

Le Marque de Culturel Masques

By Leng Kun

The bus was speeding down a busy road. After ten minutes, it braked so abruptly that my upper torso seemed to have been pushed into the seat in front of me. A hand reached my arm in time to avoid the dooming contact. Pulling myself together, I stared at my savior—a dark-skinned, thick-lipped girl. I was amazed, as she dashed an angelic smile at me, baring her pearly white teeth.

This vividly evoked in my mind a report scene regarding the Cultural Diversity Day Celebration at the San Ramon Regional Medical Center. Beenu Chadha, dressed in traditional Indian garb to present her heritage, sipped tea from Michael Nixon's tea service made in his hometown in the United Kingdom while they chatted gleefully. The same dominates Marin preschools, where the one-of-a-kind classrooms are decorated with images of different cultures—masks from Mexico, paper lanterns from Vietnam, photographs of Japanese grandmothers and granddaughters folding origami.

Unfortunately, we're just in the eye of a hurricane. Hardly does a month go by without an example of the gap between palpable alarm at continent level and people's stubborn passivity. Aren't the French riots catastrophic enough to be a wake-up call for the civilized world—what's long been considered harmonious is no longer socially sustainable? In today's Britain, what pops into some people's heads apropos of the mere mention of Muslim will be that of terrorism, fanaticism, and extreme fundamentalists, which is a far cry from what mainstream Muslims actually represent—a religion which, if you read the Koran, is in fact a more peaceful and tolerant religion than Christianity.

So, are we putting on a new mask of historic divide, comparable to the evolutionary split that occurred when a group of pioneer hominids thousands of years ago turned their backs forever on their African homeland?

The makeup of the mask of cultures is demographic diversity, while the harsh crease is ignorance and resentment. The less we learn about other cultures and ways of thinking, the more likely we are to become victims of intolerance. Contrarily, understanding, or, as the Native Americans say, learning to walk a mile in the other person's moccasins, can erase animosity and, at least, broaden individual mind.

I'm an atheist and I always respect what other people believe in; I have celebrated religious days based on my knowledge about Muslims, Sikhs, Jews, and Hindus; I venerate Confucianism and I cherish the colonial heritage romanticized by Europeans. Absorbing a vast range of cultures and "subcultures" has enlarged the possibility of being an Easterner and Westerner.

"Yi, er, san pengyou...uno, dos, tres amigos..." the nice singing suddenly intruded upon my rumination and grasped my attention. Two boys, one with big blue eyes and curly burgundy hair, the other native Chinese, were strolling along the sidewalk, hand in hand. Above their heads, Dutch tulips cascaded over a balcony, kissing each other in the zephyr.

Je n'ai jamais rien vu d'aussi beau.

Sales Taxes Head up as Imported Goods Put off Buyers

Boom Seen in Purchasing Ebb
Good News for Consumers Falling Hard on Producers
Or Bad News for Both?

By Leng Kun

March 26, 2006—Edison Ho sits surfing the Internet when a rust brown cockroach dances across his desk. The paunchy Chinese manager swats with his hand, missing badly, then purses his lips and blows the tiny intruder from the keypad on his phone. As the creature scurries free, the manager's computer screen resumes an account of his ongoing search for the cheapest floorboard-retailing store for his new home.

This week the State Ministry of Finance claimed that it would raise sales tax on certain luxuries, ranging from magnificent cars to golf equipment, from imported make-up to once-and-for-all wood chopsticks. The policy will be brought into effect on April 1, 2006.

Sales tax, or VAT (value added tax) as it is called in Britain and the European Union, is a tax that consumers have to pay in addition to the cost of the goods they are buying. Goods are taxed differently in the exact situation, so as to balance consumption and promote the development of economy in China.

Sales tax is rising across the country, squeezing individuals who are faced with high floorboard and car prices after a deep ten-year slump.

The turnaround appears to be a sign that the boom in floorboards and cars is coming up, as homes will become more expensive in metropolitan areas after the deadline of April 1.

Mr. Zhang Bin, a professor at the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Technology, predicted on March 25 that the furnishing boom would be reaching a peak in the following week. The previously median sales tax on floorboards and cars would rise considerably, said Zhang.

Still, the number of new luxury cars sold continued to grow, and economists cautioned that it might have little effect on the life of the petit bourgeois, reducing the confidence of the populace instead.

Sales tax on luxuries will rise by at least 15 percent, according to released statistics from the State Ministry of Finance. Only the prices of oil, medicine, and tobacco remain unchanged.

For example, at present, a Malbelline mascara stick costs RMB 98 *yuan*, and best of all, customers may get additional gifts at occasions like lipsticks. However, by April 1, the enticements will have shrunk to probably nothing at all, and all that a new customer receives for a bill of RMB 98 *yuan* might be a half-sized mascara stick.

Even in Shanghai—where average sales tax will rise about 20 percent, according to a rough estimate—the car boom is still going on. Most car companies have reduced the price of luxury cars and raised that of mini, economical ones. “I’m appalled at the increasing prices and what they are asking in relation to what they are giving,” said Mr. Wang, who has been looking around the car market, pinning his hopes on getting a cheap car for his family. “You are not getting what you pay for, and my hopes seem to have been dashed.”

The BMW car that he has a crush on costs almost 1.8 million, about 300 thousand or more than it did when he first looked last year, recalled Wang. Besides, the oil prices are still increasing, which will “put a heavier burden on me as a middle-income white-collar,” murmured Mr. Wang in a crestfallen tone.

In most places, sales tax on once-and-for-all wood chopsticks will also be raised, although

less in fact than on imported make-up and luxury cars. "It seems to me that forests will bottom at the end of this year," said Dr. Shang, CEO of Brijing Environment Management Company. "I can't understand why we Chinese don't use stainless steel like Koreans do, which will save a lot of woods."

Many of the biggest sales tax increases on wood chopsticks occur in cities like Chengdu, Ningxia, Lanzhou and Guizhou, where light regulation and poor awareness of environmental protection has served as a catalyst for the abuse of once-and-for-all wood chopsticks. "A handful of wood chopsticks cost me merely RMB 3 *yuan* previously. But now, I pay the same amount of money to get only a quarter of the same bunch," complained Ms. Lee, a restaurateur in the commercial district of central Chengdu, taking a break from calculating checks. "I'm afraid my business will suffer."

Ms. Chen, a loyal client of Lee's restaurant, said she was concerned that the food prices would also rise in accordance with increasing sales tax on wood chopsticks, although she acknowledged "it is a good way to curb the denudation of trees."

Not only ups, there are also downs in the new tax policy. One conspicuous example is the sales tax on motorcycles. "Around 1994, motorcycles were mainly owned by the rich, and the sales tax at that time was 10 percent. With the development of society, the boom has transferred to the countryside. Many farmers buy substandard motorcycles due to the high sales tax they can rarely afford, which has resulted in countless traffic accidents and tax evasion. Now the Ministry of Finance lowers the tax to only 3 percent. I assume it will enable a larger group of farmers to purchase standard motorcycles since the tax matters little to them then," analyzed Mr. Zhang Bin.

Nonetheless, one suspect thing is not on the list—the luxury villa. The authorities explained that "villa owners are charged property tax", a tax based on the value of the house per square meter, which keeps rising every year.

A number of experts have expressed concerns toward the new tax policy. Mr. Zhang Bin, once again analyzed that the policy was based on the egalitarianism—the rich should be charged more taxes and the poor less, and thus it aimed to bridge the gap between different classes of people. "Government should encourage people to purchase economical consumer goods and bring into their mind the outlook of scientific development, which to a certain extent will restrain corruption."

"The surge in the sales of cars, floorboards and make-up before April 1 reflects people's concerns about the increase of sales tax, which I personally hold is a good phenomenon. On the other hand, a series of problems arouse. First, some companies and retailers are likely to maintain their current prices despite increasing production costs in order to gain advantage in the market, which is obviously unfair. Second, the measure is redolent of Chinese characteristics. For example, how many officials will appear as martinets in the temptation of fortune? Third, whoever the responsibilities will fall upon, individuals or corporations? Last but not least, most ordinary workers are worried that they can afford fewer goods after sales tax is raised, which will definitely undermine their confidence. So how the domestic economy will be affected by the policy is uncertain." Mr. Zhang Bin recapitulated that "this policy is brought out for the sake of the masses, and the central government will do as little harm as possible to the people. It is to rob nobody of his purchasing power, but to restrain expenses on luxuries. The less people spend on luxuries, the less influence the measure will exert on them. For instance, if people get granite or cement rather than wooden floorboards, how can they be affected on that? Perhaps the policy is going to benefit the working class more, I think, and it's going to strike root in people's heart the outlook of scientific development." Mr. Zhang Bin finally cautioned that customers should keep cool in the hot upsurge of discount advertisements in the remaining few days before the new tax policy is

taken into effect.

Shadows Behind Fashion:

In West China, Sighs of Worry as Teenage Dropouts Increase

By Leng Kun

Xichang, Sichuan, May 2, 2006-- Stepping out of the front door, I was blinded for a moment by the white, fizzing sunlight.

It was a really warm day, an unexpected heat that bridged the cusp between spring and summer. I was on my way to the hairdresser's shop after I last did my hair four months ago.

The hairdresser's shop was in a long room above a supermarket, reached by a steep flight of stairs. There was a groove worn in each step by the customers who climbed and descended in a regular stream.

This was first time I had ever come to the place. It smelled of cigarettes and hair oil. At times the smell of popcorns would climb the stairs along with a client and when the door opened the waiting girls lifted their noses together.

"Just get that mop of mine cut," I said to my young hairdresser, who pointed at me with two fingers, a cigarette wedged between them. Then I seated myself in a light, updated swivel chair with foot pumps that kept silent as the hairdresser adjusted the height of the seat.

I watched him fish a pair of scissors out of his case and get down to his work.

To hold boredom at bay, I glanced around. Colorful photographs of female models with various fashionable hairstyles hung above a picture rail that ran along the wall. At the end of the room, a row of chairs were employed by a number of patient customers.

In front of me was a full-length mirror flanked by shelves overflowing with a mixture of plastic combs, bowls of blue liquids, shaving mugs, scissors of different sizes, hair brushes and, stacked neatly in a pyramid, ten bright red tubs of *Arch*.

I eyed my hairdresser when he trimmed my bangs.

A callow youth with spiky maroon hair. His visage was so thin that his cheekbones highlighted incongruously.

"How old are you, girl?"

I was startled by his outburst question, for he was silent for most of the time, except when he broke off from cutting and took a drag on his cigarette, sending a wisp of gray blue smoke like the tail of kite twisting into the air.

"Seventeen," I replied. "And you?"

He looked up from his work at hand and glanced into the mirror, seeing me looking back at him. He smiled. "Nineteen."

I was once again stunned. "You didn't go to a college? I thought guys your age should be in college..."

He remained speechless for a spit minute. "I dropped out of junior high at 14."

"Why?"

"I did rather bad at school. Moreover, I come from the countryside and I've got a bunch of brothers. My family could not support all of us to school. I am the second oldest and the oldest has never been to school. The younger ones are also leaving one by one after primary school."

"What—what are they going to do?" I asked.

"Do manual labor like building, or learn certain skills preparing to work as chef or hairdressers, just like me."

"So, how about your salary?"

"It depends. We obtain only 25% of the fees customers pay. The rest is for maintaining the

shop.”

“And your family approve?”

“As long as we could earn enough money to support ourselves...”

I felt a bittersweet sensation plunge in my stomach. I dashed a squint at the photographs of models with fashionable hairstyles on the walls, and fell into musing.

With its integral interests in design, from bangs to ringlets to the whole cascade of hair, pure black as well as colorfully dyed, the hairdressing industry’s contribution to people’s imagination on the head is something so ubiquitous now as to seem commonplace. Fashionable hairdressing bends the rules and exaggerates everything. What we call hairstyles have long been melted into lifestyles. We are now more and more desperately needing the vocabulary of art, of style, to describe our peculiar like for all the latest in the continual creative play of urban life.

Anyhow, it has almost never crossed anyone’s mind that dark shadows might be lurking somewhere in the glory.

“Middle school dropouts, aged from 17 to 20, from poor counties, diligent and naïve—they are at least 90 percent of my workers,” said Mr. He, an owner of a hairdresser’s shop in the commercial district of central Chengdu.

Mr. Liu, one of the renowned senior hairdressers in Xichang city, confided that he himself was merely a primary school graduate. He was capable of writing nothing except his name. “Nearly all my employees hold the same education degree,” he added. Mr. Xiao, the only worker there that had a diploma of junior high, said he was suffering from a severe stomachache. “My low pay does not guarantee me good food,” he said with frustration.

As far as I am concerned, a number of village juveniles in the poor west region of China drop out of school at an average age of 15 and begin the work of their life—dish-washing, hairdressing, etc. Approximately 63% of them are forced to leave school due to familial poverty, 27% for rather dissatisfying performances at school, and about 10% out of visceral dislike for studies, according to some rough statistics. Their income per month is usually 300 *yuan*, to a large extent robbing them not only of the sumptuous lives enjoyed by their urban contemporaries but also of the ambitions of youth.

For all the worry over the youngsters’ future, a sociology professor analyzed, “Admittedly, they will breath new life into fashion industry since they are deft and creative. Meanwhile, they might better prepare themselves for adulthood by possessing certain basic skills earlier. But what about their personality? They are still immature in both psyche and physique, to say nothing of their insufficient education and narrow views, which determines that they cannot possibly improve themselves even though they achieve huge successes in their career. I think it’s not doing much good, in that it stifles the probable development of the youth while making the overall service quality poorer; furthermore, it brings the society a surplus flow of callow attendants, which benefits little. I personally suggest that the local government regulate juvenile education in order to better improve the overall quality of the population.” Finally, the anonymous professor characterized West China’s hairdressing climate and landscape as open and permissive, like stretches of blue sea to sky, explorative and adventurous, ripe with possibility and peopled by those who sought that out. “It might leap to zenith had more people of higher quality been involved.”

When my hairdresser had finished, I hopped down from the seat and saw a cascade of hair run down the length of my shoulder, glistening charmingly in the sun. I paid 6 *yuan* to check out.

The sun was still strong when I reached the pavement outside the shop, but it was less fiery now, already beginning to drop from its zenith.

About Science

By Leng Kun

Albert Einstein is a genius that I most look up to.

Einstein was self-disciplined. A hundred times every day he reminded himself that his inner and outer life were based on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that he must exert himself in order to give in the same measure as he had received and was still receiving. He was strongly drawn to a frugal life and was often oppressively aware that he was engrossing an undue amount of the labor of his fellow-men. He also lived a simple and unassuming life, good for him physically and mentally.

Also, I admire Einstein's optimism. Schopenhauer's saying, "A man can do what he wants, but not want what he wants," had been a very real inspiration to him since his youth; it had been his continual consolation in the face of life's hardships, his own and others, and an unfailing wellspring of tolerance. This realization mercifully mitigated the easily paralyzing sense of responsibility and prevented him from taking himself and other people all too seriously; it was conducive to his view of life which, in particular, gave humor its due.

I adore his ambition. Einstein thought it was absurd from an objective point of view to inquire after the meaning or object of one's own existence or that of all creatures. And he never looked upon ease and happiness as ends in themselves. The ideals that had lighted his way, and time after time had given him new courage to face life cheerfully, had been Kindness, Beauty, and Truth. And he made his life worthwhile through the sense of kinship with men of like mind, the occupation with the objective world, and the eternally unattainable in the field of art and scientific endeavors.

Einstein's passionate sense of social justice and social responsibility had always contrasted oddly with his pronounced lack of need for direct contact with other human beings and human communities. He was truly a "lone traveler" and had never belonged to his country, his home, his friends, or even his immediate family, with his whole heart; in the face of all these ties, he had never lost a sense of distance and a need for solitude—feelings which increased with the years. He was largely independent of the opinions, habits, and judgments of his fellows and avoided the temptation to build his inner equilibrium upon such insecure foundations.

Einstein said "the most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious." Sit was the experience of mystery that made him dedicate his whole life to science.

Are You Ready for QQ Space?

By Leng Kun

What a tangled mess we weave, when we practice to, uh...set up a room. Fear not, say the arbiters of technology. Public forums, at least the ones where you speak your mind, may soon be as obsolete as wires. "Once you get a private forum, you never want to go back to being tethered to public opinions," says a senior analyst at Internet Research. "It's very addictive."

Although Blogs are capturing almost everyone's heart, "QQ Space" refers to a specified virtual room. Brought out by Tencent in early 2005, it can be operated with unprecedented ease. The "room" is made up of a variety of finite areas, ranging from "Journal", where you can share your diaries, jokes, works, and even secrets, to "Mini Hut", your design-free "home". QQ Space "infuses your desire to speak freely with your dream to furnish your own room," says Mr. Chen, a senior analyst at Tencent Group who specializes in Blogs.

According to some online statistics, QQ Space is catching on—it estimates the number of users in China will grow nearly tenfold between 2006 and 2010, reaching 32 million.

More important, the technology is getting easier to use. The operator learned from the problem that plagued the recent bout of blogs: inconvenience and uniformity. Presently, if you want to have a look at someone's blog, you will have to remember his exact Website in order to read the silent pages. To avoid that pitfall, a group of IT elites at Tencent started the QQ Space program to set a diverse blog. "Once you add someone to your Pal List, you have his blog." Plus, QQ Space now has delicate music players, which enables the users to enjoy their words with beautiful music. The most spectacular is probably the "Mini Hut", in which you can put your "bed", "desk", and whatever you can come up with, making it as "comfortable" as your own living-room. "The technology is just starting to hit its stride," says Mr. Chen.

So, how do you get your special QQ Space? One component is necessary—you must possess a QQ identity. Then click on your icon and select "QQ Space". In a split second a conversation box regarding QQ Space Download will run on your screen. Another mere click makes your new world heave into your eyes. You can type your words there, publishing or encoding; also, you are free to decorate your QQ Space with all kinds of knick-knacks offered by Tencent. Sometimes you will need transaction—QQ coins, which you use to "purchase" your room background, your photo show, and your music player, are available via QQ coin cards offered by Tencent.

"I share my secrets with my friends on my Message Board," says XiaoXiao, a senior girl at No.1 Middle School, Xichang. "It saves the embarrassment when we're face to face."

"I love the feeling of freely designing my 'home'. I can furnish it with what I can't get in real life, and the virtual transaction is of great pleasure," says another girl.

"It makes QQ ever more fascinating," says DingXue, a junior student. "Previously I could only have my icon and profile, but now I have my own free Blog along, which enables my friends to know me more. It's quite easy and cool!"

Tencent also offers monthly subscription services that allow the users to operate anywhere via mobile phones.

So, technophobes be warned: the ease and convenience of QQ Space might finally entice you into the Blog Time.

A Victim of His Self

—My View on *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

By Leng Kun

"I watched the smoke rising from the liquid as it changed color from red to purple and at last to green." Entrenous, just drink the drug and you will immediately transform into any person you like. Feel in a whirl? So do I! But after reading Robert Louis Stevenson's most famous novel, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, a magnificent story that takes readers to the very edge of madness, I have come to realize that such a thing is within the realms of possibility.

En bloc, the story is told from the perspective of Utterson, a lawyer himself and a friend to a brilliant scientist, Dr. Henry Jekyll. After relating a disturbing tale of a fiend assaulting a small girl, Utterson begins to question the odd behavior of his friend. As his investigation furthers into the life of Dr. Jekyll, Utterson uncovers a fact so harrowing that he can hardly take it in.

This breath-taking story gives me much food for thought. When the protagonist, Jekyll, encapsulates his philosophy—a man is truly two rather than one, he is commenting not only on people's dual personality but also on the society that controls him. It transpires that the pressures existing in high society of the Victorian era—an age that generally has two sides—were so great that many of the rich and the respectable lived a double life of propriety and shame. Not only did they want to break away from the restraining shackles of society, but also they longed to experience the thrill of something dangerous that was shunned by the tight moral that governed the upper class. Therefore, many people led a concealed life. The simplest example is Jekyll's alter ego, Hyde, a homophone of "hide".

Throughout this story, fragmentation of the Victorian society is frequently revealed; it finally culminates in the confrontation between the two opposing characters of Dr. Lanyon and Dr. Jekyll, although both of whom build their reputations on their achievements among elites: Lanyon is content with normal ordinary life while Jekyll, in line with the Victorian ethos of adventure in both science and daily life, aims to discover new horizons of research. He feels unprecedented pleasure and liberty in being Hyde but this is too much for the traditional ethics and mindset of Lanyon, who is shocked to death when witnessing Jekyll's transformation.

Likely, Jekyll's ambition to separate good and evil in humans is driven by discoveries of other scientists who have gained world fame, plus the doubts around him. So at the end of the story, Jekyll excuses what he has done, and his confession rapidly changes into a state of denial, vividly portraying the hypocrisy of the Victorian society. Anyhow I do not think Jekyll is a victim of his times, but rather of himself. Pressures undoubtedly existed in the Victorian society at his time, especially with the advent of many scientific discoveries. We must not, however, forget that Dr. Lanyon, who comes from the same privileged, learned background and who is under the same pressure as Jekyll, does not succumb to the cheap thrills of separating humans into two parts. Jekyll simply fools himself into a false sense of security, which is the root of his inevitable downfall. He deserves no more sympathy than anyone else in the novel and is the architect of his own tragedy.

In a way, Jekyll is a parallel to the author himself. Stevenson was born into a strong Presbyterian community in Edinburgh and frequently disagreed with his stern Calvinistic parents. In this masterpiece, he demonstrated what it was like to be tied down and compared it to the joy of being free from whatever one was suppressed by. Also, through Jekyll and his self-conflict, Stevenson conveyed the internal battle of choice that we all experience between right and wrong, good and evil.

Having once started reading, I found it difficult to put this gorgeous book down. The strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is wrapped tightly with foreshadowing events and sinister descriptions of places and characters, both of which help to build suspense as the reader prepares to venture into the dark streets of London and to better serve the theme of duality and secrecy. While enjoying the fantastic plot, I could not help but lose myself in the wonderful design of the masterpiece and admire the author's flair as a storyteller with deftness of keeping coming up with new gimmicks to astound his readers.

A quintessential Victorian novel, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* has attracted and is still charming numerous readers from every corner of the world. Just as the saying goes, "A good tale is none the worse for being told twice." The story has been adapted to films and operas time and again. Moreover, *Jekyll and Hyde* has become a synonym in terms of someone who is sometimes nice but at other times unpleasant, and the author's true skills which lie in the way he portrays Jekyll, successfully evolving him from the diligent, benevolent scientist to the brutal, inhuman criminal Hyde showing symptoms of wild indulgence has been etched on people's memories. I am sure this impressive book will stand time's test and rise like enchanting smoke to a shelf where only the best are preserved.

An Unforgettable Spring Break

This spring break, some friends told me that they had found part-time jobs and encouraged me to get one. Not wishing to idle time away, I phoned several service agencies to find out what was needed in the community. Three days later, I started my first part-time job.

The first week I was involved with a group going to a very old gentleman's home to do a total cleanup of his house and garden. When we arrived, an elderly woman greeted us at the door. I thought she was the wife, but it turned out she was the daughter. She was 75, and her father was 98! She told us what we needed to do, and we proceeded to clean the house from floor to ceiling and clean up the yard as well. It is amazing how much work a group can get down when everyone is working together and being of service to someone who really needs the help. That gentleman's house went from dirt and dinginess to a sparkling clean palace by the time we finished at the end of the day.

The thing I most remembered about that day, however, was not the great cleaning job that we did, but something altogether different. When we first walked into the house, I noticed the wonderful pen-and-ink drawings that adorned the walls in all the rooms of the house. I asked the daughter who had done them. She said that her father had, and that he hadn't taken up art until he was 80 years old! I was dumfounded: these drawings were works of art that could have easily been hanging in a museum. At that time, I was a little past 17 and wanted to do something that would utilize my creative and artistic capabilities more than being the top student of a school would allow. I had been feeling that it would be too difficult to make a change at this "key" stage of my life. Boy, did my limited belief system get expanded that afternoon!

I continued to do service projects around town for two more weeks, including completely painting someone's home and setting up a large bleacher for a song contest for challenged children. I had a lot of fun and did a lot of good. In addition to the good feelings that came from helping out others, the good feelings I shared with my partners as members of a community that cared for each other, went a long way toward creating a work atmosphere that was a joy to be part of.

Since then, I have kept my heart open and stimulated myself with that old gentleman and his works of art, which has enabled me to have a large number of good friends. And I have begun to hold a more optimistic view on life and learned to relish every minute of life.

My Original Lyrics:

(Rap)

These ideas are nightmares for Chinese parents
Whose worst fear is a child who deeply loves something foreign
Like whatever they say has no bearing
It's so cool to plant in her heart any swearing
To see her walking around with her headphones blaring
Alone in her own zone, cold and she don't care
She dances on the edge of her dream
All the sadness turns inside out
When she talks about
Her legs that never give out

'Cause she loves her dream so bad
That she stretches her arms out
But if she ever met failure she'd block it out
Determined, she's cute and she's learning a knack
Talking black, brainstorming with rock and rap
She's overcome troubles, obstacles, and many gaps
To realize her dream she's wearing many hats
And dance in the moon, the dream is like a dome
There's no control, and she just lets her emotions go
(Vocal)

(C'mon!) Sing with me (Sing!), sing for the year (Sing It!)
Sing for the laughter, and sing for the tear (C'mon!)
Sing it with me, just for today
Maybe tomorrow, she'll be reaching her dream
(Rap)

The world is changing, intertwining with wonders
In the land of dreams, a pursuer's mind is a sanctum
Only ya holy, only have one honey
Only this girl lonely, 'cause don't anyone know me
But everybody just feels like they can relate
I guess dreams are magical, they can be great
And they can upgrade, or even better they can change fate
There's nothing else I long for more on my way
Like the headstrong cats, plus the determined moths that never turn their backs
How the hell am I thwarted from my dream?
Standing on corners and porches must longing
To have a scholarship, no more missing United States
But the Rockies crucify me, the Great Lakes burn me
Disneyland turns on me, NBA is all around me
To get their eyes on every chance I have
I can't help losing myself every time I rap
So I've made myself work hard like a tight cannon
Any giggle stops at lulu.com/roseleng
That's why I didn't hesitate to write this mail
Strictly just to tell the truth that I wanna go to the USA
But all my friends have been listening to me unbelievably
So I'm twisted 'cause one side of me is telling
That I need to move on but the other side is down and crying
I know I'm nothing, but this can't stymie the power of dream
It's all critical, if my music is literal and I keep a journal
How the devil can I repeat others' essays?
I couldn't, I wouldn't be fit to
The world's full of wishes too, USA, that is a kaleidoscope I'm looking into
(Vocal)

(C'mon!) Sing with me (Sing!), sing for the year (Sing It!)
Sing for the laughter, and sing for the tear (C'mon!)
Sing it with me, just for today
Maybe tomorrow, she'll be reaching her dream
(Rap)

They say music can alter moods and talk to you
But can it pick up a dream for you and cock it too?
Those who go to America with offers are just few
But unless I try, how can I know if it's true?
See what I do, is hearing about me setting firework
I'd rather struggle all my life than live like a worm
Not that I'm just boasting myself
We young girls, of course this is affecting our future
Ignoramuses never know music is reflection of self
I don't wanna explain it, just be persevering in nature
If I failed, how can I come from practically nothing?
To be able to dream any dream that I wanna dream
That's why I sing for myself at this special moment
Just for my remote dream that shines golden
Who post pin-up pictures on their walls all day long
Materialize their favorite places and know all their bygones
Or for anyone who's ever been through struggles in their lives
So they sit and they cry at night, wishing they could fly
Till they receive a scholarship and they jump and they vibe
I know I'm nothing to the world, but I'll let the world look into my eyes
That's why I seize the moment, try to freeze it and own it,
Squeeze it and hold it, 'cause I consider these minutes golden
And maybe the world'll admit it when I'm gone
Just let my spirit live on, through my lyrics that you hear in my songs
And we can—

(Vocal)

(C'mon!) Sing with me (Sing!), sing for the year (Sing It!)
Sing for the laughter, and sing for the tear (C'mon!)
Sing it with me, just for today
Maybe tomorrow, she'll be reaching her dream
(C'mon!) Sing with me (Sing!), sing for the year (Sing It!)
Sing for the laughter, and sing for the tear (C'mon!)
Sing it with me, just for today
Maybe tomorrow, she'll be living her dream

A Father's Day in a Tea Cup

By Leng Kun

On a hot summer day, my mom, the chef of the house, refused to cook dinner. Even with the air conditioner on, it was hard not to sweat in the large wok. So, the lazy family decided to eat out. We usually liked to go to a Sichuan restaurant just two streets from our home. But that day we wanted to branch out to other places just for a new flavor. We spotted a Cantonese restaurant in a shopping complex next to a large supermarket. On inspection, the interior of the place wasn't bad and the food looked pretty good. We walked in and got a table.

The waitress pulled us over to a center table, asking us about drinks and giving us menus. Her face employed a constant look of anger and frustration on it, until she smiled. After a twinkle of smiling, her whole face caved inward again.

While drinking the tea from my teacup, I could not help but stare at the man in the line of my eyesight.

He was looking out of the door, shifting his eyes every few minutes. The only thing in front of him was a teacup and a teapot. The waiters and waitresses would question him. By the nod of his head, I guessed that he was saying that the people he was waiting for were going to come and he wasn't just making them up to stay in the air-conditioned restaurant. He kept looking out of the window; his eyebrows were furrowed, wrinkling his face even further. He was a tiny man with a mop of gray hair and little black eyes underneath a brush of just as gray eyebrows. His skin was blotted with sun blotches, turning parts of his skin darker or lighter than others.

"Do you think he's actually waiting for someone?" I asked my mom.

She shrugged and waved me off. "He probably is..."

Then came our food, two dishes at a time. We started eating. My stomach was doing cartwheels as I saw each dish. And then I saw the look on the old man's face. He was at least eighty years old. He gave me a somewhat sad face but turned away quickly before I could respond.

"Maybe we should order him something," said my mom halfway into the dinner.

The man finally ordered a bowl of soup for himself. He drank his soup slowly and watched the door, sometimes muttering to himself. I could rarely tell what he was actually saying, but by the way his face was squeezed up, I didn't believe it was anything positive.

I was most drawn in by his foot. He had his legs crossed. The leg on top dangled in the air, jiggling slightly. That foot's shoe was off, showing a gray old sock with holes all over it. He kept on jiggling that foot. And I was absolutely mesmerized for some particular reason.

He glanced over at our table every once in a while and muttered something incomprehensible. The waiters kept groaning, "Your son won't come today, just stay out of here." Time was passing by very quickly with no sign of anyone who was going to join him.

The more I looked at him, the more I feared about aging to that point on life, feeling so helpless and so creaky. When we finally get to that age where the world becomes a box of Monday through Sunday pills and less-salt and less-fat and less-everything diet, and most importantly, less-communication with our beloved children, where was life? Are we going to live each day like deserted bandages?

I feel my father is immortal right now because the end seems so far away. But, that day, I felt like I was growing so old and so fast. Later I recalled my elder neighbor, who would wait at the door next to the front door for his family to visit him. He stood from the morning until the afternoon, expectantly with a look of pure joy on his face. When his family finally did come, they only stayed for half an hour and then left the old man watching their backs as they went to their car. Afterward, he would watch another few hours before escaping back to his room for a night of solitude and memory.

It was so depressing to watch his blank face. These two old men made my heart ache with a universal sadness.

I went home that night and turned on the television, only to hear a hostess say, "Today is Fathers' Day, make a good wish for your father before going to bed..." When I closed my eyes, I could only see the old man with the torn sock and the teacup of bitter tea. Anyhow, I planted a soft prayer. "Dad, I wish

you happiness and health. Happy Fathers' Day..."

Excerpts from *In Between Mirrors*

(<http://www.lulu.com/content/254933>)

By Leng Kun

As he galloped down the winding, oak-lined road toward his destination, Polin could feel his muscles tighten. He knew the task before him would require more wisdom than force, and he asked no companions.

He took a turn on the left, and his destination came into view in front of him. Two stories tall and about forty meters long, the edifice had marble facing illuminated by streetlamps. The grandeur of the façade went perfectly with the immaculately landscaped gardens.

The insides were bathed in total darkness.

What a comfortable house...except for its owner has gone. Polin sighed silently.

He looked around. The square at this hour was as empty as the sky, the only visible souls on the far side of the road a couple of drunken teenage genies staggering away. The only light was from the dull moon, slanting over the tops of the rows of oaks.

Few things could be more impressive than the peace that descends on deserted street at night.

All attributes to the Lord's trap.

He walked up the doorsteps, his long, thin tubes snaking their way deftly into the crack between the wall and the door.

As he watched its movement, the deep sense of shame, which had left him for nearly twenty years, now returned abruptly and began haunting his soul. He turned his gaze momentarily away from the tubes, fighting the force that often dragged his mind back and locked him in gloom. The memories came like a tempest to his senses...the reek of blood, the stench of death, the cries of despair against the howling wind and the heartbreaking sobs of his mother.

Never had he stopped the battle against his sharp teeth and long tubes since his birth. *A born half-blooded vampire.* But he had never blamed the marriage of his mother, a beautiful witch, to his father, a vampire, despite the morals which had long condemned the "low-lives" of vampires and admired the ancestry of wizards, since the latter were the only humans in the magic world. Hence their relationship had become the butt of scathing criticism. When Polin was born, his mother was abandoned by her family and she could only flee to the Castle of Vampires to depend on his father, but who blamed her for the insults shot from his fellow vampires and started to feed on her blood. One night, as Polin could very well remember, after a horrific fight, his mother never got up. He stood beside his bloodless mother and felt an uncontrollable upwelling of guilt and hatred.

It is his fault!

As though his soul was inhabited by a demon, Polin grasped his mother's wand and moved to the cabin where his father was sucking up a hawk's blood with his tubes. Without any word, Polin pointed his wand toward his father's back and shouted a roar of fatal hexes taught by his mother to protect himself. With streams of blood squirting heavenward, his father cried, twisted, and rolled over on the ground in pain.

As the last dazzling flash of red light burst out from the tip of his wand, his father gave an ultimate struggle and the cabin fell silent.

After burying his mother with her wand, Polin fled the Castle of Vampires but found the outside world equally unfriendly. He was thirteen then, but he stood merely three feet, just

because of his hybrid origin. His strange appearance made him an outcast whenever he was met. Wide eyes with fright surrounded him. So he was forced to live in a cave hidden by high bushes, feeding on some plants. As time passed by, his teeth grew larger and his tubes longer, steadily sticking out of his mouth. He tried every way he could think of to rid them but in vain, which only left him with unbearable pain as if his skins were peeling away. His hopes and courage to live on diminished day by day, and finally, gathering all his remaining strength, he ran uphill when an avalanche took place, allowing the iciness permeating each of his numb cells and large masses of snow rolling him over and over downhill, eventually annihilating his body and swallowing his guilt and hatred...

I'm dead. I'm in the Hell. He thought as he opened his eyes weakly. Rays of sunshine warmed his face instead. He wondered how long he had been dead. Three days? Seven days? It mattered little. He was lying in a bed as soft as marshmallows, and pleasing fragrance emanated from around him. Food appeared by his bedside. He jammed as much as possible into his mouth, beginning to feel the flesh materializing on his bones. Then he found his teeth and tubes had disappeared. He lay back again, fog shrouding his mind. *Hallucination before torture in the Hell.* He reassured himself.

Again, he closed his eyes quietly.

It was the distant sound of sobs that awoke him. His body slowly sat up.

Somebody is being punished for his crimes. I'm the next.

He flung his legs off the bedside and staggered out of the room. The moment he entered a long corridor, the crying became instantly clearer. He saw a young woman sitting at the top of the stairs at the far end of the corridor, her head in her hands. Without any hesitation, he strode across the hardwood floor, quietly sat down beside the woman, and patted gently on her back.

The woman lifted her head slowly from her hands, her face buried in tears.

"Thank you," she said disjointedly, still sobbing.

"What happened?" Polin asked.

The woman shook her head with an undertone of sadness. A minute later, she dried her eyes and asked, "What's your name?"

"Polin." He honestly remembered his mother used to call him like this, and he had completely forgotten his family name. *A dirty name.*

The woman smiled, "I'm Lucia Truhood, a servant of the Lord of Mirrors." Her emerald green eyes glimmered.

"Where am I?" Polin's voice sounded hollow.

"In *Gritzburg*, the Lord's castle."

"How did I get here?"

"I happened to pass the hill when the avalanche took place, and I saw you rolled down. So I saved you and fed you. You've been here several days."

The half-blooded vampire felt a chord had been touched in his icy heart. He studied his young caretaker. She had a pink heart-shaped face, green twinkling eyes, and blonde straggly hair running down the length of her waist. Years had passed since anyone had shown any mercy.

"Thank you, Lucia."

Lucia gave a weak smile and stood up. Polin noted she was tall (about three feet taller than him), slender, and high-breasted, with the kind of figure and movements that suggested swiftness, smartly and attractively dressed in a blue pleated skirt and a white blouse. Patches of pink had appeared in her cheeks, as had he.

When Polin awoke the next morning, he felt much better. Gazing up at the chandelier on the wall above his bed, he could not help thinking of Lucia, and the comforting aura in her presence. Sitting up, he was surprised to find a bowl of scarlet liquid by his bedside. The nearer he

moved his nose toward it, the harder his heart was pounding.

It is blood! Lucia knows I am a vampire!

The emotion he felt was one that had deserted him for some days. Shame. Guilt. Hatred. And fear. He jumped from his bed. *Where shall I run?*

"The Lord wants to meet you," a sweet voice came from the door.

Polin turned, frightened; his face was red, squirming with shame. Lucia entered, smiling, "Origin is no shame as long as your heart is good." She indicated the bowl, "It's from a dead ox. Drink it and regain your energy."

Reassured, Polin took the bowl and swallowed in one gulp. It was not until then that he realized how thirsty he had been.

"Good. Now, the Lord's waiting for you." Polin realized he had been entranced by the sweetness of her voice when Lucia gave him an angelic smile and led him into a long hallway.

This place looks like a shadow, a ghost of former grandeur and excellence.

They stopped when Polin found himself standing at one end of a very long and splendid hall with a highly polished, dark marble floor. The peacock-blue ceiling was inlaid with gleaming golden symbols of hawks that were flying about. The walls on each side were paneled in shiny dark wood and had many gilded portraits hung on them. Every few seconds a fire would emerge from one of the left-handed frames with a soft *whoosh*; on the right-hand side, a hawk would burst out with a name on its wing once in a while. Halfway down the hall were four white marble columns standing at the four corners of a large square. At the center was a fountain, in which stood a tall, noble-looking statue of a wizard with his wand pointing straight up in the air. Glittering jets of water flew from candles around it. A few feet behind it lurked a broad black figure with long silver hair, his back to them.

"My Lord, Polin's here." Lucia moved to the figure and murmured to his ear. The figure gave a languid wave of the hand, and Polin watched Lucia leave the hallway in feline grace.

Then the figure turned around slowly. His bony face was almost shaded by his thick silver hair and mustache that ran down the back and chest of his loose-fitting black robe. His narrow penetrating eyes were like a tiny pair of crawling spiders.

He is the Lord of Mirrors? Polin gaped.

"Welcome, Polin!" The man marched his massive body fully toward the small Polin, who couldn't help recoiling as he gazed into the man's menacing eyes.

"Y-yes, Lord."

The hoary man stretched out his right hand. Polin took it and felt a thin palm close around his with much force.

"Aw, a nice man, Polin." The man had retreated his hand, his raucous laughter filling the air.

Polin watched the white-haired man's left hand drift into his robe and produced a wand.

"Open your mouth, Polin," a remote voice issued from the man.

Polin quivered, trying hard to move his lips but they wouldn't cooperate. He stood as still as a statue for a few moments, after which, his mouth opened slowly.

The man immediately pointed his wand to Polin's throat and a plume of smoke flew out. Polin felt his mouth tear apart and threw both hands to clutch his throat. His tongue was as hot as if stung by jalapenos, all the taste buds bulging with pain. Nevertheless, his gaze had been fixed upon the hoary man's eyes, which were like two small cobras, winding into his mouth and biting his throat. He wanted to yell but his larynx seemed to have been jerked, unable to pronounce any sound. Just as he thought he would be stifled to death, the excruciating pain suddenly ended. Polin loosened his hands and tears were on the verge of pouring out.

Pulling himself together, Polin stared up at the silver-haired man. The two tiny cobras

which had been etched on his vision had been substituted by a satisfied smile.

“Polin, I’ve *Mortified* your inborn weapons—your teeth and tubes. They won’t come out again unless you let them.”

Polin felt relieved, kneeling down on the tartan carpet though his body was still rigid, “Thank you, my Lord.”

The man let out a long roar of laughter and asked Polin to straighten up. His look suddenly turned stern. “Have you seen around my Great Castle, *Gritzburg*?”

Polin nodded blankly, “It’s very impressive...”

The hoary man waved his wand disapprovingly and stepped away from Polin, back to the center of the hallway.

“If you think it’s impressive, you’ll never imagine how grand it was four decades ago...” He heaved a nostalgic sigh, his tone suddenly outraged, “They ruined all the grandeur and me! Those hypocritical wizards and witches who blatantly acclaimed themselves as the Indefatigable Guard of Justice! Those who hold prejudice against non-human births!”

The last words seemed to have struck a chord in Polin’s heart, who could sense the hoary man’s shudder with fury from behind; so did himself.

The man paused as if waiting for his sudden rage to fade away. Slowly, he turned to Polin again and grabbed his shoulders with trust, “Would you like to join me in fighting for the real justice for the thousands of innocent lives who are suffering from contempt and insults like us?” He shook Polin with force as though waking him up.

This did ring a bell. The humiliating memories of his childhood suddenly flooded over him: how his parents were looked down upon, how his mother was deserted, and how he was outcast by the world...

A pulse of anger and hatred welled up inside his body, Kneeling down at the feet of the hoary man, Polin vowed in a firm voice, “Yes, my Lord, it’s incumbent upon me to fight for the well-being of the all the non-human lives. I pledged to devote my whole life and strength to this great sacred battle.”

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It was time for the battle.

In a second, the lock clicked open and he retreated his tubes at once.

Polin exhaled, telling himself to clear his mind for the task at hand.

After stepping over the threshold, he shut the door noiselessly behind him. The living room was covered in total gloom, but he could see everything clearly with his vampire eyes inherited from his father.

Vampires are beloved sons of nights. Their eyes are priceless diamonds waiting to be picked up by the sky. He remembered the Lord often told him.

With a humorless smile, he glanced across the room. A maple door was set in the opposite wall, one in the left wall, and two in the right.

Polin thought for a moment and started with the room to his left. It was a gloomy, cavernous room with rough stonewalls, alongside which stood several clean cupboards. Pots and pans were visible hanging from the dark ceiling. The silence was only broken by the faint noise of gently moving water from the pipes at the foot of the wall, like low whispering. Without any clues, Polin retreated the kitchen and moved to the next room.

Soundlessly pushing the door open a few inches, Polin stretched his head and peered inside. It was as empty as the living room. A vacant bed lay still on the far side. Several chairs scattered about beside a worktable dotted by a pile of books.

It’ll be empty from tonight on. He thought. *The man who sleeps in this room died a mere while ago.*

Then Polin entered, his eyes scanning every nook and cranny for the tiniest trace of the secret box.

Where did he hide it?

Leng Kun's Research Paper

ABSTRACT

Emily Dickinson's Reluctance to Publish

The research paper concentrates on the mystery of Emily Dickinson's reluctance to publish her poems in her lifetime. Among the various explanations to this center of interests, the paper takes up the new view as the thesis that Dickinson who was in fact well aware of her worth, deliberately chose to withhold her poems from the world until they could be valued as unique artistic creations, even if this meant postponing fame until after her death. To support this thesis, the paper is developed into four major parts. The first part deals with the background of the "myth of tragic Emily" in terms of her life in brief, the myth's genesis and its revision in recent years after her death, the refutation of "unworldly" image through analysis of her poems. The second part focuses on the correspondence between Dickinson and Higginson to show Higginson's inability to recognize genius in Dickinson's poems and Dickinson's confidence in her own poems. The third part presents Dickinson's view of herself as an artist by revealing her state of mind, her reason for approaching Higginson and Higginson's effect on her. The fourth part seeks evidence directly from Dickinson's poetry to demonstrate the conflict Dickinson had to face between artistic integrity and popular recognition and her eventual determination to withhold her poems from publication in order to achieve artistic immortality. The conclusion highlights the potential and fascination in the studies of Dickinson's life and work and then restates the thesis of the paper explicitly stated in the introduction.

Emily Dickinson's Reluctance to Publish

At her death in 1886, Emily Dickinson left behind over 1,700 poems, of which only 7 were published anonymously while she was alive. Certainly then, the woman Yvor Winters called "one of the greatest lyric poets of all time" was all but unknown as a poet during her lifetime. For many years after her poems first appeared in 1890, her reluctance to publish was attributed to a supposed unconcern for worldly matters, including literary fame. Literary critics, serious biographers, and writers of fictionalized accounts of her life created an image of Emily Dickinson as a timid, reclusive, mystical thinker, who was too absorbed in personal sorrows and ecstasies to be concerned with literary recognition. And this image persists, to a great extent, in the public mind today. Since the late 1950s, however, a new view of the poet has been emerging. This view, based on close studies of Emily Dickinson's life, letters, and poetry, reveals an artist well aware of her worth, who deliberately chose to withhold her poems from the world until they could be valued as unique artistic creations, even if this meant postponing fame until her death.

Beginning in her mid-twenties, Emily Dickinson gradually retreated from the many stimulating personal relationships that had filled her early life. By her late thirties, her retirement was complete; she passed the rest of her days living with her parents and her younger sister, who managed the household. During her later years, Emily Dickinson had virtually no direct contact with anyone outside the immediate family. While she was still connected to her circle of friends, Emily Dickinson made at least one tentative attempt to find an audience for her poetry but only a handful of verses were published anonymously,

most of them in a local newspaper, and these were subjected to considerable editing. Upon the poet's death at fifty-six, her sister discovered over one thousand poems and initiated an effort to publish them. Beginning four years later, in 1890, these poems finally appeared in print.

Over the years, as her following grew, Emily Dickinson became the subject of a number of highly romanticized biographies. Her admirers were trying to establish a connection between her cloistered existence and the powerful passion that coursed through much of her finest poetry. Only after scholarly editions of her letters and poetry appeared in the 1950s were literary critics in a good position to produce an accurate picture of the poet's life and her attitude toward her art. Even so, a good deal of the mystery remains with us.

The idea that Emily Dickinson knew very little of the real world has been disputed by recent studies of her life and works. One biographer and critic, Owen Thomas, finds a remarkable number of legal, political, and financial words and expressions in her poetry. This fact leads him to conclude that Emily Dickinson "was well aware of the world outside her little room, that in fact she used the language of this outside world to create some of her best poetry". In the same vein, William Howard points out that the largest group of specialized words in Emily Dickinson's poems reflects the scientific and technological discussions of her day. Further disagreement with the image of the poet was a shy, unworldly creature comes from Clark Griffith, who sees her as a person whose sensibility was "responsive to the brutalities which life imposes on the individual, and acutely aware of the nothingness with which existence seems surrounded". If we reject the image of Emily Dickinson as a mystical recluse who had little interest in the real world, we must also question the theory that she did not publish her poems out of the same lack of interest.

Perhaps the most substantial evidence regarding Emily Dickinson's reluctance to publish can be found in her letters to a professional writer and social reformer named Thomas Wentworth Higginson. This correspondence began in 1862, after Higginson published an article in the April issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, entitled *Letter to a Young Contributor*, which offered some practical advice for beginning writers seeking to publish. As a result of reading this article, Emily Dickinson sent Higginson four poems, along with a letter containing this question, "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?" This and other early letters in their correspondence reveal the poet's interest in gaining recognition. Later correspondence with Higginson seems, however, to have dampened her hope of achieving critical praise.

Unfortunately, almost all of Higginson's letters to Emily Dickinson have been lost. Nevertheless, the main points of his answers to her early letters have been inferred by numerous critics, using the poet's replies to Higginson as the basis for these conclusions. Paul Ferlazzo, for example, infers that Higginson's response to her first letter must have included some recommendations for alternating, or "regularizing", her poems, along with a request for more of her work. Ferlazzo bases this judgment on Emily Dickinson's second letter to Higginson, which says, in part, "Thank you for the surgery—it was not so painful as I supposed. I bring you others—as you ask—though they might not differ—" The "surgery" surely refers to some changes recommended by Higginson, and Ferlazzo thinks it is significant that the poet admits that she was sending him more of the same kind, for this indicates that she did not intend to follow his advice.

In a second letter to Emily Dickinson, Higginson must have recommended that she not try to publish for the present time, perhaps suggesting that she rewrite her poems along the lines he had prescribed. This can be inferred from the reply to this letter, which reads, in

part:

I smile when you suggest that I delay "to publish"—that being foreign to my thought, as Firmament to Fin—If Fame belonged to me, I could not escape her—if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the chase—my Barefoot—Rank is better.

Those critics who believe that Emily Dickinson's reluctance to publish was a deliberate choice on her part do not take at face value her avowal to Higginson that publishing was "foreign" to her. Instead, they see Higginson's inability to recognize the genius in her desire to publish. As Richard Sewall says it, Emily Dickinson's

.... disavowal about publishing can hardly be taken literally. After all, she had sent him (Higginson) the poems in response to his article on how young writers could get their work published...what she said...about publishing could perhaps mean that, in view of Higginson's hesitance, she was renouncing her ambition to be a public poet...perhaps in the hope that some far-off Tribunal would render different and unequivocal judgment...

In suggesting that Emily Dickinson chose obscurity after Higginson's "hesitance", Sewall does not mean to imply that she was unsure of herself as a poet because of his criticism. On the contrary, Sewall states that "in her exalted conception of herself as a poet and in her confidence in her powers, she had no...reason to be deferential to Higginson...and she knew it". Thus, it was not a sense of inferiority that moved the poet to her decision. Rather it was the realization that her poems would not be accepted in the forms she had created for them and that public recognition would require her to alter them to meet public expectations. Robert Spiller, in finding that Emily Dickinson "failed to publish" because she would not accept compromise as a path to recognition, makes much the same point as Sewall:

The general reading public that asked for meter that is smooth, rhythm that is easy, and words that are limited to only one obvious meaning interested her not at all. She was willing to wait.

In this same regard, Johnson remarks that, although Emily Dickinson's early letters to Higginson do indicate an interest in publication, she is also asking for a special kind of advice. "At the time she wrote Higginson," Johnson explained in his biography of the poet, "she does not seem to be trying to avoid publication as such; she is inquiring how one can publish and at the same time preserve the integrity of one's art". This inquiry, Johnson continues, was a real concern for Dickinson because prior to her writing to Higginson, two of her poems had been published anonymously in the *Springfield Daily Republication*, an influential newspaper of that time, and both poems had been altered radically by editors to suit their sense of regularity.

Modern critics and biographers are in almost universal agreement that she was disappointed in Higginson's response to her poetry. They also agree that, as Ferlazzo puts it, the man "lacked disconcertment as to her purpose as an artist". Thomas Johnson, in his appraisal of their correspondence, concludes that Higginson, though somewhat impressed by the wording and thoughts in Emily Dickinson's poems, "literally did not understand what he was reading". By this, Johnson means that Higginson was confronted with the work of an "original genius" and was bewildered as to what to make of it. Throughout his correspondence with her, Higginson was apparently attempting to get her to write more traditional poetry, or as Johnson observes: "He was trying to measure a cube by the rules of plane geometry". There is no evidence, however, that she ever followed any of Higginson's suggestion, despite the fact that she maintained a friendly correspondence with him for many years.

For Emily Dickinson, then, the idea of revising her creations for the sake of achieving

quick—and probably fleeting—recognition was what was “foreign” to her, not recognition based on acceptance of her poems as unique works of art. This conviction comes through clearly in several of her poems, for example:

Fame is the one that does not stay
Its occupant must die
Or out of sight of estimate
Ascend incessantly—
Or be that most insolvent thing
A lightning in the Germ—
Electrical the embryo
But we demand the Flame

In commenting on this poem, Inder Nath Kher says that it does not mean that Emily Dickinson is “averse to genuine fame”. It means, he continues, “that she does not wish to be considered as writing simply for the sake of some cheap glory”. Reinforced by this poem—assuming “we” in the last line refers to the poet—is the conclusion that Emily Dickinson would rather have had “the Flame” of her artistic integrity than the “insolvent thing”, namely popular recognition.

Along with the same lines, given the deliberate decision to forgo publication rather than compromise her art, the first lines of another poem become significantly clear: **“Publication—is the auction/Of the mind of Man”**. And there can be no doubt that when she wrote the following stanza, Emily Dickinson had accepted that fact that true fame would not be hers in her lifetime.

Some—works for Immortality—
The Chiefter part, for Time—
He—Compensates—immediately
The former—Checks—on Fame—

She chose to maintain her artistic integrity and await that immortality.

The personality of Emily Dickinson will continue to fascinate those who enjoy speculating about brilliant artists whose lives were cloaked in privacy. Since she said so little about herself outside of her somewhat enigmatic poetry and her letters, the popular image of a mystical, romantic Emily is likely to coexist for many years with scholarly appraisals of her life and work. Her poetry, however, does more than create an aura of mystery about its author; it reveals a dedicated genius moved by deep, religious reverence for her craft. Yet Emily Dickinson, gifted with the power to create extraordinary works of art, also felt compelled to preserve the uniqueness of her creations by refusing to compromise in order to attain public recognition. She was willing to trust that future generations of readers would award her the fame her work deserved.

Applicant's Name: Leng Kun

Personal Statement

I'm ugly. I have a big mouth and, well, a pair of narrow eyes if I want to impress someone. If the traditional beautiful looks of Chinese women are a pair of big black eyes and a small cherry-like mouth, that means I go nearly against the traditional esthetic standard. And then there are the belles.

My appearance has always been something that has set me apart. It has helped define me. It's just as long as I can remember, I haven't liked the definition very much. Every Sunday when I was in primary school, my mother and I would watch Super Girls Song Contest. Singing with friends at home, I always imagined the booming voice of Li Xiang giving the performance by performance of my singing. But no matter how well I performed at home with friends, during school recess the stigma of "ugly kid" stuck with me while they were choosing singing teams.

Still concerned as junior high rolled along, I visited a beauty specialist. Pacing the exam room in a shaky, elliptical orbit, I worried, "What if I can't improve my looks? Will my social status forever be marked by my ugliness?" In a primary school dream, I imagined Super Girls' hostess Li Xiang's voice as she commented on the fantastic pitch I had performed when—with a start—the doctor strode in. Damp with nervous sweat, I sat quietly as she showed me the result report. The skins around my eyes were too delicate to be widened and she had no way to minimize my mouth. My looks would not be evolved.

Whoa. I clenched the handbars in frustration as I rode home. What good were my grades and honors when even my friends poked fun at the ugly kid? What good was it to pray, or to genuinely live a life of love? No matter how many singing medals I had won, could I ever be considered a truly successful singer in a big-mouthed, narrow-eyed frame? I could be smart, but could I ever be the "cute" in "cute and smart"? All I wanted was someone special to look into my eyes; all I wanted was someone to say, "I truly envy your face!"

It has been hard to deal with. I haven't answered all those questions, but I have learned that appearance is not all it is made to be. I'd rather be an ugly, compassionate person than a beautiful tyrant. I can be a belle in so many other ways: intellectually, spiritually and emotionally.

I've ironically grown prettier from being ugly. It's enriched my life. Being ugly has certainly had its advantages. While the road to my school was under construction, for example, I was always safe thanks to my scare-the-hell-out-of-you

looks. The road was steep and in the late evening dangers seemed to lurk everywhere. Yet Lucy Chang, “blessed” with looks, always managed to escape from brutal robbers around the corners. The same quality has paid off in school love affairs—I’m never bothered by goo-goo-eyed boys.

Oprah Winfrey didn’t have a pretty face, and her race and familial poverty made her life seem to hold no promise. But she was an extremely bright girl at school and today she is not just a very successful TV personality, but also a woman who has inspired many. It seems silly, but standing on the dais in front of the whole school last year I remembered Oprah Winfrey and imagined that I would one day hold a most successful TV talk show. (It helped to create a nice image through confidence.) But I could just as easily become a journalist, if not for my child—like, mouth-gaping, eyes-straining wonderment at the name below the headlines, then maybe in the hope of growing a bit nicer (the magic of photography just works that way).

Even with ordinary looks, the actor Renee Zellweger took dramatic steps toward Hollywood and earned several statuettes at the Golden Globes. Cathy Guisewite (with far-from-good appearance) constantly creates nice characters to her comic advantage. Looks have enhanced the professionalism of Juey Rong, the least attractive singer in the history of Hong Kong with an egg-like face and a tomato-like mouth. She has used that edge as a constant reminder to sharpen her singing skills and nowadays she is famous as a pop star with the most amazing strength. Their looks have put no limit to their work in the arts or music. Neither will mine.

My eyes are narrow and my mouth is big. I’ve struggled with it at times, but I believe my ugly Chinese face might win appreciation in some other countries that hold different esthetic standards. Most importantly, I’ve realized that being unattractive can’t stop me from doing what I love. It won’t stem my dream of becoming a journalist (I have even become a correspondent for *21st Century Teens*). My looks can’t prevent me from directing a movie and excelling in singing (or even dancing). With my bad-looking visage I can laugh, jump, run, dance, write, paint, help, volunteer, pray, love and cry. I can break a city record in badminton. I can write and illustrate books. I can recite William Wordsworth’s lines from *The Daffodils*. I can run a mile in under three minutes, dance like a wild monkey and be hopelessly wrapped in good paintings. I have learned that my appearance, even as a defining characteristic, is only a part of the whole. It won’t limit me. Besides, in this way I’ll never squander on costumes.

Suddenly I'm the Adult

By Leng Kun

This summer my family gathered on a seaside village for a weekend. My parents were there, my three little cousins, and me. We ate at one of those restaurants where the menu is scrawled on a blackboard held by a chummy waiter and had a wonderful time. With dinner concluded, the waiter set the check down in the middle of the table. That's when it happened. My mother did not reach for the check.

In fact, my mother did nothing. Conversation continued. Finally it dawned on me. Me! I was supposed to pick up the check. After all these years, after hundreds of restaurant meals with my parents, after a lifetime of thinking of my mother as the one with the bills, it had all changed. I reached for the check and whipped out my China Construction Bank card. My view of myself was suddenly altered. With a stroke of the pen, I was suddenly an adult.

Some people mark off their life in years, others in events. I am one of the latter, and I think of some events as rites of passage. I did not become a young woman at a particular year like 13, but when a kid strolled into the store where I worked and called me "Madam". I turned around to see whom he was calling. He repeated it several times—"Madam, madam"—looking straight at me. The realization hit like a punch: Me! He was talking to me. I was suddenly a madam.

There have been other milestones. The cops of my youth always seemed too big, even huge, and of course they were older than I was. Then one day they were neither. In fact, some of them were kids—short kids at that. Another milestone.

That day comes when you suddenly realize that all the badminton players in the game you're watching are younger than you. Instead of being big women, they are merely big kids. With that milestone goes that fantasy that someday, maybe you too could be a player—maybe not a badminton player but certainly a baseball player. I had good eyes as a kid—not much power, but keen eyes—and I always thought I could play the game. One day I realized that I couldn't. Without having ever reached the hill, I was over it.

For some people, the most momentous milestone is the death of a parent. This happened recently to a friend of mine. With the burial of his father came the realization that he had moved up a notch. Of course, he had known all along that this would happen, but until the funeral, the knowledge seemed theoretical at best. As long as one of your parents is alive, you stay in some way a kid. At the very least, there remains at least one person whose love is unconditional.

For women, a milestone is reached when they can no longer have children. The loss of a life, the inability to create one—they are variations on the same theme. For a childless woman who could control everything in life but the clock, this milestone is a cruel one indeed.

I count other, less serious milestones—like being discovered to have broken something. As the house-owner caught it was I, the culprit that had broken his windows, I sat there pretending that really responsible for penalties was for adults. I, of course, was still a kid. The owner was buying none of it. I was an independent person, an adult. She all but said, Go to the court.

There have been others. I remember the day when I had a ferocious argument with my father and realized that I could no longer shout at him. He was too small and the days when he could just pick me up and take me to my room-isolation cell were over. I needed not to shout, but to persuade and reason. He was suddenly, rapidly, older. The conclusion was inescapable: So was I.

One day you go to your friends' weddings. One day you celebrate the birth of their kids. One day you see one of their kids driving, and one day those kids have kids of their own. One day you meet at parties and then at weddings and then at funerals. It all happens in one day. Take my word for it.

I never thought I would fall asleep in front of the television set as my mother did, and as my

friends' mothers did, too. I remember my parents and their friends talking about insomnia and they sounded like members of a different species. Not able to sleep? How ridiculous! Once it was all I did. Once it was what I did best.

I never thought that I would eat a food that did not agree with me. Now I meet them all the time. I thought I would never go to the beach and not swim. I spent all of August at the beach and never once went into the ocean. I never thought I would appreciate opera, but now the pathos, the schmaltz and, especially, the combination of voice and music appeal to me.

I never thought I would prefer to stay at home instead of going to a party, but now I find myself passing parties up. I used to think that people who watched birds were weird, but this summer I found myself watching them, and maybe I'll get a book on the subject. I yearn for a religious conviction I never thought I'd want; I now exult in my heritage anyway and feel close to ancestors long gone, and I echo my mother in arguments, I still lose.

One day I made a good toast. One day I handled a headwaiter. One day I bought a sofa. One day—what a day!—I became an adult, and not too long after that I picked up the check for my own. I thought then and there it was a rite of passage for me. Not until I got older did I realize that it was one for her, too. Another milestone.

Hurry, Don't Be Late!

They will be here in a minute, surely. I'll just stare at my shoes a little while longer to pass the time. Wish I'd brought a book. Hang on, though, what if I've got the wrong day? The wrong place? Have the clocks gone back? No, damn it. I'm off home. Whoever I'm waiting for clearly lives in a different time zone from me.

I am always 10 minutes early, so if you are 10 minutes late, I've been foot-tapping for 20 minutes. I know it's not fair to hold the first 10 against you, but I just can't help myself. I never wait more than 20 minutes beyond the appointed meeting time, not for anyone, ever.

OK, that's not strictly true. I have, on occasion, lingered anxiously and heartbrokenly for up to an hour, but the bitter rage that follows is never a pretty sight. If you've made me wait that long, you will wish you hadn't bothered turning up at all.

Traffic jams, lost contact lenses, last-minute clothing catastrophe and an un-missable scene on TV all conspire to keep us from our destinations. But if it were merely a question of daily problems, we would all be late with equal frequency. So how come some people are always late and some are always on time?

If I can manage to be punctual, why can't you? Because I abandoned a still-steaming cup of coffee while you sat down to roll another cigarette. Because I splattered jam on my pants and quickly wiped it off whereas you took time to change your whole outfit. Because I switched off midway through a TV series, but you had to ride out the end, didn't you? And don't even think about blaming the traffic. How do you think I got here? By flying carpet? Late trains or slow buses just won't wash: only carelessness or arrogance can explain persistent lateness.

Let's tackle the lesser sin first. Some people are always late because they are incapable of making realistic calculations about how long it takes to do things. There are 60 seconds in a minute and 60 minutes in an hour; just deal with it. Painful as it may be, you have to accept that, as you've agreed to meet at eight and it's now a quarter to, you don't have time to phone your friend.

Much worse, though, are those with big egos. Being late is not a proof of carefree temperament. It's just rude. Deliberate lateness is nothing short of an expression of contempt.

Of course, there are some perfectly lovely latecomers out there. I just never wait long enough to find out.

Toy Renaissance Among Teens

By Leng Kun

How childish we are, when we play with, uh...toys. Fear not, say today's teenagers. Toys, at least the ones we kept in childhood to drive away boredom and loneliness, have come back. "What's wrong with us playing with toys? Once you get your favorite, you never want to be tethered on traditions," says Li Zhilong, a senior student at Xichang No.1 Middle School. "It's very addictive."

Although technological products predominate birthday presents, toys are favored by a large number of students. Approximately 22 out of 30 teenagers prefer toys as birthday gifts to anything else.

The primary reason, according to most students, is that they have grown tired with digital products such as CDs and software, which are the usual gifts. They say they want something cute and fresh, and it's toys that bring back them the joy of "the good old days". "Why not be innocent in life when it's really difficult to get through?" says a girl customer in a gift shop in Xichang.

It's admittedly no bad thing picking up the old companions. And perhaps replay the stuffed-animal conventions that often occurred in your bedroom. No one feels sad owning a whole store full of toys. When you feel tired, they comfort you; when you are down, they cheer you up. Dark days are always brightened by these lovely stuffs. Why not give a shot? But remember: don't rely too much on them—always pull yourself together!

A Book of Immortality

By Leng Kun

It is well-known that there are four great classic works in the history of Chinese literature. Among the four, *A Dream in Red Mansions* tops the list. Ever since its publication, the novel has fascinated millions of Chinese readers, those living in the author's own age—late Qing Dynasty, and the people in the modern times. What makes the novel immortal? The immortality lies in the vivid and lively portrayal of characters, its panoramic view of Qing culture and its wide social implications.

The novel, centering on the tragic love between Bao Yu and Dai Yu, contains numerous memorable characters, complicated plot and tangled conflicts. Dai Yu, the beautiful, frail and sentimental heroine, wins our decided sympathy. She sets out to seek true love yet falls victim of the feudal ideas. Wang Xifeng, a sharp-tongued astute woman, caters to the upper class and shows no mercy to her subjects. Even though the mansion houses countless elegantly-dressed young ladies, each is clearly identifiable. There is no possibility of mistaking any one. The vivid details give the characters an enduring attraction and grip the reader's imagination.

Besides the memorable characters, the novel unfolds a unique panoramic picture. On the one hand, it reveals the social structure of the feudal society, the family life of the nobles, the feudal ideas on love and marriage. On the other hand, it is interspersed with delightful descriptions of the charm of traditional Chinese medicine, cuisine, and literature. No other work, however great, contains as many beautiful lines and poems worth quoting as this one. *A Funeral for Withering Flowers*, a well-known sentimental poem composed by the heroine, has moved hundreds and thousands of readers to tears.

Not only does the work possess high literary value. The profound meaning of the work adds to its appealing power. It pictures the upper class in the late feudal period by describing the four feudal noble families. In the novel those feudal bureaucrats collude with each other for their own interests. Though the nobles live a luxurious and debauched life and hold high positions and exercise much influence in the society, they are usually good-for-nothing. The young generation idle away their time instead of learning how to run the nation. From the exposition of what the nobles are engaged in, the reader can feel the corruption and degeneration of the society. The final decline of the four families foretells the doomed fate of the feudal society.

A Dream in Red Mansions, a rational prediction of the late feudal period in China, an encyclopedia to the Qing Dynasty, has been and still will be immortal. It is enjoyed by readers at different levels. The beautiful love story will forever stir the hearts of young and romantic readers, its literary value and charm will forever fascinate the more mature and art-sensitive readers, and the social themes and cultural aspects will forever engage the interest of serious scholars. Sociologists and historians delving into the novel have now and then been rewarded with delightful findings. *A Dream in Red Mansions* is indeed a shining pearl in the Chinese literature.

Analysis of My Writing

By Leng Kun

The proof of good writing is in its power to trigger reflections of similar experiences and to provoke thoughtful thinking, no matter how trivial the subject seems to be. In this sense, my essays are mostly commonsensical yet idiosyncratic; they take up small subjects and, through the force of my artistically controlled exploring and vivid imagination, touch on matters of a large significance. Take, for instance, the excerpts from *In Between Mirrors*, my first book. The detailed description of Polin starts with an account of Polin seeing the quiet, sinister street. Then it moves on to Polin's secret actions at his destination. Then inadvertently comes his humiliating memory of childhood.

Having advanced so far, an alert reader may have picked up enough cues to have a vague sense of Polin's character—something having to do with evil. But he or she would get shock and sympathy if continuing to read.

The drift of Polin's life does not become clearer until the paragraph that begins with "*I'm dead. I'm in the Hell.*" Not only do this inferior creature's experiences reveal injustice in the magic world, but also they "cast doubt on the accepted structure of reality", as Athena Press comments. "It is in many ways not too far at all from the possibilities of our own time, and in other ways a metaphor for our own reality." The excerpts train a camera (forgive the unimaginative metaphor) on many familiar, seemingly insignificant phenomena in everyday human life, set them in a virtual world, bring them to focus, look at them through philosophical and personal lenses, and magnify their effects and catch something new.

Nonetheless, good writing should also show strong coherence. This is just what I'm weak in. Once I'm in a scene, I'm fine; once I'm writing about actions, once I'm doing dialogs, I'm OK and I can run with that. But I spend a lot of time sitting and finding out how to get from one place to the next. It's definitely critical because this is what really holds the whole together and makes it easier for readers to move on. For example, in the same excerpts mentioned above, the transition from Polin's humiliating memory back to his task in hand is not very fluid (even in some way looks awkward). I aimed to avoid leaps between present and past, but my pen failed to cooperate, and then I found the hardest thing about writing (and probably appropriate for any form of art or any huge project one takes on in life) is how to make the thought in the back of my mind flow freely. Perhaps this is partly due to my limited vocabulary, which can also be seen in my research paper. Sometimes I fail to use accurate words to describe scenes or analyze literary works, such as my description at the beginning of my research paper. Plus, I too often sketch outlines in a narrow perspective and scope, and there isn't enough narrative pull to make people go through my stories like a steamroller, despite my creative imagination and original style.

Trans-Atlantic Civilization: Old Legacies and New Ideas

By Leng Kun

What a micro world we have...and how distant we feel toward each other, especially the two sides of Atlantic after the war in Iraq. Never in history has the ocean seemed so wide that it's like a huge melt-pot in which older and more fundamental differences between Europe and the United States tangle under a magnifying glass.

These growing divisions—over war, peace, religion, sex, life and death—amount to a philosophical dispute about the common origins of European and American civilization. Both children of the Enlightenment, the United States and Europe clearly differ about the nature of this inheritance and about who is its better custodian.

Start with religion. A revival of the Christian faith is becoming predominant in many areas of civic and political life in the United States, while in Europe the process of secularization continues unabated. Even today the United States ranks top of religious-minded societies of Western democracies. In a recent Harris poll, 78 percent of Americans said they believed in God, and more than a third said they attended a religious service once a month or more. Numerous polls have shown that these figures are much lower in Europe. In the United States a majority of respondents told pollsters that they believed in angels, while in Europe the issue has long been apparently considered preposterous that no one even asks the question.

Terms like “crusade” and “axis of evil” that President George W. Bush has used and Manichaeic exclusions like his observation that “anyone who is not on our side is on the side of the terrorists”, reveal the assumption of a religious mantle made by a secular power, which in Europe has become unthinkable. Was it not, perhaps, this same sense of religious infallibility that seduced senior members of the Bush administration into a war with Iraq on the basis of information that has turned out to be false?

Other reasons for Europe's alienation from the United States are harder to define. For a want of better term, Peter Schneider calls it American narcissism.

Backlashes surged when American troops in Iraq mistakenly shot an Arabian journalist or reduced half of a village to rubble in response to the explosion of a roadside bomb. Only a fool would maintain that an occupying power could afford many such mistakes, even if it is under constant threat of suicide attacks. The success of an occupation policy—however temporary it is meant to be—depends on the occupier's ability to convince the population, by means of symbolic and material gestures, which is prepared to admit to mistakes.

The Bush administration, in its use of the language of power, has created the opposite impression—not just in Iraq. The United States obviously cannot be wrong about anything, nor does it have to apologize to anybody. In many parts of the world, people have come to believe, fairly or not, that Americans regard the life of their countrymen as infinitely more valuable than the lives of any other of the earth's inhabitants.

Of course, even in Europe only a pacifist minority denies the existence of necessary, unavoidable, justifies wars. The interventions in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan were supported by many European nations, even if some took a long time to make up their minds. European soldier took part in these wars and continue to play a part in the peacekeeping afterward.

What arouses European suspicion, though, is the doctrine of just, preemptive wars Bush

has outlined. Anyone who claims to be waging a preventive war in the cause of justice is confusing either a particular or a partisan interest with the interest of humanity. A president who makes such a claim would be arrogating the right to be the ultimate arbiter of war and peace and to stand in judgment over the world. From there it is but a short step to dismissing a basic insight of the Enlightenment, namely that human judgment and decisions are fallible by their very nature. This fallibility cannot be annulled or ameliorated by any political, legal or religious authority. The same argument goes for the death penalty.

However, animosity is not the only feature of the trans-Atlantic relationship. Europe is rightly envious of America's multicultural society. Undoubtedly the United States has produced the world's most varied and integrative culture, and resultantly it is the only one to have a worldwide appeal.

Nonetheless, an illusion emerges from the American multicultural model. Since Americans really have come from all over the world, in the United States it is easy to believe that you can know and understand the world without ever leaving the country. Those who were born and brought up in America forget that these people "from all over the world" first had to become Americans—a condition that new immigrants generally accept with enthusiasm—before they could celebrate their cultural otherness.

The impressive integrative power of American society seems to generate a kind of obliviousness to the world, a multicultural unilateralism. The result is a paradox: a fantastically tolerant and flexible society that has absorbed the whole world yet has difficulty comprehending the world beyond its borders.

These differences and irritations add up to a substantial disagreement on the joint origins of American and European civilization. Europeans think that Americans are on their way to betraying some of the elementary tenets of the Enlightenment, establishing a new principle in which they are "first among the unequal".

And Washington accuses Europe of shirking its international responsibility, and thus its own human rights inheritance.

Unfortunately, we cannot expect the news media in the United States or Europe to present a nuanced view of their dispute. In extensively reading on American and European societies I have become convinced that news broadcasts usually confirm their audiences' views: in Europe, about America, the "cowboy nation", and in the United States, about Europe, the "axis of weasels."

These disagreements will be influenced but cannot be resolved by the American presidential elections. The divisions are too deep, and Europe cannot meet the United States halfway on too many issues—the separation between church and state, the separation of powers, respect for international law, the abolition of the death penalty—without surrendering its version of its Enlightenment inheritance.

The United States also feels as strongly on other contentious issues: the universality of human rights and the need to intervene—if the United Nations is unable to act—when there is genocide or ethnic cleansing, or when states are failing.

So are we standing on the threshold of a new understanding or a new historic divide, comparable to the evolutionary split that occurred when a group of pioneer hominids thousands of years ago turned their backs forever on their African homeland?

So far it has usually been the Americans who have had to remind the Europeans of these common origins, which Europeans, in turn, have often betrayed. Maybe this time it is up to the Europeans to remind the Americans of the promises of the Enlightenment that the United States seems to have forgotten.