POLITICS AND POETICS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF JOHN KEATS AND LI HE

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
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in the Department of English
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

By
Changming Yuan
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THESIS

POLITICS AND POETICS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF

JOHN KEATS AND LI HE

This thesis presents a comparative study of the poetry of John Keats and Li He, both of whom are considered major "romantic" poets in so-called world literature. Using various approaches--thematic, biographical and New Historicism--the study explores similarities as well as differences between the two poets' ideas and literary expressions, demonstrating how politics and poetics are closely interrelated.

Chapter One treats "romanticism" as a useful term representing a crosscultural literary value, which may be found in the work of writers like Keats and Li who are geographically and historically widely separate. Chapter Two concentrates on those contextual elements which contributed in an important way to the development of Keats and Li as poets; that is, their biographical backgrounds, their sociopolitical milieux, their intellectual environments, and the literary arenas in which they were situated. Chapter Three deals with patriotism as an important theme in both Keats's and Li's poetical writings. But mainly as a result of the differences between their cultural and sociohistorical backgrounds, the two poets' patriotic concerns are very different: while Keats's patriotism places emphasis on
the issue of freedom, Li is concerned primarily with the problem of national reunification. Chapter Four discusses the two poets' similar tendency against the established order: just as legitimate tyranny, the conservative government, the English Church and other reactionary institutions are the object of Keats's satirical exposure, the decadence of the ruling classes and the darkness in his political reality are a constant target of Li's attack. Chapter Five investigates the two poets' abiding concern for human suffering. Chapter Six displays Keats's and Li's common quest for the ideal in the worlds of art, nature, myth and dream as a poetic effort to redeem rather than escape the harsh reality of the human world.

The study finds that although there are certain ideological and stylistic differences between the two poets, they share many important thematic interests. While their differences may serve to illustrate how each poet is formed and informed by his contextual specificities, their similarities point forcefully towards romanticism as a crosscultural literary category. On a different plane, this comparative thesis suggests that at similar historical junctures (such as in an age of social unrest?), similar preoccupations and thematic concerns will find expression in the work of writers who may belong to disparate cultures and who may have no actual contact with one another.
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Abstract

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TO MY PARENTS YUAN HONGQI AND LIU YU

献给我的父母袁宏启 刘瑜
TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE........................................i
ABSTRACT....................................................ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.........................................iv
DEDICATION..................................................v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.........................................vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.................................1
CHAPTER TWO: THE POET AND THE AGE.........................29
CHAPTER THREE: THE POET AND THE PATRIOT..................75
CHAPTER FOUR: THE POET AND THE RADICAL....................122
CHAPTER FIVE: THE POET AND THE HUMANITARIAN..............175
CHAPTER SIX: THE POET AND THE IDEALIST.....................224
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE CONCLUSION.............................264
Chapter One
Introduction

Politics are what verse should
Not fly from, or it goes all
wrong.
---- William Empson

John Keats and Li He had no actual contact with each
other. Indeed, the two poets were so far away from each
other--one lived in Georgian England, the other in mid-
Tang China--that any direct or indirect linkage between
them is inconceivable. However, they are so "congenial in
spirit and [so] similar in style" (David Chen 67) that
anyone familiar with their poetical careers would be
tempted to compare them in literary studies.

A brief review of the relevant commentary and
criticism shows that Keats and Li present "a most
interesting subject for the comparative study of Chinese
and Western literatures" (Tu 131). For instance, in his A
History of Chinese Literature, which was published in
1954, the Chinese literary historian Lin Keng observed
that

[Li He] is a poet fully devoted to his art. His early
death and artistic spirit are reminiscent of Keats.
While Keats's claim that "A thing of beauty is a joy
forever" may well be taken as an early anticipation
of the aesthetic movement [in the late nineteenth
century England], Li's painstaking efforts to turn
out fine poetry prove him to be just another bloody-
voiced nightingale. (212)
Although it was made in passing, this comment was significant in that it called attention to the two poets' common tendency towards aestheticism as well as their similar commitment to producing fine poetry in difficult life-situations (like "bloody-voiced" nightingales).

In his well-known essay "From the Ivory Tower to the White Jade Palace" (1964), the Chinese poet-critic Yu Guangzhong considered Li an "unintended precursor" of many modern "isms" in Western literatures (91) and realized that there were as many macabre elements in Li's poetry as in the poetry of Keats, Poe and Baudelaire (80). More interestingly, Yu suggested that a comparative study might be made between Li's "Mei Ren Shu Tou Ge" (Song of a Beautiful Lady Combing Her Hair) and Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes." But as his primary concern was with Li He, the critic did not commit himself to any detailed discussion of the similarities between Li and Keats or any other Western poet.

One year after the publication of Yu's essay, David Y. Chen made quite a substantial effort to compare Li with Keats. Based on a careful study of the two poets' biographies as well as their writings, the comparatist recognized that "their similarities have sprung from the similar life experiences which are shaped by certain given environments and an inborn spirit of a poet" and which are characterized by "poverty, illness and frustration" (67). For Chen, "the essential and common experience of life of
the two poets is suffering, and suffering in a devoted and persistent poetic career has refined their works into a poetry of intensity" (81). It is true that Chen's approach to the two poets was predominantly biographical and that his treatment of their poetry was very limited. His findings are nevertheless important because they pointed towards "the recognition and acceptance of parallels in world literature, such as Li He and Keats" as something which was not only "possible" but "meaningful" as well (81).

In 1970, John D. Frodsham's complete English translation of Li He's poetical works appeared, in which the translator-critic concluded his lengthy introduction by mentioning that "In his sensuality and the despairing intensity with which he strives to hold the passing moment burning eternally in his art, like a frozen flame, [Li] is akin to Keats" (lxiv). In the immediately following sentence, Frodsham went on to say that both Li and Keats were "half in love at times with easeful death" and, in so doing, the critic revealed some basic themes commonly present in their poetry.

What is particularly significant about Liu Changlang's short article on "Li He and Keats: A Comparative Study" (1976) is that the author focused his critical attention on their poetry per se probably for the first time in the history of Keats-Li studies. As he examined and compared their representative works through
what he called the "analogical approach," the comparatist noted that the two poets had a similar tendency towards "duality," which was marked by their quest for the ideal on the one hand, and their attachment to the real on the other (51). But because Liu placed too much emphasis on details, he did not elaborate along these lines as one might have hoped.

More recently, Xu Zhixiao published an article entitled "Li He and Keats: A Comparative Study between Two Talented but Short-Lived Romantic Poets" (1990). In this four-page article, the author maintained that "what commonly distinguishes Li's and Keats's writings as romantic poetry lies in the way the two poets project their inner realities into poetry through bold and rich imagination" (92). But as a result of the differences in their personal experiences and social conditions, the two poets also showed some important differences in their poetic styles. According to Xu, Li's poetry "contains more personal and sentimental elements than Keats's does," whereas "there are more elements of dissatisfaction at social realities, more elements of quest for the ideal and the beautiful in Keats's poetry than in Li's." Based on his observations about these differences, the comparatist came to the conclusion that "Li's poetic style belongs to passive sentimentalism and Keats's to active romanticism" (95).

This brief review of critics' judgments tells us that
over the past few decades there has been a continuing interest in comparing Li with Keats. However, although each of the comparisons mentioned above is constructive, illuminating and valuable in its own way, they are, as Tu Kuo-ch'ing has rightly pointed out, "no more than impressionistic comments, none being based on a comprehensive and thorough study of the poets compared or the theories adduced" (131). While more material can and should be covered and accounted for, it is also important for the comparatist to approach the two poets in a systematic way. In other words, we must not only treat Keats's or Li's poetry as a whole but also base our comparative study of the two poets on an appropriate methodological foundation. Without this methodological foundation, we would inevitably fail to gain a deeper insight into both Keats's and Li's poetry in particular, and achieve a fuller understanding of the general significance of Keats and Li as "perfect parallels in the literary history of the world" (David Chen 67).

This study proposes to make a systematic and detailed comparison between John Keats and Li He, investigating and explicating their similarities and differences in terms of how each of the two poets wove his social and political concerns into his poetry and the particular effect his sociohistorical conditions had on his poetic development. As I am particularly interested in the interrelationship between contemporary politics and a poetry that is
categorized as "romantic," I shall deal with Keats's aesthetic theory, and Li's concern with poetic style, in relation to the social and political realities of their times, rather than as theories in their own right. But before proceeding to do all this, I would like to address myself to several fundamental questions by way of assumption and generalization and, in doing so, I hope to sketch out the theoretical framework necessary for my study.

The first question is one which I think anyone engaged in a comparative study of Keats and Li should set out to answer and which may be simply stated as: How justifiable is it to put the two poets together in literary studies? Given the fact that they spent their poetic careers in different times and belonged to disparate cultures, where, in other words, does their comparability lie? For me, the answer to this question is to be found in the typological or classificatory possibility that both Keats and Li can be, as they have been, identified as "romantic" poets in world literature. But what does "romanticism" mean? Within the Western context of literary scholarship, "the term 'romantic poetry' was," according to Rene Wellek, "used first of Ariosto and Tasso and medieval romances from which their names and 'machinery' were derived. It occurs in this sense in France in 1669, in England in 1674" (184), whereas "The distinction of classical-romantic occurs for
the first time [in England] in Coleridge's lectures, given in 1811, and is there clearly derived from Schlegel" (193). As a critical term, says Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The word 'romanticism' has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing"(6). However, although every literary student may have his or her own definition or re-definition of the term, it has most frequently been used to describe "the literature, and in lesser degree the painting, music, and some of the philosophy in the period c. 1780-1830, the period of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, and the nationalistic movements in Greece, Italy, and Germany that followed" (Frye 3). As a historical-cultural construct, the term basically refers to, that is to say, the literary movement which is generally thought to have originated in late eighteenth century Germany and culminated in early nineteenth century France. Considering that in England few writers of major significance called themselves "romantics" during that period, it should be noted that the English romantic movement is not a conscious one. With its specific historical connotations and denotations, the term is thus apparently unapplicable to Li or any other writers of non-European origin.

It is true that there has been no such "Romantic period" or "Romantic movement" in the history of Chinese literature as in the West. Nor is there any dichotomy between romanticism and classicism in the study of Chinese
literature. Yet ever since Lu Xun (1881-1936), one of the
greatest writers in modern China, began to use the word
"langmande" (romantic) in 1930, it has become a most
important term in literary studies. Traditionally, the
Chinese expression "langman" or "langmande" has been used
to describe anyone or anything considered to be "fangdang
buji" (unconventional and/or unrestrained), "fuyou shiyi"
(poetic) or "chongman huanxiang" (full of fantasies). But
as a critical term, the expression "langman zhuyi"
(romanticism) takes on quite different meaning within the
Chinese context, for it is almost unanimously defined as
"a fundamental creative method in the history of arts,
which stresses the representation of the real through the
expression of the ideal."\(^6\) Given this definition, we find
it possible to consider the term as representing a
crosscultural literary phenomenon. That is to say, while
romanticism became dominant in Western Europe between 1780
and 1830, it can be argued, and has actually been argued
by some Western literary historians (and even by certain
of the European romantics themselves—for example, August
Wilhelm Schlegel), that "the romantic" is an element in
much of the literature of all ages and all places. In his
"Classic and Romantic: A Point of View," H. J. C. Grierson
contends, for instance, that "Plato was the first great
romantic because his thought, his romantic conception of
an ideal world behind the visible, his 'city laid up in
heaven,' his daring deduction of all being and knowledge
from the Idea of Good, was ferment which disintegrated the ancient view of life, of man and his relation to the divine . . . . The next great romantic after Plato is St. Paul. The third great romantic movement . . . is that from which I started [my discussion], the flame which Rousseau kindled and which spread to Germany and England" (46-47).

Again, in his well-known essay "Towards a Theory of Romanticism," Morse Peckham maintains that one "primary referent of the word 'romanticism' [is] a general and permanent characteristic of mind, art and personality, found in all periods and in all cultures" (231). From these theoretical positions, one can readily see that although it may mean different things to different people, "romanticism" is a very useful and helpful but problematic concept in literary criticism. As long as we define it in an explicit way, we may well apply the term to our study of literatures.

Here I must confess that I am not prepared to examine what is according to such a general definition "romantic" in Homer, in Shakespeare, in the literature of the Middle Ages or in Asian literature. Nor do I intend to commit myself to a full discussion of the theoretical issues concerning the very notion of romanticism. But I do wish to treat the term in a global context and define it first as a mental state or a psychological-ideological tendency, which may manifest itself, consistently or otherwise, and with varying degrees, in writers who have different
historical and cultural backgrounds. Such a tendency is marked by a number of features. For one thing, the romanticist has a strong spirit of revolting against authority. In matters of religion, for instance, he or she tends to be sceptical, pantheistical or even atheistical. While they find it difficult to reconcile himself with the idea of any one single omnipotent and omniscient divinity, romanticists tend to place human beings in the centre of the universe. In so doing, they reject, consciously or not, the notion of any One supernatural being, thus undermining the ideological foundation of religion. And the powerful proclamation about the death of God, which Nietzsche puts into the mouth of Zarathustra, can be taken as a most explicit (and extreme) manifestation of this romantic tendency.

Politically, romanticists often adopt a critical attitude towards the governing authorities. For them, the supreme ruler of their country is no more than one of their fellow human beings. Simply because they have more power at their command, kings, emperors or governmental leaders allow themselves, as Keats remarks in the opening of the third book of his *Endymion*, to "lord it o'er their fellows." By treating their rulers as human beings just like anyone else, romanticists thus subvert political authority to a certain degree and at the same time show, although in an implicit way, that their own political positions are progressive (in the sense that "all men are created
equal"). Intellectually, romanticists may hold a historical or contemporary authoritative figure in great esteem. They often challenge this figure, however, in one way or another as they desire to "outdo their elders, to attain fame and recognition for themselves" (Halsted ix). With their tendency to rise against authority, romanticists are thus by nature radicals if not revolutionaries.

Concurrent with their rebellious tendency, romanticists attach a great importance to the development of selfhood. For them, while people are the centre of the universe, the self is the most authentic being in the world. As Emerson would put it, to understand one's self is to understand the world, and to be true to one's self is to be true to life. Obsessed as they are with the exploration of self-consciousness, romanticists stress individualism which leads "to an increasing preoccupation with uniqueness, and hence to a weakening of the conviction that men resemble[d] each other or that such solidarity [is] ultimately to be desired" (Hugo 32). This individualism is underlined, so to speak, by the psychological-philosophical impulse to experience and interpret human life in terms of introspection rather than retrospection and in terms of particularity rather than generality. As an individualist, the romanticist is concerned with two important categories: the inner realities of his or her personal experience which
constitute his or her subjectivity and individuality, and the physical objects of the outer world which are mostly "strange, unexpected, intense, superlative, extreme, unique, and etc." (Babbitt 10). While they place a high value on their personal experience, whether it is emotional or intellectual, romanticists advocate freedom and opposes the repression of what they see as the intrinsic powers of human nature or for the development of personality.

Given their individualistic concerns, it is not surprising that romanticists devote much of their attention to the pursuit of what is ideal. For them, "Everybody needs some kind of vision of a better world that man can create" (Frye 126). This vision is significant in that it may serve us "as a standard by which we can judge the 'real' world according to our ideals;"--I am quoting Frye again--"as a model to work from when acting according to an ideal vision; and as a means of recognizing a better order of things when it is presented to us" (126). As they try to build up such vision, romanticists follow three principles: intellectually and philosophically, they are interested in whatever is true about human existence and the physical world; morally and socially, they promote whatever is good about human nature and human behaviour; and aesthetically and artistically, they are keenly sensitive to whatever is beautiful about man and nature. In their painstaking
efforts to realize truth, good or beauty, romanticists show themselves to be ardent pursuers of the ideal.

In the meantime, romanticists have a high sense of historical mission and social responsibility. While they may stress idealism and individualism, they know well that they are members of the human community. "Once fortified with this conception of humanity and his knowledge that he is a part of it, not [merely] an observer," as Comfort has reminded us, the romanticist is "under an obligation to concern himself with the entire environment of the times"(179). Whether or not practical circumstances allow him or her to play a significant role in human affairs, he or she is fully confident in his or her own talent or ability to make contributions to the welfare of humanity. More important, he is ready to make a commitment, "insofar as it is a matter of praxis, that is, the fulfillment of a pledge to save a definite political cause" (Calinescu 136). Knowing that her very life belongs to a sociohistorical process, the romanticist finds it important not only to keep an eye open to what is happening around her but also to do something about the social and political conditions of her day, either by interpreting them or by modifying them. With his or her commitment to the progressive cause of the whole human race, the romanticist tends to give a historical value to his or her artistic productions and seldom fails to notice their social effect.
Also noticeable is that the romanticist has a serious concern with the realities of the human world. In the course of trying to realize his own potentialities, he recognizes that unless the existing human environment is favourable, it is difficult, if not entirely impossible, for him to fulfil his personal goals. By saying this I do not mean to suggest that the romanticist's critical attitude towards human realities results solely from her concern about her personal development. What I am trying to say is rather that there is a close relationship between her desire to contribute significantly to the progress of mankind and her tendency to look at the real world in critical terms. When he observes, as he often does in actual life, that the social and political conditions of his day are far from being satisfactory, the romanticist feels disappointed, discouraged and disillusioned. Consequently, romanticists tend to hold at least for a time a liberal or radical position in contemporary politics. And as they function out of an informed commitment to the welfare of humanity, romanticists are sympathetic with their fellow-sufferers and thus proves themselves to be true humanitarians.

A final important point to be made about romanticism as a psychological-ideological tendency is that romanticists tend to take a dynamic view of the world. While they may show a profound interest in the problem of immortality, they are acutely aware of the brevity and
mutability of life. Such awareness leads them to look at the universe in terms of change and contrast. For them, everything in the human world is in a constant flux, and only nature has an eternal existence in time whose movement is always independent of the human will. With this recognition, the romanticist loves all the more those objects which have or may have a permanent value, such as nature, beauty, fame and creative work. If he ever wants to attain immortality or permanency in life, he knows that he can do so only by constructing a monument with his own life or creative talents. And as a result of her dynamic approach to life and the universe, the romanticist often has a sense of urgency which determines that she leads an intense life, a life full of anguish, anxiety or internal conflict.

Having outlined the major characteristics of the romantic personality, I now shift my attention to the term "romanticism" as an aesthetic principle, which has been followed consciously or otherwise, and with individual differences, by artists who may belong to different periods and different cultures. As a general principle in literary creations, romanticism has at least six recognizable tendencies, which I describe very succinctly in the following way:

1. For the romantic writer, the essential quality of literature is determined by the use of imagination.
thematic concerns he may have, the romantic writer considers imagination to be the soul of his art. To him, imagination is not only "an organ of knowledge" which offers "an insight into the nature of reality" (Wellek 194) but also a creative power which leads to the realization of truth, good or beauty and thus serves to redeem the "insufficiency" of reality.

2. The functional significance of literature lies mainly in the expression of the ideal. For the romantic writer, only when people have a clear vision of a better world and work towards it can human life become really meaningful. In order to contribute to the progressive cause of humanity, the romantic writer thus takes it as one of her major concerns to search for and communicate what constitutes the ideal.

3. In terms of the source of literature, the romantic writer tends to locate it within her own heart and mind. As she articulates her personal emotional or intellectual experiences, she transforms her art into a unique monument to selfhood. With its condensed form and expressive function, poetry, especially lyric poetry, is thus often a favourite genre that romantic writers like to work with.

4. As for the object of literary representation, the romantic writer gives special attention to nature. While he tends to play down its violent force, he conceives of nature as "an organic whole, on the analogue of man rather than a concourse of atoms--a nature that is not divorced
from aesthetic values" (Wellek 196).

5. Technically, the romantic writer emphasizes the original use of language, imagery and other structural or rhetorical devices. Because he or she likes to give a personal significance to his or her artistic work, the romantic writer has a tendency towards symbolism.

6. When it comes to literary material, romantic writers set a high value on mythological, legendary or historical elements. By exploring or reconstructing these elements, romantic writers enable themselves to make their art an integral part of their whole cultural tradition and simultaneously offer a deeper interpretation of their contemporary world.

Needless to say, these artistic propositions can and should be taken as a close or, rather, a necessary reflection of the romantic personality in literary practices. When I use the term "romanticism," it should therefore be considered to be a literary category which refers to the way a writer of romantic character\textsuperscript{10} translates into practice the literary principles itemized above.\textsuperscript{11} (Here I am fully aware that simply by trying to give a working definition of "romanticism" I have taken a huge risk. But such a risk is worth taking since no one can entirely avoid this term in the study of "romantic" literature.\textsuperscript{12}) And when I describe a particular literary figure (or text) as romantic, I do not mean that the author (or the text) is purely or absolutely romantic.
Rather, I mean to say that the author (or the text) is romantic in certain respects and to a certain degree. Put bluntly, the term "romanticism" represents a relative value in literature. As we shall see later in great detail, both Keats and Li can be described as belonging to this literary category although not to the same extent. It is true that the two poets are separated temporally by almost exactly ten centuries and geographically by more than ten thousand miles. Yet they share similar psychological-ideological tendencies and their writings incarnate similar aesthetic features. It is in these similarities, that is to say, that the comparability of the two poets lies; and it is these similarities that warrant a meaningful parallel study in world literature.

Once we have recognized both Keats and Li as poets who have a strong tendency towards romanticism, it becomes immediately necessary to deal with the question of how to pursue the comparison. If the two poets offer a legitimate subject for the comparative study of literatures, how should we, in other words, carry out such a parallel study in practice? Obviously, there are many methodological models available and useful as well. One of them is, for instance, the so-called "thematic approach" which, according to the Chinese comparatist Chen Peng-hsiang, "investigates [the origination of] a particular theme or motif . . . and pays special attention to the way different authors explore the same theme to express their
different innermost concerns or to reflect their different contemporary lives" (624). By examining what romantic concerns Keats and Li have in common and by comparing how the two poets weave their thematic interest into the fabric of their poetry, we can undoubtedly gain a deeper insight into both poets. Another methodological model is the biographical approach which, traditional or old-fashioned as it may be, cannot be dispensed with, for, no matter what critical position one may have, one cannot separate a poet's work entirely from his or her life. Also helpful but more or less incompatible with the biographical approach is what has often been referred to as the intrinsic approach which concentrates on the literary qualities of a text itself. As I intend to conduct a quite comprehensive comparison between Keats and Li in terms of the interrelationship between politics and poetics, I find it more rewarding not to limit myself to using one method exclusively, although there may be many other possibilities besides, for example, the various approaches used by such Western critics as Marilyn Butler and Jerome McGann.

While I refrain from committing to any single current mode of critical practice, I do not mean, however, to proceed with my study without any methodological foundation at all. My theoretical stance can be synoptically shown by way of a relational paradigm of literature:
sociohistorical

[writing subject] -- [text] -- [reading subject]

context

As one can see in this paradigm, all three literary entities—the writing subject, the text and the reading subject—are constitutive elements of a large context. This context is not only a historical continuity but also a sociocultural conglomerate. While it is composed of various sociocultural specificities, this context as a whole has a forming, informing and/or transforming power on any one of its constituents and is characterized by an ongoing process of politicization. Indeed, whether we like it or not, we are part of our own sociohistorical context and thus part of contemporary politics. Just as any lack of interest in politics is itself a political attitude in an individual's case, the very depoliticization of a whole society's cultural life is, if anything, a process of politicization. As a social being, every individual is a political subject.

Assuming that all literary entities constitute, and are simultaneously constructed by, their sociohistorical context, we must bear in mind two important chiastical relationships. One is between the contextuality of text and the textuality of context and has been touched upon in a quite different way in Montrose's influential essay "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture" (1989). By "the contextuality of text," I mean
to stress that the conception, composition, publication and reception of a literary text are specifically bound up with its social, cultural and historical environment. In this sense, every literary text is a unique reflection and refraction of social and historical reality. By "the textuality of context," I mean to stress that the sociohistorical elements underlining the production of a literary text have no absolute and objective independence but, rather, are subject to human interpretation or reconstruction. The other relationship I call attention to here is one between the readerliness of the writing subject and the writerliness of the reading subject. By "the readerliness of the writing subject," I mean to suggest that the writing subject is a reader of his or her own sociohistorical context as a text and that the act of writing is to a large extent an interpretative one. By "the writerliness of the reading subject," I mean to suggest that the reading subject has a natural tendency to impose certain contextual categories on a literary text and that the act of reading is often a highly creative one. The significance of these two chiastical relationships lies primarily in the way they point towards the relative and dialectical nature of literary criticism as "a site of intellectually and socially significant work in the historical present" (Montrose 31).

Precisely for the reason that sociohistorical context has an undeniable effect on both what the writing subject
writes and how he writes on the one hand, and on both what the reading subject likes to read and how he reads on the other, I propose to compare Keats and Li by paying special attention to the interrelationship between poetics and politics and, in doing so, I may demonstrate, although not purposefully, how my own contextual specificity informs my literary study. Since both Keats and Li have traditionally been recognized as poets whose writings have a strong tendency towards aestheticism and thus tend to rule out political reading, my approach to the two poets will, I hope, enforce my theoretical position all the more effectively. I am aware that my emphasis on the importance of context might associate this study with New Historicism. However, I refuse to consider myself one of its practitioners, not because I find New Historicism incomplete or invalid as a doctrine, an attitude or a mode of practice but because, as I have already said, comparatist study must retain the right to use other methodological models besides the New Historicist one.

Another question which I can answer only in a limited way here is: What can we hope to establish about the poetry of John Keats and Li He through parallel analysis? Given my theoretical as well as methodological position, I have three general purposes in mind. First, I attempt to show that as two important poets in the Western and Chinese literary traditions, both Keats and Li embody thematic concerns and rhetorical strategies that are
typical of romanticism. These two poets' common tendency towards romanticism is particularly significant because it enables us to see that just as Western literature is not merely a regional phenomenon, Chinese literature is by no means an isolated one, and that the two major literary traditions can be studied in a highly rewarding way within the large context of world literature. Second, I want to emphasize that both Keats's and Li's poetic creations are a product of, and a response to, their respective sociohistorical contexts. Because there is a close relationship between textual embeddedness and contextual specificity, the two poets can and perhaps should be approached in terms of the interplay of poetics and (contemporary) politics if a full understanding of their romanticism is to be achieved. Third, in comparing Keats and Li, I hope to demonstrate in a more general way that contemporary social/political situations play so important a role in writers' choices of subject-matter that they may contribute as much as, if not more than, individuals' tastes to the formation of literary style. Based upon this point, I wish to make a larger observation about literary history: that at similar points in the development of a nation's culture (such as during the decline of a dynasty?), similar preoccupations and thematic concerns will emerge in the work of writers, even when the two cultures are as distant from each other as nineteenth-century Britain and late-Tang China. In order to make sure
that my parallel analysis will offer a mutual illumination of the two poetic careers, I will try to treat them with equal attention although sometimes material may force me to give more space to one than to the other. Specifically, I will begin with a reconstruction of those contextual elements which may have contributed significantly to the development of Keats and Li as poets, that is, their biographical background, their social and political milieux, their intellectual environment and the literary arena in which they were situated. Then I will proceed to examine and compare in detail how the two poets formulated and articulated their thematic concerns in terms of their patriotic, radical, humanitarian and idealistic tendencies. (As these tendencies are closely interrelated with one another and often find simultaneous expression in both Keats and Li, there is no absolutely clear-cut distinction between the corresponding chapters and some overlapping in my discussion is inevitable.) Finally, I will conclude by summarizing what I have found about Keats's and Li's poetic productions.

One last point. I will use J. D. Frosham's translations of Li's poetry (that is, his revised edition published in 1983), making corrections only for his occasional errors. Since I am not a native writer of English, I think Frosham's translations will convey the beauty of Li's poetry better to readers who do not understand the original language. When I cite other
primary or secondary materials written originally in Chinese, I will insist on the use of my own translations simply because they are more suitable for the illustration of my argument than any other possibly existent versions. For the convenience of the Western reader, I shall provide both the Chinese characters in the simplified version and modern pronunciations in the pinyin romanization for all the poems I need to quote in full. As for the Chinese names, I shall put the family name before the given name to conform to the Chinese tradition.
Notes:

1. Chen's article is entitled "Li Ho and Keats: Poverty, Illness, Frustration, and a Poetic Career," which can be presumably taken as the shortened form of the author's unpublished PhD dissertation Li Ho and Keats: A Comparative Study of Two Poets (Indiana University, 1962).

2. The name of the Chinese poet is spelt as "Li Ho" in Chen's essay as well as in some other secondary materials published in English. But for the sake of conformity, I have chosen to use the pinyin romanization and spelt it as "Li He" in my present study.

3. In the same year Liu published another article "The Anacreontic Features in the Poetry of Li He and Keats." Unfortunately this article is unavailable for review.

4. As an adjective, the word "romantic" is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "of the nature of, having the qualities of, romance in respect of form or content." As for the word "romance," the Oxford Companion to English Literature has the following explanation:

   Derived from the Medieval Latin word romanice, 'in the Roman language'. The word roman in Old French was applied to the popular courtly stories in verse which dealt with three traditional subjects: the legends about Arthur, Charlemagne and his knights, and stories of classical heroes especially Alexander.

   According to Cihai (Word-Seas), the Chinese expression "langmnde" (romantic) is a translation from the English word "romantic," which Lu Xun used for the first time in a literary essay published in 1930. While it hardly needs to be documented here that Keats is referred to as a romantic poet in Western literary scholarship, Li He has also been recognized as a romantic figure in Chinese literary scholarship. In An Outline of the History of Chinese Literature, for instance, Li is rated "a highly-talented but short-lived original romantic poet" (341).

5. I use "world literature" in the vague way that it has often been employed—to refer to the totality of all literatures in the world. For more on the meaning(s) of the term, see Ernst Elster, "World Literature and Comparative Literature," 7-13; Claus Cluver, "The Difference of Eight Decades: World Literature and the Denise of National Literatures," 14-24; and Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, 48-9.

7. In my present efforts to define "romanticism" as a psychological-ideological tendency and later as an aesthetic principle, I draw upon a number of Western conceptual categories because I find them applicable not only to Western literature but to Chinese literature as well.


9. This very contested term has many ideological implications. But the most basic one is, I think, that literary creation is driven by individual, and predominantly subjective, faculties and aims.

10. By "a writer of romantic character" I mean a writing subject with some or all of the psychological-ideological tendencies which I have categorized as "romantic."

11. According to Peckham, it is not only possible but also helpful to define "romanticism" as a transhistorical and crosscultural literary category; but such a definition "must be able to get us inside individual works of literature, art, and thought: that is, to tell us not merely that works are there, to enable us not merely to classify them, but to deliver up to us a key to individual works so that we can penetrate to the principles of their intellectual and aesthetic being" (232). I hope that my tentative theory of romanticism would be able to submit successfully to this test.

12. In his Poetry as an Occupation and an Art in Britain, 1760-1830 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Peter T. Murphy mentions that certain important terms like accomplishment, art, happiness, beauty and freedom in his vocabulary have been described as "not in the critical lexicon since before Lovejoy" (7). The same can apparently be said of such terms as romanticism, art, ideal, imagination, liberalism and liberty that I have used in my present study. But as Murphy has rightly pointed out, such terms are used because "in their very looseness (and persistence) they do work that cannot otherwise be done. The reason we need them and continue to use them is that they respond to the complexity human culture offers" (8). While one may feel "a reasonable discomfort" with such words, I hope, as
does Murphy in his case, that the seriousness of the argument in the following chapters will "justify these terms for me" (8).

13. Montrose talks about "historicity" instead of "contextuality" and thus confines himself to the temporal aspects of context. For more detail, see Veeser's *The New Historicism*, 15-36.
Chapter Two
The Poet and the Age

Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and in another, the creations of their age. From this subjection the loftiest do not escape.

---- Shelley

The mode of production in material life determines the social, political, and intellectual life processes in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.

---- Karl Marx

The writer takes in words, thoughts and structures from a babel around him, and his text is a giving back to the same discussion, part, in short, of a social process.

---- Marilyn Butler

All literary productions are "human acts occupying social space" (McGann 21) and, as such, they are never turned out in a historical vacuum, but always powerfully conditioned by the multiplicity of cultural diversity within a particular sociohistorical context; whether the writing subjects themselves are conscious or unconscious of this, their sociohistorical milieux have an undeniable
effect upon both what they write and how they write. Just as human subjectivities are "constructed by cultural codes which position and limit all of us in various and divided ways" (Newton 152), literary works are, so to speak, authored as much by a whole network of social forces as by an individual writer. Given this assumption, it is important to direct attention to contextual specificities while we strive towards a full understanding of any particular set of literary texts. In this chapter, I shall attempt to foreground those major elements of background which may have had an immediately formative or informative power on the poetic development of John Keats and of Li He, although such efforts may never suffice.

The age in which John Keats lived was, as Coombs has stated, "an age of change, of revolution in both its literal and modern sense" (33). In 1776, the American colonies declared their independence from Britain, and took up arms to defend their right to freedom with a war which lasted six years and which put the British rule to an end in these colonies. Thirteen years later, the fall of the Bastille ushered in a series of bloody struggles for "liberty, equality and fraternity" in France, which were to change Europe profoundly. It is true that many of the most violent events had taken place before Keats was born and well before he began his writing career. Yet the immediate impact of the shock-wave of the French Revolution in particular was still strongly felt within
the European community. As Napoleon proclaimed himself Emperor in May 1804 and embarked upon foreign invasions, he almost completely changed the nature of the French Revolution which had already "tumbled into expediency and terror" (Woodring 20). While many reformers and enthusiasts were feeling disappointed and disillusioned, monarchist forces in Europe joined together to resist the expansion of the newly-established French empire. After repeated trials of strength, Napoleon first surrendered in April 1814 and then mounted a new military offensive one year later only to be defeated once and for all at Waterloo. With Louis XVIII returning to power in France, a "Holy Alliance" of European crowned heads was formed in 1815. As Europe tried to re-establish legitimacy or the principle of hereditary rule through monarchical congresses, such as the Treaty of Paris (1814), the Congress of Vienna (1815), the conference held at Aix-la-Chapelle to admit the King of France to the Alliance (1818), the Carlsbad Conference of German princes (1819), the meeting of the Crown Prince of Prussia with the Emperors of Russia and Austria at Troppau (1820) and the meeting of Ferdinand of Naples with the Holy Alliance in Laybach (1821), political upheavals broke out one after another in Spain, Portugal, Naples and Greece.

While revolutionary movements were surging throughout Europe, and, farther afield, in America, the
political situation within Britain was far from stable and peaceful. Ever since 1763 when John Wilkes was arrested for an attack on the King's minister, Bute, in his paper *The North Briton*, the power of the monarch and the accepted constitutional order had been challenged again and again by radical movements such as the Yorkshire petition for parliamentary reform (1780), the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore (1797) as well as the Irish Rebellion (1798). In the face of a long threat of a Napoleonic invasion from abroad and a strong demand for political reform at home, the British government, especially the Tory ministry led by Liverpool (1812-26), became increasingly restrictive with regard to freedom of political thought, resorting to repressive legislation. In 1817, for instance, the Seditious Meetings Bill drove all democratic societies underground just as the Combination Acts against the formation of unions had suppressed the Corresponding Society and other radical groups eighteen years before. Furthermore, the government suspended Habeas Corpus so as to deal with political gatherings in any way it wanted to. The best example of how the political authorities were ready to take harsh measures to repress political protests was the notorious Peterloo Massacre of August 1819, which was reminiscent of the Boston Massacre. The same year, the Six Acts were formally passed. Designed largely to prevent armed rebellion and check the reform movement, these Acts
contained provisions which, among many other things, restricted the freedom of the press and the right to hold public meetings, liberalized methods of arrest without warrant and confinement without trial, and forbade the publication of seditious literature.¹

By "seditious literature," the government meant to say, in Lord Ellenborough's words (1804), "that if publication be calculated to alienate the affection of the people, by bringing the government into disrepute whether the expedient be ridicule or obloquy . . . it is a crime."² Given this definition of seditious literature and the political situation of the day, it was little wonder that writers and journalists like William Cobbett, Richard Carlile, Thomas Wooler and William Hone had trouble with the political authorities. One of the most famous examples was the case of Leigh Hunt (1784-1859), the editor of the Examiner who "in his role as the middle-class conscience of a late and post-war radicalism . . . believed that the middle and working classes could be joined in a single popular front for reform"³ and who was imprisoned at Horsemonger Lane Goal for two years simply for an article commenting on the Prince Regent. This and other similar cases pointed to the fact that, as a sub-category of politics, censorship not only existed but operated very effectively in Britain. While the government tried every possible means to suppress criticism, opposition and the demand for political reform,
members of the ruling classes were themselves as corrupt, decadent and absurd as they had ever been. There were, for example, many ministerial and royal scandals which were brought to light in the 1820s. Among them were the Prince Regent's attempts to divorce Caroline, the so-called "green bag" episode of 1817 concerning Secret Committees of each House, and the sale of commissions in wartime by the mistress of the Duke of York.

In the meantime, Britain was going through a period of great social changes, which were brought about largely by the movements known to historians as the Industrial Revolution and the Agrarian Revolution. With the accumulation of capital for investment, with such inventions as Cort's "puddling and rolling" technique (1783), Cartwright's power-loom (1785), and Davy's safety-lamp (1815), with the application of the new gas-lighting and of steam power and, more importantly, with the increasing number of people who had practical skills and experiences with simple machinery, Britain rapidly turned its industry into a highly mechanized and profitable one. As its textile, coal, mining and iron industries developed further, the country became more and more urbanized. On the agricultural side, the appearance of Jethro Tull's seed-drill and the new Rotherham plough, the use of turnips and clover to remove the need for fallow fields, coupled with the popularization of careful stockbreeding as well as enclosures which had come into practice by the
end of the seventeenth century, allowed Britain to raise its production of crop and meat to an unprecedented level. As agricultural production gained higher efficiency, farming was turned into a commercial enterprise in the countryside, where land was the most important source of profit. Within several decades, Britain made so much progress in industry and agriculture that it developed not only a full-fledged market economy but the strongest economy in the world. Such economy was particularly efficient as it helped the country to survive the hard times of the French wars and simultaneously brought long-term national benefits.

In the short-term, however, many undesirable and almost devastating effects were brought about by industrialization and commercialization. One most obvious result was the division between what Disraeli later called "Two Nations"—the multitude of the poor and the privileged rich. On the one hand, the factory owners and landlords were getting richer and richer as they made every effort to raise their productions and reduce their costs. In industrial centres like London, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham, for instance, the manufacturers used child labour extensively, extended working hours and paid low wages. As they were concerned with nothing but their financial gains, factory owners except a few philanthropic industrialists like Robert Owen gave far more attention to "dead" machinery than to "living
machinery". On the other hand, labourers were working and living under deplorably poor conditions. While most villagers lost their land and found themselves subject to seasonal employment, factory workers were treated and exploited cruelly by their masters. For instance, spinners had to work more than ten hours a day in temperatures around 27°C, and could be fined for opening a window to let in some fresh air or even for whistling to alleviate the stresses. During the Napoleonic wars, Britain had experienced a great increase in population, trade and employment. After Waterloo, however, trade declined all of a sudden, harvest failed, inflation ran high, and unemployment jumped up. Instead of doing something really helpful to improve the situation, in 1815 the House of Commons, which consisted largely of self-interested land owners, introduced the Corn Laws, which threw even more people into misery. As the economic depression deepened, "Classes consequently hated and feared each other". Such feelings manifested themselves clearly in events like the Luddites' organized destruction of machinery in Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire in 1810-11, the Spa Fields riot and other disorders of 1816, and the Cato Street Conspiracy of 1820.

On the cultural plane, the few decades around 1800 saw the emergence and development of what has traditionally been called the Romantic movement. As a historical phenomenon, this movement can be taken to a
large extent as a complex of responses that intellectuals made to the chain of events which Western society had been experiencing since the fall of the Bastille. In 1790, for instance, Edmund Burke published his well-known *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in which the statesman and philosopher tried to defend the established order in English society. But it was Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) and his democratic and republican ideas that received wide public acclaim among the less privileged of society. If these two writers are better considered as Enlightenment figures rather than predecessors of the Romantics, then William Godwin and Rousseau contributed undoubtedly in a direct way to the development of English romanticism. While Godwin's ardent support of the French Revolution made him the spiritual leader of the English pro-revolutionaries, Rousseau's theories about the natural rights of man had a strong appeal to dissident thinkers in general, not because they were entirely new or original (they owed much to English writers such as Hobbes and Locke), but because they encouraged man to take a fresh look at himself as a social being and at nature as a source of inspiration. As the ideas of political, individual and intellectual liberty struck root in the hearts of an increasing number of people, an attitude of disrespect for existing institutions began to prevail, which brought about and enforced "impulses that modified most, or all, western
traditions" (Woodring 25).

Meanwhile new developments were made in the world of science. During the 1760s and the 1770s, for instance, Joseph Priestley's amateur passion for scientific inquiry led him to make valuable contributions to knowledge about oxygen and electricity. In the mid-1790s, Erasmus Darwin published his pioneering work Zoonomia in which he made first suggestions about how life had been evolved from a single source. By the time when the first geological map of England (by William Smith) appeared in 1815, the study of geology and botany had achieved so much that even the ordinary people became fascinated with nature and the wilder countryside. More significantly, as scientific movements developed, more and more people thus began to question the very foundation of human society. In his 1816 lectures to the College of Surgeons, William Lawrence challenged, for instance, the belief in vitalism, arguing that it was structure rather than mysterious vital agents that determined the manifestations of life. Several years later, when the Tory government imposed a clampdown on the freedom of expression, the young surgeon voiced his opposition in terms of the difference of individual biology. Although Lawrence's ideas on science and politics were condemned by such conservative institutions as the Court of Chancery, the College of Surgeons, and the Quarterly Review, they were shared by many people, as we can see from the fact that four pirated editions of his
Lectures on Comparative Anatomy (1819) appeared in 1822 and 1823.

In the fine arts, it was typical of the artists and composers of the period to adopt a more personal view of art. Technically, they tried to break away from established customs and traditions, experimenting widely with their new ideas. Thematically, they paid special attention to intellectual freedom, personal feelings, natural beauty, and medieval or outlandish things. In music, for instance, European musicians or composers like Beethoven, Paganini and Schubert broke the limits of classic forms to express the "natural" rhythms of man and their intense feelings about nature. In painting, artists both on the continent and in Britain tended to depict what only they were privileged to see: while the paintings of Jacques-Louis David and Delacroix on contemporary subjects often embodied a personal vision or a political ideal, most of the landscape paintings of J. M. W. Turner, John Constable, John Crome and others represented an imaginary realm rather than an actual scene. As a most distinctive example of the artist who depicted "a personal vision," the poet-painter William Blake was concerned more with the expression of his own idea of the mythological world than with the representation of the real world, as in the cases of his "Nebuchadnezzar" and "Dante and Virgil Approaching the Angel Who Guards the Entrance of Purgatory." But it was in literature that the romantic spirit found its full
expression in Britain. As Butler has remarked, the so-called Romantic age was "immensely rich in English literature" because no other period had produced "[S]o many poets, novelists, essayists and critics of true importance and individuality, writers who [were] not followers of greater names nor part of a school, but themselves distinctive voices" (1).

As literary creation flourished, literary criticism became more and more self-conscious as an intellectual activity. While Coleridge and Hazlitt were two most outstanding individuals who devoted a significant part of their lives to the contemplation and evaluation of literary practices, there were many institutions established to publish literary criticisms. In 1802, for instance, The Edinburgh Review came into existence and, within only sixteen years, it had a subscription of more than 14,000 copies. Similarly, The Quarterly Review, founded in 1809, had a wide circulation. As Butler noted, "In their heyday, about 1812-14 the two great reviews . . . were read by 100,000 people" (116). Just as those radical journals like William Cobbett's Political Register (1816), T. J. Wooler's Black Dwarf (1817), John William Hone's Reformist's Register (1817) and Richard Carlile's Republican (1819) played an "important and highly visible role in English affairs" (Behrendt 188), these two influential magazines, together with other periodicals like Leigh Hunt's Examiner (1808), Henry Colburn's New
Monthly Magazine (1814) and William Blackwood's
Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine (1817) functioned in an
important way to shape and guide the literary taste of the
day. With the printed word having become such an
effective vehicle in public discourse, it was little
wonder that when publishers made decisions about a
literary work, they had to take into account not only the
existing political elements like censorship but also the
possible response from critics as well as the reading
habits of various kinds of audiences. But this situation
seemed to be more evident in the Regency period (1811-20)
when the younger generation of Romantic poets came to the
scene. When Shelley finished his Queen Mab in 1813, his
publisher refused, for instance, to print the work for
political reasons. Again, when Cantos I and II of
Byron's Don Juan were published in 1819, neither the
author's nor even the publisher's name appeared in the
work. Although this was soon to become an open secret, the
very fact that the two names were not printed was
indicative of the publisher's uncertainty about the
reception of the work (in other words, some might consider
it obscene).

One of the younger poets of the Romantic period,
Keats was born in London on 31 October 1795 to a family
which had a small but prosperous business, a livery stable
attached to an inn. According to most of his biographers,
his first seven or eight years were "remarkably happy,
though in an unremarkable way" (Ward 4). In the summer of 1803, Keats started his education at Mr. Clarke's academy at Enfield, a village about twelve miles north of London. But when his father suddenly died in a riding accident in April 1804, Keats's life began to be haunted by misfortune. In March 1810 his mother died of tuberculosis after an unhappy second marriage. The same year, Keats left the school to become an apprentice to Hammond, a surgeon at Edmonton. Five years later, he moved to London and registered for further surgical training at Guy's Hospital. In July 1816, he passed the difficult examinations to receive the license of the Society of Apothecaries. But much to the surprise of Mr. Abbey, a warehouseman who had been made the guardian of the four Keats children upon the mother's death, Keats decided, in the autumn of that year, to give up medicine for a full-time career as a poet. In May 1818, his brother George married Georgiana and soon emigrated to America. After seeing them off at Liverpool, Keats and his friend Brown started a walking tour to the northern part of England and further to Scotland and Ireland. But his illness forced him to discontinue the trip and return alone to London in mid-August. The following three and a half months he stayed with his youngest brother Tom, taking care of him until he died of tuberculosis. During the last few years of his own life, Keats suffered a great deal from poverty, illness and his hopeless love for Fanny Brawne, daughter
of the widow who had rented Brown's house at Wentworth.
In early February of 1820, Keats began to cough up blood
and, upon his doctor's advice, he travelled in mid-
November to Rome, accompanied by his devoted friend
Severn. But Keats had no chance to recover from the
family disease. After violent haemorrhages, he died in
Severn's arms in the evening of 23 February 1821.

Keats's creative life covered a very short period,
which began in 1814 and ended in 1820. But during those
six years, his poetic power developed and matured as
rapidly as one can imagine. While he was still working for
Hammond, Keats was introduced by his school friend C. C.
Clarke to the glories of the poet Spenser, whose
"Epithalamium" and The Faerie Queen awakened Keats's own
poetic potentialities. The result was "Imitation of
Spenser," Keats's earliest known attempt at poetry. In
October 1816, it was Clarke again who introduced him to
Leigh Hunt, a man Keats had long admired as a great hero
and who "encouraged him and helped to shape both his
political and poetic life" (Watkins 21). As he developed
his friendly relations with the Hunt circle including the
painterHaydon and the poet Reynolds, Keats continued to
pursue his keen interest in poetic creation. Three months
after he met Shelley at Hunt's house in mid-December of
1816, he published his first book entitled simply Poems.
During the summer of 1817, Keats met Charles Dilke,
Charles Brown and Benjamin Bailey, who were to remain
close friends with him and to whom he was to write many of his finest letters. Although Keats's attitude towards Wordsworth changed later, he was more than pleased when Haydon arranged for him to meet the great man and Lamb on 28 December 1817. In the first two months of 1818, Keats took time to attend regularly Hazlitt's lectures on the English poets while working on his long poem *Endymion*, which was published in April. On July 1, 1820 appeared his third and last book *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes, and Other Poems*. In the same year, Keats's illness prevented him from writing any more poetry after "In after time a sage of mickle love," the "last stanza, of any kind . . . before his lamented death."\(^{12}\)

Without tracing the many biographical details which might also be relevant here, I wish to emphasize only one most important aspect of Keats's life to illustrate the extent to which the poet was, in his own words, "formed by circumstance" (*Letters* 2:103).\(^{11}\) Upon the publication of his *Endymion* in 1818, Keats encountered, as has often been noted, a series of attacks that Tory reviewers staged on his early poetic work. For instance, in the August issue of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, which was actually put out on 1 September, J. G. Lockhart who signed his name as "Z" derided Keats as a "bantling" who had "already learned to lisp sedition." After making a mockery of the young poet's family, educational and professional backgrounds and reprobating his diction, taste and character, the Tory
critic suggested that because "Keats belongs to the Cockney School of Politics, as well as the Cockney School of Poetry," the poet should go "back to 'plasters, pills and ointment boxes, &c'" (See Matthews, ed., 109). In another unsigned article in Quarterly Review (dated April, but published not until 27 September 1818), John Wilson joined in the attack and complained that he was "unable to read the first canto [of Endymion]." Of the poet himself the reviewer wrote:

He is unhappily the disciple of the new school of what has been somewhere called Cockney poetry; which may be defined to consist of the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language . . . . This author is a copyist of Mr. Hunt; but he is more unintelligible, almost as rugged, twice as diffuse, and ten times more tiresome and absurd than his prototype, who . . . generally had a meaning. (Matthews, ed., 110)

From the way in which Keats was emphatically identified in such reviews with the Cockney School, which meant in part political radicals associated with the Examiner, it is clear that the poet was maliciously attacked not only because there were some immature elements in his early poetry, but because he had a friendly relationship with Leigh Hunt, a leading radical of the day who had been persecuted by the Tory government. Put differently, it was his political connection rather than poetic immaturity that had made the rising poet a target of Tory reviewers' attack. As a victim of a large political battle that had been going on between conservatives and radicals, Keats certainly suffered a great deal. It is now a biographical
commonplace that Keats's early death was not actually *caused* by hostile reviews of his early work as thus suggested in Shelley's *Adonais* or in Byron's *Don Juan* (XI lx). But when we recall how in the late summer of 1820 "[Keats's] sickened disgust began to accuse the Blackwood's review of contributing to his illness" (Gittings 400), how Reynolds told Bailey that "that poor Keats attributed his approaching end to the poisonous pen of Lockhart" (Rollings, ed., I: 232) and especially how the poet himself remarked to Taylor that "if I die, you must ruin Lockhart" (Quoted in Garrod, ed., 220), we recognize that Tory reviewers' virulent attack on Keats did affect the poet in a profound way. Although what Hunt called "critical malignity" (Quoted in Gittings, 400) was not the direct cause of Keats's death, it certainly intensified the poet's suffering from illness, poverty and other causes and thus hastened his tragic end.

Given the political climate which was growing increasingly conservative after 1815, it is not surprising that Keats should have been attacked violently by politically biased reviewers. It is not surprising either that the poet developed a strongly ambivalent attitude toward the reader or what he referred to as "the Public." On the one hand, Keats seemed to believe that the reading public would receive his poetic work with good will, if not in a favourable way. In his published Preface (See Stillinger, ed. *The Poems of John Keats*, 102-03) to
Endymion, for instance, the poet offered a remarkably self-critical introduction to the long poem as he regretted "mak[ing] it public," accused himself of "great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished" and suggested that "The two first books, and indeed the two last . . . are not of such completion as to warrant their passing the press." By doing so, the poet was probably trying to defend himself or pre-empt criticism. At the same time, he made it clear that he did expect the public to give him a fair treatment. On the other hand, however, as we can see from his letter of 9 April 1818 to Reynolds, in which he defended his draft Preface to Endymion, Keats held a very hostile view of readers in general. After making a distinction between "writing for myself for the mere sake of the Moment's joy" (Letters 1:266) and writing "to the Public" (Letters 1:267), the poet claimed that "I never wrote one single Line of Poetry with the least Shadow of public thought." And in a moment of pride, anger and obstinacy, Keats went on to talk about readers and, in particular, reviewers as porcupines:

My glory would be to daunt and dazzle the thousand jabberers about Pictures and Books--I see swarms of Porcupines with their Quills erect like lime-twigs set to catch my Winged Book' and I would fright 'em away with a torch . . . . if there is any fault in the [draft] preface it is not affection: but an undersong of disrespect to the Public. (Letters 1:267)

This outburst of hostility clearly shows that there were "extraordinarily powerful conflicts with Keats's
conception of audience." Such conflicts deserve our special attention, for they throw much light on both how contemporary circumstances may have influenced Keats's ideas about the reader and how these ideas in turn may have influenced his own poetic practice.

Equally worthy of note is that the more conservative political climate after Waterloo also affected the poet's relations with book publishers. Before his first book officially came out on Monday 3 March 1817, Keats had, for example, a very good relationship with Charles and James Ollier. This we can see from Keats's eagerness to approach the brothers (Letters 1:115) and from the publishers' anxiety "to have as one of their first publications a volume by a new poet whose fame had been already prophesied" (Gittings 108). However, the poor reception of his Poems in the sociopolitical conditions of 1817 soon led the poet to end his working relations with the Olliers, presumably after they, in an insulting letter to George Keats, expressed "regret that your brother ever requested us to publish his book," and relief that George was about to spare them "the unpleasant necessity" of having "any further connexion with it." It is true that Keats maintained a close relation with John Taylor until the end of his short life. Yet he often quarrelled with his new publisher over the content of his poems. The most telling example took place in the autumn of 1819, when Keats was trying to revise "The Eve of St. Agnes" to show
that the love affair was consummated. Although Woodhouse, the publisher's legal advisor, warned the poet that such revision might make the poem unsuitable for ladies, Keats refused to change his mind, retorting that he did not want ladies to read his poetry at all. Infuriated by "This folly of Keats [which] is the most stupid Piece of Folly [he] can conceive," Taylor threatened that he would not publish the poet's work.\(^ {17} \) On another occasion, the publisher John Murray is believed to have actually discouraged Keats from writing any poem that might be too disturbing to the minds of his bourgeois audience.\(^ {18} \) Such anecdotes clearly show that "Writing poetry is a human activity, and partakes of human complexity" (Murphy 7).

The act of writing was, in other words, not only a personal experience but also a social event. This being so, Keats's poetry, like any other work of art, should be seen as a result of a whole interactive network of social forces rather than that of any one individual's influences.

Turning to Li He, we find that the Chinese poet also lived in an age of great turbulence. Although the Tang dynasty had risen in the first half of the seventh century as the most powerful empire of the world, it began to decline after the rebellion of An and Shi (755-763). As the dynasty entered the last quarter of the eighth century, it was plagued more and more by the encroachment of Tibetans on its northwestern frontiers and, especially,
by what historians have traditionally referred to as the two major "evils" of Tang: the evil of the eunuchs and the evil of the border generals. On the one hand, because they had been playing a uniquely important role in determining the imperial succession, the eunuchs usurped a large part of state power, thus complicating and intensifying the political struggles within the whole bureaucratic system, which was constituted largely by "literary" families and scholar-officials. On the other hand, as a result of the decentralization of military power after the forsaking of fubing militia system, many provincial military governors became so powerful that they constantly challenged the rule of Tang by trying to set up their own separatist regimes. In point of fact, there were, between 763 and 805, nearly fifty zhou in the north which were tightly controlled by rebellious generals. Although Dezong (reg. 780-805) made some efforts to pacify those military rebels in the early 780s, he was never able to improve the situation in any significant way. As he felt increasingly suspicious of his generals, the emperor trusted his eunuchs to the exclusion of almost all others and even put Dou Wenchang and Huo Xianmin in charge of his Armies of Divine Strategy. In an attempt to play down the tension between the eunuchs and bureaucrats, Shunzong appointed Wang Shuwen as his Chief Minister and allowed him to carry out some political reforms. But Shunzong's reign lasted no more than one year and, within eight
months, both the emperor himself and Wang as well as the latter's supporters were driven out of the political stage by eunuchs who were highly powerful and conservative.

When Xianzong (reg. 806-821) came to the throne with the help of a group of eunuchs led by Ju Wenzhen, he tried to restore the power of the imperial house by launching a series of punitive expeditions against those recalcitrant military governors who dared to defy the central government. In these operations Xianzong was quite successful, particularly during the early years of his reign. In 806, for instance, he captured Liu Pi, a rebellious general in Xichuan. The following year, he defeated Li Qi, another rebellious general in Zhenhai. But as the emperor depended heavily on the eunuch-controlled Armies of Divine Strategy, these victories were won "at the cost of aggravating to unmanageable proportions the [other] 'evil,' that of the increasing power of the eunuchs" (South 11). More deplorably, long before he was able to bring all the border garrisons and military governors under his authority in 819, Xianzong had began to live a self-indulgent life, preoccupying himself with a superstitious search for immortality. In the meantime, the court was divided into two large opposing groups which were later to be known as the Li cabal and Niu cabal: the former consisted of those who inclined towards the idea of military subjugation, the latter of those who tended to support the policy of
appeasement towards the rebellious generals. While the feud between the two cabals developed and started to dominate the entire political life, government leaders like Li Fengji, a chief minister, and his followers remained corrupt and self-interested, making few efforts to improve the almost chaotic situation. As an immediate result of the political struggles of the day, Xianzong was murdered in 821 by a powerful eunuch named Chen Hongzhi who supported the Niu cabal. After the emperor's death, "the 'not-to-use-arms' policy came into practice and thus the political arena underwent a great change" (Chen Yinke 72): the evil of border generals came back again and grew until it completely destroyed the dynasty in the early tenth century. It was true that in the light of later events there was some revival of Tang during Xianzong's reign. However, the period was by no means one of "supreme harmony" as "Yuanhe" the name of his reign indicated.

Given the political situation of the day, Chinese society was in general disorder. Ever since the Rebellion of An and Shi, more and more people began to flee from the warring areas to the relatively peaceful districts. As a result, the political centre remained in the north, but the economic centre moved to the south where more and larger cities appeared, among which were Chengdu, Canton, Suzhou, Hangzhou and Yangzhou. Within a few decades, the eight provinces in the south became more prosperous than
ever before: agricultural production increased; mining, metalworking, shipbuilding, tea-processing, textile and handicraft industries developed; and large private workshops came into existence. As the production of commercial goods grew, various kinds of local markets were formed and silver came to be used as the means of exchange. By 782, there had appeared nearly two thousand individuals whose wealth was worth more than ten thousand guan in each case. But in spite of the big economic developments in the southern provinces, the country as a whole was deep in a financial crisis. Simply because most districts in the north were under the control of local warlords, the central government had to abandon its traditional "Guanzong based" policy and adopted one which relied almost exclusively on the wealth and taxes of the southern provinces. While it needed an enormous supply of money and materials in its military operations against disintegrating forces and Tibetan encroachments, the government also had to maintain strong troops at strategic points along the canal transport route from the south to the north through the Huai Valley. Moreover, there were too many non-productive elements to be paid out of tax monies. In 805, for example, the number of government officials in both civil and military services reached as high as 368,668. In 807, more than 830,000 soldiers were engaged in various military activities, whereas only 1,440,000 households actually paid their taxes. "Compared
with the households furnishing taxes in the Tianbao period [742-56]," as Li Jifu estimated, "this is only one quarter."19 Obviously there was a contradiction between the reduction in source of supply and the increase in expenditures on civil and military services. This contradiction, serious as it was, created not merely an economic problem but a social one as well.

In order to secure a very large amount of income from a disproportionately small area, the government introduced a variety of economic policies. In 780, the liangshui (double taxation) scheme initiated by Yang Yan was put into effect. This tax-reform was quite a success at first but soon became a heavy burden on tax payers during the Yuanhe period as a result of a severe deflation "which had been plaguing the country since the mid 780s."20 Other exorbitant taxes and levies were also imposed, such as the jieqian ling (order of borrowing money) in 782, the jianjia shui (house framing tax) in 784, the qingmiao shui (green seedling tax) in 792, and the cha shui (tea tax) in 793.21 Another irregular way in which the government tried to increase its revenue was the infamous practice of "offering gifts", by which people were forced to present gifts to the Emperor on almost every occasion. But in most cases, these "gifts" were embezzled by government officials or used by them to gain personal favours from the monarch. The numerous exactions, the abuses of economic policies and excessive cruelty as well as
extensive corruption of bureaucrats in enforcing the
collection of taxes and gifts thus caused enormous
hardships for the people in general, and for the peasantry
in particular, forcing thousands of families to declare
bankruptcy and flee from their own districts. In 818, the
number of households in Wenxiang County was, for example,
reduced by a third. While many men had to work as tenants
and seek employment in cities after the collapse of the
juntian (equal land) system, others either turned to
soldiering or became outlaws. As the social and economic
conditions deteriorated, people began to show their
discontent openly. In 762, for instance, there was an
uprising in Taizhou led by Yuan Chao. In 811, there was
another uprising against corvée in Chenzhou. Twelve years
later, the angry peasants in Wujian killed the county
magistrate and distributed among themselves the rice
reserved in public storehouses. Such movements gradually
developed into the nationwide Huang Chao Uprising in 875,
which contributed directly to the eventual downfall of
Tang.

Culturally, mid-Tang China witnessed some important
movements in Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, which had
been playing an almost equally significant role in social
and intellectual life since the establishment of the
dynasty. These movements, which started as a response to
the chaotic social and political situation after the
Rebellion of An and Shi, were commonly characterized by
what Ge Zhaoguang described as "a strong consciousness that tried to liberate itself from the framework of conventions" (217). While the great thinker and writer Han Yu (768-824) concerned himself deeply with the restoration of Confucian doctrines and campaigned against both Buddhism and Taoism as unorthodox constructs and superstitious practices, his ideas about "yi xin qiu dao" (seeking truth and/or virtue from one's heart and mind) were developed by his pupil Li Ao, whose theoretical work Fuxing Shu (Book on the Recovery of Human Nature) focused on the moral perfection of selfhood and marked the actual beginning of the neo-Confucianism of the Song dynasty. Meanwhile the southern school of Chan which emphasized the sudden enlightenment of the mind became the mainstream of Buddhism, and Taoists like Sima Chengzhen and Shi Jianwu shifted their attention from the superstitious search for human immortality to the practical maintenance of one's spiritual and physical health. Although there were still open and sharp contentions among scholars and religious people, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism as the three major schools of thought actually showed "a clear tendency towards fusion at the ideological-cultural level" (Fang 303). Disillusioned and disappointed as they were, most intellectuals of the day were, in other words, less optimistic and paid much more attention to the inner reality than previous generations.  

As ideological trends turned and converged, new
progresses were made in scholarship, science, technology and arts. When he worked as a chief minister in Dezong's reign, for instance, Jia Dan made a large number of local and national maps, thus contributing greatly to the studies of cartography and geography. In 801, Du You, another chief minister, published his Tong Dian (General Canon), "a treatise on the constitution, a masterly work which helped to set the precedent for a new type of history." While there were continuous developments in the studies of calendar, mathematics, geography and medicine, the carving plate, which had been invented in the early eighth century, was used more and more in the printing of literary works. In the field of the arts, mid-Tang China did not produce as many famous painters or sculptors as one might expect, but it yielded many accomplished musicians, among whom Li Ping and Ying Shi were particularly well-known. More noteworthy was that mainly "as a result of the development of commodity economy and the rising and growth of the townspeople" (Wu 184), such forms of literature as ci, bianwen and chuangyi (prose romance) began to thrive. Among those which were particularly popular in the time were Bai Xingjian's Li Wa Chuan (795) and Yuan Zhen's Ying Ying Chuan (800), which dealt with the themes of love and individual freedom in both cases.

Most important, the years around 800 were extremely rich in the so-called serious literature. On the one
hand, this period was one of great individual achievements as embodied in the works of Han Yu, Liu Zongyuan, Bai Juyi, Yuan Zhen, Liu Yuxi, Zhang Ji and many others. On the other hand, the period observed two major literary movements: the guwen (ancient prose) movement and the New yuefu (musical bureau poetry) movement. As a historical phenomenon, the guwen movement was initiated in the mid-sixth century when such writers as Yuwen Tai and Su Chuo tried to follow the style of ancient prose instead of the prevailing style of pianwen (rhythmical prose characterized by parallelism and ornateness) in their prose writings. But the movement did not gain any real momentum until Han and Liu Zongyuan began not only to write consciously in the simpler ancient style of the Confucian classics but also to oppose in theory the formalized and euphuistic prose of the Six dynasties. Although this movement was confined to prose writing, it found wide support among nearly all important writers of the day. Under the direct influences of Han and Liu, writers like Li Guan, Ouyang Zhan, Shen Yazhi, Li Ao and Huangfu Shi all developed a guwen style in their prose writings.

As the counterpart of the guwen movement in prose, the New yuefu movement in poetry led by Bai and his great friend Yuan had a very early origin. Since the Jian-an period (196-220), yuefu, or the folk songs of the Han dynasty, had been imitated by individual poets of every
generation. But it was during the Yuanhe period that a conscious movement was formed. Dissatisfied with the highly-coloured and over-elaborate poetic style of the Southern dynasties and with the worsening social and political conditions of mid-Tang, Bai and Yuan took it as their major objective to use a simple language to reflect and criticize contemporary life as the Han balladeers had done. They called their own poetic works "new vuefu" because they used the same headings of the old Han songs but broadened their thematic scope and completely changed their metrical patterns. With their serious purposes, contemporary significance and vigorous style, the new vuefu poems of Bai and Yuan became extremely popular among common people and highly influential in poetic creations as well. Among the supporters and participants of the New vuefu movement were Liu Yuxi, Zhang Ji, Wang Jian and Li Shen, who were all outstanding poets of the Yuanhe period.

With "The large number of eminent writers and the variety and extent of their writing," the few decades around 800 thus represented, in South's words, "a literary period of great vitality and vigour" (75). This period distinguished itself in many important ways. For one thing, the poets, essayists and fiction writers of the period mostly took a serious interest in, and maintained a critical attitude towards, contemporary realities. Such interest and attitude could easily be related to the general unrest that resulted from the Rebellion of An and
Shi, to the influence of the great poet Du Fu (712-770) who was keenly alive to his contemporary social and political conditions, and to the traditional Confucian principle that literature should always serve a human and moral purpose. With their serious intentions, the writers were very much concerned with the effectiveness of language as an artistic vehicle and, in a certain sense, both the guwen movement and the New Yuefu movement could be seen as a conscious search for an appropriate or powerful style. Further, the Yuanhe writers, especially Han, Liu, Bai and Yuan, strongly resisted established literary conventions. In order to catch up with, or even to surpass, their immediate predecessors, they strove hard to achieve originality and freshness in their work. A famous example occurs in Han's poem "Nan Shan" (Southern Hills), in which the author used more than fifty metaphors consecutively to describe the same mountainous scene. To many contemporaries like Li Zhao, such unconventionality was certainly something very "strange."

It was in this literary period known for its seriousness and strangeness that Li He distinguished himself as a poet. Born in 790 in Chang-gu, a beautiful mountain village about thirty miles away from Luoyang, Li (styled Changji) was the first son of a minor branch of the imperial house of Tang. His father, supposedly Du Fu's twenty-ninth younger cousin, served as an official on
the border and was once the magistrate of Shan County; his mother was from the Cheng family; he had a sister and a younger brother. As Li's family was very much in reduced circumstances, little has come down to us about his parents, his education or his early life. But from his own writings we do know that Li suffered from poor health from childhood. By 806, his hair had already turned grey. In 807 when his father died (?), Li travelled to Luoyang, the Eastern Capital of Tang, and called on the great man Han Yu. Two years later, Li had a visit in Luoyang from Han and Huangfu Shi. In the autumn of 810, he took the district examination in Henan fu and received a grade of jun (outstanding) and, in winter, he went to Chang-an for the much desired jinshi (doctoral) degree but was prevented from taking the examination for the reasons which I will discuss later in detail. About a year later, Li returned to Chang-an and was soon offered a post as Supervisor of Ceremonies in Chang-an. In the spring of 813, he gave up office—probably because of his poor health and his dissatisfaction with this insignificant position—and returned to his native place. A few months later, he went to Chang-an again. And in the autumn of 814, he travelled (through the south?) to Luzhou in the hope of gaining a post through the help of his friend Zhang Che, who was working under Xi Shimei, a general still loyal to Tang. Although Li stayed there for nearly three years, he never got what he wanted. In the winter
of 816, he returned to Chang-gu and died of an illness and in poverty.

Li's poetic life, as is recorded in both Xin Tang Shu and Tai Ping Guang Ji, began when he was only seven years old. 27 Although little can be established about his early development as a poet, we know that he wrote so much and so well that, by 804, he had become well known for his poems, especially those written in the Yuefu tradition. 28 As he grew older, Li developed a most intimate relationship with Wang Canyuan, Yang Jingzhi, Quan Qu and Cui Zhi who had literary talents as well as influential family backgrounds and who were always eager to read the songs or poems Li had written. While all his Yuefu ballads were set to music by the Yunshao musicians of the day, Li's poetic talents were well recognized by important writers such as Han and Huangfu. Devoted as he was to his creative work, Li composed a great deal in his short life. But he threw away many of the songs and poems he considered unsatisfactory. Before he died, Li divided his poetic works, numbering 233 pieces altogether, into four sections and gave them all to his friend Shen Ziming. Fifteen years after Li's death, the poet Du Mu (803-852) wrote an influential preface to his poetry, commenting that "Li broke away from tradition and went far along literary paths [so strange] that one cannot really claim to understand them." 29 And ever since the Song dynasty, Li has been dubbed a "guicai" (ghostly or demonic genius)
"for his untraditional treatment of fantastic and macabre theme" (Tu 9).

To see how Li was personally and materially affected by the social and political conditions of his time, it is not only helpful but also necessary to elaborate the way in which he was deprived of the opportunity to obtain the jinshi title. After he passed the provincial test with honours in the autumn of 810, Li went to the royal capital to take the final test for the degree in the winter. But shortly after he arrived in Chang-an, he found that he was not allowed to sit the examination, for there was a serious charge about hui (taboos on names) that had been brought against him. As was required by customary law, one should avoid using, either in speech or in writing, the names of one's elders, especially of one's father, and of one's superiors, especially of the emperor. If Li succeeded in passing the final test, his subsequent assumption of the jinshi title would have violated a family taboo, for the character "㙰" in the title was a homophone of "奀" (note the difference in writing) which was part of his father's given name. At this important juncture, Han Yu wrote a famous essay "Hui Bian" (Refutation of the Nominal Taboo) to show his support of Li and simultaneously to justify himself in having recommended Li as a jinshi candidate. In this short article, the literary giant pointed out that there had been two exceptions to the law and that the avoidance of a
part of a name and of a homophone was actually unnecessary. After giving ample examples, Han went on to argue by asking in bitter satire: "If the son cannot be a jinshi because the father's name is 'Jinsu,' then if the father's name were 'ren' [meaning 'love' or 'benevolence,'--not an uncommon character used in Chinese names], could not the son even be a ren [meaning 'human being']?" Eloquent and convincing as it was, Han's argument hardly improved the situation for Li. Although the charge about hui was apparently groundless and slanderous, the young poet had to yield to the great pressure of a ridiculous tradition and thus failed at the very last moment to gain the most prestigious degree in Tang.

According to Ju Tan Lu, it was Yuan Zhen (779-831), the poet and a high official of the Ministry of Rites who, in order to revenge a personal insult, had brought Li's case to the attention of the authorities and thus prevented Li from sitting the examination. But as many scholars have shown, Yuan never served in that position during his lifetime. Nor would he have been so mean as to do such a thing to Li in 810. While it is now almost impossible to identify who shot the first arrow of slander at Li, we may reasonably assume that Li's downfall had much to do with the jealousy of his fellow-candidates or rivals. Indeed, with Li's outstanding talents for poetic composition which constituted a distinctive part of the
jinshi examination, with Han, the literary patriarch of the day, as his major sponsor, Li was doubtless a most competitive student that many less gifted students would want to see removed from his candidacy in one way or another."

On a more important level, it seems that the charge about hui was brought against not only Li alone but also those who had recommended him as a jinshi candidate. This becomes almost self-evident when we recall Huangfu Shi's warning to Han: "If you do not clear up this matter, both you and He will get into trouble" (Han Yu, "Hui Bian," 34). As Tu has put it, "Chinese tradition has it that a literary man is a statesman and vice versa; Therefore, Han Yu's sponsorship of Li He or any other promising juniors may have been both to create a literary school of his own and to establish political influence" (22). Considering that the very competitive nature of the jinshi examination created a lot of rivalries among the candidates' patrons and that Han had made many a political enemy," it is possible to suggest that as a disciple of Han, Li was probably an innocent victim of a political battle between the candidates' hostile sponsors.

With his candidacy for the jinshi degree thus rejected once and for all, it hardly needs to be said that Li suffered tremendously as a result. Before going to Chang-an for the final examination, the young poet had been extremely optimistic about his career and full of confidence in his own talents. Towards the end of his "Gao
Xuan Guo (The Grand Official Carriage Comes on a Visit), a well-known poem supposedly written when Han and Huangfu visited him on a summer day in 809, Li had claimed that "With flagging pinions I now cling to / Soaring wild-geese, / Yet some day, shamed no longer, / This snake shall rise a dragon." But after the tragical incident in Chang-an, Li felt great sorrow, bitterness and disillusionment as we can see in his "Kai Chou Ge" 开愁歌 (Song: Throwing off My Sorrow): "Though I have reached my twentieth year, / I've missed my goal. / My whole heart sad and withered / As a dying orchid" 15 While his pride was deeply hurt, Li was also troubled by the idea that he had let down his sponsors. In "Ren He Li Za Xu Huang Fu Shi" 仁和李寄胥皇甫詩 (A Few Remarks Addressed to Huangfu Shi), the poet wrote, for example, "In vain you deigned to call me friend / I offended your eyes, / Just when you were going to haul me up, / Your strong rope snapped / . . . / before the palace gates swung wide, / The mad dogs found me."

More significantly, what these "mad dogs" had done to him made it virtually impossible for the young poet to enter the civil service, not to mention gaining high office. Although he was later offered a minor post in the capital, he was never able to get rid of poverty and frustration. It is a well-established fact that Li died of a chronic disease. But "his untimely death . . . was very likely hastened by the dashing of all his hopes for a brilliant official career" (Frodsham xx). That is to say, the shafts
levelled at him in the jinshi examination hall contributed as much to Li's early death as the hostile reviews in Tory magazines did to Keats's.

Based upon our knowledge about John Keats and Li He, we find that there were many interesting biographical similarities between the two poets. To begin with, both Keats and Li died early at the age of twenty-six. During their short lives, they suffered a lot from, to use David Chen's words, "illness, poverty and frustration." As the eldest sons of their families, both Keats and Li had to assume family responsibilities at an early age after their fathers' deaths. While they never married," they both tried very hard to make a living by relying on their own abilities and they were both victimized in a political battle. They travelled quite extensively; they had many good friends; and of course, they had a profound love for poetry and poetic creation. But there were also some important differences between their lives. While Keats's family belonged to the class of rising bourgeoisie, Li's belonged to the class of fallen aristocracy. Keats received a very liberal education in his early life and took it as the purpose of his life to become one "among the English poets"; whereas Li presumably had a more-or-less conventional education and aimed at a political career all through his life. And among many other differences in their life experiences was the fact that, while Li started to write poetry as a child, Keats did not
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Page(s) 68
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begin his creative life until he was almost twenty. This fact shows that Keats's poetic power developed extraordinarily fast, while Li's did extraordinarily early.

From a larger perspective, we can see that the times in which Keats and Li lived and wrote were, in both cases, full of political oppression, social turmoil and economic depression. More significant perhaps, both Georgian England and mid-Tang China were experiencing a crucially important period in the histories of the two countries: while the years around 800 marked the beginning of Tang's decline and fall as a feudal empire, the years around 1800 witnessed the rapid rising of England as the most powerful capitalist country in the world. As Butler has reminded us, "Since culture is a way of expressing experience, we should expect to find these tensions, conflicts and signs of transition reflected in the arts" (4). Only by situating Keats and Li in their respective historical and cultural contexts can we clearly see, that is to say, the significance of the similarities and differences in their poetical works as well as their life experiences. Indeed, to see how poets like Keats and Li are contextualized by their sociohistorical environments is to see how they "create themselves as creatures--'creations'--of the age" (Levinson 3).
NOTES:

1. Or as L. C. B. Seaman recounts in *A New History of England* (1981), these Acts "extended and consolidated the laws against public assembly and freedom of expression. Any house could be searched without warrant on suspicion of containing firearms. Public meetings were again virtually forbidden. Periodicals were taxed to price them beyond the reach of the poorer classes. The power of magistrates to seize literature judged seditious or blasphemous was further increased" (382).

2. For a full quotation and discussion of these words, see O'Higgins, *Censorship in Britain* (London: Nelson, 1972), 34.

3. For more commentary on this point, see Kevin Gilmartin, "Popular Radicalism and the Public Sphere," *Studies in Romanticism* 33 (Winter 1994), 556.

4. Woodring, 21. For a solid discussion of the meaning(s) of "classes" or "class" as applied in early nineteenth century England, see E. P. Thompson, 9-12 and ch 16.

5. For more commentary as well as more detailed information on such historical events, see, for example, Butler, 127.

6. For a brief but excellent discussion of the general context of such disrespect as well as social criticism in Britain between 1775 and 1830, see William Stafford, *Socialism, Radicalism, and Nostalgia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 11-30.


9. See Klancher for a full-length discussion of the problem of audiences during the romantic period.
10. For more discussion along these lines, see Stephen C. Behrendt, 83-84; and also Jackson, 292-293.


14. Here I am using the term "radical" in a general way to describe Keats's political affinities, the political groupings and allegiances of some of his contemporaries (ranging from Leigh Hunt and reformers like Major Cartwright to parliamentarians like Brougham), whereas the term "conservative" is used to refer to supporters of those political institutions which to varying degrees radicals opposed, that is, the institutions of the Court, the aristocracy, Parliament (Lords and Commons), "Whig" and "Tory" groups, the Church, and so on. For more detail on the social, political and historical implications of labels like "radical" or "radicalism," see especially E. P. Thompson, 466-71, 603-06, 645-49.

15. See Andrew Bennett, Keats, Narrative And Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994), 44.


17. For a more detailed account of the anecdote, see Edmund Blunden, Keats's Publisher: A Memoir of John Taylor, 365-67.

18. For sources on Murray's reluctance to publish anything that was too sexually explicit for the "lady" reader, see Tim Chilcott, A Publisher and His Circle: The Life and Works of John Taylor, Keats's Publisher (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 40-44.


22. For more detailed discussion along these lines, see Fang Litian, *Chinese Buddhism and Traditional Culture*, 298-306; see also Ge Zhaoguang, *Taoism and Chinese Culture*, 215-238.


24. In his Preface (824) to Bai Juyi's *Chang Qing Ji*, Yuan Zhen noted, for example, that Bai's poems were widely circulated among common people in both handwritten and carving-plated copies. A quite detailed discussion on the invention and application of the carving plate during the Tang dynasty was provided in Yang Zhijiu's *An Outline of the History of the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties*, 138-140.

25. In his historical work *Tang Guo Shi Bu* (825), Li Zhao described the general literary-cultural trends of the years around 800 in the following way: "While during the Zhenyuan period [785-805] people upheld the principle of unrestrainedness, during the Yuanhe period people did that of strangeness" (Bk III, 12).

26. In Li-scholarship there have been two sets of dates used for his birth and death: 790-816 and 791-817. While most non-Chinese scholars use the dates 791-817, Chinese scholars adopt the dates 790-816. I endorse the Chinese opinion for the same reasons as Kuo-ch'ing Tu has given in his *Li Ho* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), 11-13.

27. But we should discount the story given in these two early books that Li wrote his famous poem "Gao Xuan Guo" (*The Grand Official Carriage Comes on a Visit*) when he was seven. For the reasons, see Liu Yan, *A Biography of the Poet Li Hezhuang* (Taiyuan: Shangxi People's Press, 1984), 26-30.

28. As is recorded in "A Biography of Li Yi" included in both *Xin Tang Shu* (Bk 203, 5784) and *Jiu Tang Shu* (Bk 137, 3731), "[Li Yi] was as famous for his poetry as his clansman Li He by the end of the Zhenyuan period [785-804]." See also Liu Yan, 200.


31. "At this time Yuan was also good at poetic composition and had always wanted to make the acquaintance of Li He. One day, he carried some gifts with him and went to Li's house for a visit. Upon seeing his calling card, Li made no response. But shortly after, he dispatched his servant with the message: 'For what reasons should someone with a mingsheng degree [a much less prestigious degree in Tang] come to see Li He?' Stunned and unable to utter a word, Yuan withdrew in humiliation and anger." See Kang Pian, *Ju Tan Lu*, 60-61. As many scholars have noted, the authenticity of this anecdote is very questionable.

32. For a detailed discussion along these lines, see, for instance, Qian Zhongliang, 32-33.

33. To illustrate this point, I would like to refer to the case of Li Guyan as an example. According to *Tai Ping Guang Ji* (Bk 155), Li had already gained a good reputation as an essayist by 812 when he took part in the jinshi examinations. In order to have him removed from his candidacy, a fellow-candidate(?), who was actually one of his cousins, deliberately led him to break an important examination rule by instigating him to pay a personal visit to Xu Mengrong, the Chief Examiner, beforehand. But fortunately, Xu was very sympathetic towards Li after hearing his story. Rather than prohibiting him from sitting the examination, the Examiner kindly warned the student against dirty tricks other fellow-candidates might play on him out of jealousy. As a result, Li passed the examinations, obtained his degree, and thus had a much better opportunity than our poet had had two years before.

34. One year before Li took the provincial test for the jinshi degree, Han had to resign from office as a result of his criticism of, and struggle against, some powerful eunuchs who had engaged themselves in illegal practice. Although Han was re-assigned a post in 810 as Magistrate of Henan County, he had no more jurisdiction over eunuchs. For more detailed discussion on Han's political activities at this time as well as his relationship with Li, see Liu Guoying, *A Critical Biography of Han Yu* (Beijing: Beijing Teachers' College Press, 1991), 173-84; and Chen Keming, *A Critical Commentary on Han Yu* (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 1985), 267-75.
35. J. D. Frodsham, transl. *Goddesses, Ghosts, and Demons: The Collected Poems of Li He* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983). All subsequent quotations from Li's poems refer to this edition. As Frodsham usually uses more lines in his translation than in the original, line references are provided parenthetically according to the original Chinese text.

36. While it is well documented that Keats never married during his lifetime, it is difficult to ascertain whether Li did so or not. Most modern Chinese scholars and critics from Zhu Ziqing to Xu Chuanwu believe that Li married and that his wife also died an early death. But this opinion or speculation is based almost entirely on the interpretation of a very limited number of Li's poems. Without any "hard evidence" I find it more prudent to assume at this moment that the poet never married.
Chapter Three
The Poet and the Patriot

Is the nation in danger? Every man is called into play; every man feels his interest as a citizen predominating his individual interests; the high, and the low, and the middle classes become all alike politicians.

---- Coleridge

Patriotism, in modern times, and in great states, is and must be the creation of reason and reflection, rather than the offspring of physical or local attachment. . . . Patriotism is not, in a strict or exclusive sense, a natural or personal affection, but a law of our rational and moral nature, strengthened and determined by particular circumstances and associations, but not born of them, nor wholly nourished by them.

---- William Hazlitt

[E]very action, thought and emotion of human beings is inseparably bound up with the life and struggles of the community, that is, with politics.

---- Georg Lukács

Patriotism, or "love of country" in the commonest sense of the word, is obviously an emotional response that must perforce have a psychological foundation. Indeed, as Leonard W. Doob has cogently argued, all patriotic feelings are rooted in "the more or less conviction of a
person that his own welfare and that of the significant
groups to which he belongs are dependent upon the
preservation or expansion (or both) of the power and
culture of his country" (6). Once an individual becomes
aware of himself being a member of a large national
community and thus develops a sense of belonging, he would
naturally concern himself to a certain extent with the
fate of his nation as a whole. If he realizes that his
personal welfare is intimately and importantly connected
with the nation's power and culture, he would not only
take an active interest in domestic politics but also
commit himself in one way or another to promoting the
common weal; or if he finds that his personal welfare is
not so closely connected with the nation as with some
other group(s), he would tend to show indifference towards
national affairs although he may sometimes (unwillingly)
subjugate his needs to the demands of the state. No matter
how much the individual may love his country, his
patriotism, if anything at all, is thus not a purely
emotional state. Rather, it is a psychological tendency
that is full of social and political implications.

As an emotion of the intellectually informed and
politically committed, patriotism offers a theme that has
been no less engaging to literature than such eternal
themes as sexual love or seasonal change. "Infinitely
various though the emotion may be in its expression, it
is, nevertheless, almost universal" (Drinkwater 11) and
seems particularly strong when a national community is threatened or plagued by internal and/or external forces of destruction. In this chapter, I will concentrate on those poems which mark Keats's and Li's patriotism in a most compelling way. It is true that the two poets embody a wide range of differences: they lived in different social and historical conditions, they inherited different literary and cultural traditions, they wrote in different languages, and they had different patriotic concerns. Yet both Keats and Li, as we shall see from their poetic writings, were keenly alive to their contemporary social and political currents and had a profound love for their respective countries. Moreover, both poets used a colourful language and vigorous style in expressing their patriotic concerns. Such similarities, while they provide us with a necessary point of departure, will undoubtedly make us more appreciative of any differences between the two poets and thus enable us to see more clearly the extent to which their poetic productions were simultaneously a result of, and a response to, their own times.

Before examining Keats's patriotism and his poetry per se, we must recall that between 1793 and 1814 Britain was experiencing a highly demanding war with revolutionary and Napoleonic France. This historical fact is important because it reminds us that the poet spent his entire early life in a human community where there was a rapid growth
of national consciousness. As Linda Colley has admirably put it in her recent book *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (1992), "war with an obviously hostile and alien foreign power had forged a semblance of unity and distracted attention from the considerable divisions and tensions within" (322). Whether they lived in Wales, Scotland or England, whether they belonged to the low, the middle or the high classes, and whether they liked or disliked the men in power in London, Britons of both sexes and of all walks of life came to define themselves together against a common threatening Other beyond their sea shores. While the vast majority of able-bodied men were ready to take up arms and fight in the event of an invasion,¹ the nation as a whole was worried about its own safety and security. With war functioning as the crucial unifying force and, especially, with so many Britons gaining a strong sense of their national identity, it was not surprising that patriotism was almost the order of the day. One good example of this cult of patriotic fervour is the hero-worship of Nelson, hero of the Battle of Trafalgar which took place in the summer of 1815 and which resulted in the defeat of the French navy.

But with the final outbreak of peace in 1815, it seemed that patriotic movements began to take a discernible new direction within British society. If during the French wars Britons of different political opinions and allegiances had reached some kind of
consensus as a result of their common concern with the nation's security, after Waterloo the previously-existing division between two large opposing camps resurfaced and became perhaps more profound or irreconcilable. On the one hand, there were loyalists or conservatives, for whom to be a patriot was to remain loyal to the sovereign and supportive of the established social order. On the other, there were liberals or radicals, for whom to be a patriot was to show genuine concern for the poor and take an active part in the struggle for a more democratic political system based on universal manhood suffrage. At Spa Fields in November 1816, for example, Henry Hunt voiced his criticism of those "city patriots" like Waithman who he believed were basically unconcerned with the miseries of the oppressed. In his political articles, William Cobbett repeatedly expressed his hope that many a father would "be induced to spend his evenings at home instructing his children in the history of their misery, and in warming them into acts of patriotism" (Quoted in Cunningham, 67). While many Britons who had participated in the war effort thought that they deserved a role in national political life as well, radicals who aimed at parliamentary reform "instinctively used a vocabulary of patriotism, not as an atavistic survival of their eighteenth-century forbears, but as a constantly reforged tool of opposition" (Cunningham 57). The following ballad which was very popular in the 1810's may serve as a good
illustration:

As for me, in all weathers, in peace or in war,
My service my country commands;
Her rights are at stake and the time is not far
When her sons shall assert their demands:
Then, then, my brave Britons, we ne'er shall be
slaves,
Nor shall tyrants rule over this isle:
See the goddess of freedom her banner high waves,
And inspires her loved sons with her smile."

Set against the patriotism of loyalists, such a radical version of British patriotism was, needless to say, a close reflection of the ideological impact of the French Revolution. Although the patriotism of radicals had been severely repressed in the late 1790s and during the years of the threat of invasion, it was soon revived and began to gain more and more popularity among ordinary Britons in the years immediately before and after the French wars came to an end.

When Keats started to write poetry, presumably in 1814, the year of Napoleon's abdication, British patriotism was almost at a turning point, by which I mean to say that patriotic attention within British society was shifting its focus from the problem of national security to that of civil rights. This shift found expression in Keats's first sonnet "On Peace," probably the second poem he ever wrote in his life:

Oh Peace! and dost thou with thy presence bless
The dwellings of this war-surrounded isle;
Soothing with placid brow our late distress,
Making the triple kingdom brightly smile?
Joyful I hail thy presence; and I hail
The sweet companions that await on thee;
Complete my joy--let not my first wish fail,
Let the sweet mountain nymph thy favorite be,
With England's happiness proclaim Europa's liberty.
Oh Europe! Let not sceptred tyrants see
That thou must shelter in thy former state;
Keep thy chains burst, and boldly say thou art free;
Give thy kings law—leave not uncurbed the great;
So with the horrors past thou'll win thy happier fate.

As one can easily see from the poetic apostrophe "Oh Peace!" with which the sonnet opens, the poet has been expecting the arrival of peace as a godly figure whose very "presence" may bring comfort and happiness to his fellow countrymen. Consumed as he might be with the "late distress" of his people, he finds great joy in seeing his "war-surrounded" motherland finally relieved from a long impending invasion. As he enthusiastically celebrates the end of war with France, the poet feels, however, that his joy is not really "complete." For him, happiness is certainly the most desirable state of human existence. But without peace, happiness is impossible. In order to maintain peace, liberty should be "proclaimed" while the ruling classes must be made to subject to law. If those sceptred tyrants are left "uncurbed" as they have been, the people in "the triple kingdom" and all over Europe would inevitably fail, as the poet clearly suggests in the last five lines, to win their "happier fate." Such ideas, while they are "based on a genuine personal conviction" (Wright 22), clearly show that the poet's very "first" wish is derived from his critical thinking about the despotic rule of the kings or "the great." This being so, the poet's treatment of such themes as human distress,
liberty and legitimate tyranny in the sonnet should therefore not be considered a mere echo of Leigh Hunt's articles in the Examiner of April and May 1814, as critics like Aileen Ward and Miriam Allott have suggested.

Although it was not published until long after the poet's death and although it has often been considered "stilted" (Ward 37), the sonnet deserves our special attention, not only because its thematic shift from the celebration of peace to the warning against sceptred tyrants closely reflects the patriotic movements within British society, but also because it exemplifies the way in which Keats drew his earliest poetic inspirations from his social and political concerns. As a young apprentice to a village doctor at the time, Keats was busy learning medical skills and taking care of his patients at Edmonton. But his daily preoccupations there did not prevent him from looking beyond to what was happening in the outside world. The very fact that he wrote the poem in reaction to Napoleon's deposition by the allies shows the poet having very strong patriotic impulses. Without a deep love for his country, without an active interest in contemporary world affairs, Keats would not have commenced his poetic career thus by articulating his concerns with the fate of his nation. Or one may put it more strongly: it was his social and political concerns that made Keats an emerging poet. While he was to gain his poetic maturity in the few years to come, the thematic content of the poem
demonstrates that by the time he began to try his hand at poetry, Keats had already developed a deep concern with the social and political conditions of his country and that his poetic imagination was "informed in fundamental ways by the power relations that dominated his age" (Watkins 12).

As an emerging poet with intense patriotic sentiments, Keats must have recognized liberty or freedom as the most important issue in contemporary politics. Otherwise he would not have attended so much to this theme in his (early) poetry. While in the above sonnet the poet draws attention to the interrelationship between liberty and happiness, in his poem "To Hope" the poet utters the hope that

In the long vista of the years to roll,
Let me not see our country's honour fade:
O let me see our land retain her soul,
Her pride, her freedom; and not freedom's shade.
From thy bright eyes unusual brightness shed—
Beneath thy pinions canopy my head!

Let me not see the patriot's high bequest,
Great Liberty! how great in plain attire!
With the base purple of a court oppress'd,
Bowing her head and ready to expire:
But let me see thee stoop from heaven on wings
That fill the skies with silver glitterings!

(ll. 31-42)

The repetition of the verbal formulae "let me see" and "let me not see" in these lines may lead one to see the poet-speaker more as a gazer than as an activist. But for Keats, the very act of making such pleas in poetry has a political significance, for it may help promote the awareness of the problem of freedom. (Indeed, any
politically-aware poet will use poetry as a vehicle for taking part in contemporary politics.) Based on his observation of "the bare heath of life" (1.4) and his contemplation of "the fate of those I hold most dear" (1.9), the poet realizes "when by my solitary hearth I sit,/ And hateful thoughts enwrap my soul in gloom" (ll. 1–2) that the whole political situation within British society was darkening after the Napoleonic wars. Upon this observation, the poet fears that under the oppression of "the base purple of a court"—it may be worth pointing out that the expression "base purple" is used as an oxymoron here, since purple is traditionally a symbol of nobility—liberty would be reduced to nothing but a "shade." More significantly, as he juxtaposes freedom with the "soul" and the "pride" of his beloved country, and further with "the patriot's high behest," the poet makes it clear that the love of freedom is identifiable with the love of country. For Keats as for many radicals of the day, a patriot is by definition an advocate of freedom. Put differently, if an individual has any genuine concern with the fate of his country and the welfare of his people, he must fight for freedom, whether national or civil. If the individual does not concern himself with the cause of freedom, he should not be considered a patriot at all. With these ideas as its underlying message, the poem should thus be taken as an important expressive index to Keats's patriotism which, as we shall see more clearly.
later, can most conveniently be defined in terms of his emotional and intellectual commitment to the cause of freedom or what may be called at this point constitutional restriction of the power of the monarch.

Once we understand the lines quoted above as a further exploration of the theme of freedom, which the poet first introduces in his sonnet "On Peace," we come to see that Keats's presentation of his "sweet Hope" in the whole poem signifies nothing less than a formation of his own political vision. To the poet, good politics or government should ensure that "freedom; [and] not freedom's shade" is retained in the country. If the people are deprived of freedom, they would have every reason to hate their rulers. In the meantime, the poet finds it important not to lose his "bright-eyed Hope" (1.21). For him, Hope is not merely an agent that enables him to "keep that fiend Despondence far aloof" (1. 12). With its "unusual brightness" (1.35) and "ethereal" (1. 29) power to "fill the skies with silver glitterings" (1. 42), Hope is also "a star [that] / Gilds the bright summit of some gloomy cloud; / Brightening the half veil'd face of heaven afar" (ll. 43-45). In other words, Hope is a guiding light that may function to lead the poet and his fellow patriots in their efforts to retain their "country's honour." This guiding light or political vision, which is apparently developed out of the poet's anxiety about the social and political realities in his country, has a great emotional
and persuasive force: by presenting his hope in terms of light versus dark, an image for political conflict that forms part of the political discourse of the time, the poet creates a sharp contrast between two opposing categories. Such contrast, which constitutes a most distinctive part of Keats's poetics, is effective in that it gives to the poem a symbolic tensity that challenges the reader's "mind's eye" (l. 3).

That Keats's patriotism is strongly marked by his preoccupation with the cause of freedom can also be seen from the tributes he constantly pays to patriotic heroes, whether they are native or foreign, contemporary or historical. In a little poem written (according to Stillinger's editorial note) in 1814 or 1815, on 29 May, for example, the poet cherishes his memory of martyrs of freedom as he attacks the glorification of Charles II:

Infatuate Britons, will you still proclaim
His memory, your direst, foulest shame?
Nor patriots revere?
Ah! when I hear each traitorous lying bell,
'Tis gallant Sydney's, Russell's, Vane's sad knell,
That pains my wounded ear.

However immature or feeble this short poem may appear, it is significant in a number of ways. For one thing, the fact that the above lines were composed on the occasion of the anniversary of the restoration of monarchy, brought about by making Charles II the king in 1660, demonstrates that the young Keats, although only eighteen or nineteen at the time, was a close observer of contemporary
political events and was capable of expressing his political feelings readily through poetry. For another, the poem's reference to such historical figures as Sydney, Russell and Vane who were mostly vehement republicans in the English Civil War and whose names appeared frequently in the literature of Keats's time indicates that those known in the 1660s as "Commonwealthsmen," that is, supporters of the principles of the Commonwealth who opposed Charles II, and what they saw as "popery" (the infiltration of Roman Catholic influence into the British court) had an important informing power on the poet's mind. Actually, when we recall "Keats's absorption, during his last eighteen months at school, in Burnett's History of Our Own Times [a book which offers a vivid account of the long struggle for freedom in England], along with Mavor's Universal History and Robertson's histories of Scotland, America and Charles the fifth" (Thorpe 1230-31), when we consider Clarke's remark about how "This [Burnett's] work and Leigh Hunt's Examiner newspaper . . . laid the foundation of [Keats's] love of civil and religious liberty," it becomes evident that the young poet was not only familiar with the names of the heroes of the Parliament side and republican ideals of the Civil War but also, and more important perhaps, aware of the whole question of the relationship of traditions about the Civil War to the debates about reform, the monarchy, and other political matters in the
Regency period. Needless to say, the "freedom" that those men like Sydney wanted bears very little resemblance to what a modern democratic society assumes is basic to individual freedom--for example, they did not demand "one man one vote" and indeed did not regard the idea as essential to freedom. But in the context of Keats's early admiration for representatives of the Parliament side in the Civil War, the meaning of "freedom" did not seem to have changed much since the seventeenth century, for it tended to mean freedom from whatever was currently perceived as a major source of oppression. If there was any change in the meaning at all, it may be stated as this: while for republicans of the Civil War the major source of oppression was the crown, for radicals of the Regency period it was the crown and the Tory government. Considering that "his whole civil creed was comprised in the master principle of 'universal liberty,' viz., 'Equal and stern justice to all, from the duke to the dustman'" (Clarke 150), Keats must have recognized that the contemporary struggle for a more democratic political system was a historical development of the patriotic movements of the seventeenth century and thus an integral part of the great patriotic tradition of his country. Without this recognition it would be unimaginable that the poet should have felt so strongly about the fate of Sydney and his like as to produce an "indignant riposte" (Newey 166) to the ringing of "each traitorous lying bell." With
its celebration of three men who remained loyal to their republican, Commonwealth ideals even after the Restoration and who were actually executed for resisting the rule of Charles II, the poem can be taken, that is to say, as an explicit statement of Keats's understanding of what a true patriot should be.

Also noteworthy here is the way in which Keats projects his patriotic concerns through two kinds of contrasts he creates in the poem. The first is an emotional one, in which the poet's articulated sadness is set against other Britons' supposed joy. The second may be termed a ritual contrast, in which the poet's private commemoration of those "gallant" patriots like Sydney, Russell and Vane is set against his countrymen's public celebration of the anniversary of Charles II's restoration. As these two kinds of contrasts work hand in hand within the context of the poem, one is deeply impressed with the high level of political consciousness Keats has achieved as a rising poet. Although many of his countrymen may have failed to develop a sound understanding of the event and thus turned out to be politically insensitive, the poet remained as sober as ever about whom to love and whom to hate. From his point of view, Sydney, Russell and Vane are true patriots to be "revered" because they have fought and fallen for the cause of freedom, whereas Charles II is "the direst, foulest shame" to be condemned because he is the enemy of
freedom. Upon hearing the "traitorous lying bell," the poet thus has an essentially different response. While most of his countrymen may happily join in the celebration of the Restoration, the poet feels not only sad and disappointed but also angry: his countrymen should never have become so "infatuate" as to "proclaim" the memory of their true shame and forget their true heroes.

Deeply concerned as he was with his countrymen's political infatuation (with the sentimentalized image of King Charles II?), the young Keats must have realized further that it was vital to perpetuate the memory of those who had made sacrifices for freedom's sake. For the poet, to celebrate those freedom-fighters of the Civil War period was not only to show the personal respect he had maintained for them since his school days at Enfield, but to promote the cause of freedom itself. In a time when political conservatism was common among ordinary Britons and when political oppression was rampant in the country, to commemorate those martyrs was to celebrate their fighting spirit. And to celebrate their fighting spirit was to invite his fellow countrymen to take part in the effort to carry forward the great tradition of British patriotism that emphasized freedom as the most fundamental principle in political life. In his verse letter "To George Felton Matthew," the poet therefore reminded his early poetical friend that after paying homage to Chatterton, Shakespeare and Milton,
The next could tell
Of those who in the cause of freedom fell;
Of our own Alfred, of Helvetian Tell;
Of him whose name to ev'ry heart's a solace,
High-minded and unbending William Wallace.
While to the rugged north our musing turns
We well might drop a tear for him, and Burns.
(11.65-71)

In another verse letter he wrote to Charles Cowden Clarke, the poet further re-expressed his admiration of those national heroes who had fallen "in the cause of freedom":

You too upheld the veil from Clio's beauty,  
And pointed out the patriot's stern duty;  
The might of Alfred, and the shaft of Tell;  
The hand of Brutus, that so grandly fell  
Upon a tyrant's head.
(11.68-72)

From these lines we can clearly see how Keats's admiration of heroes of the struggle for the citizen's rights against the arbitrary power of the monarch might have been fostered by Clarke who had lent him and often discussed with him Bishop Burnet's History of My Own Time. But as he repeatedly alluded to those heroes in his writings, we understand that the poet was not simply recalling what the book had to say. Nor was he simply endorsing what his friend and former teacher had taught him. The poet's primary concern here was, I think, to articulate his own enthusiasm about the problem of liberty and at the same time to remind his reader of "the patriot's stern duty" to advance the cause of freedom.

Conspicuous in the long list of names of patriotic heroes in Keats's poetry was Tadeusz Kosciusko, the well-
known champion of Polish independence who had led his people in their rising against Russia and whom many British radicals highly respected and praised. By commemorating him in a zealous sonnet, which was first published in the Examiner in February 1817, the poet compels us to see that whoever has made contributions to the cause of freedom deserves to be held most dear. Whether he belongs to a different nationality or a different historical period, his heroic deeds should be kept in the living memory of humanity. This was because, as the poet strongly suggests in the sonnet, the very name of a patriotic hero like Kosciusko is a great inspiration to those who are willing to join in the struggle for freedom:

Good Kosciusko, thy great name alone
Is a full harvest whence to reap high feeling;
It comes upon us like the glorious pealing
Of the wide spheres— an everlasting tone.
And now it tells me, that in worlds unknown,
The names of heroes, burst from clouds concealing
Are changed to harmonies, for ever stealing
Through cloudless blue, and round each silver throne.

It tells me too, that on a happy day,
When some good spirit walks upon the earth,
Thy name with Alfred's and the great of yore
Gently commingling, gives tremendous birth
To a loud hymn, that sounds far, far away
To where the great God lives for evermore.

In these lines the poet makes no use of topical words like "freedom" and "patriot" as he has frequently done in other earlier poems. But his triple reference to the word "name" in the sonnet is thematically significant enough. For the poet, "the names of heroes" like Kosciusko and Alfred are
synonymous with "patriot" and "freedom." To do honour to their names is therefore not only to eulogize them as individual heroes but also to celebrate freedom itself as a political ideal. Moreover, by juxtaposing Kosciusko's name with "some good spirit [that] walks upon the earth," the poem connects the cause of freedom with the Divine Will, thus suggesting (as Shelley does in A Defence of Poetry) there is something in the power governing the Universe that is inherently "progressive." When the sonnet finally harks back to Alfred--the famous king who according to legend resisted the Danish invasion and whom Hunt called (in his Examiner of 2 March 1817) "an ancestor in the cause of English liberty" (See also Hoagwood, "Keats, fictionality, and finance: The Fall of Hyperion," 129-30)--as an icon of genuinely English patriotism, it becomes clear that by appealing to the names of patriot-heroes like Kosciusko, the poet is actually trying to call on his fellow countrymen to continue their own fight for freedom.

Having demonstrated freedom as the principal focus of Keats's patriotic concerns, we can now go a step further to look in a more complete way at the ideological content the poet might have assigned to the term. In order to do so, we must not forget that those freedom-fighters who figure most importantly in Keats's poetry can be divided into two large groups. One includes those like Alfred, Tell, Wallace, and Kosciusko who have proved themselves to
be great champions of national independence. The other group consists of those like Sydney and Russell who have made enormous sacrifices in their struggle for civil rights. As the poet hails and re-hails all these fighters as patriotic heroes, he invests the term "freedom" thus with two basic semantic components: national independence and civil rights. While Keats sometimes might put more emphasis on one component than the other, such a definition of freedom is obviously accurate in the sense that it had an immediate relevance to contemporary political life within British society, which had been dominated by the problems of national security and parliamentary reform. It is true that this definition was not uniquely Keats's. But the poet did give to it his special stamp as he constantly paid tribute to patriotic heroes without making any distinction between them. According to the poet, "the glory of Patriotism [is] the glory of making by any means a country happier" (Letters 1:307), whereas the glory of making a country happier is the glory of committing oneself to the great cause of freedom. Only when an individual is willing to fight for national independence or civil rights can he be recognized as a true patriot.

While enough has been said about how the love of country was for Keats--to borrow Hazlitt's words--"little more than another name for the love of liberty, of independence, of peace, and social happiness" (67), it
remains to say something about two fundamental ways in which the poet tended to express his patriotic concerns. First, as we have found in the cases of his sonnet "On Peace" and "Lines Written on May 29," Keats would compose a whole poem in response to some specific political events or situations. Such compositions are occasional in nature, but they are important because they illustrate that the young Keats was not only politically alert but also poetically capable. As the very occasionality of these political poems suggests the emotional intensity that is so typical of Keats, one is justified in rejecting Ward's remark that the poet was perhaps "temperamentally incapable of real political poetry" (34). Secondly, the poet would quite abruptly turn to political themes while dealing largely with non-political matters in his poetical writings, as in the cases of his verse epistles "To George Felton Matthew" and "To Charles Cowden Clarke." The abruptness of this habitual turn, while it signifies the "spontaneous overflow" of his political feelings, also points towards the fact that the poet's thematic concern with national affairs is profound and persistent. More interestingly perhaps, by incorporating his patriotic concerns into verse letters, the poet is able to bring together "the conversational and the formal, the public and the private, the immediate present and the recollected past," thus adding to his works a "moral sincerity and uniformity." As a result, when the poet tells us that
"there is a joy in footing slow across a silent plain,/
Where patriotic battle has been fought" ("There is a joy"; ll. 1-2), we are allowed to share the warmth he feels "with patriotic lore" ("Oh! how I love"; l. 9). And when he writes in his verse epistle "To My Brother George" that

--The patriot shall feel
My stern alarum, and unsheath his steel;
Or, in the senate thunder out my numbers
To startle princes from their easy slumbers.
(ll. 73-76)

we understand that the poet is not only "recalling the libertarian and patriotic sentiment of Cowper's The Task (1785)" but also trying to inspire his fellow countrymen into "acts of patriotism."

Not unlike Keats, Li lived and wrote in a time when "patriotic battle" was a major concern to both the governing authorities and common people. While he was equally alert to what was harmful to the national well-being, the Chinese poet was also ready to give powerful expression to his love for his country. But except for such and other very general similarities I can establish, I must say, few real points of contact between the Keats section and the Li section in this chapter. What I am going to do in the following is, in other words, not to make a case for seeing Li as similar to Keats in any significant way. Quite the reverse, I want to argue that social and cultural differences between the China of Li's time and the England of Keats's time make it difficult to
see parallels between their work, in the political realm. Indeed, in a comparative study of two poets like Li and Keats who were conditioned by different contextual specificities, the more we go into detail, the more differences we should expect to see in the way the sociopolitical circumstances affected their respective poetical careers, and even in the very way they conceived their responsibilities or commitments as poets writing about sociopolitical concerns. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the predominant problem that mid-Tang China had been facing since the An-Shi Rebellion was the problem of military or provincial separatism, which posed a great threat to the nation's unity and caused a large portion of the population to suffer from nothing less than a civil war. While ordinary Chinese might simply hate those rebel military governors and wish for a peaceful and prosperous life, the whole bureaucracy was divided on the question of how to achieve the nation's reunification. For Li Jifu and his followers, the most effective way lay in military expeditions against those rebel satraps. But for other bureaucrats like Niu Sengru, punitive expeditions could only intensify the conflict between the Central Government and local warlords and it was therefore more expedient to bring those recalcitrant generals under the authority of the Central Government by giving to them whatever they wanted. This difference of opinion between two military strategies constituted an important part of
what has been conventionally called "Niu-Li Factional Strife" --a political struggle which, according to Chen Yinke, started in the Yuanhe period and lasted for more than fifty years. More important, the difference leads us to see that if we can use the term "patriotism" here--in the sense of loving the Fatherland as a whole, there were two major versions of patriotism in mid-Tang China, for the patriotism of appeasers was set against that of militants. With Xianzong himself being in favour of the political programme offered by Li Jifu, it follows naturally that it was militant patriotism that carried most of the day. Even after Wu Yuanheng, a hard-line chief minister who resolutely pursued the "using-arms" policy, was assassinated in the summer of 815 by his political enemies, the patriotic battle against rebel satraps never really stopped until the last days of Xianzong's reign.

Having said this, I must immediately point out that probably because patriotism is normally considered an outgrowth of the nationalism that began developing in the late medieval period in Europe, most Western scholars of Chinese history are quite loath to apply the words "patriotism" and "nationalism" to anything in China before the second half of the nineteenth century. However, since patriotism in the commonest sense of the word stands for an almost universal human emotion and thus does not necessarily always go together with any particular nationalistic movement, I would maintain that it is
reasonable to use the term in the Chinese context to describe, as many Chinese scholars have done, any historical figure or literary work that shows to a certain extent an attachment to, and a concern with, the country. On this view, one may therefore find patriotic elements in much of the work of Tang-dynasty authors. For example, in some of their so-called "biansai shi" (literally "Frontier Poetry"), poets like Wang Zhihuan (688-742), Wang Changling (698-756?) and Gao Shi (702-765) not only described the natural environment and military life in the Chinese frontiers but also voiced their concerns with the armed encroachments of non-Chinese tribal groups as an external force threatening the peace and safety of the Chinese nation. Again, when Li Bai and Du Fu referred to the An-Shi Rebellion and its devastating consequences--I am thinking of Li Bai's poems like "Liang Fu yin"梁甫吟, "Meng Hu Xing"猛虎行 and "Zeng Zhang Xiang Gao"赠张相镐 and Du Fu's poems like "Bei Zheng"北征, "Chun Wang"春望 and "Wen Guan Jun Shou He Nan He Bei"闻官军收河南河北--what they injected respectively into their poetry was their patriotic feeling against military separatism as an internal force threatening the peace and unity of the country. From these examples we see that there was a patriotic tradition well established before Li He's own time and that different sociohistorical conditions led to different patriotic concerns.

Although we know little about the biographical
backgrounds of his short life and even less about the compositional backgrounds of his poetic writings, it is clear from what he wrote that Li had patriotic concerns as profound as Li Bai's or Du Fu's. Like many of his fellow countrymen who had a political conscience, Li He maintained a serious concern with the unity of his country and nursed a deep hatred against rebel military governors. And like many scholar-officials of the day, he firmly stood on the side of the Central Government in its long and bloody expeditions against separatist warlord regimes. In other words, if Keats's patriotism can be defined in terms of his concerns over the problems of national security and civil rights, Li's can be defined in terms of his concerns over the problems of national unity and provincial separatism. As a descendent of the imperial house of Tang, Li might probably have developed a particularly strong attachment to the dynasty. But this does not mean that the poet's concern with the nation's unity was based entirely on personal or family association. Nor does it imply that Li's patriotism was a purely emotional category. Rather, like Keats's, Li's patriotism was a unique response the poet made to the social and political conditions of his country. Put differently, if Li and Keats have a similarity it is in the fact that they felt the call of "patriotic" values as an emotional and intellectual response they had to make as poets.
In his famous "Yan Men Tai Shou Xing" (Ballad of the Grand Warden of Yan Gate), Li presents to us a most heroic scene in which government troops battle against heavy odds beyond the Great Wall. Although the military event described in the poem was not recorded in historical literature and thus probably created out of the poet's imagination, such a fierce battle between government garrisons and rebel border generals was certainly nothing unfamiliar to mid-Tang Chinese:

黑云压城城欲摧，
甲光向日金鳞开。
角声满天秋色里，
塞上燕脂凝夜紫。
半卷红旗临易水，
霜重鼓寒声不起。
报君黄金台上意，
提携玉龙为君死。

Hei yun ya cheng cheng yu cui,
Jia guang xiang yue jin lin kai.
Jiao sheng man tian qiu se li,
Sai wai yan zhi ning ye zi.
Ban juan hong qi lin Yi shui,
Shuang zhong gu han sheng bu qi.
Bao jun huang jin tai shang yi,
Ti xie yu long wei jun si.11

Black clouds whelm on the city,
Till it seems the city must yield.
Our chain-mail glitters under the moon,
Metal scales agape.

Clangour of horns fills the sky
With colours of fall.
Beyond the frontiers, like rouge from Yan
Night's purple congeals.
Our scarlet banners, half unfurled,
Withdraw to the river Yi,14
So cold the drums, in the heavy frost,
Their sound is dulled.
We require the king for his favours to us
At Yellow Gold Tower15,
Clutching our Dragons of Jade
We die for our lord.

As the poem unfolds, we are immediately told that the war
clouds are gathering heavily over the border city: on one side, there is a large enemy force bearing down upon the city like "black clouds"; on the other side, the government troops, overwhelmingly outnumbered as they may be, are ready in full battle array with their "Metal scales agape." In the next four lines, the poet makes no direct reference to any individual soldiers. Nor does he commit himself to describing in any specific terms how the battle is actually going on. Yet by emphasizing the bloody result of the battle, the poet illustrates that the government garrison has been fighting under extremely difficult circumstances. Although they have suffered heavy losses, the government troops are, however, as determined as ever to carry the battle through to the end. When the speaker says in the last line that "We die for our lord," we understand that he is expressing his will to remain loyal to Tang, a will that is apparently shared by his fellow soldiers fighting beyond the Great Wall.

Given its thematic interest in the patriotic battle against those rebel generals who brought calamity to the country and the people, the poem must have had a great appeal to any mid-Tang Chinese who was concerned with the nation's unity. But the effectiveness of the poem lies not so much in which historical event it may refer to or what it tries to say to the reader as in the way in which it says what it has to say. Three points stand out. First, the poem shows a rich pattern of visual imagery. By using
such colour-expressions as "Black clouds," "metal scales," "colours of fall," "rouge from Yan," the "Night's purple," "scarlet banners" and "Yellow Gold Tower," the poet is able to render a picturesque depiction of a tragic battle and simultaneously makes his depiction symbolically significant. Coupled with other auditory and tactile images like "Clangour of horns," "Drums" and "the river Yi," these visual images greatly enhance the sensuousness of the poem. Secondly, as he constantly shifts his focus of attention from the human foreground of the battle-scene in the first couplet to the temporal background in the second, and then from the climatic and geographic background in the third to the human foreground in the fourth, the poet gives to his work what may be called a "montage-effect." These shifts are effective within the poem's context because they allow the reader to visualize the whole progression of the battle from the same perspective. Thirdly, the poet's historical allusions to the ancient warrior Jing Ke in line five and King Zhao of Yan in line seven fit into the workings of the poem so well that they achieve a double significance. On the personal level, by making the historical allusions the poet reveals his wish that his own talents be duly recognized and put into service. On a different level, he makes a strong suggestion that both the supreme ruler and his subjects should do their utmost, as did Jing and King Zhao, to maintain their country's unity or independence.
With these points in mind, one would easily understand why Han Yu, having just read the opening lines of the poem, should immediately give orders to invite the young poet into his house.\textsuperscript{16}

If the above ballad exemplifies the way in which Li expresses his patriotic concerns through his description of a fictitious battle, his poem “Shang Zhi Hui” 上之囬 (The Emperor Returns) can be taken as a good example of how the poet does so through his representation of historical events:

\begin{center}

\begin{tabular}{ll}
Shang zhi hui, & 上之囬, \\
Da qi xi. & 大旗喜。 \\
Xuan hong yun, & 晃红云, \\
Ta feng wei. & 拔风尾。 \\
Jian xia po, & 剑匣破, \\
Wu jiao long. & 舞蛟龙, \\
Chi You si, & 蛊龙死, \\
Gu peng peng. & 鼓逢逢。 \\
Tian gao qing lei qi duo di, & 天高雷齐堕地, \\
Di wu jing yan hai qian li. & 地无惊烟海千里。
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

The Emperor returns! 
Great banners rejoice, 
Hanging red clouds, 
Fluttering phoenix tails.

Breaking from its case 
His sword leaps like a dragon. 
Chi You is dead! 
The drums are rolling.

Heaven blesses us all, 
Thunder falls to the earth. 
Over ocean's thousand leagues 
No wild waves fly.
In this short poem, Li uses the same title of the fourteenth of the *Cymbal Songs* of Han, which is devoted to the celebration of Emperor Wu returning to his Huizhong Palace (宦中宮) in 106 B.C. after he defeated Yuezhi and Xiongnu. By so doing, the poet establishes a context of happy experience. This context achieves its historical immediacy as the poet reenacts in short-rhythmmed and three-syllable lines the scene of fluttering banners, which are animated in the poem to highlight the sovereign's victorious return. To reinforce the ceremonial effect achieved in the opening couplets, the poet alludes in the following lines to two legendary rulers of ancient China: one is Zhua'ixu who had a magic sword that could automatically leap out of its case to subdue his enemies; the other is the Yellow Emperor who killed Chi You, a devilish rebel, and was thus able to bring peace and prosperity to his people. These allusions, while they represent a situation parallel to the sovereign's, are important because they function to tell us indirectly how powerful the sovereign's army is, how fierce the battle is and what kind of enemy he has defeated. As the poem concludes, the poet changes from the three-syllable line to the seven-syllable line and, in doing this, he takes a much larger perspective and presents a cosmical world where there is a universal celebration of victory. In this world, the rolling sounds of drums described in line nine become celebrating thunders from Heaven whereas the
glittering colours of flags mentioned in line four are transmuted into profound peace and tranquility.

To understand this poem further, I would like to refer briefly to C. Y. Yeh Chao's essay on a ballad written by Li Shangyin (813-858), who loved Li He's poetry and on whom Li He had an important influence. In this essay, the well-known Chinese critic emphasizes that there are three criteria for judging whether or not a classical Chinese poem allows for an allegorical reading. The first should be based on the life and personality of the author; the second upon the tone, the spirit or the content of the work; and the third upon the sociohistorical situation in which the poem is produced. When we apply these criteria to Li He's case, we find that his poem under discussion is not a mere imitation of an old poem written in the Han dynasty and in the style of 

*yuefu shi* (Music Bureau Poetry), a form which quite frequently had nothing to do with the "real" world and which is noted for its general and rather stereotyped nature. Rather, the poem can be seen as a reflection of Li's concern with some contemporary events. This is because, first, Li's family relation to the royal house of Tang, his life-long efforts to seek high office in the government and his friendship with such anti-separatists as Han Yu and Huangfu Shi put him in a firm position against provincial separatism. Second, the happiness and enthusiasm that are so rarely seen in Li's poetic writings (Liang 92) but register so
pervasively in the poem itself clearly show that the poet strongly supports military expeditions against monstrous rebel-warlords who disrupt national unity. Third, we know as a historical fact that when Xianzong was enthroned in 806, Liu Pi, a rebel military governor in Xichuan rose against the Central Government. But within the same year, he was captured by General Gao Chongwen and sent under escort to Changan where he was soon decapitated. The following year, Li Qi, another rebel general in Zhenhai, met his end in a similar way. Within the context of Xianzong's victories over Liu Pi and Li Qi, which offer an obvious parallel to Emperor Wu's victory over Yuezhi and Xiongnu or the Yellow Emperor's victory over the rebellious Chi You, the poem's contemporary significance is all too apparent: by rewriting the cymbal song of Han, the poet expresses at once his intense feelings about the imperial force's initial victories over rebel satraps and his hope that Xianzong would follow Emperor Wu's suit and take a personal command in the struggle for the maintenance of national unity. That is to say, Li's poem does contain some allegorical elements. In point of fact, as we use Yeh's criteria in the course of our discussions of Li's poems, we shall repeatedly see that the poet has a clear tendency to express his ideas and feelings in a roundabout or implicit way. This tendency is of course not uniquely Li's, for "there is in China," as Yeh has reminded us, "a long tradition of tuoyi yanzhi [ 讲意 二字]."
meaning roughly to express oneself through allusions or in an allegorical way]." But partly because in his unique situation "He dare not speak out while he cannot keep silent," and partly because "He wanted to emulate his predecessors" by exploring poetic possibilities in a unique way, this tendency is particularly strong in him, especially when he tries to admonish or criticize the governing authorities of his country.

In his "Meng Hu Xing" (Ballad of the Savage Tiger), the poet gives full expression to his hatred for rebel satraps as he compares them to a ferocious tiger and thus presents a strong indictment of their evil deeds:

Chang ge mo chong,
Qiang nu mo peng.
Ru sun bu zhi,
Jiao de sheng ning.
Ju tou wei cheng,
Diao wei wei jing.
Dong hai huang gong,
Chou jian ye xing.
Dao feng zhou yu,
Niu ai bu ping.
He yong chi dao?
Bi shang lei ming!
Tai shan zhi xia,
Fu ren ku sheng.
Guan jia you cheng,
Li bu gan ting.

No one attacks it with a long lance,
No one plies a strong cross-bow.
Suckling its grandsons, rearing its cubs,
It trains them into savagery.
Its reared head becomes a wall,
Its waving tail becomes a banner.
Even Huang from the Eastern Sea,
Dreaded to see it after dark,
A righteous tiger, met on the road,
Was quite enough to upset Niu Ai.
What good is it for that short sword
To hang on the wall, growling like thunder?
When from the foot of Tai Mountain
Comes the sound of a woman weeping,
Government sets deadline for its capture,
But officials dare not listen.

It is true that in this ballad Li adopts the title of an old Music Bureau poem which originally has little to do with warlords. It is also true that ever since Confucius made his famous remark that "The oppressive government is more ferocious than a tiger," the image of a ferocious tiger has often been used in classical Chinese literature to symbolize the oppressive government. However, as has been noted by Liu Yan, Yang Qiqun and other contemporary critics and scholars, the tiger-image embedded in the framework of Li's poem resembles and thus represents a monstrous warlord rather than any actual beast in the animal world or the oppressive government. And there are good reasons supporting such an allegorical interpretation.

According to many commentators, the third couplet in Li's poem is a re-formulation of a short passage from an ancient history book Li Shi Chun Qiu 吕氏春秋, a passage which describes the powerfulness of certain (legendary)
warlord-like figures. While this textual reference may be taken as an unequivocal allusion to rebel-satrapis in Li's time, it is significant that in his poem bearing the same title as Li He's, Li Bai also expressed his intense feeling against separatist warlords like An Lushan and Shi Siming whom he called "ju ao" (驕敖, or "monstrous turtles"). Keeping these textual backgrounds in mind, one realizes that the ferocious beast portrayed in Li He's poem is a symbol of wicked warlords. This symbol gains an explicit historical significance if we pay attention to the proper sociopolitical context within which the poem was written. As is well recorded in *Jiu Tang Shu* and *Xin Tang Shu*, when Wang Wujun, the rebellious military governor of Chengde died in 801, his son Shizhen assumed the title and when Shizhen died in 809, his son Chengzong became he governor and continued to challenge the rule of Tang. Although Xianzong sent many troops to pacify the rebels there, he had to give up his hope in 810 because they were never able to fulfil their commission. With the poem's descriptive details fitting so nicely into this chain of historical events, it is very likely that when Li was working on the ballad, he had the Wangs in mind. As for the reason why the poet does not spell out the names of these separatist warlords, it probably lies in his intention to present a portraiture of all rather than any individual warlords in his time. This poetic intention becomes evident as the poet leads us to see that the
rebel-satraps have two basic characteristics. On the one hand, they are so powerful as to defy any military attempts to destroy them. Within the spheres of their powers, they have not only established their separatist regimes but also managed to exercise their rule for several generations already. On the other hand, these warlords are so savage that even Huang, a legendary tiger-tamer and Niu Ai, a duke supposedly turned were-tiger, have a mortal fear of them. In the next four lines, the poet broadly hints that because of the failure of "that short sword" or government troops, the people are suffering helplessly under the oppression of those warlords. At the end of the ballad, the poet further exposes the incompetence and cowardice of government officials and thus turns the whole poem into a double-edged satire on both warlords and the bureaucracy. Presented in a simple language and short-rhythmmed poetic form, this satire has indisputably a powerful effect on the reader.

While he constantly condemned rebel generals as the internal enemy of the whole nation and despised them into the bargain, Li also kept close watch over what was going on beyond the Chinese frontiers. In his "Sai Xia Qu" (Song: Beyond the Frontiers), for example, the poet wrote:

Hu jiao yin bei feng,
Ji men bai yu shui.
Tian han qing hai dao,

朗角引北风，
荆门白于水。
天台青海道，
Cheng tou yue qian li.  城头月千里。
Lu xia qi meng meng, 露下旗朦朦，
Han jin ming ye ke. 寒金鸣夜刻。
Fan jia suo she lin, 蕃甲锁驼鳞，
Ma si qing zhong bai. 马嘶青塼白。
Qiu jing jian mao tou, 秋静见毛头，
Sha yuan xi ji chou. 沙园夕集愁。
Zhang bei tian ying jin. 皃北天影尽,
He sheng chu sai liu. 河声出塞流。

Barbarian horns have summoned the north wind,
Thistle Gate is whiter than a stream!26
The road to Green Sea vanishes into the sky,
Along the Wall, a thousand moonlit miles.

While dew falls drizzling on our flags,
Barbarian armour meshes serpents' scales,
Cold metal clangs the watches of the night,
Horses whinny where Green Grave gleams white.27

In autumn stillness see the Banner Head,26
On the vast sands the mournful furze,
North of our tents the sky itself must end,
Across the frontier comes the River's roar.

By working in the "Frontier Song" genre which normally
refers to Chinese wars against non-Chinese tribal groups,
Li makes it explicitly clear that his thematic concern is
with the problem of national safety. As the north wind
blows, the poet imagines himself hearing the "Barbarian
horns" and further seeing a sepulchral scene beyond the
Chinese frontiers: the moonlit desert is dazzling white
like waters, the barbarian nomads are gathering together
like "serpents's scales," and their horses have eaten all
the grass in Green Grave which is now "gleam[ing] white"
like desert sands. Alerted to the possibility that the
nomads may launch an invasion at any time, the poet becomes worried, as does the "furze" on the sand, about the safety of his nation and thus calls attention to the stars of the constellation Mao, whose flickering is said to presage trouble on the northern borders. Such patriotic concerns can be found in much of the poetry which Li supposedly composed while he was in Chang-an. A good example is his "Song Qin Guang Lu Bei Zhong" (Seeing off the Banquet Officer Qin on His Military Expedition to the North). As its title clearly indicates, the poem is an occasional piece and therefore has a close relation to contemporary events. Upon departure of Qin who "has beheaded many a nomad Khan" (l. 17) and who "has just been raised to the rank of Banquet Officer" (l. 20), the poet tells us that he feels a great anxiety about how "Bearded nomads keep violating our borders, / Arrogant like rainbows arched in the sky" (ll. 3-4). As to how to defend his country against armed encroachments of the nomads, the poet pins his hope on patriotic heroes like General Qin who "gallops on his white horse" and whose "gallant men display their virile mettle" (ll. 7-8). Once General Qin and his men begin their military campaign, they would soon defeat the enemies on the northern borders as the poet thus expects at the end of the poem: "Today he holds up his sword upon leaving, / When will he return, the flood dragon slain?" (ll. 43-44).

That Li concerned himself deeply with the patriotic
battle against both rebel satraps within, and encroaching nomads without, the Chinese frontiers is further testified by the fact that the poet had a strong wish to participate directly in the war effort. Shortly after he resigned from office and returned in poor health to Changgu to recuperate in 813, he wrote a series of short poems known as "Nan Yuan Shi San Shou" (Thirteen Poems from My Southern Garden), among which the following four invite our special consideration:

IV
San shi wei you er shi ju,
Bai ri chang ji xiao jia shu.
Qiao tou zhang lao xiang ai nian,
Yin wei rong tao yi juan shu.

V
Nan er he bu dai wu gou,
Shou qu guan shan wu shi zhou.
Qing jun zan shang ling yan ge,
Ruo ge shu sheng wan hu hou?

VI
Xun zhang zhai ju lao diao chong,
Xiao yue dang lian gua yu gong.
Bu jian nian nian liao hai shang,
Wen zhang he chu ku qiu feng?

VII
Chang Qing lao luo bei kong she,
Man Qian hui xie qu zi rong.
Jian mai Ruo Ye xi shui jian, 見君若耶溪水劍，
Ming zhaio gui qu shi Yuan Gong. 明朝歸去事猿公.

IV
"Not yet thirty but still turned twenty,
Hungry in bright sunshine, living on leaves.
Old man on the bridge! Feel sorry for me
And give me a book on the art of war!"[9]

V
Why shouldn't a young man wear a Wu sword,
He could win back fifty provinces in pass and
mountain, [11]
I wish you would visit the Ling-yan Pavilion,
How can a student ever become a rich marquis?

VI
Seeking a style, culling my phrases,
Grown old carving grubs! [12]
At dawn the moon hangs in my blinds,
A bow of jade.
Can't you see what is going on, year after year,
By the sea of Liao Dong?
Whatever can a writer do
But weep in the autumn wind?

VII
Chang-qing was lonely and wretched
In his empty house,
Man-chian was always joking--
Too anxious to please.
Better to go and buy a sword
From Ruo-ye river,
Come back at dawn next day serve

Dominating these lines are obviously the poet's strong impulses to become a swordsman rather than remain a "wordsman". In a country plagued by separatist warlords, the poet wishes to follow the example of Zhang Liang, a military strategist who helped Gaozu of Han to unify China before he was to live a retired life. If he indulges himself in "seeking a style, culling [his] phrases, / [And] . . . carving grubs" as he has done since his childhood, the poet realizes that he would never be able
to "win back fifty provinces in pass and mountain." Nor would he have any chances of being made "a rich marquis."
Only by making himself a swordsman like the Monkey Duke and going to the battle-field can he hope to contribute significantly to the cause of national unity and at the same time improve his frustrating situation which reminds him of the tragic fate of talented writers like Chang-qing and Man-chian. Lu Xun is right when he observes that "The long-nailed, skinny-like-a-stick Li He simply overestimates his own abilities" (Lu Xun 5:194). But considering the very fact that Li joined the military and spent his last few years in Luzhou, we recognize that what he articulates in the above poems is not mere wishful ranting which signifies nothing but "a kind of psychological compensation for his frustrated ambition" (Tu 25). Rather, the poems should be seen as a powerful manifestation of how the poet tends to associate his personal success closely with the unity or welfare of his nation.

In light of the above observations, we see that like Keats, Li was a great patriot-poet. While the two poets were both acutely aware of what were the most urgent issues in contemporary politics and what their patriotic duty was, they were able to give ready and powerful expression to their social and political concerns. But it is also noticeable that there are some major differences between the two poets. Although they might have an equally
profound love for their respective countries, their patriotic concerns were, for instance, different as a necessary result of their different sociohistorical conditions: while Keats's patriotism was characterized to an important extent by his emotional and intellectual commitment to the cause of freedom, Li's was marked by his attention to the problem of national unity. Considering that Keats was from a rising lower-middle class family while Li was from a fallen aristocratic family, it does not seem extravagant to suggest that the two poets' patriotism had quite different socio-psychological foundations. Most significantly, the very term "patriotism" might hold a different meaning to each of them. For Keats, the love of country is almost exactly identifiable with the love of freedom. But for Li, the love of country seems to be just another name for the loyalty to Tang.

To gain a thorough understanding of the significance of the similarities and differences embodied by Keats and Li as patriot-poets, we had better stop here and proceed to investigate the two poets' other major political concerns, for "Being a patriot was a political act, and often a multi-faceted and dynamic one" (Colley 374).
NOTES:

1. For more detailed discussion, see Linda Colley, 291-300.

2. For a discussion of these lines, see Linda Colley, 337.


4. It is interesting to note that Keats speaks here of the "triple kingdom" (meaning presumably England, Scotland and Wales) but then goes on to refer to "England's happiness" in the victory over Napoleon. Anyone sensitive to Scottish or Welsh nationalist aspirations would probably see this as a devious piece of English imperialism— that is, treating the three kingdoms as a unity and then (to add insult to injury) speaking of England as if equivalent to all three. But within the context of the poem Keats's reference to England seems to be more of a (political) synecdoche than of anything else.

5. Algernon Sydney [or Sidney], 1622-1683, a lifelong republican, was tried in 1683 for acts of treason against King Charles II, and executed (even though he seems not to have been involved in a republican insurrection).

6. "Russell" is presumably William, Lord Russell, known as "the patriot," 1639-1683, accused of having planned an insurrection against King Charles in 1683, convicted of treason, and beheaded as in the case of Sydney.

7. Sir Henry Vane, 1613-1662, served under Cromwell as commissioner of the Admiralty but had no immediate part in the execution of Charles I; nevertheless he was executed in 1662, after the Restoration.

8. A good example is found in Caledonius' poem "To Britons" (Black Dwarf [1819], 3:153), the thematic concerns of which are astonishingly similar to Keats's. For a quotation and discussion of the poem, see Michael Scrivener, Poetry and Reform (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1992), 263-64.

9. C. C. Clarke, Recollections of Writers, 124. In the same context Clarke also mentions the way in which Keats read his Burnett on the table while eating his supper "from beyond it."
10. For more detailed discussion along these lines, see Clifford Siskin, 24-28.


14. During the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.), Prince Dan of Yan sent his friend, the famous warrior Jing Ke to Qin to assassinate its king in an attempt to save his own kingdom from being annexed. But this attempt resulted in Jing himself being killed right in the court of Qin. Before he left Yan, Jing was said to have sung loudly by the river Yi: "Oh, how the wind blows, and how cold the waters of Yi, / Once the warrior on his way, he will never return!"

15. Legend has it that during the Warring States Period, King Zhao of Yan built a tower southeast of the river Yi, in which he put a large amount of yellow gold as a means of inviting talented individuals to come up to serve his kingdom.

16. For a detailed account of the anecdote, see Tu, 20.

17. See C. Y. Yeh Chao, "Li Yishan's 'Ballad of the Sea,' the Natural Scenery in Guilin, and the Contemporary Political Situation" included in her Essays on Classical Chinese Poetry (Hong Kong: Zhonghua Press, 1977), 72-108. For a more detailed discussion on these three criteria, see Yeh's essay "A Point of View: The Allegorical Elements in the Ci of the Changzhou School" included also in Essays on Classical Chinese Poetry, 160-201. Many years ago, Ren Erbei put forward three similar criteria in his Approaches to the Study of Ci (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1935), 21.
18. For extended commentary on Han's and Huangfu's opposition to provincial separatism in contemporary politics, see Chen Keming, 64-70; and Jiang Guozhen, 70-78.


20. Yao Wenxie, "Preface" to Li He's poetic works, included in Li, He Shi Ge Ji Zhu, eds. Wang Qi et al (Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe, 1977), 368.

21. For a detailed discussion on how Li tried to achieve this end, see Xu Chuanwu, 9-14.

22. "The Righteous Tiger" or "zhouyu" is said to show up only when a country is perfectly governed. Unlike ordinary tigers, it never treads on crops nor eats living creatures.

23. Frodsham's original translation of the last couplet of the poem reads "Government regulations forbid / Any official to dare to listen." But within the context of the poem, his version seems not accurate enough and may be misleading.

24. For a quotation of the original text, its source and its meaning, see, for example, Qian Zhonglian, Mengtiaoan Zhuanghu Erzhong (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 1984), 44-45.

25. For a quotation of Li Bai's original poem "Meng Hu Xing" as well as a discussion of the poem's reference to An and Shi, see, for example, Li Hui, Selected Readings in Li Bai's Poetry (Harbin: Heilongjiang People's Press, 1980), 196-203.

26. "Thistle Gate" is a name often used to refer to Su County, Hebei, which is close to present Beijing.

27. "Green Grave" refers to the area in Central Asia where Wang Zhaojun, the Chinese princess married to a Han chieftain, is buried.

28. "Banner Head" refers to the constellation Mao, which roughly corresponds to the Pleiades. When these stars flicker, people believed that there would be trouble on the northern frontiers.
29. Here the River refers to the Yellow River.

30. As is told in *Shi Ji*, when Zhang Liang (d. 189 B.C.) was young, he met a poorly dressed old man on a bridge, who presented him with a book on the art of war after testing his patience again and again. Thanks to this book, Zhang became a great military strategist and was able to help Liu Bang to establish the Han dynasty.

31. According to *Zizhi Tongjian*, Li Jiang said in the seventh year of the Yuanhe period (812) that "In Henan and Hebei there are over fifty counties which do not obey the laws and orders of the Central Government."

32. As Tu Kuo-ch'ing has noted, "carving grubs" is a Chinese cliche "referring to ornate, trifling writings of a poetaster or pedant. Here it is used in the sense of self-debasement as well as self-mockery" (135).

33. "The Monkey Duke" is a legendary master of swordsmanship who eventually transforms himself into a white monkey.
Chapter Four
The Poet and the Radical

[T]he duty of literature is to be of service to the writer's generation: that of poetry to influence public affairs.

---- Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen

For I will teach, if possible, the stones to rise against tyrants.

---- Lord Byron

Wherever there is oppression, there is bound to be resistance.

---- Chinese Proverb

"Politics," says Carl Woodring, "has an integral place in Keats's canon" (Woodring 28). In a letter to Charles Brown, on September 22, 1819, Keats wrote that "My occupation is entirely literary; I will do so too [i.e., keep it so]. I will write, on the liberal side of the question, for whoever will pay me. I have not yet known what it is to be diligent" (Letters 2:176). That same day, he reiterated his political stance as he told Dilke that "They [i.e., the Examiner's reports of the protests after Peterloo] have put me into spirits: notwithstanding my aristocratic temper I cannot help being very [sic] much pleased with the present public proceedings. I hope sincerely I shall be able to put a Mite of help to the
Liberal side of the Question before I die" (Letters 2:180). In view of the private nature and the specific context of the letters, in which the poet informed his friends about his never materialized intention to take up journalism, one may argue that these two passages expressed nothing more than a sudden whim. Even if they should be treated seriously, these remarks represented, as is indicated by the future tense the poet used, a political position to be developed rather than one that had already been taken. When we study Keats's poetical writings in relation to these statements, we find, however, that the poet did exactly what he said. Throughout his short life, he was always "explicit about his political allegiance" (Dickstein 175) and kept writing, indeed, on the liberal side of the question. Even in November 1820 when his poor health had prevented him from writing any more poetry,\(^1\) the poet did not forget to reiterate, at Naples, on his way to Rome, his professed hatred of despotism: "I know my end approaches, and the continued visible tyranny of this government prevents me from having any peace of mind. I could not lie quietly here. I will not leave even my bones in the midst of this despotism" (Quoted in Thorpe, 1228).

In the previous chapter we have seen how Keats committed himself both emotionally and intellectually to the cause of freedom; in this chapter we shall consider the poet's position in contemporary politics, "a position
most of his contemporaries described as radical" (Bromwich 202). But what did it mean to be a radical in the Regency period? According to E. P. Thompson, to be a radical in the years between Waterloo and Peterloo or what he called "the heroic age of popular Radicalism" basically meant to be "concerned with the piecemeal exposure of the abuses of the 'borough-mongering' or 'fund-holding' system . . . [and] a sweeping parliamentary reform" (603). Although Keats's "unfaltering belief in progress . . . did not warrant revolutionary allegiances" and although he "felt a closer kinship with the politics of Leigh Hunt and his brother, John, than with powerful demagogues like Cobbett and Orator Hunt" (Bromwich 202), the young poet was a radical\(^2\) in the sense that he not only sympathized with the reform movement but, more important, exposed and opposed the cruelties of despotism or legitimate tyranny. Just as his patriotism was largely characterized by his enthusiastic advocacy of freedom, Keats's radicalism was strongly marked, in other words, by his rebellious tendency against the established social order--it will be remembered that Keats once applied the word "rebel" to himself: "I feel confident I should have been a rebel Angel had the opportunity been mine" (Letters 1:142). It is this tendency, which obviously bears a close relation to Keats's love of freedom, that allows us to see the poet as a radical who was deeply concerned with "The present struggle in England of the people to destroy" "a horrid
superstition" that the ruling classes had "spread . . .
against all innovation and improvement" (Letters 2:193).
If Keats's poems like "On Peace" or "Lines Written on May
29" display an active concern with contemporary politics
as we have discussed earlier, then his sonnet "Written on
the Day Mr. Leigh Hunt Left Prison" can be taken as an
open political act, an act which, in Bromwich's words,
"took more courage and independent resolve" in the 1810's
than a similar act would have in the subsequent decades.
As a leading radical of the day, Hunt had just served a
two-year term in prison on the charge of libel against the
Prince Regent. To conservatives and those belonging to the
ruling classes, Hunt was no doubt a thorn in the flesh.
But to liberals and those sympathizing with the cause of
freedom, he was a heroic fighter. By commemorating in
verse his release from prison and, especially, by
presenting the sonnet to him (indirectly through C. C.
Clarke) in a "conscious" manner (Quoted in Ward, The
Making of a Poet, 41), Keats made it clear that he chose
to stand on the liberal side of the question. A "tame echo
of Tom Moore's lines to Hunt" (Ward 41) though it may be,
the poem thus signified an important step in Keats's early
development as a liberal poet. On one level, his efforts
to approach Hunt through poetic means were illustrative of
his intention to cultivate a personal relationship with
the elder poet as his chosen guide and of his increasing
interest in a poetical career. On another level the sonnet

125
served for Keats as something like an application for "membership" in the radical camp led by Hunt, whom in a later sonnet to Haydon Keats was to rank among the "Great spirits" now sojourning on earth and who had "borne the chain for freedom's sake." 3 What made the young Keats admire Hunt in particular was the latter's double identity as an outstanding radical-poet of the day. To put it in a different way, it was neither Hunt's achievement in poetry nor his promotion of the cause of freedom alone but a combination of the two that won Keats's early admiration. 4

Like his mentor Hunt, Keats as a rising radical poet was ready to voice his opposition to the Establishment although such opposition might get him into trouble in those years. Towards the end of his verse epistle "To My Brother George," for example, Keats wrote:

On one side is a field of drooping oats,  
Through which the poppies show their scarlet coats:  
So pert and useless, that they bring to mind  
The scarlet coats that pester human-kind.  
(ll. 127-30)

By associating the "pert and useless" coats of poppies with Redcoats, the poet turned the "drooping oats" into a symbol of the oppressed and at the same time presented a forceful satire on the Military. Recalling how the troops had been dispatched to various locations to crack down on political protests, the poet must have come to the recognition that the Military was the claws of the present regime. 5 As his hostility towards the Redcoats surfaced in
the poem, the ultimate object of the poet's satiric attack was thus not so much the individual soldiers themselves as the Tory government which sent them to "pester human-kind."

In another poem "Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition," Keats lodged a strong protest against the Church. As the "bells toll a melancholy round," calling people to gloom "from fireside joys, and Lydian airs, / And converse high of those with glory crown'd" (ll. 1, 7-8), the "horrid sound" (l. 4) gave the poet "a chill as from a tomb" (l. 10), thus reminding him of the losses of his family members. But as Aileen Ward has observed,

there was more to his protest than mere bitter association. The Church of England at that time was a hollow shell of form without real belief, of dogma unsupported by reason, to which few intelligent men could wholeheartedly subscribe; it was also a pillar of the established order which Keats hated, venal, complacent and reactionary. (82)

For instance, as a leading figure of the Evangelical movement, William Wilberforce was eager to support repressive policies of the Tory administration. While he openly defended the Combination Laws and the Six Acts, the Tory Evangelical kept telling the poor that their main duty was to endure their suffering meekly. When Cobbett commented on the Evangelicals, it is not surprising that he said their "aim was to teach the poor to starve without making a noise" (Quoted in Seaman, 404). On a different occasion, Hazlitt is recorded as having said of the Methodists that "they were a collection of religious
invalids" (Quoted in Seaman, 406). In the context of such critical opinions which Keats must have read in political journals like the *Examiner* and the *Political Register*, and, more specifically, in the context of Shelley's protest against Church and State (over the custody of his children by his former wife) which Keats had probably heard of at Hunt's house a few days before writing the sonnet, it is understandable that Keats wrote the poem to attack the trappings of Christianity and simultaneously to endorse the observation that Hunt had made about the "gloominess and bad taste [of Christian funerals]."

Keats's feelings against the Church were, then, aroused initially by the way in which it deprived people of their civil happiness. These feelings were intensifed when, unlike Benjamin Bailey, his friend-to-be who was preparing for holy orders at Oxford, the young poet realized that the Church stood for nothing but a vulgar superstition. For Keats, such superstition only added to the people's suffering in actual life because it served the political authorities as a means of enslaving the country. Therefore "if there is less superstition, there is less fanaticism; and the less fanaticism, the less suffering." As he vocalized his protest against the Church, the poet showed that he "did loathe all forms of despotic authority" (Fry 214). Whatever he came to see as supporting the reactionary Establishment or as the enemy of freedom, whether it was the Church or the Military, could only make
the poet feel disgusted and hostile.

Among the objectives of his satiric attack, the one which Keats treated most intensively in his early poetry was unquestionably the tyrannical regime itself. In the following sonnet commonly known as "Nebuchadnezzar's Dream," for instance, the poet bitterly satirized the Government as he had done the Church and the Military:

Before he went to live with owls and bats,
Nebuchadnezzar had an ugly dream,
Worse than a housewife's, when she thinks her cream
Made a naumachia for a mice and rats:
So scared, he sent for that "good king of cats,"
Young Daniel, who did straightaway pluck the beam
From out his eye, and said--"I do not deem
Your sceptre worth a straw, your cushions old door mats."
A horrid nightmare, similar somewhat,
Of late has haunted a most valiant crew
Of loggerheads and chapmen; --we are told
That any Daniel, though he be a sot,
Can make their lying lips turn pale of hue,
By drawing out--"Ye are that head of gold!"

The thematic implications of this poem are not readily apparent today. But if we situate the sonnet in its literary and sociohistorical contexts, its meaning may become as clear as it might have been to a contemporary politically-informed reader. As previously mentioned, the social, political and economic conditions in Britain had been deteriorating ever since Napoleon's final defeat in 1815. By the time Keats wrote the sonnet, supposedly in 1817, the whole country was seething with discontent. While the workers in towns and cities were suffering profoundly from unemployment that followed demobilization, the recently-imposed Corn Law had driven a great number of
families in the countryside to poverty and starvation. Instead of trying to introduce some constructive measures to relieve the people's plight, the Tory ministers who were no more intelligent than "loggerheads" (a species of turtle) and who had been pursuing their conservative policies in the way peddlers tried to sell their old wares, resorted more and more to suppressive legislation. In order to muzzle criticism and discontent, they moved, for example, to repeal Habeas Corpus and thus began to prosecute their critics without following traditional legal procedures. As a matter of fact, members of the Liverpool administration were even ready to shed blood in their effort to protect the established political order: Lord Liverpool himself once said that "One can never feel that the King is secure upon his throne till he has dared to spill traitors' blood" (Thompson 659). But such and other similar perverse acts, effective as they may be under some circumstances, failed to silence radical agitators, journalists and publishers like Cobbett, Wooler, Hone and Henry Hunt who would stand up fearlessly to express their bitter opposition to the Government. So far as the literary context of Keats's poem goes, it is well known that the use of biblical parallels was very common in contemporary political satire from the 1790s to the 1820s. Indeed many political cartoons of the time as well as opinion pieces in the magazines and newspapers used biblical references. Such literary practice, which
may be called, for lack of a better phrase, political parodies, was undoubtedly part of a long tradition in Britain (dating from the early seventeenth century, from the Levellers of Milton's time, and from more well-established communities such as the Quakers) of radical Protestant resistance to monarchical authority appealing to biblical authority, especially the Old Testament prophets' attacks on corrupt kings. As one can see from the case of Hone whose trial Keats found not only "very amusing" but also "very encouraging" (Letters 1:191)—it bears mentioning here that in February 1817 Lord Sidmouth denounced Hone's parodies in the same speech in which he moved to suspend Habeas Corpus (Ward, "Keats's Sonnet," 183), political criticism in the form of parodies of sacred texts was actually enjoying an immense popularity in the years following Waterloo.

Viewed against these literary and sociohistorical contexts into which it fits, Keats's sonnet takes on quite explicit motive and meaning. Partly because he had to avoid running into political trouble and partly because he wanted to try his hand at a different type of poetry, Keats chose to express his liberal sentiments through the use of a Biblical parallel, although such use is not characteristic of his work. By building his sonnet on a reference to the second chapter of the Book of Daniel, a popular text with the parodists which tells how the young man interprets a troubling dream which Nebuchadnezzar,
King of Babylon, has had of a great image with head of gold, breast of silver, legs of stone, and feet of clay, the poet was able to "recount the story of Daniel's prophecy as another political allegory (or, strictly speaking, analogy) to attack the tyrannical regime of his times and hint that its overthrow was imminent as the Government in fact feared" (Ward, "Keats's Sonnet," 181). More specifically, no matter what repressive measures the Tory ministers such as Liverpool and Sidmouth--"a most valiant crew / Of loggerheads and chapmen" (ll. 10-11)--may use in the course of trying to make the king "secure on his throne," they are going to be haunted, as the poet clearly suggests, by "A horrid nightmare" (l. 9) until the downfall of their tyrannical regime.

To generations of readers, the passage at the beginning of Book III, Endymion, has often appeared to be an unexpected insertion in the long poem. Granted that this impression is correct, one still finds the passage particularly noteworthy, for its very unexpectedness pinpoints Keats's radical position in contemporary politics. Without an active interest in the political problems of the day, the poet would not have digressed thus from his romance about the love between a shepherd-king and the moon-goddess. Put another way, even if we should take the opening lines of Book III as one of Keats's isolated attempts to express his political concerns, we can see them at least as a strong reminder of
the poet's attachment to the real world. No excuse is needed here for quoting so long but so important a passage:

There are who lord it o'er their fellow-men
With most prevailing tinsel: who unpen
Their baing vanities, to browse away
The comfortable green and juicy hay
From human pastures; or, O torturing fact!
Who, through an idiot blink, will see unpack'd
Fire-branded foxes to sear up and singe
Our gold and ripe-ear'd hopes. With not one tinge
Of sanctuary splendour, not a sight
Able to face an owl's, they still are dight
By the blear-eyed nations in empurpled vests,
And crowns, and turbans. With unladen breasts,
Save of blown self-applause, they proudly mount
To their spirit's perch, their being's high account,
Their tiptop nothings, their dull skies, their thrones--
Amid the fierce intoxicating tones
Of trumpets, shoutings, and belabour'd drums,
And sudden cannon. Ah! how all this hums,
In wakeful ears, like uproar past and gone--
Like thunder clouds that spake to Babylon,
And set those old Chaldeans to their tasks.--
Are then regalities all gilded masks?
No, there are throned seats unscalable
But by a patient wing, a constant spell,
Or by ethereal things that, unconfin'd,
Can make a ladder of the eternal wind,
And poise about in cloudy thunder-tents
To watch the abysm-birth of elements.

(ll. 1-28)

Mainly through his use of puns (such as "lord," "unpen" and "browse" in the first few lines) the poet offers a satirical portrayal of oppressors or shepherds as the animals of legitimacy: although they cannot "pen" great words, they are able to "unpen / Their baing vanities"; although they seldom "browse" among good books, they are ready to "browse away" any reading materials that may contain ideas "comfortable" or appealing to the labouring
people; and although their rule is based on nothing but the superstitious notion about divine right, that "most prevailing tinsel"--it is worth noting that the phrase "prevailing tinsel" is used as an oxymoron here, since "tinsel" in the commonest sense of the word refers to anything showy that is really worthless, they are proud to "lord it o'er their fellow-men." As he "inserted" in these explosive lines his stinging scorn for "regalities," the poet thus gave his work a more human and social dimension. Consequently, the whole mythological story about Endymion which Keats goes on to develop in the rest of the book was, as we shall see in more detail, invested with quite explicit political significance.

Actually, if we recall the circumstances under which the above lines were written, we can take them to be a necessary reflection of the poet's preoccupations with contemporary political issues. As is clearly shown by the letters Keats wrote in 1817, there were two important factors contributing to the writing of the passage. The first one was those political opinions against hereditary monarchy and divine right which prevailed in the radical press and prints and which Keats had imbibed and shared as a well-informed reader with strong liberal sentiments. The second factor was the Tower of Babel story which was very much in his mind when he was working on the opening of the third book. Keeping these two major factors in mind, we realize that while the first dozen lines were presented as
an outraged attack on the very notion of legitimacy or divine right, "Keats's purposes in lines 12-28 [were] to weave a clear, though perhaps oblique, reference to the Tower of Babel story as a means of predicting the defeat of legitimate monarchs" (Koch 497). Or one might say that the poet was doing something similar to what he had done in "Nebuchadnezzar's Dream." In the previous sonnet, the poet's basic concern was to suggest, by way of political analogy, the end of a tyrannical regime like the Liverpool administration. Provocative as it was, the sonnet's suggestion seemed to be more emotionally than intellectually grounded. In the opening of the third book, however, the poet based his prophecy on a bitter criticism of the idea of divine right. As he pointed out, legitimacy stemmed from nothing but birth and was supported only by strength. Not unlike animals, kings, legitimate rulers or "the present Ministers" like Sidmouth, Eldon, Castlereagh and Liverpool were meritless "with not one tinge / Of sanctuary splendour, not a sight / Able to face an owl's"—here the emphasis on the gaze, which is quite typical of Keats's political poetry, is significant in a number of ways: for one thing, by saying that they have "not a sight / Able to face an owl's," the poet seems to suggest at once that legitimate rulers are more blind or stupid than some animals, and that because of their fear they dare not open their eyes to face their own people; more important perhaps, by appealing to the sense of sight, the
poet may be trying to call on his readers to keep close watch on the activities of members of the Liverpool administration. Like Sampson, these worthless rulers rely on their physical strength. Or, in Keats's own words, it is simply because of their physical power that "they still are sight / By the blear-eyed nations in empurpled vests, / And crowns, and turbans." But when the oppressed awaken and stand up, these animals of legitimacy are soon to be overturned like the Tower of Babel. With this message, the poet's invective was thus not a mere outburst of hatred; rather, it represented a natural result of critical thinking which had a clear tendency towards the principles of democracy.  

Once the opening lines of Book III are understood as a close reflection of Keats's critical attitude towards the governing authorities of the day, their importance to the whole book and indeed to the whole poem becomes clearer. If we trace the development of the titular hero as a quester for happiness in "love immortal" (1:849), we find that he undergoes a dramatic change in his attitude towards human affairs. In the first book, when Endymion tells Peona that he is content to remain asleep "in love's elysium" (1:823) like those "who might have tower'd in the van / Of all the congregated world" (1:817-18), what he has rejected is his commitment to "the coming step of time" (1:819) and his obligations to "wipe away all slime / Left by men-slugs and human serpentry" (1:821-22). In
the third book, however, as Koch has stated, "Endymion comes awake. What he awakens to is the necessity for political action" (500). For Endymion as for the poet himself, self-absorption in love is not true happiness. Only through active participation in the world of politics can he enter the world of the ideal. With this recognition, the shepherd-king therefore begins to take political action. When he meets Glaucus, an "old mysterious man" (3:280) who has been imprisoned in a spell of old age by Circe and who tells him that he, Endymion, has been "commission'd to this fated spot / For great enfranchisement" (3:298-99), the shepherd-king engages himself to restore the old man to youth and love by dispelling the sorceress' power over him. This act is particularly significant, for it can be taken as a dramatization of the poet's critical attitude towards monarchical rule. As a regular reader of the Examiner, Keats must have been deeply impressed by the way Circe became associated with or symbolic of "Legitimate Tyranny" in the radical magazine. In an essay on Louis XVIII which appeared in the Examiner of 4 February 1816, Hunt wrote, for example, that "French Wags have converted the title of the new order of loyalty, Compagnons du Lys, into Compagnons d'Ulysses, whom Circe changed into Swine."12 Over a year later, in an article attacking Southey which was carried in the Examiner of 11 May and which Keats called "a tremendous Southean article" (Letters 1:144) concluding
with "such a thunderclap" (Letters 1:138), Hazlitt denounced the elderly poet for parting with his "Jacobean mistress" in order to marry Legitimacy which the critic referred to as a "witch . . . a murderess, a sorceress."

In describing Endymion's "great enfranchisement" of Glaucus who is recognizably a representative of all sufferers, Keats was, that is to say, using the current identification of Circe with the evils of legitimacy to allude to its inevitable downfall.

After setting Glaucus free, Endymion performs another politically significant act as he helps to re-unite the drowned lovers who "in a crystal place in silent rows, / . . . lay at rest from joys and woes" (3:735-36). In doing so, the shepherd-king shows himself to be wholly different from the capitalist brothers who viciously conspire to separate the lovers in Isabella, or the Pot of Basil, which I shall discuss in detail in the following chapter. For Endymion as for the poet himself, to wipe away the "slime" and the "thin pervading scum" (3:335) in the crystal pool was "what achievement high / Is, in this restless world, for we reserv'd" (3:714-15). Upon accomplishing this political task, Endymion finds his way to "God Neptune's palaces" (3:834) or "a golden sphere" (3:887) and thus has "his own anticipated bliss" (1:373) fulfilled and hears his beloved goddess proclaim him as a winner: "Dearest Endymion! my entire love! / . . . 'tis done-- / Immortal bliss for me too hast thou won" (3:1022-
24). From these episodes we see that the opening of the third book serves as a necessary preparation for Endymion's actual overthrow of the legitimist tyranny personified by Circe and that the political actions he takes are not without a contemporary human significance. In saying this I do not mean to suggest that the whole book is a pure political allegory. What I am trying to do is to emphasize that Keats projected his growing political awareness into the narrative structure of the poem. For Keats, it is clear that without playing an active role in human or political affairs, without gaining a sound understanding of the problem of legitimacy and without overthrowing an actual form of tyranny, Endymion and, by implication, all pursuers of "immortal bliss" will inevitably fail to reach the state of ultimate happiness. With its explicit attack on legitimacy and material oppression and, particularly, with its insistence on the need for political action, it is not surprising that Keats's Endymion should have turned out to be so offensive to Tory reviewers like J. G. Lockhart.

Here we should perhaps pause a little to note that Keats introduced some changes, both stylistic and substantive, to his poems after Endymion. If he had expressed his liberal concerns generally in an open manner in his early poems, the poet tended to do so more implicitly as he turned more and more to historical and mythological matters in his later works. There are two
important causes which account for these changes. Politically, the Tory reviewers' unfavourable reception of his early poetry including his *Endymion* or, rather, their virulent attack on his political connections, was something Keats could not afford to ignore completely. For example, an unsigned review in *British Critic* (June 1818) found it particularly unacceptable and even dangerous that "the third book [of *Endymion*] begins in character, with a jacobinical apostrophe" (Quoted in full in Matthews, ed., 94), whereas other articles written by Tory critics like Lockhart and Croker violently attacked Keats, as previously mentioned, by identifying the poet with the "Cockney School." Moreover, the passage of the Six Acts by the conservative government may well have alerted the poet to the possibility that if he continued to express his liberal sentiments overtly, he would jeopardize his much cherished poetical career. Aesthetically, as Keats was reaching the most mature years in his creative life, he would naturally want to explore his poetic powers to their fullest extent and emulate his great predecessors such as Shakespeare and Milton. This being the case, the poet began to work with such grander forms as odes, epics and tragedies. But although both his style and subject matter might become more diversified than before, and although the political content in his later works might become less apparent, the poet's liberal position in contemporary politics remained unchanged. As we can see from both his
poetry and correspondence, his political interest even deepened, especially when he tried to look at political problems within the larger context of historical and international developments. For example, in a journal letter to George and his sister-in-law, of October 1818, Keats observed that "There is of a truth nothing manly or sterling in any part of the Government" at a time when "the motives of our worst men are interest and of our best vanity" (Letters 1:396). While in Britain "All the departments of Government have strayed far from Spimplicity [sic] which is the greatest of Strength," in France "[Napoleon] has done more harm to the life of Liberty than anyone else could have done" (Letters 1:397). As for Russia, she "may spread her conquest even to China--I think a very likely thing that China itself may fall Turkey certainly will--Meanwhile european north Russia will hold its horns against the rest of Europe, intriguing constantly with France." About a year later, in another letter to George and Georgiana, Keats made these remarks "with genuine historic tact" (Thorpe 1237) after he conducted a brief analysis of the English liberal movement: "In every age there have been in England, for two or three centuries subjects of great popular interest on the carpet, so that however great the uproar, one can scarcely prophesy any material change in the Government, for as loud disturbances have agitated this country many times" (Letters 2:192). Soundly thoughtful as they are,
these opinions show the poet having a tendency in the last few years of his life to meditate on contemporary political issues in terms of history. And as a result, Keats's poetry after *Endymion* manifested a depth that was lacking in most of his early poems.

Although a fragment, Keats's *Hyperion* is admittedly a great epic work that carries within itself "some of [his] most deeply felt beliefs: his faith in progressive history, his hope for change without terror, his trust in a grecian morality of beauty separate from established religion, and his respect for human suffering" (Reed 227). Modelled unmistakably on Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the poem is a complex philosophical response to the human realities of Keats's time and, as such, it is richly endowed with sociopolitical implications. On a specific and very limited level, it expresses Keats's interest in the French Revolution. While its story about the overthrow of the Titans by the Olympians is obviously a story about revolution, the poem's portrayal of Saturn strongly reminds us of Milton's Satan, the father of all rebellions and, more importantly, of "the pathetically reduced Napoleon of Byron's ode to the fallen emperor" (Dickstein 180). There is evidence in the letters that Keats was usually critical of Napoleon (*Letters* 1:397) and tended to place him among the worldly rather than among the godly (*Letters* 1:207, 395). But "the popular view of the French general included the godlike qualities . . . and they
certainly would have been absorbed by Keats, as they were by Byron, as part of his imaginative vision of social power and social change". Not unlike Byron, and perhaps to a higher degree, Keats was profoundly ambivalent about Napoleon. While Keats, as we have seen from a letter quoted earlier, felt strongly about the harm that the French general had done to the course of liberty, the poet was "still impressed by the grandeur of Napoleon's conquests, and full of speculations about the possible good of his defeat" (Bromwich 206). These very mixed feelings, which may have been shared by many supporters of revolution, are reflected in the way Saturn is portrayed in the poem. On the one hand, the "great Saturn" (1:82) is presented as a tragic figure who deserves at least some sympathy if not respect. Although he fails in the struggle against Jove as a usurper of the beneficent rule, Saturn refuses to accept the defeat. It is his firm belief that, even if "I have left / My strong identity, my real self, / Somewhere between the throne, and where I sit / Here on this spot of earth" (1:113-15), he still has the power to "fashion forth / Another world, another universe" (1:142-43). On the other hand, however, Saturn's Lear-like stubbornness, pride and blindness "from sheer supremacy" (2:185) make him a detestable monarch. In point of fact, the very difficulty in interpreting the whole poem as a political allegory of the contemporary sociopolitical events--for example, the dethroned Saturn resembles the
dethroned Napoleon to a certain extent, but neither the rebellion of the Titans nor the revolution of the Olympians has any sustainable relation to the revolutionary movement in France—may suggest the poet's ambivalence to Napoleon or even to the French Revolution. Although Keats doubtless endorses the ideals of "liberty, equality and fraternity," he seems to think quite negatively of the social effects of the revolution itself. The following quotation from Keats's journal letter of September 1819 provides a key to understanding his interest in the French Revolution as well as his ideas about social change:

All civil[iz]ed countries become gradually more enlight'en'd and there should be a continual change for the better. Look at this Country at present and remember it when it was even though[t] impious to doubt the justice of a trial by combat . . . Three great changes have been in progress -First for the better, next for the worse, and a third time for the better once more. The first was the annihilation of the tyranny of the nobles. When kings found it their interest to conciliate the common people, elevate them and be just to them. Just when baronial Power ceased and before standing armies were so dangerous, Taxes were few. . . . The change for the worse in Europe was again this. The obligation of Kings to the multitude began to be forgotten -Custom had made noblemen the humble servants of kings- Then kings turned to the Nobles as the adorners of the[i]r power, the slaves of it, and from the people as creatures continually endeavouring to check them. Then in every kingdom there was a long struggle of kings to destroy all popular privileges. The english were the only people in europe who made a grand kick at this. They were slaves to Henry 8th but were freemen under william 3rd at the time the french were abject slaves under Lewis 14th The example of England, and the liberal writers of france and england sowed the seed of opposition to this Tyranny— and it was swelling in the ground till it burst out in the french revolution. That has had an unluc termination. It put a stop to the rapid progress of free sentiments in England and gave our Court hopes of turning back to the despotism of the 16 century.
They have made a handle of this event in every way to undermine our freedom. They spread a horrid superstition against all innovation and improvement. The present struggle in England of the people is to destroy this superstition. What has rous'd them to do it is their distresses—Perhaps on this account the present distresses of this nation are a fortunate thing—tho' so horrid in their experience. You will see I mean that the French Revolution [p]ut a tempor[ar]y stop to this third change, the change for the better. Now it is in progress again, and I think it an effectual one. This is no contest between whig and tory— but between right and wrong. (Letters 2:192-94)

From this passage which begins with a clear reference ("enlighten'd") to the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment, we see that on a larger and more important level, Hyperion is also a poem about social evolution in general. Although its landscape is devoid of human figures, the work has an explicit human significance, for its thematic concern is, as many critics have noted, with the way in which an old and static social order gives way to a new and dynamic one, despite all the desires and efforts of individuals. Underlying this process is what Oceanus refers to as the "eternal truth": if the Titans were once "beyond that Heaven and Earth / In form and shape compact and beautiful, / In will, in action free, companionship, / And thousand other signs of purer life" (2:208-211), it is ineluctable, as he continues, that "on our heels a fresh perfection treads, / A power more strong in beauty, born of us / And fated to excel us" (2:212-24). Just as they conquered "the rule / Of shapeless chaos" (2:216-17) before, the Titans are now defeated in turn by an even higher kind of life-force, as thus embodied in
Apollo and his like who are at once young, energetic, progressive and "beautiful." But their defeat is a glorious one since "'tis eternal law / That first in beauty should be first in might" (2:222-24). By using Oceanus as the spokesman for his ideas on social progress, the poet gave a philosophical depth to the poem, in which his stated intention was "the March of passion and endeavour" (Letters 1:207). At the same time, Keats justified, indirectly and in a "naked and grecian Manner" (Letters 1:207), what he had hoped for in his early poems, that is, the overthrow of one old established order. With such thematic concerns, Hyperion is, then, not merely a re-formulation of the Greek myths about the Titans and their war against the Olympians. Rather, it marks in an important way the poet's historical anxiety about social conditions. Indeed, for a politically aware Keats, Greek mythology has a human significance and historical relevancy, although it stands for an apparently remote classic subject. "It was used," says Thomas Reed, "by Shelley, Peacock, and Hunt as the vehicle for their polemic against theologically grounded defenses of counterrevolution, and against the English government" (196). Like many other liberal-minded artist-intellectuals of the day, Keats returned to classic subject materials, that is to say, not because they offered an escape from the post-Waterloo years "when the freedom that had been won during the revolutionary period
of the 1790s seemed to be on the verge of defeat by a restored absolutism," but because they "provided a means of formulating an idyllic past of human possibility and achievement that could be used as a basis for once more energizing contemporary defenders of liberty who saw loneliness and defeat everywhere about them" (Watkins 91). Given the way in which Keats articulated his social and historical concerns through such a powerful re-formulation of Greek myths, it is not surprising that his *Hyperion* should have been so popular among his contemporary liberal-minded intellectuals--Shelley liked it so much that he died with it open in his pocket; Hunt was deeply impressed by its "transcendental cosmopolitics" (Quoted in Dickstein, 180); and Byron found it "as sublime as Aeschylus" (Quoted in Brotemarkle, 24).

A hasty and "wretched play" (Watts 93) written in a curious collaboration with his friend Charles Brown and for the express purpose of making money, Keats's *Otho the Great* merits our attention because it can be taken to a certain extent as an indictment of the darkness of court politics from a historical perspective. The language or the verse may appear prosaic and parodic, but the action suggests that the play has a serious thematic concern. As the play opens and progresses, we are allowed to see how Ludolph first becomes reconciled with his father and then goes out of his way to fight for him in disguise after he has, quite ironically, rebelled against the monarch. These
dramatic episodes reveal, if anything, that while there are violent conflicts within the court, the maintenance of the established order has ultimate importance to the ruling classes. In the meantime, Ludolph's engagement with the adulterous Auranthe is seen as a cruel injustice done to the innocent Erminia who truly loves him but is wrongly accused. As the marrying couple meet their fate towards the end of the play, their tragedy is understood as a direct result of amatory deception. These developments lead us to see that court life or court politics is characterised by nothing but internal conflict, deception, injustice and decadence. It is an undeniable fact that the play is set in Germany and a time long before the poet's own age. But with its vivid portrayal of "the politics of power in both public and personal relations" (Watkins 124), with its thematic focus on the dirty workings of court politics and their devastating impact on individual lovers, the play does have a contemporary significance, not because it marks "One of [Keats's] Ambitions to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting" (Letters 2:139), but because it may serve as a historical reminder to the theatre-going public of the early nineteenth century (who were mostly members of the middle class), a reminder about how anyone can be made to suffer under the despotic rule of Otho or his like.

Simply as a result of the fact that it was left
unfinished at a very early stage, we can say little
definitely about King Stephen, Keats's only independent
attempt at historical drama. However, the first scene
clearly shows that the play was to carry a political
freight. As it "begins with the monarch's bloody
injunction" (Hoagwood 686), we instantly recognize him as
a hateful tyrant. In order to make sure that "Not twenty
Earls of Chester shall brow-beat / The diadem" (I, i, ll.
35-36), the tyrannical king is ready to drive his "pride
of war" to the killing ground. But when he is constantly
referred to as an "usurper" (ii, l. 9), a "crime-loving
rebel" and an "ingrate" (iv, ll. 38-39) in subsequent
scenes, the opposition led by De Kaims seems justifiable.
We are not sure about the true reasons for the bloody
conflict nor its specific historical significance. But if
we consider the fact the poet started to write the play
within less than two weeks after the Peterloo Massacre, we
may see without much difficulty Keats's meaning and
intentions in this play as his "charged encounter" with
"the silent pages of our chroniclers" (I, ii, l. 5). On 16
August 1819, more than 60,000 defenceless people, many of
whom were women and children, gathered at St Peter's
Fields, Manchester, carrying banners bearing slogans
against the Corn Laws and in favour of universal suffrage.
Although organized by its leaders as a peaceful
demonstration, the meeting was brutally charged by the
military, resulting in eleven deaths and hundreds of
injuries, and its chief speaker, 'Orator' Hunt, was arrested on the spot. Christened "Peterloo" in mockery of the government's great victory under Wellington only a few years before, this incident triggered a whole series of protests and scarred the memories of ordinary Britons deeply. Two days after the massacre, in a letter quoted earlier, Keats referred to this incident, saying: "You will hear by the papers of the proceedings at Manchester, and Hunt's triumphal entry into London. It would take me a whole day and a squire of paper to give you anything like detail. I will merely mention that it is calculated that 30,000 people were in the streets waiting for him. The whole distance from the Angel at Islington to the Crown and Anchor was lined with multitudes" (Letters 2:185). In his September 22 letter to Dilke, Keats remarked that he was very "pleas'd" with these public demonstrations (Letters 2:180). From these letters it is evident that when Keats was working on his second historical drama, the Peterloo Massacre and subsequent events were very much in his mind. This being so, it seems not too much to suggest that the bloody opening scenes of the play were meant to be an enactment of, or an allusion to, the real event of the day. By foregrounding the mercilessness or bloodthirsty nature of legitimate tyranny embodied in King Stephen, the poet was, that is to say, probably trying to voice his indignation at, and opposition to, the Tory government's using brutal violence on those peaceful
demonstrators at St Peter's Fields.

Among those few critics who have given serious considerations to Keats's last and unfinished major work *The Jealousies*, Robert Gittings sees the poem as "a literary satire" (370) like Hazlitt's "Letter to Mr Gifford," Reynold's *Peter Bell* or Byron's introduction to Book One of *Don Juan*, whereas Watkins argues that the central issue of the narrative is social division and social blindness (177-84). The contributions made by these two critics are certainly helpful to our understanding of the poem. What I want to stress here is, however, the way in which Keats uses a language of bitter satire to present, in displaced form, a complete portrayal of the ruling classes. Situated within a spiritual framework, the story is very simple: To silence the criticism of his people fairy Emperor Elfinan is betrothed to a fairy prince named Bellanaine, but in the meantime tries hard to carry off his earthly lover through the help of the magician Hum, an engaging rascal. As the narrative develops, we are led to see "the strangest sight--the most unlock'd-for chance--/ All things turn'd topsy-turvy in a devil's dance" (ll. 755-56). While the Emperor himself is depicted as a silly playboy who "lov'd girls smooth as shades, but hated a mere shade" (l. 10), the entire establishment, including the "priesthood" (l. 11), the "House of Commons" (l. 135), the "Chancellor" (l. 145), the "bishopric" (l. 146), the "Duke of A" (l. 154),
"Viscount B" (l. 157), "Admiral De Wit:" (l. 416), the "Ambassador" (l. 551), the "Chief-justice" and "Lord Mayor" (l. 768), come under bitter and more specific ridicule. Even the associates of the governing authorities are caricatured. For instance, Eban, the Emperor's page, is described as "A fay of colour, slave from top to toe, / . . . / [Whose] speech, his only words were 'yes' and 'no'" (ll. 182-85) and, within the Royal Palace: "A Poet, mounted on the Court-Clown's back, / Rode to the Princess swift with spurring heels" (ll. 775-76). With its explicit reference to England as "Angle-land" (l. 114) and, especially, in the context of the royal scandal—the Regent's attempt to divorce Princess Caroline by threatening to bring her under trial for adultery—which was to rock the whole country only half a year later,17 the long poem should thus be seen primarily as a powerful political satire rather than a mere manifestation of Keats's artistic versatility. Indeed, when we recall the derisive remarks Keats made about contemporary politicians shortly after he wrote the poem—in his letter to his sister-in-law in America, he observed, for instance, that "My Lords Wellington, Castlereagh and Canning and many more would do well to wear T wang-dillo-dee written on their Backs instead of wearing ribbands in their Button holes" (Letters 2:246), we recognize the work as "Keats's fullest satirical response" (Watkins 179) to Regency politics.
Although Li He was not a radical in the same sense as Keats was, he held a no less firm position in contemporary politics. While he devoted, as Keats did, a significant portion of his poetical writings to the criticism or satirization of the governing authorities or to the exposure of the darkness of the political realities of the day, the Chinese poet was certainly in favour of "a change for the better" in the sociopolitical climate in mid-Tang China. And in this sense he may well be considered a "radical." According to Frodsham, "Perhaps something like 20 percent of the verse, at a conservative estimate, can . . . be labelled satirical, though half the time we can never be sure just what target he is aiming at" (xl).

There are two major factors accounting for this difficulty in understanding Li's satirical poetry. On the one hand, although many of his works belong to the popular genre of Yuefu poetry, the poet tends, as I have mentioned earlier, to express his ideas and feelings implicitly or allegorically rather than in a simple and direct way as, for example, Bai Juyi does--Bai is said to have tried out his poetic writings on an old maid-servant, deleting anything beyond her comprehension. On the other hand, we have little material available on Li: there are very few contemporary references to him or his poetry; few authors living in the century after his death thought his poetic career interesting enough to write much about; and his prose writings (letters, official documents, political
essays, etc.) are lost to us (unlike some of his contemporaries). Without sufficient material or hard evidence which seems particularly necessary to validate an allegorical reading of a poetic text, one might easily fall into such critical pitfalls as pure speculation and circular argument; and it is little wonder that Chinese scholars have frequently disagreed wildly about how to interpret a poem, or even about whether or not a given poem is allegorical at all. But by following what Yeh Chao has repeatedly told us about the tradition of allegory in, and the criteria for allegorical interpretation of, classical Chinese poetry, it is, I think, not only possible but also reasonable to ascribe satirical intent to much of Li's poetic work.

As two leading figures of the New yuefu movement, Bai and his friend Yuan Zhen firmly believe that the poet is the social conscience of his age. In the Preface to his own collection of fifty yuefu poems, Bai writes:

[These ballads] are concerned with ideas rather than fine phrases . . . . This was the principle underlying the three hundred poems [of Shijing or The Book of Songs] . . . . Their style is smooth and flowing, therefore they can easily be played and sung. Put shortly, they have been written for the emperor, for his ministers, for the people . . . not for art's sake.¹⁸

Such poetic conviction, while it can be seen as a revival of an ancient belief underlying both Shijing and Chuci (The Songs of Chu), was certainly shared by many of Bai's contemporaries who either joined in or supported the New yuefu movement. A major mid-Tang writer of yuefu poetry
himself, Li He would undoubtedly have subscribed to this belief. Although Li Sao—the greatest poem of Chuci, a poem which is highly ornate and obscure—may have had more influence on Li than any other ancient poetic work, the young poet was, like Bai, Yuan and Han, concerned with the use of poetry as a vehicle for social and political criticism. In his "Ku Zhou Duan" (Lament That the Days Are So Short), for example, Li makes very clear his critical attitude towards the ruler of Tang as the poet expresses his intense feelings about the brevity of life. At the opening of the poem, the poet invites time or "flying lights" to have "a cup of wine" (ll. 1-2) with him. He is keenly aware that while life ends soon between the alternations of the "cold moon" and the "hot sun" (l. 5), there are no such supernatural beings as "the Lady Spirit" and the "Supreme Unity" (ll. 9-10). As the poem progresses, the poet imagines himself going to the mythological world to "cut the dragon's feet / And eat the dragon's flesh" (ll. 13-14), that is, to make time stand still by killing the dragon that draws the chariot of the sun. But since this is something unattainable in the real world as we are clearly meant to see, man cannot stop himself from aging. Nor can he consequently live an immortal life no matter whether he tries to "swallow yellow gold / Or eat white jade" (ll. 15-16). In the last four lines, the poet concentrates on the fact that no human being has ever succeeded in achieving immortality in
history. While there is no way of knowing the true
identity of Ren Gong-zhi who is believed to be an
immortal, emperors Liu Che of the Han dynasty and Ying
Zheng of the Qin dynasty who were frenzied searchers for
immortality are both dead now: the former "lies in the
Mao-ling Tomb, just a pile of bones, / [the latter] . . .
in his catalpa coffin--What a waste of abalone!" (ll. 19-
20).

Ostensibly, the controlling impulse of the poem is
not a political one, or not merely a political one; it is
something more personal or philosophical, for the poem
seems to present itself as a more or less pure lament
about the brevity of human life. However, when we examine
the poem in relation to Li's political concerns and,
especially, when we pay attention to the way the poem ends
on a strong note of sarcasm, we find that it is also a
criticism aimed at the supreme political authority of his
country. This interpretation can be justified in three
steps. First, it is well documented that unlike Dezong and
Shunzong, Xianzong was an emperor who took great interest
in elixirs of immortality. In the autumn of 810, for
example, Xianzong asked Li Fan, one of his chief
ministers, whether or not he could put his faith in Taoist
magicians.19 Although he was given a quite stern lecture on
the folly of such superstitious practice, the emperor
continued his ardent pursuit of immortality through Taoist
arts. While he frequently swallowed pills of immortality,
which were usually made of gold, arsenic, lead, mercury and like substances, Xianzong even appointed Liu Bi, a seclusive Taoist, as Governor of Taizhou so that "[Liu] could gather herbs of immortality for him in Tiantai Mountain" (Jiu Tang Shu, vol. 1, 465). But ironically, although he had begun to use such drugs almost on a daily basis since 819, the emperor died in 821 when he was only 43. Second, with its explicit references to Liu Che and Ying Zheng who were famous or, rather, infamous assiduous searchers of human immortality, the poem contains sufficient textual evidence showing that the poet was dwelling to a certain degree on the problem of emperors' ludicrous preoccupations with elixirs of life. This satirical concern becomes more evident when we consider such poems as "Fu Wu Ge Ci" 拆舞歌辞 (Lyric for the Duster Dance) and "Xiang Quan Jiu" 相劝酒 (Let's Drink Wine) where the poet suggests that the Emperor seek longevity by drinking good wine rather than by taking poisonous drugs.20 Third, as many critics and scholars have noted, the Tang authors often referred to their contemporary emperors as Han Wudi (Liu Che).21 Given this literary tradition, it is very likely that the ultimate object of the poem's satirical attack is neither Liu Che nor Ying Zheng. Rather, the poet was using historical allusions to criticize Xianzong as a pursuer of immortality. That Li criticised the emperor in such a roundabout way can easily be explained by the fact that no individuals were allowed
to make any negative comments on a contemporary emperor. Although some of Li's contemporaries like Bai and Yuan wrote works that were sometimes openly critical of political and social conditions, they had to cloak their criticisms in one way or another when they referred to the emperor himself. That is to say, if the poet wanted to perform the Confucian duty to point out the emperor's shortcomings, he could do so only indirectly or by way of allusion. Otherwise he would endanger not only his political or poetic career but his biological life itself. Bearing all these points in mind, we therefore find it justifiable to say that "Ku Zhou Duan" signifies not only Li's personal anxiety about the brevity of human existence but also his political concerns with Xianzong's unavailing pursuit of immortality. To be more exact, it is the poet's own urgent feeling about the passage of time that leads him to see and thus to satirize the emperor as a ridiculous pursuer of human immortality.

In another poem known as "Guan Jie Gu" (Drums in the Street of the Officials), the poet criticizes the very notion of human immortality and thus presents an even more powerful satire on the search for an immortal life. As the poem unfolds, the poet calls attention to the way in which time passes continuously in the "Thunder of drums" (ll. 1-2). In so doing, he is able to reveal to us the great pressures time imposes upon human existence. More significant is that by using the sound of drums as a
time-image, the poet gives to his work a definite contemporary significance. In the middle of the poem, the poet elaborates on the point that nothing in the universe is immortal except time itself. With "the drums pounding away a thousand years" (l. 5), everything in the universe must perforce follow its own natural course: in the physical world, the sun and the moon rise and fall periodically; in the plant world, trees like yellow willows turn colour according to the season; and in the human world, people become old and die as did former emperors and their consorts. Such being the case, it hardly needs to be said that man can never hope to live an immortal life. Towards the end of the poem, the poet asks: "How many times have Ethereal Immortals been buried in Heaven?" (l. 9). This question, paradoxical as it may be, carries a strong message: even in the mythological world, there are no immortal beings. While all living creatures are bound to die in the end, only "the drip of the water-clock goes on day after day without pause" (l. 10). With its temporal reference to Tang, with its human reference to Han Wudi and particularly with its thematic message about the mortality of human beings, the poem thus can and perhaps should be seen as a political satire. Indeed, Li's constant exploration of the theme of human (im)mortality in the context of his constant reference to Han Wudi can best be explained in terms of the poet's satirical concern with Xianzong's stubborn and foolish search for elixirs of
life.

That Li maintains a strong critical attitude towards the supreme governing authority can also be seen from his frequent portrayal of kings and emperors. In "Qin Wang Yin Jiu" (The King of Qin Drinks Wine), for instance, the poet creates a striking image of a monarch who, after accomplishing his military tasks, indulges himself in an extravagant and sensual life:

Qin wang qi hu you ba ji,
Jian guang zhao kong tian zi bi.
Xi He qiao ri bo li sheng,
Jie hui fei jin gu jin ping.
Long tou xie jiu yao jiu xing,
Jin cao pi pa ye cheng cheng,
Dong Ting yu jiao lai chui sheng.
Jiu han he yue shi dao xing,
Yin yun zhi zhi yao dian ming,
Gong men zhang shi bao yi geng.
Hua lou yu feng sheng jiao ning,
Hai xiao hong wen xiang qian qing,
Huang e die wu qian nian gong.
Xian ren zhuo shu la yan qing,
Qing qin zui yan lei hong hong.

Straddling a tiger, the King of Qin Roams the eight Roles, His glittering sword lights up the sky, Heaven turns sapphire.

Xi and He whip up the sun With the sound of glass, The ashes of kalpas have flown away,
Past and present at peace.

From a dragon's head spouts wine
Inviting the Wine-Stars,
All night the gold-groove zithers
Twang and sing.
The feet of rain of Dong-ting lake
Come blown on the pipes.
Flushed with wine, he shouts at the moon--
It runs back in its course.
Beneath dense drifts of silver clouds
The jasper hall glows.
The keepers of the Palace gate
Cry out the first watch.
In the ornate tower, a jade phoenix sings,
Faltering and sweet.
From ocean-pongee, patterned in crimson,
A faint, cool scent.
The yellow beauties reel in their dance.
A thousand years with each cup!

As fairy candlesticks waft on high
A light, waxy smoke,
Eyes rapt with wine, those Emerald Lutes
Shed seas of tears.

As one can readily observe in the first four lines, the poem opens with an enthusiastic eulogy of a heroic conqueror: with his great force of character which is displayed by his tiger-straddling posture, and with his military power which is symbolized by his sword, the king of Qin is thus able to defeat all his enemies and bring peace to his turbulent country. But this initial eulogistic tone is undermined as the poet turns his attention in the following six lines to the way in which the king of Qin drinks wine, not with his generals to celebrate his military feats as one might have expected, but with the palace girls to enjoy his life as an emperor. Although day already breaks, the keepers of the Palace Gate dare not offend him by telling the right time.
Although the girls in yellow can hardly stand steadily on their legs, they have to keep dancing in front of him. More noteworthy is that the poem ends with a sympathetic description of how the palace beauties entertain the king with tears in their eyes. This descriptive detail, coupled with the poem's emphasis on the king's drinking of wine, leads us to see that the whole poem is presented more as an exposure of the king's self-indulgence than as a praise of his military successes.

While trying to see the satirical significance of the poem further, one is perhaps attempted to ask whom the poet possibly refers to as "the king of Qin." To answer this question, we need to take into full consideration the interrelationship between the signifier and the signified. In so far as the signifier or the name goes, there are two historical figures who are known respectively as the king of Qin: one is Ying Zheng (reg. B.C. 246-209), the notorious first emperor of the Qin dynasty, the other is Taizong (reg. A.D. 627-650), the actual founder of the Tang dynasty who was given the title of King of Qin before ascending the imperial throne. But since the poem has no specific historical reference to the Qin dynasty as the Qing commentator Wang Qi pointed out, it is unlikely that the poet is talking about Ying Zheng. Nor is likely the case with Taizong since the emperor does not fit into the picture presented especially in the second part of the poem. As far as the signified is concerned, both Dezong
(reg. A.D. 780-805) and Xianzong bear some resemblance to the poem's king: the two emperors of Tang became self-indulgent soon after they won some victories over rebellious generals. But with the poem's textual reference to immortality, in which Dezong showed little interest during his lifetime, it is not impossible that the poet has Xianzong in mind; and Liu Yan is probably right in saying that the signifier "the king of Qin" is "borrowed to satirize the reality of the ninth year of the Yuanhe period" (95). Here it may be noted, however, that it is not really important to identify whom the poet is actually referring to as the king of Qin. What is important is that as the poet exposes the self-indulgence of the king of the Qin in the poem, Li shows himself to be critical of certain kings or emperors.

Besides Xianzong's superstitious search for immortality and his self-indulgence, the poet is also very much concerned with the way in which the emperor governs the country. In his "Lü Jiang Jun" (Song of General Lü), for instance, the poet voices his bitterness towards Xianzong's appointing people by favouritism. As we can readily see in the first twelve lines of the poem, there is a satirical contrast between two generals. One is General Lu whose situation the poet undoubtedly shares to some extent. With his "scarlet hare [or horse]" (l. 2), his "valiant heart" (l. 3) and his "dragon-sword crying out at night" (l. 6), the general is ready to go to the
battlefields to defend the unity of his country when "the rebellion in the North stains in the blue sky" (l. 5). But not unlike the poet himself, he is left "idle" (l. 6) and thus denied of the opportunity to serve his country. All the general is able or allowed to do is to "weep at Gold Grain Mound by funereal trees" (l. 4). In his place, another general "powdered [like a female] rides under a fiery banner" (l. 8). This powdered general, cowardly and incompetent as he is, dare not meet the enemy's challenge on the battleground. When the "iron horsemen of Mount Heng" begin to attack, they cannot see him in person although they can "smell from afar the ornate arrows in [his] perfumed quiver" (l. 12).

This poetic scene has a specific historical reference. Shortly after Wang Chengzong inherited the governorship from his father, the son and his military associates garrisoned in Mount Heng Prefecture staged a rebellion against the rule of Tang in the winter of 809. To put down the rebellion, Xianzong appointed his favourite eunuch Tutu Chengcui as commander-in-chief of a large imperial force, much to the disapproval of his court officials like Xu Mengrong. But as Tutu was no soldier, his failure was inevitable.\textsuperscript{25} Associated with this historical event, the poem gains a double satirical significance. On the surface, the contrast between General Lü and the lady-general serves to ridicule the latter's cowardice and incompetence. But in depth, this contrast is
created to expose Xianzong's bigotry and misgovernment: if the emperor had taken the advice of his court officials and chosen the right person for the job, the rebellion in Mount Heng Prefecture would easily have been quelled. That the hidden or ultimate object of Li's satirical attack is Xianzong can most conveniently be seen towards the end of the poem when the poet resentfully points out that "Low and inscrutable is the vaulted azure covering the land / This is the way the world works in our Nine Provinces" (ll. 17-18). As the poet thus sympathizes with General Li and ridicules the lady-general, Li weaves into the fabric of the work his bitter criticism of Xianzong's failure to govern by using the right people.

While Li constantly and courageously attacked the political authorities of the day, whether his target was the emperor himself or those eunuchs to whom he had given much control over state affairs, the poet spared no efforts in exposing the criminal deeds committed by the Military. The best example comes from his poem "Huang Jia Dong" (The Caves of the Yellow Clan), at the end of which Li presents a striking contrast between two conflicting forces after he offers a quite detailed description of the extraordinary-looking Yellow Clan soldiers:

Xian qu zhu ma huan gui jia, 闲驱竹马缓归家,
Guan jun zi sha Rongzhou cha. 官军自杀榕州槎。

(ll. 9-10)
Quietly trundling their bamboo-horses,
They slowly go home,
Leaving the government armies to kill
The natives of Rong-zhou.

With its most appropriate diction, this closing couplet enables us to see clearly how the battle comes to an end: on the one hand, the Yellow Clan soldiers return home "quietly" and "slowly" or, rather, in a leisurely manner after they win in the battlefields; on the other, the defeated government troops begin to slaughter the innocent and harmless inhabitants of Rongzhou in order to wreak vengeance and lay false claim to a resounding victory. This contrastive scene is therefore very significant not merely because it is a vivid representation of a fierce battle but because it reveals the extent to which the Military is inept, brutal and corrupt.

If we reconstruct its specific sociohistorical background properly, the poem as a whole may have more political implications than one can readily recognize. According to Xin Tang Shu, the Yellow Clan natives, who lived in the region of South Guangxi and West Guangdong, had been "trouble-makers" to Tang ever since the years of Suzong (reg. 756-61). In the winter of 816, the year when the poet supposedly died, the aborigines staged a major uprising against the local government. To pacify these rebels, Xianzong sent his imperial force to the region. But incompetent and corrupt as they were, the government troops led by Pei Xingli failed in the action and deliberately killed thousands of local people. In his
report to the Central Government, Pei shamelessly claimed that his men had "killed and captured 20,000 enemies." 26 With its close relevancy to this historical event, which Han Yu also referred to in 820 in his "Huang Jia Zei Shi Yi Zhuang" (Memorial Concerning the Rebellion of the Huang Clan), 27 the poem exemplifies the way in which the poet concerned himself deeply with the social and political realities until the very end of his life. More important, in writing about the Yellow Clan natives' uprising, which was seldom mentioned in historical literature, Li expressed at once his "anger at the government troops who, unable to defeat the enemies, could only kill the innocent people to lay fraudulent claims" (Chen Benli 38) and his sympathy with the southern aborigines who had long been living under the oppression and exploitation of Tang bureaucrats. Thus the poem shows, to quote from Yang Qiqun, that Li "had a sound attitude towards the Yellow Cave natives, which is highly commendable" (79).

In another interesting poem known as "Yang Sheng Qing Hua Zi Shi Yan Ge (Singing of Yang's Purple Inkstone with a Green Pattern), Li seems to focus his entire poetic attention on the fine quality of Yang's inkstone made of a famous purplish stone produced in the mountains of Duanzhou, Guangdong. At the opening of the poem, the poet enthusiastically praises the local stone-masons, whose skills are "subtle as spirits, / [as they] Trod the sky, hewed purple clouds with polished knives"
(ll. 1-2). In the following lines he tells us in more
detail how Yang's inkstone comes to be beautifully made.

And at the end of the poem, the poet writes:

Yuanhao cu dian sheng jing xin,  
Kong yan kuan wan he zu yun.  

(ll. 9-10)

Often the round brush whispers on
The stone, forever new.
Master Kong's inkstone, broad and stubborn,
Was no match for this.

Exquisite as it is in its accuracy of description, these
lines mark a quite sudden poetic movement from a pure
eulogy of Yang's inkstone to a seemingly incidental
mockery of Master Kong's (or Confucius's) inkstone: as he
compares Yang's little-known but beautiful inkstone with
Confucius's famous but "broad and stubborn" inkstone, the
poet plays down the values symbolized by the latter. There
is no sufficient biographical evidence showing that Li has
the intention to do so. Nor can we find in his poetry any
other politically significant detail that might support
such an interpretation. But considering how Master Kong's
inkstone is preserved like a sacred object in his temple in Shandong and how one may treat the inkstone as a
metonymy of Confucius within the context of the poem, it
seems possible to suggest that the poet is trying to show
his contemptuous feelings towards the sage as an
ideological authority indirectly by mocking his inkstone.

From the foregoing discussions it is now self-evident
that both Keats and Li maintained a keen interest in
contemporary politics during their lifetimes. As they respectively criticized their political authorities, ridiculed the Military and scorned religious or ideological authorities, the two poets added to their poetic works a social and political dimension and gave them a contemporary significance. More interestingly, both poets seemed to have a tendency to speak and write against the Establishment. This tendency, while it shows the two poets having a more-or-less strong spirit of revolt, is undoubtedly one of the most important similarities between them. Technically, in the course of formulating and articulating their political concerns, both the English and Chinese poets tended to adopt rhetorical manoeuvres which might help them to avoid any possible trouble. To elaborate a little bit, largely because of the existence of political censorship in Britain, Keats often projected his political feeling through historical allusions or within a mythological framework. Although he sometimes expressed his liberal concerns openly, as he did in his Jealousies, the poet refrained from doing so when political censorship operated very effectively. Likewise, because it was forbidden in China to criticize an emperor, especially a contemporary one, Li usually voiced his critical feelings towards Xianzong indirectly by way of historical insinuations or mythological references. Even when he worked with contemporary subject matter as he did in his "Song of General Lu," the poet must hide his real
satiric intent.

At the same time, we must be fully aware, however, that when they wrote about their political concerns, the two poets were essentially different in many important ways. Although they appeared to share a common tendency against the governmental, military and other authorities in their times, their political concerns were very different in both content and expression. For instance, while Keats was attentive to such problems as despotic authority, divine right and royal decadence, Li paid special attention to Xianzong's fatuity, bigotry and self-indulgence. Again, Keats experimented with a diverse spectrum of poetic forms like sonnets, odes, epics and tragedies, but Li wrote mostly in the form of song or ballad. Such differences, while they can be explained as a necessary result of the fact that the two poets were formed and informed by different social and cultural conditions, clearly show that both Keats and Li are unique creations of their own times.
NOTES:

1. As previously noted, the few lines known as "In after time a sage of mickle lore" are according to Stillinger the only poem "Written in 1820" (680), which Brown believed to be "the last stanza" Keats wrote before his death. Considering that the poet had become seriously ill by mid-November 1820 when he travelled to Rome upon his doctor's advice, we can reasonably assume that Keats had written his last stanza well before that time.

2. In discussing Keats in relation to contemporary politics, modern critics have often referred to the poet as a "liberal" (or a "radical") without giving any clear definition or re-definition of the term(s). The fullest attempt made so far in this connection was perhaps the definition of "liberal" offered by David Bromwich. According to this critic, that word may have come to be too quickly understood and therefore too easily dismissed. It was, in fact, the word Keats used to described his politics . . . . But several distinctions have to be made at this point. First, to be a liberal, even of the enlightened Whiggish variety, took more courage and independent resolve in 1819 than it did in 1832. Second, for a young writer with only a foothold in the middle class, it involved a threat of sustained persecution, as it never could for established men of affairs like Francis Jeffrey or Lord Holland. More important, when Keats used the word "liberal" he did not mean what the enlightened Whig meant. He had in view a liberal-mindedness like Robin Hood's, the pursuit of which implied a thorough reformation of sexual mores and economic arrangements. (201)

But based on my reading of Keats's political poetry and on E. P. Thompson's discussions of "Radicalism" in the Regency period, I would rather consider the poet a radical, though he himself might have preferred to be called a liberal. For an excellent discussion on the differences between "radical" and "liberal" views (especially on reform), see Kevin Gilmartin, "Popular Radicalism and the Public Sphere," Studies in Romanticism 33 (Winter 1994): 549-57.


4. This point was borne out by Keats's later enthusiasm for Milton which was, as Wright pointed out, "due not only to his literary genius but also to his ardour for liberty." For more on Keats's admiration of Milton, see Wright, 8-9.
5. For more commentary on Keats's contempt for, and his distrust of, the military power, see Wright, 10-11.

6. The sonnet was written on Sunday 22 December 1816. On 18 December Keats visited Hunt and "found the cottage caught up in a new and agitating atmosphere, created by Shelley." For a more detailed account of this circumstance and its connection with Keats's writing of the sonnet, see Gittings, 110. It is also relevant to mention that on January 20, 1817, less than one month after Keats wrote the sonnet, he dined with Horace Smith together with Haydon, Hunt and Shelley. At the gathering and during the arguments for or against Christianity, Keats presumably expressed his feeling against the Church (Letters 1:138).

7. See the Examiner, no. 411, 732-33.

8. Voltaire, Oeuvres: Dictionnaire philosophique (Paris, 1813), vol. 13-14: 221. Keats had a copy of the 1813 edition in his library, which the poet must have read in the years immediately before and/or after he wrote the sonnet. In a letter of September 18, 1819, the poet "used the word 'superstition' three times in association with organized system of belief" (Reed 201).

9. As quoted in Miriam Allott, "Woodhouse notes in his copy of E (Berg Collection, New York Public Library), K said, with much simplicity, 'It will easily be seen that I think of the present Ministers by the beginning of the 3d book'" (206).

10. In Clarke's "Cockney" commonplace book, there is an entry that "The Principle of a Despotic Government is Fear,—[Voltaire,] Philosoph. Hist." While Keats must have read the commonplace book, this entry might have left a particularly deep impression on him. For more on the influence of the book on Keats, see John Barnard, "Charles Cowden Clarke's 'Cockney' commonplace book," in Roe Nicholas (ed.), Keats and History, 65-87.

11. For additional commentary on the details of this challenge, see, for example, Bromwich, 199-201; and Koch, 495-96.

12. While one should note here the parodic importance of puns to both Keats and Hunt, the same is true of usual punning in political cartoons and caricatures. For more commentary on this issue, see, for example, Newey, 173-74; and Koch, 498-500.

13. Watkins, 93. In support of this argument, the critic gives a quite lengthy quotation of an article in the Examiner in May 1817 and observes that the article
"suggests the continuing presence of the French general in the popular imagination, and in terms that sound strikingly similar to Keats's description of the fallen Saturn." Another good example is a poem entitled "Napoleon in Exile" (Black Dwarf [1818], 2:782) by F. (presumably R. C. Fair, the publisher of The Theological Inquirer), a poem which, according to Michael Scrivener, "presents a very idealized picture of Bonaparte" (263).

14. In the same context Reed goes on to suggest that examples may include Shelley's Laon and Cythna, Peacock's Rhododaphne and Hunt's Italian tales.


16. For further discussion on the Peterloo Massacre and its impact on contemporary politics, see Asa Briggs, The Age of Improvement (London: Longmans, 1959), 209-11; and also E. P. Thompson, 687-90.

17. According to Jack Stillinger, Keats wrote the poem "probably towards the end of 1819" (676). Aileen Ward believes that "the royal scandal had been rocking the kingdom since August" (334). But it "hardly became news," as Robert Gittings has pointed out, "till she arrived in England in June 1820" (370). For a detailed account of the Regent's proposals to try the Princess for adultery as well as the ways people responded to the news, see Seaman, 383-84.


19. For a more detailed account of this anecdote, see Jiu Tang Shu, vol. 1, 431-32.

20. For a discussion on such poems as well as their references to Xianzong, see, for example, Yang Qiqun, 67-68; see also Liu Yan, 79.

21. See Qian Zhongliang, 45; and also Yeh Chao, 89.

22. For instance, in his poems like "He Yu" 贺雨, "Qi De Wu" 许德芜, "Fa Qu" 法曲, "Er Wang Hou" 二后 and "Hu Xuan Qu" 胡玄曲, which were supposedly written for the emperor, Bai often tried to admonish Xianzong by encouraging him to learn from Taizong and do what was good for his country and his subjects. For a detailed discussion along these lines, see Yu Bingli, A Study of Bai Juyi's Satirical Poetry (Taipei: National Teachers' University Press, 1981), 127-30.
23. It is typically a Tang practice to announce the opening and closing of the gates of Chang-an by beating drums throughout the city.

24. Frodsham's translation reads "powdered lady-general." But in Li's original poem, there is no direct textual reference to any "lady." What the poet does is to suggest that, powdered as he is like a female, the eunuch-general is no soldier.


27. For a quotation and discussion of Han's original text concerning the rebellion, see Yang Qigun, 93.
Chapter Five
The Poet and the Humanitarian

When an injustice occurs, there is most likely to be an outcry against it.

---- Han Yu

[By] speaking out our repressed anger, we can recognize and thus correct, not only our distemper but that of our civilization.

---- Dante

A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must be his own.

---- Shelley

Any artist who tends to place humankind at the centre of the universe is sure to have a serious concern over the human reality. As they externalize through their chosen art whatever they have internalized, such artists would seldom fail to express this concern in their artwork. In his "Sleep and Poetry" (1816), which has been held by general critical consensus to be the most important of his early poems, Keats asserts that "the great end / Of poesy" lies in its function "To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of man" (ll. 245-47). To achieve this end and "do the deed / That [his] own soul has to itself discreed" (ll. 97-98), the poet recognizes that he should not remain
in the realm "of Flora, and old Pan" (l. 102). Rather, he must pass these joys "for a nobler life," where he may find "the agonies, the strife / Of human hearts" (ll. 124-25). Only when he knows how the human heart feels and suffers can he hope to gain a deep insight into human existence in a world where "A sense of real things comes doubly strong, / And like a muddy stream" (ll. 157-58). In an often-quoted letter of April 1819, the poet writes to his brother George that

I will call the World a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read--I will call the human heart the horn Book used in the School--and I will call the Child able to read, the Soul made from that school and its hornbook. Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways! (Letters 2:102)

According to Keats, while "the first political duty a Man ought to have a mind to is the happiness of his friends" (Letters 2:213), a poet must try to live in compassionate understanding of human sufferings. Otherwise, he would never be able to fulfil the noble task of soul-making or to reach the height of poetry reserved only for "those to whom the miseries of the world / Are misery, and will not let them rest" (The Fall of Hyperion; ll. 148-49). Such ideas which gleam brightly in both his poetry and correspondence clearly show that Keats himself had thought out a solid theoretical foundation for his humanitarian position.

While it may be relatively easy to document Keats's
stated concerns with the agonies and strife of human hearts, it is difficult, if not entirely impossible, to illustrate that Li had a similar theoretically-informed interest in the poor human condition, for there is no evidence demonstrating that the Chinese poet ever related artistic creation to human suffering in the way Keats did. In fact, Li rarely theorized about the poetic character or poetic truth. Nor did he ever say anything, to the best of our knowledge, about the importance of trying to understand human miseries. But from what he did in his poetry it is obvious enough that Li also had an active concern with the hard reality of the human world. That is to say, although the two poets may have used different rhetorical devices in their poetic practice, they both had, as we shall see in this chapter, a serious thematic interest in human miseries. As they exposed the inhuman forces working in their respective societies, sympathized with the real-life underdog, and urged the improvement of human conditions, the two poets proved themselves to be more than perceptive observers of human life. Put differently, if a "humanitarian" can be defined as someone who "functions out of an informed commitment to the welfare of the human community",¹ both poets were passionate humanitarians. Equally interesting is that the two poets often gave simultaneous expression to their humanitarian feelings and political concerns in their respective works, although, for example, disease,
mortality, and the passing of time as part of the human condition are, strictly speaking, a different matter from the struggle of the poor against the rich and the injustices of the class system. However, since a person who is concerned with the general welfare of humanity, with relieving human suffering, is more likely to be on the side of the poor against the rich, and therefore to find himself or herself resisting authoritarian rulers, it follows naturally that his or her humanitarian and political sentiments are, more often than not, intertwined and intertwined together. Consequently, while examining Keats's and Li's poetical writings, one may find it difficult (and perhaps unnecessary) to make a clear-cut distinction between humanitarian concern and political resistance.

To begin with, let us recall how Keats was eager to voice his concerns over "the miseries of the world" when he had hardly commenced his poetic career. While in his first sonnet "On Peace" he drew attention to "our late distress" (1. 3), in another two early poems--"Stay, ruby breasted warbler, stay" and "As from the darkening gloom a silver dove"--Keats conveyed his deepened sense of human reality in a way which was to be typical of him: by addressing the warbler and dove respectively as a symbol of joy unattainable in the human world, the poet created a striking contrast between the darkness in human conditions and the serenity of a transcendent realm. In the former
poem, the poet fervently and persistently invites the "fluttering thing" (l. 5) to stay with him, not because its "sparkling eye" (l. 2), "pretty head" (l. 4) or "little wing" (l. 7) is pleasant to the eye, but because the bird represents "a soft smile / Amid the gloom of grief and tears" (ll. 23-24). With its "soft note" (l. 20), the singing creature is a source of joy and comfort for people "when bleak storms resistless rove, / And ev'ry rural bliss destroy" (ll. 17-18). As the poet repeatedly asks the bird to remain together with him, he makes it clear that he is dissatisfied with the poor human condition. Similarly in the latter poem the poet rejects "the dark gloom" (l. 1) of life as he tries to reach out for the soaring "silver dove" and share its happy experience in

the realms above,
Regions of peace and everlasting love;
Where happy spirits, crowned with circlets bright
Of starry beam, and gloriously bedight,
Taste the high joy none but the bless'd can prove. (ll. 4-8)

Although the poem was supposedly written on the death of Keats's grandmother, it is not necessarily an occasional piece to her memory. As is clearly suggested by the impersonal tone of the sonnet as well as the use of such inclusive pronouns as "any" or "our" in the last line, the poet was not expressing pure personal or individualistic feelings. Rather, he was articulating his larger concerns with human suffering by using a language that includes a certain conventional element, for poets from Edmund
Spenser and John Milton to William Cowper and Samuel Taylor Coleridge had used pastoral elegy to express general humanitarian-philanthropic sentiments. This is not of course to say that Keats was cynically pretending to share sentiments that he did not in fact share; only that he might have adopted forms of expression that in some sense draw on the liberal sentiments of earlier poets who may have had an influence on him. For Keats as for any other person who closely associates his own happiness with that of his community, the personal experience of the individual seems to have a social significance just as the collective experience of a society may have an impact on the life of an individual.

Probably because they were never published during Keats's lifetime or because they are considered "stilted" or immature, these two poems have never been granted prominence in Keats criticism. However, they mark an important step in Keats's poetic development because they contain two basic motifs of much of Keats's later and greater work--a sense of constant concern over poor human conditions and the attempt to seek happiness in a realm other than the human world (Ward, The Making of a Poet, 40). Such concerns or sentiments are common to many poets of the age, but the contrast between two realms that is observable in both of these early poems deserves our special attention, for it is illustrative of how Keats's mind was constantly caught between two different worlds.
even well before he became fully devoted to poetic creation. While he had a daily encounter with the suffering of his patients, the emerging poet realized that he could find happiness only in a situation beyond human society. This early rejection of human reality should not be construed as a passive act of escapism on the poet's part. Rather, it is a poetic formulation of Keats's concern with the harshness of human conditions. There are two major reasons supporting this interpretation. Textually, both poems end with a return to "the gloom" or "grief" of human life. Put differently, no matter how he desires to be together with the warbler or the dove, the poet is fully aware of himself being part of human reality and his mind always comes back to it at the end of the poem. This poetic movement, which often takes the form of a round psychological journey or empathetic experience in his later and more matured work, demonstrates that Keats's artistic endeavour had a human significance from the very outset. Biographically, it is a well-known fact that Keats was apprenticed to Thomas Hammond for five years between 1811 and 1815. By the time he wrote the above two poems, he had doubtless gained from his several years of experience as a country medical worker a large amount of first-hand knowledge about the bitterness and pain of life. With this knowledge increasing almost on a daily basis, with contemporary medical ethics encouraging him to develop what de Almeida refers to as "the sympathetic
ability to recognize physical and mental pain" (36),
Keats's concerns with human distress were therefore not only active but serious.

To see how "Keats's concern is with the spectacle of pain and the mystery of suffering, and [how] he explores the mind's spiritual resources to conquer and transcend this suffering" (Chatterjee x), it is helpful to look at those poems which he wrote shortly after he moved to London. In a sonnet on solitude, which turned out to be his first published poem, Keats expresses his great distaste for the urban life "among the jumbled heap / Of murky buildings" (ll. 2-3). In another sonnet known as "To one who has been long in city pent," the poet gives no direct description of urban life on the surface structure of the poem. But right in the first line he clearly suggests that the city is a gloomy prisonhouse. This suggestion is reinforced as the poet introduces to us a whole physical world in the foreground of the poem, a world where "'Tis sweet to look into the fair / And open face of heaven, --to breath a prayer / Full in the smile of the blue firmament" (ll. 2-4) and where "with heart's content" the poet could read "a debonair / And gentle tale of love and languishment" (ll. 5-8) or what he himself had written in his early "Spenserian" poetry. By illustrating what joy can be found in this poetic world, Keats creates a sharp contrast between nature and the city. In doing so, the poet compels us to think of the poor condition in the
human world and simultaneously presents an indirect
indictment of the inhuman forces symbolized by the city.

With his deeply rooted concerns over the living
conditions of man, it comes as no surprise that there is a
persistent theme of human suffering in almost every major
poem Keats wrote after he gave up his medical career. In
Endymion, the longest and most ambitious work he ever
composed, Keats did much more than just "make 4000 lines
of one bare circumstance and fill them with Poetry"
(Letters 1:170). As he put himself to what he calls "a
test, a trial of my Powers of Imagination and chiefly of
my invention" (Letters 1:169), the poet gave ready
expression to his feelings about, and contemplation of,
the human reality of his day. While the third book
contains, as we have already seen, some of Keats's most
explicitly and powerfully expressed sentiments against
tyrannical rule as a major cause of human suffering, there
are other episodes in the long poem which are also charged
with a contemporary social significance. One good example
is the episode of Alpheus and Arethusa which takes place
toward the end of Book Two. When "His dream [is] away" (l.
933), the first thing that Endymion observes is the way in
which the river Alpheus and Arethusa, a nymph attending
Diana, are suffering profoundly from their deprivation of
freedom to love. "See[ing] how painfully [Alpheus]
flow[s]" (l. 948), the nymph strongly resents the
"cruelty" (l. 972) done to them by her mistress and
remarks that "should I obey / My own dear will, 'twould be a deadly bane. / O, Oread-Queen! would that thou hadst a pain / Like this of mine, then would I fearless turn / And be a criminal" (ll. 959-63). But in spite of their misery and protest, the "Cruel god" (l. 952) refuses to set them free and even makes them suffer more by letting them fall "adown a fearful dell" (l. 1009). On the surface level of the narrative structure, there is no direct reference to contemporary social conditions in Britain. However, if we consider the fact that when Keats started working on the poem sometime after 18 April 1817 (Letters 1:134; 139), the Tory government had just suspended Habeas Corpus over a month earlier to suppress criticisms of king, constitution and government in speech and in writing,' we may well say that the two lovers' profound suffering from the "persecuting fate" (l. 1006), like the oppression which Porphyro and Madeline are made to suffer in "The Eve of St Agnes" (which I am going to discuss in a moment), is an allusion to the political oppression that characterized British society. Even if it is, as some critics (like Allott, for instance) might argue, a "pure" re-working of Ovid's legend about Alpheus and Arethusa, the episode is not entirely without social significance, for, when Endymion comes to ask his "gentle Goddess . . . to soothe, to assuage . . . those lovers' pains; / And make them happy in some happy plains" (ll. 1014-17), it is self-evident that the shepherd-king is not only
sympathetic to the lovers but also willing to do something helpful about their suffering.

In "The Eve of St Agnes," as in his Endymion, Keats projects his humanitarian concerns typically by way of a dramatic representation of lovers' experience. Although his expressed subject matter is an old superstitious ritual, the poet's thematic concern is not really with the past. Rather, "Keats is, as all artists must, using the past as a way of formulating the present" (Watkins 84). While its setting of "bitter chill" (l. 1), "sculptur'd dead" (l. 14) and "Rough ashes" (l. 26) may serve as a general reminder of the poor human condition of Keats's own time, the poem's sympathetic treatment of the story itself clearly reveals the extent to which Keats is concerned with the happiness of his fellow sufferers. More important perhaps, the narrative emphasis on Madeline and Porphyro coming from hostile family backgrounds has a specific social as well as literary implication, for the hostility between the two lovers' families is not only reminiscent of the Romeo and Juliet story but also suggestive of the social tension between the labouring and exploiting classes within British society. This suggestion becomes apparent when we note how the old beldame refers to Madeline's family as a "blood-thirsty race" (l. 99) and how the servant further tells Porphyro that his lover's kinsman even in his illness "cursed thee and thine, both house and land" (l. 102). In other words, the hostility
shown by "Hyena foemen, and hot-blooded lords, / Whose very dogs would execrations howl /Against [Porphyro's] lineage" (ll. 86-88) may simply result from the young man's "obscure" or lower family status. It is true that within the narrative framework of the poem, the poet says nothing explicitly to this effect. However, his keeping Porphyro's family in low profile throughout the poem indicates that the young man comes from a lower social class. If this is the case, if, to be more exact, the enmity between Porphyro and his beloved's family does reflect to a certain degree class relations of the poet's own time, then the poem can be seen as a telling example of how humanitarian sentiments and political concerns are often interfused together in Keats's poetry. (Such interfusion is even more evident in Keats's *Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil*, which was written actually before "The Eve of St Agnes," but which I shall discuss later for the convenience of comparison.)

Another way of considering how Keats incorporated his humanitarian concerns into the poem is through what may be called a matrix of contrastive categories the poet developed within its narrative structure. On the one hand, the youth, beauty and harmony that characterize the love relationship between Madeline and Porphyro present in the foreground or the human-scape of the poem a contrast to the elders' agedness, ugliness and enmity. On the other hand, the warmth, light, perfume, hope, vigour that fill
Madeline's chamber are set in the background of the poem against the "coldness, darkness, gloom, death and decay" (Watts 40) of the castle. These two sets of contrasts are drawn from different realms and thus may carry different psychological forces. But they both constitute an integral part of the poem's thematic framework and their narrative implications are mutually illuminative: just as Madeline's chamber is greatly overshadowed by the darkness of the castle, so is her love relationship with Porphyro by the hostility of the elders. That is to say, the poem's matrix of contrastive categories is functionally significant because it alerts us to the overshadowing presence and the destructive nature of oppressive forces as thus symbolized by the castle. If the two lovers hope to live a happy life of their own, they must bravely fight against oppressive elements personified by the elders or resolutely reject their poor social condition symbolized by the castle. With this point in mind, we find it easy to understand why the lovers finally choose to dash into the storm:

And they are gone: ay, ages long ago
These lovers fled away into the storm.
That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe,
And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form
Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm,
Were long be-nightmar'd. Angela the old
Died palsy-twitch'd, with meagre face deform;
The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,
For aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold.
(ll. 370-78)

For these lovers, it is apparently desirable to enjoy freedom of love even at the risk of death in the stormy natural world, which may prove to be as hostile as the
castle although in a different sense. Should they remain in the sepulchral castle and fail to do anything about their unfavourable social condition, they would be doomed to meet a tragic end as Angela and the Beadsman are. With this message, the conclusion of the poem should thus be regarded as an expression of social criticism rather than a sign of Keats's pessimism or a statement of an escapist "move out of the world of human time, beyond the mortal realm of sensations" (Goldberg 126).

Turning to Li He, we find that the Chinese poet was also keenly alive to "the pains . . . of his species." Although he, as in the case of the classical Chinese poets, never wrote any poem of great length or expanded design like Keats's *Endymion* or "The Eve of St Agnes," and although, unlike Keats, he seldom used lovers' experience as his thematic framework, Li maintained an equally serious concern with the harsh realities of the human world; and as he gave utterance to such concerns, he showed himself to be an equally passionate, if not an equally self-conscious, humanitarian. At the same time, there was also an element of convention, or at least the sense of following a recognized tradition, in Li's humanitarian utterances—given the tradition of humanitarian sentiment in the work of Du Fu and other earlier Tang authors. It is always risky to ascribe certain feelings to a poet on the basis of an apparently "sincere" expression of feeling. But considering Li's
personal suffering from illness, poverty and frustration, his career objective to enter the civil service, as well as his direct or indirect knowledge about the human reality in a war-torn age, we may reasonably say that his concerns over human suffering were genuine and deeply rooted. When Li adopted conventional forms of expression, he must, in other words, have shared humanitarian sentiments that were usually associated with, or expressed in, those forms. For example, in his little poem "Huang Tou Lang" (The Young Man with a Yellow Hat), a poem which may have been written according to the rules of the poetry of separation, the poet gives a most sympathetic representation of the miserable life of a boatman who, in order to make a living, has to separate himself from his loving wife for months at a time. As the poem proceeds, we are confronted with a heartbreaking parting scene: after the husband has "rowed away, not to return" (l. 2), the wife begins to suffer from worry and loneliness:

Nan pu fu rong ying,  南浦芙蓉影，
Chou hong du zi shui.  惆红独自垂，
Shui nong Xiang e pei,  水弄湘娥珮，
Zhu ti shan lu yue.  竹啼山露月。

(11. 2-5)

Lotus shadow by south shore,
Sad, red petals drooping alone.

Water murmurs,
Lady of Xiang's girdle-jades,
Bamboos weep, moon over dew-drenched hills.

In these lines, as Tu Kuo-ch'ing has observed, "the poet
does not explicitly compare a woman parted from her husband to a red lonely blossom, but the analogy between the lonely appearance of the flower and her saddened image is obviously intended" (107). This analogy between a human situation and a natural scene is very effective in the poem, for it enables the poet to present his subject matter in a doubly suggestive way. First, by calling attention to the sad expressions of such personified natural objects as the petals, the water and the bamboos, the poet makes us see the emotional impact the parting has on the wife. Second, as he tries to shed light on how the wife is left behind to suffer from worry and loneliness, the poet leads us to imagine those emotional sufferings as well as physical hardships the boatman may go through after his departure from his wife. With this double suggestiveness, the poem is thus an indirect but powerful expression of Li's concern about the suffering of the boatman, and by extension, of the working people as a whole.

That the poet was concerned with human suffering in general is borne out by the very fact that there were various kinds of sufferers sympathetically portrayed in Li's poetry. In "Ping Cheng Xia" (Under the Walls of Ping City), Li used a partly conventional language of the so-called "Frontier Poetry" to present his humanitarian concerns in a much more direct way, for he grounds the poem firmly on realities in the living world
and in the human heart:

Ji han ping cheng xia
Ye ye shou ming yue.
Bie jian wu yu hua,
Hai feng duan bin fa.
Sai chang lian bai kong,
Yao jian han qi hong.
Qing zhang chui duan di,
Yan wu shi hua long.
Ri wan zai cheng shang,
Yi xi wang cheng xia.
Feng chui ku peng qi,
Cheng zhong si shou ma.
Jie wen zhu cheng li:
"Qu guan ji qian li?"
Wei chou guo shi gui,
Bu xi dao ge si.

Hungry and cold, under Ping City's walls,
Night after night we guard the shining moon.
Our farewell swords have lost their sheen,
The Gobi wind cuts through our temple-hair.

Endless desert merges with white void,
But see--far off--the red of Chinese banners,
In their black tents they're blowing short flutes,
Mist and haze soaking their painted dragons.

At twilight, up there on the city walls,
We stare into the shadows of those walls,
The wind is blowing, stirring dead tumbleweed,
Our starving horses whinny within the walls.

"Just ask the builders of these walls
How many thousand leagues from the Pass we are?
Rather than go home as bundled corpses
We'll turn our lances on ourselves and die."
It is true that there is, as is typical of classic Chinese poetry, no such first-person pronouns as "I" or "we" in the (original) poem. But the poet is apparently using the persona of a city guard in his attempt to reach into the very depths of human misery. As the poem opens, the poet-speaker pours out his grievances against hardships imposed upon himself and his fellow soldiers. While he and his peers are suffering physically from cold and hunger and emotionally from homesickness in the open, their superiors or commanding officers are enjoying food and music "far off" in their big black tents. This contrastive scene introduced in the middle of the poem is important because it serves to highlight the injustice done to the soldiers and simultaneously justify their complaints. With a further poetic movement, the poet-speaker finds himself in a truly gloomy and lifeless situation of "twilight," "shadows" and "dead tumbleweed." Hearing the "starving horses [that] whinny within the walls," the speaking soldier feels all the more strongly about the likelihood that he will soon perish under the walls. And not unlike the whinnying horses, he thus begins to cry out his own innermost feeling against the ill-treatment that soldiers received in the front. For him, it is better to fall down in a military action, whether it is a battle against enemy troops or a mutiny against their unfair officers, than to starve to death in a cold night. With its use of the persona of an ordinary soldier or, rather, with its in-
depth exploration of the psychological reality of a suffering city-guard, the poem distinguishes itself from many frontier poems written by Tang authors and simultaneously presents itself as an astonishing example of how Li is passionately concerned with what Keats calls "the agonies and strife of human hearts."

Just as he uses the persona of a city guard in the above poem to express his deep sympathy for all suffering soldiers garrisoned at northern border outposts of Tang, Li adopts the persona of a palace girl in his "Gong Wa Ge" (Song of a Palace Beauty) to project his concerns with the confined and disconsolate life led by the harem of the emperor. In this seven-character poem which contains certain stereotypes of gongyuan shi (literally, "Palace Resentment Poetry"), the poet-speaker begins by telling us how the girl spends her life in a world of "Light of tapers" (l. 1), "flowery chambers" (l. 2), "incense" and "Persian rugs" (l. 3). With all the luxuries in her physical situation, the girl is obviously enjoying a quite comfortable material life. But she feels bitter about the very idea that she would never have need of "red palace-wardens" (l. 2) or the chance of becoming one of the emperor's concubines. As she listens to the clepsydra's gong at night and reflects upon the tragic fate of Lady Zhen who committed suicide after she had been ruthlessly discarded by Emperor Wen of Wei (reg. 220-26 A. D.), the girl realizes that she herself is also living in
a mausoleum-like prisonhouse where "The cold creeps in past the eaves-net" (l. 5), where "Coloured simurghs on lintels of blinds / Bear scars from the frost" (l. 6) and where "Crying mole-crickets mourn for the moon, / Beneath hooked balustrades" (l. 7). Although she is "locked" (l. 8) in the deep and quiet palace like Lady Zhen, the girl is not, however, going to give up her struggle for freedom. Rather than waiting passively for the emperor to change his mind, she would make active efforts to liberate herself. Hence in the closing couplet of the poem the girl openly says: "I wish that my lord, who is dazzling bright / As the Great Light itself, / Would set me free to ride off on a fish, / Attacking the waves" (ll. 11-12). This thematic concern with the suffering of palace ladies is quite common in mid-Tang poetry—for example, in his "Shang Yang Bai Fa Ren" (The Grey-haired Woman from Shangyang), a famous poem written supposedly in the spring of 809 when he submitted a memorial petitioning Xianzong to permit more palace ladies to return home, Bai Juyi expressed similar concerns with palace ladies who suffered all through their lives. But Li's poem is unique in the sense that "his description of [the girl's] miserable and confined situation is superbly vivid" (Qian Zhongshu, Tan Yi Lu, 52) and works particularly well with his representation of her innermost feeling and thoughts.

In view of the political realities of mid-Tang China, it may appear to be too naive for the poet or his persona
to hope for the liberation of palace girls. But if we consider the poem in relation to its proper historical background, it takes on new meaning and is thus by no means a mere verbal formula of the poet's wishful thinking. In the summer of 813, as is recorded in *Jiu Tang Shu* (Vol. 2, 446), a heavy storm and a severe flood that ensued incurred a large number of deaths and a tremendous amount of damage in the capital area, whereas there had been a severe drought in the northern part of China just a few years before. Alleged to be a result of a predominance of the *yin* (the feminine or negative principle in nature), these events compelled Xianzong, an enthusiast for the Taoist arts, to agree to send three hundred of his harem back to their homes as a way of restoring the balance between the *yin* and the *yang* (the masculine or positive principle in nature). As one can see from its closing image of waters or "waves," Li's poem was probably written soon after this event. But this is not to say that the poem is only an occasional piece. What Li tries to do in the poem is, as under many similar circumstances, to use a specific historical situation to express his ever-present humanitarian concerns. Put differently, Li's thematic concern in the poem is not so much with the liberation of palace girls as with the exposure of inhuman forces working in his society. The very fact that the poem reenacts the plight of a confined palace girl instead of celebrating the release of three
hundred from the emperor's harem proves that the poet's real intention is not to give a poetic account of the historical event or to express an unrealistic hope but, as Bai had done in his "Shangyang Bai Fa Ren," to call attention to the cruel and inhuman treatment given to palace girls. By taking the persona of a palace girl, the poet is trying, in other words, to show his sympathy with her and her like and voice his opposition to those who make palace girls suffer in their "flowery" but "locked" chambers.

While palace girls, frontier guards and labouring people were suffering profoundly in one way or another, the upper classes kept living a fast life despite the warring situation and natural disasters that mid-Tang China was facing. "Ever since the Zhenyuan period," as the Tang historian Li Zhao observed, "the social customs in Chang-an [actually] became more and more extravagant in entertainment." With his personal experience as Supervisor of Ceremonies in Chang-an, Li certainly had a firsthand knowledge of how the nobility or the rich indulged in luxury and dissipation; and with his passionate concerns over the poor human condition, it follows naturally that Li would hold the privileged in great contempt. From those poems which Li probably wrote while he was still in Chang-an, we may clearly see the extent to which the poet committed himself to the satirical exposure of the rotten life led by the upper
classes. In his "Ye Yin Zhao Mian Qu" 夜饮朝眠曲 (Song: Drinking All Night, Asleep All Morning), the poet presented a satirical portrayal of a princess who sought sensational pleasures by "Drinking all night, asleep all morning,/ Without a care in the world" (l. 7); in "Chao Shao Nian" 朝少年 (Ridiculing a Young Man), Li voiced his bitter feeling against a lad from a rich family, who "hasn't read more than half a line / Since he was born./ But bought high office for himself / With gleaming gold" (ll. 15-16); and in his "Nan Wang Qu" 难忘曲 (Song: Hard to Forget), Li made clear allusions to a high official's family living in splendour and promiscuity as he described how its "clove branches, intricately interlaced,/ Cover the balustrade" (ll. 7-8).

More noticeably, Li often turned to past history to look at how those belonging to the privileged classes had lived in wanton extravagance and wild debauchery. By so doing, the poet allowed himself to emphasize not only historical reality but also historical continuity, because what had happened in the past,--as Li saw from the social actualities of the moment surrounding him--was happening in the present. In "Rong Hua Le" 荣华乐 (Joys of the Rich), one of the longest poems Li ever wrote, the poet offers, for instance, a full satirical picture of the infamous Liang Ji, one of the richest and most powerful officials in China during the closing decades of Eastern Han (25-220 A.D.). At the beginning of the poem, Li describes Liang as
"A young, owl-shouldered nobleman / [Who] Just turned
twenty, / [And who had ] Teeth like cowries, / Scarlet
slips" (ll. 1-3). In the forty-four lines that follow, the
poet elaborates on how Liang made himself "The perfect
ladies' man" (l. 11), how he enjoyed the emperor's favour,
how his very shoes attracted the attention of "Nine
Ministers, six officers" (l. 18), how he used "a thousand
yards / of embroidered silk" and "a thousand pounds of
gold" (l. 24) to buy support and loyalty from lictors as
well as household servants, how "Around the twelve gates
of Luo-yang / His mansion sprawled" (l. 25), how he would
"dine on a phoenix from Cinnabar Hill" (l. 31), how "He
was wealthy enough to fill a cave / With purple gold, /
Yet asked for presents of rare costly rabbits / Burnt with
his brand" (ll. 43-44) and how his family had produced
"Three empresses, / Fifty colonels, / Seven noblemen, /
[And] A pair of generals" (ll. 45-47). At the end of the
poem, Li introduces a sudden poetic turn as he writes:

Dang shi fei qu zhu cai yun,
Hua zuo jin ri jing hua chun.

(l. 48-49)

Though these once gorgeous clouds dislimned
And flew away,
Translated to our capital
They brought us spring today.

By alerting his reader to the present as nothing but a
transformation of the past, Li gives to his poem a double
significance. At one level, the poet makes it clear that
although his poetic account follows Liang's biography
quite closely, it is not merely a historical exercise. Rather, the poet is using the past as a vehicle to express his contempt for those contemporaries of his who were living as Liang had done. At a deeper and more interesting level, the poet is trying to convey the message that no matter how members of the privileged classes may be enjoying themselves today, their "gorgeous clouds" would soon dislirm and fly away and that he who does not remember the past is condemned to repeat it. Thus, when we read Li's poems like "Rong Hua Le," "Ye Yin Zhao Mian Qu," and "Nan Wang Qu," we can also take them as expressions of the poet's humanitarian concerns, for his very contempt for the privileged must have been developed out of, and informed by, his insightful knowledge of the sufferings of common people.

To compare in a more specific way how Li and Keats wove their social and humanitarian concerns into the texture of their poetic work, it is appropriate to look at Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" and Li's "Ping Feng Qu" "歌风曲" (Song: the Screen). In the former poem, the English poet creates two different worlds--"the joy-filled one of the bird, and the pain-filled one at [the poet's] feet" (Brotemarkle 123) --which are in striking contrast to each other. On the one hand, the pain-filled world is recognizably the world of human reality in which the poet maintains a physical presence and from which no one can really escape:
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.
(ll. 23-30)

On the other hand, the joy-filled world symbolized by the nightingale represents a transcendental realm which the poet tries to reach through sympathetic imagination. As his soul flies "on the viewless wings of Poesy" (l. 33) to the bird, the poet imagines himself feeling the tenderness of the night, seeing "The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild; / White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine; / Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves" (ll. 45-47), tasting the "dewy wine" on "The coming musk-rose" (l. 49), and hearing the murmurs of "flies on summer eves" (l. 50). With the bird's world so beautiful and so appealing to his senses, the poet wishes to forget "The weariness, the fever, and the fret" that characterize the human world. However, the more he tries to do so, the more vivid his memories actually become. This paradox shows that the poet is undergoing a psychological turmoil, a conflict between body and soul, so to speak. While his soul is reaching out to become one and the same with philomel, his corporal being remains tied to the real world, thus reminding him of human suffering and aging as well as the losses of "Beauty." Within the poem's context, such memories are certainly revealing, for they not only
mark in an obvious way the speaker's generalized grief over the universal human condition--everyone has to grow old; everyone has to face disease and/or death--but also imply a more specific sentiment against political oppression. As one can see from his frequent juxtaposition of pain and sickness with trouble and oppression (Letters 1:281; 2:79; 86), bad politics could be associated with the ideas of disease in Keats's mind. When he refers to the actuality of the human world, the poet must have, that is to say, included repressive government in his grim list of human maladies.

It is exactly these unfading memories that finally lead the poet to return to the human world after his imaginative journey to, and empathetic experience with, the nightingale: "Forlorn! the very word is like a bell / To toll me back from thee to my sole self!" (ll. 71-72). The poem's insistence on such return, which is typical of Keats, attests that the poet's primary concern in the ode is with the agonies and strife of human hearts, whereas the poet's round journey serves at once as a verbal re-enactment of an intense psychological experience and as a rhetorical strategy the poet uses to introduce and sharpen the contrast between the beautiful world the nightingale lives in and the world where "youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies." By pinpointing what is desirable in a transcendent realm like the philomel's world, the poet is actually trying, in other words, to
bring to our mind what is undesirable in the human world. When he repeatedly asks at the end of the ode "Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music:--Do I wake or sleep?" (ll. 79-80), the poet is thus emphasizing not only the strong effect the bird's song has produced on his senses but also the great revulsion his body feels against the harshness of the real world.

In his "Ping Feng Qu," Li creates an equally striking contrast between two different scenes, a contrast which the Chinese poet also uses to project his humanitarian concerns although in a different context:

Die xi shi zhu yin jiao guan,
Shui ning lu ya liu li qian.
Tuan hui liu qu bao gao lan,
Jiang huan jing shang zhi jin chan,
Chen xiang huo nuan zhu yu yan,
Jiu gong wan dai xin cheng huan.
Yue feng chui lu ping wai han,
Cheng shang wu ti chu nu mian.

Butterflies lighting on China pinks--
Hinges of silver,
Frozen water, duck-head green--
Coins of glass,
Its six-fold curves enclose a lamp
Burning orchid-oil.
She lets down her tresses before the mirror,
Sheds her gold cicadas,
Perfume of aloes from a warm fire,
Smoke of dogwood.
Goblets of wine joined with a sash,
A new bride in raptures,
Wind by moonlight blowing the dew,
Cold outside the screen,
As crows cry from the city walls,
The girl from Chu sleeps on.
In the first six lines, the poetic attention is focused entirely upon a cozy domestic situation where two young people are celebrating their matrimony. Although the poet says nothing about the social status or family backgrounds of the newly married couple, we know from such luxuries as "her gold cicadas" or gold cicada-shaped hairpins that they belong to the rich if not to the nobility. As they begin to live together as husband and wife, the couple have every kind of sensational pleasure available to them in the chamber: the beautiful sight of twelve elaborate screens arranged in pairs across their bed, the pleasant smell of aloes and dogwood, the warm feeling of the fire, and the delicious taste of wine in the goblets tied with a sash. While the couple spend the night "in raptures" behind the screens, other people like the girl from Chu are, as the last two lines of the poem remind us, suffering outside from cold as well as misfortune symbolized by the crying crows.

This contrastive scene presented in the closing couplet invites our special consideration, for it signifies a sudden poetic turn which is characteristic of Li. With its strong dramatic effect, this sudden turn enables the poet to emphasize the great difference between the rich and the poor. Meanwhile, by shifting his attention to the poor at the end of the poem, Li makes it clear that his thematic concern is actually with the harsh aspects of human existence. Further, Li's juxtaposition of
the world of the rich with that of the poor, which is obviously comparable to Keats's juxtaposition of the ideal with the real, exemplifies the way in which Li also likes to express his humanitarian concerns through contrast.

Having seen how Keats and Li expressed their concerns similarly through juxtapositions of contrastive scenes, we may now consider the interesting fact that both wrote a beautiful poem about autumn. In Keats's famous ode "To Autumn" which "offers an ideal, 'impersonal' image of the season" (Roe 197), there is no direct description of human activities in the poem's foreground, and thus no apparent social content. But viewed in relation to contemporary discourses of social and political conflict, the poem was as much about the sociopolitical climate that characterized the season as about the season itself. When it was written in mid-September of 1819, Britain had experienced the infamous Peterloo Massacre only one month earlier and yet was fortunate enough in having a much better harvest after a series of crop failures in the years immediately preceding. Probably because the poet had been feeling strongly about the darkening social climate and poor agricultural production, he found the autumn to be particularly appealing. When he came to represent in a most objective or impersonal way the "fine" air, the "temperate sharpness," the "chaste weather--Dian skies," the warm "stubble fields" and the agricultural abundance of the season (Letters 2:167), the poet created a sharp
contrast between the poem's seasonal and its sociopolitical context. As a matter of textual fact, the poem does contain many allusions to contemporary sociopolitical conditions and thus can be seen as another example of how Keats tended to weave his humanitarian and sociopolitical concerns into a single poetic work. In the first stanza, for instance, the poet employed a series of words whose political implications may have been readily apparent to "A reader in 1819-1820 familiar with popular political pamphlets and songs" (Keach 196): the problem of "Conspiring" (l. 3) that captured much public attention and that was seriously considered in September 1819 by such government officials as the Home Secretary Lord Sidmouth and the Chancellor Lord Eldon; "the bees" (l. 9) that "had been politicized and repopularized by Paine, Spence, and Wooler and that was used almost exclusively at this time [as a trope of the populace] by working-class socialists and radicals" (Behrendt 193); and the "clammy cells" (l. 11) that strongly reminded one of the government lock-up and/or sweatshops. Another even more explicit allusion is found in the use of the word "poppies" (l. 17) in the second stanza, a word which Keats used in an earlier poem ("To My Brother George") to ridicule "the scarlet coats that pester human-kind." While the use of this word can be closely associated with the troops sent to "pester human-kind" in St Peter's Fields, the warm-looking "stubble plains" (l. 26) in the third
stanza are certainly suggestive of "Peterloo, that cold and bloody 'stubble plains'' (Levinson 89). With such explicit allusions which are probably intentionally made, the ode is thus not merely a blatant falsification of the true state of agriculture in Britain during those years as, for example, McGann has argued (McGann, *Beauty of Inflections*, 57-58). Nor does it signify "a refuge from history" as Fry has more recently suggested (211). Rather, what the poem presents is at once a satirical contrast to, and an indirect indictment of, the inhuman forces in the real world.

A close look at the poem would further show that the poet is concerned as much with Peterloo as with the general social condition. From its descriptive indexes to autumn which include such physical categories as wild fields, winnowing wind, gathering clouds, clear water, ripening fruit and singing insects, it seems that the poem's subject matter deals with nothing but a serene natural scene. But the very exclusion of human figures from the poem's foreground and, especially, the personification of autumn as a gleaner in the second stanza serve to alert us to the harsh reality of the human world. By emphasizing "the seasonal change from summer to winter with all its traditional thematic associations: living and dying, maturing and decaying, staying and leaving" (McGann 55), the poem suggests a parallel between the transitoriness of the season and the mutability of
human life. Moreover, "The premonition of departure that concludes the poem, the hint of darker and colder days to come, was prophetic" (Ward 322) not only in a meteorological sense but in a sociohistorical sense as well, for the hint can be taken as a warning against the worsening social and political conditions in Keats's time.

In his well-known poem "Nan Shan Tian Zhong Xing" (Walking through the South Mountain Fields), Li also offers a most objective or impersonal representation of the autumnal scene:

Qiu ye ming, qiu feng bai,
Tangshui liao liao chong ze ze.
Yun gen taixian shan shang shi,
Leng hong qi lu jiao ti se.
Huang qi jiu yue dao cha ya,
zhe ying di fei long jing xie.
Shi mai shui liu quan di sha,
Gui deng ru qi dian song hua.

The autumn wilds bright,
Autumn wind white.
Pool-water deep and clear,
Insects whining,
Clouds rise from rocks,
On moss-grown mountains.
Cold reds weeping dew,
Colour of graceful crying.

Wilderness fields in October--
Forks of rice.
Torpid fireflies flying low,
Start across dike-paths.
Water flows from veins of rocks,
Spring drip on sand.
Ghost-lanterns like lacquer lamps
Lighting up pine-flowers.
Like Keats's ode "To Autumn," Li's poem contains no direct textual reference to the human world and is full of descriptive details about natural objects like fields, wind, crops, flowers and insects which characterize the scene of autumn. And "With its vivid and realistic representation of the desolate scene," the poem, like Keats's, "is apparently a work inspired by an actual experience rather than a work of pure imagination." But there are also some noticeable differences between the two poems. For one thing, the physical scenes depicted in the two poems are different. While Keats's poem deals with a plateau day scene of mid-autumn, Li's poem describes a mountain scene in a late autumn evening. Further, the poetic tone is different: if Keats's poem is like a "warm-looking" picture, then Li's is like a "cold-looking" one. Such differences and similarities, while they may represent very complicated problems from a cultural or textual point of view, can be explained to a large extent by the fact that Li was going through a different experience in a different context when he wrote the poem, although his thematic concerns were similar to Keats's.

By the time Li wrote the poem, supposedly in 813 after he resigned from his official post in Chang-an and returned to his native place in poor health and in bitter despair, the problem of land annexation in the countryside had become very serious as a result of the abuse of liangshui fa (double taxation policy). While a great
number of farmers had lost their land and fled away from their home villages, those who remained as tenant-farmers often had to pay their landlords a rent almost twenty times more than, and in addition to, the taxes they paid to the government. To make it worse, the bad weather in the summer of 813 brought crop failures to many areas in the northern part of China including Li's native place. When he walked through the bleak fields, saw the dreary realities in agriculture, and reflected on his own hopeless situation, it is not surprising that the poet felt at once sad about himself and sympathetic with those helpless farmers who had to tear themselves away from their land. It is not surprising either that when the poet came to represent what he actually saw on a late-autumn evening, such feelings would find their way to his artwork. That is to say, if the poem is heavy with cold and gloom, that is because the poet was in a mood of sad reflection; and if the poem insists on the exclusion of human figures from its landscape, that is probably because the poet wanted to emphasize the fact numerous farmers had left their land in desperation. As Xu Chuanwu has put it, "The poem is highly illustrative because its description of a specific scene offers an epitome of contemporary agricultural failures in the vast countryside" (156). To interpret the poem along these lines is of course not to denigrate the work, or even to question its aesthetic integrity or intentions, but to suggest that like Keats,
Li is using the autumnal scene as a way of projecting his concerns about social reality.

To compare further how Keats and Li articulated their humanitarian concerns through poetry, it is interesting to consider the way in which they look into and dramatize the causes of the miseries of the world. In his Isabella, for example, Keats did not simply recast a popular Boccaccio tale into another more refined artistic form but moulded it into a powerful expression of his understanding of how and why people suffer in the real world. Although the work may not be satisfactory to the poet himself, the changes and additions he introduced into it were significant enough. As Ward observed, "In Boccaccio's tale the brothers murder Lorenzo merely because of his illicit passion for their sister; Keats added an economic motive with the brothers' greedy ambition to marry Isabella to a wealthy noble" (173). Again, Keats reduced the number of the brothers to two. "By taking away their numerical superiority to the two lovers," as Heinzelman remarks, "Keats emphasizes . . . that their superiority is economically and politically based" (172). While such changes doubtless give to the poem a contemporary social and economical dimension, the anglicization of Isabella to Isabel in Keats's poem as well as its setting of northern landscape shows that the story has a domestic significance as well. Another important change is Keats's matter-of-fact description of the physical decay of Lorenzo's body.
which was presented as miraculously uncorrupted in Boccaccio. This change was made probably because the poet intended to retain the horror of the story or because he wanted to emphasize the result of the brothers' cruelty. Bearing these changes and additions in mind, we understand that like the enmity between Porphyro and his beloved's family in the case of "The Eve of St Agnes," the conflict between the two lovers and the two brothers represents not merely an individual marriage problem that involved a few people in Florence a long time ago but also a fierce social struggle between two opposing classes that was going on within contemporary British society.

In the following lines, which were probably added after Keats had his first glimpse of poverty among the cotton-spinners in Lancaster in the summer of 1818, the poet presented a strong indictment of the exploiting classes and pinpointed their greediness and cruelty as an immediate cause of human misery:

14

With her two brothers this fair lady dwelt,
   Enriched from ancestral merchandise,
And for them many a weary hand did swell
   In torched mines and noisy factories,
And many once proud-quiver'd loins did melt
   In blood from stinging whip; --with hollow eyes
Many all day in dazzling river stood,
To take the rich-ored driftings of the flood.

15

For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,
   And went all naked to the hungry shark;
For them his ears gush'd blood; for them in death
   The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark
Lay full of darts; for them alone did seethe
   A thousand men in troubles wide and dark:
Half-ignorant, they turn'd an easy wheel,
That set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel.

16
Why were they proud? Because their marble founts
Gush'd with more pride than do a wretch's tears?—
Why were they proud? Because fair orange-mounts
Were of more soft ascent than lazar stairs?—
Why were they proud? Because red-lin'd accounts
Were richer than the songs of Grecian years?—
Why were they proud? again we ask aloud,
Why in the name of Glory were they proud?
(11. 105-28)

These explosive lines, which describe how the "ledger-men" (1. 137) or "money-bags" (1. 142) like Isabel's brothers fed off the labour of others, clearly show that the poet was acutely aware of the parasitic and exploitative nature of the rising bourgeoisie. For every single ledgerman to retain his "pride," "a thousand men" had to labour like beasts of burden all year around "In torched mines and noisy factories" or "in dazzling river." Even animals were forced to work to death. It is precisely the exploiting classes that made, in other words, working people to suffer from all kinds of hardships. As the poet asked again and again the question of "Why were they proud?", he seemed to be trying to rouse the social conscience of his fellow countrymen. Considering how he attributed human poverty and suffering to the cruelty and greediness of the exploiting classes, how he sympathized with the oppressed and the exploited, and how he hated social evils personified by the grasping brothers, we find the poem significant in two important ways. First, as mentioned earlier, it affords us an excellent example of how humanitarian sentiments and political concerns were given
simultaneous expression in Keats's poetry. Such poetic confluence, while it can be taken as a close reflection of the way those sentiments and concerns were constantly working together in Keats's mind, shows that the poet tended to look at the overall human condition from a specific political position. Second, the poem makes us see that Keats was most importantly a humanitarian who generally found himself on the liberal or radical side of political questions. With "Keats's political ideas always includ[ing] 'the people,' meaning all those out of power," and with his "sense of belonging to the poor" (Reed 203), we may thus fully endorse the comment Bernard Shaw made many years ago, "If Karl Marx can be imagined as writing a poem instead of a treatise on Capital, he would have written Isabella".\(^{15}\)

Compared with Keats, Li seldom elaborated on who or what exactly made his fellow countrymen suffer. But he did give many clear hints about where to locate the cause of human misery. In his "Lao Fu Cai Yu Ge"老夫采玉歌 (Song of the Old Jade-Hunter), for instance, the poet never spelt out the real reason why "an old man hungry and cold" (l. 3) had to hunt for jade in "the mist-hung waters of Indigo River" (l. 4). Nor did he ever mention who or what forced the old man to leave his "cold village, white thatched hut" (l. 11) on rainy nights. Yet by stressing that "the waters of Indigo River are gorged / With human lives" and that "Men dead a thousand years / Still loathe
these torrents" (ll. 7-8), Li made a clear suggestion about the ruling classes as bringing misery to people like the old hunter. In order to satisfy the extravagant needs of those noble women who like to wear "shake-as-she-walks / Only to please the eye" (l. 2), the old man and his like had to keep hunting for the "crystal-emeralds" (l. 1) even at the cost of their lives. Put a different way, it was the unfeelingness of the ruling classes rather than the waters of Indigo River that caused labouring people to suffer profoundly and endlessly. While the reason why the poet did not say this may lie partly in his intention to achieve a particular effect on the reader and partly in his unwillingness to repeat what Wei Yingwu had done in his "Cai Yu Xing" (Ballad of Jade-hunting), it is clear that Li injected his humanitarian feeling into this short but powerful poem.

In the first one of his "Gan Feng Wu Shou" (Five Exhortations), the poet associated the miseries of his fellow countrymen with the ruling classes in a much more overt manner. Right at the opening of the poem, Li stated explicitly that what made labouring people and even nature suffer was the rapacity of officialdom: "He-pu has no more shining pearls, / Lung-zhou has no more 'wooden slaves' / Enough to show us that the powers of Nature / Can never meet officialdom's demands" (ll. 1-4). To illustrate this point further, the poet presented to us a dramatic situation where a district official, with "a
widened face, [and] a curly purple beard" (l. 8), came to collect *jian shui* (silk-as-tax) from a peasant-woman. The following lines which form the second half of the poem are particularly telling:

"Bu yin shi jun nu,
Yan de yi er lu?"
Yue fu bai xian guan:
"Sang ya jin shang xiao,
Hui dai chun ri yan,
Si che fang zhi diao."
Yue fu tong yan yu,
Xiao gu ju huang liang.
Xian guan ta sun qu,
Bu li fu deng tang.

(ll. 11-20)

"If it were not for the Magistrate's anger,
Would I have come in person to your house?"

The wife of Yue bowed to the district official,
"The mulberry leaves are as yet very small.
We'll simply have to wait till the end of spring,
Then silk reels will begin to spin and spin."
While the wife of Yue was making excuses,
Her sister-in-law prepared some yellow millet,
The district official ate it, kicked over the dishes,

Then sent his petty clerks into the house.

Although the mulberry leaves were not big enough for silkworms to eat, the district official came in a tearing hurry to extort "silk reels." When the wife of Yue tried to explain the difficult situation, the official just turned a deaf ear to her. Even after eating the good food "yellow millet" her sister-in-law prepared especially for
him, the official was as demanding as ever and kept sending his inferiors to the house. From the way in which the official pressed for silk-tax against the course of nature, we can clearly see the point the poet wanted to make here: it was the oppressive and rapacious government that caused labouring people like the wife of Yue to live in endless misery. With its straightforward language, vivid characterization, and satirical treatment of the subject matter, the poem offers us a quite surprising reminder of Li's range and vitality. Close as it is to Bai Juyi's New yuefu poetry in both style and content, this poem shows that Li was very critical of the Tang government's taxation policies. Moreover, it reveals the extent to which the poet was at once involved in the New yuefu movement of the Yuanhe period and influenced by the realistic tradition of Shijing. And Qian Zhongshu is right in saying that Li's poem can be seen as "nothing less than a sequence to Du Fu's 'San Li'[Three Officials]" (Qian Zhongshu 47).

Given their constant concerns over the miseries of the world, it is only too natural that both Keats and Li cherished a strong wish for the improvement of human conditions. In "What can I do to drive away," one of the last poems Keats wrote, for instance, the poet's hope for a social "change for the better" (Letters 2:185) came to the surface. After he presented a hell-like picture of the real world, the poet wrote yearningly: "O, for some sunny
spell / To dissipate the shadows of this hell!" (ll. 44-45). When Keats composed these lines, probably soon after the Peterloo Massacre, he was suffering greatly from illness, poverty and doubt about his relationship with Fanny Brawne. But as the poem shows, he was concerned not only with his personal life but also with the general social condition as well. As he reflected on the happiness of his friends, of his fellow countrymen, and even of the whole of humanity, the poet recognized that if human beings were to live a better life, the social climate should be improved. Therefore the poet began his search for a way to "the new dawning light" (l. 46). He knew well that wine did not serve the purpose because it was "vulgarism, / A heresy and schism" (ll. 24-25). Only an overall clearing-up of the social climate could help to drive away his own "dismal cares" (l. 28) and alleviate the suffering of his species. Here, in urging for "some sunny spell" or a social change for the better, the poet showed that he was becoming a revolutionist although not a "very full-blooded" one as Bernard Shaw believed he would have.

With his family and cultural backgrounds, it is utterly inconceivable for Li to call for, or even to think of, a change in the social system as Keats did. But this does not mean that the Chinese poet was willing to accept the human reality as it was. In sympathizing with the real-life underdogs like the old jade-hunter and the wife
of Yue, Li must have come to the recognition that in order for his fellow countrymen to live a peaceful and prosperous life, it was necessary to improve the social and political conditions. To Li, such improvement undoubtedly depended heavily, if not completely, upon the emperor. Once the emperor became "dazzling bright / As the Great Light itself," there would be a great change in the social and political climate. Thus in his "Zhi Jiu Xing" (Let Wine Be Brought In), a poem supposedly written in Chang-an shortly after he was rejected as a jinshi candidate, Li expressed his hope that someday he would be able to present his ideas "straight to the throne" (l. 8). After comparing himself to Zhufu of Western Han and Ma Zhou of early Tang, both of whom had been in a frustrating situation similar to Li's before they were summoned to court by their respective emperors, the poet then went on to express his wish or conviction that "at a single cock-crow / The sky will turn white" (l. 10). Like Keats's call for "some sunny spell," this urge for "a single cock-crow" signified the way in which Li related his personal happiness and well-being of his species to the general social climate.

In the foregoing discussions we have seen how both Keats and Li, with perceptive observation, profound sympathy and imaginative insight, reached into the most miserable hearts of their species and recognized the need to improve general human conditions. As they gave
expression to their concerns with the hard realities of the human world, the two poets showed themselves having a similar tendency towards humanitarianism. This tendency, which actually persisted through their entire poetic careers, was undoubtedly shaped and strengthened by the poets' social and personal experiences. As mentioned earlier, both Keats and Li suffered a great deal from illness, poverty and frustration during their short lives. While their personal sufferings may have made them particularly sensitive to the miseries of the world, their imaginative powers made them extremely sympathetic towards their fellow sufferers.

In Keats's case, his "tremendous knowledge" of the pains and troubles of the real world led him to realize, as he commented again and again in his letters, that "We are not the only toilers and sufferers" (Letters 2:39) and that "We suffer in common with all" (Letters 2:230). While his medical experience offered him a deep insight into the agonies and strife of human hearts, his walking trip in the summer of 1818 enabled him to see the human reality in a larger way. Upon reaching Lancaster, for example, he found shuttles of the spinning mills as "the most disgusting of all noises" (Ward, The Making of a Poet, 189) and was deeply impressed by the ugliness and uproar of the city as well as the discontent of the working people. As he journeyed further north, he was struck by the poverty of the Scottish peasants and the way in which
the "kirkmen have done Scotland harms" (Ward, The Making of a Poet, 189). While in Ireland, he was so distressed by the wretchedness of the Irish that he deplored that "We live in a barbarous age" (Letters 1:320). In Li's case, while the three years in Chang-an must have made the poet familiar with the decadent and extravagant life led by the upper classes, his several trips between the capital and his native village and, especially, his long journey to Luzhou certainly opened his eyes to the suffering of his species in a warring period. Although we know little about what the poet actually learnt from those trips, we can reasonably assume that he did gain from his social experiences a close knowledge of the miseries of the world he lived in. It is exactly the knowledge of human suffering that informed and reinforced Li's as well as Keats's humanitarian tendencies; and it is exactly their humanitarian tendencies that led Li and Keats alike to cry against human miseries and injustices.
NOTES:

1. For more discussion along these lines, see Hermione de Almeida, Introduction to Critical Essays on John Keats (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1990), 2.

2. For substantial commentary on texts on medical ethics which were prevailing in Keats's time and with which Keats must have been familiar as a medical student, see de Almeida, 34-42.


4. A good case in point: Percy Bysshe Shelley's lyric beginning "I arise from dreams of thee" was for generations read as a personal lament—Shelley was feeling sad one day so wrote a sad poem—until Timothy Webb pointed out that Shelley called it "The Indian Serenade" and that it was meant to imitate Persian poetry, an Indian woman's love call to her sweetheart. The erotic excess of the poem's imagery had nothing directly to do with Shelley's feelings: it was his idea of an Asian (or more particularly Persian) poetic sensibility. For more detailed discussion along this line, see Timothy Webb, Shelley: A Voice Not Understood (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1977), 35-36.


6. For a quotation of, and a discussion on, Bai's original poem, see, for example, Gu Xuejie and Zhou Ruchang, eds and annots., Selected Poems of Bai Juyi Shixuan (Beijing: People's Literature Press, 1963), 70-73.

7. For more historical detail about the drought, see Eugene Feifel, 80-86.

8. For more detail, see Li Zhao, Tang Guo Shi Bu, Bk III, 15.

9. For more detailed discussion, see Liu Ruilian, Li He, 52.

11. It is interesting to note here that the word "plain(s)" is often used in contemporary periodical verse about the Peterloo Massacre. Examples can be found in "The Bloody Field of Peterloo: A New Song" (The Theological and Political Comet [1819], 85-86) and "The Peterloo Man" (Black Dwarf [1819], 3:659-60). For a quotation and discussion of these two poems, see Michael Scrivener, 218-19, 266.

12. Fan Wenlan, quoted in Xu Chuanwu, 156.


14. For a more detailed discussion on the problem of land annexation in mid-Tang China and its serious consequences, see Liu Yan, 67-69.

15. For more commentary on this point, see Bernard Shaw, "Keats" included in Stanley Weintraub, ed. Bernard Shaw's Non-Dramatic Literary Criticism (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1972), 134.

16. Right at the beginning of his "Cai Yu Xing," a poem which deals with the same subject matter as Li's poem does, Wei Yingwu (737-?) wrote: "令府往白丁，/日採之/ 捕王" (The Government commandeers ordinary men, / Telling them to hunt for jade in Indigo River). By doing so, Wei made it explicitly clear that it was no other than the government that caused people to suffer from jade-hunting. For a more detailed discussion of Wei's poem, see Xu Chuanwu, 145.

17. As previously noted, Li usually hid his criticisms in allegory, whereas some of his contemporaries like Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen were often openly critical of political and social conditions. For example, Bai wrote a poem called "Heavy Taxation" which was very similar in both content and form to Li's poem under discussion but which, as its very title indicates, presented a much more direct satirical attack on government oppression. As for why Bai tended to be more openly critical than Li was, the main reason lies, I think, in the way in which, as a high official, the former used his poetry to "improve the political situation indirectly by informing the government authorities about the actualities." For more on this
point as well as Bai's "Heavy Taxation," see Lu Mingshan, 
Bai Juyi (Hong Kong: Yawen Press, 1992), 61-64.
Chapter Six
The Poet and the Idealist

The path stretches far into the distance, I will go up and down to conduct my quest.
---- Qu Yuan

By magic songs and incantations, even the moon can be dragged down from the heavens.
---- Virgil

If I were not a conqueror, I would wish to be a sculptor.
---- Napoleon

On April 24, 1818, Keats wrote an interesting letter to his friend J. H. Reynolds, declaring that "I would jump down AEtna for any great Public good" (Letters 1:267). Only fifteen days later, he brought up the topic again when he told his publisher John Taylor that "I find that there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world" (Letters 1:271). Within another six months or so, in a moment of warm confession, the poet was to repeat the same point to his literary agent Richard Woodhouse: "I am ambitious of doing the world some good" (Letters 1:387). These scattered remarks bear quoting here by way of preface not because they carry an astonishing degree of ideological consistency, but because they point forcefully and directly towards Keats's ideal to place his "ultimate in the glory of dying for a great human
As a matter of biographical fact, Keats had been trying to do the world some good all through his life. This we can clearly see through those major decisions he made about his life. Shortly after he left the Enfield School at Midsummer 1810, he chose, for instance, to apprentice himself to Thomas Hammond, surgeon and apothecary of Edmonton. It is true that there is no hard evidence showing that the young Keats arrived at this decision independently. But according to C. C. Clarke, his closest friend at the time, the medical profession "was Keats's own selection, and not one chosen for him" (Quoted in Goellnicht, 14). Considering that he had become a very purposeful youth in his later school days, that his mother's illness and subsequent death had a shattering effect on his mind, and that all other careers such as tea brokerage and the Naval service either had little appeal to him or proved to be impractical, it was only too natural that Keats should want to be a doctor. For him, it was obviously too late to help relieve his mother's pain by entering the medical profession now. Nor could he ever hope to bring her back to life. However, "he was determined more than ever to conquer diseases, and his generally high-minded and generous nature . . . found in medicine a specific means of helping others" (Goellnicht 15). In other words, Keats decided to take up medicine not merely because it was a most sensible choice for a middle-
class lad like him, but because it would also enable him to heal the sick and do something about human suffering he had witnessed while taking care of his dying mother. Such being the case, we may well endorse the observation Thorpe made many years ago: "[Keats's] ideal was service, performed in a natural, unassuming way--to do the world some good but not to preach" (181).

Fortunately for literature, Keats made his second and the most important decision about his life in the autumn of 1818, that is, to give up medicine and pursue his ambition in poetry. The motives behind this decision may be related, as Ward speculates, to Keats's "longing for fame that will outlive death . . . the desire for love, which seemingly cannot be won any other way; or even . . . the need to expiate some imaginary guilt deep in the unconsciousness" (103). Or, as Goellnicht suggests more recently, Keats abandoned medicine probably because of "his fears about his ability to operate, the growing encouragement from his literary friends, and the obvious contrast between the sordid, depressing hospital duty in the Borough and intellectual stimulation at Hunt's Vale of Health" (45). If we take Keats's own words into consideration, we find, however, that there seemed to be but one fundamental reason for his change of mind: after he had been trying his hand at poetry for over a year, Keats became convinced more than ever that his greatest powers lay in literary creation. As he told his shocked
guardian Abbey towards the end of that year, "I possess Abilities greater than most of Men, and Therefore I am determined to gain my living by exercising them." With Keats, it was certainly important to help assuage the pain of the body. However, as a daily witness to the strife and agonies of the human heart, Keats recognized that it was even more important to heal the wound of the heart. In a world which was "full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression" (Letters 1:281), to help relieve the pain of the heart was particularly urgent. Since he had literary abilities greater than most men, it follows naturally that Keats wanted to serve the world in the best way he could. By exercising these abilities, or by writing the best poetry he was capable of, he could achieve the great end of poetry "to sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of men." As Keats was later to claim in his second Hyperion, "a poet is a sage; / A humanist, physician to all" (I 189-90) and as such, the poet can do as much benefit to the world as those "who love their fellows even to the death; / Who feel the giant agony of the mind; / And more, like slaves to poor humanity, / Labour for mortal good" (I 256-59). Given these ideas on the social role of the poet and "the therapeutic function" (Vendler 70) of poetry, we understand that although Keats decided to change himself from a doctor of the body to a doctor of the heart, his tendency towards altruism, his desire to cure the sick and his ambition to do the world
some good remained the same and would never change in the course of his life.

While we can quite easily document Keats's desire to serve society as a doctor and poet, it is much more difficult to prove the same for Li He, for there are much fewer materials about the Chinese poet's life. Nevertheless, the very fact that Li spent so many years preparing himself for the jinshi examination may lead us to see that just as Keats was ambitious of doing some good for the world, Li was also committed to making contributions to his country. To understand Li's motives and intention, it is helpful to say a few words about the general social status of the intellectuals and their desires and aspirations in life during the Tang dynasty. Following a long Confucian tradition, the intellectuals in China had been associated with the ruling classes more closely than with any other social classes such as the peasants, the craftsmen and the merchants who were mostly confined to illiteracy. But it was not until the early years of Tang when the new order institutionalized an examination system as a means of recruiting talented and capable officials at all levels of government that the shi or scholar-gentry class became unprecedentedly important in social life. Under this new system, the intellectuals could compete with one another on a more-or-less equal basis and "might through their academic pursuits bloom into fame and wealth overnight" (David Chen 75), whether
they came from obscure or illustrious family backgrounds. As officialdom, which was synonymous with power and economic security, became the objective every intellectual sought to realize in his lifetime, "Those who did succeed in joining the officialdom were as happy as if they had become immortals in paradise whereas those who failed were as miserable as if they had descended into the lower world." Since an official career was the ambition of practically all Tang dynasty intellectuals and, particularly, since the examination system was their main route to position and wealth, it is thus very natural that Li would want to take part in the examinations. Or one might say that Li wanted to pass the jinshi examinations simply because he took it as a short cut to personal success. When we consider Li's academic endeavours in relation to his serious sociopolitical concerns, we come to see, however, that Li was not just an ambitious young man. In other words, Li was fighting his way to the civil service not only because he desired to rise above the world as an individual or to bring honours to his family as a branch of the imperial house but, more importantly, because he found in officialdom an effective way of helping make his country peaceful and prosperous. That Li's motives for serving as an official were not totally selfish can be seen from his poems like "Zou Ma Yin" (《走馬吟》) (The Song of the Horseman), in which the poet explicitly claims that "I carry a sword that is meant for other men,
/ Not knowing how to hold it to illuminate my own body" (ll. 7-8). If we can take the poem's sword as a symbol of talents, then it is clear that Li wanted to use his abilities to serve his people rather than just to make a name for himself. This point becomes even clearer when we recall the poet's stated admiration of those historical figures like Zhang Liang who resigned from their high positions and began to live a retired life shortly after they helped to bring peace or unity to the country. For Li, as for many other Tang intellectuals who had a strong political conscience, to enter the civil service was not so much a matter of obtaining fame and wealth as a matter of realizing their political ideals. With his determination to serve his country, Li therefore never succumbed to unfavourable circumstances. Although he was profoundly hurt when he was prevented from sitting the final jinshi examination and thus deprived of the opportunity to obtain high office, although he might feel somewhat humiliated when he was given a minor post in 811 "probably by virtue of his ancestors' services" (Tu 26), Li decided to accept the job. For him, there might still be some chance as long as he remained physically close to the central government.

But despite his high aspirations to "win back fifty provinces in pass and mountain," Li was left idle in Chang-an all the time like General Lu whom he described and who, valiant as the soldier was, had no chance to go
to the front and join the patriotic battle against separatist warlords. As Supervisor of Ceremonies, all Li had to do was to set out the ceremonial vessels properly in the imperial ancestral temple, make correct seating arrangements at court audiences, and give the right signals to bow, kneel, kowtow or rise during ceremonies. Partly because of his deteriorating health and partly because of his recognition that his dull and simple work was "fit only for slaves and bond-maids / Who want no more than to wield dustpan and brush" ("Zeng Chen Shang" [Presented to Chen Shang]; ll. 31-32), Li resigned from his office and returned to his family estate in Chang-gu in the spring of 813 as previously mentioned. But his worldly ambitions never faded away. Once his health improved, he set off for Luzhou, hoping that he would be able to obtain a more promising post in the military through the help of Zhang Che (d. 822), his friend who was Han Yu's disciple and kinsman. Although the three years in Luzhou brought him no better results, his decision to change the course of his life by pursuing a military career was significant enough, for it demonstrated how Li was anxious to help maintain peace and the unity of his country. By saying this I do not mean to argue that Li's motives and intention were all purely altruistic. The point I am emphasizing here is that no matter what Li had tried to do with his life, he never swayed away from his commitment to the welfare of his fellow countrymen. With
Li, to join the military or the civil service is not only to distinguish himself as an individual but to do his bit for his country as well.

While he persisted in looking for an opportunity to offer his service directly to his country, Li devoted much of his time and energy to poetic creation. As Li Shang-yin tells us in his biographical sketch of Li He:

From time to time Li He would set out on a large donkey, followed by a boy-servant with an old tapestry bag on his back. When occasionally inspired, he would scribble a line and drop it in the bag. At nightfall when he returned home, his mother would have her maid-servant receive the bag and empty it out. Upon seeing how much he had written, the mother always used to say: "My son will not stop until he's vomited up his heart." She would then light the lamp and give him his meal. Li He would take from the maid-servant what he had written, grind some ink, fold some paper, complete the poem, and put them into another bag. Unless he was very drunk or it was a day of offering condolences at a funeral, it was usually like this.

In his "Jiu Ba" (After a Drinking Party), a poem written for Zhang Che, Li He himself once told us how he was sometimes "Chanting poems the whole night long, / Till the east grows white" (l. 12). Although he had extraordinary talents for poetry composition which had become the main topic on the jinshi examination since the reign of Empress Wu, he had very few chances of finding a high position. Nor did poetry itself seem to be an effective means of helping his fellow countrymen in a warring situation. Seeing that many youths of his time, men of action rather than of imagination, had become frontier officers and thus put themselves in a good
position to realize their political ambitions, Li even doubted the value of literature, especially in moments of despair and depression. However, he never gave up his pursuit of poetry. For him, poetry was not only a channel through which he could release his intensive feeling about life and the world, but also a power which would allow him, as he found in the way Han Yu and Huangfu Shi used their pens, to "perfect creation / Humiliating Heaven" ("Gao Xuan Guo" [Grand Official Carriage Comes on a Visit]; l. 10). At the very least, poetry could help him to understand the human heart to its very depths and interpret it to the world, as Li clearly suggested in his "Ba Tong Da" (The Servant-Lad from Ba Replies): "But for you who have chanted these vuefu ballads, / Who would understand the depth of sorrowful Autumn?" (ll. 3-4). Moreover, as a disciple of Han Yu's, Li must have shared his master's firm conviction that "Wen yi zai dao" ("Literature is a vehicle for the [Confucian] Way"). In his "Chu Cheng Bie Zhang Youxin Chou Li Han" (On Leaving the City and Parting from Chang You-xin I Pledge Li Han with Wine), the young poet himself proclaimed that "I want to play ritual music, / Making sure my cadences are fresh and new, / So ordering things that for ten thousand years / The Imperial Way will be like a god on wing" (ll. 27-30). With such artistic convictions and objectives, it is not surprising that in spite of his poor health and impoverished conditions, Li
kept "scraping off the green lustre [of newly grown bamboo shoots] / To inscribe [his] songs of Chu" ("Chang Gu Bei Yuan Xin Sun Si Shou Zhi Er" [Four Poems about New Bamboo-Shoots in My North Garden at Chang-gu 2]; l. 1).  

Thus far we have seen that both Keats and Li cherished a lofty ideal of service during their lifetimes. More importantly, both poets tried to fulfil their ideals by exploring the social functions of poetry although under different circumstances. While they constantly drew attention to, and voiced their criticisms of, the inhuman forces in the human world as we have discussed in the previous chapters, they also engaged themselves, consciously or otherwise, in searching for what is ideal. For Keats, as for Li, to pursue the ideal was, as Rodway has put it, "not to escape, but to transmute ugly contemporary fact" (228). When they responded to the harsh realities of their own times by creating imaginative alternative worlds, what Keats and Li were trying to do with their poetry was, then, in Keats's words, to provide "a Remedy against such wrongs within the pale of the World" (Letters 1:179). But what ideal worlds did they create in their poetic enterprises? How did they conduct their search for the ideal? And to which extent were the two poets similar to, or different from, each other in their meditation between the ideal and the actual? It is exactly these questions that the rest of this chapter
attempts to address. I am fully aware that there is no short or simple answer to any one of these questions. Nor do I intend to deal with them in a complete and comprehensive way, for a full answer would inevitably involve many aesthetic, philosophical and psychological problems which might deserve a separate and thorough study in their own right. My concern is with those ideal worlds which the two poets may have tried to construct in opposition to the bitterness and misery of life in the real world. On the basis of all the foregoing discussions, I want to consider, that is to say, Keats's and Li's poetic ventures into the ideal simply as part of their effort to redeem or reform the actual. Indeed, in an age riddled with pain and violence, what better service or "remedy" could an artist offer to the humanity than the construction of the ideal as well as the creation of beauty?

Among those alternative worlds that both Keats and Li seemed to have meticulously created, the world of art comes to our initial attention, for it not only offers us glimpses of the poets' utopian impulses against the atrocities they portrayed elsewhere but also embodies their aesthetic ideals to a large extent. In his "Ode on a Grecian Urn," one of the greatest iconic poems in the English language, we find, for instance, that Keats integrated his social ideals into a most vivid verbal representation of the sculptured reliefs on the urn. As
one can readily see within the poem's surface structure, there are two separate scenes which are both devoted, very significantly, to the description of social life in an ancient Greek context. In the first scene, which presents itself in the first three stanzas of the poem, deities and mortals become indistinguishable from or identical with one another because they are all lost in "wild ecstasy" (l. 10) "In Tempe or the dales of Arcady" (l. 7). As "soft pipes [...] play on" (l. 12), those "men or gods" (l. 8; my emphasis) never give up their "mad pursuit" (l. 9) "beneath the trees" (l. 15). While the social life represented in this scene is characterized by "happy love" (l. 25) which is "For ever warm and still to be enjoyed" (l. 26), the social life described in the second scene or the fourth stanza is marked by "pious morn" which prevails over the "little town by river or sea shore, / Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel" (ll. 35-36). With all the people "coming to the sacrifice" (l. 31) or the "green altar" (l. 32) in procession, the "streets for evermore / Will silent be" (ll. 38-39) like the urn itself. These two scenes contrast with each other: "Their spirit and their temper are different," as Bowra observes, "and in them Keats anticipates Nietzsche's famous analysis of the Greek genius into the Dionysian and the Apollonian elements" (128). But it is noteworthy that the two scenes are also complementary in content, for they co-represent a quite ideal realm, a world in which ecstatic excitement
and luminous order seem to be two fundamental aspects of social life. To say this is, of course, not to say that the ode represents nothing but the very ideal, and still less is it to say that the Arcadian world on the urn is free of all tension and conflict. When we look beyond the poem's initial depiction of the urn as a "bride of quietness" to see the "pursuit" of apparently mortal women by "men or gods" with a "struggle to escape" as well as the impending sacrifice of a heifer, we may actually find that the poem has a "subtext" of violence." And feminist critics such as Geraldine Friedman are certainly right in pointing out that the poet's claim of the privilege of interpreting the urn "is figured as a male subject's sexual pursuit of a female object of desire." With this subtext of struggle and conflict which are remindful of the reality of the human world, the poem shows, once again, that even in the course of constructing the ideal, the poet is acutely aware of the dark elements in the actual world. While we are not sure whether by describing the urn in terms of silence the poet means to mute or reconcile the violence that is there on the urn's decorated surface, it is indisputable that as he brings to focus in the two scenes what is ideal about social life, he projects in the ode his desire for human betterment.

On an aesthetic level, it is a critical commonplace that, with its "heavily brocaded texture and [its] sense of utter absorption in meditation" (Frye 51), the ode
contains some of Keats's most mature ideas about art itself. As is strongly suggested by the poet's great admiration of the urn, which maintains its existence at once at present as a "still unravish'd bride of quietness" (l. 1), in the past as a "foster-child of silence and slow time" (l. 2) and in the future as a "Sylvan historian, who canst thus express / A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme" (ll. 3-4), an ideal work of art should be able to transcend all temporal boundaries. To achieve this state of permanency, the artist must always keep in mind that "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'--that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (ll. 49-50). Here I do not intend to trace in detail the many particular developments in Keats's aesthetic thinking and in his ideological context which may help us to understand the meaning of beauty-truth equivalence (these have been discussed in the excellent work of Thorpe, Bowra, Goldberg, McGann, and others). But I do want to stress the point that for Keats truth is "not mere fact or logical conclusion he perceives, nor is it a moral precept, nor a religious idea" (Thorpe 135). Rather, it is a vision of ultimate reality or the ideal. As it lies beyond the realm of the sensuous, truth is realized not by the reasoning mind, but by the imagination, a power which may discover and even invent an "ideal". Only when he uses the imagination to gain "a clear perception of its beauty" (Letters 2:18) can the artist hope to arrive at truth, for
its very essence is beauty. And only when he reveals truth through the creation of beauty can he hope to turn his artwork into a piece of immortality like the Greek urn.

In his "Li Ping Kong Hou Yin" (Song: Li Ping at the Vertical Harp), one of the greatest poems about music in the Chinese language, Li did not commit himself to any aesthetic contemplation as Keats did in his ode. But in describing the overwhelming effect of the music, the Chinese poet did offer a specific example of how art may "perfect creation." As Li Ping, the poet's contemporary and one of the emperor's most accomplished musicians from the Pear-Garden School, plays his harp made from the best paulownia from Shu (Sichuan) and the best silk from Wu (Jiangsu), the fantastic music he produces reaches all realms and has a tremendous emotional and intellectual impact upon whatever or whomever it penetrates: in the natural world, "the frozen clouds [are] / Falling, not floating" (l. 2), the "Jade from Mount Kun is shattered, / Phoenixes shriek, / Lotuses are weeping dew, / Fragrant orchids smile" (ll. 5-6), and "Where Nu Gua smelted stones / To weld the sky, / Stones split asunder, sky startles, / Autumn rains gush forth" (ll. 9-10), and even "Old fishes leap above the waves / Gaunt dragons dances" (l. 12); in the human world, "Before the twelve gates of the city / The cold light melts" (l. 7) "Ladies of the River [are] weeping among bamboos, / The White Girl mournful" (l. 3) and those who hear the music
"go in dreams to the Spirit Mountain / To teach the Weird Crone" (l. 11) who is said to have been an expert performer on the vertical harp; and in the supernatural world, "The twenty-three strings move / The Purple Emperor" (l. 8) and "Wu Zhi, unsleeping still, / Leans on his cassia tree, / As wing-foot dew aslant / Drenches the shivering hare" (ll.13-14). For the poet, Li Ping's music is a great work of art because it can transcend all spatial boundaries or because it can move the whole universe. With this suggestion, the poem is thus not merely a high praise of Li Ping's talent for music but also a clear incarnation of the poet's ideas about what an ideal work of art might and should be.

On a different level, the musical world depicted in the poem is to a large extent an ideal world of harmony, where all kinds of creatures, whether they are animals or plants, join one another in listening to Li Ping playing his harp. Even lifeless things such as clouds and minerals become "lost" in the music as if they all could feel and react as human beings do. Most interestingly, both gods and human beings are so deeply moved by the same music that there seems to be no more difference between them. When we pay special attention to how this musical world is characterized by universal harmony, we find it possible to say, although in a very limited sense, that the poem also reflects some of Li's social ideals. For the poet, Li Ping's music has a great appeal not because it is pleasant
to the ear, but because it offers one a vision of an ideally harmonious world, a world which poses a sharp contrast to the social conditions of the so-called "Yuanhe" (harmonious) period. This contrast is never portrayed on the surface structure of the poem. Rather, it is suggested through the poet's reference to the human background. In other words, by situating Li Ping's music firmly in the contemporary human world--right "in the centre of the kingdom" (l. 4) or in the capital city which has "twelve gates" (l. 7)--the poet gives a human significance, with or without his intention, to the ideally harmonious world of the poem and at the same time reminds his reader of the harsh realities of mid-Tang society. This human significance becomes clearer when we look beyond the poem's description of the harmonious effect of Li Ping's music to see the "Lotuses [are] weeping dew" (l. 6) as well as the "Ladies of the river weeping among bamboos" and "The white girl mournful" (l. 3). That is to say, as in the case of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Li's poem also has a subtext of sadness and misfortune. I stress this subtext because it exemplifies how Li, like Keats, projects into his artwork about the ideal his ever-present awareness of the bitterness and pain of human life.

Another kind of alternative world that both Keats and Li attended to is the world of nature. For them, the natural world seems to be not only a source of comfort
they need in time of anxiety, disappointment and
frustration, but also an embodiment of the ideal they hope
to realize in their poetic quest. In Keats's "Ode to a
Nightingale," which we have discussed in a different
context, it is clear that the poet treats the feathered
songster simultaneously as a synecdoche of the natural
world and as a symbol of the ideal. A lovely creature in
Nature, the nightingale can offer immediate pleasant
sensations to begin with: the moment its joyful song
reaches his ears, the poet-speaker feels "as though of
hemlock [he] had drunk, / Or emptied some dull opiate to
the drains / One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk"
(ll. 2-3). "[B]eing too happy in [its] happiness" (l. 6),
the poet recognizes the bird as the very incarnation of
the ideal. Therefore he desires to join the nightingale
and share its "happy lot" (l. 5) with the help of wine:

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
'Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O, for a beaker full of the warm south,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:
(ll. 11-20)

But probably because it is a human product, wine can only
remind the poet of the pain and troubles in the human
world. If he really wants to "leave the world unseen," he
must "fly to [the bird], / Not charioted by Bacchus and
his pards, / But on the viewless wings of Poesy" (ll. 31-
Once he begins to use the imagination, the poet can experience all the sensual pleasures the bird is enjoying in the woodland realm. This process, instantaneous as it is, is observable in stanza five where there is, significantly, no mentioning of the bird. Actually, in the entire poem, this stanza is the only place where we can neither hear its song nor locate its objective presence. To this, one might say that the poet's attention is now focused on the bird's physical situation rather than the bird, or that he is so overwhelmed by the sensuous beauty in the bird's paradise that he forgets the existence of the bird itself. However, it is more likely that the poet does not mention the nightingale because he considers himself as the bird. Having attained such a full sympathy with the nightingale, the poet becomes one and the same with it and thus dissolves himself completely into Nature. Although he finally returns to his "sole self" (l. 72) at the very sound of the word "forlorn," the poet still feels a strong attachment to the bird, an attachment that clearly shows that the poet is a devoted pursuer of the ideal.

With its stark contrast between the human world (the actual) and the natural world (the ideal), the poem seems to suggest that these two worlds are widely separate from, and thus utterly irreconcilable with, each other. But as he re-enacts his empathetic experience with the nightingale, the poet makes us see that they may meet
through the agency of the imagination. That is to say, in describing his psychological journey to the bird or, rather, in translating his physical experience into a work of art, Keats shows us how to use the imagination to achieve a poetic mediation between the actual and the ideal. As a human singer, the poet knows well that he is "born for death" (l. 61). No matter whether or not he chooses to "cease upon the midnight with no pain" (l. 56), he would eventually become "a sod" to the "high requiem" of the "immortal bird" (ll. 60-61). Yet by exploring his imaginative powers, through "the viewless wings of Poesy," he can not only reach the ideal but also produce an ode which may allow him to "add a mite ... to the singing of the nightingale" and thus "find for himself an immortality" (Goldberg 115). Defined within its framework of poetic transportation between the mortal singer's world and the feathered songster's, the poem's thematic emphasis is thus not on immortality or even the ideal itself. Rather, it is on the process of pursuing the ideal through the imagination. For Keats, the end or the fulfilment of the ideal is undoubtedly important. But the process of pursuing the ideal through the means of imagination is even more so, for it is, after all, the use of the creative imagination rather than anything else that enables him to write a poem, thus giving us "A thing of beauty [which] is a joy for ever" (Endymion 1:1).

Like Keats, and certainly more like Tao Yuanming (or
Tao Qian 356-427 A. D.) and many other scholar officials in Chinese history whose political ambitions came to be thwarted in their troubled lives, Li often turned to the natural world not merely to experience sensual pleasures it may offer but to seek spiritual sustenance in an idealized locality. In "Chang Gu" (Chang-gu), for instance, Li gives a very elaborate description of the natural surroundings of his native place and at the same time projects his mood of longing for the ideal. With its ninety-eight delicately wrought lines, the poem falls into five sections. The first is an initial celebration of the tranquil beauty of the mountainous country as we can see from the opening passage:

Chang-gu wu yue dao,  星台五月稻，
Xi qing man ping shui.  细青满平水。
Yao luan xiang ya die,  烟峦相压叠，
Tui lu chou duo di.  颤绿愁堕地。
Guang jie wu qiu si,  光洁无秋思，
Liang kuang cui fu mei.  凉旷吹浮媚。

(ll. 1-6)

Paddy fields at Chang-gu, in the fifth month,
A shimmer of green covers the level water.
Distant hills rise towering, crag on crag,
Precarious greenery, fearful of falling.
Dazzling and pure, no thoughts of autumn yet,
Cool wind from afar ruffles this beauty.

In the second section, the poet introduces us to the Temple of the Divine Maiden of Orchid Fragrance, the tutelary deity of Mount Nu-ji (Maiden's Table) and tells us how "Luminous, on high her jade-white face / As I burn
cinnamon on the Heavenly Altar" and how "Her robes of mist are fluttering in the night, / She drowses by Her altar, pure of dreams" (ll. 43-46). The third section is a depiction of the ruins of the Fu-chang Palace which was originally constructed during the Sui dynasty (581-618 A.D.). In the fourth section, the poet pays an enthusiastic tribute to his home village and its people:

Zhen rang ge xiu duan,  环绕到路段，
Li su zu feng yi.       里俗祖风义。
Lin xiong bu xiang chu,  邻凶不相斥，
Yi bing wu xie si.      疾病无邪祀。
Tai pi shi ren hui,      老皮识仁惠，
Guan jiao zhi tian chi.  小角知天池。
Xian sheng si xing guan,  县省司刑官，
Hu fa gou zhu li.        户乏沾租吏。
(ll. 57-64)

This precious land is cut from fissured silk,
Our villagers prize truth and righteousness.
No sound of pestles is heard when a neighbour mourns,
No evil rites we used to drive off plagues.
The fish-skinned oldsters, virtuous and kind,
The horn-haired children, modest, quick to shame.
The country justices have nothing to do,
No dunning tax collectors call on us.

The last section may be taken largely as a repetition of what the poet has done at the beginning. But in re-celebrating the tranquil beauty of the country the poet does add a new dimension to his work, not only because he is now describing different natural scenes and objects, but because he ends the poem by telling us one of his
fondest wishes: "This man from Cheng-ji, restless and fretful, / Would like to emulate Master Wine-sack's ways" (ll. 97-98).

This long poem is significant because it marks Li's pursuit of the ideal in two important ways. On the one hand, it clearly shows the poet having a tendency to idealize his native place as part of the natural world. For Li, the tranquil beauty of the rural scenery and the honest simplicty of the local people in Chang-gu, while they stand in sharp contrast to what he has seen and experienced in the capital, represent a quite ideal human situation. In a war-torn age, this peaceful and beautiful place may be considered no less than a paradise on the earth. As he depicts Chang-gu in such an exquisite and eulogistic manner, what the poet expresses is then not only his deep love for his native place but his longing for an ideally harmonious human world as well. Had this poem been written for or during the jinshi examinations, these sentiments, which were doubtless thought admirable in official circles, could be taken as a close reflection of the ways in which the poet might have couched his ideals in vague and idealized terms in order to meet the cultural expectations surrounding his work. But written sometime in the early summer of 813 after he resigned from his official post in Chang-an, this poem was apparently not an occasional or officially-oriented piece of work and thus should be seen as a most sincere expression of the
poet's desire for human betterment. On the other hand, as one can see from the closing couplet quoted above, the poet desires to return to the natural beauty and the social harmony of Chang-gu, but only after he makes significant contributions to his country as did Master Wine-sack or Fan Li (floruit 5th century B.C.), the great statesman who retired into happy obscurity after helping the state of Yue defeat its enemy Wu. But deplorably, Li has in fact never risen to any office even remotely approaching Fan's. Nor is it easy for him to obtain any high office in the future. All he can do now is to keep hoping that someday he will be able to retire to Chang-gu after doing some good for his country and people. With this strong reminder of the poet's high political aspirations, the poem is thus as much about Chang-gu as about Li's search for the ideal.

A third kind of alternative world to which Keats and Li devoted much of their poetic attention is the world of myth. It is true that the mythological figures or ethereal elements present in their poetry come from entirely different sources and carry vastly different cultural implications. It is also true that the two poets may use mythological materials in different contexts and for different effects. However, they share one interesting and important thing in common: both of them project their desires for the ideal into the mythological world they undertake to create or re-create. When they work with
mythological materials, they seldom stick to the mythological tradition. Rather, they often alter them as their imagination sees fit. As John B. Vickery has pointed out, "Literature uses mythological materials as direct sources for events and characters in which transcription is the relation, but it also draws on myth for stimulus to original conceptions and formulations" (69). In his Endymion, it is noteworthy that Keats deliberately changes the roles of deity and mortal. In the original myths of Endymion, the shepherd king is lulled to sleep by the goddess of the moon. As he remains asleep all the time, he is never conscious of the goddess's visits to him. Nor does he have any idea about the passion she bestows upon him. But in Keats's version, "Endymion is," as Karla Alwes notes, "allowed consciousness throughout most of the poem, asleep long enough only to have a dream of the goddess" (35). More remarkably, it is not the moon-goddess, but the human shepherd who is in ardent pursuit of love. The reason for these changes lies, I think, mainly in the poet's psychological tendency to identify himself with the shepherd king as a conscious pursuer of the ideal rather than an unconscious object of supernatural love. This point is borne out by the way in which Keats transforms the moon-goddess "from the symbol of chastity in the original Greek myth into an embodiment of externality, immortality, perfect beauty--those ideals toward which all men would passionately aspire" (Goldberg 21). For Keats,
as for Endymion, to be in love with the moon-goddess, "that completed form of all completeness" (1:606), is apparently to be in pursuit of the ideal itself.

While the above alternations are significant of Keats's effort to search for the ideal in the mythological world, his introduction of the Indian maid to the poem clearly reveals his attraction to what is real. An unnamed mortal being like the shepherd himself, the Indian maid is described simply as "the stranger of dark tresses" (4:462) as opposed to Cynthia's "golden" hair (4:451). Associated thus with the earth rather than with heaven, the Indian maid is, that is to say, a recognizable symbol of the actual human reality. In the following passage, we see how "Endymion's heart, like Keats's imagination, is cut 'in twain'" (Alwes 54), or equally divided between his love for Cynthia and his love for the Indian maid,

Upon a bough
He leant, wretched. He surely cannot now
Thirst for another love: O impious,
That he can even dream upon it thus!--
Thought he, "why am I not as are the dead,
Since to a woe like this I have been led
Through the dark earth, and through the wondrous sea?
Godess! I love thee not the less: from thee
By Juno's smile I turn not--no, no, no--
While the great waters are at ebb and flow.--
I have a triple soul! O fond pretence--
For both, for both my love is so immense,
I feel my heart is cut for them in twain."

(4:85-97)

Obviously, Keats's protagonist is a divided being. While he strives towards the ideal, he feels strongly attached to the real. This psychological dilemma, while it gives an
emotional tensity to the symbolic structure of the poem, is solved towards the end of the work through "some unlook'd for change" (4:982), which "magically transforms the Indian maid from the darkness that characterized her as both mortal and a stranger to a golden and thus immortal Cynthia" (Alwes 61-62). Although this solution may prove to be unrealistic, the poem's final revelation of the Indian maid and Cynthia as one and the same is important, for it serves to convey to us a message about the need for the combination of the ideal and the actual: However mutually exclusive these two categories may appear to be, they should and can be combined together in one way or another. While it may be difficult, if not entirely impossible, to achieve such combination in life, it is possible to do so in poetry or through "the viewless wings of Poesy" as Keats illustrates later in his "Ode to a Nightingale."

According to Xu Chuanwu, "Among 240 poems or so which were written by Li He, more than 80 used mythological materials" (11). But to see how Li pursues his quest for the ideal in the mythological world, it is perhaps enough to just look at his "Tian Shang Yao" (A Ballad of Heaven):

Tian he ye zhuan piao hui xing,  天河夜转漂回星，
Yin pu liu yun xue shui sheng.  银浦流云雪水声，
Yu gong gui shu hua wei luo,   玉宫桂树花未落，
Xian qie cai xiang chui pei ying.  仙妻采香垂珮缨。
Qin fei Juan lian bei chuang xiao,
Chuang qian zhi tong qing feng xiao.
Wang zi chui sheng e guan chang,
Hu long geng yan zhong yao cao.
Fen xia hong shou ou si qun,
Qing zhou bu shi lan tiao chun.
Dong zhi Xi He neng zou ma,
Hai chen xin sheng shi shan xia.

The River of Heaven wheels round at night
Drifting the circling stars,
At Silver Bank, the floating clouds
Mimic the murmur of water.
By the Palace of Jade the cassia blossoms
Have not yet fallen,
Fairy maidens gather their fragrance
For their dangling girdle-sachets.

The Princess from Qin rolls up her blinds,
Dawn at the north casement.
In front of the window, a planted kolanut
Dwarfs the blue phoenix.
The King's son plays his pipes
Long as goose-quills,
Summoning dragons to plough the mist
And plant Jade Grass.
Sashes of pink as clouds at dawn.
Skirts of lotus-root silk,
They walk on Blue Island, gathering
Fresh orchids in spring.

She points to Xi He in the east,
Deftly urging his steeds,
While land begins to rise from the sea
And stone hills wear away.

The poem opens with a magnificent cosmical view of heaven.
As the River of Heaven (the Milky Way) turns round,
drifting the stars circling like a watery current, the
floating clouds keep flowing along the silver banks of the
starry river as if with a gurgling sound of a running
stream. Following this highly dynamic scene is a much more
detailed picture of the easy life in heaven, a picture which actually consists of four scenes. The first is a garden scene, where fairy maidens are gathering fragrant flowers from the cassia tree which is close to the Jade Palace of the moon. The second scene is a domestic one, in which the Princess from Qin is looking through her windows at the kola tree which is said to be phoenixes' favourite resting place. The third scene describes how the King's son or Prince Qiao is working the celestial fields by playing his pipes. In the fourth scene, we see the Immortals walking on their favourite island in the Southern Sea and gathering various kinds of mythical plants like orchids to make the elixir of life. At the end of the ballad, the poet emphasizes that the inhabitants of heaven are never concerned about the passage of time. To them, even an entire epoch, which may produce great changes in the physical world, is but another joyful day.

Within the mythological context of the poem, what Li constructs is apparently a paradise, or a world of the ideal, so to speak. Although this ideal world is located in a realm far beyond the earthly boundaries, it has a distinctly human dimension, as is thus evidenced by the changes that the poet makes in re-presenting the myths. According to Lie Xian Zhuan (Biographies of Immortals), for instance, the Princess from Qin, also known as Nong Yu (daughter of Duke of Mu of Qin), is an exceptionally good performer on the xiao (flute), who is married to an
Immortal and whose music is so attractive that phoenixes come to perch on the palace-roofs. But in the poem she is portrayed more as a domestic figure than a musician. Again, in the original stories about him, Prince Qiao (son of King Ling of Zhou [reg. 571-543 B.C.]) is an accomplished player of the sheng (pipes), who can use the instrument to imitate the cries of phoenixes before he ascends to heaven. In Li's reformulation of the myth he is changed, however, into a farmer who takes care of his fields by using his pipes as his working tools. As an inevitable result of these and other similar changes, the poem's mythological world gains a sharp human significance. While such abstract themes as beauty, leisure, harmony and immortality that permeate the whole poem are exactly those ideals for which every earthling would fervently crave, the Immortals as inhabitants of heaven are very much like humans in the sense that they enjoy fragrant flowers, have their own families and even need to work as human beings do on the earth. When Li represents mythological materials, it is therefore clear that, like Keats, Li often changes them so as to make them fit into the thematic framework of his poetic work.

As they make frequent excursions into the worlds of art, nature and myth, Keats and Li also turn to the world of dream in their poetic effort to pursue the ideal. "By structuring a poem around a dream," says Andrew Bennett in a recent book, "the writer is able to escape the alluring
but confining requirements of the temporalities and causalities of plot" (21). With Keats and Li, it seems, however, that the dream-poem is a powerful mode of expression because it may allow them to speak more fully about their dream-experiences rather than because it can give them more narrative freedom. By re-enacting their dream-experiences within a poetic form, they may enable themselves, in other words, not only to recapture the immediacy of the illusory pleasures of the mind but, more importantly, to articulate and formulate their visions of the ideal. In Keats's *Endymion*, we recall that the shepherd king dreams several interesting dreams throughout the poem, each marking a quite significant development in the course of the protagonist's and, by extension, the poet's search for the ideal. In Book One, as Endymion tells Peona, his "sweet sister" (1:408) after he regains consciousness from his sleep, "opening his eyelids with a healthier brain" (1:465), he has his first vision of the moon-goddess (the ideal) in a dream "That never tongue, although it overteem /With mellow utterance . . . / Could figure out and to conception bring / All I beheld and felt" (1:571-78). Later, in Book Two, Endymion has another dream in which he embraces Cynthia in his arms and thus experiences "Love's madness" (2:860). When he awakes, he finds that "Now I have tasted her sweet soul to the core / All other depths are shallow" (2:904-05). Finally, in Book Four, Endymion dreams of himself entering the ideal world
where he "walks / On heaven's pavement; brotherly he talks
/ To divine powers" (4:407-09) and lingers on until he
joins "His very goddess: good-bye earth, and sea, / And
air, and pains, and care, and suffering; / Good-bye to all
but love!" (4:431-33). From what the shepherd king tells
us about his dreams we can clearly see that for Keats, the
dream-world is not merely a region of admitted fantasies.
Nor is it a private place of retreat from the actual.
Rather, it is a realm of the ideal. This being so, the
process of representing dream-experiences is then a
process of constructing the ideal.

That Keats attaches importance to the poetic
representation of dream-experiences as an integral part of
the process of constructing the ideal can most clearly be
seen in the opening passage of his The Fall of Hyperion,
the last major poem in which Keats reflects upon the
social role and function of the poet:

Fanatics have their dreams, wherewith they weave
A paradise for a sect; the savage too
From forth the loftiest fashion of his sleep
Guesses at heaven: pity these have not
Trac'd upon vellum or wild Indian leaf
The shadows of melodious utterance.
But bare of laurel they live, dream, and die;
For Poesy alone can tell her dreams,
With the fine spell of words alone can save
Imagination from the sable charm
And dumb enchantment. Who alive can say
"Thou art no poet; may'st not tell thy dreams"?
Since every man whose soul is not a clod
Hath visions, and would speak, if he had lov'd
And been well nurtured in his mother tongue."
(1:1-15)

In these powerful lines, Keats stresses that any people,
even savages or those still living outside "civil[iz]ed
countries" (Letters 2:193), can fulfil their wishes for the things of heaven in their dreams. But without Poesy, without the imaginative powers, these men can only "live, dream and die." Here lies the reason why "the poet and the dreamer are distinct, / Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes" (1:199-200). "While the poet pours out his balm upon the world," as Goldberg puts it, "the mere dreamer only vexes it. Without the creative act, without the telling of dreams, without poetry to cast its own spell, the imagination cannot be saved from dumb enchantment" (110). If the poet just indulges himself in dreams and forgets "the miseries of the world" (1:148), he would reduce himself into nothing but "a dream thing" (1:168). Only when the poet presents his dream-experiences and visions through his artwork to his fellow sufferers can he hope to realize the therapeutic function of poetry and thus do some good for the world.

In his short but richly textured poem "Meng Tian" (A Dream of Heaven), Li too presents to us a picture of heaven as he draws on his dream-experience:

Lao tu han chan qi tian se,
Yun lou ban kai bi xie bai.
Yu lun zha lu shi tuan guang,
Luan pei xiang feng gui xiang mo.
Huang chen qing shui san shan xia,
Geng bian qian nian ru zou ma.
Yao wang qi zhou jiu dian yan,
Yi hong hai shui bei zhong xie. 一泓海水杯中泻。
The ancient hare, the shivering toad,
Weep sky-blue tears,
The cloud-towers are half-revealed,
Walls slant and white.
Jade wheel crushes the dew,
Wet globe of light,
Pendants of phoenix jade I meet
On cassia-scented roads.

Now yellow dust, now clear water,
Below the Three Hills,
Sudden the changes of a thousand years
As a galloping horse.
From far above, the Middle Kingdom
Is just nine wisps of cloud,
All the clear waters of the sea
A spilt cup.

With its four couplets, the poem divides nicely into two parts. In the first part, the poet offers an astonishingly cool vision of heaven. Clear as it is, the sky seems to have been washed by tears shed by the ancient hare and the shivering toad in the moon. While the moon, like a jade wheel in the sky, rolls and crushes the dew, its wetted light illuminates the wall of half-revealed cloud-towers. As he roams along cassia-scented roads, the poet-speaker meets and presumably talks with Chang-e, the goddess of the moon, and other fairy maidens. In the second part, the speaker looks down at the earth and witnesses the great changes of a thousand years that are running like a galloping horse. Seen from heaven, the Middle Kingdom which used to have nine provinces is as small as many wisps of clouds, whereas the entire ocean is no bigger than a cup of water. As its title indicates, the poem is a description of an ideal or transcendental realm. But when
we pay close attention to its diction and imagery, we find that the poem's portraiture of heaven bears little resemblance to the paradise that Keats envisages in "Endymion." Nor is this version of heaven similar to what Li himself has depicted in his "Tian Shang Yao." Indeed, with the hare and toad, both denizens of the moon, so sad as to "weep . . . tears," with the cloud-towers so ominous ("white," the colour of death), with the jade wheel of the moon so violent as to "crush" the dew (the traditional symbol of grace in China), and with the inhabitants of heaven so inconspicuous, allowing us to hear only the tinkling of their jade pendants, Li's sketch of heaven in this poem seems almost as tragic as his depiction of the human realm below and is thus far from appealing as a place in which one would want to live. To understand this quite tragic vision of heaven, it is appropriate to refer to the well-known legend about Li's death. As Li Shangyin recounts in his biography of Li He:

When Li He was at the point of death, he suddenly saw in daytime a man in a dark red robe, riding a red dragon and carrying a tablet with characters on it like ancient seal scripts or "thunderclap" inscriptions. The man pronounced, "I am here to summon Li He." Li could not read the inscriptions, but he immediately got out of his bed, bowing and saying, "Mommy is old and ill; I cannot leave her yet." The man replied with a smile, "The Emperor of Heaven has just completed the White Jade Tower and is summoning you to write a description of it. To live in Heaven is enjoyable, not bitter." Li just wept. All those attending him saw it. In a little while, Li gave up his breath. From the window where he used to sit, a mist rose into the air. The sounds of pipes and carriages were heard. Li's mother hastily kept everyone from weeping. After another while, about the time it takes to cook five pecks of millet, Li
finally died.'

Although we should not take this legend literally, we can reasonably assume, however, that in his last days when he suffered more profoundly than ever before from illness, poverty and despair, the poet often had his visions of heaven. If, as many commentators and critics believe, the poem under discussion was actually written shortly before his death, its tragic elements can, that is to say, be explained in terms of a strong sense of universal suffering that the poet must have developed as his own life was coming to a tragic end.

At the same time, it is important to note that with its well-balanced machinery, this dream-poem affords us an excellent example illustrating that, like Keats's protagonist in *Endymion*, Li is also a divided being. While his *hun* (ethereal spirit) may seek to attain the ideal, his *po* (physical spirit) remains closely tied to the real. Even when he reaches heaven and finds himself in company with the moon-goddess in his dreams, the poet hardly forgets what is going on in the human world. It is true that in the poem he mentions nothing specific about the human actuality in the Middle Kingdom. Yet as he ends the poem by referring to the earth in terms of the relativity of time and space, the poet gives a philosophical depth to his work and simultaneously makes it clear that his concern is primarily with the human world rather than the ethereal world. For Li, dreams are
undoubtedly a means of breaking the mind free of, to
borrow Tu's phrase, "the yoke of reality" (45), a channel
through which to release his spiritual energy, or an
avenue leading to the ideal itself. But dreams are not
enough. If one wants to contribute to the welfare of
humanity, one must never lose sight of the human world.
Such thematic implications show that even when he tried to
construct an ideal realm out of his dream-experience, the
poet was concerned as ever with the reality of the world
he lived in.

In his fine book The Art of Chinese Poetry, James J.
Y. Liu defines a poetic world as both a "reflection of the
poet's external environment and an expression of his total
consciousness." Based upon the foregoing discussions, we
find this definition to be particularly applicable to the
many important ideal worlds which Keats and Li have
created in their common effort to serve the interests of
humanity.
NOTES:

1. For more commentary on these remarks, see Goellnicht, 45.


3. Li Shang-Yin, "A Short Biography of Li He," included in Li He Shige Jizhu, 7-8.

4. In her book Li Ho, M. T. South points out that Li and his fellow literati of the mid-Tang period expressed their opinions about the social conditions in yuefu ballads and that these "last two lines . . . certainly suggest that the poet himself considered that his exclusion from office may have been the result of his outspokenness" (304).

5. Before paper was invented in the second century A. D., Chinese characters were traditionally written on strips of bamboo, from which the "green lustre" (the green outer layer?) had been stripped. It is generally known that most of Songs of Chu were written by Qu Yuan (340-278 B. C.) who has an important influence on Li He.

6. In his recent book The Sculpted Word: Keats, Ekphrasis, and the Visual Arts (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1994), Grant F. Scott connects this subtext of violence in Keats's ode with Homer's first ekphrases, observing that the first ekphrases ever written involved shields and armour and thus, rather than being aesthetic exercises, constituted battle pieces, poems of conquest and domination. However unlikely it appears at first, Keats's "Ur" is firmly rooted in this heritage and evolves from the seeds sown by the political and sexual hegemony of Homer's ekphrases. Beneath its surface sangfroid, the ode masks a heredity deeply implicated in violence and usurpation and inextricably bound up with the ambivalent power of the visual image. (150)

7. For more detailed discussions along these lines, see, for instance, Friedman's article "The Erotics of Interpretation in Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn': Pursuing the Feminine," Studies in Romanticism 32 (1993): 225-43.

8. Actually this poem was originally dated, according to the Chinese lunar calendar, on "the twenty-seventh day of the fifth month."

10. For a more detailed discussion on the distinction between the hun and the po in traditional Chinese thought, see Tu, 140, note 32.
Chapter Seven
Conclusion

Life is short, but art is long.
---- Hippocrates

On the night of Thursday 3 February 1820, Keats coughed out a drop of blood and instantly realized that "That drop of blood is [his] death warrant" (Quoted in Gittings, 380). About ten days later, the poet sent a letter to his girl friend Fanny Brawne, lamenting that he had left no "immortal work" behind (Letters 2:263) and that if he had had the time, he would have made himself remembered. Presumably during the period of his last illness, Li wrote a short poem entitled "Qiu Lai" (Coming of Autumn),¹ in which the Chinese poet also expressed such sentiments as he asked: "Who will ever read these slips / Of green bamboo, / Or forbid the ornate worm / To pierce its powdery holes?" (ll. 3-4).² But in spite of the two poets' uncertainties about their own work, what they composed respectively across the span of their short lives has stood well the severe test of history. As we read their poetry today long after their tragic deaths, we still find it as appealing as any other work kept in the treasure house of world literature.

A major reason for the great appeal of the poetry of Keats and of Li lies, as I have tried to demonstrate, in
the ways they spun their social and political concerns into the texture of their writing. While they remained keenly alive to what was happening around them in the real world, both poets explored the social function of poetry to a large extent, giving full and forceful expression to their love for their respective countries, their opposition to despotic rule or bad government, their sympathy for all the suffering people as well as their quest for the ideal. In formulating and articulating these feelings and concerns, the two poets showed themselves having not only a common "yearning Passion . . . for the beautiful" (Letters 1:404), a common tendency to "look upon fine Phrases like a Lover" (Letters 2:139) or, in Li's words, to "Mak[e] sure [their] cadences are fresh and new," but also a serious commitment to the welfare of their fellow human beings. Although many of their ideas about society and politics might not necessarily be new or original, although their poetic expression sometimes might contain a quite conventional element, and although their meanings and intention were often implicit rather than explicit, the very tenacity and persistency with which the two poets maintained their sociopolitical concerns down to the end of their brief careers testify that their opinions were based on genuine personal conviction and that their sentiments were sincere and deeply-rooted. To say this is to acknowledge that neither Keats nor Li was, as is sometimes suggested, a mere follower of some other
socially or politically influential figures and that neither Keats nor Li was, as is frequently implied, an artist who wrote for art's sake only.

In the meantime it is noticeable that there are many important differences between Keats and Li as poets writing about their sociopolitical concerns. For Keats, a true patriot must, for example, take an active part in the struggle for freedom or constitutional limitation of the arbitrary power of the monarch, but for Li, to love the country meant to join in the battle against those separatist local warlords who challenged the rule of Tang. Again, as Keats attacked the notion of legitimacy or divine right, what he was doing was, intentionally or otherwise, to promote republican or democratic ideals, whereas Li was apparently performing his Confucian duty as he tried to criticize the emperor's shortcomings. Even when they expressed their common concern with human suffering, they often did so in a different thematic context: while Keats seemed to be particularly attentive to lovers' experiences, Li portrayed many sufferers belonging to different professions or social groups. Technically, Keats experimented with a whole spectrum of poetic forms, but Li wrote mostly in the short form of ballad. More significantly, although both Keats and Li used a moving language as well as sensuous imagery, they had different stylistic tendencies: if Keats's best poetry can be described as robust and as attempting to be
transparent despite its densely allusive character, Li's is aphoristic and sentimental. To acknowledge such differences in form and content is, needless to say, not to forget that each poet is unique, and so is his work.

In my attempt to account for the differences and similarities between the two poets, I have referred in the previous chapters to their respective family backgrounds, life experiences, sociohistorical contexts and literary traditions as major categories which functioned to shape their poetic developments. While those differences are by and large predictable, they have an important significance because they help us to understand that as each poet is formed and informed by a unique conglomeration of contextual specificities, his work is simultaneously a unique result of, and a unique response to, his own time. It is true that in terms of historical periodicity or the transmission of ideas, the two poets have no common link to warrant a fruitful influence study. However, by investigating the intricacies of their poetic work in a comparative manner and, especially, in close relation to their social and political milieux, we have come to see that the two poets resemble each other to a surprising degree in their thematic concerns and sometimes even in the ways they present these concerns. Such similarities invite and bountifully repay our efforts at comparison, for they lead us to recognize both Keats and Li as typical romantic poets. As a literary category, the term
"romanticism" can and perhaps should be, that is to say, treated as representing a crosscultural value as I have suggested earlier. Although a definitive methodology is yet to be developed in the field of comparative study between classical Chinese poetry and English "romantic" poetry, as Vincent Yang has recently pointed out,¹ I hope that my approach has turned out to be conducive to the mutual illumination of Keats's and Li's poetry.

In a more general way, my present comparative study has also served to illustrate that contemporary politics has a profound effect on both what a poet writes about and how he writes. Given this close relationship between politics and poetics, to understand a particular set of artistic productions one must therefore try to understand the age in which it is originated and processed, just as to understand a particular age one must try to understand the artwork it produces. Is this not particularly true in the case of Li He and John Keats?
NOTES:

1. For more discussion on this situation, see Xu Chuanwu, 75.

2. Here "these slips / Of green bamboo" are apparently a reference to Li's own verse since Chinese characters used to be written on bamboo slips, whereas "the ornate worm" has traditionally been taken to mean "book-worms."

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