

A Review of the Poem “Invisible Rhythm”: Visible Sound of Invisible Rhythm

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Abstract:

This poem, titled “Invisible Rhythm”, explores the interplay between visual art, music, and poetry, drawing inspiration from an exhibition. The poem mirrors the rhythmic and thematic elements of the exhibited works, such as *Phases of the Moon* and *Tidings*, embodying a dynamic, wave-like structure that echoes the artist’s emphasis on hidden rhythms. The author integrates the names of the artworks into the poem, reflecting their influence on its form and content. The poem’s staggered lines and varying rhyme schemes create a musical cadence, with repeated phrases like “you know it’s coming” serving as a thematic anchor. This phrase encapsulates the artist’s—and poet’s—response to existential challenges in art, particularly the threat of AI, asserting the irreplaceable value of human creativity. The poem also pays homage to literary figures like Shakespeare and Du Fu, weaving intertextual references into its meditation on art, transience, and resilience. Central to the poem is the concept of “invisible rhythm”—a subtle, deeply personal pulse underlying artistic creation, perceptible only through attentive engagement. The poet’s deliberate use of form, sound, and imagery reflects this rhythm, inviting readers to uncover layers of meaning beyond surface observation. Ultimately, the poem celebrates the enduring power of human expression, transcending technological and temporal challenges.

Keywords: “Invisible Rhythm”; interdisciplinary art; AI and artistic creation; polyphonic poetry

Invisible Rhythm

Chen Long¹

First summer shakes

its buds of May

Wrens are whistling

in an invisible way

¹ Chen Long (陈龙), a renowned Chinese poet, has produced a wealth of poetry and currently resides in Beijing.

You know, eventually
it's coming
You are still waiting
while wandering

Your unconscious
sense cheats your
heart

Your eyes contain
the lies
from your avatar
A polyphony rises
from woody afar

Lontano, the specious
Lorenzo
The voices of Death
are whispering
and trembling
from heart to eyes

The muse you look for
is coming
You know it's coming,
coming from God's
chess and cards

A poet is crying
for his homeland,

weeds and grass
hidden in your chaotic
strokes and scars
A cricket is cooing,
moons are sliding,
and shading
into the beauty
of fireworks blooming
in the dark

Tidings up and down,
again and again
A kid's melody is
gradually emerging
Your souls along
a promenade
are haunting

You know it's coming,
coming ever clearly
Yet your strokes and scars
turn more rough
No matter people
pass and laugh,
robots mock
and sun's phase hides
in the stock
January just sang
a hidden song
called

Rhythm, the goddess
of its own cause

Original Chinese poem:

隐律
陈龙

初夏摇散它
五月的花蕾
鸬鹚在啾啾
身消影晦

你知它最终
一定会来
你仍在等待中
徘徊

你无意识的
意识糊弄你的
心

你的眼睛
满含谎言，
自你的化身
一首复调乐响自
远方的重林

远方，似是而非的
洛伦佐
死神的声音

在窃窃私语
战战兢兢
从中心到眼睛

你苦苦寻觅的缪斯
即将来临
你知它一定会来，
来自上帝的
未解谜局

诗人暗自哭泣
为他的故国
和荒草地
隐在你的混沌
画痕和疤痕
秋虫浅唱低吟，
月亏又月盈
暗暗掩映
在美丽
烟花盛放纷争
的黑暗之际

潮汐落下
复又升起
孩童的旋律
渐渐响起
你的灵魂回萦
在海滨廊宇

你知它一定会来，
来得无比明晰
而你的画痕和疤痕
却日益粗砺
无论人如何
过而一笑，
机器人讥诮
日相隐身于
层层幽峭
一月刚刚唱了一首
不为人知的歌
名叫

韵律，一位女神
它自足玄妙 (Chen, n.d.)

This poem, like its title, contains the beauty of rhythm, with dynamic movement akin to “Tidings up and down, / again and again”, which is echoed in the form of the poem itself. Each stanza and line flows in a staggered manner, visually resembling wave after wave, advancing and retreating, in a continuous cycle. From the perspective of its creation, this poem is based on the author's visual experience at an art exhibition. The poem reflects the works observed by the poet and the corresponding emotions they evoked.

Reportedly, the author attended the opening of the exhibition by Mr. Blain, president of the Royal Academy of Arts, at the Lisson Gallery in Beijing. In the poem, the author incorporates the names of the exhibited works in order of their appearance: First Summer, Wren, Lontano (Italian for “Far Away”), Phases of the Moon, Tidings, Phase of the Sun, January Just, Promenade (which can also mean “seaside walk” or “stroll”).

It is evident that the poem's title was influenced by the theme of the exhibition and the core concept of the artist. In the large-scale work, *Phases of the Moon*, the moon transitions from full to crescent, and from light to dark. This underlying rhythm is often unrecognized amid the noisy background, but this is precisely what the artist aims to convey. During the exhibition, the author briefly interviewed the president, who emphasized the subtle rhythms behind these works. These rhythms, whether known to the viewer or not, represent the artist's sophisticated response to the ultimate challenge to human art (such as AI). Can machines discern and create such “profoundly simple” poetic thoughts hidden in chaos?

Clearly, this response to the ultimate challenge is also a high standard of self-demand in the creation process, which is what resonated with the author and gives the poem its deeper meaning. This depth requires both the observer and the reader to feel with their heart, as it is often imperceptible through mere observation. The meaning is often shaped by a combination of music, poetry, art, history, daily life, and personal experience, influenced by the creator's individual techniques. These meanings tend to be hidden behind the form of the work, difficult for others to detect. But even so, through a close reading of the text, we can still glimpse the mystery embedded within the poem.

First, the poem's form reflects two distinct features. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the staggered structure of the lines visually resembles the rhythm of music and waves. The ebb and flow of the lines—seemingly disconnected yet continuous—creates a rhythm, which the poet refers to as a “self-sufficient goddess”. The term “self-sufficient” is a Buddhist term, which, in simpler terms, means that one's inner self is so full and complete that it lacks nothing and doesn't need external validation. We can see that within the same stanza, some

lines are broken into two lines, while others are divided into three. That is, the third line continues to indent a certain space after the second line. Additionally, the number of lines and the staggered form in different stanzas are varied, like a musical composition with rhythm and variation. This form varies according to the length of the lines and their rhyme schemes, which is another formal feature.

The poem contains the following rhyme combinations: “may” with “way”; “avatar” with “afar” and “scar”; “lies” with “rises” and “eyes”; “Lontano” with “Lorenzo”; “rough” with “laugh”; “mock” with “stock”; as well as a series of “-ing” rhymes (“tremblin”, “blooming”, “emerging”, “haunting”), indicating the ongoing nature of this “unsolved mystery” (echoing the line “It will come / eventually”). Among these, “whistling”, “waiting”, “wandering”, “whispering”, “sliding” with “shading” and “coming” with “crying” and “cooing” also employ alliteration. Additionally, there are near-rhymes, such as “heart”, “card”, “dark”; “down” with “along”; “again” with “emerging”; “sang” with “song”; “call” with “cause”. These repeated and overlapping rhymes lend the poem a musical quality, creating another rhythm that resonates with the poem’s title. It is clear that the poet enjoys rhymed poetry, as seen from his self-translated Chinese version.

Behind these obvious formal features lies the poet’s subtle expression. Perhaps the three repeated lines “you know it’s coming” serve as clues to unlocking the poem’s meaning. According to the poet, this phrase actually comes from the artist himself, who said, “I know it’s coming, that day will come.” What does “that day” represent? It represents a reflection presented by this series of works: how to face the challenge and end of artistic creation (i.e., “the end”). This challenge could be from contemporary AI (as suggested by the line “robots

mock”), or from over 100 years ago when photography was invented, and people thought painting was going to “die” because humans couldn’t paint as precisely or vividly as a camera. Yet painting survived, just as it does now, because technology cannot replace what truly reflects human emotions and the soulful aspects of humanity, such as art, painting, and poetry. As the spiritual core of the poem, “you know it’s coming” provokes a serious reflection on facing the unknown challenge. What exactly is “it”? The author does not clarify, but by linking the title and the final lines to “rhythm”, he suggests that it is closely connected to human perception and construction of beauty.

The reason the poet uses “its” instead of “her”, including in places corresponding to “the goddess,” is to leave the interpretation more open. The hidden meaning of the poem is something only the author fully understands. However, it is clear from the deliberate way the poet writes and translates that he has embedded his own “cod” within the poem, like the “strokes and scars” he mentions. These marks are the poet’s attempt to retain his own “cipher” in both the English and Chinese versions.

The title “Invisible Rhythm” is the key to unlocking the author’s “cipher”. In this poem, the core expression revolves around “rhythm”— the hidden rhythm that is invisible to most. To see it requires a deep understanding of the creator’s various facets and artistic concepts: why they create and how they create. As a creator, the artist believes that it doesn’t matter if viewers don’t understand or laugh it off (as suggested by the lines “No matter people / pass and laugh”). He doesn’t care about that. What he focuses on is expressing his inner feelings, which are influenced by contemporary challenges like AI, and the circumstances and moods during creation (such as “your souls are haunting”). The artist describes his creation process as being

both connected and detached from life, like many souls wandering around the “Promenade”. The word “Promenade” also has the meaning of “wandering”, creating a double entendre. The artist wants to create something he considers higher-level, and poetry works in the same way. When the poet created this poem, he, like the artist, sought out double meanings in imagery and a breakthrough in atmosphere. The poet says that when you’re accustomed to a particular style or way of writing, you feel it has become meaningless, so you challenge yourself to break through and try new forms of expression, such as abstraction and estrangement. This creative spirit of “self-challenge” can be seen in the poet’s admiration for the German poet Paul Celan. Celan’s language is particularly “estranged”, with some referring to his style as “poetics of estrangement”, an often incomprehensible style because his poetry is entirely encoded by himself. The underlying rule of this encoding is known only to him, which reflects “rhythm”. This “rhythm” is undoubtedly hidden, so the entire poem reflects this “hidden rhythm”.

Following the “rhythm” to unlock this poem naturally leads us to the most musical section of the poem, “Lontano” (a painting created based on this piece of music), an orchestral work composed by Hungarian composer György Ligeti during his experimental phase at the Cologne Electronic Music Studio. This work, composed in the 1970s, is closely related to the “spectral music” movement, a genre that uses scientific measurements and analysis of sound spectra to create unique sound textures and colors. Spectral music is considered a “direct descendant” of electronic music. Spectral music requires repeated listening to small sound fragments, which are often overlooked at first. To fully appreciate this music, one must listen from various angles. This process mirrors our gradual exploration of this poem (and many other complex modern poems). One must pay attention to the overtones of a sound, not just its fundamental tone—

much like the vibrations produced when a metal bowl is struck. When the artist created the triptych “Lontano”, he initially painted a basic texture in the center of the middle canvas, without knowing what the final painting would look like. Then, while listening to the orchestral piece “Lontano”, he gradually developed a vision and extended the painting from the center to the edges of the newly added canvases. This sudden inspiration, creating from the heart (represented in the poem by “Heart”) and extending to the eyes (represented by “eyes”), reflects the common creative experience shared by all artists, including the poet: creation begins from the heart rather than the senses. This is the hidden meaning of the line “from heart to eyes”. It can be inferred that the poet wrote this poem while listening to the orchestral piece and viewing the artist’s painting, starting with the early summer of May, mingling his appreciation of both music and painting.

In the middle of “Lontano”, one passage closely resembles the musical rendition of Du Fu’s “Autumn Meditation” from the documentary “The Moon Reflected in Water”, directed by Ye Jiaying. The director invited a Japanese orchestra to recite the poem in a style reminiscent of Tang dynasty poetry, with a sound resembling a chant. The imperfect pronunciation of Chinese by the Japanese performers, combined with the natural acoustics, creates a novel and lasting impression. The similarity of this music may have reminded the author of the poet Du Fu, as suggested by the lines “A poet is crying / for his homeland / and the weedy grasslands.” No poet and no poem better reflect these sentiments than Du Fu and his work “Spring View”. At the same time, there is a similar chirping of crickets in the music. Once you carefully listen to the music, it becomes easier to understand the poem. Clearly, whether in painting or poetry, if you don’t understand the context (especially the state of

creation at the time) or fully experience the stimulus and motivation behind the artist's creation, it is hard to enter the world of the work. Since poetry is even more abstract than painting, if the poet's intuitive associations are based on the music listened to during the creative process, then interpreting the poem must involve tracing the music to match the details in the work, allowing us to gradually perceive the hidden “rhythm”.

Moreover, this poem reflects the poet's deep familiarity with both Chinese and Western poetry, with multiple tributes to famous poets and lines, particularly in the poem's beginning and ending. For example, the poem opens with the line “Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,” from Shakespeare's most famous sonnet, “Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?”, which corresponds to the artwork “First Summer”. The author probably found the coincidence with Shakespeare's lines too fitting to ignore, as the poem was written in May, and thus adapted it as the opening. Furthermore, the poem's final lines, “the goddess / of its own cause”, seem to be a tribute to Emily Dickinson's famous line, “Beauty is not caused. It is.” Additionally, references to Du Fu and crickets express a subtle melancholy, as seen in the lines “A poet is crying / for his homeland / and the weedy grasslands,” which pay homage to Du Fu's famous lines, “The nation is shattered, but the mountains and rivers remain; the city in spring is overgrown with grass and trees.”

It is evident that the emotional tone of this poem is complex, much like the artworks of the academy president. The poet is not expressing panic or helplessness in the face of death, but rather an active reflection and response. However, this response is subtle and difficult to grasp, making it hard for ordinary readers to understand because it involves intricate relationships. This is why the poet refers to the poem as “polyphonic music”. Behind this “polyphony” lie

many pairs of corresponding images: “the coming it” (intentionally translated as “it” rather than “she” in the Chinese version) and “the muse seeking desperately”; “the poet” and “the cricket”; “the moon phase” and “the sun phase”, and so on. Poetry is the art of language, and the poet's meticulous attention to specific images and the overall atmosphere may only be known to the poet himself, but the final appearance of the work will undoubtedly be different. The force behind this is the “rhythm” contained within the work, and “rhythm” is precisely the soulful flag of humanity's final fortress, which AI cannot conquer.

References

Chen, L. (n.d.). 隐律 [Invisible Rhythm] [Poem].