

Poet Cinema: From Chang'an to Pasolini's World of Poetry and Film

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The animated film *Chang'an* met with both critical acclaim and box-office success after its release.¹ Many children even began, spontaneously and with feeling, to recite Li Bai's "Bring in the Wine" after the screening.² The earlier film *Full River Red* likewise took the lyric "Full River Red" as its poetic core.³ At the moment when audiences recited "Bring in the Wine" and "Full River Red" together, they entered a resonance across time and space—a demonstration of the tremendous energy that a poem can unleash. As someone who writes poetry, I could not help breaking into what Chinese internet slang calls an "auntie smile": See? Who says people today no longer read poetry? This moment has come after all!⁴ There will always be a moment when your life intersects with poetry. Poetry has, from the beginning, been a form of faith for the Chinese. For several thousand years we have relied on education through poetry, charged, as the old formulation has it, with "deepening human relations, beautifying moral instruction, and transforming customs."⁵ A Russian proverb says, "Into every line of poetry a drop of blood has fallen."⁶ I am more inclined to believe that a god dwells in every poem. The spirit of Yue Fei dwells in "Full River Red." When everyone recites it together with heart, feeling, and life itself, each person enters Yue Fei for a moment, and each person becomes Yue Fei for a moment.

Within China's several-thousand-year poetic civilization—in which poetry has served as faith, fashion, and a way of life—each person's relation to poetry is secret and absolutely intimate. Someone may ordinarily neither read nor write poetry, yet when the moment arrives, this gene fires at the slightest touch. Poetry, an exquisitely wrought and fully mature literary paradigm, dwells in the body of Chinese civilization. It bears, one might say, our most ancient lyric impulse and our most tenacious humanity.

1 The 2023 animated film is internationally listed as *Chang An* or *Chang'an* and is also known as *30,000 Miles from Chang'an*. The Chinese title, *Chang'an san wan li*, literally evokes "thirty thousand *li* from/through Chang'an."

2 *Jiang jin jiu* (将进酒) is rendered "Bring in the Wine"; "Invitation to Wine" is another established English title. Unless otherwise indicated, translations of Chinese verse in this document are prepared for the present translation.

3 *Man jiang hong* (满江红), rendered "Full River Red," is the name of a *ci* tune pattern rather than a unique poem. The lyric invoked here is traditionally attributed to Yue Fei (1103–1142), although its authorship has long been debated.

4 "Auntie smile" (*yimu xiao*, 姨母笑) is Chinese internet slang for an indulgent, delighted smile, often prompted by watching younger people or a favored romantic pairing.

5 The wording comes from the "Great Preface" to the *Mao Odes*: "The former kings used [poetry] to regulate husband and wife, perfect filial reverence, deepen human relations, beautify moral instruction, and transform customs" (先王以是经夫妇，成孝敬，厚人伦，美教化，移风俗). "Mao shi xu," Chinese Text Project, accessed July 31, 2026.

6 No authoritative source for the Russian proverb as worded in the manuscript was located in the quotation and proverb references consulted. The saying has therefore been retained as an attributed but unverified proverb rather than converted into a sourced direct quotation.

At the end of *Chang'an* appears a line that lingers in the mind: “As long as poetry remains and books remain, *Chang'an* will remain.”⁷ It offers a transcendent view of history and invites us to think about the Chinese past borne by poetry. Frederick W. Mote once made an intriguing observation about the Chinese historical imagination. In his view it is profoundly paradoxical: China is the world’s only ancient civilization never to have been interrupted; on the one hand, it possesses a historiographical tradition continuous for millennia, yet on the other, no more than five buildings from before the Tang dynasty are said to survive.⁸ In China, then, it is not architecture or material substance that bears history. On the contrary, all tangible matter has been offered up to time as a sacrifice. The true vessels of Chinese history and memory are words and poetry. As long as poetry remains and books remain, *Chang'an* will remain. Our history—our shared past—is transmitted through poetry and books and lodged in the hearts of successive generations.

Chang'an may be described as an animated Three Hundred Tang Poems. It directly quotes or quietly embeds a great many poems—perhaps as many as forty-two—enough to give viewers the experience of watching *The Chinese Poetry Competition* in a cinema.⁹ Through surrealist techniques the film depicts “worlds within poetry.” The sight of Gao Shi, Li Bai, Du Fu, and a host of other poets drinking, singing, and pursuing their ideals also reflects a range of contemporary attitudes. Even the free-spirited Li Bai, for example, resembles some young people today in seeking upward social mobility through marriage: both of his wives were daughters of former chancellors.¹¹ In the film, Gao Shi—who wrote, “Do not fear that no friend awaits you on the road ahead; under heaven, who does not know your name?”—and Li Bai—who wrote, “The great roc rises with the wind in a single day, soaring ninety thousand li”—are like the two sides of a coin. Deep within, the two young men are isomorphic: both yearn to soar to the sky,

7 An interview with the directors gives the line as “只要诗在，书在，长安就在,” literally, “As long as poetry remains, books remain, *Chang'an* remains.” “Directors Xie Junwei and Zou Jing: *Chang'an* Is Also Thirty Thousand Miles of Ideals,” *Xinhua*, August 7, 2023.

8 Frederick W. Mote’s formulation is “The past was a past of words, not of stones.” He discusses the recurrent loss and rebuilding of Chinese urban fabric, but the supplied manuscript’s precise figure—“no more than five” surviving pre-Tang buildings—was not located in Mote and remains to be verified. Frederick W. Mote, “A Millennium of Chinese Urban History: Form, Time, and Space Concepts in Soochow,” *Rice University Studies* 59, no. 4 (1973): 35–65, esp. 53.

9 The manuscript states that the film contains about forty-two poems. Contemporary reporting based on the filmmakers’ account consistently gives forty-eight. See “The Directors of *Chang'an* Explain the Film,” *Xinhua*, July 14, 2023; and “A Compilation of the Forty-Eight Poems in *Chang'an*,” *Xinhua*, July 18, 2023. The body preserves the manuscript’s number and marks the discrepancy here.

10 *The Chinese Poetry Competition* (中国诗词大会) is a nationally broadcast CCTV quiz and recitation program centered on classical Chinese poetry. The comparison is cultural shorthand for a densely concentrated public encounter with canonical verse.

11 The statement that both wives were daughters of former chancellors is biographically unstable. Modern accounts commonly describe Li Bai’s first formal wife as a granddaughter of the former chancellor Xu Yushi; accounts of the Zong marriage vary between “daughter” and “granddaughter.” The manuscript’s unqualified wording is preserved but should not be treated as settled fact. See Ha Jin, *The Banished Immortal: A Life of Li Bai* (New York: Pantheon, 2019).

accomplish great deeds, and establish a career.¹² A life of advancement by seniority, promotion, and salary increases holds no attraction for either of them, yet history carries them toward different fates. Here their grand ambitions become internalized as a heavy burden of culture—the unbearable weight of life.¹³ Viewers feel an intimate pang of recognition in all this. The legendary poets’ lives, divided between striving and “lying flat,” seem not so different from those of people today. Yet above their lives as ordinary men rises another, more transcendent life: the life of the poet, the splendor and force that cross the centuries in the lines from “Bring in the Wine,” “See how the Yellow River’s waters descend from heaven, racing to the sea never to return!” That High Tang age, so prodigal of poets, is worth revisiting across time again and again.

Return now to *Full River Red*. The film contains so many righteous men intent on assassinating Qin Hui, so many lives lost, so many years invested, and so brutal a *sijian*—a sacrificial intelligence—operation; yet in the end they do not want Qin Hui’s head. They want him to recite Yue Fei’s “Full River Red.”¹⁴ To my mind, this is the film’s stroke of genius, because it embodies precisely this sophisticated view of history. Whether a treacherous minister lives or dies is immaterial. What matters is how history is written and remembered, and how we enter that history today. The sinologist Simon Leys put the point more plainly: “The past seems to adhere to human minds more than to stones.”¹⁵ The continuity of Chinese culture is not confirmed through the immortality of material things; it can be realized only through unceasing transmission from one generation to the next. Poetry has long since become the underlying hue of the Chinese mind. “Thirty years of achievement—dust and earth; eight thousand li beneath cloud and moon.”¹⁶ The poet’s ardent blood flows in the blood of generation after generation. Poetry’s supreme beauty enters millions upon millions of hearts and shapes the temperament of a people.

Brief as they are, poems preserve a nation’s genetic code. Beyond canonical works such as “Bring in the Wine” and “Full River Red,” classical verse has appeared in many films and television dramas. Chen Kaige’s *Legend of the Demon Cat*, for example, features Bai Juyi’s

12 The *li* is a traditional unit whose length varied historically; in Tang contexts it is often approximated at about half a kilometer. Li Bai’s “great roc” (*dapeng*) also invokes the gigantic bird of the opening chapter of the *Zhuangzi*; “ninety thousand *li*” is deliberately cosmic, not cartographic.

13 The supplied text reads 宏伟的报复, literally “grand retaliation,” an evident character error for 宏伟的抱负, “grand ambitions,” which is adopted in the translation. “Lying flat” (*tangping*, 躺平) is a contemporary expression for withdrawing from relentless competition, careerism, and prescribed striving.

14 *Sijian* (死间), literally “death agent,” is the category of spy in chapter 13 of the *Sunzi* who is sent to transmit false information and is expected not to survive. The film’s plot turns this classical intelligence term into a sacrificial conspiracy extending across years. See Sun-tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, trans. Roger T. Ames (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), chap. 13.

15 The sentence is best treated as a Chinese paraphrase rather than a recoverable verbatim quotation from Simon Leys. Leys’s essay develops Frederick Mote’s contrast between a Chinese past lodged in texts and memory and a past lodged in durable monuments. Simon Leys, “The Chinese Attitude Towards the Past,” *China Heritage Quarterly* 14 (June 2008).

16 The lines are from the lyric “Full River Red” traditionally attributed to Yue Fei: 三十功名尘与土，八千里路云和月. The numerical expressions are poetic measures of career, distance, and campaigning rather than statistical claims.

“Song of Everlasting Sorrow”; New Dragon Gate Inn quotes Xin Qiji’s “Breaking the Array: A Heroic Lyric Written for Chen Tongfu”; the television drama *The Age of Awakening* quotes Du Fu’s “Thinking of Li Bai on a Spring Day”; and *Empresses in the Palace* uses the Tang poet Cui Daorong’s “Plum Blossoms.” Famous poets of the past have also become cinematic protagonists, as in Liu Rushi, *The Death of Wang Bo*, and *Xin Qiji: A Legend Forged in Blood and Iron*.¹⁷

Someone may therefore ask: “First Yue Fei, then Li Bai—who will be the next figure to set off a cultural reverberation on the big screen?” Some time ago I took part in several episodes on poetry and film for CCTV-6’s *Today’s Film Review*. The program also conducted a poll on Weibo and Bilibili: Whose life would you most like to see brought to the screen? Unsurprisingly, Su Shi led the vote, followed by Li Qingzhao and Xin Qiji.¹⁸ To generations of writers, Su Shi and Li Qingzhao have represented something like the ideal man and ideal woman. Consider Su Shi first. Everyone knows the open, untrammelled freedom of his poetry and lyrics—what magnificent ease! An incurable optimist, he seems to regard every possible worry as evidence that one’s perspective is not yet broad enough. He crossed disciplinary boundaries throughout his life: poet, prose writer, ci lyricist, calligrapher, painter, gourmet, experimental winemaker, and exceptional engineer. More important, whatever field he entered, he brought it to an extraordinary pitch of accomplishment. I remember reading Lin Yutang’s biography of Su Dongpo many years ago; the admiration in Lin’s prose surged like a mighty river. I too was astonished: How could a person be so extraordinary? Su Shi was a good elder brother, a good husband, a good judge, and even a good adversary. He and Wang Anshi alone—political enemies yet spiritual intimates—would supply enough of a “dual-male-lead” plot to keep audiences binge-watching for several seasons.¹⁹ That is the poll’s first-place choice. Now for the second, Li Qingzhao. Viewed as a whole, the history of premodern Chinese literature is almost entirely a history of men’s literature. Very few women were able to make their own voices heard. Women from ordinary families were sealed within the household; even if they wrote superb poems, those poems could not leave the women’s quarters. The few talented women who ornament the historical record were either “socialites” such as Yu Xuanji and Liu Rushi or women such as Li Qingzhao and Zhuo Wenjun, who were born into eminent families.²⁰ Li Qingzhao inherited a deep tradition of family learning, and the atmosphere at home was unusually relaxed and free. From today’s perspective, one might almost say that she was raised as a tomboy, acquiring a bold, carefree temperament and a willingness to do as she pleased. In the “first half of her life,” Li Qingzhao was dealt what Chinese card players call a pair of jokers—the strongest possible hand. Her marriage to Zhao Mingcheng, with their book-wagering, spilled tea, and conjugal

17 Established English distribution titles are used where they are readily identifiable; otherwise the film and television titles are translated descriptively. The three poet biopics at the end of the sentence have circulated under inconsistent or limited English titling.

18 An independently accessible archive of the CCTV-6/Weibo/Bilibili poll was not located. The ranking is retained as the author’s first-person account of a program in which she participated.

19 Lin Yutang’s English biography was published as *The Gay Genius: The Life and Times of Su Tungpo* (New York: John Day, 1947); *Su Dongpo zhuan* is the familiar Chinese title. “Dual-male-lead” (*shuang nanzhu*, 双男主) is a contemporary screen-industry and fandom category, not a historical designation.

20 The manuscript’s 交际花 literally means a “society flower” or socialite and is a loose modern label. Applying it jointly to Yu Xuanji and Liu Rushi compresses distinct historical identities, statuses, and periods; the translation marks that categorization as the essay’s own.

harmony, is also the most “shippable” romance of the age.²¹ The young couple often played a game possible only for top-ranking students. They would first brew a pot of fine tea, then compete to identify the book, fascicle, page, and line in which a particular allusion appeared; only the winner could drink. When Li Qingzhao won, she would crow over her victory and, in a moment of excitement, spill the tea. Centuries later, Nalan Xingde wrote the scene into a celebrated lyric: “Book-wagering made the spilled tea fragrant; at the time we thought it only ordinary.”²² History then changed its face, treacherously and without warning. The Jin armies drove south, and Li Qingzhao entered the hard mode of her life. The former tomboy became a true hero of tremendous, conventionally “masculine” mettle, writing: “To this day I think of Xiang Yu, who refused to cross eastward over the Yangzi.”²³ She then suffered her husband’s death; Li Qingzhao was only forty-six when Zhao Mingcheng died. National catastrophe and personal grief entwined around her in middle age. Yet the story of Li Qingzhao as an independent woman could never be ordinary. In later life, her divorce from her second husband became a sensational legal battle. To remarry and then divorce after a hundred days in that era demanded an astonishing price and astonishing courage.²⁴ Watching China’s foremost woman of letters “tear apart a scumbag” is also immensely satisfying. Li Qingzhao was given the script of a grand female-led drama.²⁵

Beyond these two, I personally look forward even more to seeing modern poets brought to the screen—Hai Zi, for example. It is striking that Hai Zi, long since entered the history of contemporary Chinese poetry while also “flying into ordinary people’s homes,” has astonishingly

21 The slang cluster is deliberately preserved. *Wangzha* (王炸) is the pair of jokers, normally the strongest combination in the card game *Dou Dizhu*; *CP* denotes a romantic pairing or “ship”; *xueba* (学霸) is a top-ranking student; and *dese* (嘚瑟) means to crow, preen, or show off.

22 Nalan Xingde’s lines come from “Huanxisha: Who Thinks of the West Wind, Alone in the Cold?” (浣溪沙·谁念西风独自凉). They allude to Li Qingzhao’s account, in her postface to the *Catalogue of Inscriptions on Metal and Stone* (《金石录后序》), of competing with Zhao Mingcheng to locate passages in books and spilling tea in their excitement.

23 The couplet is from Li Qingzhao’s quatrain conventionally titled “Summer Days” (《夏日绝句》). The phrase 丈夫气 literally means “the spirit of a man” and belongs to a historically gendered vocabulary of heroic resolve; “conventionally masculine mettle” preserves that register without endorsing it.

24 Zhao Mingcheng died in 1129. On a 1084 birth date, Li Qingzhao was forty-four or forty-five by modern age reckoning and forty-six by traditional East Asian count, which explains the manuscript’s figure. Her alleged remarriage, lawsuit, imprisonment, and divorce have generated a long historiographical controversy. One early narrative states that she sued Zhang Ruzhou one hundred days after the marriage. See Ronald Egan, *The Burden of Female Talent: The Poet Li Qingzhao and Her History in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 145–58; and Li Qingzhao, *The Works of Li Qingzhao*, trans. Ronald Egan, ed. Anna M. Shields (Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), xxi–xxii.

25 “Tear apart a scumbag” (*shousi zhanan*, 手撕渣男) is hyperbolic internet slang for publicly and decisively confronting a disreputable male partner. *Da nüzhǔ* (大女主), literally “grand female protagonist,” denotes a female-centered prestige or heroic narrative.

still not become the subject of a film or television production.²⁶ I especially hope Chinese cinema will dare to express images and ideas of the poet that are more modern and more cutting. To put it bluntly, China sorely lacks cinematic representations of modern poets like Pasolini. For a poet of Pasolini's extraordinary spiritual powers, both poetry and film continually address the spiritual predicament of modern people and resist their spiritual degradation. One might say that he writes poetry in images, or that he propels images through poetry. For Pasolini these may simply be different costumes, different weapons. A poet who foresaw his fate early, a poet for whom the stake seemed already reserved, his fundamental in-game ID remained "poet"; cinema may have been only his weapon, a newly purchased skin, his battle dress.²⁷

The world contains as many people who hate Pasolini as people who love him. When I first saw *Salò*, or the 120 Days of Sodom many years ago, I understood why so many people hated him. Later, after encountering his poetry—his long poem "Victory" and the astonishing volume *The Nest of Echoes*—I came to understand why so many loved him.²⁸ Pasolini possessed a terrifying degree of spiritual intensity. He is an overpowering poet: even before one has read his books or poems or watched his films, merely leafing through a chronology of his life and works can produce a feeling of suffocation. For fellow creators in particular, the sight of such productivity can be crushing. Pasolini began writing poetry at seven; by thirteen, he already considered himself "an epic poet." His works are measured not by page count but by the kilogram; anyone without enough strength could not even hoist them. His lines are like thugs freshly released from prison, weapons in hand, filled with anger and agitation, with an unnamed fear prickling at one's back, and with a tragic hue steeped in compassion, as though contracted from some unknown source. One of Pasolini's own celebrated lines explains him perfectly: "I love this world that I hate."³⁰

One feels that he is always on the point of launching a new struggle. The first thing one perceives when reading his poetry is its overwhelming pain—a pain that is not simply a sensation but, more deeply, a force. Pasolini himself once suggested that all his dreams amounted

26 "Flown into ordinary people's homes" echoes Liu Yuxi's "Black Robe Lane" (《乌衣巷》): "the swallows before the halls of Wang and Xie / now fly into the homes of ordinary people." The supplied file is undated, although a same-titled essay is cataloged in a 2025 conference volume; no exhaustive filmography was supplied. The claim that no screen work about Hai Zi had appeared is therefore retained as the author's time-bound observation, not certified as an absolute or current fact.

27 The paragraph shifts into gaming language. An "ID" is the player's basic identity or handle; a "skin" is a purchasable cosmetic appearance that does not alter the underlying character; "battle dress" extends the metaphor. The translation preserves the deliberate collision between sacrificial-poet imagery and contemporary gaming speech.

28 The full film title is *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975). "Victory" translates *Vittoria*, a long poem by Pasolini; published English renderings of the title vary with the edition.

29 The manuscript prints 《回声之潮》, "Tide of Echoes." The identifiable 2022 Chinese Pasolini selection translated by Liu Guopeng is 《回声之巢：帕索里尼诗选》, literally *The Nest of Echoes*, and this corrected title is used in the body. Liu's afterword also records Pasolini's first poetry at seven, his self-description as "an epic poet" at thirteen, and the 2,894-page, 1.7-kilogram scale of the 2003 collected poems. Liu Guopeng, "Afterword to *The Nest of Echoes*," *The Paper*, October 11, 2022.

30 The manuscript's Chinese quotation contains an extra 痛 and reads literally, "I love this pain-world that I hate." It appears to condense a passage in "The Ashes of Gramsci": "loving / the world I hate." The translation regularizes the evident textual fault while retaining the aphoristic compression. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *The Selected Poetry of Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. Stephen Sartarelli (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

to this: that he might always possess absolute force, a spiritual intensity, as though he were distancing himself from himself—though in fact it is not so simple. In his own words, it is “a universal, disheartening sense of pain.” This oppressive and universal pain binds us deeply together. Pasolini suddenly becomes our contemporary; his pain joins our present. As he himself wrote, he is “a force from the past,” and his only love lies in tradition. Yet he is no traditionalist fundamentalist. For him, the past may be no different from the future: none of us has seen antiquity, and the past is as unknowable to us as the future.³¹

This temporal relationship, full of parallelisms and paradoxes, runs through Pasolini’s work. His psychic and spiritual structure bears a subtle and uncannily attuned isomorphism to the entire historical course of the twentieth century. Both are seduced and captured by a force, both struggle with the world in ecstatic terror, and both ultimately sink into distortion, even into bloodied flesh. Pasolini’s fervor is not the fervor of the anthem. It is fervor pitched in a tragic-absurd key. Nor is it a flat heroism that consists only of high notes. It is a twisted texture capable of touching the deepest ground of many souls: a divided perception, torn beliefs, postures, discourses . . . In the realm of the spirit, he reenacts the complex process of a world continually falling. All his poems appear lucid, yet readers who listen closely will hear him appeal to an irrational voice that seems rational: understanding reality from within reality, doubting faith from within faith.

Pasolini’s language thus possesses a demonic tension. Its magic and the historical revolutions of the twentieth century might almost be described as different masks worn by a single body. With a personal spirit like a violent storm, he answered the upheavals of his age. In many passages of Pasolini I repeatedly sense a poet who knew his fate from the outset, even a poet for whom the stake had already been reserved. For many people, the defining image is of his violent death at a young age and the mystery surrounding its cause. A poet is constituted not only by his writing but by his life, his loves, and even his death. Pasolini’s fate seems like a script he wrote himself. He not only foretold the spiritual predicament and degradation humanity would face; he also seems to have discovered his own fate early on. In his poetry he writes of watching his own slaughter with perfect clarity—as though fate were continually rehearsing in his poems. The essay recalls him as writing approximately: “My entire life was spent in hiding, pursuit, and extreme fear, because at that time I possessed a morbid and absolute terror of death. I was continually tormented by the thought of ending my life by hanging myself from a hook . . .”³² It is as though his tragic ending had been scheduled from the beginning and all his evasions and resistance were preparations for it. It must be stressed that he is a poet who resolutely refuses reconciliation. This also makes him exceptionally difficult to transmit in Chinese. As one of his Chinese translators has declared, he is unique in the world of poetry, a style unto himself. He refuses, consciously or unconsciously, every form of reconciliation. To convey, in our present

31 The phrase “a universal, disheartening sense of pain” is quoted in Liu Guopeng’s account of Pasolini’s introduction to the 1970 self-selection *Poesie*. “I am a force of the Past. / My love lies only in tradition” comes from Pasolini’s “Poem in the Shape of a Rose”; the capitalization varies by translation. Pier Paolo Pasolini, “From ‘Poem in the Shape of a Rose,’” trans. Stephen Sartarelli, *Academy of American Poets*.

32 Pasolini was murdered at Ostia on November 2, 1975; the circumstances remain contested and are still widely described as unresolved. The extended quotation about hiding, pursuit, hooks, and suicide was not located in the reliable English or Chinese editions consulted; the manuscript itself introduces it with “approximately.” The “Chinese translator” subsequently quoted is not named in the supplied document and cannot be identified with certainty. See “Directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini,” Criterion Channel; and Liu Guopeng, “Afterword to *The Nest of Echoes*.”

Chinese-language context, a poetry born of such absolute refusal—a refusal of every form of reconciliation—must itself be an ordeal, a profoundly difficult and magnificent struggle.

Chinese encounters with Pasolini's cinema have likewise proceeded through several stages. To take my own case: many years ago I first watched his films out of curiosity about the forbidden. I did not yet know that films so transgressive had been made by a poet. I first bought *Salò* from a street stall selling pirated discs; then I watched his adaptations of biblical stories and his composite, total art . . . It must be said: Pasolini is a terminator of “positive energy.”³³ Only many years later, after I had read his poetry and returned to those films, did I truly understand Pasolini's cinematic world.

Pasolini's oeuvre is in fact an integral whole. What shakes me most is not an individual poem or fragment of creation but his entire mode of work: how he worked, lived, rested; how he thought the world in Pasolini's way and perceived it in Pasolini's way. This complete manner of coexisting with the world is precisely the central seduction of poet cinema. One might even say that it embodies a sadomasochistic relationship between modern people and the world. I hope to see more Chinese poet cinema in the future.

Poetry does not chase reality. On the contrary, from Qu Yuan's “Heavenly Questions” to the present, it has always created and completed reality in astonishing ways. I continue to hope that poetry, through a secret force, will reclaim this world in which perception is increasingly withering. In the past, one crucial motive power in artists was “the search,” because the world's materials were limited and the world was poor. The blue-green hues of *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* are exceptionally subtle because lapis lazuli was costly; paintings before the Renaissance rarely used blue because blue materials were scarce. Because productive capacity was limited, artists continually sought rare materials with which to construct singular artistic worlds. Today, however, we have entered the oppression of overcapacity. Information and materials rush toward us from every direction, yet the “truth” and “beauty” we need seem not to have increased at all. The future is an age in which everyone is an artist. The artist's most important work may be to select genuine nourishment from a heap of refuse, whether human-made or AI-generated—to move from postmodern “collage art” into the “art of selection” of a posthuman age. A vast, suffocating heap of exquisite garbage swiftly buries every fragment of our spare time and erases the boredom and perplexity we once possessed, even though much of what gives life value, and much of our capacity for reflection, arise precisely from boredom and perplexity. Fragmentary information consumes our attention and dilutes the intensity of our emotions. The internet has changed the cognitive habits of this generation. People no longer come into direct contact with things; instead, they build logical connections through information and thereby lose their “touch” for the world. Poetry, however, speaks directly to being. It is the antenna of “being” and a revolt against internet-based cognition. Faced with endless burial, disappearance, and attrition, poetry forged and tempered in the fire is polishing our increasingly rusted and abraded perception and restoring the human mind's capacity for intimacy. With the most fragile strokes, poets excavate the truths of life and history in the unyielding ocean of information. Literature must always allow what falls silent in real life—what is weakened, what is repressed, what is difficult to articulate, subtle, ineffable—to find its voice. Yet in recent years

33 “Positive energy” (*zheng nengliang*, 正能量) is a pervasive contemporary Chinese expression for affirmative, socially wholesome, and often officially approved moral messaging. Calling Pasolini its “terminator” is an intentionally comic reversal, not an evaluative phrase introduced by the translator.

the voice of poetry itself has almost become a form of silence. In the end, we will still discover that poetry and beauty are among the most tenacious basic needs of human nature.

Poetry's "selection" of the present is never immediately effective; it may be understood only years later. Many years from now, people will see the history selected by poets—its absurdity and turbulence, and the continuing growth of its prophecies in the future. Today, when the bonds that hold human communities together have already fractured, poets still attempt to make a broad historical response to the emotional and moral experience of our age. In poetry, we recognize both the beloved and ourselves, and choose the way we ourselves will live through this war.