



主 编 王柯平 邱 鸣

英诗品录

EXPERIENCING ENGLISH THROUGH POETRY

— 王柯平◎著 —





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“读诗使人灵秀”（代前言）

学习和掌握一门外语，如同打开一扇了解另一文化世界的窗户。英语作为一种国际性语言，其实际效用更是如此。那么，怎样借助语言这一工具去了解那个文化世界呢？从深层角度看，恐怕主要还得靠读书这一传统渠道，尽管不可排除现代电子媒介的辅助与渲染作用。

论及读书或学习（of studies），英国文艺复兴时期的思想家培根（Francis Bacon，1561 - 1626）声称：“Histories make men wise; poets witty; the mathematics subtle; natural philosophy deep; moral grave; logic and rhetoric able to contend. *Abeunt studia in more* \ [Studies pass into and influence manners \]. Nay, there is no stond or impediment in the wit but may be wrought out by fit studies; like as diseases of the body may have appropriate exercises.”^①（“史鉴使人明智；诗歌使人巧慧；数学使人精细；博物使人深沉；伦理之学使人庄重；逻辑与修辞使人善辩。‘学问变化气质’[直译为‘学问入于性格并影响性格’]。不特如此，精神上的缺陷没有一种是不能由相当的学问来补救的：就如同肉体上的病患都有适当的运动来治疗似的。”^②）早先，我也曾拜读过王佐良先生的相关译文，记得他把“poets witty”译为“读诗使人灵秀”。近30年过去了，这种先入为主的记忆依然难忘。我总觉得，上述两种译法虽在伯仲之间，但比较而言，前者（“巧慧”）更符合词义，而后者（“灵秀”）更显得传神，或者说更契合我对诗歌以及读诗的理解与期待。

事实上，“诗歌使人巧慧”也罢，“读诗使人灵秀”也罢，其要旨大同小异，均强调诗歌特有的诗性智慧（poetic wisdom），在潜移默化与怡情悦性中，对读者进行情感的滋养、灵思的启示、精神的补救、素质的提升，乃至性格的影响。在当今推崇智商（IQ）、情商（EQ）与人文素养（cultural literacy）或三者并重的教育哲学里，读诗的上述效果近乎一石多鸟，可以担当多重角色，在素质教育中理应发挥不可或缺的作用。更何况在这个庸俗

① Cf. Francis Bacon, "Of Studies" in *Essays* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995), p. 129.

② 参阅培根：《培根论说文集》，商务印书馆，1986年版，第180页。

寡淡的散文化时代里，借助读诗以及诗性智慧，兴许能给人如何“诗意地栖居”透射出一缕希冀之光。但愿这不是一种乌托邦式的奇思怪想！

不消说，诗歌既是语言的艺术，也是音乐的艺术，亦诗亦歌，可诵可吟。西文中指称诗或诗歌的 poem 一词，源自古希腊文 ποιημα，可拉丁化为 poiema，原本表示诗乐合一的艺术作品，现代古典学者依然将其翻译为 music-poetry（直译为“音乐诗歌”）。另外，西文中表示抒情诗的 lyric，也源自古希腊语 λυρα，可拉丁化为 lyra，原本是指一种用于吟诗弹唱的里拉琴。总之，诗歌融文字的魔力与音韵的精妙于一体，能感能思、愈神愈美。其文辞华章，或缘情而绮靡，或体物而浏亮，或简约而沉奥，或自然而清丽，或“俚采百字之偶，竞价一句之奇，情必极貌以写物，辞必穷力而追新”。^①这听起来好像是在谈论中国诗歌（而且化负为正地淡化了其中隐含的批评）。其实，就中外诗歌的本质来讲，无论在表情达意、遣词用句、形象思维或想象创造等方面，均有诸多彼此会通之处。当然，西方的诗歌概念比较宽泛，其中包括悲剧与喜剧等等，至于所用的音韵格律，也与中国古典诗词相异……此非本书主题，姑且不予赘述。

① 参阅刘勰：《文心雕龙·明诗》。另参阅陆机：《文赋》，钟嵘：《诗品序》，司空图：《诗品》等。

本书主题是谈“读诗习语”。所谓“读诗”，是读英文诗；所谓“习语”，是学英语。按其原文书名（*Experiencing English through Poetry*），本可译为《通过诗歌体验英语》。大家知道，学习英语是讲究听、说、读、写、译等五种基本技能的（five skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating）。我觉得将诗歌印成书或录成音，就可以用作素材来训练和提高上述五种技能。譬如，在吟诵朗读诗文之余，也可以用于听说谈论、撰写批评或翻译练习，这有助于培养我们对语言的敏感性，有助于体认隐含其中的人文、道德、哲理与审美等多种价值。在诗歌文本中，语言的表现是一种情感形态，不同于在科学文本中所采用的逻辑形态，因此，其空灵微妙的含蓄性与有机语境的歧义性特别突出。这虽然会有些费解，不如科学语言那样直白，但却更能昭示语言的妙用与诗歌的灵秀，所以更值得细细咀嚼，如同品尝橄榄一样，慢慢体悟诗歌艺术与诗性智慧的非常滋味。

一般说来，评论家解诗需要悟性与技巧，我们普通读者品诗也需要悟性与技巧。本书浅述了一些诗歌欣赏的基本方法，但相关悟性则因人而异，不可言说，只能自己去训练、修养、实践

与提高了。

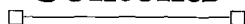
需要指出的是，本书是作者于廿载之前在国外留学时所做的一份研究报告。当时对学习英语语言文学十分入迷，觉得国内的英语教学比较忽视诗歌阅读欣赏，因此满怀热情地探讨了读诗习语的可能性。回国后，我在英语教学中也试用过一段时间，其效果颇为令人满意，但后来由于从事美学与文化哲学的研究，这方面的教学实验也就随之停顿，只有在解释相关美学理论时借用诗歌分析做一些旁证或说明。现在，国内学习英语的环境与条件今非昔比，在一定范围内已经超出了实用英语的水平，可以说是已到了一个需要提升档次和融贯人文教育的新阶段。有鉴于此，我的一些同仁与过去教过的一些学生，都建议我有机会将这部文稿予以出版，为钟情于读诗习语者提供一种可资参考借鉴的实用方法。这便是本书付梓的主要缘由。

借此出版之际，本书除了在最后一章增加了数首诗文之外，其余部分仍保留原貌，未做任何改动。作者曾想：如若本书对于国内喜好诗歌的英语学习者有所帮助，也算了却了自己早年的一桩夙愿。另外，文中有不当之处，诚请各位方家批评雅正。

王柯平

2005 年隆冬于京东寓中

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Introductory

In the Chinese EFL(English as a Foreign Language) learning context , students (who have progressed through the elementary, intermediate, and particularly the advanced grades) are ready to look at the target language from a different point of view. They feel ready to study the language in all its diversity, the varieties of its modes of expression and its structure.

To meet the students' needs, literature is widely used in EFL programs. Poetry, like stories, novels and drama, is another example of language being patterned in a special way in a special genre. However, as an art of employing words in the most creative manner, poetry provides a new, characteristic dimension to language that no other form of literature does.

Poetry is linguistically rich, vivid, suggestive, and full of variety. The metrical effect, the rhyme scheme, the rhythmic elegance and "the musical thought" (Carlyle) all gather together to set out the unique qualities of poetry and the magic power of words. In addition, the variant syntax, flexible lexical choice and placement, polysemantic and associational meanings bring forth some other characteristics of poetry (see Chapter 1).

Reading poetry, as it has been claimed, not only provokes pleasure and makes people "witty" (Bacon), but inevitably involves a close engagement with the language used. Thus, there can be a real synthetic study of poetry and language which will bring benefits to both. In other words, knowledge of language can enhance one's appreciation of poetry, and in turn a reading of poetry can deepen one's understanding of language. That is why poetry may be considered a fertile



ground for language learning (see Chapter 2).

Yet in the EFL course in China, poetry is treated as a Cinderella, for the greater emphasis has been placed on prose. With respect to the content of the literary curriculum, poetry covers only a small portion, in striking contrast to the large quantity of novels and dramas (usually abridged or extracted). Even so, poetic texts tend to be left untouched during the teaching process. Many teachers, for instance, who adopt *English for Today* as their textbook will skip over the poems selected there, such as Robert Frost's *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*. This phenomenon is, to a certain extent, associated with a widespread misconception—poetry is always a hard nut, too hard to crack. Myths of this kind even go as far as to overlook the fact that some poems, written in straight language, can be pleasantly read and discussed either in the street or in the classroom. Good examples may be the love poem *A Red, Red Rose* by Robert Burns and the patriotic song *My Country* by Dorothea Mackellar. Aside from the “ill-treatment” of poetry, the teaching strategies they adopted cause poetry to be almost entirely overlooked. It happens very commonly in China that the approach to literary texts leads the students to make sweeping generalizations about their reading. A teacher, during lecture time, is inclined to ride a hobbyhorse. He usually commences a session by supplying a mass of information about the author, or hijacking plenty of second-hand remarks from well-known critics. He will subsequently continue to report a private literary experience or aesthetic appreciation. At the final stage there will be an over-generalized summary of the central theme, the social significance and the writing style. As for the examination of language, he only stops occasionally to paraphrase the “key points” or to explain the literal meanings of esoteric vocabulary in the texts studied. This type of method normally can engender such problems as the following: The students are crammed with bio-

graphical knowledge of the writer, the general idea (i. e. subject, theme, plot, characters) of the text, but they may remain in the dark about how language functions as an effective way of communication in a literary context; or the students' response to the text may be very much affected by the lecturer's dominating voice and second-hand criticism. During seminars they may not take part in any real discussions, but simply parrot back what has been said during the lectures.

The study of literature may result in a mere name-dropping acquaintance with authors, dates and titles, frequently without the reading of more than a brief fragment of an author's work in an anthology; and even worse, the students will lose their interest in the course, because the way in which literature is taught strongly violates their fundamental demands: the demands of improving the quality of their linguistic utterance rather than the training of literary criticism.

In quest of possible solutions to the above problems, we searched through all the available approaches, ranging from aesthetic appreciation to textual analysis, presented in literary publications as well as in language journals. Consequently we came out with two models that appealed to us most: the linguistic-analytic approach and the literary-critical approach. The linguistic approach treats literature as a storehouse of language diversity. It ultimately concentrates on exploring figurative speech in various contexts of use. That is, it encourages close examination in literary texts of syntactical features and the operation of language, such as lexical choice, placement, word polysemy, association and so forth (see Chapter 3).

The critical approach mainly applies to the training of reading capacity. It is chiefly concerned with a careful assessment of literary creations in terms of their historical, social, cultural, moral and aesthetic values. As one of its primary achievements, this approach provides an opportunity for systematic analy-



sis of literary art. It additionally bears, in a social sense, a didactic intention so as to maintain the continuity of life, standards of culture, and the mode of conduct (see Chapter 4).

When considering the EFL circumstances in China, both the purely linguistic and purely critical approaches seem to be somewhat limiting or one-sided in terms of the probability of application. It therefore may be desirable to cook up a mixture by blending these two parental models according to the Chinese context. Hence, attempts have been made to bring into shape an integrated approach (see Chapter 5).

To further illustrate this kind of discussion of poetry, the succeeding section will be devoted to applying the new strategy in the treatment of a sample text (see Chapter 6).

Owing to the Chinese educational philosophy and the EFL situation, text selection is, as a rule, subject to influences of the essential objectives of a literary curriculum and the Chinese socio-cultural background. Thus, the last part of the book puts forth some proposed criteria regarding text selection that are easily adaptable to the local scene. In addition, a limited number of selected poems, together with relevant notes, are offered for the convenience of those who might be interested in the tryout of this approach (see Chapter 7).

In concluding this introduction, I would like to make it clear that the mixture represented by our integrated approach hardly agrees with everyone's taste; and, since it is new and untried, it stands in need of guidance and cautious observation of its functions and shortcomings.

Chapter 1 ---

Poetry and Words

A poem begins with a lump in the throat; a homesickness or a love-sickness. It is a reaching-out toward expression; an effort to find fulfillment. A complete poem is one where an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words. . . My definition of poetry (if I were forced to give one) would be this: words that have become deeds.

(Robert Frost)

Poetry is a verbal art created through the figurative use of language. A poet, however intelligent he may be, will not write great poetry without a talent for language. The same applies to his reader; that is, he who wants to appreciate poetry must indispensably have command of the medium he employed. In poetry, the magic power of words is brought into full play regarding its vividness, suggestiveness, creativeness and so forth. Hence poetry can be viewed as an iceberg in terms of linguistic exploration where there is much more below the surface than we initially perceive.

1.1 The Definition of Poetry

Poetry enjoys a long history during the progress of human civilization. But to answer the question “What is poetry?” most of us would be prone to evade it with the words which St. Au-

gustine once used in reference to other matters—if not asked, I know; if you ask me, I know not. However, there still have been many critics and poets who have kept trying to define poetry in “exact language”. They hitherto have offered us innumerable definitions, a few of which are quoted below:

Poetry is, says Aristotle, composed of “the means as a whole—rhythm, language, and harmony—used, either singly or in certain combinations”. It is, declares Wordsworth, “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” In Shelley’s view, “poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds.” In Leigh Hunt’s phrase, poetry is “the utterance of a passion for truth, beauty and power, embodying and illustrating its conceptions by imagination and fancy, and modulating its language on the principle of variety in unity”. (Hudson, 1932:83)

According to Matthew Arnold, poetry is at bottom “a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty”. (Arnold, 1969:236)

According to Judith Wright, “poetry is above all personal, and concerned with feeling . . . It is to human feeling that poetry speaks, and as long as there is anything to answer it, poetry will go on speaking”. (Wright, 1967:xiii – xvi)

This list of definitions might be extended through as many pages as we please. But still, it will be open to controversy and can hardly lead to a final agreement. Nevertheless, the cited versions will be sufficient to exemplify the enormous difficulties in establishing a cast-iron formula to imprison the protean life of poetry. This would remind us of Christopher Brennan’s experience of inquiry into the qualities of poetry.

As a poet and a critic, Brennan had analysed a series of existing notions in his research “What Is Poetry?” He eventually came out confessing:

I have not defined poetry: I disavowed, at the outset, all intention to do so . . . If you should ask me, after all, to define poetry, I should say that it is a beautiful mystery, and perhaps the definition would be found not incomplete. (Chisholm, 1965:19)

It is fortunate for us, then, as readers, not as critics, of poetry, that we need not devote ourselves greatly to exploring either the definitions or controversies about the ideal aims of poetry. Yet it is necessary to seek a general formula to mark out some of the characteristics of poetry, otherwise we would commence on our work without any principles to guide us.

We may regard poetry as a particular kind of art with double aspects. On the one hand, it is an act of communication by means of words, but words in poetry are not convenient symbols of objects such as banknotes. They are intellectual things employed to convey multiple meanings, feelings and thoughts. Drawn from normal human speech, they can produce a musical value or rhythmic beauty when arranged in a special order. Thus, poetry is always, as Wordsworth asserted, “a collection of the language really spoken by men”. It is, however, the language raised to the power. Poetry, on the other hand, is one of the humanities, which probes the deepest human experiences—birth, love, peace, happiness, admiration, ecstasy of life, or death, hate, chaos, misery, jealousy, pain, grief, loneliness, despair, disaster of war. . . In short, poetry presents all aspects of the human condition.

If this argument still appears inadequate, we may as well set our feet upon the safe ground provided by T. S. Eliot—“We learn what poetry is—if we ever learn—from reading it.” (Eli-

ot, 1964:19)

When we read Robert Burns' *A Red, Red Rose*, for instance, we will not bother about how the poem is fashioned, that is, how it comes out of imagination. Fancy or inspiration seems to be of not much validity in our reading and appreciating it. We concentrate on the poem itself as something is there presented in printed words. We read over it with our eyes tracing the orderly-placed symbols as fast as they can. We get absorbed in the person's experience of romance, sharing his passions and vicariously responding to his emotions. "My love", "a red rose", and "my bonnie lass" all dance together to bring forth a vivid image of a sweet, beautiful young lady, whom we can see through the mind's eye. The verses like:

*As fair thou art, my bonnie lass,
So deep in love am I;
And I will love thee still, my dear
Till a' the seas gang dry.*

not only powerfully express the speaker's profundity of love, his devotion to his "lass", but nobly deepen the reader's feelings and exalt his conception of human love to a great degree.

The poem is in reality a song of love. The whole expression seems not to stream from Burns' pen and ink, but spring from his heart and blood. Transcending the physical love of body, he enthusiastically eulogizes the spiritual love of soul. As an ideal kind of love, it engenders a vast magnetic field that attracts the admirer to "come again" to see his love "tho' it were ten thousand mile".

Contrast this with Dryden's *Tyrannick Love* as follows:

*Ah how sweet is to love ,
 Ah how gay is young desire !
 And what pleasing pains we prove
 When we first approach Love's Fire !
 Pains of Love be sweeter far
 Than all other pleasures are.*

we receive two distinct messages from these two poems that describe almost the same subject: the former, as we can feel, intuitively and instinctively, focuses on a noble, passionate love of spirit, and the latter on a strong, zealous desire for the flesh.

As far as appreciation of poetry is concerned, we remain at a surface level up till this stage. Hence we shall pursue this matter further so as to come to terms with the freshness of imagery, the beauty of rhythm created by the magic power of words in a poetic context.

1.2 The Power of Words in Poetry

Under the influence of the primitive idea of language, words are regarded as “spiritual symbols” with magic power. They are invented to classify things of the living environment, and to express the nature of the human soul. Thus, nothing, whether human or superhuman, is beyond their power. They “come to play that important part in our life which has rendered them not only a legitimate object of wonder but the source of all our power over the external world”. (Richards, 1923:47)

It is lucky that we are, as modern men, free from the manacles of the old view of language which was bound up with word-magic. We consider language as man's greatest invention. The capacity of the human brain has invented a system of symbols and sounds by which people communicate feelings,

thoughts, ideas, desires, dreams, attitudes and experiences. The words of a language, as bricks and mortar, make it possible for the artists to build up a grand palace of literature, within which poetry is perhaps the centre-point tower.

Poetry is linguistically rich and vivid. As a marked feature distinct from prose and everyday speech, it says much more in the same number of words. The poet, more than any other writer or speaker, strives hard to look at words afresh as a painter does with pigments. We are told by Abercrombie, for example, that the poet

must out of the subtly adjusted sound and sense of words, contrive such a texture of intensities and complexities of meaning, of unsuspected filaments of fine allusion and suggestion, as will enable these gossamers to capture and convey into our minds just those feeling gleaming qualities of experience which elude the hold of every day straightforward language. (Bateson, 1966:34)

In poetry, words are carefully chosen and arranged in a rhythmic pattern. They therefore create sensuous imagery and musical grace, which give us knowledge and pleasure just as we get from pictures and music. Moreover, the words are often used as symbols or colours by the poet to illustrate his perspective and experience of human values covering truth, goodness, beauty, or falsehood, evil, ugliness and so on. Additionally, they are also employed to tell stories, comedy, tragedy, and the pathos of the human condition. In general, the words, under the poet's skill, all appear alive in performing their "magic power". Here we may as well look at a few basic elements of poetry to see how this "power" has been exercised.