



## The Dionysian Spirit Reflected in *Bringing in the Wine*

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### Abstract

The poems of Li Bai are extremely gigantic and vigorous, and also full of emotions, which provide us an aesthetic space to think. Through the natural and unrestrained quality that reflected in his poems, people can not help thinking of the Dionysian spirit of Nietzsche. Although there are lots of differences between the oriental and occidental cultures, it still can find something in common, which might be accepted as an angle to understand the Poetry written by Li Bai. With the comparison between the Dionysian spirit and the emotions that reflected in *Bringing in the Wine*, people could appreciate the tragic aesthetics that existed in his poems.

**Key words:** Dionysian spirit; *Bringing in the Wine*; Life consciousness

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### INTRODUCTION

Li Bai was the most prestigious Romantic poet of Tang Dynasty, and he was called “fallen fairy” by He Zhizhang because the admiration of his outstanding talent, then Li Bai was well known as the “poetic genius” around China. Inadvertently, this “name” is always given people the impression that Li Bai was an immortal who was otherworldly, however, when think it carefully, people can out find that this impression has a certain relationship

with his fondness of liquor. Underlying the stimulation of alcohol, human being’s neural cells are paralyzed and the emotions are amplified, and in this situation people can express their inner feelings cynically, and write out many earth-shaking masterpieces. In addition, when a poet has some creative impulses, he can achieve an ecstasy state in inspiration with the help of liquor. As Plato had said, “without the poetic ecstasy of God, no matter who knocks at the poetry’s door, he and his poetry will always stand outside it.” There are lots of poems that are referring to drinking in Li Bai’s works, what’s more, his ideas and thoughts are filled with the madness which was existed in Dionysian, in other words, he might be the Dionysus described by Nietzsche.

### 1. THE DIONYSIAN SPIRIT

Dionysian spirit was put forward by Schiller, but Nietzsche made a full development of it and then the spirit of Dionysus became a core concept in the western philosophy. The earliest explanation of Dionysian spirit was in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this book, Nietzsche pointed out that:

The continuous evolution of art is bound up with the Apolline and the Dionysiac in much the same way as reproduction depends on there being two sexes which co-exist in a state of perpetual conflict interrupted only occasionally by periods of reconciliation. (Nietzsche, 1999)

Besides, in *Ecce Homo, How One Becomes What One Is* and *Twilight of the Idols* he also declared explicitly that: he was a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus.

Dionysus and Apollo are personages in the ancient Greek mythology. Dionysus lived a wandering life because of the persecution of Hera, although the days for escaping was extremely painful, it brought him lots of excitement, intoxication and crazy at the same time. So the ritual of Dionysian was very special: People got together with singing and dancing crazily, and indulged their lust; they

had to stimulate emotions and even achieved a state of madness; and their pursuit for the spiritual satisfaction and gaiety from the ecstasy. So, in the eyes of Nietzsche, the Dionysian spirit symbolized indulgence, it was a state of mania that intertwined pain and pleasure, and was a formation of life which was experienced in the struggle or indulgence. Apollo was the god of light and also the god of plastic arts, who covered the world with beautiful brilliance. So in the ancient Greek, when held the ritual of Apollonian, there would be many neat ranks consisted of numerous boys and girls arming with laurel and elegantly moved towards the Temple of Apollo, which showed people a solemn appearance and a holy sense of beauty. So Nietzsche considered that the Apollonian spirit represented a beautiful illusion that had disguised its sincere appearance, rather than a real world. Therefore, Nietzsche preferred to admire Dionysus in the deep mind, who played a more important role in the tragedy of ancient Greek, while Apollonian was only a harmony force to adjust him. The world of Dionysus was more authentic and humanistic than that of Apollonian. Dionysus created a world that was composed of inebriation and mad, which could put the soul into a drunken state. Besides, in this situation, the rational factors had been retired, while the instinct emotions had been inspired, and then people could get completely free from it. In a word, people would enjoy the pleasure and satisfaction that could not receive in real society from this original vitality.

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## 2. THE REFLECTION IN *BRINGING IN THE WINE*

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Li Bai indulged in drinking all his life. In *The Song of Xiangyang*, he wrote that: It has thirty-six thousand days in a century, and it should drink three hundred cups one day. In addition, he even came up with the idea that he could live or die for drinking. From his poems and thoughts, it can be known that Li Bai had a special fondness of wine. However, instead of saying that Li Bai had a heartfelt love for liquor, it seemed to be that drinking was his negation to the tragic life. He had been eager for governing the country as well as Lu Zhonglian and Zhang Liang, and then became a recluse who would return to the mountain as soon as he had fulfilled the ambition. However, this ideal arrangement was nothing but a wishful thinking of himself, ultimately, he failed to deliver it in the cruel society. With the devastating blow to him, Li Bai gradually realized that the most simple thing whose purpose was easy to achieve was drinking alcohol, namely, he could drink it at any time if he wanted. Whereas, he was not drink for wine's sake, it is alcohol that could bring him into a maniac state, or the so called "Dionysian state", which allowed him to forget his existence and the honor and disgrace temporarily, and the pleasant sensation was more enough to let the

open-minded poet have courage to continue his life. The embodiment of Dionysus spirit has reflected in many poems, such as *Drinking Alone with the Moon* and *The song of Xiangyang*, while *Bringing in the Wine* is the most prominent expression of this spirit.

*Bringing in the Wine* was written in 752, when he failed to secure an official position in Changan where was the capital of Tang dynasty. People known that Li Bai was living in the Flourishment Age of Kaiyuan, which was a prosperous period in Tang dynasty, however, the sagacious monarch did not give him a chance to realize the ambition. Besides, by that time Li Bai had been thirty-five years old, which means that he would have had his own career, nevertheless, he had nothing. So when thought of this, he was extremely depressed, indignant and ambivalent. Helplessly, he filled the wine with frustrations and releases, and expressed them vividly in this poem. So the emotions in this poem were complicated and intricate, which was a mixture with pleasant and sorrow and with the bold and exquisite sincerity at the same time.

In the poem, Li Bai began with "the waters of the Luteous River rush down from the sky", and used the enlarging exaggeration to describe the Yellow River's majestic and spectacular. He imagined that the river was felling from the sky, which was really a grand sight. And at the second sentence, he immediately turned to: "White locks are wailed at before bright mirrors in halls high, for turning at dust into snow flakes from their morning's jet black" (Sun, 1997), he used the narrowing exaggeration to condense the thousands of years to a overnight, then took this to reveal the life's short and the time's flying, and also expressed the feeling that human being was just a dust in the universe, in which no one would remember him. In the next, he shouted loudly: "Seize the moments of content in life and make full mirth of them, let not your golden beakers stay empty to glint at the moon." It means that people should live in the moment. Since the insignificant of life was an irreparable tragedy, why not enjoy the immediate pleasures with the golden cup and wine? In other words, Li Bai was living in a frustrating life, it was the alcohol that could let him forget the miserable suffering, the coins and the social status. After that, on one hand, he shouted that all things in their being were good for something, and on the other hand, he sighed with emotion that he was willing to indulge in the unconscious drunk. In fact, it was not difficult to understand at all. Li Bai once boasted that he was a roc which could fly into the heaven, however, his talent and ambition did not get the authorities' due attentions. The completely neglecting of his supercilious self-confidence, not only declared the failure of his career, but also signified that he had isolated from the secular society in spirit, which put him into a painful and lonely situation. Consequently, he could do nothing but seek the existence

and satisfaction in the drunken state. Indeed, he made it. Although he failed in officialdom, he achieved a great success in literature and in the philosophy of life. From the emotions that had described in *Bringing in the Wine*, people can find Dionysus's shadow. They have something in common though there are some differences between the cultures, namely, both of them had pains in life and got satisfied in the drunk state, which gave them a chance to indulge themselves totally and enjoy life momentarily. Undoubtedly, it was a crazy attitude towards life in most people's opinion, while in the eyes of Nietzsche, it's the most important factor in the development of the ancient Greek tragic art.

Seen from the angle of art, the poem started with a great momentum, and ended in a sorrowful tone, besides, the emotions in the whole chapters were checkered: It turned bold into indignant, then turned into madness, and turned into melancholy in the end. This was the exclusive sorrow of Li Bai, which was mournful but not distressing, and a sense of awfully bold in the extremely angry. But it had some similar aspects of Nietzsche's Dionysian spirit, or it was the embodiment of Dionysian in a sense. He attempted to *carpe diem* after realizing that life was not easy rather than escaping the reality negatively. He faced the pangs of life confirmedly instead of escaping it when he encounters the frustration in career. The lament, guffaw and sarcasm that behaved in this poem was a truly reflective of his mind. The wine gave him a stage to abreact and indulge, yet Li Bai had not given up the inner pursuit of life. He manifested his ambition in poems at times and explained them in drinking, especially in the drunk state, he showed a high confidence in his talent. He whipped all the hardships and misfortunes as mad as Dionysus, and performed the subtext of the Dionysian spirit. Namely, life is a tragedy, we should play it impressively, and do not lose the magnificent and delightful to it.

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## CONCLUSION

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Li Bai's life was full of loneliness, grief and indignation, whereas, instead of being depressed, he explored the meaning of life in a new wild incarnation. Probably we felt despicable with the inaction ideas or *carpe diem* thoughts that showed in some of his poems, Li Bai, after all, was an emotional person, not the God. He had the right to complain, indeed, he had exclaimed that the road was so broad that he could not see it, sighed that all the sages were alone and complained that the road ahead was hard. Regardless of the fact that he grumbled a lot, undergoing the endless frustrations, he chose to drown his cares in wine and immersed in the spiritual conversations with Dionysian. It was the Dionysian spirit that made his poetry a new vitality, which arouses the generous and optimistic factors in his mind. Li Bai were the Dionysus who understood life in a unique way, in which human should live with a strong vitality which would fade pains, honor and wealth, and seize the chances to get satisfied no matter how hard the life was, otherwise, people could only live in a mediocre life full of bitterness. Li Bai was tragic to a certain extent, but the tragedy was filled with aesthetics, which contained the survival value and the consciousness of life.

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