

William Empson's Journey to Mount Nanyue and His Poem "Autumn on Nan-Yueh"

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Abstract: William Empson, an English poet and critic, had a special experience at Mount Nanyue in Hunan, China, but this has been rarely revealed. In the period of China's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, he joined the Temporary University of Changsha and arrived at Mount Nanyue. At Nanyue, Empson, together with the faculty of the Temporary University of Changsha (later to become Southwest Associated University), thoroughly demonstrated the spirit of being content with poverty, tenacious struggle, and following one's heart wherever one is heading. More importantly, Empson at Nanyue created a modern poem, "Autumn on Nan-Yueh," which was the longest in his literary career, to record the details of his life and his thoughts on the relation of literature and politics at Nanyue. It has unique significance and deserves commemoration both from the cultural and literary perspectives.

Key words: William Empson; Mount Nanyue; the Temporary University of Changsha; "Autumn on Nan-Yueh"

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标题: 威廉·燕卜苏南岳之行及其诗作《南岳之秋》

内容摘要: 英国诗人、批评家威廉·燕卜苏在中国南岳衡山的经历鲜有文章披露。中国抗日战争期间，燕卜苏跟随长沙临时大学，抵达湖南南岳衡山执教。在南岳，燕卜苏同长沙临时大学（后成为西南联合大学）师生将安贫乐道、顽强拼搏、无问西东的精神发扬得淋漓尽致。更为重要的是，燕卜苏在南岳留下了文学生涯中最长的一首现代诗《南岳之秋》，诗中记载了他在南岳的生活细节及其关于文学与政治关系的思考，无论从文化角度，还是从文学角度看，都有独特意义，值得铭记。

关键词: 威廉·燕卜苏；南岳衡山；长沙临时大学；《南岳之秋》

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William Empson (1906-1984) was an influential English literary critic and poet. Well known for his masterpiece, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), Empson was praised as the greatest English literary critic of the 20th century. So critical is this work to modern western poetry that it is still an indispensable reference book for students in literary and arts departments of universities in America and Britain.

In the 1930s, Empson taught in China and had a chance to live temporarily at Mount Nanyue in Hunan Province. Mount Nanyue (also Mount Heng, the Southern Mountain of the Five Sacred Mountains in China) deserves a whole spectrum of flowery rhetoric such as being graceful, magnificent, mysterious, cultural, and spiritual. Its grace is embodied in the saying "overshadowing the others in China are the Five Mountains among which the most elegant is Nanyue." Apart from its gorgeous peaks, clear waters, verdant trees, and ancient temples, everything there seems so harmonious and appeasing that any conflict can be solved. Consequently, Mount Nanyue is also called the mountain of harmony.

Mount Nanyue has been the stage for numerous moving stories. As a cultural stage, for a time gathered here were also groups of universities and scholars. This paper mainly conducts a probe into Empson's journey to Mount Nanyue during China's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, thus revealing the story between the two.

William Empson's Life Experience at Mount Nanyue

Empson came to China and taught in the university mainly because he did not like the boring life in London, and it might have been quite disappointing for him to make a living by tutoring and writing articles. He even had asked the great poet T.S. Eliot to seek employment for him at the University of Cairo. In early 1937, he received a three-year contract to teach at Peking University (Haffenden 432). In the same year, he went home to visit his mother and brothers in Yorkshire and pack his things. He left London on August 12, 1937, took the train across Europe, Russia, and Harbin, and finally arrived in Beijing at the end of August. Unfortunately, Empson's arrival coincided with the outbreak of China's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. Therefore, he came to Mount Nanyue together with the Temporary National University of Changsha, which was formed jointly by Peking University, Tsinghua University, and Nankai University because of the war.

This new university was located on the former site of Jiucuiyuan Bible College

in Changsha, and a standing committee including the former presidents of the three universities—Jiang Mengling, Mei Yiqi, and Zhang Boling—was soon organized. Classes started on November 11, 1937. The main campus and Colleges of Science, Technology, and Law were located in Changsha. Banners advocating for the spirit of anti-imperialism, patriotism, democracy, and science were fluttering among buildings of the university to encourage the students. Due to Japanese air raids, the College of Literature and Arts was forced to move to the Bible College at Mount Nanyue. Eighty students and more than twenty professors arrived. As the classes started, Qian Mu, Wu Mi, Tang Yongtong, He Lin, Luo Changpei, Luo Xi, Wei Jiangong, and Chen Xueping arrived. Before long, the other nineteen professors also arrived. Their names were recorded in verse form in the autobiography of Rong Zhaozu, a professor from Peking University. Liu Wuji quoted the verse¹ in his diary at Nanyue:

What is the fun to lean over railings? (Feng Youlan)

I didn't hear much about its elegance. (Wen Yiduo)

In a leisurely manner you can still enjoy the rhythm rapid. (Zhu Ziqing)

So cherish the days with a transcendent spirit. (Ye Gongchao)

The first emperor sank the great cooking vessel in great river; is it right?

(Shen Youding)

Since the diplomatic envoy had accomplished task perfectly and bright.

(Zheng Binbi)

Three thousand royal intellectuals by the river have been prepared in vow.

(Pu Jiangqing)

And how long will prince Wuji be waiting to defeat Zhao? (Liu Wuji)

Who would be the first one to calmly take his weapon? (Rong Zhaozu)

And fight the invader in an incompletely prepared condition? (Wu Dayuan)

I find myself in the south when I wake up from a dream sound and sweet.

(Sun Xiaomeng)

Milky mist seems to be still lingering upon a tinkling rivulet. (Luo Ailan)

1 The original of the verse: 冯闲雅趣竟如何 (冯友兰) / 闻一由来未见多 (闻一多) / 性缓佩弦犹可急 (朱自清) / 愿公超上莫蹉跎 (叶公超) / 鼎沈雒水是耶非 (沈有鼎) / 秉璧犹能完璧归 (郑秉璧) / 养仕三千江上浦 (浦江清) / 无忌何时破赵围 (柳无忌) / 从容先着祖生鞭 (容肇祖) / 未达元希扫虏烟 (吴达元) / 晓梦醒来身在楚 (孙晓梦) / 皓岚依旧听泉鸣 (罗皓岚) / 久旱苍生望岳霖 (金岳霖) / 谁能济世与寿民 (刘寿民) / 汉家重见王业治 (杨业治) / 堂前燕子亦卜菽 (燕卜菽) / 卜得先甲与先庚 (周先庚) / 大家有喜报俊升 (吴俊升) / 功在朝廷光史册 (罗廷光) / 停云千古留大名 (停云楼, 教授们的宿舍)。

How the long thirsted mountains are longing for a rain! (Jin Yuelin)
 Who can to my people and the world the blessings bring? (Liu Shoumin)
 How eager I am to see resistant wars being waged with a lion's will!
 (Yang Yezhi)
 Look, swallows under the eaves may be messengers from a far sphere.
 (William Empson)
 There comes a prophecy that the blessed days may come with ease.
 (Zhou Xiangeng)
 How we hope to hear the message nice and peace! (Wu Junsheng)
 How we hope the glory to shed on my state like sunshine in the sky!
 (Luo Tinguang)
 All the names are as gorgeous as the clouds flaming high.
 (Tingyun Building, the residential building of these professors) (7-8)

In the above verse, "fenglan" in the first line is a word in the name of this professor, refers to leaning over railings; "wen" and "duo" in the second line are words in the name of this professor, refers to hearing and being many in number; "peixian" in the third line is a word in the name of this professor, refers to the elegant name of a classical musical instrument; in the fourth line, "gong" means "you," and "chao" "transcendence"; the fifth line means that "is it right for empire Qin to overthrow the Zhou dynasty" and as words in the name of this professor, "shen" means to sink and "ding" means an ancient cooking vessel with two loop handles and three or four legs, as symbol of imperial power; in the sixth line, "binbi," as a word in the name of this professor, refers to an ancient allusion about an intrepid envoy of the Zhao State who brought back a jade plate which was the symbol of power and dignity of his state; in the seventh line, "pu," as a word in the name of this professor, refers to a place by a river where prince Wuji of the Wei State supported many intellectuals; in the eighth line, Professor Liu is of the same name as prince Wei Wuji; "zu" in the ninth line, part of this professor's name, here also refers to the name of General Zu Di in the Eastern Jin Dynasty who was an eager pioneer to fight against northern invaders and had a famous weapon named Bian; "da yuan" in the tenth line, as a word in the name of this professor, here refers to reaching a perfect state; "xiaomeng" in the eleventh line, as a word in the name of this professor, refers to the daydream of Zhuang Zi, an ancient philosopher in the Chu State of southern China; "lan" in the twelfth line, as a word in the name of this professor, refers to mists in the mountain; "yuelin" in the thirteenth line, as a word in the name of this professor, refers to rain in the mountain; "shoumin" in the

fourteenth, as a word in the name of this professor, refers to bringing blessings to people; “yezhi” in the fifteenth, as a word in the name of this professor, refers to dealing with state affairs of war and peace perfectly; “yan bu sun” in the sixteenth line, as pronunciations of the Chinese name of this professor, refer to a swallow that is seen as an auspicious messenger; “xiangeng” in the seventeenth line, as a word in the name of this professor, refers to lucky days in traditional Chinese calendar; “junsheng” in the eighteenth line, as a word in the name of this professor, refers to being nice and peace; “tingguang” in the nineteenth line, as a word in the name of this professor, refers to the glory and dignity of the country; “tingyun” in the last line, as a word in the name of this building, refers to being as glorious as to stop flowing clouds according to a Chinese allusion. It can thus be seen that a large number of giants had gathered at Nanyue. Among them, William Empson was the only foreign teacher who was described as a messenger from a far sphere. His unique status in the temporary university is highlighted.

The university at Nanyue was then in a very difficult situation, as Qian Mu, the great scholar, reminisced: “The college was located on the mountainside of Nanyue, the ex-site of the Bible College. Two teachers shared a room. One of the rooms was the biggest where Chiang Kai-shek had once dwelt” (199). Coincidentally, Empson shared a room with Professor Jin Yuelin, the famous philosopher who had studied in the United States and Britain and was well-versed in both Chinese and western learning. In addition to poor accommodations, dining and teaching conditions were also unsatisfactory. Liu Wuji was then teaching three courses. According to his words, the students were in urgent need of text and reference books, and even the small blackboard was moved into the classroom later. “The rice that Hunan cook prepared is hard and countable. It’s difficult to swallow,” he added (Liu Wuji 9). In such a difficult environment, Empson, far away from his peaceful hometown, shared happiness and suffering with his Chinese colleagues and students. His students were extremely impressed by his ethics and talents. Especially impressive are the words of two of his students, who later became leading figures of foreign studies in China.

According to the memoir of Li Funing, “His books were not yet shipped to Nanyue because of war-time transportation problems, and still Mr. Empson taught works of Shakespeare. He typewrote the entire text of *Othello* from extraordinary memory, had it mimeographed, and handed it out among students” (33). Empson paid great attention to heuristic teaching; for example, he once questioned his students: “Is *Othello* easily jealous?” Students valued him very highly. Li wrote in his memoir: “Mr. Empson taught me Shakespeare for two semesters. He taught me

how to analyze and comment on Shakespeare and helped me lay a solid foundation. He was always emphasizing the importance of analyzing and thinking. In this way he guided his students to the field of literary studies, which at the time was extremely rare for those studying foreign languages. More importantly I benefited much from the reading and writing course taught by Mr. Empson for the third and fourth grade" (34).

Liu Zhongde, another student of Empson's and Professor at Hunan Normal University, recalled in his article "Temporary National University of Changsha and Its Stories:" "Mr. Empson and Zhu Ziqing were among those famous professors who taught us at Nanyue. I can still remember how he taught us, the fourth grade students in the Department of Foreign Languages, to read Shakespeare. At that time he was already a famous British poet and critic, and had published *Collected Poems* and *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. He was very learned, informal, and liked drinking. He often stopped and enjoyed the music of Huqin—the Chinese violin—played by a classmate of mine. Later he followed us to Associated University in Kunming, and continued to teach despite the tough environment. This is quite commendable" (271).

William Empson's Life Experience at Mount Nanyue in His Poem

Apart from writing poetry criticism and theoretical works, Empson wrote poems as well. However, he was not a prolific poet and only 56 of them were published in *The Complete Poems of William Empson* in 1955. Generally, his poetry is of an academic and Eliotic style. He loved the metaphysical poetry of the 17th century and once said that he was envious of the beautiful lines of John Donne and he himself had even been trying hard to find out interesting expressions of metaphors and puns (Perkins 74). His witty poems seem so simple, but they are still ambiguous and contain much dense and powerful content.

Wang Zuoliang, his Chinese student, viewed his poems in this way: "People assumed that he had imitated metaphysical poetry of the 17th century, but in fact his poems are more ambiguous. Though they are simple words of original Britain flavor, they contain elements of scientific and philosophical theories of the 20th century, such as Einstein's theory of relativity and Wittgenstein's logic and philosophy of language. Some lines are easy to analyze separately but hard as a whole" (204). Being different from the classical tradition of Europe that Eliot always adopted and insisted on, Empson's poems are filled with theories of the modern world, and a traditional as well as a "metaphysical" style admired by modern poets can be found while some seemingly unrelated images are dramatically

juxtaposed. The foam on the lake from tooth-brushing is reflected in the water like stars, while the real stars are blocked by the morning mist. Then the tension of the soupy water is compared to the force of a spaceship whose speed exceeds that of light. His poems, which mingle new scientific and technological knowledge, are academic in style, and filled with wit and reason. When talking about this “debate-style poetry” that carries many contradictions, Empson interestingly said that the poet should write those things that really make him annoyed, even crazy...quite a few of his good poems are based on an unresolved conflict (Wang 205).

There at Nanyue, Empson wrote “Autumn on Nan-Yueh,” his longest poem of two hundred and thirty-four lines to record his life and thoughts. This poem is of a witty style, but easier to understand than his other ambiguous poems. What is clearly attached with the title is the statement that the poem was completed at the time “with the exiled universities of Peking.” With a quotation of a part of W. B. Yeats’ poem, “The Phases of the Moon,” Empson introduced “flight” as the clue of the whole poem. His trip, part of which was flight, took him to Nanyue, and his trip of “flight” never stopped. Right during his non-stop trip of “flight,” Empson recorded the details of his life and his thoughts on the relation of literature and politics.

It’s worthwhile to ruminate over many lines of Empson’s “Autumn on Nan-Yueh.” The following is about Mount Nanyue:

The holy mountain where I live
 Has got some bearing on the Yeats.
 Sacred to Buddha, and a god
 Itself, it straddles the two fates;
 And has deformities to give
 You dreams by all its paths and gates.
 They may be dreamless. It is odd
 To hear them yell out jokes and hates
 And pass the pilgrims through a sieve,
 Brought there in baskets or in crates.
 The pilgrims fly because they plod.
 The topmost abbot has passed Greats. (92)

Here, Empson associated Mount Nanyue with Yeats. In his eyes, these two holy “mountains” equated and complemented each other. Yeats, the holy mountain of his spiritual world, gave him pabulum and literary inspiration. Nanyue, the holy

mountain of his natural world, was "sacred to Buddha, and a god itself," bringing fresh horizon to Empson. At Nanyue, Empson witnessed the intercourse of such main characters as "deformities," "pilgrims" and "abbot." The identity of Mount Nanyue as a Buddhist Shrine therefore got greatly rendered.

The following is about Empson's life at Nanyue:

(The souls aren't lonely now; this room
Beds four and as I write holds two.
They shudder at the winter's thrust
In cradles that encourage 'flu.) (92)

...

As for the Tiger Bone, the brew
With roses we can still get here,
The village brand is coarse and rough,
And the hot water far from clear.
It makes a grog. It is not true
That only an appalling fear
Would drive a man to drink the stuff.
Besides, you do not drink to steer
Far out away into the blue.
The chaps use drink for getting near. (93)

Obviously, the living conditions of professors were extremely poor. A room "beds four" and when Empson was writing the poem two professors had already lived in the room. Empson wrote: "They shudder at the winter's thrust / In cradles that encourage 'flu," which meant that they were afraid of winter when it's easy to catch cold owing to the poor living conditions. Despite a difficult life and frequent illness, Empson lived optimistically "on hope" and "on trust" (91). In the poem, he conveyed that friendship with colleagues was his source of happiness. He himself also said that he wanted to express a happy mood because he then had excellent companions (Wang 207). Though in the humble and crowded room, "the souls are not lonely." Maybe many had this kind of mood at that time, but Empson, a British literary celebrity, came to China in war, and stuck with Chinese colleagues and students to the bitter end. So, he was definitely a man of noble character. He also wrote that he could buy "the Tiger Bone, the brew with roses," but the brand manufactured in the village was "coarse and rough" with "the hot water far from clear," hence a grog. Drinking the stuff did not occur only for "an appalling

fear.” For them “chaps,” drinking was mostly for “getting near” and enhancing friendship. Empson’s humorous words portrayed his simple life at Nanyue and demonstrated the valuable spirit of being content with poverty of teachers and students at the Temporary University of Changsha (later to become Southwest Associated University).

The following is about Empson’s teaching experiences at Nanyue:

‘The souls remembering’ is just
 What we professors have to do.
 ...
 The abandoned libraries entomb
 What all the lectures still go through,
 And men get curiously non-plussed
 Searching the memory for a clue.
 The proper Pegasi to groom
 Are those your mind is willing to.
 Let textual variants be discussed;
 We teach a poem as it grew.
 Remembering prose is quite a trouble
 But of Mrs Woolf one tatter
 Many years have failed to smother.
 As a piece of classroom patter
 It would not repay me double. (92)

In the exiled university, not only the living conditions were poor, but also the teaching conditions were backward. “The abandoned libraries” in Peking reserved the contents of all lectures but they couldn’t be moved together. Without textbooks or references, teachers gave the lectures only based upon “the souls remembering.” They obtained the teaching materials by “searching the memory for a clue.” Just as Empson in the above stanza wrote, teachers taught a poem “as it grew.” In other words, teachers recalled the whole poem little by little during the teaching process. Empson regarded the teaching ideas as “Pegasi,” which would be groomed as “mind is willing to.” Evidently, teachers’ own thoughts for teaching played a critical role. Actually, for Empson, a knowledgeable man from Cambridge, this felt just like a fish in water. Moreover, in his view, “verse has been lectured to a treat / Against Escape and being blah” (93). He certainly gained enjoyment from teaching poetry in this way. However, he had a sense of propriety, reminding himself “not to fly”

and keep himself just where he was (93). Empson also wrote in the above stanza that "remembering prose is quite a trouble." "But of Mrs Woolf one tatter / Many years have failed to smother." Empson had long been interested in Adeline Virginia Woolf's prose, so it was not hard for him to remember Woolf's prose. Though teaching Woolf's prose did not repay him double, it had become "a piece of classroom patter" and Empson felt at ease in this type of lecture. In the tough times, the spirit of tenacious struggle in teaching and learning of teachers and students at the Temporary University of Changsha was fairly displayed.

The following is about Empson's thoughts on the relation of literature and politics:

So far I seem to have forgot
 About the men who really soar.
 We think about them quite a bit;
 Elsewhere there's reason to think more.
 With Ministers upon the spot
 (Driven a long way from the War)
 And training camps, the place is fit
 For bombs. The railway was the chore
 Next town. The thing is, they can not
 Take aim. Two hundred on one floor
 Were wedding guests cleverly hit
 Seven times and none left to deplore.
 Politics are what verse should
 Not fly from, or it goes all wrong.
 I feel the force of that all right,
 And had I speeches they were song.
 But really, does it do much good
 To put in verse however strong
 The welter of a doubt at night
 At home, in which I too belong? (95)

Mount Nanyue was so remote that people ought to be able to evade reality and politics there, but Empson still didn't get rid of the bondage of the two. In the main part of the poem he discussed the relation of literature and politics in an ambiguous way. The above-quoted poem reflected two kinds of mindsets of the poet. On the one hand, politics are what literature "should not fly from," "or it goes all wrong."

Empson knew this all right. In the above poem, we can find these lines: “And training camps, the place is fit / For bombs”; “Two hundred on one floor / Were wedding guests cleverly hit / Seven times and none left to deplore.” At Nanyue, Empson witnessed the bombs aiming at the training camps and innocent people, and finally killed so many. The cruel reality struck the poet’s sensitive sympathetic mind. In the special context, Empson in the whole poem mentioned such unique words and concepts as nationalism, race, economics, the Red argument, Marx, Stalin, Japs (a derogatory abbreviation for Japanese) and Germans, thus associating his poem with politics. On the other hand, he detested putting all political stuff in literature. In the above poem, we can find his rhetorical question: “But really, does it do much good / To put in verse however strong / The welter of a doubt at night / At home, in which I too belong?” Empson thought putting in verse such chores as “the welter of a doubt at night,” however politically strong, would not “do much good.” He also did not “like the verses about ‘Up the Boys,’” which were filled with “the revolutionary romp” and “the hearty uproar that deploys / A sit-down literary strike.” In his eyes, these literary words belonged to “pomp” and would finally “come down to noise” (94). Here, Empson manifested his conservatism of reformism. In the last stanza, he said he “wouldn’t fly again.” Though life was not easy at Nanyue, he wanted a stable life and did not want to move again. But “even in breathing tempest-tossed,” all other members started to move and forcibly he had “got to go” (97). Autumn passed and Mount Nanyue would “take the snow.” Empson wrote at last: “The soldiers will come here and train. / The streams will chatter as they flow” (98). All seemed calm but had the potential bloody fight that he did not desire. The political changes brought unexpected and undesirable moves to Empson. Empson’s two kinds of mindsets on the relation of literature and politics thus created an unending outcome for the whole poem.

By contrast, here the author of this paper cites a poem, “A Rainy Night,”¹ written by Liu Zhongde when he was a student at Nanyue:

In a mass of darkness
Dense clouds are surging forward
Upon a quiet mountain

1 The original of the poem: 夜, / 一团黑暗。/ 浓密的云雾在奔腾, / 满山一片静。/ 一所古老的学院。/ 倾盆大雨下个不停, / 夹杂着远处一阵犬吠, / 还有几声鸡鸣? / 惊醒了流浪者的怀乡梦。/ 哪里怒马的悲鸣? / 战场厮杀的喊声? / 雨正在打着柏松, / 打着落叶的梧桐, / 也打着坚贞的巨石, / 一齐发出反抗的吼声, / 巧妙地 / 交织成一支进军行。/ 松柏、巨石、梧桐, / 经过彻夜的斗争, / 还依然常青、强硬、直挺, / 在打击中 / 孕育着伟大的新生!

And an ancient college
 Downpours the rain, mixed
 With the distant burst of barking
 Several rooster crows awake
 Nostalgic dreams of a wanderer, but where
 Are the angry laments of steeds? And where
 Are the roars of warriors in battle?
 There stand the rows of pines,
 Walls of phoenix trees, and
 Unmovable stones, in the torrents of rains
 Their resistant roars are woven into a virile march
 They will stand, ever green, tough and upright,
 Till the dawn when new life burgeons through
 The darkness of night! (270-271)

It's evident that Liu, a passionate student, had different style of writing with Empson, a moderate teacher. In his poem, Liu outlined a scene that was still thriving and full of vitality even though they experienced ups and downs. "The angry laments of steeds," "the roars of warriors in battle" and "their resistant roars" were "woven into a virile march." In Liu's poem, the march thus headed on in high spirits. The images of "pines," "unmovable stones" and "phoenix trees" were "green, tough and upright," symbolizing "new life" burgeoning at Nanyue, implying a new journey for the "ancient college" and predicting a brand-new look of China. The ambitious emotion, instigating words and optimistic attitude toward politics were in sharp contrast with those in Empson's poem.

People held a high opinion of Empson's character. One of his Japanese students said that he was an honest and authentic person, always kind and gentle to friends and students (Fukuhara 33). His experience in China has been put in a poem by one of his friends:

During the China Incident
 Came the long trek
 By the exiled Peking universities,
 Of which he was a teaching member;
 So William went
 To Hunan and Yunnan.
 He ran about in hope, on trust,

Happy to have escaped from the pell-mell.
 The teachers taught just
 What they could remember
 In strict rotation,
 Having no way to check.
 This suited William well,
 He being a master of misquotation. (Bottrall 50-51)

Bottrall in the poem recorded Empson's exiling experiences together with the temporary university from Hunan Province to Yunnan Province. Luckily, Empson has escaped from the chaos and survived in a succession wars in China. Moreover, Bottrall described Empson's unique teaching experiences in the temporary university, claiming that the teachers, without references and ways to check, could only teach based upon their memory. Subtly, Empson's inaccuracy or carelessness in quotation was revealed in a jocular way: "He being a master of misquotation." Throughout his life, Empson came to China twice and lived in China for seven years. The first time he lived in China was from 1937 to 1939 when he was hired by Peking University for the first time. In the Second World War he returned to Britain in service of his country and did his best as an intellectual and citizen. After the war he returned to Peking University to teach and lived in China for another five years from 1946 to 1951.

Mount Nanyue is an important birthplace of Huxiang culture. Empson was the first foreign scholar who lived there temporarily, wrote a long poem of 234 lines, "Autumn on Nan-Yueh," and thus exerted great influence on the modern Chinese poetry. "Autumn on Nan-Yueh," the longest of Empson's poems, gives an account of his life and thoughts at that time. The poem also demonstrates the resolute, diligent, and eager-to-learn spirits of the teachers and students of the Temporary University of Changsha. No doubt, Empson's journey to Mount Nanyue is valuable academically and deserves commemoration.

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