sour prentices,
Go tell court huntsmen that the king will ride,
Call country ants to harvest offices,
Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams, so reverend and strong
Why shouldst thou think?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
But that I would not lose her sight so long;
If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,
Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with me.
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,

And thou shalt hear,
All here in one bed lay.

She's all states, and all princes, I,
Nothing else is.
Princes do but play us; compared to this,
All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy.
Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,
In that the world's contracted thus.
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere.

In the poem the poet scolds the sun and calls it "busy old fool." He complains and rails against the sun because the rising sun wakes and disturbs him and his beloved from their sleep. The lover's seasons do not change according to the sun but has its own pace, which is set by the lovers. The poet tells the sun to go and annoy schoolboys and rush them to school, or to call the huntsmen to prepare for the king's ride, or the farmer to work in the fields. But the sun, which creates time, has no influence on love, and in love, there is no time: "Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime, / Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time."

In the second stanza, the poet goes on mocking the sun: although the sun shines over the world, and its beams are very bright, they are not comparable to love's "brightness." The poet could easily deny the sun by closing his eyes, if he did not want always to keep them open to keep his beloved in sight. If he were only to wink for a moment, he would not be able to see his beloved and that

moment is “so long.” The poet also boosts that his beloved’s eyes shine much more bright than the sun and her beams would blind the sun’s eyes. In his praise of the beloved’s beauty and loveliness, Donne employs a convention of the Renaissance love poem, but he masterly converts it into a hypothesis: “if her eyes have not blinded you,” which makes the conceit much stronger and more convincing. If his beloved has not blinded the sun, can he tell him if all the treasures of India are still there or if they are in bed with him: “Whether both Indias, of spice and mine, / Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with me.” The reference here is to both the East and West Indies, which, in Donne’s time, were well known for their spices and precious mines. The poet now claims that his beloved is all of those precious treasures of the East and West Indies, and they are in bed with him: “all here in one bed lay.”

The poet explains that his beloved is equal to the “all States,” and that he is “all Princes, I,/ Nothing else is.” All the States belong to the prince and his beloved yields to him. Compared to the bond that units the lovers, all the honors and wealth of the world are not real, they are false. The poet mocks the sun that has to work hard to warm the outside world, but he offers him an alternative by narrowing the whole world down to themselves and to their room, to the bed they are in: “To warm the world, that’s done in warming us. / Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere; / This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere.”

The vigorous opening of this poem exemplifies the dramatic effects of Donne’s poems, and his bold hyperboles and conceits. The whole poem is structured with several hyperbolic assertions: the personified sun is granted consciousness and personality, and the whole poem is addressed to the sun. This personified sun is actually the most important character in the poem; he is the other of the dialogue. Second, there is the conceit that love overcomes time: “no season knows, nor clime, / Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.” Third, there is the conceit that only

the sphere of love matters, while the physical and the real world are dispensable. At the end of the poem, the poet claims that their bedroom is the whole world and their bed is its center. These figurative assertions characterize different feelings that are centered in the poet's sense of fulfillment and satisfaction in love. Although we know these assertions are rhetorical, it is the inspiration from these feelings that give the love expressed in the poem its full sense.

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Andrew Marvell: Between *Eros* and *Thanatos*.

Andrew Marvell is perhaps the other most important representative of the metaphysical poets. He writes in the traditional, classical style as in his ode to Cromwell. As the critic Jack Dalglish writes, his work "reveals the successful assimilation and fusion of the two great poetic influences of the early seventeenth century: it combines the passionate, probing intellectuality of Donne with the clarity and poise of Jonson."[7] Marvell is good at handling verses of intense emotions, sometimes expressing seriousness through wit and irony, by relating trivial thoughts as profoundly important issues. Nigel Smith, the editor of *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, comments that his poems "reflect deeply on the nature of poetry, ancient and modern, classical, Renaissance and contemporary, European and English. He thought about the identity of the poet and his responsibilities to public and private realms."[8] Marvell's poetry confronts two basic problems facing the poet writing in the seventeenth century: on the one hand, the relationship between amorous and devotional verse and, on the other, the challenge to fixed beliefs represented by the

world of public life and politics. The three poems I have selected are on the theme of love: “To His Coy Mistress,” “The Definition of Love” and “The Unfortunate Lovers.”

To his Coy Mistress

The poem “To His Coy Mistress” follows a long tradition of classic and Renaissance love poetry that was written around the motif of *carpe diem*, which is to urge the beloved to "seize the day" and enjoy love, usually sex, before it is too late and death overtakes the lovers. “To His Coy Mistress” is probably the best-known poem of Andrew Marvell and one of the most famous *carpe diem* poems in English. The poem is addressed to his mistress by the poet who wants to persuade her to give herself to him. The persuasion involves clever allusions, witticisms and conceits in a clever and well-structured framework. The poem unfolds in a monologue tone and the argument is developed logically in three stages to persuade his mistress that life is short, and they better enjoy love before they die.

To His Coy Mistress[9]

Had we but world enough and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love’s day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges’ side
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow

Vaster than empires and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.

But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long-preserved virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust;
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,

Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
Than languish in his slow-chapped power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Through the iron gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

The poet tries to persuade his mistress to give herself to him. If they had all the time in the world, there would be time to enjoy each other but since there is little precious time, they should not be wasting it. The poet makes use of the millenarian ideas of the seventeenth century, biblical references and the concept of the tripartite soul, to exaggerate the idea of time. "I would/ Love you ten years before the flood: / And you should, if you please, refuse / Till the conversation of the Jews." The Flood is recorded in the Old Testament and refers to God's decision to return to earth, following the "conversion of the Jews," and the second coming of Christ. The poet uses these ideas to express the length of time that would take his shy mistress who is hesitating. The reference to "vegetable love" is to the "vegetable" soul, which, according to Aristotle, is the very basic soul, and describes the love of the poet, which is basic and instinctive, and grows vastly and slowly. It would take a hundred years to see and praise the mistress' eyes and forehead, two hundred years for each breast; in short, it would take thirty thousand years to praise every part of her body: "An age at least to every part, / And the last age should show your heart." His mistress deserves all this

time and all his intense love, however there is not enough time in this world for him to love her properly: “Had we but world enough, and time.”

The poet continues his argument by impressing upon his mistress that they are just finite human beings and they should take advantage of their bodies while they are youthful, “Now let us sport us while we may”; before her beauty will perish, “Thy beauty shall no more be found”; and the virginity she wants to preserve will be left to the worms, after she is dead. When she dies, her virgin honor will turn to dust, as her body and virginity will, and the poet’s lust for her body will turn to ashes as well. Although the grave is a fine and a private place for lovers to meet, those who lie in graves will never be able to embrace their lovers. Although Marvell is using images of death and decay that are typical of *carpe diem* lyrics, his images are more graphic when he describes that only worms will enjoy her virginity: “in thy marble vault . . . / worms shall try/ That long-preserved virginity:/ And your quaint honour turn to dust.”

In the last stanza, the poet sums up his argument by trying to convince his mistress to take action. They should take advantage of the fact that they are still young and desirable; they should love each other while they can. In doing so they can win a battle over the destructiveness of Time: “Thus, though we cannot make our sun/ Stand still, yet we will make him run.” The imagery Marvell uses has always been a topic of controversy as his image of the lovers as “amorous birds of prey” is not felt to be very romantic and not what would make his mistress give in. “Let us . . . / Tear our pleasures with rough strife/ Thorough the iron grates of life.” Some commentators have felt that Love is not described as being “conventionally sweet and sentimental but rather vaguely dangerous and threatening; beneath the surface, Marvell seems to be issuing a warning as much as an exhortation” (Nigel vii). However, it has also been suggested that the physicality of their encounter will not only bring them pleasure but will also bring them back to life. The gate of life

can be seen as a witty take on the gate of death, a reversal of the imagery of the grave into the life that their sexual intimacy will bring them. This is the way the lovers will be able to enjoy (their) Time: "Thus, though we cannot make our sun / Stand still, yet we will make him run."

This is the one difference between Donne and Marvell. In Donne, love has power over time and death – "Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime, / Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time." In Marvell, however, the poet is more aware that "we cannot make our sun"; the lovers will not be able to change time, but they will make good use of it: "yet we will make him run." "To His Coy Mistress" follows the classical tradition of a love elegy, in which the speaker praises his mistress through the motif of *carpe diem*. The poem follows closely the pattern of Petrarchan love poetry, and the elaborate techniques of erotic poetry of the fifteenth and sixteenth century that indulged in carving the body of the beloved into several parts. Marvell structures his poem as a logical thesis to give the speaker three main arguments to persuade his mistress, yet these arguments are based mostly on common senses and not on any complex logical deduction.

The Definition of Love

Somewhat different from "To His Coy Mistress," is my next choice of poem by Andrew Marvell, "The Definition of Love" (Smith 107). The poem lends itself to be compared to Donne's poetry because of its intensively elaborated imagery and neo-platonic implications of love, namely, that the love of the soul is distinct from the love of the body. The poem is about the nature of love, but different from other poems of this type, Marvell seems concerned with the unattainability of "two perfect but irreconcilable" loves, rather than with the fulfillment of love through a union. In

this poem, Marvell focuses on the despair rather than on hope that is what most love poem of this kind stress: “where hope usually precedes despair in descriptions of the progress of love” (Smith 107).

The Definition of Love

Love is of a birth as rare
As ’tis for object strange and high;
It was begotten by Despair
Upon Impossibility.

Magnanimous Despair alone
Could show me so divine a thing
Where feeble Hope could ne’er have flown,
But vainly flapp’d its tinsel wing.

And yet I quickly might arrive
Where my extended soul is fixt,
But Fate does iron wedges drive,
And always crowds itself betwixt.

For Fate with jealous eye does see
Two perfect loves, nor lets them close;
Their union would her ruin be,
And her tyrannic pow’r depose.

And therefore her decrees of steel
Us as the distant poles have plac’d,

(Though love's whole world on us doth wheel)
Not by themselves to be embrac'd;

Unless the giddy heaven fall,
And earth some new convulsion tear;
And, us to join, the world should all
Be cramp'd into a planisphere.

As lines, so loves oblique may well
Themselves in every angle greet;
But ours so truly parallel,
Though infinite, can never meet.

Therefore the love which us doth bind,
But Fate so enviously debars,
Is the conjunction of the mind,
And opposition of the stars.

The poet defines love as being "rare" because it is the product of "Despair" and "Impossibility." Only the selfless and generous Despair could bring him such divine love. Hope could not have done that since it may prove itself ineffective and helpless because this love can never be achieved. He could have easily obtained it except that Fate intervened and thwarted his hopes: "But Fate does iron wedges drive, / And always crowds itself betwixt." Fate, adds the poet, is jealous of "Two perfect loves" and will not allow them to come together, "nor lets them close." Their perfect union would be the ruin of Fate, which does not allow happiness, and would bring down her power: "And her tyrannic pow'r depose."

The rest of the poem is taken up with a discussion of Fate and how it has placed the lovers in two separate spheres, poles apart, so that they will never be able to be united. Fate's decree makes it impossible for the lovers to meet each other, both physically and spiritually. Although the planet goes around, the perfect lovers still do not have the ability to embrace each other on their own power. The symbols of iron wedges and steel decrees suggest that Fate has dominion over the real world and also over the physical bodies of the lovers. The only possibility for them to come together is if heaven falls, the earth collapses, and the planet is compressed "into a planisphere," namely, never.

The poet compares the two lovers to two infinite lines that together make a perfect circle, but because the lines are parallel they will never meet: "But ours so truly parallel, / Though infinite, can never meet." Here the geometric conceit is employed to contrast the two perfect lovers with common lovers, and to emphasize the impossibility of their ever coming together. The common lovers are like oblique lines; they meet because their nature is less perfect; the two perfect lovers, instead, are parallel lines, they extend to infinity and never meet because they are perfect.

Finally, the poet blames Fate for keeping them apart. What Love wills together, Fate will keep apart: "Therefore the love which us doth bind,/ But Fate so enviously debars." What remains for the two lovers, who are denied physical union, and what diminishes their despair, is the "union of minds": "the conjunction of the mind, / And opposition of the stars." This ending can be read in opposition to the previous poem, "To His Coy Mistress." While in the latter poem the poet is trying to persuade his lover to give herself to him, in this poem the poet is trying to persuade her to accept a platonic relationship, a "union of minds."

The Unfortunate Lover

The next poem by Marvell, “The Unfortunate Lover” (Smith, 85) is very much in this vein. In fact, the definition of love as “despair” can only have as its result “The Unfortunate Lover” who is continuously defeated by the designs of Fate. The lovers always move parallel to each other but they never meet. Their destiny is to be only lovers of the mind but not of the body.

The Unfortunate Lover

Alas, how pleasant are their days
With whom the infant Love yet plays!
Sorted by pairs, they still are seen
By fountains cool, and shadows green.
But soon these flames do lose their light,
Like meteors of a summer’s night:
Nor can they to that region climb,
To make impression upon time.

’Twas in a shipwreck, when the seas
Ruled, and the winds did what they please,
That my poor lover floating lay,
And, ere brought forth, was cast away:
Till at the last the master-wave
Upon the rock his mother grave;
And there she split against the stone,
In a Caesarean sectión.

The sea him lent those bitter tears
Which at his eyes he always wears;
And from the winds the sighs he bore,

Which through his surging breast do roar.
No day he saw but that which breaks
Through frighte'd clouds in forkèd streaks,
While round the rattling thunder hurled,
As at the funeral of the world.

While Nature to his birth presents
This masque of quarrelling elements,
A numerous fleet of cormorants black,
That sailed insulting o'er the wrack,
Received into their cruel care
Th' unfortunate and abject heir:
Guardians most fit to entertain
The orphan of the hurricane.

They fed him up with hopes and air,
Which soon digested to despair,
And as one cormorant fed him, still
Another on his heart did bill,
Thus while they famish him, and feast,
He both consumèd, and increased:
And languishèd with doubtful breath,
The amphibíum of life and death.

And now, when angry heaven would
Behold a spectacle of blood,
Fortune and he are called to play

At sharp before it all the day:
And tyrant Love his breast does ply
With all his winged artillery,
Whilst he, betwixt the flames and waves,
Like Ajax, the mad tempest braves.

See how he nak'd and fierce does stand,
Cuffing the thunder with one hand,
While with the other he does lock,
And grapple, with the stubborn rock:
From which he with each wave rebounds,
Torn into flames, and ragg'd with wounds,
And all he 'says, a lover dressed
In his own blood does relish best.

This is the only banneret
That ever Love created yet:
Who though, by the malignant stars,
Forcèd to live in storms and wars,
Yet dying leaves a perfume here,
And music within every ear:
And he in story only rules,
In a field sable a lover gules.

The poem narrates the tragic story of the unfortunate lover's life from before his birth to his death. The poem begins with the Infant Love who spends his pleasant days by streams and shades but his love does not last: "Alas, how pleasant are their days / With whom the infant Love yet

plays!" His love is like a meteor that vanishes suddenly and leaves no trace in time. His birth is also tragic. It happens in a shipwreck when his mother, in collision with a rock, gives birth to him. The unfortunate lover is born as a result of the impact and he comes into this world as a result of a "Caesarean section." This was the beginning if his unfortunate life and the sea gave him the "bitter tears" that have accompanied him all through his life.

The next stanzas narrate his upbringing: how he was the heir of an estate but fell unfortunately in the "cruel care" of greedy guardians who fed him with both hope and despair: "They fed him up with hopes and air, / which soon digested to despair." They exploited him and took advantage of him: "as one cormorant fed him, still / Another on his heart did bill." As a result, he became weaker and feebler living in an environment that prepared him both for life and for death: "Th' amphibium of Life and Death."

In the next sixth and seven stanzas, the poet describes the continued misfortunes of the unfortunate lover. Fortune seems dead set against him and even Heaven is "angry" at him, and seems to enjoy a "spectacle of blood." When Love became became concerned with him and shot its arrows of desire in him, there was no hope that this love would be fulfilled. He was like Ajax, the son of Oileus, who had to brave "the mad tempest." Now he was facing three attacks – from the flames of love, from the waves of Fortune, and from the mad tempest. The last two refer to his other misfortunes and to how he was exploited by his greedy guardians. As a lover, he also tried in vain to fight against Fate. He fought these unequal fights bravely, "cuffing the thunder with one hand," and the rock with the other, but he is torn into flames, and "ragg'd with wounds." Only a lover who has gone through a similar experience can understand his feelings: "he says: a lover dressed/ In his own blood does relish best."

However, there seems to be some consolation, after all, for the unfortunate lover. In the last stanza we are told that at his death the unfortunate lover's name will be praised and he will be remembered and his memory cherished. He leaves behind fame and glory, and his story will be put to music and played for generations to come. He becomes a hero and his image will be colored with the red of his blood. As in the previous poem, the consolation for the unfortunate lover is that his name will be remembered and he will be rewarded with fame and glory.

An interesting reading of the "Unfortunate Lover" come from Hirst and Zwicker who make the case for "The Unfortunate Lover" as the supreme text of the poet's imagined life, and as the key to understanding his whole poetic production.[10] In their view, the poem exemplifies the contrast between a diversified poetry and an obscure biography, and the ambiguities and contradictions they generate. For instance, they find "shocking" that a poem of seduction such as "To his Coy mistress," despite "its simulacrum of heterosexual ecstasy," actually suggests "misogyny and [heterosexual] aversion" when "worms and decay" serve as the prompt to desire" (Hirst 386). A similar fear of annihilation in heterosexuality shapes the argument of the "Unfortunate Lover" (Hirst 387).

The "Unfortunate Lover" explains, to a great extent, these contradictions since it is a narrative of the self in the world, which narrates the Unfortunate Lover's traumatic experience, from a Caesarian birth, "as descent in a world of dissonance and differentiation" (Hirst 374), to the death of his father's by drowning (Hirst 375), and the (erotic) abuse from the cormorants, a figure of rapacity which parallels the "tyrannical and voracious, abusive and wounding" behavior of the clergy in their black robes (a possible reference to the religious struggles of 1640) (Hirst 375). This is a form of sexual abuse that the authors suggest was done with "the availability of the child to erotic attachment" (Hirst 376). However, at the end of the narrative of trauma and suffering,

it is the imagination that triumphs; and this poem, as well as Marvell's poetry, is evidence of this triumph. Eternity, the authors conclude, is only to be possessed through verse, which is the conclusion of all Marvell's poems. "Here [in "The Unfortunate Lover"] is a model of the writing life; here is a natural history of the imagination written out … as the biography of the Unfortunate Lover" (Hirst 379).

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Richard Crashaw or Eros and Ecstasy.

Crashaw is known for the vibrant stylistic ornamentation of his verses. As he was highly influenced by seventeenth century Spanish and Italian poetry, he reflected little of his contemporary English metaphysical poets, but, instead, he adhered to the highly emotional and ornate imagery of the continental Baroque poets. He uses conceits to draw analogies between the physical beauties of nature and the spiritual significance of existence. His verse is marked by loose trains of association, sensuous imagery, and eager religious emotion. One of his methods of conveying the intensity of his religious feelings is his use of erotic language, a technique which he probably learned from Donne, although, according to Itrat-Husain, the Catholic mind trends to use "a sensuous vehicle to express spiritual states and tries to interpret the invisible with the help of the visible, hence the frequent use of erotic symbolism in the Roman Catholic mysticism."[11] The erotic imageries in "To the Noblest and Best of Ladies, The Countess of Denbigh,"[12] which is the first poem by Crashaw that I examine, are those are typically used in the "parody of seduction poetry."

To The Noblest and Best of Ladies, the Countess of Denbigh[13]

What Heaven-entreated heart is this,

Stands trembling at the gate of bliss?

Holds fast the door, yet dares not venture

Fairly to open it, and enter;

Whose definition is a doubt

'Twixt life and death, 'twixt in and out.

Say, lingering fair, why comes the birth

Of your brave soul so slowly forth?

Plead your pretenses, O you strong

In weakness, why you choose so long

In labor of yourself to lie,

Not daring quite to live nor die.

Ah, linger not, loved soul! A slow

And late consent was a long no;

Who grants at last, long time tried

And did his best to have denied.

What magic bolts, what mystic bars

Maintain the will in these strange wars!

What fatal, yet fantastic bands

Keep the free heart from its own hands!

So when the year takes cold we see

Poor waters their own prisoners be;

Fettered and locked up fast they lie

In a sad self-captivity.

The astonished nymphs their flood's strange fate deplore,

To see themselves their own severer shore.

Thou that alone canst thaw this cold,

And fetch the heart from its stronghold,

Almighty Love! end this long war,

And of a meteor make a star.

Oh, fix this fair indefinite,

And 'mongst Thy shafts of sovereign light

Choose out that sure decisive dart

Which has the key of this close heart,

Knows all the corners of 't, and can control

The self-shut cabinet of an unsearched soul.

Oh, let it be at last Love's hour;

Raise this tall trophy of Thy power;

Come once the conquering way, not to confute

But kill this rebel-word, 'irresolute,'

That so, in spite of all this peevish strength

Of weakness, she may write, 'Resolved at length.'

Unfold at length, unfold, fair flower,

And use the season of Love's shower;

Meet His well-meaning wounds, wise heart!

And haste to drink the wholesome dart,

That healing shaft, which Heaven till now

Hath in Love's quiver hid for you.

O dart of Love! arrow of light!

O happy you, if it hit right!

It must not fall in vain, it must

Not mark the dry regardless dust.

Fair one, it is your fate, and brings

Eternal worlds upon its wings.
Meet it with wide-spread arms, and see
Its seat your soul's just center be.
Disband dull fears, give faith the day;
To save your life, kill your delay.
It is Love's siege, and sure to be
Your triumph, through His victory.
'Tis cowardice that keeps this field,
And want of courage not to yield.
Yield then, O yield, that Love may win
The fort at last, and let life in;
Yield quickly, lest perhaps you prove
Death's prey, before the prize of Love.
This fort of your fair self, if't be not won,
He is repulsed indeed, but you're undone.

The Countess was the widow of the Earl of Denbigh who died in 1643 fighting for King Charles I. She was a lady-in-waiting to Charles I's Catholic Queen Henrietta Maria. When the Queen fled to Paris to avoid the Civil War, the Countess followed her in exile. She was not Catholic and had not fully committed to Roman Catholicism until she met Crashaw in Paris and considered converting. This poem was written to persuade her and it was successful.

The poet does not attempt to convert her to the new religion. He does not use theological arguments, and he does not once refer to the Catholic Church. Even God is not referred to directly except as "Allmighty Love." The poem is about resolving, about making a difficult decision. The poem addresses the Countess's heart, depicting it as terrified and irresolute, standing on the threshold, daring not to accept what the poet believes to be the one true faith: "trembling at the

gate of bliss; / Holds fast the door, ye dares not venture/ Fairly to open it, and enter." The conceits he employs deal with birth and delivery. The main section deals with the conceit of being "in labor of yourself ," in the sense that only her willfulness can deliver her soul: "why come the birth of your brave soul so slowly forth?" The poet questions her indecision, her hesitation and not daring to choose, and lying to herself: "O you strong/ In weakness, why you choose so long/ In labor of yourself to lie, Not daring quite to live nor die." He brings up the image of consent, as in a marriage proposal, when delaying too long implies "a long no": "a slow/ And late consent was a long no." Delaying a decision can be fatal, "fatal bands," causing paralysis of the will.

Crashaw, once again, uses the door metaphor to depict the heart and the ideological struggle of the Countess: "What magic bolts, what magic bars / maintain the will in these strange wars." He employs paradox to express concepts that are otherwise quite conventional in a religious context, for instance, the notion of keeping her heart free, "open" to choices, which actually binds it. The reference to wars, as in "these strange warres," though it may be also a reference to the Civil War going on in England, it also refers, in this context, to her psychological and spiritual "war." The image, which compares the Countess, "frozen" in her irresolution, is that of water frozen by the winter cold, which holds the waters in bondage: "Poor waters their own prisoners be/ Fettered, and locked up fast they lie/ In a sad self-captivity." Man or woman, are not always aware of the forces that cause them to delay and to procrastinate, instead, believing they are still free to choose, they are actually "frozen" in their irresolution. They deplore their fate when, in fact, they are the only ones who can "thaw" their situation: "Thou that alone canst thaw this cold/ And fetch the heart from its stronghold."

Lines 29 to 43 shift the attention to “God,” who is only named indirectly as the “Almighty Love!,” to appeal to Him to solve this “war,” this bind at the heart of the Countess, to “end this long war/ And of a meteor make a star.” The poem becomes a prayer to the Almighty who knows all the corners of her soul and can unlock her heart: “The self-shut cabinet of an unsearched soul.” It is also an appeal to the Countess to let it soon be the hour when God’s love will triumph: “Oh, let it be at last Love's hour.” The Countess is described now as a “fair flower and Cupid’s arrows of love become those of God and are healing wounds, “his well-meaning wounds.” The only enemy in this “war” is death, so the poet urges her to decide soon, before death comes:

Yield then, O yield, that Love may win
The fort at last, and let life in;
Yield quickly, lest perhaps you prove
Death's prey, before the prize of Love.
This fort of your fair self, if't be not won,
He is repulsed indeed, but you're undone.

The heart of the Countess may not obtain the prize of Love if death comes before she yields to God, the Almighty Love! On the other hand, death becomes the assistant of love when fate forces the lovers to die in another poem, “An Epitaph upon Husband and Wife, who died and were buried together”(Williams, 478).

An epitaph upon husband and wife.

Who died and were buried together.

To these whom death again did wed,

This grave's the second marriage-bed.
For though the hand of Fate could force
'Twixt soul and body a divorce,
It could not sever man and wife,
Because they both lived but one life.
Peace, good reader, do not weep ;
Peace, the lovers are asleep.
They, sweet turtles, folded lie
In the last knot that love could tie.
Let them sleep, let them sleep on,
Till the stormy night be gone,
And the eternal morrow dawn;
Then the curtains will be drawn,
And they wake into a light
Whose day shall never die in night.

Their death is their second wedding and Death is the host at the ceremony. The grave becomes their second marriage bed to enjoy the love which will bind them together forever. Fate may force the lovers to die physically by separating their bodies and souls, but it could not deny their marriage because the lovers took woos before God and lived together in "one life." The poet tells us that it is sad to see the lovers die and to read of such pathos, but one should not weep, because their souls are not dead; they have just fallen asleep. The lovers are like turtles covered in their shells lying together sleeping in the same grave: this is the last bond with which love can bind these two souls. Although the grave is not comfortable, the stone pillow hard and the sheets are cold, it is safe because "love made the bed" for them. When the stormy night ends and the pathos

is gone, eternal life will come. Then husband and wife will awake and rise from their dark grave to the heaven where there is no night, there is no death.

Although this little poem is written in simple language, it is representative of most of Crashaw's themes: the personified death, fate and love; the conceits of death as the second marriage, the grave as the marriage bed; the dualism of body and soul; the attempt to emotionally involve the reader, and, finally, the belief in eternal life after death.

Although Crashaw's poems are those of a devotional poet, there is no attempt to be doctrinal or to convert. As Husain suggests, "his faith is nothing but the 'progressive fructification of dogma' in his soul; and it is love which helps the 'seeds of life' to blossom forth" (Husain 179). This love which becomes the symbol of faith is sensual love. Conversion to Roman Catholicism takes the form of yielding to almighty Love, to God, but always with erotic implications as at the end of "The Countess of Denbigh": "It is love's siege, and sure to be/ Your triumph, though his victory" (lines 59-60); "O yield, that love may win/ The fort at last, and let life in" (lines 63-4). This erotic love reappears as the mysterious joys of love in another poem, "The Flaming Heart" (Williams, 61).

The Flaming Heart

Well meaning readers! you that come as friends
And catch the precious name this piece pretends;
Make not too much hast to' admire
That fair-cheek't fallacy of fire.
That is a Seraphim, they say
And this the great Teresa.
Readers, be rul'd by me; and make

Here a well-plac't and wise mistake.
You must transpose the picture quite,
And spell it wrong to read it right;
Read Him for her, and her for him;
And call the Saint the Seraphim.
Painter, what didst thou understand
To put her dart into his hand!
See, even the yeares and size of him
Showes this the mother Seraphim.
This is the mistresse flame; and duteous he
Her happy fire-works, here, comes down to see.
O most poor-spirited of men!
Had thy cold Pencil kist her Pen
Thou couldst not so unkindly err
To show us This faint shade for Her.
Why man, this speakes pure mortall frame;
And mockes with female Frost love's manly flame.
One would suspect thou meant'st to print
Some weak, inferiour, woman saint.
But had thy pale-fac't purple took
Fire from the burning cheeks of that bright Booke
Thou wouldst on her have heap't up all
That could be found Seraphicall;
What e're this youth of fire weares fair,
Rosy fingers, radiant hair,
Glowing cheek, and glistering wings,
All those fair and flagrant things,

But before all, that fiery Dart
Had fill'd the Hand of this great Heart.
  Doe then as equall right requires,
Since His the blushes be, and her's the fires,
Resume and rectify thy rude design;
Undresse thy Seraphim into Mine.
Redeem this injury of thy art;
Give Him the vail, give her the dart.
  Give Him the vail; that he may cover
The Red cheeks of a rivall'd lover.
Asham'd that our world, now, can show
Nests of new Seraphims here below.
  Give her the Dart for it is she
(Fair youth) shootes both thy shaft and Thee
Say, all ye wise and well-peirc't hearts
That live and dy amidst her darts,
What is't your tastfull spirits doe prove
In that rare life of Her, and love?
Say and bear wittnes. Sends she not
A Seraphim at every shott?
What magazins of immortall Armes there shine!
Heavn's great artillery in each love-spun line.
Give then the dart to her who gives the flame;
Give him the veil, who gives the shame.
  But if it be the frequent fate
Of worst faults to be fortunate;
If all's præscription; and proud wrong

Hearkens not to an humble song;
For all the gallantry of him,
Give me the suffring Seraphim.
His be the bravery of all those Bright things.
The glowing cheekes, the glistering wings;
The Rosy hand, the radiant Dart;
Leave Her alone The Flaming Heart.
Leave her that; and thou shalt leave her
Not one loose shaft but love's whole quiver.
For in love's feild was never found
A nobler weapon then a Wound.
Love's passives are his activ'st part.
The wounded is the wounding heart.
O Heart! the æquall poise of love's both parts
Bigge alike with wound and darts.
Live in these conquering leaves; live all the same;
And walk through all tongues one triumphant Flame.
Live here, great Heart; and love and dy and kill;
And bleed and wound; and yeild and conquer still.
Let this immortall life wherere it comes
Walk in a crowd of loves and Martyrdomes
Let mystick Deaths wait on't; and wise soules be
The love-slain wittnesses of this life of thee.
O sweet incendiary! shew here thy art,
Upon this carcasse of a hard, cold, hart,
Let all thy scatter'd shafts of light, that play
Among the leaves of thy larg Books of day,

Combin'd against this Brest at once break in
And take away from me my self and sin,
This gratious Robbery shall thy bounty be;
And my best fortunes such fair spoiles of me.
O thou undanted daughter of desires!
By all thy dowr of Lights and Fires;
By all the eagle in thee, all the dove;
By all thy lives and deaths of love;
By thy larg draughts of intellectuall day,
And by thy thirsts of love more large then they;
By all thy brim-fill'd Bowles of feirce desire
By thy last Morning's draught of liquid fire;
By the full kingdome of that finall kisse
That seiz'd thy parting Soul, and seal'd thee his;
By all the heav'ns thou hast in him
(Fair sister of the Seraphim!)
By all of Him we have in Thee;
Leave nothing of my Self in me.
Let me so read thy life, that I
Unto all life of mine may dy.

The full tittle of this poem is informative: "The Flaming Heart upon the Book and Picture of the Seraphicall Saint Teresa" (as She is Usually Expressed with a Seraphim beside her.) This is the last poem in Crashaw's trilogy on Saint Teresa of Avila, which focuses on a painting of her based on her autobiography. The poet addresses the reader, and the viewer of the painting, to tell them that the painter got it wrong. Readers should listen to him, "be rul'd by me," and make a "wise mistake." In order to get the painting right the reader should transpose the picture and,

instead of the seraph, he should see the figure of Teresa of Avila: “Read Him for her, and her for him;/ And call the Saint the Seraphim.” (“Seraphim” is the plural of seraph and Crashaw probably uses it for the rhyme.)

The painter obviously did not understand what he was doing when he put the dart in the seraph’s hand: “What didst thou understand/ To put her dart into his hand!” The dart belongs to Saint Teresa, “the mistresse flame.” He calls the painter, a poor-spirited man, “O most poor-spirited of men!” for being unkind to her and depicting her as a pale and passive feminine figure, “ To show us this faint shade for Her… Some weak, inferior, woman saint.” The painter misread the book and gave the seraph all the alluring qualities he should have given to the Saint. She deserves the radiant hair, the glowing cheeks and “all those fair and flagrant things,” that the painter gave the seraph. He calls on the painter to rectify his mistake, and give the Blushes to the seraph and the fire to Teresa: “Doe then as equal right requires, / Since His the blushes be, and her’s the fires, / Resume and rectify thy rude design;” He tells him to “undress” his Seraph and suit him as he demands, and most of all, to give the seraph the veil, and the dart to Saint Teresa: “Undresse thy Seraphim into Mine./ Redeem this injury of thy art;/ Give Him the vail, give her the dart.” The dart belongs to Teresa to pierce the hearts of men, “Give her the Dart for it is she/ (Fair youth) shootes both thy shaft and Thee/ Say, all ye wise and well-peirc’t hearts/ That live and dy amidst her darts.” The dart belongs to her who is the flame, while the veil belongs to the seraph for shame: “Give then the dart to her who gives the flame;/ Give him the veil, who gives the shame.”

But if the painting cannot be changed, the poet is content to leave the dart to the seraph but the “Flaming Heart” is Teresa’s alone: “Leave Her alone The Flaming Heart.” The wounded heart is a more powerful weapon than the dart: “Leave her that; and thou shalt leave her/ Not one loose shaft but love’s whole quiver. / For in love’s field was never found/ A nobler weapon then a

Wound." This is the conceit of the wound of love, which is described in *The Life of Saint Teresa of Jesus*: "another prayer very common is a certain kind of wounding; … but the suffering is so sweet, that one wishes it never would end…"[14] The wound as a form of ecstasy is the wound of love, which Saint Teresa describes as the active and passive aspects of love: "O heart! The equal poise of love's both parts/ Big alike with wounds and darts." Suffering is both active and passive love, and the truth that wounds others is the wounded heart itself: "Love's passives are his activ'st part/The wounded is the wounding heart." The saint's progress to martyrdom reaches its climax when the "mystic deaths," the "love-slain" appears.

In the last part of the poem, which was added later, the poet addresses Saint Teresa in the first person, that is, the book, which is the very source of visual and poetic inspiration. In this last section, which is in the form of a litany beginning with "By all" (as in "By all thy lives and deaths of love"), the poet addresses the Saint informally as "(Fair sister of the Seraphim!)," with a plea that her "flaming heart may "wound" him and annihilate him, "Leave nothing of my Self in me." In the hope, expressed in the final lines, that he may read his life in hers and "dy" an ecstatic death: "Let me so read thy life, that I/ Unto all life of mine may dy."

Critics believe that this final section of the poem is, perhaps, the best of Crashaw's Baroque imagery: "the richest fiery shower of Baroque imagery found anywhere in Crashaw's poetry." As Mario Praz has observed, in these last lines the poet's "yearning for ecstasy is so powerful and desperate that he almost seems to have reached it." In the course of seventeenth century literature, he writes, "there is no higher expression of that spiritualization of sense which is condensed here in a portentous, dizzy soaring of red-hot images."[15] The poem ends in a kind of mystical explosion which Praz describes as typical of Baroque: "The Baroque tries, by multiplication of sensory impressions, to exhaust the sensory and to suggest the presence of the spiritual" (Praz 131).

Recent Literary Criticism on Metaphysical poetry

My reading of some representative poems by Donne, Marvell and Crashaw, which are known under the category of "metaphysical" but are more properly called "Baroque," has shown some common traits: they use unique imagery to surprise and astonish the reader; they write love poems with erotic and transcendental, if not religious, implications; they can be described as intellectual or even scholarly, and the poems make use of great many devices and conceits. Rosemond Tuve, in *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*, discusses the influence of Ramist logic on metaphysical imagery and analyzes the functional value of this imagery and concludes that the common characteristics of metaphysical imagery are: "aptness, subtlety, accuracy of aim, disregard of the superficially pleasing, logic power, ingenious or startlingly precise relationships or parallels, a certain 'obscurity' due to logical complexity."[16] When referring to the metaphysical conceit, Mourgues points out that "it is easy to see that it accounts for the intellectual element in metaphysical poetry, its analytical tendency, its difficult subtlety, its use of scholastic modes of reasoning, and its learned imagery" (De Morgues 9). From the functional perspective, these characteristics, carried out by metaphysical conceits, serve to "enter into a solid union and at the same time to maintain their warring identity."[17] In this sense, Mourgue claims, "the term metaphysical becomes a general term, since this kind of poetry is bound up with universal problems of mankind and may therefore be found in any country and at any time" (Mourgue 9).

In the twentieth century there was a shift in attitude toward the English Metaphysical poets by T. S. Eliot. In his essay on "The Metaphysical Poets, a review of J. C. Grierson's book on *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler*,[18] T. S. Eliot shed new light on the metaphysical poets by claiming that they did not represent a digression from the mainstream of English poetry, but rather a continuation of it: "the poets of the seventeenth century

(up to the Revolution) were the direct and normal development of the precedent age." He claimed that metaphysical poetry is distinguished from other poetry by its unification of sensibility, "which subsequently disappeared, but ought not have disappeared."[19] By 'sensibility' Eliot did not mean merely feelings, emotions or capabilities of grasping sensual impressions, but that synthetic faculty that can amalgamate and unite thought and feeling, which can fuse remote and even contradictory experiences into a new integration. He also proposed a theory of the 'dissociation of sensibility' of eighteenth and nineteenth century English poetry, which is characterized by "the difference between the intellectual poet and the reflective poet" (Eliot 64). His famous quotation, "A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience" (Eliot 65), implies that the metaphysical poets had a mechanism of sensibility that enabled them to assimilate and fuse the most disparate and heterogeneous experiences into new integrations. They could feel their thoughts and express their thoughts through sensuous imagery. In their metaphysical poems, poets like Donne, Marvell and Crashaw, were able to express their thoughts and ideas by embodying them in sensuous, and always erotic, imagery. It is mainly through their use of sensual imagery that the unification of sensibility found its way in characterized expression.

Recent criticism of Metaphysical Poets has certainly progressed from the days of Dr. Johnson. Critics are no longer biased against a group of poets that seemed to stray from traditional Renaissance and Elizabethan poetry. There has been no attempt, however, in contemporary criticism to make amen to Dr. Johnson's derogatory term of "metaphysical" or to approach these poets as poets. What is excluded in most of these contemporary studies is the poetical. Katrin Ettenhuber in her study of St. Augustine's influence on John Donne is a very scholarly work that

analyzes how every work of Augustine can be traced in Donne's poetry but does not say much about his poetry.[20]

Gary Kuchar's study is on George Herbert's religious work and the relation of poetry and Scripture in seventeenth-century England but does not touch on the baroque potential of this relation.[21] Kuchar's other work is, likewise, on the poetry about religious sorrow in early modern England.[22] Both works are outside the object of my study. The work of Louis L. Martz comes closer to address the issue of baroque but his study, *From Renaissance to Baroque: Essays on Literature and Art*, touches on the relation of literature and art and is mainly concerned with art rather than literature or poetry.[23] Martz understands the baroque as an artistic and not as a poetic phenomenon.

The only critic that comes closer to my topic is Hugh Grady's *John Donne and Baroque Allegory: The Aesthetics of Fragmentation*.[24] This is a very interesting study that introduces one of the major exponents of Baroque literature, Walter Benjamin and his seminal work on the *Origins of German Baroque Drama*.[25] Grady sees a connection with Benjamin and Donne, by way of Baudelaire, who has been compared to Donne. Grady likes to claim that Benjamin's theory "can help illuminate the poetry of John Donne and contribute to developing new directions in John Donne's studies" (Grady 2). What appears to interest Grady, however, is not so much Benjamin's theory of allegory as the way he was able to combine formalism with cultural, social and political studies (Grady 3). He quotes Benjamin that the function of artistic form is "to make historical content…into a philosophical truth," and he concludes that Benjamin's work is "fundamentally formalist and historicist" as well as "presentist"(Grady 4). According to this "presentist" view, our knowledge of the past changes as our culture changes and develops. This implies, for Grady, that our knowledge of John Donne will vary accordingly to what are the dominant views of the twenty-

first century. Or even better, adds Grady, "it is better to say, what twenty-first century Donne we will ourselves construct" (Grady 4).

What Grady "constructs" is a historicist Benjamin who is a far cry from the allegorical Benjamin of his study on the German *trauerspiel*. The notion of "fragmentation" that he derives from Benjamin and applies to Donne bears no comparison to the fragmentation that characterizes the German *trauerspiel*. In Benjamin, the notion of fragment derives from his concept of allegory, which is not only ahistorical but also points to the impossibility of history: a history which is death and decay. This is not at all what we have in John Donne. In my view, as I have indicated, Benjamin's type of allegory is closer to the late poetry of Meng Jiao.

In discussing the differences and similarities between Metaphysical and Baroque, Grady dismisses the Baroque in favor of using the term "metaphysical." He believes that the differences are only a question of terminology and not of poetic styles. Even though the Baroque is the more internationally accepted term, both in literature and in the arts, and the term "metaphysical" is an "arbitrary term," Grady believes that the term Baroque is not a clear concept, "[the baroque] became, as its usage proliferated, more a cluster of associations and judgments than a clear concept of its own" (Grady 17). In trying to historicize the term, Grady finds that there is very little consensus today on what the term means. He quotes Gregg Lambert's study on the Baroque to the effect that the term is not historical but has no other mode of existence than expression and that the baroque is essentially an "empty category" and that it has played havoc "with the empirical assumptions as the basis of historical narration" (Lambert quoted by Grady 17).

In concluding this survey of critical appraisals of the "metaphysical poets" it may be useful to look at Gregg Lambert's work on the Baroque and to the reasons for his dismissal of the baroque.[26]

Lambert rightly relates the Baroque to modernity but he believes that we are at the end of our modernity and in the postmodern era. Thus both modernity and the Baroque are no longer viable forms for Lambert, namely, "that a certain tradition of modernist experimentation is no longer possible" (Lambert, 146). He concludes his study on the return of the Baroque in modern culture, that this return of the baroque may very well be "the last sign of our own fading modernity, which, in or at the end, can also be compared to a flawed and imperfect pearl" (Lambert 149).

We observe in Lambert what we said of the other critics, namely, that the main problem in defining the Baroque derives from historicizing the term. Even when one understands that we are dealing with a poetic style, even when in Lambert the Baroque is conceived as a modernist style, we are always dealing with a style whose time has come. In all these cases, what is being avoided is the poetic or allegory, or, which is the same, the baroque.

NOTES

[1] Herbert Grierson, J.C. *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*. xv-xvi.
[2] Odette De Mourgues. *Metaphysical Baroque and Precieux Poetry*, 9.
[3] The first edition of John Donne's collected poems, printed in 1633, two years after he died, were later called *Songs and Sonnets*. It showcases Donne's dazzling range of poetic themes and styles, from works of religious devotion to intellectual wit, cynicism and sexual passion. There are 12 of his Holy Sonnets, as well as Elegies, Satires and a number of famous verses such as "The Flea," "The Good Morrow" and "The Sun Rising". All the texts of John Donne's poems quoted in this thesis are from *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* edited by John T Shawcross. Donne, John, and John T Shawcross. *The Complete Poetry of John Donne.* London: University of London Press, 1968.
[3] Theodore Redpath. *The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne*, 175.
[5] For John Donne see Helen Gardner. *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets*. Oxford University Press, 1965.
[6] Harold Bloom. *John Donne: Comprehensive Research and Study Guide,* 16.
[3] Jack Dalglish. *Eight Metaphysical Poets*, 171.
[8] Nigel Smith. *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, xvii.
[9] _____. *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, 75.

[10] Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker. "Imagining Andrew Marvell." *ELH*, vol.74, no.2 (Summer 2007), 371-395.
[11] Husain Itrat. *The Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century*, 180.
[12] According to the 1652 version, the poem has the subtitle: "Persuading her to Resolution in Religion, and to render herself without further delay in the Communication of the Catholic Church". According to the *Norton Critical Edition of Seventeenth Century British Poetry: 1603-1660,* there are two versions of the poem and both versions are parodies of the seduction poem. Here I follow the *Norton Critical Edition* version.
[13] Crashaw, Richard, and George Walton Williams. *The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw.* New York: New York University Press, 1972. 146-153.
[14] Saint Teresa of Avila. *The Life of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, 427-428.
[15] Mario Praz. *The Flaming Heart*, 261-262.
[16] Rosemond Tuve. *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*, 353.
[17] Tuve quotes from J.C. Smith who explains that each of the most famous metaphysical conceits by John Donne and Marvell can be reduced to a metaphysical problem. See J.C. Smith, "On Metaphysical Poetry," *Scrutiny*, Dec. 1933.
[18] Grierson, Herbert John Clifford, and Alastair Fowler. *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler.* Rev. / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
[19] T. S. Eliot. "The Metaphysical Poets" in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, 63.
[20] Katrin Ettenhuber. *Donne's Augustine: Renaissance cultures of interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2011.
[21] Gary Kuchar. *George Herbert and the Mystery of the Word: Poetry and Scripture in Seventeenth-century England*.
[22] Gary Kuchar. *The poetry of religious sorrow in early modern England*.
[23] Louis L. Martz. *From Renaissance to baroque: essays on literature and art*.
[24] Hugh Grady. *John Donne and baroque allegory: the aesthetics of fragmentation*.
[25] Walter Benjamin. *The origin of German tragic drama*.
[26] Gregg Lambert. *Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture*.

Chapter 2

Mid-Late Tang Baroque Poetry

Introduction

In his introduction to the translations of Meng Jiao's poems, David Hinton writes that the poet: "opened an imaginative space so original it began an alternative tradition, a tradition which included a number of major poets, and at least two great ones: Li He and Li Shangyin."[1] This alternative tradition of employing quasi-surreal and symbolist techniques to explore ways of being and their relation to the universe ended with the death of Li Shangyin in 858, although its influence continued well into the next Song dynasty. Meng Jiao's poems combine symbolist poetics, linguistic density and ambiguity with intense surreal imagery, which give his poems a quality of expression that conventional language fails to articulate. These qualities make Meng Jiao the first of three major poets of the mid-late Tang Dynasty to be discussed in this chapter.

Li He, the second poet, was a younger contemporary of Meng Jiao, and one of the most imitated mid Tang poets for his grotesque style of poetry which is filled with fantastic and unusual imagery, full of inauspicious words as "old" and "death." He wrote numerous poems about love but also about ghosts and the supernatural world, none of which are in regulated verse. His poems, described by Fusheng Wu as the "poetry of Beautiful women and ghastly ghosts," adopt and transform the eroticism of the Palace Style poetry of the

Southern Dynasties, but are also characterized by the peculiar theme and imagery of love of death.[2] The sensuality, eroticism and the treatment of poetry as a sophisticated craft, together with the macabre imagery and diction that make his poems ambiguous and obscure, make of Li He the other major poet of the Mid Tang Dynasty.

The third poet I discuss is Li Shangyin, a Late Tang poet whose death puts an end to the tradition Meng Jiao started and Li He pursued. Li Shangyin is probably the most complex and ambiguous Chinese poet. His use of Buddhism lore, historical and literature scholarship, obscure but luxurious images, intellectual and witty diction, make his poems beautiful but also extremely ambiguous and difficult to interpret. These three poets exemplify not only the best of Mid-late Tang Poetry but also what I call Baroque poetry and baroque poetics.

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Meng Jiao and Benjaminian Allegory.

Meng Jiao (751-814) is usually regarded as a minor poet and is always excluded from the polished and gracious tradition of Chinese literary history. He was born in southern China at the time of the disorders caused by the military defeats on the borders (751), and later by the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763), which brought about the decline and the eventual demise of the Tang dynasty. Meng Jiao spent the first half of his life as a recluse till he moved his family to Luoyang, the Eastern capital of the dynasty and the center of

culture and the arts. He was around forty years old when he moved at the request of his mother, who wanted him to get a respectful government position through the Jinshi exam, the national exam for recruitment in the government It was in Luoyang that he met Han Yu (768-824), the famous essayist, poet and critic, who advocated the emulation of the antique style of lyric poetry.

Although Meng was highly regarded as a major poet in Han Yu's poetic circle and received frequent financial support and job recommendations, his life was spent in misfortune and adversity. He did not pass the exam until his third attempt in 796, when he was forty-five years old; and not until four years later he was assigned a low rank paid position far away from his family, which he did not hold for long. He had children late in life but all three of them died young, and eventually his wife died also. He was unemployed after he resigned from his post and remained poor all his life. His poetry is full of cold and dark feelings, grotesque imagery and contrived expressions with a despair that comes from anger and disappointment. The poems he wrote in his later years, when he lived in Luoyang, employ surrealist and symbolist techniques that bring to his poetry a deep sense of introspection on life and death. David Hinton, in the Introduction to his translation of the late poems remarks that: "This desperate situation is everywhere in Meng Chiao's work. It appears in Meng's literal descriptions of his world, but more importantly, it is often internalized and transformed into an atmosphere of loss and disorientation (Hinton xii).

Around five hundred of his poems have survived, most of them are lyric verses according to the old Yuefu 樂府 style. Meng Jiao, however, was very fond of grouping poems together into a narrative. He has many of these group poems, some as many as fifteen poems under one title. The narrative sequence is not itself straightforward or logical. It's allegorical. I have quoted only one poem from each narrative series but I have also tried to give a sense of the whole. The three poems I have chosen are "Cold Creek" (the third of nine) 寒溪九首之三, "Autumn Thoughts" (the sixth of fifteen) 秋懷十五首之六 and "Laments of the Gorges" (the third of ten) 峽哀十首之三.

Cold Creek (III)

寒溪九首之三

曉飲一杯酒 踏雪過清溪

波瀾凍為刀 剸割鳧與鷖

宿羽皆翦棄 血聲沉沙泥

獨立欲何語 默念心酸嘶

凍血莫作春 作春生不齊

凍血莫作花 作花發孀啼

幽幽棘針村 凍死難耕犁

The first translation is by Stephen Owen:

Cold Creek (III)

At dawn I drank a single cup of wine,

Threading the snow I visited the clear creek.

The waves had frozen into knives

That hacked and carved the ducks and widgeons.

Feathers that spent the night, all cut off and lost,

The sound of blood sinking into mud and sand.

Alone I stand – what shall I say?

Silently I brood, my heart cries out bitterly.

Frozen blood will never make springtime,

If it made springtime, inequality would be born.

Frozen blood will make no flowers,

If it made flowers, it would bring the widow's weeping.

Hidden away, village of thorns and brambles,

Frozen to death, there can be no plowing.

The second translation is by David Hinton:

Cold Creek (III)

I sip wine at dawn, then cross the snow

out to this clear creek. Frozen into knife –

blades, rapids have sliced ducks open,

hacked geese apart. Stopping overnight

here left their feathers scattered, their

blood gurgling down into mud and sand.

I stand alone, dazed, words giving way

to that acrid clamor of the heart. Frozen

blood mustn't beget spring. If it begets

spring, newborn life's never evened out,

and if frozen blood breaks into blossom,

widow-tears begin. What isolate beauty:

a village all thorns and brambles, fields

all frozen and dead no one can plow.

Both translations are fairly close to the original. Owen translates what is there but does not go any further. For this reason, his translation remains somewhat vague and the reader has to imagine the rest of what he reads. Hinton's translation fills in the gaps and makes the poem more readable and more understandable, if not more enjoyable. In his translation we understand how the waves froze into knifes and cut the feathers of ducks and geese. Hinton gives us a narrative, Owen stops short from putting it together.

"Cold Creek," is a narrative of nine poems that depict an extremely cold and horrifying landscape, in transition between winter and spring, the first month of the lunar calendar year. The series of poems focus on three major points: 1) they blame and condemn heaven for the severe cold weather that kills birds and fish and makes people's life harder and more difficult; 2) an admonition and an attempt at dissuading the people from collecting the frozen birds and fish for food, as these creatures are killed by heaven and are not suitable to eat as food; 3) a sincere elegy for these dead creatures after he buries them. These poems are not meant to portray Meng Jiao as a naturalist or an animal protectionist. The birds and the fish are symbols of the poet's despair at the reality of his times and his condemnation of its practices. The macabre coldness and deaths of the fish and the birds are his way of denouncing the disastrous age he lives in and the poor people like him who are made to suffer.

This third poem narrates, specifically, the morning scene when the poet sees the dead birds on the river that froze overnight and their frozen blood in the mud, and the poet's lament at what he saw. The first six lines describe the morning landscape: the poet drinks a cup of wine to keep himself warm from the cold and steps on the snow to cross the creek. When he arrives, he sees the unexpected scene of the frozen river, which is completely different from the one he remembered and he depicted in the second poem. Instead of the beautiful picture he had in mind, the frozen creek is horrifying: feathers of dead birds and blood frozen in the mud. Waves frozen in knife blades, birds killed and their feathers cut off and abandoned. The poet stands alone and does not know what to say. Here Owen's translation is more helpful: "Silently I brood, my heart cries out bitterly." The poet's own speech is frozen, as he is overwhelmed by sadness and pain.

The next four lines are somewhat obscure. In "The Poetry of Meng Chiao and Han Yu," Owen explains "The unnatural cold spell in early spring has, in spilling the blood of the birds over the landscape, created an unnatural kind of spring rain. Meng Chiao fears that this rain of blood will take the place of normal spring rain, causing the plants to grow unnaturally"[3] Flowers, writes Owen, associated with sexuality, will give rise to unnatural marriages, to widowhood, which refers back to the 'widow's cry' in the preceding poem, and here may also suggest birds" (Owen 144). The unnatural event of the frozen creek, with the death and devastation brought about by the overnight freeze, has created an unnatural spring that will have drastic consequences. Instead of the usual happy spring

marriages it will bring an unnatural one and only widowhood. Here Hinton's translation is more helpful. In this desolate land, with its frozen fields, nothing can grow. Usually winter prepares for spring but this unnatural winter cannot bring about a spring of life and renewal but only one of mourning and death.

The imagery in this third poem is a decayed, withered, and abandoned landscape. The frozen waves, the abandoned feathers, the frozen blood, the ghostly village of thorns and brambles, communicate the sense of a world dark, bitter and in decay. Poem III is exemplary of the baroque poetics that characterizes the narrative of "Cold creek" and of Meng Jiao's poetry as a whole.

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"Autumn Thoughts" (sixth of fifteen) 秋懷十五首之六

老骨懼秋月 秋月刀劍棱

纖威不可干 冷魂坐自凝

羈雌巢空鏡 仙飆蕩浮冰

驚步恐自翻 病大不敢凌

單床寤皎皎 瘦臥心兢兢

洗河不見水 透濁為清澄

詩壯昔空說 詩衰今何憑

The first translation is by Stephen Owen.

"**Autumn Meditation"** (VI)

Old bones fear the autumn moon,

The autumn moon is a sword's edge.

Against its thin might you can't shield yourself,

My cold spirit freezes up for no reason.

The widowed bird makes a nest for that hollow mirror,

A gale of fairies cleanses the floating ice.

I fear my startled footsteps will fly away of themselves,

But my sickness is great – I cannot rise to the others.

On my single sheet I awake in the gleaming whiteness,

Lying emaciated, my heart cautious and frightened.

A washed river whose water you cannot see,

Passing through the foul, it makes it clear and pure.

Long ago when my poetry was vigorous, it was empty discourse,

Now my poetry declines – what can I rely on?

The second translation is by David Hinton:

"Autumn Thoughts" (VI)

Old bones fear the autumn moon. Autumn

moon, its sword-blade of light – a chill

spirit sits frozen, and helpless against

even a sliver of its light. Widowed birds

build nests of it – blank mirror, drifting

ice bathed in winds of eternity. Afraid

my footsteps may startle away, sickness

vast, I can't brave ice. Waking into this

pure glistening light, I lie in bed alone,

emaciated and all fear, all heart of fear:

it rinses rivers so clean water vanishes,

renders foul and muddy clear and pure.

When strong, my poems were empty talk.

Now they're so frail, what is there to trust?

"Autumn Thoughts" is an allegorical narrative of fifteen poems with a single dominant theme: the hard life of the aged who live in poverty and illness. In these poems, the poet depicts the changes in the autumn scenery with bitterness and sadness. The most frequently used words are: old, lonely, bone, ill, autumn, cold and death. He writes of his weakness, coldness, and illness that his aged bones feel, and his hostility for the autumn season. This is also the distress, the helplessness and the loneliness that his aged soul feels, and the hostility for his destiny. The autumn in these poems is not that of a bountiful harvest but one of death and decay. The emotions they deliver are terrifying and full of depression and self-pity. In Owen's view this sixth poem is "mostly fantasy, and as such it is the most difficult of the sequence" (Owen 170).

The poem begins with the statement that the poet, the old bone, fears the autumn moon because it has blades of knives and swords. The poet suffers insomnia during the autumn nights which are too cold for him. Why should he fear the autumn moon? Is not the moon usually a beautiful thing to watch? The moon is usually a symbol of beauty during autumn nights, but for the poet, a sleepless and sick old man who worries about his life, the moon becomes a frightening symbol of time holding deadly blades. When the cold moonlit shines on his body, the poet feels that it freezes his soul. He fears time symbolized by the moon at night and the momentum of the moonlight which is like blades of knives and swords. The coldness brought about by the autumn moon has also frozen his soul. Owen places emphasis on the moon more than on the poet himself: "The light is spiritually cold

rather than physically cold, hence the rational voice in Meng says the freezing is 'for no reason.' The 'thinness', *hsien*, of the blade of moonlight is primarily the thinness of a thread – a 'strand of light' will cut the 'single thread of life'" (Owen 170). Hinton's reading places emphasis on the poet, instead, who is "helpless against" the unchallengeable moonlight.

The next two lines which depict the moon are ambiguous. Grammatically, the line means: either "a restrained hen-bird builds a nest *under* the moon," or "a restrained hen-bird builds a nest *for* the moon." Owen believes the former and Hinton the latter. Besides the literal meaning, the "restrained female" and "the moon" always remind one of the moon goddess, Chang E, who steals the immortal elixir and levitates to the moon where she has to live alone in the cold.

The next four lines record the poet's reaction to the moonlight in his room. He reveals that he has been seriously ill and worried about his health. He is startled by the moonlight on the floor and afraid that it may blur his sight and he may fall, so he dares not step on it. Owen and Hinton translate these two lines very differently, and, to a certain extent, different from the original. Owen gives a subject to the verb *kong* – "I" fear; but he gives the verbal phrase "*zi fan*" a different subject – footsteps: my startle footsteps will fly away of themselves. Hinton actually makes the subject of the "*zi fan*" the footsteps as well, but translates "*zi fan*" together with "*jing*" as "startle away." The most controversial translation is the next line: the word "*ling*" usually means "(standing) above" or "(stepping) on." Owen

translates it as “rise” which is right, although “to the others” seems a little confusing; Hinton translates the line as “can’t brave ice” – since the character “*ling*” has the meaning of “ice” when it is used as a noun, but in the line it is a verb. The next line tells of the white moonlight cast on his single bed when he wakes up, and his heart is cautious and frightened. Owen explains “this complicated metaphor” as a contrast between mortal reality and immortal ideality.

The next four lines deliver the main point of the poem, if not of the whole narrative series: the redemptive function of his poetry. The ray of moonlight which seems to frighten the poet is, after all, one and the same with the “washed river whose water you cannot see,” in Owen’s translation. When the moonlight strikes the river, the water almost disappears, and by passing through the dirt, it makes it clear and pure. This is, of course, an illusion. It is the illusion cast by the moonlight that makes the foulness of the river clean and pure. The moonlight is another metaphor for Meng’s poetry. This is what his poetry appears to do by shedding light on the foul making it clean. The poet, however, as we have seen, denounces this poetic illusion as frightening, as something that would make him fall. The allegory denounces the illusion of the ray of moonlight that appears to cleanse the foul and make it pure again, but cannot.

The last two lines denounce this type of “vigorous” symbolic poetry, which the poet employed in the past, but which was only “empty discourse,” in Owen’s translation, or

"strong" but only "empty talk," in Hinton's translation. Now that Meng has moved away from the traditional and symbolic poetry of Han Yu and his circle, his poetry has "declined" (Owen), and is "frail" (Hinton). His poetry has no longer the support of tradition, as it no longer emulates the ancients. His poetry is, by definition, no longer lyrical, it is allegorical and Baroque. As such, it stands by itself and has nothing else to rely on: "what can I rely on?" (Owen), "what is there to trust?"(Hinton). This sixth poem is an allegory of the impossibility of poetry to whitewash reality. Poetry, like the moonlight, can provide an illusion of purity, but it also denounces it as an illusion.

Lament of the Gorges (The Third of Ten) 峽哀十首之三

三峽一線天 三峽萬繩泉

上仄碎日月 下掣狂漪漣

破魂一兩點 凝幽數百年

峽暉不停午 峽險多飢涎

樹根鎖枯棺 孤骨嫋嫋懸

樹枝哭霜棲 哀韻杳杳鮮

逐客零落腸 到此湯火煎

性命如紡績 道路隨索緣

奠淚吊波靈 波靈將閃然

The first translation is by Tak-wai Wong:

Sorrow of the Gorges (III)

Three gorges, one thread of sky;

Three gorges, cascades of a thousand cords

Above slant the shattered sun and moon;

Beneath madly surging water impeded.

Shattered soul, a few gleams;

Frozen deep for centuries;

Gorges' light doesn't halt at noon;

Gorges perilous, full of hungry spittle.

Tree roots locked in rotted coffins,

Solitary bones hung wavering in wind;

On the branches perches weeping frost,

Mourning cadences gradually become clear.

Exile's shriveled guts,

Here scalded and seething in water and fire;

Life is like spinning threads,

Road winds along the rope

Pour libation-tear to condole the wave-spirits;

The wave-spirits just gleam and burn.

The second translation is by David Hinton:

Laments of the Gorges (III)

Three Gorges on thread of heaven over
ten thousand cascading thongs of water,

silver of sun and moon sheering away
above, and wild swells walled-in below,

splintered spirits glisten, a few glints
frozen how many hundred years in dark

gorges midday light never finds, gorges
hungry froth fills with peril. Rotting

coffins locked into tree roots, isolate
bones twist and sway, dangling free,

and grieving frost roosts in branches,
keeping lament's dark, distant harmony

fresh. Exile, tattered heart all scattered

away, you'll simmer in seething flame

here, your life like fine-spun thread,

its road a trace of string traveled away.

Offer tears to mourn the water-ghosts,

and water-ghosts take them, glimmering.

The narrative of "Laments of the Gorges" is probably the most baroque group of poems of the Mid-late Tang. As Frodsham comments, the death imagery in the poem is "typical of the Baroque: its application to the landscape, the giver of life itself, is disconcerting and unpleasant"; "Nature has been stripped off her veil: the universe itself has lost its awesome magic and has become a source of cold conceits. In typical Baroque fashion, the spiritual and the material have become dissociated."[4] Tak-wai Wong does not fully agree with Frodsham. He thinks that the poem does not merely depict the natural landscape and that it talks "like the other poems under the same title, about the sorrow in or of the gorges. It expresses an exile's feeling of despair – in terms of the rugged landscape, and of the unusual natural phenomena."[5] He does agree, however, that the poem is Baroque, but he believes that it stems from "the complex imagery structure, the distorted version of 'things', and the tragic fusion of emotion with landscape" (Wong 28). For him, this "complex

imagery structure, distorted vision of 'things', and the tragic fusion of emotion with landscape" are all elements that "distinguish it as a Baroque poem" (Wong 28). However, both critics are essentially in agreement; they both consider "Laments of the Gorges" as the others in the series, as an excellent example of Tang Baroque poetry.

The third poem of "Laments of the Gorges" opens with a scenery that depicts the Three Gorges: the view of the landscape moves from the general to the specific, from a broad view to a narrow focus. The poet first gives a general description of the Three Gorges and, then, he goes in more detail. For Tak-wai Wong, the initial general view provides the poet's true impressions, but the details of the landscape are probably imaginary, and are meant to inspire the "significance of the imagery, uniquely expressing the power of death in conceits of roots and branches" (Wong 27). Of course, everything is imaginary, even the Gorges. It's an allegorical landscape of death and decay.

The poem describes the desolate, arid and death-like landscape of the Three Gorges and their laments through their "ten thousand cascading thongs of water," which the poet hears, as he passes through them. The Gorges are also the recipients of memories of the people and the events that took place there, "frozen" over hundred years in the dark. The Three Gorges are "rotting coffins" locked in tree roots, where the branches are "bones" that "sway, dangling free," as "grieving frost roosts in branches," adding to the "lament's dark, distant harmony."

The latter part of the poem shifts its attention to the poet, and here David Hinton's translation is more helpful, because it is more interpretive and less literal than Wong's. In Hinton's translation it becomes clear that the Gorges are now addressing the poet as an "exile" who has finally found his home in these places: "Exile … you'll simmer in seething flame here." The Gorges are the end of the line for him. His life, after a road "of string traveled away," "like fine-spun thread," has finally reached its resting place in the Three Gorges. The poem ends with an invitation to the poet to offer his tears as sacrifice to the water ghosts of the past, and with an invitation to them to accept his tears, by "glimmering."

The single poems I have discussed exemplify the main themes of the allegorical narratives of which they are a part. In all of them, the landscape is dramatically associated with time and death, as they are both destructive. The natural scenery is always twisted and pained with colors of cold, darkness and bitterness, through which the poet communicates his feelings of helplessness and despair. Although he does not use many scholastic references, he creates unique expressions and images with simple characters through uncommon combinations, word order, and by even coining words and putting them together, obsessively. His poetry relates mainly to the poet's sorrow and idiosyncrasies – he does not mind to portray himself in his startling, ghostly, and elegiac poems as a desperate, creepy old man, ill, and full of self-doubt. Meng Jiao is the quintessential Tang Baroque poet.

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Li He or Irony and the Lyric

Li He died at age of 26 but earned the fame of possessing a "demonic talent" because of his dense and allusive use of symbolism, his sensual and often grotesque imagery, and his unconventional style of poetry. After his death, the two greatest poets of the Late Tang, Du Mu and Li Shangyin, had only great praise for him and his poetry. Their celebration of Li He created an image of him as a poet completely absorbed by his poetry but indifferent to the social and political implications that made poetry an important asset of mainstream Chinese life during the Tang dynasty. As Owen remarks, "Indeed, he is more a poet when simply left to write poetry. If he works at poetry, it is not the social poetry that is the norm" (Owen 162).

Li He was born to a remote branch of the imperial house of Tang, which did bring some privileges other than respect. He was talented but never conformed to the social and literary standards of his day. His official biography in *New History of Tang* 新唐書 tells how he could write poems at the age of seven and he was enthusiastically accepted by his contemporaries as a poet. "He never wrote poems on a given topic, forcing his verses to conform to the theme, as others do."[6] He was a talented relative of the imperial house, but he was never accepted to enter the national government exam because of his father's name, *jinsu*, whose pronunciation sounded like the name of the exam, *jinshi*, and so the exam

became taboo for him. This absurd situation, which evoked great sympathy among his contemporaries, gave him strength for his writing and also determined his lifestyle: a disregard for traditional poetic forms, macabre as well as sensual imagery, his obsession with the eroticism of the Southern Dynasties Palace Style poetry (gongtishi 宮體詩), which, most likely, was the cause of his death by "sexual dissipation," according to Frodsham.[7]

The three poems of Li He that I will discuss are "Song of Heyang" 河陽歌, one of the most famous yet obscure of his fantasy poems; "Su Hsiao-hsiao's Tomb"蘇小小墓, a famous ghost poem, with a mixture of eroticism and the macabre; and "Song: A Lovely Girl Combing Her Hair" 美人梳頭歌, an imitation of the Palace Style poetry, full of sensuality and erotic allusions.

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Song of Heyang 河陽歌

The poem is obscure and enigmatic, but literally it depicts the scene of a night feast where the poet meets someone he desires. This poem was influenced by other longer regulated verse poems, of the same title, written by Li Shangyin when he was young. Scholars are divided as to what happens in the poem. There are those who believe that the poem recounts events that happened to the poet himself, and those who believe that it is an account of someone else's romance. The title, 河陽歌, "Heyang Song," refers to Heyang, a location north of the Yellow River. In traditional Chinese poetry, poems named after

places, or which contain place-names in their titles, usually invoke some shared lore about the place. But Li He's Heyang does not do that, because no lore is related to it, or the lore has long ago been lost before it could be annotated.

Heyang Song 河陽歌

染羅衣

秋藍難著色

不是無心人

爲作臺邛客

花燒中潬城

顏郎身已老

惜許兩少年

抽心似春草

今日見銀牌

今夜鳴玉譙

牛頭高一尺

隔坐應相見

月從東方來

酒從東方轉

觥船飫口紅

蜜炬千枝爛

I am using the translations by J.D. Frodsham and by Stephen Owen.

The following translation is by Frodsham:

Song of Ho-yang

When you dye silk clothes

Autumn blue is a difficult shade to get.

Like that man from Lin-ch'iung

I am not without a heart.

Blossoms burn in Chung-tan city,

But Master Yen is old by now.

I'm sorry I let those two young girls

Pluck my heart like a spring flower.

Today, I noticed their silver plaques,

Tonight, they will beat jade pendants at a feast.

Ox-heads, a foot high!

You could hardly miss them, sitting there apart.

Moon rising east,

Wine circling east.

Greedy mouths red on the flagons.

A thousand beeswax candles shining.

A comparatively literal translation is the following by Stephen Owen:

Song of Heyang

Dyeing gossamer,

autumn indigo is a color hard to set.

I am not someone without a heart,

acting as a sojourner in Taiqiong.

Flowers burn Zhongdan City,

Gentleman Yan has now grown old.

I regret allowing a pair of youths

to make my heart sprout like a plant

in spring.

Today I saw the silver badge,

tonight a feast with ringing jades.

Oxhead a whole foot high,

I'll surely see her on the other side of the table.

The moon comes out from the east,

the ale comes around from the east.

Beakers, the moist mouth red,

a thousand branches of wax tapers glittering.

The poem, as the title indicates, is in verse style. To dye silk clothes with autumn blue is a metaphor to indicate that the feelings between lovers are not built up quickly, but take time and several interactions. The story related here refers to Zhuo Wenjun and Sima Xiangru, a famous love story of elopement from the Han dynasty. The "中潬城 zhong Dan cheng," in the third line, is probably the only connection with the title, because it is the name of a fort in the middle of the yellow river in Heyang. When the flowers are in full bloom in this fort, the body of "顏郎 Yan lang" is said to have grown old: Yan was a Han dynasty low ranked official who unluckily did not fit the promotion standards set by three generations of emperors and when he finally met an emperor who valued his ability, he was too old to take office. There is some controversy as to whom "Yan lang" refers: some scholars believe that this is a gesture of humility, others believe it refers to a guest at the same feast who was older in age.

The poem mentions two youths. We do not know if they are two singing girls, or the poet and the singing girl, or the singing girl with her lover, whose love sprouts as fast as the spring grass. The phrase 惜許 xi xu at the beginning of the seventh line is ambiguous: it could mean both "allowing regret" or "treasure and approve" but in each case, they imply

two different readings. If it is “regret,” then the fast sprouting love affair should not be allowed, but why? Or it may be a memory: the once fast sprouting love is gone now. If it is “treasure and approve,” the fast sprouting love between the two youths must have happened in the past and therefore it can be treasured and approved. Together with the previous two lines: flowers in full bloom make the city look like it is burning in flames – it must be spring time; but Yan’s body has grown old, it has an air of shame, pity and helplessness: a man with an old body, in spring time, either regrets allowing a long lost love affair to happen, or recalls the once treasured love with a singing girl.

The next two lines identify the woman with the silver plaque as a licensed singing girl, since, in the Tang dynasty, workers in the state-run entertainment industry were required to wear a silver plaque at their belts, on which their names were inscribed. By the silver plaque one knew who was performing, and at night one could see her serving and singing. The ox-head, 牛頭 niu tou, is usually understood as a wine container in the shape of an ox-head. The seat second to the next, 隔坐 ge zuo, indicates that they are not sitting together, there is someone in between, but they could see each other. The wine that circles from the east describes, most probably, a drinking game played at the feast. The character 觥 gong literally refers to an ancient wine container coming with a spoon, which can be used to distribute the wine in drinking cups. The character 飫 yu literally means to be satiated with food, or satiety. The last line depicts a surrealistic scene with “thousands bee-wax candles shining” 蜜炬千枝爛.

Both Frodsham and Owen have different approaches to the original. Owen's approach is more literal, whereas Frodsham's is more liberal and provides a more acceptable reading of the poem. He explains that Autumn Blue means that the color is dark blue and this is why it is a hard color to dye, it takes several times to get the color right. He also relates "autumn" to "old age" and agrees with Ye Congqi 葉蔥奇, a modern scholar, that the poem is about the poet who "considers himself too old for a love-affair with a young girl" (Frodsham 152). Whether or not it is about the poet is irrelevant. It is certainly about someone whose time has passed, as Master Yen who is "old by now."

Frodsham explains in a footnote that he followed the interpretation of the famous Japanese Sinologist Suzuki Taro and believes that this poem is "about two singing girls whom Ho had evidently met some years previously while passing through Ho-yang county, Honan" (Frodsham 152). Therefore, his translation of the two youths is "those two young girls," which is understandable. So the phrase, "love sprouting like spring grass," literally, "drawing hearts like spring grass" means, in this view, that the poet is sorry for becoming involved with those two young girls: "I'm sorry I let those two young girls pluck my heart like a spring flower."

The feeling one gets from the poem is more a sense of loss deriving from the memory of a past love affair when the two meet again at a feast. Years have passed, the man has grown old, yet the girl is still working as a singing girl in a state-run entertaining house.

Once they were madly in love with each other, now the man notices her name on the silver plaque and sees her at her performance at night. They do not sit together, but apart from each other, but he believes she must have seen him as well. The moon rises and drinking goes round and round. The drinking cups are tired of the guests' lips, while the candles are shining bright lighting up the room. The wine goes around as always, the entertainment is the same, only people age and change.

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Su Xiaoxiao's Tomb 蘇小小墓

幽蘭露

如啼眼

無物結同心

煙花不堪翦

草如茵

松如蓋

風為裳

水為珮

油壁車

夕相待

冷翠燭

勞光彩

西陵下

風吹雨

The translations of this poem are, once again, by Frodsham and by Owen; one is more interpretative and the other literal.

The translation by Owen is the following:

The Tomb of Little Su

Dew on the hidden orchid.

Like crying eyes.

Nothing ties a love knot,

Flowers in mist I cannot bear to cut.

Grass like the carriage cushion,

Pines like the carriage roof,

The wind is her skirt,

The waters, her pendants.

A carriage with oiled sides

Awaits in the evening.

Cold azure candle

Struggles to give light.

At the foot of West Mound

Wind blows the rain.

Frodsham's translation is the following:

Su Hsiao-hsiao's Tomb

Dew upon lonely orchids,

Like tear-brimmed eyes.

No twining of love-knots,

Mist-wreathed flowers I cannot bear to cut.

Grass for her cushions,

Pines for her awning,

Wind as her skirts,

Water as girdle-jades.

In her oil-silk carriage

She is waiting at dusk.

Cold candles, kingfisher-green,

Weary with shining.

Under the Western Grave-mound,

Wind-blown rain.

Su Xiaoxiao was a famous prostitute who lived during the Southern Qi dynasty (479-502). She was a very good singer and died young of an illness. There have been many stories written about her during her lifetime and after. The earliest surviving writings is a Southern Dynasties ghostly song called "Su Xiaoxiao's Song 蘇小小歌":

妾乘油壁車　　I ride a coach with oiled sides

郎騎青驄馬　　he rides a blue dapple.

何處結同心　　Where will we tie a true love knot? –

西陵松柏下　　on West Mount, under the cypress and pine.[8]

The oiled-sides coach became a symbol of Su Xiaoxiao. It is her symbol in all the literature about her. People even believe that the coach was buried with her in the tomb. In this Southern Dynasty song, the "true love knot" is knotted with two laces or belts, and it is usually a symbol of the love partnership and it is used as a euphemism for sexual behavior in erotic literature. The other conventional symbols used in the song are West Mount, the cypress and the pine: West Mount is usually a place for tombs; cypress and pine are trees people usually choose to plant beside tombs. Therefore the meaning of the song is that true love can be achieved only after death, in the tomb. In the Tang dynasty, there was a version of this story that in stormy nights, when people passed by her tomb, they could hear the sound of singing coming from the tomb. It is believed, however, that Li He never visited her tomb, which is located nowadays either in Jiaxing County or by the

West Lake in Zhejiang Province. As Owen says, Li He's poem is probably "a scene of the mind realized in poetry" (Owen 169).

The poem begins with a strong display of rhetorical showmanship: dew on the orchid, tearing eyes, flowers in mist, carpet like lawn, skirt of wind, pendant of water, timid candle light in the blue color of kingfisher's feather, and so on. The detailed description exemplifies the sensuality of the poem, which transforms the poet's dark obsession with death into an aesthetic representation. Fusheng Wu once commented on this poem that Li He "adopts some highly evocative diction and then cancels out its effects by setting it in a very different context. Thus no one would expect the above-mentioned phrases [orchid, flowers in mist, jade pendants, candles in green color of the kingfisher's feather, and etc.] to be used to describe a graveyard scene" (Wu 109). Li He's poem was probably inspired by the old song of the Southern Dynasties, but he goes further. The old song says true love can be only found in death, but Li He says that even in death, one waits in vain for one's true love.

Owen's literal translation indicates the sense of loss in the endless waiting in vain, which makes the flowers in the mist too piteous to be picked. It seems that it is the flowers' pitiful condition, which is at stake but it is actually the situation described in the previous line: "nothing to knot a true love with." Owen summarizes his understanding of the poem as follows: "The old singer half materializes, scattered in the scene around her tomb, then

in the coach of the old song, and finally as a flickering ghost-light, waiting still – until a gust of wind-blown rain puts out the candle and ends the poem" (Owen 169). In Owen's view all the flowers, dew, grass, pine, etc. that the poet depicts are all materialized images of the ghost of Su Xiaoxiao, who is waiting in vain for her love because "nothing ties a love knot." However, the ghost still has hopes to attract some passerby when the storm ends. This is a sad and romantic interpretation of the poem, but in the old song, the sounds of music and singing could only be heard in the storm not before or after. Owen's translation of the title as "the Tomb of little Su" also does not do justice to the larger-than-life figure of Xiaoxiao, especially when shortened to "little Su," which sounds a lot like an American "little Sue."

Frodsham's translation, instead, captures very well the pathos of the poem and the lover's drama who cannot bear to cut the "mist-wreathed flowers" over her tomb because it would be like cutting the lifeline that links him to her. Frodsham, describes very well the tomb that the poet has created out of Nature: the grass that she has as cushions, the pines for awning, the wind as her skirt, and water as her girdle. There is also her "oil-silk carriage" where she is waiting at dusk. Finally we arrive, at the end of the poem, to see her tomb: "the Western Grave-mound, / Wind-blown rain." All this section is described much more crassly and vaguely in Owen whose translation of these last lines does not even give the notion that we are looking at her tomb: "At the foot of West Mound/Wind blows the rain."

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Song: A Lovely Girl Combing Her Hair 美人梳頭歌

西施曉夢綃帳寒　香鬟墮髻半沉檀

轆轤咿啞轉鳴玉　驚起芙蓉睡新足

雙鸞開鏡秋水光　解鬟臨鏡立象床

一編香絲雲撒地　玉釵落處無聲膩

紆手卻盤老鴉色　翠滑寶釵簪不得

春風爛漫惱嬌慵　十八鬟多無氣力

妝成婑髿欹不斜　雲裾數步踏雁沙

背人不語向何處　下階自折櫻桃花

This is probably one of the best versions of Palace Style poetry in Li He's poetry. Palace Style has often been criticized for objectifying women, especially by Palace Style poets who usually adopted the descriptive techniques of the "Poetry on Things" (yong wu shi 詠物詩), where women are usually represented as precious toys" (Wu 82). The scenes of women putting on a make-up are the most common subjects of this type of poetry. One of the most probable sources of Li He's inspiration is Xiao Gang, Emperor Jianwen of Liang (503-551), "A Lovely Woman's Morning Toilette"美人晨妝詩.[9]

北窗向朝鏡　　By the north window she faces the morning mirror,

錦帳復斜縈　　Twisted brocade curtains slant down by her side.

嬌羞不肯出　　Coy and blushing she is reluctant to come out,

猶言妝未成　　And says her make up is not yet complete.

散黛隨眉廣　　Kohl on her brows broadens with her eyes,

胭脂逐臉生　　Red rouge comes to life with her face.

試將持出眾　　I bet if you take her in front of the crowd,

定得可憐名　　She will surely win the title of "The Adorable."[10]

Most of the criticism of Palace Style poetry can be found in this small poem: the appreciation of the woman's beauty and her shyness, not because of who she is but because she is observed in detail as an object. As Wu claims: "The almost rude intrusion by the poet in the last couplet indicates that the focus of the poem is actually not the woman, as the title suggests, but the poet, because the description of her manners in the first six lines only serves to advance the poet's hypothesis about this woman in the last two lines. It is he, the observer, who has the last word" (Wu 82). However, Li He is not just an imitator, but an innovator of this type of poetry, although he did imitate its clichés. The title of the poem is typical of this erotic style, which takes as its central theme the scene of a beauty combing her hair. Differently from Xiao, Li He's poem is not concerned with the whole make-up, but with only one stage: the combing of her hair in the style she prefers.

I have chosen two translations, one by Frodsham and the other by Fusheng Wu. The two translators have quite different understanding of some of the key words and their use

in the poem. Fusheng Wu's translation is comparatively accurate since it is probably based on Wu's reading of Xiao's poem. His translation is the following:

A Lovely Woman Combing Her Hair: A Song

Xi Shi dreams at dawn, the silken curtains are cool,

Half of her perfumed hair falls on the sandalwood pillow.

The well windlass creaks – the turning of singing jade,

With a start it wakes up the newly slept lotus.

Twin simurghs open the mirror – two lights on an autumn water,

By the ivory bed she loosen her tresses in front of the mirror.

A skein of scented silk spreads on the floor like clouds,

Jade hairpins fall down from her lustrous hair without a sound.

Her delicate fingers pile up the color of old rook's plumage,

Which is so sleek that the jeweled comb and hairpins cannot hold.

The brilliant spring breeze vexes her lovely indolence,

Having tied eighteen knots or more her strength fails.

Her toilette done, the beautiful hair sits firm without slipping,

In cloud skirt she dances to "A goose treading the sand."

Silently she turns away – where is she going now?

Down the steps to pick herself some cherry blossoms.

By comparison Frodsham's version is more interpretative and in general a better translation:

Song: A Lovely Girl Combing Her Hair

His-shih dreaming at dawn,

In the cool of silken curtains.

Scented coils of her falling chignon,

Half aloes, half sandalwood.

The turning windlass of the well,

Creaking like singing jade,

Wakes with a start this lotus blossom,

That has newly slept its fill.

Twin simurghs appear on her mirror,

An autumn pool of light.

She loosens her tresses before the mirror,

Stands on her ivory bed.

A single skein of perfumed silk,

Clouds cast on the floor,

Noiseless the jade comb tumbles down

From her lustrous hair.

Delicate fingers keep pushing back the coils –

Color of an old rook's plumes,

Blue-black and sleek – the jeweled comb

And hairpin cannot hold.

Light-heartedly the spring breeze vexes

Her lovely disarray.

After trying eighteen knots or more,

Her strength has fled.

Her toilet over, the well-dressed chignon

Sits firm and does not slip.

In cloudy skirts, she measures her step,

A goose treading the sand,

She turns away without speaking –

Where is she off to now?

Just down the steps to pick herself

A spray of cherry blossom.

The first four lines depict the scene of the beauty getting up after a night sleep. The woman who is as beautiful as Xi Shi 西施, wakes up with her yesterday's hairstyle out of shape: duoji 墮髻, a popular Tang woman hair style, half- loose. She gets up and the bed creaks; the jade pendants hanging from the bed curtain ring as well. Now she is fully awake. The next four lines describe the scene of her undoing her half-loose hairstyle: she first opens her covered mirror on the dresser. The mirror is decorated with a pair of simurghs on its back and it is clear and bright as the autumn water. She loosens her unshaped hairstyle standing in front of her mirror by the ivory bed. When she succeeds in doing so, the end of her long hair falls like clouds cast on the floor, and her jade hairpin slides on the floor in the hair without making a sound. She, then, redoes her hairstyle: her long thin fingers are working on her hair, which is as black as a raven's feather. But her hair is so smooth and silky that her hairpins do not hold and stay. She gets impatient because of her lovely indolence and she is tired to make the eighteen-coils hairstyle. The color of raven's feather is a common and popular image for a woman's hair, but the most common phrase is that of a young raven's feather, not an old one, which is what is used in the poem. The concluding lines tell us what she does after her hair is styled and sits right. She steps out at the rhythm of the music of "The Geese on Sand." The music full name is "Wild Geese Alighting on a Sandy Shore"平沙落雁, which is a very famous ancient piece, and one of its authors, although it cannot be proved, was the early Tang poet Chen Ziang (659-700). Where is she going? Downstairs: to pick a small branch of cherry blossoms. From this brief

description of Li He's poem, we see an essential difference with the Palace Style's model: instead of a static description of the woman's manners, the woman in Le He's poem moves dynamically. Zhu Ziqing explains Li He's innovation of Palace Style poetry as adopting the device "of using eccentric and obscure conceits to complement the shortcomings of superficiality and the eroticism of the Palace Style."[11]

In his translation, Frodsham introduces the chignon, which was very popular among women in the Tang dynasty. The women's hairstyles in this period became higher and higher. Women used chignon to decorate, shape and make their hair taller because usually their own hair could not meet the standards of high hairstyles. The Late Tang poet Lu Guimeng 陸龜蒙(?-881) wrote: "All the girls in town wear hair one foot in height, not just mine is high."[12]

Li He modeled his poem on the Palace Style's Morning Toilette poetry but his version is not only radically different but it is also an affectionate description of the woman who is no longer in her youth. His portrait of the old courtesan transpires, gradually and indirectly, through indirect details that do not seem to apply to her at first, such as, "An autumn pool of light" to point out that she is no longer young, but in the "autumn" of her years.

Her dreams at dawn are, perhaps, erotic, reminders of her better days and of a love she can no longer expect. Her age shows in that she is late in rising and by her fallen chignon. The color of her raven hair is described as "old." As I have indicated, the color of raven's

feather was a common and popular image for a woman's hair, but for a young woman the phrase for hair would be young raven's feather, not an old one, as in this case. Her "old rook" matches her beauty which is just as old. Because of her age, her toilet is a chore. After trying eighteen knots or more, she has no strength left. Her toilet done, she sits firm and "does not slip," as she sometimes does. She is careful in stepping out, like a "goose treading sand," at the rhythm of the music of "The Geese on Sand," an ancient piece that she probably danced at when she was young. When she was young, after finishing her toilet she probably stepped out into the crowd to be admired, as the Palace Style poem has it: "I bet if you take her in front of the crowd,/ She will surely win the title of "The Adorable." Now, that is long past. The poet brings up the question of where could she be going now that she has finished her toilet: "Where is she off to now?" The implication is that because she is old now she has nowhere to go. The reply, which reflects the general pathos of the poem, is nowhere too far, just a few steps away to pick herself, "A spray of cherry blossom." This is the only big event for which she has spent all morning doing her hair. This is all that she can expect from her day, now that she is no longer young and beautiful. Li He does not tell us that she is old and no longer an object of admiration. He describes her going through the steps of doing her hair even though she is old now. Li He takes a traditional Palace Style's Morning Toilette poem and reveals, through irony, the woman behind the object.

These three poems are representatives of Li He's poetry and of his poetic technique that I am calling baroque because they are not mimetic representations of people or events but are allegories of the impossibility of love or true love. In the "Song of Ho-yang" it is the difficulty, if not the impossibility, to dye silk clothes in the shade of "autumn blue," namely, of a love affair with someone younger, or of a different status. The poem "Su Hsiao-hsiao's Tomb" is about the impossibility of true love by collapsing the image of her "oil-silk carriage" with her tomb, where she waits for her true love in vain, forever. The third poem, "Song: A Lovely Girl Combing her Hair," is about a lovely girl who turns out to be not so young anymore and who no longer expects anything anymore from life or from love. All that is left for her to do is to go through her everyday routine of doing her hair, as she has always done, but this time only to just go down a few steps in her garden to pick herself a spray of cherry blossom.

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Li Shangyin: Envisioning Allusion as Disruption.

Ever since the early Song dynasty (960-1279), about a century after his death, Li Shangyin was regarded one of the most influential late Tang poets. During his life time (813-858), however, his poetic genius went unrecognized. About six hundreds of his poems from circulating manuscripts have survived, which were not collected and published by Li himself, or by his family after his death. The earliest annotated collection of his poems is

an early Qing dynasty collection, about seven centuries after his death, although several collections, mentioned in different sources, have been lost. His poetry is mainly known for its obscure and ambiguous imagery and meaning, whose main theme is enduring love and the temporality of all things. His poems are usually written in interlinked layers of meaning, with facts interwoven with memories and reference to ancient lore, unknown or not readily definable symbols, imagistic language and diction, which may refer to some code now lost, to construct a world of dazzling exteriority and cryptic interiority.

Li Shangyin writes in the declining phase of the great Tang dynasty, in its last attempt to assert authority and control over the local warlords. Although Li served for a short time as a low ranking official in imperial offices, he spent most of his life as one of the intellectuals who served different local warlords, and usually in the rural provinces. His career never brought him a high position and, in his last years, he quit his position because of failing health. He writes on various occasions and topics, and mainly for a small intimate circle of readers. Most of his lyrical poems, known in traditional Chinese poetry, as "無題, Wu Ti, Without Title" are about unrequited love. Their obscure imagery is usually linked to some well-known ancient lore, and the results are short but densely poetical rhymes that evoke strong sympathies in the reader.

The poems I have chosen that illustrate the "baroque" aspects of his poetry are: "The Ornamented Zither," one of his most widely known and recognized poems, which although

has a title, is one of the poems "without title"; "Written on a Monastery Wall," a poem, apparently, on Buddhism, and not very well-known; "Lamp," one of his "Poems on Things." Together with the original there are two translations for each poem that provide two potential readings or, at least, two different perspectives on how to interpret the poems.

The Ornamented Zither

The poem is named after the first two characters of the first line, which is a tradition of naming Li Shangyin's poems without titles, not to confuse it with those known as "無題 Wu Ti," meaning literally, "No Title," "Without Title," "Untitled," or "Missing Title."

錦瑟

錦瑟無端五十弦 一弦一柱思華年

莊生曉夢迷蝴蝶 望帝春心托杜鵑

滄海月明珠有淚 藍田日暖玉生煙

此情可待成追憶 只是當時已惘然

The first translation is by James J. Y. Liu:[13]

The Ornamented Zither

The ornamented zither, for no reason, has fifty strings.

Each string, each bridge, recalls a youthful year.

Master Chuang was confused by his morning dream of the butterfly;

Emperor Wang's amorous heart in spring is entrusted to the cuckoo.

In the vast sea, under a bright moon, pearls have tears;

On Indigo Mountain, in the warm sun, jade engenders smoke.

This feeling might have become a thing to be remembered,

Only, at the time you were already bewildered and lost.

James Liu includes this poem in his study of Li Shangyin as a Baroque poet. Liu's translation of the title, "Ornamented Zither," places emphasis on the ornamental, rhetorical, or allegorical character of the poem. Stephen Owen, the other translator, plays down the rhetoric of the poem by translating it "The Brocade Zither" (Owen 394):

The Brocade Zither

It just happens that the brocade zither has fifty strings,

each string, each peg turns thoughts to the flowering years.

Zhuang Zhou's morning dream, lost in a butterfly,

Emperor Wang's spring heart, lodged in a cuckoo.

When the moon grows bright on the gray sea, there are tears in pearl;

when the sun warms Indigo Fields the jade gives off a mist.

One should wait until these feelings become remembrance,

it's just that at the moment I was already in daze.

The original Chinese title contains two characters: 錦瑟 jin se. 錦 jin, literally means "brocade," but when it is used as an adjective, it means luxuriously decorated; 瑟 se, is an

ancient musical instrument with twenty five strings and movable bridges. The rectangle shaped instrument when it is being played is usually horizontally placed on a table and occasionally across the knees. The zither is the main symbol of the poem. In the first line, the zither is said to have had fifty strings which is not the case because it is a twenty-five strings instrument. The reference is to an ancient legend when the zither had fifty strings. The story goes that when the god Tai-di (Emperor Tai) asked the goddess Su-nu (the White Maid) to play it, the tunes were so bitterly sad that they brought great grief to both of them. Tai-di, then, ordered the instrument to be broken into two halves, and since then the instrument has only twenty-five strings.

Owen's translation of the first line underplays the importance of the mythic origins of the zither stating that "it just happens" to have had fifty-strings. James Liu's translation, "for no reason," undermines the origins of the legend by stating that the zither had fifty strings, for no reason. The importance of the zither is stated in the second line which links the strings and bridges to the recollection of youthful years. From the legend it is clear that the recollection of these years is not happy or pleasant. The zither's power of recollection is ironic since, as we know from the legend, its sound was so sad and so devastating that the god decided to split the instrument in half.

The recollection of youthful years is the substance of the poem and the subject of the next two couplets which are stories of tragic and unrequited love. The first story narrates

the famous allegory of Taoist master Zhuangzi who once dreamed of being a butterfly. When he woke up he was not sure whether he was Zhuangzi dreaming to be a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming to be Zhuangzi. James Liu captures the confusion of Master Chuang after his dream: "Master Chuang was confused by his morning dream of the butterfly." Owen, however, states that Zhuang Zhou was "lost in a butterfly."

The second line tells the story of Emperor Wang of Shu who had a love affair with his prime minister's wife and killed himself out of shame. After his death, his amorous heart was "entrusted to the cuckoo" in James Liu's version. In Owen's translation the "amorous heart" becomes the "spring heart," and in a more literal rendering, it is "lodged in a cuckoo."

The next stories deal more directly with the theme of unrequited love. In one legend, it is said that in nights of full moon, oysters open and show their pearls to absorb the moonlight to make them shine. When the moon wanes, the pearls lose their gleam and hide. Another legend gives a more human and less literal meaning. It is said that on nights of full moon mermaids weep and their tears become pearls in the moonlight. This is James Liu's version. Owen's translation is somewhat more vague as he translates that there are "tears" in "pearls."

The next one is more a story of unrequited love. It tells the story of Purple Jade, the daughter of the King of Wu, who refused to marry her to the man she loved. Jade killed herself and when she reappeared and her mother tried to embrace her she vanished from

her arms like smoke. Li Shangyin connects the legend to The Indigo Field, "藍田 lan tian," a mountain famous for the fine jade that can be mined there. In poetry, there is a world which resembles the Indigo Field Mountain in warm sunshine. One can only look at the jade from a distance but when one comes too close, it disappears.

The two couplets make up the substance of the youthful years recollected by the poem's zither. Just as in the case of the mythic fifty string zither, the recollection is certainly nothing to be remembered. However, the feeling that was supposed to reach the subject at the end of the poem never does. As we are told, the poet, or whoever is intended by the "you" in the last line of the poem, was already "bewildered and lost." Not only the sound of the zither fails to reach the poet, but also it would seem that the poet has no need of the fifty-string zither to remind him of his bitter youthful years.

Li Shangyin's the "Ornamented zither" is not an imitation of the fifty strings zither of old but an allegory of the impossibility of coinciding with it. The poem does not bring about the recollection of the youthful years that it promises but states, at the same time, the instability of a subject that is already "bewildered and lost." Any attempt, therefore, to read the poem symbolically is bound to end in failure, just as the poem does. As the poet indicates in the first line, there is "no reason" to recollect his youthful years because they are as sad and as tragic as those experienced by the gods. The poem is an allegory of the

impossibility of recollecting one's youthful years, since one is already "bewildered and lost."

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Written on a Monastery Wall

Differently from the "Ornamented Zither," which is one of the most well-known poems of Li Shangyin, this poem is not well-known. The poem is easily categorized among Li's Buddhist poems that he wrote when he was working in Sichuan and Guangxi, and took up the practice of Buddhism and wrote poems about his new faith and about Buddhist monks.[14] However, the poem is only apparently about Buddhism, even though the first and last couplets are a direct reference to the religion.

Written on the monastery wall

題僧壁

捨生求道有前蹤 乞腦剜身結愿重

大去便應欺粟顆 小來兼可隱針鋒

蚌胎未滿思新桂 琥珀初成憶舊松

若信貝多真實語 三生同聽一樓鐘

English translations of this poem are very few. James Liu does not even include it in his study of Li Shangyin where he translates 100 of his poems. Those I have been able to

find, however, provide sufficient subject matter for discussion. The first is by Arthur Cooper who translates it with reference to A. C. Graham's translation of the same poem. Cooper does not state directly why he translated the poem but he was probably prompted by a desire to improve on his.

The following is Arthur Cooper's translation:[15]

Written on a Monastery Wall

To leave life, seek the Way,
    follow the others,
Which asks much, begs the brain,
    Hollows the body;

Great gone, to see the World
    a grain of millet,
Small comes, to make it fit
    the Mystic Pinpoint:

Oysters, their wombs unfilled,
    long for the full moon,
And amber until made
    sighs for its past pine;

But faith in Holy Writ

for the true message

Hears Present, Future, Past

all in one gongstroke!

The following is A. C. Graham's translation:

Written on a Monastery Wall

They rejected life to seek the Way. Their footprints are before us.

They offered up their brains, ripped up their bodies; so firm was their resolution.

See it as large, and a millet-grain cheats us of the universe:

See it as small, and the world can hide in a pinpoint.

The oyster before its womb fills thinks of the new cassia;

The amber, when it first sets, remembers a former pine.

If we trust the true and sure words written on Indian leaves

We hear all past and future in one stroke of the temple bell.

The poem's title, 題僧壁 ti seng bi, literally means "writing on a Buddhist monk's Wall." The first four characters in the first two lines are Buddhist phrases: "giving up life to seek the Way" and "offering head and body," though the literal meaning of the phrase is "beg brain cut body." Both stories are derived from the sutras and they dictate that those

who are ready to give up their life and enter the monastic life should be ready to also give up their body and their mind. The middle two couplets are vague. Scholars have turned to the sutras in the hope of finding some possible allusion. Essentially they are maxims. The first implies the wisdom of seeing the world in a grain of sand, here in a grain of "millet," whereas the other points to the reverse: what is small can fit into the Mystic Pinpoint.

The third stanza with the reference to pearls echoes the "Ornamented zither." Here the two translations by Cooper and A. C. Graham part ways. Cooper's translation emphasizes the implied meaning of the first line, namely, that the "womb" of the oyster refers to that of a woman: "Oysters, their wombs unfilled,/long for the full moon." A. C. Graham's more literal translation erases this latent meaning: "The oyster before its womb fills thinks of the new cassia." The same can be said for the next line. Cooper's translation renders better the meaning alluded to: "And amber until made/ sighs for its past pine." A. C. Graham's translation does not render the main point of the imagery: "The amber, when it first sets, remembers a former pine." The point, here, is that amber does not set.

In these last lines, there is a shift from a poem apparently concerned with Buddhism to one with unfulfilled love. The reference to the oyster's womb "unfilled" makes this clear. The same conceit is made clearer in the reference to amber which is made from pine resin but does not become amber until it is set, that is, "impregnated" by an insect. The hidden image is another reference to unfulfilled love. The woman waits, like amber, to be

impregnated, but the wait is futile. Cooper's translation renders very well the longing of the amber, or the woman, whereas for A. C. Graham this has already happened because he does not see the connection of the amber with a woman's desire. We can see why Cooper felt that he had to re-translate Graham.

The stanza marks a shift from being a poem about leaving life and entering a Buddhist monastery to women who either by choice or not became Buddhist nuns and who now lay unfulfilled behind the walls of a Buddhist monastery. This shift is clear in Cooper but not in A. C. Graham who believes he is just translating a Buddhist poem. This is made clear in the last stanza where the issue is faith. In Cooper's translation, if we believe in the Holy Writ of Buddhism, we will hear eternity in the sound of the gong: "But faith in Holy Writ for the true message/ Hears Present, Future, Past/ all in one gong stroke!" A. C. Graham's translation is more literal and more confusing: "If we trust the true and sure words written on Indian leaves/We hear all past and future in one stroke of the temple bell." There is no gong stroke here that gives a sense of eternity, only a temple bell. But the main point of this last stanza is "faith." If we believe in Buddha and in the eternity that the Buddhist faith promises, we will hear the past, the present and the future in a gong stroke. If we are not believers we won't. It is impossible to say whether Li Shangyin had sufficient faith to hear the Past, the Present and the Future in a gong stroke, but it is certain that those Buddhist nuns he knew and who were pining away in Buddhist monasteries did not hear it. They

only heard, like the amber, the call of their flesh or of their unfulfilled wombs, at the full moon.[16]

Cooper's translation not only lends itself to a better understanding of the poem but it places in evidence the Baroque conceits of the oyster-womb-woman, as well as the amber-pine-insect conceit. What is more, Cooper's translation highlights the irony of the poem in the first lines of the poem which requires one to "hollow the body" when this is, precisely, what is impossible for the Buddhist nuns. Most important is the title of the poem which is written on a monastery wall. The poem is not meant to be a manifesto to promote Buddhism; on the contrary, it denounces its practice even if only for those Buddhist nuns living within its walls.

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Lamp

The "Lamp" is one of Li Shangyin's "Poems on Things." This apparently simple poem is actually quite complex in its implication, which is not readily apparent at first. The title of the poem is simple enough: 燈 deng, Lamp. It is not "a lamp" or "lamps," or "some lamp," but a generic name for all lamps, "Lamp." The two translators I have chosen are Stephen Owen and Paula M. Varsano. For Owen, the poem does not say much more than "simply offer the pleasure of beautiful lines" (Owen 474). Paula M. Varsano, instead, who translates the poem as an example of the rhetoric of hiddenness in her edited study on traditional

Chinese culture,[17] finds that its sensual surface "is like a gleaming piece of obsidian. Neither transparent enough to serve as a window nor reflective enough to be a mirror, it irresistibly attracts the eye only to withhold any compensatory promise of vision" (Varsano 1). While for Owen the "Lamp" is just one of Li Shangyin's poems about a thing, for Varsano the poem has deeper implications because she views the lamp as an instrument of light and hiddenness.

燈

皎潔終無倦 煎熬亦自求

花時隨酒遠 雨後背窗休

冷暗黃茅驛 暄明紫桂樓

錦囊名畫掩 玉局敗棋收

何處無佳夢 誰人不隱憂

影隨簾押轉 光信簟文流

客自勝潘岳 儂今定莫愁

固應留半焰 回照下幃羞

Owen's translation is the following:[18]

Lamp

Of gleaming purity, never tiring,

it even seeks itself to burn away.

When flowers bloom, it goes far with the ale;

on rainy nights it ends, snuffed at the window.

Cold and dark, a station among yellow rushes,

warm and bright, a mansion of purple cassia.

Famous painting enclosed in brocade bags,

defeated pieces gathered from the jade chessboard.

Why is there no wonderful dream? –

who does not lie awake with brooding cares?

Its shadows turn with the curtain weights,

its light entrusted to the flow of mat patterns.

My guest is finer than Pan Yue

I now am Mourn-no-More indeed.

Indeed, one should keep a half-faded flame

to turns shining on shyness as bed curtains drop.

Paula M. Varsano's translation is the following:

Lamp

In gleaming purity, never to falter,

its ardent burning seeks to consume even itself.

In the season of blossoms, it lasts as long as the wine,

then rest after the rains, its back to the window.

Cold and dim: a yellow-thatched way station;

glowing and bright: a purple-cassia pavilion.

Wrapped in brocade bags are renowned paintings,

gathered up from the jade chessboard, the defeated pieces.

What place is free of such enticing dreams?

Who does not lie awake, suffering in the dark?

Shadows bend with the curtain-weights,

light flows along the pattern of the mat.

My guest, himself, surpasses the handsome poet, Pan Yue,

and now I am Mourn-no-more, good and beautiful.

Truly, one should keep a flame half-burning,

To turn back shining on the shyness of lowered bed-curtains.

As expected, Varsano gives a more detailed line by line analysis of the poem to determine its hidden 情 qing which, "depending on its immediate context, has engendered a range of definitions and translations, from 'truth' to 'emotion', with the latter being most closely associated with the world of literature" (V 4). With the aim of searching for the hidden elements in Li's poetic enterprise, she finds that this poem is actually a combination of sources "as those found in the working of yongwu (詠物 poetry on), the erotic

atmospherics of the 'Ziye' songs (子夜歌 midnight songs) of the Southern Dynasties, and even the earliest hermeneutic practices found in the *Shijing* and *Chuci*" (V 12).

As Varsano points out, the word "Lamp" is never mentioned in the poem and if we did not know the title, we would not be able to read the poem. In fact, the poem is close to being an enigma and challenges the reader to guess what is the "Thing" being described. The lamp, she writes, is both an object of perception, even "an objet d'art – and an agent that "illuminates other objects of perception: a mediator of observation" (V 6). In other words, the lamp functions as a sign, or a trope, that signifies both itself and other signs.

The lamp is located in a room, and is said never "to falter" in its "gleaming purity." During the blossoming season, people may hold lamps to look at flowers during a night banquet, which is a reference to the well-known poetic motif of *carpe diem*: holding lights for night entertainment, because life is too short. Thus, a lamp "lasts as long as wine." In rainy nights, people go to sleep early and the lamp may "rest against the window." Lamps can be found everywhere: in the "cold and dark," in shabby rural posting stations, as well as in the "warm and bright" luxury urban hotels.

Lamps, in an art collector's house also have the chance to see famous paintings, which are rarely shown to the public and are, usually, carefully stored in brocade bags. Lamps in a chess master's house have probably watched many chess games played by the chess master, on the jade chessboard, and sometimes lost. The lamp is also the witness of those

who are asleep and dreaming, but also of those who are awake, and suffering. The lamp is also the witness of erotic encounters but always discreetly as it projects only the shadows of the lovers as they lower "the curtain-weights" of the bed, and as it follows them with its light along "the pattern of the mat." The poem depicts the delicate play of light and shadow that makes it possible to capture to shed enough light to hide the indiscreet parts of the bedroom.

Four lines from the end, however, the poem takes a "baffling" turn from its descriptive mode, and addresses the reader in the first person: "My guest, himself, surpasses the handsome poet, Pan Yue, /and now I am Mourn-no-more, good and beautiful." Pan Yue was a very talented poet but was also known, in his lifetime, as very handsome, the most handsome man of his time.[19] Mo Chou, literally Mourn-no-more, on the other hand, is a fictional character, a character of local lore but also famous for her beauty.

There have been many attempts at explaining the meaning of this narrative shift as well as the identity of the speaker that introduces the guest, as well as who the guest may be, who is even more handsome than Pan Yue. Varsano believes that the speaker has entered a dream state that makes possible "the most dramatic transformation of the poem" (V 11), namely, the speaker of the poem becomes a she, that is, Mourn-no-more, and addresses her guest as being more handsome than the poet Pan Yue.

However, it is only when we know that the title of the poem is “Lamp,” we realize that it has only been a play of light and shadow, of hiddenness and revelation, as Varsano suggests. Then we also know that it has all been an illusion, brought about by the play of lights of the lamp. The light of the lamp suggests the story of the art collector and the renowned paintings wrapped in brocade bags, and the story of the defeated chess master from the pieces left on the jade chessboard; but also possible tragic love stories: stories of sleepless nights, and suffering for love. The light of the lamp also makes it easy that the new guest is more handsome than Pan Yue by the light that it shines on him. It is all a question of light and darkness.

The poem does not end here; it continues for a final couplet:

> Truly, one should keep a flame half-burning,
>
> To turn back shining on the shyness of lowered bed-curtains.

The lines have usually been read in relation to similar lines by Ji Shaoyu, a Liang dynasty poet who lived around AD 541, who wrote: “I shall keep one or two candle-lights, so that I can see when I loosen your gown.” Commentators have seen the same sense of intimacy and sexual implication in Li Shangying’s lines: “keep half the light burning,” and wait to see “the shyness when she lowers the bed curtain.” However, I do not think that this is what Li Shangyin meant to say. On the contrary, he is stating the opposite. One

should keep the flame of the lamp low, "half-burning," in order not to shine directly on the "lowered bed-curtains."

What is at stake in the poem, in other words, is not erotic desire, or eternal desire, as Varsano claims, but only the illusions created by the lamp: these are the stories of the art collector and his famous paintings that we imagine from seeing the brocade bags; or the story of the defeated chess master that we can imagine from the pieces left on the jade chessboard, or, finally, a love story taking place behind "lowered bed-curtains." In actual fact, all there is in the room are these simple objects (a brocade bag, chess pieces and a lowered bed curtain) on which the light of the lamp shines and makes their stories possible to the reader's imagination.

The poem is an allegory of how a poem (by Li Shangyin) is constructed: a few objects that suggest possible stories but none of them definite or conclusive. A good example is the "Ornamented zither" which is composed of four stories, the story of Zhuangzi and the butterfly, and three apparently tragic love stories, which, to this day, continue to baffle the reader who tries to put the pieces of stories together into a coherent whole. Another name for the lamp is "poetry," which shines with its rhetorical light on different objects suggesting their different stories and, in the case of Li Shangyin, tragic stories.

The lamp, the zither or the writing on monastery wall, are all examples of Li Shang-yin's baroque poetics which is not symbolic or historical, but poetic and allegorical. As such a hermeneutical approach that looks for meanings in his poems is always bound to fail because the light that it shines, or the zither that it plays, its writing or inscription, leaves no residue in history.

Notes

[1] David Hinton. *The Late Poems of Meng Chiao*, xiv.

[2] Fusheng Wu. *The Poetics of Decadence*, 77.

[3] Stephen Owen. *The Poetry of Meng Chiao and Han Yu*, 144.

[4] J. D. Frodsham. *New Perspectives in Chinese Literature*, 12-13.

[5] Tai-wai Wong. "Toward Defining Chinese Baroque Poetry," 25-72.

[6] The original quote is from the *New History of Tang* 新唐書. The translation is quoted in Frodsham, J. D. *The Poems of Li He*, xvi.

[7] We do not really know the exact causes of Li He's young death, but it was most probably because of health reason. In his introduction to his translations of Li He, Frodsham mentions a Qing dynasty commentator, Yao Wen-hsieh 姚文燮，who believed that Li He's death was "brought about by sexual dissipation." This is a

possibility given the evidence provided by his poems, which hardly make Li He “into a pillar of domestic sobriety.” Frodsham (1970), xv.

[8] The song is collected in the *New Songs from Jade Terrace* 玉臺新詠, an anthology of early medieval Chinese poetry of romantic or semi-erotic "palace style" (gongti 宮體) poetry, which dates from the late Southern Dynasties period (420-589). The translation is from Stephen Owen’s *The Late Tang*, 169.

[9] The song is from the *New Songs from Jade Terrace* 169.

[10] The original poem is from the *New Songs from the Jade Terrace*. It is quoted here from the third volume of the *Anthology of the Poems of Pre-Qin Han Wei Jin Southern and Northern Dynasties* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩. The translation is from Fusheng Wu’s *The Poetics of Decadence*.

[11] Ziqing Zhu. “The Chronicles of Li He,” *Journal of Tsinghua University*, Beijing, 1935:4, 887-915.

[12] The line is from the poem, “Antique Style”: “The Antique style is out of fashion./ The new style requires more effort./ All the girls in town wear hair one foot in height,/ not just mine is high.” In Lu Guimeng’s, *Lu Guimeng Ji*, in Qi Yusheng ed. *Zhonghua Wenxue Mingzhu Baibu*, 380.

[13] James Liu. *The Poetry of Li Shangyin: Ninth-Century Baroque Chinese Poet*.

[14] On Li Shangyin’s biography see James Liu’s *The Poetry of Li Shangyin*.

[15] Arthur Cooper. *Li Po and Tu Fu*.

[16] For an account of Li Shangyin’s relation to Buddhist nuns I refer to James Liu’s study.

[17] Paula M. Varsano. *The Rhetoric of hiddenness in Traditional Chinese Culture*, 1

[18] Stephen Owen. *The Late Tang. Chinese Poetry of the Mid-Ninth Century*.

[19] 世說新語 *A New Account of the Tales of the World* is a collection of 1,130 historical anecdotes and character sketches of some 600 celebrities who lived in the late Han and Wei–Jin periods from the second to the fourth century.

Chapter 3

Comparing Metaphysical and Mid-Late Tang conceits

The Conceit in English Metaphysical Poetry

Derived from the Italian term *concetto* (concept), a poetic conceit is an often unconventional, logically complex, or surprising metaphor whose delight is more intellectual than sensual. As a rhetorical device, it is usually an extended metaphor or allegory. A conceit forms an extremely ingenious or fanciful parallel between apparently dissimilar or incongruous objects or situations and often is so farfetched as to be absurd, in some cases turning into strained ornamentation. As the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* describes conceit: "all types of conceit share an origin which is specifically intellectual rather than sensuous. The poet compares elements which seem to have little or nothing in common, or juxtaposes images which establish a marked discord in mood."[1]

In classical Western poetry, there are usually two categories of conceit: the Petrarchan and the metaphysical conceits. The Petrarchan conceit came first to prominence in fourteenth and fifteenth century Renaissance literature, when poets began using them in their imitation of the Petrarchan sonnet. In these poems, conceits were used most often to compare lovers to beautiful things in nature, but because of overuse and lack of innovation, over time, these conceits gained a negative connotation of being overdone. In the seventeenth century, the metaphysical poets greatly popularized the use of the device but they used conceits so extensively and so unrestrainedly that they were quickly criticized. Samuel Johnson in his "Life of Cowley" refused to accept the works of the metaphysical poets as poems and defined their using of conceits as wit that "abstracted from

its effects upon the hearer," a combination of dissimilar images, or of occult resemblances that may be more adequately defined a kind of "discordia concors."[2]

Although Johnson's comments were unnecessarily negative, the conceits that we associate with the Metaphysical poets are actually more intricate intellectual devices. Their conceits usually establish an analogy between one entity's spiritual qualities and an object in the physical world and control the whole structure of the poem. In a metaphysical conceit, writes Alex Preminger in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, "the spiritual qualities or functions of the described entity are presented by means of a vehicle which shares no physical features with the entity" (148). The metaphysical conceit characterizes less conventional and more esoteric associations, which are used to fuse the sensory and the abstract, trading on the element of surprise and the unlikeness to hold the reader's attention. Helen Gardener defines conceit as the "most immediately striking feature" of metaphysical poetry, which is "a comparison whose ingenuity is more striking than its justness, or, at least, is more immediately striking."[3] But the emotion evoked by the conceit is not limited to surprise but, according to Preminger, always entails "a surprised cognition of the ultimate validity of the relationship presented in the conceit, which thus serves not as an ornament but as an instrument of vision" (149).

A metaphysical conceit is supposed to make sense intellectually rather than intuitively, because it is a blend of emotion and intellectual ingenuity that by strikingly comparing apparently unconnected ideas and things gets the reader startled out of his complacency and force him or her to think through the argument of the poem. Metaphysical poetry is less concerned with expressing feelings than with analyzing them, therefore, a conceit will make sense only through the poet's complex argumentation. A good example is John Donne's famous conceit of "The Flea" which

compares physical intimacy to a flea. The conceit makes sense only after the reader reads the argumentation that Donne makes in the poem.

The metaphysical poetry of the seventeenth century originated from the poetry of the preceding Elizabethan age without a major break. The typical Elizabethan poetry expressed comparatively simple and conventional themes in a style of conscious artifice and verbal elaboration, producing what Jack Dalglish calls, "mellifluous madrigals, charming love lyrics."[4] Moreover, the emphasis put on courtly love in poetry was also very indicative of the ideals followed by the Renaissance. Metaphysical poetry reacted against this idealized vision of love and opposed the "mellifluous sweetness" of courtly love by advocating a more realistic view in poetry (Fraser 87).[5] The metaphysical poets reacted against the stale conventions of the Elizabethan pastoral poets and sonneteers, explored the ramifications of their feelings and cast a new light on them from unexpected perspectives by finding connections between their feelings and intellectual concepts. Thus, metaphysical poetry became "a remarkable fusion of thought and feeling" (Dalglish 3), which is clearly crucial to the imagery of the metaphysical conceits that wanted to convey their feelings through "apparently" logical arguments. The imagery and conceit used in metaphysical poetry is not only for ornament or illustration, but it is also a means of communicating thoughts, exploring experience and finding new insights. Thus, the development of the conceit is also the development of the poet's thoughts.

Different from the Petrarchan conceit that was very popular with Renaissance writers of sonnets, the metaphysical conceit was a more intricate and intellectual device whose force rested not just in the unexpectedness of the image but also in how well the logical argument led the reader to respond emotionally in more appropriate ways. This characteristic is very evident in the poems of the three poets discussed in the thesis: John Donne, Andrew Marvell and John Crashaw. No

matter how serious the basic theme of the poem, beside the blend of passion and thought, a self-expressive awareness of a variety of attitudes towards experience is always contained in the conceits themselves, which is not discovered until the reader grasps the whole argument of the poem.

An interesting view on metaphysical conceits comes from Katrin Ettenhuber's discussion of the metaphysical conceit in Donne.[6] She aims to locate the origins of conceit in sixteenth and seventeenth century rhetorical discourse by analyzing "the cultural and aesthetic assumptions" that underlie the reactions to the Metaphysical by Hazlitt and Johnson. She also turns to early modern approaches that do not make use of the term conceit but employ figures of speech like catachresis, "a stylistic transgression consisting of far-fetched, incongruous speeches." Catachresis is evidence of a mind "that must wander into the confines" and gravitates towards remote corners of the poetic map. She also deals with the topographical approach which emerges in Renaissance logic manuals.

Ettenhuber's discussion is useful, when she claims that the metaphor "uniquely captures this register [as in Donne's Valediction poems] of grief and longing," and also "provides a temporary fiction of connectivity, as the lovers' minds converge in the remote logical places that constitute Donne's conceits (Ettenhuber 393). However, her study of the conceit, and of catachresis, is limited to Renaissance manuals and examples from English Metaphysical poets but does not take into account theories of conceit and metaphor (catachresis is a mixed metaphor), which were also being discussed in Europe at the time. Theorists of the Baroque, as Emanuele Tesauro, as we see from the next discussion by Van Hook, who also distinguished between conceits and metaphor, but Tesauro went further to establish similarities between the English Metaphysical poets and other Baroque poets.

Quite a different discussion on conceits we get from J. W. Van Hook whose perspective not only covers both the English Metaphysical poets and European baroque theory, but also attempts to establish the similarities between the two.[7] For Van Hook, metaphysical poetry and baroque poetry are synonymous, and baroque poetics can provide insights to both metaphysical conceits and the worldview that the poetry expresses. He also differentiates between conceit and metaphor with the difference that "the conceit has its foundation in a rhetorical structure with unprecedented poetic and epistemological aims of its own" (Hook 24).

For Baroque theory, Hook turns to the work of Italian baroque theorist, Emanuele Tesauro and his Cannocchiale Aristotelico (1654), for whom a conceit is a way of communicating between minds in order to by-pass questions of truth: "The object of a conceit is thus to communicate between the *ingegni* of the poet and his reader. It seeks to "relieve the listeners' minds in some way that will give them pleasure, without encumbering them with questions of truth"[8] (Tesauro 493, Hook 24). For Tesauro the distinctive and peculiarly balanced structure of the conceit is designed to "delight the intellect with ingenious trains of thought" in order to absorb the audience wholly in some intransitive cognitive experience" (Tesauro 124, Hook 33).

The syllogism proper to the poetic conceit has its own distinctive form that corresponds to its need to remain "unencumbered by questions of truth." This is what Tesauro calls a "cavillous enthymeme" or "ingenious fallacy ... lacking the full syllogistic form," which further guarantees the autonomy of its witty conclusions by ambivalently "basing its middle term on some metaphor" (Tesauro 495, Hook 33). The full form of the baroque conceit is thus a compound structure that includes both a metaphor and a fallacious argument built around it. Its two parts aim to engage the reader's judgment and imagination, simultaneously, to "seize the mind and excite it." What particularly distinguishes the conceit is its capacity to short-circuit the intellect's habitual guardian

function, allowing the poet access to an imagination unencumbered by its customary obligations to truth and possibility.

According to Matteo Peregrini, the other major Baroque theorist quoted by Van Hook, the conceit has the unparalleled power to surprise the mind at first encounter in such a manner that it cannot be a diligent judge of the things that the poet's images propose. "My goal," Peregrini writes, "is thus to liberate the *ingegno* from the need always to refer so strongly to whatever is the case. I want to inform it of the immense treasure which it has access to within the infinite realms man is capable of imagining"[9] (Peregrini 189, Van Hook 35). The notion of conceit in Peregrini and Tesauro holds the promise of new ways of experience. They express, according to Van Hook, the dissatisfaction that was widespread in the seventeenth century, both in England and on the Continent. He gives the example of John Donne's "Second Anniversarie," which speaks of the desire to "see all things despoyld of fallacies" (l. 295) and of fulfilling the rational faculty's latent potential by severing it from empirical experience and imagination:

> When will thou shake off this Pedantery,
> Of being taught by Sense, and Fantasy?
> Thou look'st through spectacles … (ll. 291-93)

Being impatient with the limitations imposed by these "spectacles," it is not surprising, Van Hook comments, that he should have produced as many examples of complex and elaborate rhetorical structures that Italian theorists identified as conceits.

Van Hook also quotes the witty enthymeme at the end of Donne's "The Good Morrow," as an example of true Baroque:

> What ever dues, was not mixt equally;

If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die (ll. 19-21).

According to Van Hook, Tesauro's analysis can help us distinguish conceits from any of these simpler structures, just as it can plausibly suggest that a sort of *maraviglia* (wonder) might be our most appropriate response to the conceits we identify. Ultimately, says Tesauro, conceits drive the mind toward a new mode of awareness and vision until the readers, "as though themselves altered, strangely modify whatever they come to speak of, magnifying things, or coupling them together in new ways" (Tesauro 501, Hook 35). In particular, Van Hook stresses the importance and significance of baroque poetics for readers of the metaphysical poets. Theorists like Tesauro make it possible for us to distinguish fully elaborated conceits, and some of their epistemological assumptions, from mere instances of uncomplicated paradox, sophistry, or metaphor, which are merely the elementary components of those figures.

In "Delle acutezze, che altrimenti spiriti, vivezze e Concetti si appellano" (1639), Matteo Peregrini makes the point that this type of conceit not only seeks to create "wonder" ("maraviglia"), but also serves as a kind of arch, or bridge, which makes sure that what is being said "penetrates and impresses itself more boldly" on the reader's understanding.[10] For Van Hook this is the distinguishing trait between Donne's style and that of Marvell and Herbert who tend to absorb the reader's imagination in the poem's "marvelous" reality. However, all these poets are, for Van Hook, ultimately, similar. "They aim to stretch the epistemological capacities of the reader by exercising the mental faculties in unfamiliar ways. He also quotes Tesauro to the effect that "Ultimately conceits drive the mind toward a new mode of awareness and vision until the readers, "as though themselves altered, strangely modify whatever they come to speak of, magnifying things, or coupling them together in new ways" (Van Hook 38, Peregrini 127, Tesauro 90).

In conclusion, Van Hook claims that neither "the dayes rude hoarse minstralsey" ("Love's Alchymie," l. 22) nor the wild promptings of unbridled fantasy would win Donne's unqualified endorsement" (Hook 38). Donne's poems embody the fusion of intellect and imagination to which, in "The Crosse" he refers as man's corrected "concupiscence of witt" (l. 58). This poetic attitude is what confused Dr. Johnson when he reduced the metaphysical conceits to a mere image and which baroque poetics "promises to make available to us once again" (Hook 38).

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The Conceit in Mid-Late Tang Poetry

As a rhetorical device, conceits are used in both Western and Eastern literature. According to one eminent Chinese critic, James Liu, "some later [Tang] poets resemble the Metaphysical Poets also in their use of far-fetched conceits, while earlier poets are generally content with comparisons that may easily occur to anyone."[11] By juxtaposing and by manipulating images and ideas in esoteric ways, the poet invites the reader to a more sophisticated understanding of his objects of comparison, in which the poet uses one or more technique to effectively induce a desired effect on the reader, such as setting a mood or a point of view. A great deal of Mid-late Tang poetry is allusive. A. C. Graham complains about the increasing allusiveness of Tang poetry, saying that "commentators illustrate nearly every line with quotations from older sources – standard references of mythological, historical, and geographical information, earlier examples of idioms, earlier uses of images which have accumulated special associations."[12] This is common in the Mid-late Tang poetry such as Li Shangyin's, in which images are the dominating factors while their allusions act as secondary factor. Imagery in these poems, as James Liu points out, usually "involves a juxtaposition or a comparison of two objects, or a substitution of one object for another,

or a translation of one kind of experience into another" (Liu 102). In the cases, imagery has the double function of describing an immediate object and pointing at an analogy or contrast at the same time.

For the Chinese poets we are discussing (Meng Jiao, Li He and Li Shngyin), the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763) proved to be the watershed event that separated Mid-late Tang poetry from its predecessors, and was responsible for turning its sublime and very formal imagery into a more subtle and gritty poetry. The imagery that had been an allusive device in the previous High Tang poetry became a target of poetic compositions and what had been the social function of poetry became a mean to convey "poetic ideas." Mid-late Tang poetry placed emphasis on expressing the poets' psychological experiences by associating them with images that became more and more allusive. Stephen Owen, who like Dr. Johnson is not very fond of allusive poetry, call this new poetic lineage, a "technical poetics," because, according to him, "the poem begins with a quest for a *trouvaille*, a lucky find," and somehow finds it.[13] Li He's poetic practice, as Owen suggests, "challenged older notions of Confucian poetics and, instead of being a pure manifestation of the poet's sentiments or identity, the poem became a combination of good fortune and craft" (Owen 113). It is hard to guess what Owen means by "good fortune" or whether his comment is also applicable to Meng Jiao and Li Shangyin. There is no "good fortune" in poetry but only craft. If the rhetorical devices that the poets use construct new ingenuous poetic visions this is not due to "good fortune" but to "good craft."

As a rhetorical device, conceits are also used in the Baroque Mid-late Tang lyric. At the level of theory what has been said above of the conceits that are applicable to English Metaphysical poetry and to Continental seventeenth century poetry also goes for Chinese Baroque poetry. However, while the scholarship on the Western Baroque abounds, as we have seen, this is not the

case. The label of "baroque" to Tang poetry, as I have indicated, is a recent addition. Therefore, the critical literature is minimal. Beside Frodsham, James Liu and Tak-wai Wong, who are the main proponents of the Baroque in Tang poetry, the term is hardly mentioned in critical discussions of this period. In fact, this is the main objective of my thesis: not only to show that Mid-late Tang poetry (and the poetry Meng Jiao, Li He and Li Shangyin can be read as Baroque poetry, but also that the way the term has been applied to these poets by Liu and Wong does not adequately do justice to their poems.

In many ways, to speak of conceits in Mid-late Tang poetry is to break new ground on the subject as there is no such a thing in Chinese literary criticism. On the contrary, there is a resistance to calling these poets, and others that I do not discuss such as Han Yu (a patron and friend of Meng Jiao), baroque. The situation is similar, to some extent, to what transpired in England with Dr. Johnson who called poets like Donne and Herbert "metaphysical" rather than "baroque," as was the trend, then, in Europe, and chose to view their conceits as images, as Van Hook has reminded us in his discussion. The reason for this resistance is ideological and has to do with the way we define the baroque. In Europe, at least, baroque poetry, as I have indicated in the Introduction, was associated with allegory, a non-artistic mode, which opposed traditional, symbolic forms of art. In fact, the baroque is defined by the way it departs, from a symbolic mode of art. Where traditional or Renaissance forms of art went out of their way "to hide art," namely, the rhetorical apparatus that made it possible, the baroque poet went out of his way to emphasize its rhetorical structure: the tropes that made up the poem. And whereas, traditional poetry gave the illusion that what was being portrayed was somehow related to reality, or had something to do with it, the baroque poet went out of his way to shatter this illusion. The baroque poet gives the illusion that he is describing reality but he also points out that this identification is in error. This particular characteristic of

allegory made the philosopher and literary critic Benedetto Croce wish, and believe, that the baroque was only confined to the seventeenth century, which he called the century "without poetry;" because for him poetry is only symbolic. After that he hoped to be done away with allegory. Allegory, therefore, is a sign of disruption, of error, of confusion and obscurity and most literary critics, East and West, have a natural dislike for allegory.

As I point out at the beginning of the Introduction, Nietzsche, instead, defined the "baroque" as a literary style that can be found in any period and in any place: in Continental Europe as well as in China. For Nietzsche, the baroque is also a necessary, if not inevitable, style because the illusion of the symbol can only deceive so much and for so long. We know that the art that conceals art is, after all, a rhetorical construct and that the referential illusion that it creates of imitating a world beyond art is only a deception. Eventually, poets tire of pretending and concealing their art and they exhibit their imagery in all their rhetorical best. The dislike for allegory is common to both literary critics East and West. In Chinese literary criticism this is clear not only in those treatises on aesthetics such as Haun Haussy, who in his major statement on aesthetics, *The problem of a Chinese aesthetic*, where the critic claims that allegory is only a Western concept and that Chinese aesthetics identifies with the symbol.[14] The problem is allegory.

However, this is also the case with literary critics who are sympathetic to the baroque like James Liu and Tak-wai Wong. As I have already discussed in the Introduction, James Liu was the first to write a study on Li Shagyin as a baroque poet. Tak-wai Wong also wrote a lengthy essay on the baroque where he discusses, and is critical of, not only Frodsham, who was actually the first to speak of a Chinese Baroque for Tang poetry, but also of James Liu. Despite their differences, however, Wong and Liu have a similar attitude toward the baroque. They not only reject allegory as a viable poetic mode but they approach a baroque poem as if it were a traditional, symbolic

poem. They do not speak of conceits or try to identify them, they list elements that in their view characterize the baroque, and that Chinese poems have in common with their English Metaphysical counterpart. When James Liu alludes to the conceits that Chinese poems may have in common with the English Metaphysical one, it is always in a very general way, as when he claims that "some later [Tang] poets resemble the Metaphysical Poets also in their use of far-fetched conceits, while earlier poets are generally content with comparisons that may easily occur to anyone" (Liu 114). Allusion is the main trope that James Liu, and others, identifies with Li Shangyin's poetry, but it is not viewed as a conceit but as a far-fetched allusion that creates obscurity rather than clarity. By juxtaposing and by manipulating images and ideas in esoteric ways, they believe that the poet invites the reader to a more sophisticated understanding of his objects of comparison, so as to effectively induce a desired effect on the reader, such as setting a mood or a point of view. However, rather than regarding allusion as a conceit the literary critic and the translator, in particular, are annoyed by it. A. C. Graham, for instance, whom I discuss in Chapter two in relation to Li Shangyin, complains about the increasing allusiveness of Tang poetry. According to him "commentators illustrate nearly every line with quotations from older sources – standard references of mythological, historical, and geographical information, earlier examples of idioms, earlier uses of images which have accumulated special associations."[15]

Since the Chinese literary critic looks at the English to develop his idea of the Baroque, he ignores the theoretical discussion by Tesauro or Peregrini, as we saw earlier, or by any other continental critic of the baroque. For him, we are dealing with images and not with conceits. So Liu identifies images as the dominating factor in the poetry of Li Shangyin rather than allusions. As James Liu points out, imagery in the poetry of Mid and Late Tang usually "involves a juxtaposition or a comparison of two objects, or a substitution of one object for another, or a

translation of one kind of experience into another" (Liu 102). In these cases, imagery has the double function of describing an immediate object and of pointing to an analogy and to a contrast at the same time.

I believe that the conceits that I describe in the Late Tang poems constitute a first in the history of Chinese literary criticism where they have been defined with any criteria. However, the credit should go to J. D. Frodsham, who was the first sinologist who thought of periodizing Chinese literature according to the Western model. He felt that just as we use Western terminology in History to differentiate the medieval from modern and contemporary periods, we ought to do the same with literary history.[16] He thought that we can also speak of Romanticism, Neo Classicism, as well as, Baroque in Chinese literature. Frodsham is the real pioneer in the study of Baroque in Mid-late Tang poetry, even though we do not have by him a specific study on the Chinese Baroque.

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Conceits of English Metaphysical Poetry

John Donne

The Flea:

The core conceit of the poem is the flea. The metaphysical conceit deals with a flea that has just bitten the speaker and his lover. The poet claims that the flea's bite joins them the same way as does sexual intercourse, and therefore her chastity should no longer be an issue stopping her

from yielding to him. She should not feel guiltier for having sex with him than having the flea unite their blood with a bite. Sex itself is but a small pleasure: “Mark but this flea, and mark in this/ how little that which deny’st me is” (ll. 1-2), and should not be taken too seriously. In the poem, the flea, the blood it extracts, and its final death, are different symbols of love.

The flea was not Donne’s invention. It was already a popular and widely used subject in erotic poems in the sixteenth century. To celebrate its popularity, there was a publication in 1582 of *La Puce de Madame de Roches*, a collection of poems on fleas in all the five major European languages: French, Spanish, Italian, Latin and Greek[17]. The reason fleas were thought to have a strong erotic association, besides its early popularity in the works of the Roman erotic poet Ovid, was related to the popular view, in the seventeenth century, that sex is the mingling of bloods and the fleas’ bloodthirsty nature allows them to bite and drink blood from different people and mix human bloods in their bodies. This coincidence makes the image of fleas a good metaphor for lust. Donne exploits this metaphor to the fullest and turns it into one of the most famous conceits of metaphysical poetry, if not of the English language. In Donne the conceit is used to persuade his lover to have sex with him before they are married. As the flea mingles the lovers’ bloods inside its body, the lovers are already united “sexually,” although she refuses to believe him that the mingling of their bloods is not “a sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhead.” As blood is the essence of life, in its body, the flea spares three lives: besides their own lives, there is also the flea’s life. Inside the flea, the poet and his beloved are in a relationship that is more than married, because the flea becomes their “marriage bed, and marriage temple.” When she tries to kill the flea, he tries to stop her but fails. After she kills the flea, the poet reminds her that she lost nothing except the drop of blood it sucked from her; and that by having sex with him she will not lose her honor except those few drops of blood. All the fears that prevented her from yielding to him were misplaced,

especially the fear of losing her honor that she feared the most, because all she will lose is what "this flea's death" took from her.

The Good Morrow

The main conceit of the poem is the legend of the Seven Sleepers. Donne uses it to deal with the different spiritual states of the lovers before and after falling in love, when they wake up after a night of sleeping together. The Seven Sleepers' legend, as Redpath points out, is translated from the Syrian in Gregory of Tours' *De Gloria Martyrum*. (Redpath 3) The story tells that in AD 250 or 251 during the persecution of the Christians by the Emperor Decius, seven Christian youths from Ephesus took refuge in a cave in a nearby mountain. Their pursuers walled up the entrance of the cave, with the intention of starving them to death; but the young men fell into a miraculous sleep, from which they did not wake up until sometime during the reign of Theodosius II (possibly AD 439 or AD 446). When they did, they thought they had been asleep only for a single night, and one of them, who went to the city for food, was amazed to find the cross, on the churches and other buildings, which, when he had fallen asleep, had been the object of desecration. When the seven youths of Ephesus wake up, they find a new world dominated by the victory of their belief, Christianity; similarly, when the lovers wake up, the new world they find is the miraculous joy of Love over sexual pleasure. Although the original legend has strong religious implications, Donne makes use of the legend for its own practical purposes. His focus is the contrast between the different spiritual states of the lovers before and after they have slept together. Before waking up, the state of lovers' spirituality is childish and immature; after they wake up, their spirituality has grown, and they wake up to true love. True love makes them see the world differently and a world that will never die.

The Sun Rising

The main conceit is the personification of the sun – a "busy old fool" – whose business is to get everyone out of bed and on the way to work. The poet complains and rails against the sun because when the sun rises, it wakes him up and disturbs him when he is asleep with his beloved. He tells the sun to go annoy schoolboys and rush them to school or to call on the huntsmen to prepare for the king's ride, or the farmer to work in the fields. The lover's seasons do not change according to the sun but have their own pace, which is set by the lovers. The sun, which creates time, has no influence on love; in love there is no time.

The poet's arguing with the sun generates most of the humor of the poem, especially, when he claims that he is stronger than the sun, because he can "eclipse and cloud" his beams just by blinking. At the end of the poem, the poet makes a deal with the sun. He does not have to shine on all the treasures of the world but just on him and his beloved because all the treasures of the world are there with them.

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Andrew Marvell

To His Coy Mistress

The main conceit is the *carpe diem* motif: Time and Death will bring away their youth and beauty and, therefore, the mistress should yield to the poet and enjoy their love. To persuade her, the poet uses biblical references and the concept of vegetable love to exaggerate how long it would take if they waited, but this is all time they do not have. The motif of the winged chariot is also used to indicate how fast time runs. Time is fast and brief, therefore the mistress should not waste

too much time by hesitating. Time will also affect his mistress' beauty. The poet would gladly give her all the years she needs to make up her mind and hopefully decide for him, if they had "world enough, and time." If he had time he would admire every part of her beautiful body, praise her endlessly, accept her coyness, and even allow her to refuse him and wait for her for all eternity. But there is no time. The poem provides Marvell with the opportunity to show all his scholarly knowledge. He makes use of the popular millenarian ideas of the seventeenth century to express the length of time that his mistress could take to overcome her hesitation and shyness. The biblical references go back to the Flood as recorded in Genesis in the Old Testament; to God's decision to return to earth and the "conversion of the Jews" and a reference to Christ's second coming. The concept of the vegetable in the tripartite soul is used to emphasize his view of time. The "vegetable love," literally means that love is like a vegetable, a plant that will grow taller and taller and reach different parts of his mistress' body. However, since they do not have the luxury of thousands of years, the poet becomes impatient and tries to put pressure on her. He reminds her as she grows old, her treasured virginity will only be loved by worms in her grave. She could save her virginity to the bitter end, but her life will be over before she knows it. He tells her that she would not lose any honor if they slept together, so it would be better to make the most of it and not waste any more time, while they are still in their prime. This is the typical leitmotif of *carpe diem*: seize the day and do not hold back love because beauty melts away and time elapses irrevocably.

The Definition of Love

The main conceits of this poem explore the nature of love. Marvell is concerned with the unattainability of "two perfect but irreconcilable" loves rather than the fulfillment of love through union, and focuses on the role of despair rather than, as in most other poems, according to Nigel Smith, "hope usually precedes despair in descriptions of the progress of love."[18] This love is

perfect and divine, and therefore unattainable. Personified Despair and Impossibility are the parents of this rarely born love, and Fate is the jealous obstructer. Perfect love of this kind is most unwelcome to Fate who never permits the union of perfect lovers. His love can be achieved only if three conditions are fulfilled: first, the spinning planets must collapse; second, the earth should be torn asunder by some new convulsion; and third, the whole world should be cramped or flattened into a planisphere. The allegorical status of these images is clear since they are all impossible to fulfill: love cannot be fulfilled and the lovers cannot be united. The poet compares his love and his beloved to parallel lines that never meet. Only oblique lines meet in all geometrical angles, in the same way only the passion of guilt or of adulterous lovers can be satisfied. Thus, this kind of perfect love can only achieve a spiritual union, never a physical one: "the conjunction of the mind, / And opposition of the stars."

The Unfortunate Lover

The main conceit is the allegory of the unfortunate lover. The poem depicts the misfortunes that befell a lover who is unfortunate because he is the victim of a series of misfortunes, but he is also fortunate because only unhappy lovers become famous while the happy ones are soon forgotten. Marvell's allegory includes references to mythic imagery that establish a relation between the lover and the soul. The poem is one continued metaphor that describes the inevitable suffering of the "time-bound soul," the lover's sacrifice and his redemption. The miserable sufferings of the unfortunate lover from the forced Caesarean section at his birth to his tragic death are an allegory of the unfortunate lover's soul and of his fate. As Nigel Smith writes, "the unfortunate lover's career in the world of passion corresponds to the temporal life of the soul" (Smith 76).

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Richard Crashaw

To the Noblest and the Best of Ladies, the Countess of Denbigh

The main conceit of the poem is the parallel between spiritual rebirth and the delivery of the Countess's soul, who is being persuaded to convert to the Catholic faith, and her hesitation to opening her heart. Conversion is like a rebirth for the soul aspiring to convert; the soul is in labor, in the sense that only her own efforts can make it happen. The main allegory is of a trembling heart halting at the gate of bliss, as the Countess' s doubts are said to be "Twixt Life and Death." Crashaw describes the spiritual state of the Countess, before making a decision, as a state of paralysis of the will, where any hesitation can be fatal. The longer she delays, the more pain she will suffer, as she is prolonging the birth pains of her soul. The habit of delay is her foe: "To save your Life, kill your Delay."

An Epitaph upon Husband and Wife

The main conceit of this poem is death as the second wedding and the grave as the second marriage bed. As the couple is buried together, their death is their second wedding and Death is the host to the ceremony. The grave becomes their second marriage bed where they can enjoy the love that will bind them forever. Fate may force the lovers to die physically by separating their bodies and souls, but it cannot deny their marriage because the lovers took vows before God and lived together in "one life." One should not weep for their physical death, because their souls are not dead; they have just fallen asleep. The lovers are like turtles covered in their shells lying together and sleeping in the same grave: this is the last bond with which love can bind the two souls. Although the grave is not comfortable, the stone pillow hard and the sheets are cold, it is

safe because “love made the bed” for them. When the stormy night ends and the pathos is gone, eternal life will come. And the couple will wake and rise from their dark grave to the heaven where there is no night and no death.

The Flaming Heart

The main conceit of the poem is the conflict between the figural and the verbal representations of Saint Teresa. Crashaw’s point is that the painting does not record faithfully the events of her death. The painter has mistaken the mysterious experiences described in her autobiography and has portrayed her as a weak, pale, faint female who has bright cheeks because of the bright Angel besides her. Crashaw, however, provides the correct version where he highlights the bodily desire of the saint to show her love to God and God’s loving response in her transcendental ecstasy. Crashaw believes that the religious ecstasy is in “the Hand of this great Heart” that felt as if a Dart was thrust into Saint Teresa. His version of the painting entails a reversal of the traditional gender roles of masculine strength and feminine weakness. He writes: “Give him the veil, give her the dart.” The poet addresses the saint in the first person and tells her that her love is so strong and ardent that she arouses a similar emotive response in him. He describes the “mysteries” of Saint Teresa’s ecstatic rapture as the “Lights and Fires,” “eagle in thee,” “lives and deaths of love” and large “thirsts of love.” The final lines describe Saint Teresa as the vehicle to achieve eternal life, just as reading this poem, rather than looking at the painting, as an inspiration to model one’s own life on the life of Saint Teresa.

Metaphysical Themes.

John Donne’s “The Flea” takes the form of an erotic, humorous narrative. The predominant theme is the seduction of his lover that is brought about through the conceit of the flea. The

strikingly original conceit of the flea is used to demonstrate that the two lovers are already united because the flea has bitten both their bodies and has mixed their blood. The poet wants to convince her that surrendering her virginity would be no shame under the sanctified circumstances provided by the flea. The tone of the poem is highly ironic, dramatic and quite amusing. The poem is a parody of the declarations of love and devotion typical of traditional love poetry. In their place, the poet offers philosophical and theological arguments that aim to persuade her that their union has already been consummated within the flea's little body. The poem wonderfully exemplifies Donne's confident and finely skilled rhetoric that makes a mockery of such an important subject and related high ideals. Donne's wit is illustrated by his ability to embody sexual desire, sin, sacred love and holy marriage in the body of a flea, before the woman finally kills it. The flea means nothing at all; just as losing her virtue means nothing at all. "The Flea" is a rhetorical tour de force, which, in an apparently simple poem, turns an entire tradition of love poetry on its " baroque" head.

John Donne's poems contain several themes that frequently appear in his love lyrics, such as the lovers as a microcosm and neo-platonic love. These themes are found in "The Good Morrow" and "The Sun Rising," which incorporate Renaissance notions of the human body as a microcosm and lovers as constituting an entire world unto themselves. During the Renaissance, it was believed that the human body was a microcosm that mirrored the macrocosm of the world and universe. According to this view, the intellect governs the body, much like the king or queen governs the land. Donne's use this conceit to imply, instead, that lovers' bodies contain the whole world, since they are so enraptured with each other that they believe they are the center of the world and that nothing else matters but them. In "The Sun Rising," the poet tells the sun to shine exclusively on him and his beloved and, in so doing, the sun will shine on the entire world. Donne also draws on the Neo-platonic conception of physical and spiritual love as being two manifestations of the

same impulse, and employs the concept in most of his love poems. In "The Good Morrow," for instance, Donne compares the lovers to the Seven Sleepers in the cave to the time before the lovers awoke in true spiritual love. In this poem, John Donne brings together the subject of love and religion so that his love poetry becomes imbued with religious images and meanings.

The other major theme of Metaphysical poetry is death, which is one of Andrew Marvell's favorite themes and is at the center of his most famous poem, "To His Coy Mistress," where death is the logical premise of the *carpe diem* motif, and the main mode of persuasion used by the poet to seduce his mistress. In "The Definition of Love" the main theme is time, but the poet, as Ann Berthoff suggests, is mainly concerned with defining love "by the natural condition of temporal being."[19] In "The Unfortunate Lover," the theme of death is the premise of all the conceits of the poem: the paradisiacal garden, the storming sea, the tragic battle against Fortune, and the final apotheosis. The imagery of the battle against Fortune, one of the principal tropes, serves as the dramatic analogue, although, as Berthoff points out, "it appears largely as decorative reinforcement rather than dramatic metaphor" (Berthoff 83). The unfortunate lover is doomed to fail in the battle and die, because his death is an essential premise of his apotheosis at the end of the poem: "Yet dying leaves a perfume here, / And music within every ear: / And he in story only rule, / In a field sable a lover gules."

The same combination of religious devotion and spiritual love, and a concern with the theme of love in death is also found in John Crashaw's "An Epitaph upon Husband and Wife," where death is said to be a second marriage. More typical of Crashaw are his erotic-religious poems, "The Flaming Heart" and "To the Countess Denbigh," where religious enlightenment becomes a form of sexual ecstasy. In these poems, there is a parallel between spiritual fulfillment derived from religious enlightenment and sexual pleasure. In "The Flaming Heart," Crashaw hopes that his

poem on St. Teresa can light a fire in his cold heart and lead him along a similar mystical path, up to the total annihilation of his-self. In "The Letter to the Countess Denbigh," the poet invokes God as if he were Cupid and implores him to find the arrow that could open the countess' heart. The poem concludes with an exhortation to the Countess to succumb to God's Love, which echoes the conventions of traditional love poetry: Love lays siege to her heart and to the fort of her "fair self."

Conceits of Mid-Late Tang Poetry

The Chinese poets and their poems discussed in the thesis derive from a slightly different situation from that of the metaphysical poets. Meng Jiao, the first of the three Tang poets, is one of the leading figures of the trend "return to the antique." His poetry shows a moral seriousness and artistic self-consciousness, which was the core value of what Confucius saw as the didactic function of literature, which had been weakened by the popularity of the High Tang's military heroism. The "return" is based on great social changes and political events that occurred in the second half of the eighth century which, as Stephen Owen claims, made Mid-Tang intellectuals like Meng Jiao, "less ambivalent and gave their allegiance more exclusively to traditionally Chinese social and moral values."[20] The ethical focus of Meng's poetry conformed to the high moral standards of the past that were highly regarded and to which he tried to return. The "ruggedness" of Meng Chiao's poetry seems to have approximated the poems of the Book of Songs, by comparison to the smoothness, balance, and parallelism of High Tang regulated verse. But even this analysis does not do justice to Meng's poetry. As Owen states, Meng Chiao carried this raggedness to such an extreme that "his poetry was felt to be more 'ancient than others'" (Owen 18). Besides his departure from the "smoothness, balance and parallelism" of his predecessors in

the High Tang, Meng developed a personal style with several notable characteristics that distinguished him from his contemporaries. Owen lists them as the use of unusual words and images to startle the reader; a tendency for hyperbole showing both cleverness of conceit and awkwardness; a tendency to speak in absolutes, in terms of "all" or "none," which in his later poetry allows the poet to make his "absolute" ethical judgments; a strong ethical position by which he evaluates all phenomena in terms of good and evil; finally, moral and ethical metaphors, which are used to heighten moral qualities and evaluate distinctions (Owen 24). In the three poems discussed here, these traits are very easily detected. The landscapes in "Cold Creek" and the "Sorrows of the Gorges" are startlingly allegorical to represent the imbalance of the natural world by contrast to the cosmic order. In "Autumn Meditation," the poetic logic of Meng's world is perfectly developed as many different worlds are made to coexist in one allegorical narrative.

Meng Jiao

Cold Creek III

As the title of the poem indicates, this is the third of a series of nine poems placed together in a narrative. The main conceit of poem III illustrates the general barren and unusual early spring coldness which is common to all the poems. The frozen waves, the abandoned feathers, the frozen blood, the ghostly village of thorns and brambles, communicate a sense of a world dark, bitter and in decay. The macabre deaths of the fish and the birds are the poet's way of denouncing the disastrous age he lives in and the poor people like him who are made to suffer.

Autumn Thoughts VI

The poem is the fourth of a narrative of fifteen poems linked by a common theme or allegory. The main conceit in this poem is the moonlight which, unlike the romantic and friendly moon of

Li Bai, it has knife blades and a sword. This moon, instead of warming the poet's soul, freezes it, by reminding him of his remaining life. The moonlight appears to shed light on the foulness of the world and appears to wash it clean; however, this is only an illusion. The poem is an allegory of the impossibility of poetry to whitewash reality and to give a romanticized and illusory view of the world. Like the moonlight, poetry can only provide the illusion of a better world, but this illusion is denounced as an error.

Laments of the Gorges III

The poem is the third of a series of ten poems whose main conceit is the personification of the distorted landscape of the Gorges that reflect the poet's own emotions. The Gorges are also the recipients of the memories of people and events that took place there and who now address the poet as an "exile" who has finally found his home in these places, which is also the end of the line for him.

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Li He

Li He was one of the most imitated Mid Tang poets for his ironic style of poetry, which disregarded traditional poetic forms. His poems are filled with macabre as well as sensual imagery, with an obsession for the eroticism of the Southern Dynasties Palace Style poetry, and for themes of impossible and tragic love. The "Song of Ho-yang," which is not about a place named "Ho-Yang," is about the impossibility of love, about lovers who meet years later, and are now indifferent and stranger to each other. Some of his other poems are famous for the emphasis they place on sensuality and eroticism, and for the love and death theme. In "The Tomb of Su Xiaoxiao," the irony of the poem consists in the discrepancy between an apparently natural landscape and the

tomb where the famous prostitute Su Xiaoxiao rests. As she believed that even in death she would wait for her lover, Li He's irony makes clear that even in death one waits in vain. The poet is at his best when rewriting typical Palace Style poetry, apparently imitating the genre but subtly subverting it. This is the case of the other poem, "A Lovely Woman Combing Her Hair: A Song." In this version, the woman in her morning ritual of doing her hair is no longer young and is no longer the object of admiration. After her usual, lengthy routine she has no other expectation than going in the garden alone to pick a spray of cherry blossoms.

Song of He-yang

This poem, like the next two, takes as its premise a traditional poem that provides the poet with the freedom to express his own poetic view. The title, Heyang Song, refers to Heyang, a location north of the Yellow River. Usually, in traditional Chinese poetry, poems that have titles after places describe some event or some lore about the place, but this is not the case with this poem. It is typical of Li He to take up a traditional form and turn it into whatever subject he likes.

The main conceit of the poem is given in the first line: "When you dye silk clothes/Autumn blue is a difficult shade to get." This is the conceit of the dyed cloth to indicate that feelings between lovers do not develop easily, but require time and communication. Most often, however, the lovers do not always come together, as one never gets the shade of blue one desires. Critics are divided as to whether the poem is about the poet's personal experience or someone else's. The question does not affect the reading of the poem since it is clear that the person is now old and the girl he was in love with is still working as a singing girl in a state-run entertaining house. Once they were madly in love, now the man sees her at a performance. They do not sit together, but apart from each other, but he believes she must have seen him as well. The poem illustrate the

initial conceit that “Autumn blue is a difficult shade to get,” but the poem is also ironic because “autumn blue,” can also be understood as a pun on “autumn” as a late stage in life. The feeling of loss and sadness that the man feels about a love affair that could have been, is only realized too late, in the “autumn” of one’s life.

Su Xiaoxiao’s Tomb

This poem is also ironic in that it tells the story of Su Xiaoxiao who was a famous prostitute, and a very good singer who died young of an illness. Li He uses many of the conceits associated with her life story but gives his own personal version. The main conceit is the “oiled sides coach” which was a symbol of Su Xiaoxiao and which becomes in Li He’s poem her tomb, as people at the time believed. The other conceit is the “true love knot,” knotted with two laces or belts, which is said to be the symbol of undying love but it is also a euphemism for sexual intercourse in erotic literature. In the Tang dynasty, there was a version of this story that on stormy nights, when people went by her tomb, they could hear the sound of music and her singing coming from the tomb. This was a popular song whose theme was that true love can only be had after death, in the tomb. It is believed that Li He never visited her tomb, but in his version of Xiaoxiao’s story, the irony is that she waits for her lover in vain, because for Li He not even in death one can find true love.

Song: A Lovely Girl Combing Her Hair

The main conceit of the poem is a woman making herself beautiful at the morning toilet, which was a traditional Palace Style poem, which described women as precious toys. In Li He’s poem the woman is only doing her hair, which in itself, is an arduous and lengthy task. Li He’s ironic take on this type of poem is to portray the woman as no longer beautiful or in her prime.

When she is finally done up and ready to meet the men, there is none to wait for her. She has spent hours doing her hair only to go alone in her garden to pick cherry blossoms.

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Li Shangyin

Li Shangyin is perhaps unique in Late Tang poetry because of the great variety of his poetic compositions, but also because of their allusiveness which gave him the reputation as a difficult poet. One major difficulty is that Li Shangyin, as James Liu has written, is a truly Baroque poet so that his poems cannot be read as if they were symbolic representations of real events. The best example is the "Ornamented Zither," in which, despite the beauty and sensuality of the images and the sense of loss conveyed by the poem, it is pointless to assign a definite meaning to all these images and allusions. The poem is not an imitation of the fifty strings zither of old but an allegory of the impossibility of ever coinciding with it. The poem does not bring about the recollection of youthful years because the tragic loves stories to which the poem alludes leave the poet indifferent, because he is already "bewildered and lost." A similar poem, "Written on the Monastery Wall," apparently about Buddhism, is on close reading a story of unfulfilled love of those Buddhist nuns who still feel the call of the flesh. The references to the oyster's unfilled womb and to the amber's desire for the pine are metaphors for their unfulfilled desires. The poem does not promote or denounce the practice of Buddhism but provides only an insight into a reality of which the poet, most likely, was acquainted.[21] The third poem, the "Lamp," is one of those poems about things that poets can write about any "thing" they like, like a "Lamp." However, when a poet like Li Shangin writes about a lamp it is never about a lamp, but, as in this case, the lamp becomes an allegory of poetry itself. Just as the lamp suggests to the viewer stories, events, love stories, a poem,

likewise, uses figures or tropes to allude to stories and to events. The light of the lamp, like language, is used discreetly by the poet who advices us not to point it directly at something but to use it with discretion, just the poet does in alluding to the Buddhist nuns in the previous poem.

The ornamented zither

The main conceit of the poem is, of course, the zither that helps the poet to recollect his past, his youthful years. However, from the myths and legends that are recollected -- the spring heart of Emperor Wang's spring heart, which is entrusted to a cuckoo, or the mermaids crying tears of pearls, or the tragic love affair of Purple Jade who kills herself for love -- it is clear that the youthful years are not worth recollecting. All these conceits do not lead to knowledge of the past but only to confusion and bewilderment.

Written on the monastery wall

In this seemingly religious poem on Buddhism, the main conceits, of the oyster and the amber, refer to Buddhist nuns enclosed in the four walls of a Buddhist monastery who still yearn for love and sexual fulfillment. The unfulfilled oyster and the unset amber symbolize their sexual desires that have not yet been "hollowed" by the new faith.

Lamp

The poem belongs to a poetic category called "Poem on Things" which allows the poet to represent just any "thing" he likes. The main conceit is the lamp which sheds light and shadow over objects in a room. The lamp is also a metaphor for the poem, which describes the different elements in the room – the paintings, the chess set, the bedroom, according to the emphasis that the poet wants to give. The "Lamp" is an allegory of how a poem is constructed and how it signifies,

what it says and what does not. What the poet describes is what the lamp allows him to see, just as what he describes in the poem is what language allows him to do.

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Comparing English Metaphysical and Mid-Late Tang Poetry

From what has been said, it is clear that the baroque styles of the English Metaphysical poets and Mid-late Tang Poets are somewhat different even though they are formally the same. In their attempt to counter tradition with rhetorical innovations, metaphysical poets sought in conceits a way to maintain their poetic originality and personal freedom of expression. With the conceits of the Flea, the Seven Sleepers, and a humorous dialogue with the Sun, John Donne was able to express old ideas in new ways. Love is always the theme, both erotic and spiritual, but now it is couched in conceits that are no longer commonplace: the combining of blood in a flea to suggest a love bond and a marriage bed; the religious metaphor of the "Seven Sleepers" to suggest the radical difference between erotic and spiritual love; and the personification of the sun in "The Sun Rising" which rotates around the lovers solely for their benefit. The theme of love, or seduction, is found also in Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." Here the old Renaissance motif of *carpe diem* is still at work. The shadow of mortality and the threat of running out of time make powerful arguments to seduce the unwilling mistress. The theme of death is also at work in "The Unfortunate Lover" where it becomes an instrument of redemption for the unfortunate lover, while in "The Definition of Love" the poet makes a plea for platonic love for the lovers whose parallel loves will never meet. John Crashaw, instead, is an example of religious poetry where the erotic and the spiritual seem to go hand in hand in "The Countess of Denbigh" and in the portrait of St. Teresa in "The Flaming Heart." In Crashaw's "The Epitaph of a Husband and wife," death also

makes its appearance where it is defined as a second marriage. What characterizes these metaphysical poems as baroque is the way they make use of traditional Renaissance themes by re-presenting them in new ways, by breaking through the traditional and symbolic mold of their predecessors. They were castigated for it by their critics, but, today, for the same reasons we call them modern.

Love and death are not the themes of the Mid-late Tang poets I chose to discuss but since they are universal themes they find their way even in their poems. The significant difference between the Metaphysical poets and that the Mid-late Tang poets is that these work within a poetic tradition that they make their own by modifying it or subverting it. Li He's fascination with the Southern Dynasty Palace Style poetry makes him retell, in an ironic mode, the story of the prostitute Xiao Xiao and the legend that she will wait for her lover even in death, only to make the point that even then she will wait in vain. In "A lovely Girl combing her hair," Li He takes up a popular Palace Style poem, which objectified women as toys, in order to create the portrait of a woman in her morning ritual of doing her hair, but because she is no longer young she has no expectation that she will be admired or in demand.

Li Shangyin, to a certain extent, is an exception. He is more versatile and an innovator. Some of his poems like "The Ornamented zither" do not fall in any specific traditional form. Some of his late poetry is considered religious because he became a Buddhist late in life, but the poem "Written on a Monastery Wall" is not religious. As in most of his poems, Li Shangyin introduces elements that disrupt the apparent theme of the poem. In this poem, the erotic disrupts the spiritual with the tragic case of nuns in Buddhist monasteries who are still pining away for love. When Li Shangyin deals with a set poetic form, like "Poems on Things" he is being anything but traditional, though he is read as such. The "Lamp" does not just represent a "Lamp," as the poem

is often read, but becomes an allegory of the way a poem is written. Like a lamp that sheds light and darkness on the objects in a room, suggesting possible tragic stories, the poem does the same by means of tropes and metaphors that point to meanings that are never made explicit.

I have left a discussion of Meng Jiao's poetry for last because his poetry is also an exception. His poems can truly be said to be allegorical and/or baroque. The poems I have chosen to discuss are part of longer narratives that portrays a desolate and decaying landscape, where death and corruption are the main themes. These poems were written late in life but, as he tells us in "Autumn Thoughts," translated by David Hinton, he used to write very different type of poems in his youth, which provided him with a better income. This poetry was vigorous but "it was empty discourse." Now his poetry is no longer "empty" but it is no longer successful, "Now my poetry declines – what can I rely on?" We do not know the type of poetry that Meng used to write in his youth and that he calls "empty," we only know that the type of poetry that he wrote late in life, such as "Cold Creek" and "Laments of the Gorges," are "meaning-full" and "no longer an empty discourse." We only know that while this poetry did not provide him with a better income, his poems have guaranteed him a place in our modernity.

NOTES

[1] Alex Preminger. *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 148.
[2] Samuel Johnson. "Lives of the Poets – Abraham Cowley (1779)," 51.
[3] Helen Gardener. *The Metaphysical Poets*, xxiii.
[4] Jack Dalglish. *Eight Metaphysical Poets*, 2.
[5] G. S. Fraser. , *A Short History of English Poetry*, 87.
6 Katrin Ettenbauer. "Comparisons are odious? Revisiting the Metaphysical conceit in Donne." *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, vol. 62, no. 255 (June 2011), 393- 413.
7 J. W. Van Hook. "Concupiscence of Witt": The Metaphysical Conceit in Baroque Poetics." *Modern Philology*, vol. 84, no. 1 (August 1986), 24-38.
8 Emanuele Tesauro. *Il Cannocchiale Aristotelico*. 1670 edition. Reprint. Hamburg, 1968.
[9] Matteo Peregrini. "Fonti dell' ingegno ridotti ad arte." (1650) Abridged in *Trattatisti e narratori del Seicento*. Ed. Ezio Raimondi. Milan: 1969.
[10] Matteo Peregrini. *Delle Acutezze che altrimenti spiriti, vivezze e Concetti si appellano*.(1639) Abridged in *Trattatisti e narratori del Seicento.* Ed. Ezio Raimondi. Milan: 1969, p. I 18.
[11] James J Y Liu. *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, 114.
[12] A. C. Graham. *Poems of the Late Tang*, 27.
[13] Stephen Owen. *The End of Chinese "Middle Ages,"* 111.
[14] Haun Saussy. *The problem with Chinese aesthetic*. Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1993.
[15] A. C. Graham. *Poems of the Late Tang*, 27.
[16] J. D. Frodsham. *New Perspectives in Chinese Literature*. 1968.
[17] Theodore Redpath. *The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne*, 175.
[18] Nigel Smith. *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, 107.
[19] Ann E. Berthoff. *The Resolved Soul: A Study of Marvell's Major Poems*, 106.
[20] Stephen Owen. *The Poetry of Meng Jiao and Han Yu*, 3.
[21] On Li Shangyin' s acquaintance with Buddhist nuns see *The Poetry of Li Shangyin: Ninth-Century Baroque Chinese Poet*.

Conclusions

The idea of working on the Baroque and of comparing the Metaphysical poets and the Mid-late Tang poets came from reading James Liu's study on Li Shangyin as a baroque poet. I meant to expand his study to other poets, as Tak-wai Wong also suggests in his study. I became aware, however, through Wong's critique of Liu and of Frodsham, as well as from Wong's and Liu's analyses of how Chinese poets compare to Metaphysical poets, that their study did not provide me with a satisfactory guide to investigate other poets. I must say that it was my supervisor, professor Massimo Verdicchio's paper on Li Shangyin and the Baroque to open my eyes to what where the shortcomings of Liu's and Wong's study. He wrote in that paper, which I also mention in the Introduction, that Liu's and Wong's notion of "baroque" was a historical and not a formal concept. They believe that the Baroque consists in a few elements that are characteristic of the genre but they discard the essential characteristic of the baroque as a poetic concept, which is "allegory." As a result, they approach an allegorical poem like Li Shangyin's the "Ornamented zither" as a traditional and symbolic poem. My supervisor adhered to Nietzsche's notion of the Baroque as a poetic style which can be found in different ages and cultures because what is baroque are not the specific devices a poet uses, which are common to any poetry, but a style of art which is predicated on the demystification of art as symbol.[1] This process of demystification occurs at any time in literary history, in the West as well as in the East, in Europe as well as in China, wherever, Nietzsche writes, "any great art starts to fade, whenever the demands in the art of classic expression grow too great." This is the path that I hope I have followed in the thesis in my analysis of both the English Metaphysical poets and of the Mid-late Tang poets.

The main reason behind the thesis, however, was my desire to bring together Tang poetry close to its Western counterparts, the English Metaphysical poets. As a Comparative Literature student, I saw the opportunity to bring these two poetic schools, which I admired, together. James Liu's study on Li Shangyin baroque poetry gave me the idea that through comparative analysis one could establish a bridge between East and West, between the glorious epoch of Elizabethan England and the splendor of the Tang dynasties. My inspiration, however, was J. D. Frodsham, the world renowned sinologist and translator who had, as I have mentioned in the Introduction, a similar desire not only to bring the East and West cultures together, but to even Westernize Chinese literary history. In his view, it would benefit Chinese culture and literature if we described the different Chinese literary stages on the Western model rather than in dynasties. This is where his idea of Chinese baroque poetry, or baroque Tang poetry, was born. He thought that this period of Chinese literary history, the ninth century, was comparable to the seventeenth century in the West. This was not just an educated guess. As a translator of Li He, and of other major poets of the Tang dynasty, he knew that these poets, like their English Metaphysical counterparts, had similarly moved away from traditional ways of doing poetry. In their poems, they did not try to give, any longer, an accurate picture of the reality around them but their focus became the poem itself, its rhetoric, through which, nonetheless, they tried to communicate their vision of reality.

As a good reader of Chinese poetry, Frodsham understood that Chinese poets were doing what their counterparts were doing in other centuries. He knew that ninth century Tang poetry was not all that different from seventeenth century English Metaphysical poetry. This conviction also influenced the way he translated and interpreted Tang poetry. Most poems translated by Chinese scholars in China, but also in the West, tend to be very literal, as translators try to give as close a rendition of the original as possible. While this is an acceptable procedure, the results are not

equally satisfactory. In most cases, one gets a general idea of what the poem is about but it is difficult to understand it in its details. Frodsham's translations, however, are done with the Western reader in mind. He also reads the poem as close as possible to the original, but in his final translation he turns it into a Western poem. My knowledge of Chinese allowed me to see the difference between the two types of translations, which I have discussed in Chapter two, on Mid-late Tang poetry. I must say that I prefer Frodsham's translations to the more literal ones of the other translators. Where I have not followed Frodsham is in his attempt to turn Chinese literary history to Western literary history. I think we are fine as we are.

In conclusion, I would have liked to deal with more poets from both sides. As it is I have taken into account only three metaphysical poets (John Donne, Andrew Marvell and John Crashaw) and for each only three of their poems. And I have dealt only with what I thought were the most representative "baroque" poets: Meng Jiao, Li He and Li Shangyin. Important poets on both sides, like George Herbert and Henry Vaughn for the Metaphysical poets and Han Yu and Bai Juyi for the Tang poets could not be dealt with. It is my hope to include these poets, and others, in a later comparative study of the Baroque East and West.

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche. "On the Baroque style." *Human, All too Human. A Book for free spirits*, 245-46.

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