

LI HO AND KEATS: POVERTY, ILLNESS, FRUSTRATION AND A POETIC CAREER

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In romantic literature, Li Ho (790-816) of T'ang Dynasty China and John Keats (1795-1821) of Georgian England are congenial in spirit and similar in style. That the two poets who lived in different times and belonged to different cultures should become perfect parallels in the literary history of the world is by no means incidental. After studying their biographies as well as their writings, we are convinced that their similarities have sprung from their similar life experiences which are shaped by certain given environments and an inborn spirit of a poet. They both wrote an intensified, difficult poetry, just as they both lived an intensified, difficult life. The essential experience of their ephemeral existences—incidentally, they both died at the age of twenty-six—is suffering. In the following analysis, we shall examine the common causes of their sufferings in terms of poverty, illness, and an utter frustration in life due to social injustice.

First, poverty. There has been a familiar notion in traditional Chinese literature that poetry and poverty are twins. This association of an elevated form of literary creation with a distressing human situation is best expressed in the saying, "Poetry is only perfected in poverty,"⁽¹⁾ a truism in the classical tradition often referred to by men of letters when they appreciate and admire excellent poetry that is wrought out of the hard lot of a poet. Though the word "poverty" in the saying indicates more than merely the want of money,⁽²⁾ yet financial distress often induces other forms of destitution, such as separation from or bereavement of dear ones and breakdown of spirit. This cause of human tragedy is clearly witnessed in the lives of the two poets.

Before our observation of the poverty of Li Ho, we must keep in mind that, despite his royal origins,⁽³⁾ the poet in fact belonged to an already declined and impoverished aristocracy. This dubious situation is well explained by Ch'en Yin-k'e, a renowned scholar of Chinese history and literature, in the following passage:

As to the royal house of T'ang during the life-and-death struggle between the famous old houses in East China and the newly risen classes in the second half of the dynasty, its remote branches were not very different from the common scholar-gentry class in political and social standings. As it is stated in the "Geneological Tables of the Royal House" 宗室世系表 in the *Hsin t'ang shu*

新唐書, *chüan* 70: "The House of T'ang has ruled the country for three hundred years. Its offsprings have multiplied tremendously. At first, they were all ennobled with royal titles, but in later generations when the immediacy of kinship faded away, their fortune depended upon the degree of their intelligence. Therefore, some served in the government together with those of other clans, and some fell into obscurity of the common people. It is very deplorable."⁽⁴⁾

There are no detailed financial accounts of Li Ho's life; nevertheless, we can find fragmentary references to his poverty in his poems. He described his small estate in Ch'ang-ku⁽⁵⁾ as:

in my mountain home
 an acre of weedy rocky field
 night rain falling
 the shouting of tax-collectors
 the pounding of grains
 mingling⁽⁶⁾

(from "Sung Wei Jen-shih hsiung-ti ju-kuan" 送韋仁實兄弟入關)

His house, which used to be filled with music in by-gone days, was now destitute of the sweet melody, as he remarked in a cynical tone and with an allusion to Yang Hsiung (53-18 B. C.), a historically famous humble scholar, in "Lü-chang feng-shih" 綠章封事:

in Yang Hsiung's autumn room
 no sound of vulgarity⁽⁷⁾

The atmosphere of his lonesome home at night when he was working on his poetry is felt in this description in "Ch'iu lai" 秋來:

a feeble oil-lamp
 crickets weep in the pinch of poverty⁽⁸⁾

His own appearance was presented in a sort of caricature in "Shang-hsin hsing" 傷心行:

my clothes are like a fluttering gual
 my horse is like a cur⁽⁹⁾

The clothes one wears betray one's conditions of living in almost every society. Li Ho mentioned that at home he wore a country coat and no hat:

my head is no longer covered
 even with a rustic hood
 my robe is already dyed yellow
 from a bitter wood⁽¹⁰⁾

(from "Yung-huai er-shou: ch'i-er" 詠懷二首: 其二)

Even so, his coat sometimes went to the wine-shop:

at the public house
dismounted
I remove my autumn coat
to trade for a pot of native wine⁽¹¹⁾
(from "K'ai-ch'ou ke" 開愁歌)

There are indications that there was a shortage of food in the house and that he was half-starving, probably due to poor harvests and heavy land taxation. Thus he was, we are told,

in white daylight always hungry
feeding on small vegetables
of a thumbnail size⁽¹²⁾
(from "Nan-yüan shih-san shou: ch'i-ssu" 南園十三首: 其四)

When his brother was sent to a distant region alone at a very young age to earn a living for himself so as to relieve the family of some financial burden, he was heart-broken in saying:

to exchange a separation
of a thousand *li*
for a bushel of rice
.....
in the low country
a hungry boy will be seen
only in dreams⁽¹³⁾
(from "Mien-ai hsing er-shou sung hsiao-chi chih Lu-shan" 勉愛行
二首送小季之廬山)

One purpose of his several visits to the royal city of Ch'ang-an during his few active years from 810 to 813, apart from his hopes for success in politics and poetry, was to seek food, as we hear him say:

my family has an eager wish
that I might fill my empty stomach⁽¹⁴⁾
(from "T'i kui-meng" 題歸夢)

When in Ch'ang-an where he moved about among the rich citizens and prosperous noblemen at the emperor's threshold, he felt humiliated because he, so proud of his royal ancestry as he was in his princely dreams, was now in reality near pauperism:

alone riding in a roost-like cart
I do not feel much fun⁽¹⁵⁾
(from "Ch'un kui Ch'ang-ku" 春歸昌谷)

After returning to his poverty-stricken home in 814, he felt sorry that he had not been able to improve the economic conditions of his household. With an allusion to another impoverished famous writer in history, Ssu-Ma Hsiang-ju (179-117 B.C.), he said of himself:

to Mao-ling he returned
 lying [sick] he sighed
 at sheer poverty⁽¹⁶⁾

(from "Ch'ang-ku pei-yüan hsin sun ssu-shou: ch'i-ssu" 昌谷北園新
 筇四首: 其四)

Enough has been quoted from Li Ho's poems to portray him as a poor scholar who lived a wretched life. We shall turn to the English poet who also suffered from poverty.

Keats was frequently in need of money. It must be understood at the first that when he decided to give up a profitable medical practice⁽¹⁷⁾ for a poetic career with a doubtful income, he knew that it meant a renunciation of the security of livelihood. The source of income that he first relied on was one share of the yearly interest drawn from a fund established by his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. John Jennings, for the Keats children. But the poet, "having no power of calculation whatever,"⁽¹⁸⁾ was an incautious lender. His sympathy with and generosity to his needy friends had already made him loan them in 1818 a total of over two hundred pounds without any hope of repayments later. Then, on the occasion of his lending thirty more pounds to Benjamin Haydon, his painter friend, his financial source was tightened and eventually stopped by his guardian, Richard Abbey. When he himself was in the shallows, Haydon, the most frequent and inconsiderate borrower among his debtors, did not seem to care much about it and left him high and dry. Besides, he gave an amount of seven hundred pounds (or four hundred and twenty-five pounds)⁽¹⁹⁾ to which he was entitled to his brother George to take to the United States; it was never repaid, due to George's failure in trade in the New World, although George was anxious to help him in the hour of need. There was another inherited fund of more than four thousand pounds to which he and the other Keats children were entitled. Unfortunately, he knew nothing about it during his lifetime. Only George and Fanny (his sister), after his death, were informed of the legacy and claimed their sizeable shares. "It was," as the biographer Sir Sidney Colvin puts it, "a part of the ill luck which attended the poet always that the very existence of these funds must have been ignored or forgotten by his guardian and solicitors at the time when he most needed them."⁽²⁰⁾ Now his only hope for financial support was the sale of his poems. But the sale of all his three slender volumes was slight, and he had received more hard words than hard cash. He could not help

watching with envious eyes the popularity of Byron's poems which sold four thousand copies and thus made a fortune. In hours of need, he had to return to his friendly publishers for an advance of payment and often for a loan on the promise of unborn poems, as Lionel Trilling has remarked: "It was necessary for him to draw upon his publishers, Taylor and Hessey, who treated him with a generosity which was no doubt made the easier for them by Keats's financial punctiliousness."⁽²¹⁾ Passages like the following from a letter to John Taylor (Monday 23 August 1819) are not unfamiliar to readers of Keats's sincere and touching letters:

My dear Taylor—

You will perceive that I do not write you till I am forced by necessity: that I am sorry for. You must forgive me for entering abruptly on the subject, merely prefixing an entreaty that you will not consider my business manner of wording and proceeding any distrust of, or stirrup standing against you; but put it to the account of a desire of order and regularity. I have been rather unfortunate lately in money concerns—from a threatened chancery suit. I was deprived at once of all recourse to my Guardian. I relied a little on some of my debts being paid—which are of a tolerable amount—but I have not had one pound refunded—.⁽²²⁾

Even though his loans to his friends were not repaid and he himself was in distress, still his extraordinarily generous character urged him to care more for other's needs than for his own. We find him again addressing his publisher: Can you lend me 30 £ for a short time?—ten I want for myself—and twenty for a friend—"⁽²³⁾ When he heard the bad news that George in the United States had been swindled out of his money, his anxiety and anger burst out in these words, which revealed his bitter attitude toward a world deformed by the worship of Mammon:

To banish the thought of that wicked land,
 Dungeoner of my friends, that wicked strand
 Where they were wreck'd and live a wrecked life;

 And the great unerring Nature once seems wrong.⁽²⁴⁾
 ("To—[Fanny Brawne]," lines 31–33, 43)

The whole of his financial situation in his few years of independent life, the many money troubles that he had faced and the little hope to which he had clung in settling his debts, may be gathered from his will in which he stated:

All my estate real and personal consists in the hopes of the sale of books publish'd or unublish'd. Now I wish Brown and you [Taylor] to be the first paid Creditors—the rest is in nubibus—but in case it should shower pay my

Taylor the few pounds I owe him.⁽²⁵⁾

The tone of punctiliousness is distinctly echoed in the last sentence. Often the true character of a great man is revealed in trifling matters. Keats's purity of character is admirable. But the pure have little to possess and to leave behind in the material world. "My chest of Books divide among my friends."⁽²⁶⁾ was all that Keats could say humbly yet generously to the beneficiaries of his will.

In our effort to compare the impoverishment of Li Ho with that of Keats, however, a distinction must be made between the different social standings and traditions of the two poets. Keats was a commoner, a middle class youth who had no particular manner of life to assume except for the following of a universal moral code, which was largely a matter of personal integrity. He could, for instance, move from one place to another, or make his home with one friend or another, as he often did, without being ashamed of living a nomadic life. When traveling, it was perfectly all right for him to ride in a stage-coach since he could not afford a seat in the express post chaise. But Li Ho, who referred to himself as "a remote prince of T'ang" 唐諸王孫, was bound to live on his inherited estate, however ruined; and, when traveling, he had to ride on his own horse or in his own carriage, however wretched, in order to save the face of the clan. Besides, we are informed that on his dwindled fortune, he still kept a maid to wait on his mother, a page to serve himself, and a man-servant to keep the door.⁽²⁷⁾ In fact, to maintain a household which preserved all its fond memories of past glories but had already become impoverished was extremely difficult and frequently exhausted a family's financial resources, as was common with many declined noble houses in ancient times. Therefore, the pinch of poverty that Li Ho felt in a pretended appearance of nobility hurts more than it does in a free and flexible way of life of the middle class, such as in the case of Keats.

Second, illness. So far as we have learned from various sources, Li Ho was an ailing man throughout his recorded life. His most talked about poem, "Kao-hsüan kuo" 高軒過, written probably in his nineteenth year,⁽²⁸⁾ has references to his already impaired health and his broken down spirit in these lines:

this writer with grey joint eyebrows
saddens at the drifting autumn weeds
who knows the dead grass brings
forth flowering winds⁽²⁹⁾

The "flowering winds" that sent him to Ch'ang-an with high hopes in the following year were unfortunately chilled by autumn frosts, and he came home crestfallen and ill, as he told in "Ch'u-ch'eng chi Ch'üan Chü, Yang Ching-chih" 出城寄權璩楊敬之:

I have said to myself
 “the sword of Han ought to take wings”
 why should a returning carriage
 carry an ailing body home⁽³⁰⁾

During about a year when he stayed home between 810 and 811, his life was no more than what he himself described in “Shang-hsin hsing,”

diseased bones grieve
 in humble obscurity
 autumn-worn appearance
 grows white hair⁽³¹⁾

Once again in Ch’ang-an in 811 to fill his nominal position of *feng-li-lang* 奉禮郎 at the Court of Rites, his illness so persisted that he was for some time bed-ridden, as suggested by the following lines from “T’ing Ying-shih t’an-ch’in ke” 聽穎師彈琴歌:

in cold lodging
 the music of the strings
 startles the sick lodger
 I quit the fine straw mattress
 for a while⁽³²⁾

After he resigned from his office in 813, largely on account of his physical inability to carry it on, and returned home, all that was left to him in the rest of his life was a head of thinning and whitening hair and a decayed body—at so early a stage of life—in the midst of the smell of medicine. We find here and there in his poems such lines as these:

leaving me such star-spotted hair⁽³³⁾
 (from “Kan-feng wu-shou: ch’i-er” 感諷五首: 其二)
 diseased bones could still exist⁽³⁴⁾
 (from “Shih ti” 示弟)
 night is cold
 the smell of medicinal broth is strong⁽³⁵⁾
 (from “Ch’ang-ku tu-shu shih Pa-t’ung” 昌谷讀書示巴童)

Although the name of his disease has not been reported, we at least know that it was a chronic one and that, judging from his emaciation and his early thinning and greying hair, he must have suffered from a bad anemia caused by some severe internal disorder of a consumptive nature. Moreover, we are informed that a visitor once watched him spitting three times while writing poems because, as the on-looker suspected, the strenuous literary activity had choked him.⁽³⁶⁾ If his frequent spitting were habitual and could be included in his symptoms, then, in

our imagined diagnosis, his malady might be a pulmonary disorder—tuberculosis, perhaps, which has been so popular in romantic literature as to be preferred to any other form of ailment by the romantics themselves.

That Keats had contracted syphilis in September, 1817, when he was with Benjamin Bailey at Oxford and “in a youthful desire to know all of life had plunged incautiously into a reckless adventure”⁽³⁷⁾ has not been accepted as factual by modern critics, while his death from tuberculosis has been well known to the world. Early symptoms of his hereditary consumption were evidenced on his walking tour of Scotland in the summer of 1818. This dreadful disease, nothing short of a slow suicide, hung on him over a period of three years, gradually working its way into his death in the spring of 1821. It ruined him at once in three ways, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Physically, he was deprived of his robustness and vivacity; mentally, he could not bear the thought of his dear ones, his mother and his brother Tom, journeying one after the other toward the grave after he himself had suffered so long and so painfully from the same illness; and spiritually, his noble character was forced to turn at times into a savage despondency and cruelty. The worst of all was his realization that he could never fulfill his love oath to his betrothed, Fanny Brawne; and, drifting away from her day by day toward the Lethean shore, he would lose her forever. The pain and despair of a youth crippled by an incurable disease, the haunting memories of his ill-fated kinsfolk, and the resignation to his own fate that so untimely cancels all life's ambitions are collectively expressed, now with an overtone of a willing acceptance of an easeful death, in these lines from one of his masterpieces composed in the productive year of 1819:

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.⁽³⁸⁾
 (from “Ode to a Nightingale,” stanza iii, lines 23-30)

It is interesting to notice that the vivid and precise description of a consumptive youth in the above-quoted passage (the first four lines) fits perfectly in the case of the emaciated Li Ho. Would it be too risky to say at this point that the two luckless poets might have suffered from and eventually died of the same illness?

Third, frustration due to social injustice. Both Li Ho and Keats endured a major frustration in life as a result of social injustice. Their experiences were of

two different forms of man's injustice that brought virtually the same consequences to their lives. In Li Ho's case, it was the jealous bureaucracy's abuse of an old tradition to expel a brilliant young scholar from the imperial examination for civil service; while in the case of Keats, it was the merciless attack on a promising young writer by biased critics. The different kinds of affliction, nevertheless, caused the two unlucky youths the same pain and deprived them of their hope for a bright future, if not their dear lives at once.

Li Ho was a victim in a political battle. To understand Li Ho's situation, it seems necessary here to give a brief introduction to the social status of the intellectuals and their desires and aspirations in life during the T'ang period (618-907). Following a long tradition, the intellectuals had always been separated from other classes, namely, the peasants, the craftsmen, and the merchants, which were all largely confined to illiteracy. The *shih* 士 or scholar-gentry class became unprecedentedly important at the beginning of the T'ang Dynasty when there was established by the new order an examination system as a method of recruiting talented and capable officials at all levels of government. Under this establishment, the intellectuals who were not owners of large properties found a short cut to success through the examinations for civil service. Besides, there was a considerable amount of equality in the qualifications of the participants in these competitions. Accordingly, even the extremely wretched of the scholars, formerly a hopeless and starving kind, might through their academic pursuits bloom into fame and wealth overnight. Officialdom, which meant power and economic security, became the target of life-time activities of an intelligentsia struggling up from a humble status. Lü Ssu-mien, a contemporary historian, has quoted from a statement by Shen Chi-chi, a T'ang prime minister, in an explanation of people's incredible eagerness in fighting their way into governmental positions:

Those who have succeeded in entering the officialdom are as happy as if they had become immortals in paradise, while those who have failed are as miserable as if they had descended into the lower world. Their happiness and misery are as far apart as heaven from earth.⁽³⁹⁾

These words describe how great the joy would be in their success in passing the severe tests, and how deep the despair in their failure. But Li Ho's experience was even worse; for he actually did not fail in the tests but was prevented from participating in the final test in the royal capital, having passed the provincial test with honors. This is precisely where the sense of social injustice, apart from the ordinary feeling of frustration, comes in.

Moreover, the problem of Li Ho was a conflict between two opposing groups among the status-seeking intellectuals: the *chin-shih* 進士 (graduated scholars) and

the *ming-ching* 明經 (specialists in the Classics). The former title required a complete training in classical literature with an emphasis on the belles-lettres, which was a discipline for men of greater talents; while the latter only demanded a training largely limited to the memory of Confucian classics and some knowledge about governmental affairs, which was regarded as befitting men of lesser mental faculties. Accordingly, the tests by which the *chin-shih* were selected were more difficult than those designed for the *ming-ching*.⁽⁴⁰⁾ It is only natural that the *chin-shih* and the *ming-ching* were enemies in a political battle, each side having ups and downs in their changing fortune. As a matter of fact, this grudge in its utmost expression accounts for a whole series of party feuds (*tang-cheng* 黨爭) in the Late T'ang history.

The central figure in this critical episode in Li Ho's life was Yüan Chen (779-831), a poet in his own right, but a *ming-ching* in political life who later became the prime minister. We have learned from one source⁽⁴¹⁾ that when Yüan Chen was still a *ming-ching*, he once paid a visit to Li Ho, reportedly out of admiration of the younger poet's talents. But Li Ho, assuming a typical *chin-shih*'s bitter attitude toward a *ming-ching*, a scholar who sought success through political writings, refused to receive him but sent his servant to ask the visitor, "What does a *ming-ching* want to see Mr. Li for?" In embarrassment and shame, Yüan Chen retreated. When Li Ho came to register for the final examination in the capital, it was inevitable that, on account of partisan sentiment as well as personal grudge, Yüan Chen, who was now holding the office of *li-pu lang-chung* 禮部郎中 (Senior Secretary at the Court of Rites), a position closely affiliated with the administration of governmental examinations, should campaign for Li Ho's rejection.

Furthermore, the charge about the *hui* 諱 (nominal taboo) that was brought against Li Ho was unjustifiable. A note on the term and the background involved in its use is called for here. The term *hui* 諱 or *pi-hui* 避諱 may be interpreted as "the avoidance of the use or mention of the names of one's elders, especially of ancestors and parents, and of one's superiors, especially of the emperor." By the T'ang laws, there were two exemptions to this offence as brought out by Han Yü (768-823), Li Ho's patron and the literary patriarch of the time, in his fiery article, "Hui pien" 諱辯 ("Refutation of the Nominal Taboo"), in defence of Li Ho's obvious and unquestionable innocence. The two exemptions were, namely, avoidance of a part of a name or of homonyms were not required.⁽⁴²⁾ What actually happened to Li Ho was this: his father's given name was Chin-su 晉肅, and the title he intended to earn was *chin-shih* 進士 (notice the two *chin* elements have different characters in the Chinese writing). Should he be awarded the title, therefore, he would be neglecting the *hui* with the name of his sire, a violation of the law. However,

chin-shih 進士 is only partly in common with Chin-su 晉肅, and even that part, *chin* 進 and *Chin* 晉 are mere homonyms. The avoidance, therefore, is not required and the charge against the candidate groundless. Han Yü, in his article mentioned above, argued in bitter satire: "If the son cannot become a *chin-shih* because the father's name is Chin-su, then what if the father's name were *jen* 仁 (humanity—not an uncommon personal name in China)? Could not the son even be a *jen* 人 (human being—a homonym given here for mockery?)"⁽⁴³⁾ The argument was eloquent enough; nevertheless, the opposite side prevailed. Li Ho had to give up his golden chance of success. In bitter disappointment, he returned to Ch'ang-ku. As he approached his home valley, he composed a poem on the donkey's back. It reads:

cassia blossoms are scarce in snow
 a crying crow returns with bullet wounds
 waters beyond the Pass reflect
 the image of me on donkey's back
 my hat-strings hang in alien winds
 return to one's home country is
 indeed a grand occasion but
 not carrying an official seal
 I'm sorry for myself
 my dear darling wife
 you won't dare ask me "why"
 in the mirror
 two streams of tears
 a [miserable] form⁽⁴⁴⁾
 ("Ch'u ch'eng" 出城)

Keats was likewise a victim in a political battle, that of the Tory writers' assaults on the Hunt (Leigh Hunt, 1784–1859) circle, nicknamed by its enemies as the "Cockney School of Poetry," which had been famous for criticizing the Prince Regent. On the publication of *Endymion* in April, 1818, Keats received a number of harsh reviews of the volume together with the earlier volume of his *Poems* (1817). The most malignant ones were in *Blackwood's Edinberg Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review*. The *Blackwood's* article, which appeared in the August issue (actually put out on September 1, as it was almost always late) was believed to have been written by J. G. Lockhart, as one in a series devised to ruin the so-called "Cockney School," leveled primarily at Hunt, with Keats as a side target. The piece was "in a strain of insult so preposterous as to be obviously inspired by the mere wantonness of partisan licence."⁽⁴⁵⁾ The sting of the review that sounded completely out of tune with any published criticism was in its indecency of style and its mean-

ness of purpose, such as felt in these words: "So back to the shop, Mr. John, stick to 'plasters, pills, ointment boxes,' &c."⁽⁴⁶⁾ Then the *Quarterly* followed the *Blackwood's* in the onrush with a review by John Wilson Crocker, in the issue dated April (actually published on September 27). Crocker said of *Endymion* that he was "unable to read beyond the first canto."⁽⁴⁷⁾ And of the poet he remarked:

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.⁽⁴⁸⁾ The article is, to quote Colvin, "of a man insensible to the higher charm of poetry, incapable of judging it except by mechanical rule and precedent, and careless of the pain he gives."⁽⁴⁹⁾

Confronted with such enmity and insult, Keats, like Li Ho, also received earnest support. Amidst the showering darts of hostile criticism, Keats's friends rose promptly to his defence. Among them was John Scott, the editor of the *London Magazine*, who soon after writing an indignant letter to defend Keats in the *Morning Chronicle*, was killed in a duel resulting from the *Blackwood's* brawls, by J. H. Christie, a friend of Lockhart and a writer for the *Blackwood's*.

So far, all the attacks directed toward Keats had come from the thought that the poet was a disciple of the Huntian school, which was not true. Hunt was to Keats in his early days of poetic activities a source of inspiration and encouragement, no more than what Han Yü was to Li Ho in the younger poet's humble beginning. Hunt, who had indicated plainly that "he was not himself an enthusiastic admirer of *Endymion*,"⁽⁵⁰⁾ had in reality little to do with the development of Keats's art. Keats's affiliation with the Huntian school being thus denied, then the attacks that were launched upon Keats as a follower of Hunt by the Tory critics out of political prejudice seemed to have no ground for justification. Keats remained calm throughout the ordeal. But, brave and firm as he was, he nevertheless felt the scorpion's sting in his sensitive soul where the damage on his pride and ambition had been done. It might well be an exaggeration of Byron when he put in *Don Juan* these mock-elegiac lines:

John Keats, who was kill'd off by critique,
 Just as he really promis'd something great,
 If not intelligible, without Greek
 Contrived to talk about the gods of late
 Much as they might have been supposed to speak.
 Poor fellow! He was an untoward fate;

'T is strange the mind, that very fiery particle
Should let itself be snuff'd out by an article.⁽⁵¹⁾

(*Don Juan*, XI. lx.)

But when we come to weigh Keats's own feelings in saying to Richard Woodhouse, "If I die you must ruin Lockhart."⁽⁵²⁾ we must be convinced that the wrong he had suffered undeservedly must have to a great extent intensified his sufferings from other causes, namely, poverty and illness, and hastened him to his end.

In the following year, 1819, when his hurt feelings and tortured mind were soothed and mellowed into mature philosophical speculations, Keats wrote in one of the four great odes he composed that year, with a positive attitude toward the romantic mood of melancholy:

But when the melancholy fit shall fall
Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
And hides the green hill in an April shroud;⁽⁵³⁾
(from "Ode on Melancholy," stanza ii, lines 11-14)

Perhaps, on the occasion of writing these lines, Keats did not (how could he?) quite forget the April of the preceding year, the April that at once marked the public appearance of his first major creation, *Endymion*, and brought the most ruthless attack on the very poem (in the April issue of the *Quarterly*). Thus, the "April shroud" image may have taken on a double meaning: the poet's experience of the suppression of his poetic ambition and his strong reaction against the suppression; or frustration and confrontation; or, to put it prophetically, death and revival.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Consequently, the poet's creative genius certainly was revived and put to work in that year. Indeed, the year 1819 saw the climax of Keats's productivity. Frustration often does nothing but challenge and fortify a poet's devotion to his high calling.

No doubt, a full devotion to poetry has been the pivot of both the two poet's lives. In the face of the several hardships, they both showed fortitude against the misery which they very well knew had been caused by their devotion to poetry. However, a poetic career does not pay; and there were moments of temptation and compromise. Keats once told Taylor in a letter (Monday 23 Aug. 1819):

I feel every confidence that if I choose I may be a popular writer; that I will never be; but for all that I will get a livelihood—I equally dislike the favour of the public with the love of a woman—they are both a cloying treacle to the wings of independence.⁽⁵⁵⁾

But later on, when he was in utter distress, his mind seemed to have wavered and

swung a little in the other direction, just as the biographer Dorothy Hewlett has observed:

Although Keats has declared earlier that he "never wrote one single Line of Poetry with the least Shadow of public thought," it is possible that *Lamia* [1820] was to some extent composed with the poetry-reading public in mind. Keats was needing money badly and he wanted Fanny for his wife.⁽⁵⁶⁾

Li Ho understandably associated both his diseased body and his impoverished life with the incurable love of verse. In one poem he tells us:

a long song tears the collar of my robe
 a short song snaps my whitening hair⁽⁵⁷⁾
 (from "Ch'ang-ke hsü tuan-ke" 長歌續短歌)

Nevertheless, he persisted, as he put it in the voice of his page in another poem:

the grey joint eyebrows plunge
 into bitter chanting⁽⁵⁸⁾
 (from "Pa-t'ung ta" 巴童答)

It was in hours of depression and despair that he felt himself powerless and useless as a writer, whereas many youths of his time, men of action rather than of imagination, had become frontier officers, just as his own father had been before,⁽⁵⁹⁾ to serve the country in those turbulent years. He then began to doubt the value of literature, questioning himself:

seek a passage
 pick a word
 I age
 in this insect-carving work
 morning moon on the window
 hangs a jade bow
 don't you see every year
 on Liao Hai frontier
 where can literature find
 a place to cry in autumn wind⁽⁶⁰⁾
 ("Nan-yüan shih-san-shou: ch'i-liu 南園十三首: 其六)

After all, compromise and doubt are to the consecrated priests of the Muse but passing shadows on their steadfast minds, inevitable weaknesses in their noble characters, and insignificant by-products of their morbid moods. In spite of the afflictions of poverty, illness, and social injustice that brought about the utmost frustration in life, Li Ho and Keats, born to be sanctified in the name of poetry and destined to remain true to their high calling, carried on and fought to the bitter end. So the full measure of devotion to an unrewarding poetic career is shown in

the words of Keats:

This living hand, now warm and capable
 Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
 And in the icy silence of the tomb,
 So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
 That thou wouldst wish thine own heart dry of blood
 So in my veins red life might stream again,
 And thou be conscience-calm'd—see here it is—
 I told it toward you.⁽⁶¹⁾

And we listen reverently to the consecrated voice with the ultimate hope for the divine mission of our poets that, in Li Ho's words:

their pens perfect the creation
 heaven's work disqualified⁽⁶²⁾
 (from "Kao-hsüan kuo" 高軒過)

We have seen in these paragraphs that 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 (the nature of such poetry requires a separate discussion). This, however, is not to suggest a theory of definite socio-literary relationship to a scientific precision, since the study of literature as art rather than archives, a monument rather than a document, involves basically an empirical search for the invested thoughts and feelings of the author in his literary creation, which by nature defies scientific measurements. This is simply to observe that artistic creativity under certain circumstances may in all probability produce works of a similar kind and that the internal poetic spirit under similar external influences may in all probability reach across the boundaries of time and space and land in the realm of congeniality of art. This makes possible and meaningful the recognition and acceptance of parallels in world literature, such as Li Ho and Keats.

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NOTES

- (1) Familiar expressions of this notion are found in Ou-Yang Hsiu 歐陽修, "Mei Sheng-yü shih-chi hsü" 梅聖俞詩集序: "I have heard that poets who have been popular for generations were seldom successful in life, but were often in distress...In fact, poetry popular for generations has sprung from the utterances of the ancients who have known distress...Probably poetry is not perfected until the poet has known distress." 吾聞世傳詩人少達而多窮...

蓋世傳詩者多出於古窮人之辭…殆窮者而後工也；and Po Chü-yi 白居易, “Yü Yüan Chiu Shu” 與元九書: “Poets are often in distress.” 詩人多蹇。

- (2) The connotation of *ch'iung* 窮 as “distress” or “unsuccess” or “a hard lot,” which applies to various forms of suffering in the life of a writer and insinuates the confrontation with an ill fate, is best exemplified by the historian’s comment on the poet’s misfortune in Ssu-Ma Ch’ien 司馬遷: “Ch’ü Yüan lieh-chuan” 屈原列傳 in the *Shih-chi*, chüan 84 史記卷八十四: “Ch’ü Yüan... may indeed...be said as having tasted distress.” 屈原……可謂窮矣。
- (3) Li Ho was a descendent of Li Liang 李亮, the Prince Hsiao of Cheng 鄭孝王, also known as the Senior Prince of Cheng 大鄭王, and an uncle of Kao-tsu 高祖, the founder and first ruler of the T’ang Dynasty. See Chu Tsu-ch’ing 朱自清, “Li Ho nien-p’u” 李賀年譜, in *The Tsing Hua Journal* 清華學報, X, No. 4 (Peking, October 1935), 888.
- (4) Ch’en Yin-k’e 陳寅恪, *T’ang-tai cheng-chih-shih shu-lun kao* 唐代政治史述論稿 (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1947), p. 64.
- (5) Ch’ang-ku 昌谷 is located in today’s Lo-yang 洛陽 of Honan Province 河南省. See “Nien-p’u” 年譜, in *The Tsing Hua Journal* 清華學報, X, No. 4 (1935), 888-89.
- (6) Yeh Ts’ung-ch’i 葉葱奇, ed. and annot., *Li Ho shih-chi* 李賀詩集 (Peking: Jenmin wen-hsüeh ch’u-pan she 人民文學出版社, 1958), p. 286. English translation of this and other passages from Li Ho’s poems are mine.
- (7) *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- (8) *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- (9) *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- (10) *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- (11) *Ibid.*, p. 211.
- (12) *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- (13) *Ibid.*, pp. 126-27.
- (14) *Ibid.*, pp. 313-14.
- (15) *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- (16) *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- (17) Keats was a medical student from 1811 to 1816, first as an apprentice to Thomas Hammon, an apothecary-surgeon in Edmonton, then in 1815 as a registered student at Guy’s Hospital in London, where he earned his certificate to practise as a surgeon and apothecary. In 1817, he decided to give up a doctor’s life to become a poet. See Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 30, 42, 110, and 118.
- (18) Sir Sidney Colvin, *John Keats: His Life and Poetry, His Friends, Critics, and After-Fame*, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1925), p. 23.

- (19) See Bate, *John Keats*, p. 631f.
The actual amount George received remains a question.
- (20) Sir Sidney Colvin, *Keats* (London: Macmillan, 1929), p. 228.
- (21) Lionel Trilling, ed., *The Selected Letters of John Keats* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 20.
- (22) *Ibid.*, p. 283.
- (23) *Ibid.*, p. 206.
- (24) John Keats, *The Poetic Works of John Keats*, ed. H. W. Garrod (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 399.
- (25) *Letters*, p. 333.
- (26) *Ibid.*
- (27) See Wang Li-hsi 王禮錫, *Li Ch'ang-chi p'ing-chuan* 李長吉評傳 (Shanghai: Shen-chou kuo-kuang she 神州國光社, 1930), p. 50.
- (28) The traditional belief that Li Ho wrote this poem at the age of seven (see *Hsin T'ang-shu*, chüan 203 新唐書卷二〇三; *T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi*, chüan 202 太平廣記卷二〇二) is incorrect. The proof of this chronological error is based on the fact that Han Yü 韓愈 and Huang-fu Chih 皇甫湜, to whom the poem was dedicated, had not been appointed Governor of Honan and Inspector to Lo-yang respectively until 809, when Li Ho was already nineteen. See "Nien-p'u" 年譜, in *The Tsing Hua Journal* 清華學報, X, No. 4 (1935), 893, 898-99; *P'ing-chuan* 評傳, pp. 40-44.
- (29) *Shih-chi* 詩集, p. 281.
- (30) *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- (31) *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- (32) *Ibid.*, p. 350.
- (33) *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- (34) *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- (35) *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- (36) See *Shih-chi* 詩集, p. 360 (quotation from *Yün-hsien tsa-chi* 雲仙雜記).
- (37) Frances Winwar, *The Romantic Rebels* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1949), p. 350; Dorothy Hewlett, *A Life of John Keats* (New York: Barnes & Nobles, 1950), p. 103.
- (38) *Works*, p. 207
- (39) Lü Ssu-mien 呂思勉, *Sui T'ang Wu-tai shih* 隋唐五代史 (Shanghai: Chung Hua Book Co., 1959), p. 1144.
- (40) See *Ibid.*, pp. 183, 185.
- (41) See *Shih-chi* 詩集, p. 359 (quotation from *Chü-f'an lu* 劇談錄).
- (42) See Ma T'ung-po 馬遜伯, ed. and annot., *Han Ch'ang-li wen-chi chiao-chu* 韓昌

黎文集校註 (Shanghai: Ku-tien wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan she 古典文學出版社, 1957),
p. 34.

(43) *Ibid.*

(44) *Shih-chi* 詩集, p. 176.

(45) *Keats*, p. 121.

(46) *Ibid.*, p. 122.

(47) *Ibid.*, p. 124.

(48) *A Life*, p. 178.

(49) *Keats*, p. 124.

(50) *Ibid.*, p. 125.

(51) George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Don Juan* (London: John Lehmann, 1949), p. 384.

(52) *A Life*, p. 342.

(53) *Works*, p. 220.

(54) Bate, *John Keats*, p. 522 has a similar interpretation of this double meaning:

In the very springing of the flowers and the new green of the hill, transience falls upon them like a "shroud" as they emerge into being. But the same process in which death is implicit is also leading things into existence and fostering them toward fulfillment. This is an "April shroud," promising existence as well as death."

(55) *Letters*, pp. 283-84.

(56) *A Life*, p. 308.

(57) *Shih-chi* 詩集, p. 130.

(58) *Ibid.*, p. 175.

(59) See "Nien-p'u" 年譜, in *The Tsing Hua Journal* 清華學報, X, No. 4 (1935), 890.

(60) *Shih-chi* 詩集, p. 66.

(61) Bate, *John Keats*, p. 627.

(62) *Shih-chi* 詩集, p. 281.

李賀與濟慈：貧病失意與詩人生涯

陳 穎

中國唐代鬼才詩人李賀與英倫喬治王朝浪漫派詩人濟慈，雖屬異邦隔代，了無關涉；而身世相伴，作風逼似，長才短命，同歲而夭。至其詩藝之精純，想像之豐富，受當時毀譽之抑揚，對後世影響之深厚，東西輝映，千古難逢。實為中外文緣之一大奇跡。前人雖曾提及，而未有詳加比論者。

吾人從比較文學觀點，探討此二作家生活與作品，經驗與風格，相互關聯異同之處，乃知有艱苦之人生閱歷，始有偉大之文學成就。珠璣隨口，實卽血淚盈篇。窮而後工，殆非偶然。蓋二氏所共罹者：為貧困，為病苦，為社會之不公，為年命之煎迫。凡此種種，集於一身，此人世之所不能堪者，正其能藉以逞才縱筆發為瑰麗之詩篇而永垂不朽者也；亦正其能異曲同工無獨有偶者也。

本文僅將二氏生平事跡之犖犖大者，加以簡介。相提並論，就正高明。至其詩有同聲，情無二致，當俟另文探索。