

# Two Poems

by [Justin Wong](#) (February 2021)



*Still Life with Violin and Flute*, Max Beckmann, 1942

## The First Musician

**The first musician** must have been an improviser,  
Who played his crafted, tree-carved harp,  
In an age before formation,  
With impromptu melodies inventing scale and rhythm.  
I oft imagine you in forests after Eden  
Carrying your flute in the calm coal-blush of dusk,  
Weaving, as a maid on her loom, sweet melodies  
to the backdrop of birds, with their counter song.

Music must be made to reflect nature,  
Where words fail us,  
There are the strings of a lyre  
With its wild notes,  
Expressing the self  
And the predicament  
Of non-existence  
We all in time will court.

Were your chords—a harmony unsung—  
A bridge to the other severed from your knowing?  
In music as in love, we are all one,  
Your songs being subversion,  
A rhetoric in which even the babe comprehends,  
A Pentecost in Babel's confusion of tongues.

Did Sethites in the pitch of night,  
Sneak softly through the sand to your grounds  
Across a dividing gulf,  
Catching the sound of your notes  
Carried as a faun through the airs of the orient,  
To sit silent in the shadows,  
Listening intently to your invented air,  
Plucked on unrecalled modes  
That were washed as sin in the grand deluge?

Doesn't all art speak of suffering?  
Was your creation born out of tales and tall tales told,  
Of truth stranger than the fiction of your song,  
Harmonised to the chords of imperceptible spheres?

The Father of your lineage was a murderer,  
He killed a man, —your uncle  
How many times removed. You don't,  
You haunt with phantoms of polyphony,  
Causing the world around you to blush,  
Revealing the essence of broken pacts.

I can imagine the songs you wrote,  
Vanishing like breath in humid air,  
Sweet psalms lost, first fragmented,  
Then like the living, to dust,  
That speak of sin and loss,  
Of the possibility of existence  
Hovered above this world of foreboding.  
He who sings, sings the songs of his Father's sins,  
In Jubal's lamentations on the lyre,  
Wailing songs of murder and passion  
Leading one to death's valley  
In the quietude of an evening calm.

All music, every agonising aria,  
Is a footnote to you, a veiled reminder  
However obscured, of the burden of being,  
The notes you plucked were ephemeral,  
Made to fade in the decay of sound;  
As your wife's face in the shadows of your tent,  
Inspiring you with a beauty that robs the poet of words,  
Like she was the forgotten first-born of Mnemosyne.

## The Telescope and the Book

**Of knowledge** and wisdom,  
The telescope, the book,  
The world of observation or intuition,  
Ways man discerns his world.  
The natural philosophers of old  
Scoured the flesh of the cosmos,  
Seeing pattern and order in beauty  
As artists labouring in lands of Moors,  
Wondering what their fates will be,  
Seen in the patterns of shifting stars,  
Uncovering treasure in the light-scattered void.  
Influences guiding man as a celestial Sherpa,  
Up the ancient, dusty hill of Kronos,  
where the universe of stars, comets and moons,

Reflect the ethereal place of angels.

The lens and book were as one to astrologers,  
Wisdom and the world of experience co-existed,  
Becoming in time severed from the other,  
a flock of birds dividing midway through a migration,  
Things born of the same source were in enmity  
Like sons nursed in Rebekkah's womb.  
Wisdom relegated to the book,  
The theologian, the church, the priest, and the laity.  
Seeing ultimate truth in the imperceptible,  
Echoing timeless truths of virtue and the ideal,  
Of the world to come outside of this one,  
Man stepping into life akin to the Father,  
Unbound by space and the death consciousness of time.  
Knowledge became the laboratory's domain,  
Whose echoes reverberated through college cloisters,  
Those believing it was a truth self-evident  
The depth of reality was limited to appearance.  
The denial of the self, sparked the fires of naturalism,  
Where the world that can't be magnified  
In spite of man's awareness of awareness,  
Is as fictive as a tale told on a stormy night.

Then was the split in worlds,  
The gnostic eternal, the pagan temporal,  
All that is, is contained within the book  
Or seen in the world of idea,  
In disregard to the origins of God's design—  
The paradisaal home from which man is in exile—  
With the sacred and the profane side by side  
Like the Messiah crucified between two thieves.  
The influence of Arcturus is a force unseen,  
The stars that burn out in entropy,  
Reveal the mystery of unpassed days,  
The physical expression of heaven,  
As the perished earth the death of man.

What is lost is contained within  
Astrology's ancient art,  
Knowledge born of wisdom  
As Eve devised of Adam's rib,  
With soul and substance unified.

The ancient ideal—  
the alchemy of the orbs—  
Prophesying our fates,  
Perished in time's progress,  
In the split between divine will  
And earthly governance,  
To return to that harmony  
One must peer at the collection of stars,  
Searching the will of God,  
Like the Magi following the celestial sign  
In the clarity of vapourless nights,  
Arriving in Bethlehem bearing gifts,  
Weary at the feet of the Lord.

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**Justin Wong** is originally from Wembley, though at the moment is based in the West Midlands. He has been passionate about the English language and Literature since a young age. Previously, he lived in China working as an English teacher. His novel *Millie's Dream* is available [here](#).

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